

Exploration on Chinese Traditional Security Culture - From the Perspective of Confucianism

Lunhua Tan¹, Chuandong Ma²

¹Sichuan Staff University of Science and Technology, Chengdu, China

²College of Fundamental Education, Sichuan Normal University, Chengdu, China

Corresponding author: Chuandong Ma, College of Fundamental Education, Sichuan Normal University, Chengdu, China

Abstract. The Chinese traditional culture with a long history of five thousand years is extensive and profound. Confucian, one of the most important representative of Chinese traditional culture, has advocated its moral standard "benevolence", whose connotation defined by Confucius is "to love and care for others", and its essence is to respect life. When one's life is threatened, Confucius believes that life is the most important and assuring the safety of life is the supreme principle. He even uplifts this kind of behavior to the level of "filial piety" and "righteousness" in the Confucian ethical framework. Confucius's life attitude and safety behavior lay a solid cultural foundation for today's four principles of safety culture: not to harm oneself, not to hurt others, not to be hurt by others and to protect others from harm.

Key words: Chinese traditional culture; Confucianism; Confucius; life; safety culture.

1. Introduction

In the long history process, Chinese culture, enriched with extensive and profound content, has formed its own unique characteristics and charm. The long-standing and well-established Chinese culture has amazed the world for long not only because of its long history with a clear thread but also because of its instinctive characteristics.

In the late Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, hundreds of schools of thought contended and a large number of various works appeared, like bright stars sparkling in the the sky of the pre-Qin history. If we say that Chinese traditional culture is a towering tree, then the classic works of various schools and their thoughts are their rich root system that enables it green and fresh for ever. With the time goes by, through the Qin and Han Dynasty, Confucianism and Taoism became the most prominent among the various schools. After the Eastern Jin Dynasty, through Southern and Northern Dynasties, Sui and Tang dynasty, Buddhism had been integrated with the traditional Chinese culture after having been spread to China from India, becoming one of the organic part of Chinese traditional culture. Since then, Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism have been standing like a tripod and they have complemented each other, constituting the basic pattern of Chinese culture. Emperor Xiao Zong, Zhao Shen, in the Southern Song Dynasty once generalized the social functions of the three schools as, “Buddhism governs people’s spirit, Daoism governs the body and Confucianism governs the society.” [1] This generalization clearly shows the basic pattern and characteristics of Chinese traditional culture since the Tang and Song Dynasty. From a comprehensive survey on their attitudes to life, we can easily find that Confucianism pays more attention to the thickness of life (universal love for people), Daoism to the length of life (the longevity of individual) , while Buddhism pays more attention to the width of life (caring for everything in the world). They jointly safeguard the dignity

of life.

After Emperor Wu of Han Dynasty had adopted Dong Zhongshu's suggestion: Restrain all the other schools but only respect Confucianism, in the following two thousand years of the feudal society of China, Confucianism had been dominant in the official realm of ideology, having an extensive and profound influence on Chinese culture. In other words, Confucianism has been the main trend of thought in Chinese traditional culture.

2. Confucian's Philosophy on Life

Undoubtedly, as Confucianism has stressed, benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and trustworthiness have been the core of the the main stream of Chinese traditional culture, among which benevolence is Confucius's moral standard. "Fan Chi", one of Confucius's students, once asked Confucius what is benevolence, he answered, 'Love people' "Therefore, the core of "benevolence" is "to love people", through "loving the masse" to realize the true sense of "loving people" [2].

Confucius not only made a profound explanation to "benevolence", but also devoted himself to practice, with his practical action to deduce the connotation of "benevolence". As the descendant of Shang Dynasty, Confucius lived in the Kingdom of Lu. Because of his rigorous attitude of scholarship, as is shown in his words: "Try to learn more and put aside what you are in doubt of; see more and put aside what you think is dangerous." "Learning without thinking leads to puzzlement; thinking without learning is perilous." [2] he paid little attention to anything unknown even if he lived in the extremely superstitious cultural environment. He valued offering sacrifices to gods or ancestors, but he did not believe in superstition. Thus Zhuangzi said, "Saints know the existence of the things outside of heaven and earth, but they do not talk about it." [3] Confucius never talked about "fantasticity, violence, revolts or spiritual beings" [4] Once Jilu, the student of Confucius, asked him how to

serve ghosts and deities, Confucius answered, “ While you fail to serve the the living well, how can you serve the ghost? ” . Jilu asked again, “ May I ask about death?” Confucius replied, “ While you do not know about life, how can you know about death?” [2] From these we can see that Confucius's philosophy on life and world is realistic and positive. What he focused on is the “Man” in the world and the society composed by man. Whether it is to love people or to serve people, he stressed on respecting people’s right to live on, which is the foundation of human right. Suppose that a man no longer lives, how can we talk about his value and dignity? With the skin gone, to what can the hair attach itself?

