

“CONFUCIUS ON THE FIVE CONSTANT VIRTUES”

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Abstract

Human by nature are social beings. They tend to connect and relate with one another in spite of the individual differences they possess. As to the famous quote of an English poet John Donne, “No man is an island.” Man should necessarily relate with one another in order to thrive. But bearing in mind the individual differences of human beings, we cannot exclude the possibility of chaos, disorder, and discordance. That is why in a diverse society, man needs a moral guide in order to achieve a harmonious social life. Man needs to resort to ethical views and principles in order to enrich their nature as social beings. Throughout the history of philosophy, there were various ethical views being introduced by different philosophers. One of the great traditions that offered major contribution in the field of ethics was the Chinese or Oriental tradition. The most notable philosopher in Chinese thought was Confucius. In this paper, the researcher will investigate the concept of Virtue in the light of the Confucian Ren, Yi, Li, Zhi, and Xin. These are considered to be the five constant virtues of Confucianism. Ren is the virtue of benevolence and humanity; Yi is that of honesty and uprightness; Zhi is knowledge and wisdom; Xin is faithfulness and integrity; and Li is propriety, good manners, and worship. The researcher will try to discuss each concept in order to have a better outlook on Confucian ethics. These virtues serve as the basis in developing a harmonious society and good government. The main question of this paper is: What is Confucius’ view on the five constant virtues?

This paper only limits to the book of Confucius entitled, “The Analects” which is also supplemented by different secondary sources. The first part of this paper will discuss the background of Confucius and the five constant virtues in general. The second part of the paper will be an exposition of the five constant virtues. Then, the third part of the paper will be a brief discussion on the notion of gentleman – the end of the five constant virtues. The last part is the conclusion of the paper.

Keywords: *Confucius, Ren, Yi, Li, Zhi, Xin, Gentleman*

I

Chinese philosophy is famous for its ethical and moral teachings. The basic aim of Chinese philosophy has not been primarily that of understanding the world but of that making people great. Being great has a double aspect in Chinese thought. First of all, it involves inner greatness, which is a magnitude of spirit reflected in the peace and contentment of the individual in his/her completeness. Second, it involves outer greatness which is manifested in the ability to live well practically, that is, dignifying the social context of ones ordinary day-to-day existence.¹ Chinese philosophy then is much more concerned on human conduct and social relations rather than questioning the world and other beings (just like the ancient western philosophers who inquired regarding the basic stuff of the world). Chinese philosophy wanted their philosophy to be practical or applicable to their day to day living.

One of the most prominent and notable traditions in the history of Chinese philosophy was Confucianism. Confucianism has taken a commanding role throughout the history of Chinese philosophy.² As its name reads, Confucianism was founded by Confucius. He is considered to be China's most famous teacher, philosopher, and political theorist, whose ideas have profoundly influenced the civilizations of China and other Eastern Asian countries.³ Confucius' ethical philosophy is fundamentally a humanistic social philosophy. It is all about the human beings and their society rather than about the nature or about the knowledge of the nature.⁴ There were four books which were associated to Confucius namely The Great Learning, The Analects of Confucius, the Book of Mencius, and the Doctrine of the Mean.⁵ Among these books, it is the Analects or "Assorted Sayings" which is the most prominent and the most important in the Confucian thought. Accordingly, this book accurately represents the original teachings of Confucius. The later thinkers described this work as having been compiled by first and second generation disciples of Confucius and then transmitted privately for centuries; making it the oldest stratum of extant Confucius sources.⁶ That is why, the Analects of Confucius is considered to be the primary vehicle for the original thought of China's premier

¹ Koller, John M., "Oriental Philosophies," Second Edition, Macmillan Publishers LTD, 1985, p. 246.

² Baird, Forrest E. and Heimbeck, Raeburne S., "Asian Philosophy," Philosophy Classics Volume VI, Routledge Publishing, 2006, p. 299.

³ Anping, Chin, "Confucius: Chinese Philosopher," Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Confucius>.

⁴ Koller, John M., "Oriental Philosophies," Second Edition, Macmillan Publishers LTD, 1985, p. 264.

⁵ Spirko, Jennifer, "What is the Holy Book of the Confucianists?" Classroom, 2017, <https://classroom.synonym.com/what-is-the-holy-book-of-the-confucianists-12086899.html>.

