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## **Classical Chinese Philosophers**

Human nature and the Related Debate amongst Classical Chinese Philosophers

Confucianism, a 2500 year old Chinese philosophical and religious tradition that extends to the distant corners of East Asia, is believed to have been formed by Confucius who claimed that he is not the creator but the transmitter of ancient traditions and values. Born Kong Qiu in 551 BC in eastern China, Confucius made it his life's mission to restore the political and social harmony of the contemporary Zhou dynasty that had been disintegrating over the course of the past two hundred years. He wanted to achieve his goal through the revival of the moral aspect of the literate elite and the ruling class. According to him, the three vital virtues of morality were filial respect, humanity and ritual propriety.

Confucius believed humanity happened to be the basic love and goodness for other that distinguished man from other animals. His future follower, Mencius, termed it in his own words – “ To be human is to be humane”. Ritual propriety happens to be the required outward expression in response to that humanity. Ritual propriety needs to be consistent with culturally specific ideals. Filial respect or the respect towards elders is the virtue that occurs naturally and is considered to be the building block of various virtues .

The main themes that Confucianism dealt with happened to be the good life, good rulers, a virtuous person and a virtuous civic life. The teachings of Confucius are concerned with human society and human beings. Confucius considered humans to be the primary source of value. His teaching was

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completely opposed to naturalism which stated that nature happens to be the most important source of value as well as supernaturalism which denotes god or some other supernatural entity as the source of all value. The philosophy of Confucius lays stress on the approach to gain human goodness by appealing to the noblest ideals in the actions of humans .

In the course of the future centuries, filial respect would slowly turn into the most respected Confucian virtue with both good results and bad. The followers of Confucius were famous as scholars or “ ru” since they became experts in the arts and rituals which were considered to be important for leading a cultured life and good governance. The term “ Confucianism” did not have a Chinese equivalent until the modern period; the tradition was referred to as “ teaching of the ru” or the learning of the “ ru”. Following the death of Confucius, three or four generations of his faithful followers compiled every oral teaching into the “ Lunyu” book, popularly called “ Analects of Confucius”.

Mencius was the second most important sage in the tradition of Confucianism. Born in the 4th century BCE, his actual name was Master Meng or Mengzi. He emphasized some particular notions that were earlier minor portions of the teachings of Confucius. The greatest among these was the ideal that the nature of humans was basically good; he considered goodness to be an innate human instinct that was given to humans by Heaven.

Heaven, as per the teachings of Confucius, was a semi-personalistic, semi-naturalistic ultimate reality which leaned on the side of moral virtue in order to facilitate human life. Mencius later became known as the “ orthodox”

Confucianism interpreter, and the teachings of both these enlightened sages constitute the main tenets of “ classical Confucianism” in recent times.

It was during the 2nd century BCE at the time of the Han dynasty that Confucianism became the official ideology of the national government – similar to the concept of capitalism and democracy in the United States.

These ideals proved to possess negative results, both for the movement of Confucianism and the nation. As governments had a strong interest in safekeeping the stability in society, the most socially conservative interpretations of the teachings of Confucius were promoted like age and hierarchy based on gender. The politicized Confucianism product, however, was strongly rejected during the 20th century.

In order to understand the nature of Confucianism in the form a religious tradition, it is imperative to understand the religious aspect of the movement. Confucianism was never simply a socio-political network based on ethics. This argument has divided scholars from other individuals who have a passing familiarity with Confucianism. However, the actual nature of the teachings of Confucius depends on the way “ religion” is defined. If the definition of religion is based on the Judeo-Christian model, it can be justified that Confucianism does not belong to the category of religion since it does not promote the worship of a single, all-powerful god. In fact, its ideas regarding life after death happen to be vital to its core message and it even does not boast of an organized priesthood. But the familiar concepts of Western religion should not be automatically taken as the standard for the nature of any true religion. Religion can be defined as a multi-dimensional group of phenomena that can be viewed from several perspectives. This

definition implies that the transformation process is ultimate” in the true sense of the word. Confucianism seems to fit this definition clearly.

The main problem of the human condition happens to be the unawareness of humans regarding their Heaven-endowed moral potential along with the lack of will to develop it. The primary goal should be the actualization of the moral potential in order to become completely humane beings i. e. “ sages”. The main method of attaining sage hood happens to be self-cultivation which necessitates both self-reflections in order to separate the good inclinations from the bad along with the acknowledgement of the moral examples of the previous teachers and sages. The factor of the “ ultimate” can be viewed in the two core elements of the Sage and Heaven. The word “ Sage” possesses clear spiritual overtones.