It is no secret that Confucius also killed people owing to political factors. In the 10th of King Lu Ding (500 BC), on the meeting ceremony of King Lu Ding and King Qi Jing, when some dancers, acrobats and diminutive gnome came to perform, Confucius came running step by step, before coming to the last step, he said, “ How dare you ordinary people to mischief governors, you should be killed! Please order officials to execute!” So officials cut them at the waists in accordance with the law.[4] But we should also notice the main body of Confucius’s thought, that is to value and care for life.

Being buried alive with the dead is an old custom originated in the end of clan society. Early in the primitive society, people liked to put the tools, arms and articles of every day use along with the dead in the coffins. Entering the slave society, when the theocracy and the emperors were the supreme, slaves were just like speaking tools and lot of them were killed or buried alive with their dead masters, continuing to serve them in the nether world. Judging from the historical record, at that time, it had become a system that slaves or wives were buried alive. We can also find some proof from the archaeological discovery of Yinxu Tomb. With the development of the society, the ruling class came to realize the fact that man is not only the most important working force, but also the key to win struggles. Therefore, after the

Spring and Autumn Period, men were rare to be buried alive. But in such cultural background as “serving the dead as the alive”, the system had not died out. Some slave masters thought to use puppets or ceramic tomb figures to take place of living slaves. Confucius set himself against it, because ceramic tomb figures still looked like people, and it was disrespect to humans. He cursed, “Do the initiators of making ceramic tomb figures have no descendants?” [5] Under the cultural circumstance that “There are three unfilial behaviors and the most serious is that one has no children.” [5], Confucius cursed the initiators of making ceramic tomb figures, showing that how he hated those who killed people or buried people alive. Confucius thought it unjust to hurt people, and the action of killing people or burying people alive was even worse than a beast. “I once heard that, if the mother beasts were paunched to kill the young, Kylin (the mascot in ancient Chinese legend) would never come near it; if people drain the pond to catch all the fish, then dragon would not harmonize Yin and Yang (In Chinese philosophy, Yin and Yang refer to the two opposing principles in nature.) to bring rain to the world; if the nest is destroyed and the eggs are broken, then phoenix would never fly over it. Why? It is taboo for a superior man to hurt his fellows. Even those birds and beasts know to avoid the injustice, how can I, Confucius?” [4].

For Confucius, “Man is given birth by the heaven and raised up by the earth, so he is the most important.” [6], so man’s life should be respected. Once “Confucius’s stable was burned down. When the Master came back from the court, he asked, ‘Was anyone hurt?’ He did not ask about the horses.” [2]. The story reflects Confucius’s thought: People’s life is the most important. He paid more attention to people than animals, which is the typical humanistic feeling of Confucianism. The modern security culture also stresses on the safety of human beings compared to things or animals.

The ethical thought of Confucianism first of all emphasizes the existence of life and

the health of body, which is also the fundamental content of modern security culture. Confucius even uplifted the behavior of keeping life and body unharmed to the ethical frame of “fealty”, and his basic thought of cherishing life as filial conduct has had a profound impact on Chinese culture. “Master Zeng once heard Confucius say, ‘Parents give birth to a son in a good condition, and the son is filial if he returns his body in good condition to his parents. One does not harm himself and does not destroy his body, then he can be said to be saved. So a superior man dare not forget fealty for a moment.’” [7] Master Zeng warned his disciples, “ Our bodies are given by our parents. Dare we not respect our bodies given by our parents?” Lezheng Zichun, one student of Master Zeng, made a detail explanation to it, “Whatever we are doing, we should not forget our parents, so when walking, we should not go by the dangerous road. Go boating instead of swimming, we dare not risk our bodies given by our parents.” [7] It is also clearly stated in Xiao Jing (the Principles of Filial Piety), “Our body is given by our parents. Dare not damage it , the beginning of filial piety. [8] The idea of keeping one’s body safe has been consistent in Chinese culture. In modern society, the interpretation of "safety" is: "No danger means safety; no damage to body means wholeness.", inheriting the ancient inculcation of the saints. Confucius criticized anything that was harmful to one’s health. There recorded one short story in Han Shi Wai Zhuan: One of Confucius’s student, Zeng Shen, was once beaten by his father, Zeng Xi, who was also Confucius’s student. Zeng Shen fell to the ground and it was sometime before he came to his consciousness. Zeng Shen did not hate his father, but raised to ask his father, “Are you hurt, Father?” Zeng Shen was beaten to lose his consciousness, but what he cared for was whether his father was hurt when beating him with force. Zeng Shen’s behavior should be praised for his filial piety in Chinese traditional culture, and the people who witnessed the incident were deeply moved at that time, very promoting this kind of behavior, and then went cheerfully "to tell Confucius.” Instead of praising Zeng Shen’s fealty,