⁶ Csikszentmihalyi, Mark, "Confucius", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2013, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/confucius/>.

philosopher. It was written down by his followers from their recollections some decades after his death. It records conversations with his students and advise to rulers. The ethical ideal of Confucius on the Analects can be condensed or capsulized into a single complex proposition: “The Gentleman follows the Way of Self-cultivation of Virtue, observance of the Rites, devotion to learning, and Public service.”⁷

Accordingly, in the Analects, the five most important virtues are produced. These virtues are known to be the Five Constant Virtues or Wu Chang. There is a diverse plethora of values in Confucianism that branch of the Five Constants. These virtues are widely regarded as the main principles of Confucianism and all are interconnected in one way or another.⁸ The Five Constant Virtues are the Ren or Benevolence, Yi or Righteousness, Li or Propriety, Zhi or Wisdom, and Xin or Trustworthiness.⁹ These virtues are the fundamental values needed in order to live a moral life.¹⁰ The five constant virtues were important in determining who was a ‘true gentleman’ in ancient Chinese society. Regardless of a person’s class or social status, he was expected to exhibit the five virtues and use proper conduct toward others. This also applied to the way in which rulers were expected to govern. A leader, from local bureaucrat to emperor, was supposed to govern with benevolent concern for the well-being of his subjects. One reason those in charge were expected to live by the five constant virtues is that the Confucian concept of government involves leading by example. The belief was that if individuals in the government are virtuous, their subjects will be virtuous as well.¹¹

The Five Constant virtues provided a lasting contribution in the moral, social, and political life of China. Although they all solely came from Confucianism, they are widely acknowledged all over the China. To become a moral person, the ancient Chinese cultivated and monitored themselves according to the five Constant virtues and carried them down to the modern life. The Five Constant virtues then plays a major role throughout the land of China and throughout the history of China. The second part of this paper will carefully discuss and explicate each of the Confucian virtues so as to have a clearer and better understanding on these Confucian concepts. The third part of this paper will briefly discuss the end of the five constant virtues – the formation of Gentleman.

⁷ Baird, Forrest E. and Heimbeck, Raeburne S., “Asian Philosophy,” Philosophy Classics Volume VI, Routledge Publishing, 2006, p. 304.

⁸ _____. “Wu Chang: The Five Constant Virtues of Humanity,” The Evolution of Confucianism towards Modern Day China, <https://sites.google.com/a/stonybrook.edu/group23mmp/principlesofconfucianism/wuchang>.

⁹ Wang, Chang, “Philosophical Underpinnings of Chinese Legal System,” Science Direct, 2013, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/confucius>.

¹⁰ _____, “Three Fundamental Bonds and Five Constant Virtues,” Berkshire Publishing Group LLC, 2009, <https://chinaconnectu.com/wp-content/pdf/ThreeFundamentalBondsandFiveConstantVirtues.pdf>.

¹¹ Wang, Chang, “Philosophical Underpinnings of Chinese Legal System,” Science Direct, 2013, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/confucius>.

II

REN

The Ren or Jen is considered to be the nucleus of all the teachings of Confucius. This word consists of multiple meanings such as benevolence, humanity, human-heartedness, goodness, or love. Ren is considered to be the foundational virtue of Confucianism.

Ren had originally meant the handsomeness and bearing of the young virtuous warrior. Confucius transformed it into the uprightness of the junzi (gentleman or superior person), who influences others toward ethical action with the example of his excellence (de). According to Confucius, being such a gentleman does not require a high social rank, a fine appearance, or an eloquent manner of speech. Rather, it requires that one embody goodness in one's relationships with others.¹²

The concept of ren reflects presuppositions that are characteristic of Confucian philosophical anthropology (philosophical reflection on human nature). Confucians have historically viewed each person not as a morally autonomous individual but as a social being whose identity derives from his interaction with and conduct within the broader human community. The person who exhibits ren exemplifies the ideal of what a human being should be and encourages others to strive toward it. In fact, the word is homophonous with the word for human being (ren). The concept of ren, as mentioned above, has been interpreted in different ways, some of them partially expressed in English renderings such as "goodness," "benevolence," and "love." All these interpretations, however, share two notions: every human being has the capacity to possess ren, and ren manifests itself when a virtuous person treats others with humaneness.¹³

According to Confucius, Ren is what makes human beings uniquely human. The English translation "human-heartedness" suggests that Ren is what makes us human, that it is a matter of feeling as well as thinking. Ren is the foundation of all human relationships. Furthermore, by the translation "human-heartedness", this reveals the Chinese emphasis on the heart rather than the mind as the defining quality of the human nature.¹⁴ Man then should possess the heart of a human. A humane heart will lead man towards the authenticity of his being.