Confucianism gradually fell into decline in 220 CE after the fall of the Han dynasty. Daoism and Buddhism increased in popularity during this period. Confucianism was revived again in the Song dynasty which extended from 950 CE to 1279 CE. This can be considered as the second major era of Confucianism and was termed by the Westerners as “ Neo-Confucianism”. This fresh revival of Confucianism was influenced considerably by Buddhism and, to a minor extent, Daoism.

The dominant figure of this Confucian phase was Zhu Xi, the 12th century scholar, who managed to combine the teachings of his 11th century predecessors into a coherent network of religious practice and philosophy that became the most important philosophical and religious worldview of the literate elite until the 20th century . However, New Confucianism has not been spared from criticism. Both in the field of academics and politics, Neo

Confucianism has triggered widespread debate. Some view New Confucianism as being too influenced by the West while others criticize it as a moral religion. Some critics state that the orthodox transmission idea leads to the sealing off of Confucianism from new directions .

Another great Chinese philosopher was Mozi which is the title given to Mo Di, the founder of the Mohism School. He is believed to have lived in the period between the death of Confucius and the birth of Mencius. Mozi was born and raised in the Chinese state of Lu where he became the minister of Song state. He probably belonged to the lower class of artisans but was highly educated and cultured. In his early years, he studied the teachings of Confucius but due to the complexity of the elaborate rituals which he believed to be wasteful and tedious, he decided to form his own school of philosophical thought.

The Mozi also happens to be the title provided to the philosophical text that was compiled from the various writings of the Mohist thinkers. Several passages in the work happen to be repetitions of a single theme but with slight variations in the wording which indicates that the collection comprises of the notes of the disciples who attended the lectures. It is possible that Mozi only wrote a few chapters himself; other chapter in the collection might be the handiwork of future Mohist scholars.

The Mohist followers established a clearly organized order and were able to maintain a durable and longstanding network whose leaders were termed as grand masters or juzi. But, following the end of the Qin dynasty in China, Mohism became an obscure concept for a period of almost 200 years after which entire chapters of the Mozi text became lost and the remaining texts

were corrupted. It was only in recent times that Mohism was once again recognized by scholars including Sun Yirang who began the task of restoring the texts of Mozi. Findings made by archaeologists have assisted modern scholars to collate and amend the works but there still remains considerable doubt over the correct interpretation.

It is necessary to examine the important differences between the modern global community relative to society in the time of Mozi and the manner in which they impact applicability of the Mozi text. Since the inception of mature theories, concepts and methods in the field of modern international relations, it is necessary to analyze Mozi's pattern of thought in a comparative manner with reference to the theoretical framework.

This comparison will help highlight the main points of similarity and dissimilarity between the different concepts, methods and theories of present international relations and the Mohist political theory school and utilize them in the form of a catalyst in order to develop the theory of international relations. If their individual historical and social contexts are taken into account, the vital differences between the Chinese political theory of the past and the contemporary mainstream theory of international relations may be treated as the beginning point for advancing and extending contemporary theories. The contemporary theories of international relations, concepts and methods might be exported to the completely different setting and time of China in the life of Mozi. General patterns of international affairs might be developed in this manner but there are certain limitations to this method.

The records of Mozi provide an account of particular strategies that Mo Di

along with his followers used. The implicit patterns in these strategies can be found in international relations. The Mohist way of thinking happens to be a source of inspiration for the growth of modern national foreign policy and defense technology in China. The role that the thinking of Mozi plays with respect to policymaking in the nation of China, it relates greatly to strategic studies of defense.

The major documented record of the work of Mozi provides details of the pertinent method of thinking of Mozi as well as the Mohist school of thought in contrast to international relations. The contributions made to the Mohist School by the later Mohist thinkers after the death of Mozi was inferior to Mozi's own thought process. But still they were recorded by Mozi. Thus, the thinking of the Mohist School, the Mozi and of Mo Di can be considered as one and the same .

In the text, Mozi speaks very passionately about the concept of moral transformation regarding the best way to transform a situation of vice and disorder to one of order and virtue. Mozi's view regarding the transformation of morality can be assessed through standards internal to philosophy as well as in terms of their credibility from the standpoint of social and cognitive psychology and neuroscience in terms of truthfulness and psychological realism. Mozi provides the concept of morally appealing role models and offers them a central role in his theory of transformation and moral education. In fact, Mozi's promotion of emulation seems to make sense of his emphasis on the value of possessing worthy superiors to identify with .



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