

# The Ascension of Confucianism to State Ideology and Its Downfall

洪庆福 著

## 儒学兴衰概要

子曰：吾十有五而志于学，三十而立，四十而不惑，五十而知天命，六十而耳顺，七十而从心所欲不逾矩。

有子曰：礼之用，和为贵。先王之道斯为美；小大由之。有所不行，知和而和，不以礼节之，亦不可行也。



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# Preface



ublications in English on Chinese humanities, with particular reference to Confucianism, have long been a notable presence in academic life both at home and abroad. Naturally, the question itself emerges: why another while there is already choice among many?

A marked proportion of English learners on Chinese collegiate campuses simply demonstrate little knowledge, or even concern about, the many cultural milestones Confucianism has recorded, for good or bad, in the progression of Chinese civilization. Growing by the day their verbal expressiveness on issues relating to the West as they are, they just find it a tall order to address Chinese cultural themes in proportionate effectiveness. These two observations, when combined, readily suggest or well translate into a cultural one-sidedness at best and cultural unconsciousness at worst. For all their alleged command of English, as a result, years of academic pursuit finish with only a “one-way ticket” to excellence in terms of broadly defined mastery of English, and, this “pass” comes to nothing substantial in advancing themselves to the demanding world of cross-cultural communication in an age labeled “multiculturalism” and “globalization”, all on a re-engineered traditionalism and localism basis.

A corresponding picture featuring international students doing Chinese studies, as is everywhere recognizable and instantly acknowledged by many, lends an almost equal cause for serious concern. While offered a broad basis for approaching and, then, appreciating the Chinese humanities, they are in the want of a non-partisan guide to the marrow of cultural China and its fabric of life along the lines of Confucianism. Volumes-thick scholarly writings harass and perplex



those expected to get initiated; pocket-size general-interest ones insult, by way of over-simplicity, the intellect and judgment of those well under way to Confucian scholarship; and textbook-format ones neither suffice in extending the horizons of nor stand chances to enrich the grounds for those well-established in Chinese studies. More seriously, there remains to be filled the vacuum of a Chinese-authored (in English) introduction-hermeneutics-and comparativism-perspectived at once-to Confucianism, Confucian China and Confucian culture.

The delivery to you of this 3-volume long *Confucianism: A Comparative Approach & Interpretative Study*—with its respective sub-headings being *The Ascension of Confucianism to State Ideology And Its Downfall*, *Confucianism in Cross-Cultural Dialogue*, *A Lead-up to Confucianism (published)* —is not just meant to supply a cure to the situations briefed on in the above. Aside from an analysis and appreciation of the Confucianism-styled Chinese cultural expression within an interpretative historical framework coupled with an approach lent by comparative studies of Confucianism and Christianity, another key intention is to recapture and present the Confucian impulses to seek answers to the mysteries of human experience in this secular-oriented Oriental land; decipher or carve out order in relating the Chinese man to his perceived universe; respond creatively or otherwise to nature, both inner and outer, as well as to the shifting landscapes of dynastic rise and fall; express the earthly ambitions of the Confucian man himself in his rigidly stratified society; and create lasting monuments in variously fashioned forms indigenous to the Confucian mind.

Also, I have it as my aim first to demystify the Chinese cultural record by showing that Confucianism, as is true of all other time-honored ideologies, did not spring force spontaneously or independently of other beliefs or creeds, but reflected a set of specific shaping forces of history out of which its material and spiritual representations emerged and, then, to shed light on the view that the many questions, ideas, desires and longings prevailing in a China, a

Chinese culture, and a Chinese society now in transition, carry in their "physiology", "psychology" and "ethos" Confucianism for part of their living functions, i. e. just as human endeavors are inseparable from the nature of the universe, the passage for China, the nation, the culture, and the society, to modernity will be ill fated if at the cost of severing linkages with China's national heritage, cultural legacy and societal tradition, of which Confucianism is unmistakably a most enduring element.

Above all, this presentation of Confucianism is expected to serve as a jumping-off point for further exploration into Confucian premises as well as an invitation to promote intercultural dialogue and multi-cultural symbiosis.