Confucius taught him a lesson with the story about Shun (a legendary monarch in ancient China), “Haven’t you heard of the story when Shun was a son? He would wait to be beaten when his father held a small bamboo board, but he would run away when he saw his father hold a big stick. Whenever his father needed him, he would be around, but his father could never find him when his father wanted to kill him.” Later, Confucius also harshly criticized him, “Now you respectfully stand there in your father's side, waiting for his great anger. You are not a good man. No sins are more serious than this!”[9]

Confucius was very cautious in three things: fasting, wars, and diseases. Carefully handling fasting is for the need of etiquette, while his carefulness to wars and diseases show his attitude to life. When Prince Ling of the State Wei asked Confucius about the army array operations, Confucius answered, “ I have heard of such things as offering sacrifices to gods or ancestors, but I have never learned about the army array operations.” [4] Confucius was very cautious in war, and he even praised highly the soldiers who ran away from battlefield for life many times. “ A man of the State of Lu followed the king in battle, but he escaped from the battlefield three times in three wars. Confucius asked him about the cause of his escapes, the man replied, ‘ If I died, no one would support my old father.’ Confucius thought him a filial son, elevated and honored him.” [10] Therefore, when one’s life is endangered because of his loyalty, Confucius’s emotion would naturally deflect to his life. Mencius considered “ultimately combative behavior” as unfilial behavior harmful to parents. [5], and so Confucianism encourage people “not to fight angrily in the masses.” [2]

3. Confucius’s Safe Behavior

Confucius’s attitude of cherishing life also embodied in his cautions in behavior. He always tried to avoid anything harmful to his health and safety. Here are some

records in the Analects, from which we can have a glimpse of Confucius's life style and behavior. All the quotations except for those followed by indicated sources are from The Analects: Xiang Dang, annotated by Wu Guozhen. The numbers before the quotations are those from the original works.

Quotations about the dietary habits of Confucius:

10. 8: The Master did not indulge in refined cereal or delicious meat. He did not eat long – exposed, sour food, nor did he eat rotten fish or meat. He did not eat what looked or smelt bad, nor did he eat anything not properly prepared or not served at meal time. He did not eat meat which was not rightly butchered. He did not eat food without its appropriate sauce. Plenty of meat as there was, he did not take it to exceed the due proportion for the rice. What he did not limit himself was only wine, but he did not allow himself to get drunk. He did not help himself to wine and dried meat that were bought in the market. He rejected no ginger, but did not take too much.

10. 9: After a sacrifice held by the price, he did not keep overnight the meat bestowed on him. And he did not keep over three days the meat at his own family sacrifices. If kept over three days, the meat would not be served.

Quotations about Confucius's attitude to disease and medicine:

7. 13: The Master was cautious in three things: fasting, wars and diseases.

10. 16: When Jikangzi sent him some medicine, the Master kowtowed and accepted it, saying, " I am not sure about it, so I dare not taste it. "

Quotations about Confucius's ways of act:

10.10: When eating, the Master did not talk. When in bed, he did not speak.

10. 24: While in bed, the Master did not lie flat like a corpse. At home, he did not sit like a guest.

10. 26: Before getting on a carriage, the Master would stand straight, and reach for the cord to the handlebar. Having been aboard, he did not turn round or talk hastily, nor did he make instructional gestures.

The gate of the State of Lu had been rotten for long and was about to collapse. When the Master went through it, he would quickly walk through. Those standing by said, "It has been like this for a long time." The Master said, "So for a long time, it will be dangerous." [11] Confucius was wary prudence.