However, Confucius did not really give a formal definition of Ren. In his sayings (Lin Yu), Confucius never gives a clear definition of Jen. Accordingly, this reflects to his understanding of humanity which is for him highly personal. The way of humanity lies within each human being and must be realized in one's personal life. When one makes

¹² Stefon, Matt, "Ren: Chinese Philosophy," Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ren>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Koller, John M., "Oriental Philosophies," Second Edition, Macmillan Publishers LTD, 1985, p. 265.

an absolute and objective characteristic or feature of the way of humanity would result to the distortion of Jen.¹⁵ Hence, Ren is highly subjective that it depends from person and person and through personal realization. However, Confucius gave his followers a glimpse on the understanding of Jen so as to help them realize its meaning in their own lives. One of the assertions of Confucius on Ren is that it is mans ability to love – the core of humanity.¹⁶

It is also said that Jen is considered to be the ultimate guide of human action. It is a sense for the dignity of human life, a feeling of humanity towards others and self esteem for yourself.¹⁷ Accordingly, a true human being never departs himself from the way of Ren; one who departs from Jen is not expressing the fullness of humanity.”¹⁸ Jen then is necessary towards achieving the fullness of humanity. The Analects reads:

“Wealth and honor are what every man desires. But if they have been obtained in violation of moral principles, they must not be kept. Poverty and humble stations are what every man dislikes. But if they can be avoided only in violation of moral principles, they must not be avoided. If a superior person departs from humanity (Jen) how can he fulfill that name? A superior man never abandons humanity (Jen) even for the lapse of a single meal. In moments of haste, he acts according to it. In times of difficulty and confusion, he acts according to it”¹⁹

The quotation above stresses that Jen will make man fully human. It is then clear how important Ren is in the Confucian thought. Furthermore, it is said that a life without Ren would not be worth living. Someone who is wise or a true scholar would do nothing to injure Jen.”²⁰ It is Ren that makes life worth living. This may perhaps be contrasted to the thought of Socrates about how to live a worthy life. In Socratic sense, life should conscientiously be examined in order to make it a worthy one. Confucius, on the other hand, associated a worthwhile life with the observance of Ren. Remember that Ren is what makes us truly human; to realize the being of human beings. When one abandons Ren, he is giving up his fully human life. Jen is worth sacrificing one’s life for; that it is the basis of all human value and worth. It is ultimately Jen which makes life worth living.”²¹ Confucius, in the Analects, said:

¹⁵ Koller, John M., “Oriental Philosophies,” Second Edition, Macmillan Publishers LTD, 1985, p. 265.

¹⁶ Ibid, 265.

¹⁷ Dr. Lee, Archie C., “The Main Concepts of Confucianism,” Philosophy Lander, 2000, <https://philosophy.lander.edu/oriental/main.html>.

¹⁸ Koller, John M., “Oriental Philosophies,” Second Edition, Macmillan Publishers LTD, 1985, p. 265.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid, p. 266.

“If one takes Ren away from a Junzi, wherein is he worthy of name? There is no interval so short that the Junzi deviates from ren. Though rushing full tilt, it is there; though head over heels, it is there.”²²

Accordingly, Ren manifests itself in the inner mind in love and compassion for people and in avoiding harm or envy towards anyone. Ren is reflected on the golden rule of Confucius saying, “Do not do unto others what you would not wish they should do unto you.”²³ Just as man treats his self as human being through love, this should also be extended to how he treats the other agents. The Ren person spares no effort to help and love others; one even lays down one’s life for the sake of this end, with no thought of being repaid.²⁴

The Confucian Virtue of Ren then is somehow a form of authentic love – the love for your self and the love for others. This kind of love has the power to sacrifice one’s self for the sake of others. That is why Ren is one of the most important virtues to be cultivated in human life.

Li

The next Confucian virtue is Li. Just like Ren, Li also has multiple English translations. It is often rendered as ritual, proper conduct, or propriety. Originally, Li denotes court rites performed to sustain social and cosmic order. The Confucian’s, however, reinterpreted it into a formal social roles and institutions that, in this view, the ancients abstracted from cosmic model to order communal life. From customary patterns, Li came to mean conventional norms; yielding a new concept of an internalized code of civility that defined proper human conduct.²⁵ It may also mean religion; the general principle of the social order; the entire body of social, moral, and religious practices taught and rationalized by Confucius. It further means ritual and ceremony; a system of well-defined social relationships with definite attitudes toward another just like love in the parents, filial piety in the children, respect in the younger brothers, friendliness in the elder brothers, loyalty among friends, respect for authority among subjects, and benevolence in rulers. Moreover, it means a moral discipline in personal conduct and propriety in everything.²⁶ Li then is very much broad to define in a single word.

However, to understand better the broadness of this notion, it is necessary to carefully look on the historical understanding of Li. Accordingly, there are three

²² Confucius, “The Analects,” trans. By Robert Eno, An Online Teaching Translation, 2015, article 4.5, p. 14.