In terms of structure and content, the materials used, culled from both primary and secondary sources, are offered chronologically. Each chapter will begin with an introduction designed to bring up a brief sketch of some of the most important dates, people, events, and developments of the period or topics under focal study. Put otherwise, subject-matter is produced successively and presented in a meaningful historical context, facilitating the eye and mind with an unobstructed view of the prevailing historical and material conditions that so powerfully impacted the form, content, reach and reverberation of each weighty Confucian expression in the realm of attitude and idea and in that of cultural artifact. This approach, whenever needs be, is modified to accommodate culturally significant ideas or developments by way of pulling them out of the chapter or section covering their period of occurrence and discussed either separately or in conjunction or comparison with others that came to life in other periods or entered the cultural stage of other nations. A detailed survey and, hence, treatment of all the Confucianism-related Chinese humanities can not only be unwieldy and confusing, but also go out of bounds for the purposes of this approach to and study of Confucianism. Instead, I have distilled from the mass of available information covering Confucianism in all its sweeping historical periods what I consider the crucial points,





always aiming to grasp the essence of the mosaic of political, economic and social developments, bringing to light, thereby, the pervasive themes attracting, choices made and propositions upheld by the Confucian scholar-official (both conventionally favored ones and those discounted or neglected for various reasons) and the Confucian society in both times of certainty and confidence and those of challenge and crisis.

For the generation of this guide to a comparative and interpretative study of Confucianism, I'm grateful to many an encouraging voice, instructive hand, enthusiastic eye, and enlightening mind. I owe special thanks to Professor Rolph R. Mirus, University of Edmonton, Canada. He was a major force in driving the need for such a writing into my mind when I was working on a CIDA (Canada International Development Agency) in the 1995-1996 period. Professor Sun Jingyao, Shanghai Normal University, Professor Fang Hanwen and Professor Ye Linsheng, Soochow University, they all shared my vision and affected, both with their insight into comparativism and Chinese culture and with their intelligent concern for structure and detail, the way I discuss certain issues and frame particular arguments, and for this I'm most appreciative. I'm also fortunate enough to have been extended invaluable and hard-to-single-out support from the following teaching and research staff members at the Foreign Studies School, Soochow University: Zhou Zhengxing, Lu Zhaoming, Xu Qinggen, Ding Wanjiang, Du Zhengmin, Zhu Quanming and Chen Gao. I wish to recognize in particular the contributions of Miss Yang Zhihong: working with me on the project all along, she has assisted me all the way from manuscript through clean copy with patience, smile, and advice, a vote of confidence in this undertaking. This writing is a rewarding experience. The task has been made more enjoyable by many of my students. Rather than the "dum-dum" kind of empty-eyed gawkier, they have exhibited surprising originality in the feedback process, a follow-up to my instructing them on traditional Chinese culture with the draft of this book functioning as core



reading material. Finally much credit for the successful production of this 3-volume long project goes to Shanghai Education Publishing House. I offer my thanks for their sponsorship, academic review and criticism. Equally, I acknowledge the cooperative spirit the editorial staff have displayed in transforming manuscript into this beautiful book. Mr. Zhang Wenzhong, Mr. Xu Wenkan and Ms. Ni Yajing deserve a special note of appreciation: their unflappability, good humor, and eagle eyes have led to considerable improvements in the launch of this project.





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# Chapter 1

## A Review of Orthodox Confucianism



he Way Confucius designed represented an attempt, both to bail out the Zhou Establishment and to project the people of his time, upon delivering them out of uncertainty and loss of bearings, onto a *li*-lined path of social order, with *ren* being the source fountain of all motivations toward a life of peace and harmony. It was out of this Way and at once in the many statements Confucius made on how to contract to oneself the Way's earthwork, on how to gain access to the Way, and on how to take sure steps along the Way, that Orthodox Confucianism emerged. Excluding many additions and modifications done to it in later times, Confucianism's "initial public offering" figured as:

### Quest For Man And Society

**An inquiry into man and society** Within the framework of the past yet supported by a positive look toward civilization, historians are at times fond of employing descriptive narrative, or the so-called "work picture", to present a framework of the past for appreciating the present. So do writers. The past tense and the grammar of imagined remembrance permeated, for long, Western literary tradition. What were thematic of much major Western literature from Theocritus to Renaissance were, with no exaggeration, lamentations over a golden age lost and an Arcadia laid waste, and longings for a possible recapture of Eden.