Here we only list some details of Confucius's life behavior, and most of his ways of act is to meet the need of "Rites". But it is easy for us to see that the idea of protecting life and safety first has been one of Confucius life style. The safety culture constructed by Confucius has reached the stage of self-discipline and self-perfection. Judging by the view of modern safety culture, what Confucius advocated embodies the self-protection awareness: consciously away from hazards. Confucius's "picky" and limit on a diet reflects his attention to food safety; his caution to disease and medicine reflects his awe to life; Confucius's code of conduct is the vivid display of safety behavior.

4. Conclusion

In 1986, INSAG (International Nuclear Safety Group) proposed that all of the operation of nuclear power station should be under the control of nuclear safety culture. The term 'safety culture' was first used in INSAG's (1988) 'Summary Report on the Post-Accident Review Meeting on the Chernobyl Accident' where safety culture was described as: "That assembly of characteristics and attitudes in organizations and individuals which establishes that, as an overriding priority, nuclear plant safety issues receive the attention warranted by their significance." The U.K. Health and Safety Commission developed one of the most commonly used definitions of safety culture: "The product of individual and group values, attitudes,

perceptions, competencies, and patterns of behaviour that determine the commitment to, and the style and proficiency of, an organization's health and safety management".^[5] Although its connotation was still limited in the field of nuclear power industry at that time, when the concept was proposed which presents the direction and development trend of world culture, it caused great repercussions immediately in the world of many industry, and was widely shared.

The essential connotation of safety culture in the west countries focuses on the safety of the people's life, while Chinese culture has been stressing "people-oriented". So when the concept of safety culture with a Christian culture background was introduced into China, it immediately had a strong and harmonious resonance with the Chinese culture of a profound historical tradition. Since the 1990s, safety culture has been flourishing in the academia and production areas. After many years hardworking, the construction of safety culture has reached initial result, especially in the awareness of the the public and producers, safety culture has been gradually accepted. The concept of safety culture is imported into Chinese culture from the west, but the respect for life is the universal value with positive energy. The result of the comprehensive safety culture should goes in accordance with the "four principles ": not to harm oneself, not to hurt others, not to be hurt by others and to protect others from harm. Throughout Confucius's life attitude and safety behavior mentioned in this article, we have to say that Confucius physically fostered the seedling of security in the big garden of Chinese culture in the pre-qin period. Especially in the case of "protect others from harm", Confucius's "benevolence" to his moral standards made a shining example for later generations. Confucius's "benevolence" in ancient China has made a warm and rational dialogue across time and space with "safety culture" of modern western culture on the subject of respect for people's life. Safe development is the foundation and guarantee of scientific development, promoting safety culture is one of the most important measures to

construct a harmonious and a well-off society. In an effort to build modern safety culture system with Chinese characteristics, safety culture has spread from industry safety to the community safety, from the center on the safety of life to focus on occupational health. We should further promote the safety culture, strengthen the safety consciousness, update the safety concept, popularize safety knowledge and regulate security behavior. In modern time, when we review the philosophy thought of our ancestors and saints, we can get more inspiration from them.

References

- [1] Wang Yunwu, (1937) *The First Collections of Book Series: Liu Mi (Yuan Dynasty)*, San Jiao Ping Xin Lun, Commercial Press, Beijing.
- [2] Wu Guozhen, (2012) *A New Annotation English Version of the Annalects of Confucius*, Fujian Education Publishing House, Fuzhou.
- [3] Chen Guying, (1983) *Modern Translation and Annotation to Zhuangzi*, Zhong Hua Book Company, Beijing.
- [4] Sima Qian, (1983) *The Historical Records*, Zhong Hua Book Company, Beijing.
- [5] Yang Bojun, (1960) *Translation and Annotation to Mencius*, Zhong Hua Book Company, Beijing.
- [6] Gao Ming, (1975) *Modern Translation and Annotation to Da Dai Li*, Commercial Press, Taipei.
- [7] Wang Wenjing, (2001) *Decipher on the Book of Rites*, Zhong Hua Book Company, Beijing.
- [8] Wang Shoukuan, (2004) *Translation and Annotation to the Classic of Filial Piety*, Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, Shanghai.
- [9] Lai Yanyuan, (2007) *Modern Translation and Annotation to Han Shi Wai Zhuan*, Commercial Press, Taipei.
- [10] Zhang Jue, (2007) *Translation and Annotation to Han Feizi*, Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, Shanghai.
- [11] Huang Hui, (2006) *Annotation to Lun Heng*, Zhonghua Book Company, Beijing.