²³ _____ . “Wu Chang: The Five Constant Virtues of Humanity,” The Evolution of Confucianism towards Modern Day China, <https://sites.google.com/a/stonybrook.edu/group23mmp/principlesofconfucianism/wuchang>.

²⁴ _____ . “The Five Constant Virtues of China,” Google Valve, 2016, <http://www.goolevalve.com/news/news-detail-195.html>.

²⁵ Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “Li: Chinese Philosophy,” Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/li-Chinese-philosophy..>

²⁶ Koller, John M., “Oriental Philosophies,” Second Edition, Macmillan Publishers LTD, 1985, p. 267.

classifications or stages of understanding the notion Li. The earliest notion of Li is religious where it is concerned with the rites of religious performances. It soon came to denote other rituals like marriage and military and government festival. This understanding of Li coincides with a more or less elaborate set of rules and conventions which demands a particular observation in carrying out various activities which are mainly religious or social in character. The second notion of Li refers to the customary code of social behavior. In this kind of understanding, Li is a customary law or common morality. It takes in a form of a written law but in a positive sense, that it, it is more on what should be done rather than what should not be done. The third notion of Li is viewed in its conformation to the norms of humanity or Ren. This is the most important notion of Li since it highlights the Ren.²⁷ However, all those meanings of Li are closely related to each other. They all refer to acts which are public and ceremonial and acts which constitute the important rituals of life.²⁸ It is then a devotion to rites and ceremonies.

The best of these practices reflect the concrete embodiment and expression of Jen (Ren) in the past, and therefore serve as the guide to its realization in the present. This is the reason why Confucius, when asked about Jen by one of his disciples named Yen Yun, said, "To master one's self and return to propriety (Li) is humanity (Jen)."²⁹ It is clear in that statement that Confucius established a connection between Li (propriety) and Ren (benevolence). When one respects the customs and traditions of the society, it is also an expression of respect to the humanity. Furthermore, the Jen is the grounds of Li; that which makes Li a standard of conduct is that fact that it is in accord with Jen. Customs and traditions not in line or not in accord with Jen are not really Li. The true and authentic Li, according to Confucius, are those rules proper to actions that genuinely embody Jen. The Li should become the means whereby the individual's humanity can be evoked and developed.³⁰ Li then should be fundamentally based on Ren or Jen. Authentic Li should rightly conform to the notion of Ren which aims to achieve moral and social order so as for the humans to become truly humans. As what Confucius said in the Analects, "In the practice of Li, Harmony is the key."³¹

Li then is very much important not only in the sense that it shows respect to the traditions (of rites and ceremonies), but also that it helps to realize the Ren. Confucius further emphasized the importance of the rites in the Book VIII of the Analects which reads:

²⁷ Koller, John M., "Oriental Philosophies," Second Edition, Macmillan Publishers LTD, 1985, p. 268.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 266.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Confucius, "The Analects," trans. By Robert Eno, An Online Teaching Translation, 2015, article 1.12, p. 3.

“Courtesy without rites is labours lost. Prudence without rites is timidity. Courage without rites is disorder. Honesty without rites is impatience. When gentleman cherishes his family, the people are inspired towards benevolence. When he does not desert that of long standing, the people are not stealthy.”³²

Yi

The next Confucian virtue is Yi or commonly translated as righteousness. Accordingly, it is the virtue of fulfilling one’s duties and responsibilities to family, community, nation, and the world.³³ It is then the act of doing what is right and good for the others. Confucius said in the Analects,

“The superior man regards righteousness (yi) as the substance of everything. He practices it forth in modesty and he carries it to its conclusion in faithfulness. He is indeed a superior man!”³⁴

The quotation above suggests that Yi or righteousness is necessary for the formation of the superior man or gentleman (the concern of the third part of this paper). Yi informs the agents of the right way of acting under specific situations so that they will be constantly in accord with Jen or Ren. It is then both a moral disposition to do what is right and an ability to recognize what is right; like it is a moral sense or intuition. Confucius, accordingly, sometimes talks of this ability in terms of person’s character or uprightness.³⁵ Furthermore, Yi is a moral sense beyond simply following the norms or rules. It involves a balanced understanding of the situation and the “creative insights” necessary to apply virtues with no loss sight of the total good. Yi represents this ideal of totality as well as a decision-generating ability to apply a virtue properly and appropriately in a situation.³⁶ Yi then is a virtue which goes beyond the simple observation of rules or laws in a society. It is all about absolute righteousness, that is, following what is really right and avoiding what is really wrong. It encompasses rules for there are some rules which are morally wrong. Yi also reminds the agent to be observant or vigilant to the situation in observing virtues. It is then similar to the concept of practical wisdom proposed by the famous Western philosopher named Aristotle. In Aristotelean sense, practical wisdom is knowing what is right, good, and best based on a given particular set of circumstances or situations.³⁷

³² Confucius, “The Analects,” trans. By William Cheung, Confucian Publishing Company, 1999, Book I, Article 2.