Confucius assumed such a narrative, too. The Zhou political system and its cultural institution, esp. the Zhou world of morality—established by Duke of Zhou upon borrowing heavily from cultures



handed down from the Xia and Shang times—arrested Confucius' most attention. The more he buried himself in reading ancient files bearing on early Zhou years, the better the things were which he discovered and romanticized. These years of what he called as "faith and order", with every one from commoner to emperor knowing his/her place and enjoying a stable and happy life, came to him as such a fine picture that he proclaimed, "I'd set about recovering the Zhou Establishment in the east (the state of Lu, his home country, lying in the east of the previous unified Zhou empire) the first thing if only any body could term me to an appropriate office." Resultingly, the body of thoughts known as Confucianism, which he developed upon the above-mentioned quest, reflection and reading, was framed in a frame supplied by the past, and against which the present was evaluated. And it was into this frame that Confucius built his own view of history which, we find, differed greatly from that of ancient Greeks, that of Christians, and that of his Taoist contemporaries.

As known to all, the earliest Greek fertility cults like that of Dionysus were a celebration of the endless cycle of living and dying and, thus, the cyclical view of history received blessings from a whole line of the world's greatest personages from Plato through Aristotle to St. Paul and St. Augustine.

No such cycle is truly cherished by Christians. To them, the world moves all the way from Genesis (the beginning) through Repent (mid part) down to Final Judgment (the close-end), a movement necessitated by the concept of the "original sin".

For Taoists, the movement of history is neither a cycle as known to ancient Greeks nor a three-step process as suggested by Christians, but a linear process of demise.

Confucius justified no cyclical view of history although he had man go for a harmonious relationship with nature which he realized does move in a cycle. Nor did he come up with any view of history as being in the tight control of a being called the Almighty God—he did uphold Heaven, though—for he took man's nature to be good by na-



ture. As regards his view about the Taoist approach to history, he had little regard for it, for he believed that man would finally be able to curb this downward trend—by reversing the order of things and through the wrought-iron fence of history to the very place where the Zhou regime started—even though there had been an accelerating decline of his so-called “lush smelling” Zhou cultural tradition, which he found attributable to both the greed and cruelties of the ruling and the fall into negligence of the universal order as embodied in the teachings of ancient sage-kings and in the institutions they molded. Further still, at the same time that he discarded the Taoist view of history, he dumped into the dunghill the idea of history as an accumulated process, because he found that the self-righteousness of change as asserted by new-money cliques would but lead man and society to chaos upon chaos. All these thinkings of his can be reduced to one statement: the past should be held as being fixed, immutable and invariable!

Overall, Confucianism with Confucius was a quest into something better than the present. Since he found this “something better” in the past, Orthodox Confucianism took on a conservative inclination the moment it was born, with the past providing the scales to weigh things on.

Despite that his own-styled view of history, which was to characterize the Confucian world outlook in later times, was but futile in the sense of his motivating efforts to make amends for what had passed and couldn't be remedied, the fact that he deplored over the unhappy state of affairs of his time (not a barren lament, but with a constant inference of a possible recovery of the past glory of the Zhou), and that he showed much confidence in man's being eventually able to secure such a recovery, injected into Confucianism a vigorous spirit, as important as its conservative perspective, to the survival and growth of Confucianism. Only with an understanding of these two counterbalancing yet mutually completing forces, can we know deeper the tonal, rhythmic, textual and harmonic subtleties of all aspects of

### Humanism

#### **More a school of humanism than a sermon on theology**

Long in vogue in certain intellectual quarters outside China has been the notion that Confucianism is theological and, for this matter, a religion. We find, in retrospect, that the formation of this notion has been due to the following few causes:

a. Rafts of religious concepts embedded in all the classics Confucius tapped for inspiration, such as that of Heaven, flowed direct into Confucianism.

b. Upon becoming standard textbooks for generations after generations of the Confucian literati, most of these classics which were written in times under theocracy significantly impacted the mindset of the scholar-official class with their significant religious overtones.

c. While he largely succeeded in bringing the spirit world into service for the secular one, through such efforts as re-interpreting Heaven's Mandate into mostly a moral mission, Confucius did not in actuality break away thoroughly from theology. He theologized, for instance, the absolute power as embodied in his ideal sovereign, thus making the view of the sovereign as Son of Heaven take firm ground in the Confucian world.

d. The worldly order sanctioned by Confucius was a ritual one. When issuing pronouncements about this order, Confucius sanctified it by applying to it some of what he found to be the most admirable elements of traditional Chinese religion, the most noticeable of them being ancestral worship. Thanks to the permeation of these religious elements, the mainstay of Confucianism through the ensuing centuries down to China's recent past not only cherished this order decked out with religion, but also tried to keep religious life tied to other aspects of Chinese socio-cultural life.