³³ Baird, Forrest E. and Heimbeck, Raeburne S., “Asian Philosophy,” Philosophy Classics Volume VI, Routledge Publishing, 2006, p. 305.

³⁴ Koller, John M., “Oriental Philosophies,” Second Edition, Macmillan Publishers LTD, 1985, p. 269.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ _____, “Yi in Confucianism,” Hisour, <https://www.hisour.com/yi-in-confucianism-49325/>.

³⁷ _____, “Practical Wisdom,” Pressbooks, <https://kstatelibraries.pressbooks.pub/EDCI702/chapter/module-2-practical-wisdom/>.

Similar to the Confucian virtue Yi, the agent should be mindful and considerate to the situation and make it as the basis in determining what is morally right and wrong.

Moreover, what is according to Yi is unconditional and absolute. Actions must be performed for the sole reason that they are right.³⁸ Yi then reminds that agent that the act of doing what is right and good should be solely for the very sake that it is good and no other reasons. Some human acts are done for the sake that it produces certain benefits. Like for example, a man helps an elderly woman so that he will be rewarded with some money; or a political candidate who distributes money to the citizens in order to gain some votes from them. Those acts are not in accordance with Yi since they are done for the sake of other ends and not for the good. remember that Yi is doing right unconditionally, that is, doing right for that is what ought to be done. Accordingly, this Confucian concept is also similar to Kant's ethics of duty; the actions are done as a good in itself and not as a means to an end.³⁹ For Kant, all humans have rational duties to one another centering their duty towards the good, that is, of respecting humanity. All humans must be seen as inherently worthy of respect and dignity. He argued that all moralities must stem from such duties; a duty based on deontological ethics. Consequences such as pain and pleasure are irrelevant.⁴⁰ Just like Yi, man should do what is ought to be done not for the sake of other ends like benefit or utility, but for the sake of goodness itself.

Accordingly, a person who acts for the sake of Yi because such action is the right thing to do, is not far from Jen. To practice Jen is to act out of love and respect for humanity for no other reason than that it is right or the humane way to act.⁴¹ The practice of Yi then is close to the practice of Jen. This clearly shows the intimate relationship between Jen and Yi; that Yi is necessary for the cultivation and formation of Ren.

ZHI

The fourth Confucian virtue is Zhi or translated as "Wisdom". As rational beings, man should enrich and nourish their mind through the devotion of learning. That is why, Confucius emphasized the importance of wisdom. It is an important feature of the Way in which wisdom is viewed. Accordingly, the term Zhi encompasses the dynamics of the thinking process which is composed of two parts: *Hsueh* (learning) and *Ssu* (thinking). *Hsueh* describes the object of the knowing process while *Ssu* describes a process of critical thinking and reflection necessary to incorporate or assimilate the knowledge

³⁸ Koller, John M., "Oriental Philosophies," Second Edition, Macmillan Publishers LTD, 1985, p. 270.

³⁹ Dr. Lee, Archie C., "The Main Concepts of Confucianism," Philosophy Lander, 2000, <https://philosophy.lander.edu/oriental/main.html>.

⁴⁰ Misselbrook, David, "Duty, Kant, and Deontology," British Journal of General Practice, 2013, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3609464/>.

⁴¹ Koller, John M., "Oriental Philosophies," Second Edition, Macmillan Publishers LTD, 1985, p. 270.

acquired.⁴² Learning then is something which one acquires through external experience while thinking is the internal process, that is, the ability to synthesize, criticize, compare, or incorporate certain knowledge. Confucius, however, emphasized the necessity of balancing these two. He stated that one without the other would lead to an impaired or distorted knowledge. As the Book II, Article 15 in the Analects reads, “To learn without thinking is labor in vain, to think without learning is desolation.”⁴³ It is then necessary that these two should coexist in acquiring wisdom. This saying of Confucius was further explicated by the Chinese politician Xi Jin Ping on his speech entitled “Wit and Vision”. According to him, Confucius wanted to denote that learning without thought is pointless and thought without learning is dangerous. He said that studying without thinking would result to being in the dark and not learning anything at all. An empty thought, on the other hand, without the basis of learning would lead to confusion and lack of insight. Xi Jin Ping further associated this notion to the method of studying. Accordingly, blind study without contemplation is like having books that would lead you along by the nose without forming an own opinion. On the other hand, simply thinking on ones own without studying and researching is like building a tower on a base of a sand – one will gain nothing in the end. The only way to gain true knowledge and wisdom is by combining studying and contemplation.⁴⁴ Confucius then emphasized that in acquiring wisdom, man should both learn and think. He should learn from someone or something and this learning should be fully realized and understood by subjecting it to cognitive activities like analyzing, synthesizing, comparing, incorporating, and the like.

Furthermore, Confucius said that there are three methods to learn wisdom. In the Analects, he said, “By the three methods we may learn wisdom: First by reflection, which is the noblest: second by imitation, which is the easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest”. The first one is somehow associated to thinking while the second and the third one is somehow associated to learning. Reflection, the noblest one, makes the best understanding of unstrained subjects as one connects different concepts and then empowers one to transform it into something better. It is further like a discovery method that stimulates various insights and helps man in growing out learning and thinking potentials. Imitation, on the other hand, is the easiest method. It is a social form of learning where one gathers from one another through observation, imitation, and modeling. It includes attention, memory, and motivation. The third one which is experience, is

⁴² Malik, Yogish, “Three Most Effective Methods to Learn Wisdom: by Famous Chinese Philosopher Confucius, Medium, <https://medium.com/quotes-and-thoughts/wisdom-learning-methods-yogeshmalik-4e2c30ce1455>.

⁴³ Confucius, “The Analects,” trans. By William Cheung, Confucian Publishing Company, 1999, Book 2, Article 15.

⁴⁴ Jinping, Xi, “Wit and Vision,” Foreign Languages Press, 2015, https://www.chinastory.cn/ywdbk/chinastory/wap/en/detail/20190722/101270000042741563764362373032081_1.html.

accordingly the bitterest way to learn wisdom. It would be favorable yet insufficient. Experience comes with its own price, exhaustion, and pre-hypothesis.⁴⁵

Confucius also has a similar view with Socrates regarding knowledge or wisdom. Concerning Socrates, his famous quotes says that the wisest man is he who knows that he knows nothing. It is then an acknowledgment of ignorance. Concerning Confucius, he said in the Analects, "Knowledge is to acknowledge what is known, and what is unknown as not known."⁴⁶ For Confucius then, knowledge is not simply all about knowing things, but also knowing that there are still things that one doesn't know. It is similar to Socrates' view of the wise man. Both of them stresses the importance of ignorance.

It should also be noted that Confucius notion of wisdom is not more on the acquisition of the nature of thinking (epistemology), the nature of transcendental beings (metaphysics), the nature of the phenomenon (phenomenology), the nature of physical universe (natural philosophy); rather, it is more on the acquisition of the ethical or moral knowledge. This is of no surprise since he is fundamentally concerned with ethics. When Fan Chih, one of the disciples of Confucius, asked to Confucius about wisdom, he said, "To work for what is right for the people; and to respect the spirits of gods from afar, can be considered wisdom."⁴⁷ From the quotation, it is clear that he is establishing a connection between wisdom, righteousness, and propriety. Wisdom is all about knowing what is right and good. furthermore, Confucius emphasized that it is necessary to come to know humanity and what things are so that life may be ordered in a way conducive to human welfare.⁴⁸ This then clearly shows the ethical nature on his view of wisdom.

The most important knowledge, for Confucius, is the knowledge of the self rather than the knowledge of the external things such as social conditions and institutions. "Acquiring knowledge" is above all knowing who and what one is and this means knowing the principles upon which one acts. Accordingly, true knowledge is obtained only when there is self-knowledge, for in Confucianism, it is always the moral and social self that is taken as the ultimate.⁴⁹ This notion then is somehow similar to Socrates' famous saying that an unexamined life is not worth living. It is necessary to know thyself in order to live a worthy life. They are then both stressing the importance of examining one's self. In Confucian sense, man should strive for the knowledge of the self in order to acquire authentic wisdom.

Confucius' notion of wisdom is much more viewed on an ethical perspective. It is not more on the knowledge of the external things rather on the knowledge of the self and

⁴⁵ Malik, Yogish, "Three Most Effective Methods to Learn Wisdom: by Famous Chinese Philosopher Confucius, Medium, <https://medium.com/quotes-and-thoughts/wisdom-learning-methods-yogeshmalik-4e2c30ce1455>.

⁴⁶Confucius, "The Analects," trans. By William Cheung, Confucian Publishing Company, 1999, Book II, Article 2.

⁴⁷ Ibid, Book 4, Article 22.

⁴⁸ Koller, John M., "Oriental Philosophies," Second Edition, Macmillan Publishers LTD, 1985, p. 272.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 273.

the morality. This virtue is even necessary in order to acquire Ren and for the formation of the gentleman. The Book I, Article 14 of the Analects reads:

“The gentleman does not seek to satiate himself in eating, does not seek ease in living, is quick in his dealings, and prudent in his speech, and keeps to the correctness of those with the way. He can be considered as devoted to learning.”⁵⁰

XIN

The fifth Confucian virtue is Xin or translated as trustworthiness. Accordingly, Confucius uses this term for about 20 passages in the Analects. The frequency of his usage of this term would suggest that Xin has a significant place in his ethics.⁵¹

This notion is related to honesty, believing, and trusting. It is a virtue necessary in dealing with other persons; that man should not deceive others and should exactly mean what one will say.⁵² The virtue Xin is accordingly composed of two parts: first is all about the person and second one about his act and speech.⁵³ The notion Xin is of great importance in the individual person as well as his interpersonal relationships with the other persons and with the administration.⁵⁴ Concerning the self and interpersonal relationships, Confucius said in the Analects:

“Be loyal and trustworthy in speech and be sincere and respectful in conduct. Conduct should be so even when you are in the states of Man and Mo. Even when you are in your neighboring communities, should your speech not be loyal and trustworthy, and your conduct not sincere and respectful? Be standing and see it planted before you. Be seated in the carriage and see it on the wooden bar in front. Such is conduct”⁵⁵

The quotation above stresses that man should observe honesty in his speech and conduct. He should then be true to his words and should avoid deceiving others. It is through honesty that man will also gain trust. With that, man will be able to build a harmonious relationship with other people. Confucius said in the Analects, “A person

⁵⁰ Confucius, “The Analects,” trans. By William Cheung, Confucian Publishing Company, 1999, Book I, Article 14.

⁵¹ Wee, Cecilia, “Xin, Trust, and Confucius’ Ethics,” University Press of Hawaii, 2011, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23015356>.

⁵² Tikagami, Noriko, “Essence of Confucius and Confucianism: Yi, Zhi, and Xin,” Research Institute for Creating New Paradigms Based on Eastern and Western Wisdom, 2019, <https://inst-east-and-west.org/en/learning/2019/002725.html>.

⁵³ _____. “Wu Chang: The Five Constant Virtues of Humanity,” The Evolution of Confucianism towards Modern Day China, <https://sites.google.com/a/stonybrook.edu/group23mmp/principlesofconfucianism/wuchang>.

⁵⁴ _____, “Xin: One of the Five Constant Virtues of Confucianism,” China Culture, 2013, http://en.chinaculture.org/2013-01/15/content_450291.htm.

⁵⁵ Confucius, “The Analects,” trans. By William Cheung, Confucian Publishing Company, 1999, Book XV, Article 6.

without trustworthiness, who knows what he may do? A carriage without a yoke strap, a cart without a yoke hook: how can you drive them?"⁵⁶

Furthermore, Confucius said that a trustworthy person is close to becoming a righteous person. He said that trustworthiness is close to righteousness; that one's words are tested true. A righteous person should be truthful to his words. This then clearly shows that Xin and Yi (righteousness) are closely related. Accordingly, these two are even conducive to success. In the Analects, Confucius said, "For to be successful, a man should be by nature honest and devoted to righteousness. He would take heed to what is spoken and would note the countenance."⁵⁷

Now, what is the importance of trustworthiness in social administration? Accordingly, faithfulness is regarded by Confucianism as the fundamental basis in building and administering a society. The rulers and the state administrative should firstly gain the trust and faith of the people before calling upon them. Only when the ruler is faithful and honest with his words that people will also become faithful and honest.⁵⁸ Trust is very much necessary in order to establish a harmonious relationship between the administration and the people. Without trust, there would be a chaos in the society. In the Analects, Tzu-Hsia, one of the disciples of Confucius, said, "The gentleman should gain the trust of the people before he employs their services. Without trust, the people would consider their employment as exploitation. The gentleman should gain the trust of his lord before he recommends improvements. Without trust, the lord would consider his recommendations as contemptuous."⁵⁹ This suggests that both the people and the administration should have a mutual trust. A man of service should be trustworthy so that he would be worthy in such position. On the other hand, a man should also gain the trust of the administration so that his words would be acceptable especially when he makes suggestions or recommendations.

Xin or trustworthiness indeed plays a significant role in the Confucian virtue. It plays an important role not only in the individual person, but also in his social relations and engagement with the administration. This will make up the moral man.

⁵⁶ Confucius, "The Analects," trans. By Robert Eno, An Online Teaching Translation, 2015, Article 2.22, p. 8.

⁵⁷ Confucius, "The Analects," trans. By William Cheung, Confucian Publishing Company, 1999, Book XII, Article 20.

⁵⁸ _____, "Xin: One of the Five Constant Virtues of Confucianism," China Culture, 2013, http://en.chinaculture.org/2013-01/15/content_450291.htm.

⁵⁹ Confucius, "The Analects," trans. By William Cheung, Confucian Publishing Company, 1999, Book XIX, Article 10.

III

After discussing the five constant virtues, the paper now proceeds to the question regarding the end of those virtues. Where are those virtues directed to? What is the end of the five constant virtues? The end of those virtues is the formation of the *Junzi* or translated as Gentleman. Accordingly, it is the ideal towards which all Confucians aim and strive; it is the pivotal concept of the Analects.⁶⁰ The gentleman is one who cultivates himself morally, who participates in the correct performance of the rites, who shows filial piety and loyalty where these are due to others and the self, and who have cultivated humanness.⁶¹ The Gentleman then is the ideal man, the superior man or the man of virtue. In the Analects, Confucius said that a gentleman sets his heart on virtue.⁶² The five constant virtues namely the *Ren*, *Yi*, *Li*, *Zhi*, and *Xin* are entirely possessed by the Gentleman. A Gentleman is one who has a good and benevolent heart, who faithfully observes the rites, who thinks and acts righteously, who devotes himself to learning, and who honestly and faithfully expresses actions and words. To quote once again, the ethical ideal of Confucius is capsulized into a single complex proposition: "The Gentleman follows the Way of Self-cultivation of Virtue, observance of the Rites, devotion to learning, and Public service."⁶³ The self-cultivation of virtue is associated to Yi or righteousness; the observance of the rites is associated to Li or propriety; the devotion to learning is associated to Zhi or wisdom; and the Public service is associated to Xin or trustworthiness. But where is Ren? Remember that Ren is the nucleus of the Confucian virtue, hence, these four virtues should be fundamentally grounded on the Ren.

To further emphasize the doctrine of the gentleman, Confucius said in the Analects:

"For the gentleman there are the nine things which he thinks: In seeing, he thinks of enlightenment; in listening, he thinks of clarity; in countenance, he thinks of gentleness; in facial expression, he thinks of courtesy; in speech, he thinks of loyalty; in serving, he thinks of respect; in doubt, he thinks of questioning; in anger, he thinks of difficulties; and in considering acquisition, he thinks of righteousness."⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Baird, Forrest E. and Heimbeck, Raeburne S., "Asian Philosophy," Philosophy Classics Volume VI, Routledge Publishing, 2006, p. 305.

⁶¹ Dr. Johnson, Michael, "Confucianism: The Way of the Gentleman," University of South Africa, Brewminate, 2017, <https://brewminate.com/confucianism-the-way-of-the-gentleman/>.

⁶² Confucius, "The Analects," trans. By William Cheung, Confucian Publishing Company, 1999, Book II, Article 11.

⁶³ Baird, Forrest E. and Heimbeck, Raeburne S., "Asian Philosophy," Philosophy Classics Volume VI, Routledge Publishing, 2006, p. 304.

⁶⁴ Confucius, "The Analects," trans. By William Cheung, Confucian Publishing Company, 1999, Book XVII, Article 10.

The quotation above simply speaks of the five constant virtues. It is by constantly practicing all those five constant virtues that one will become a Junzi or Gentleman – the man of virtue.

Conclusion

The five constant virtues indeed offer a rich insight of ethical teaching. Those moral teachings of Confucius will not only lead man towards the formation of the gentleman, but also towards the formation of the good, harmonious, and fruitful social life. That is why, as mentioned in the chapter one of this paper, Confucius philosophy is fundamentally a humanistic social philosophy. It is much more concerned with man and with the society. The five constant virtues of Confucius will also remind the readers that they should not only look at one single virtue, rather, they should be open and embrace all the five virtues in order to live a truly moral life. Remember that those five constant virtues are intimately related to each other. Missing one of them would result to a problem. The Analects reads: “What is attained with wisdom but not secured with benevolence will be lost despite of its acquisition. What is attained with wisdom, secured with benevolence, but not presided over with dignity will not be respected by the people. What is attained with wisdom, secured with benevolence, presided over dignity but not enacted in accordance with the rites will not yet be goodness.”⁶⁵ It is then necessary to observe all the five constant virtues in order to become authentically good person.

These ethical teachings of Confucius gave a great impact in the entire Asian world until today. No doubt why he is regarded as one of the most important names in the philosophy of the East. He was considered to be the legitimate though uncrowned king of his times and even regarded as a god.⁶⁶ It is universally acknowledged that his contribution stands above all others in shaping the ideals and institutions of the culture of the east.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Confucius, “The Analects,” trans. By William Cheung, Confucian Publishing Company, 1999, Book XV, Article 33.

⁶⁶ Baird, Forrest E. and Heimbeck, Raeburne S., “Asian Philosophy,” Philosophy Classics Volume VI, Routledge Publishing, 2006, p. 302.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

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