e. Confucius' own life was one in pursuit of sage-hood. And he was believed to be a sage by the bulk of the Chinese population for as



long as up to the early 20th century. Much posthumous glorification of the sage and a wealth of legend grew around his name. The *Analects*, the sublimity of which rests primarily in its simple ideas understandable to the citizenry, functioned for the better part of the Chinese history since Confucius as China's *Authorized Version of the Bible*. Not just that. While Confucianism has always remained unchurched, the practice of Confucianism has always been assisted by the institution of Confucian shrines and/or temples, the first ones of which sprang up like mushrooms all across China shortly after it became state ideology in the Western Han Dynasty. Admittedly, these shrines like those still well-kept ones in China's major towns have stood mainly as monuments preserving the memory of Confucius and great Confucian scholars, rather than as religious institutions like Christian churches, Jewish synagogues or Buddhist monasteries. However, the significance of these shrines can not simply be covered by all the implications of the capitalized term Pantheon. Somehow or other, Confucian shrines evoked, for centuries running on end, deep religious sentiments when they were interpreted as pantheons written in the lower case. One witness: as of the late Manchu (qing) rule, semi-annual (spring and autumn) sacrifices were offered there with all solemn pageantry featuring religious music and dance.

Still, concerns over man and man's world, rather than over gods and/or gods' world, constitute Orthodox Confucianism's distinctive character, which tells the world that Confucianism is neither religion nor a school of theology. Observations made hereunder may lend the needed strength to this claim:

a. Confucius did not offer to man's world any sacred scripture common to organized religion coming in varying shapes and colors. Nor did his followers. Canons were duly developed for understanding and practicing Confucianism, yet they never amounted to a system of religious dogma.

b. As noted previously, Confucius did clothe his ideal worldly order in any religious attirement. Religion was sourced only for the



sake of maintaining order, however, not for that of religiousness—Mo Zi well explained it by commenting that Confucius “learns religious rituals while cutting no niche in his own heart to hold any statue of spirits, which is something like one’s learning social etiquette yet playing host to nobody, and, like one’s weaving a fishing net yet having no fish coming to his net.”

c. Both Confucius and Confucianists in dynastic China offered explanations about the world of man, but they did it with purely moral ideas rather than with singularly theological ones. Truly, there is a religious touch in all theorems of Confucianism about the man’s world, yet this touch is but skin deep, distances to the touch as could be disclosed in Moist teachings.

d. Orthodox Confucianism has little use for theology which counts much in the world’s religions. What’s more, gods, deities and spirits, some of which were once taken as concrete entities in the formative years of Confucianism, dissolved gradually into concrete symbols, and then, disappeared into a generalized moral belief about the brotherhood of humanity and about a pantisocracy .

e. Each culture postulates its own way toward the realization of man’s sublimity. To Hebrews, whose philosophy was born out of awe at gods, it was through a firm belief in gods and through mercy-seat blessings. To traditional Hindus, it would be obtainable only in Nirvana after one would willingly endure all the ordeals in mundane life. To Christians, it is held reachable if one can resist all the temptations and seductions cast into his secular life by Mr Bad, Mr No-Good, Mr Malice, and Mr Envy, etc. . Common to all these three peoples and to many others is the notion that there is a better life attainable somewhere over the bounds of the material world, whether or not they unanimously agree that one will fall into what has been variously termed as “the great deep”, “hell”, “utter darkness”, or “chaos”, so long as one minds the do’s and dont’s as stipulated by one’s belief. This is not the case with the Confucian culture. Confucianism neither was born out of awe at gods nor developed as a result of wonderment at



man, which was true of ancient Greek philosophy. Instead, it was born out of and developed upon an awe and a wonderment at the order of man and society, something that had brought peace to man's secular world in early Zhou years and before.

In order to re-institute this order, Confucius prescribed few doses of religion's bitter medicine. He held out little hope of heaven or any threat of hell. According to him, earthly life just is not a transition to another life. So, quite contrary to the move taken by the Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a religious allegory authored by Bunyan—the Christian flies from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, the vision of an ideal happy state—the very step taken by true Confucianists as ordained by Confucianism is not an irrational one to write off losses in the secular world, but one to re-mold the secular with beliefs in man's betterment toward sage-hood.

All taken, that we say Orthodox Confucianism is more a teaching about humanity than a religious sermon is mainly because that it's majorly interested in man, in the secular world of man, and in man's being able to get nobility from degradation, rise to power from obscurity, and to attain sage-hood by relying more on morals than on belief in gods. It may appear in religious outfits, yet it is not so in flesh and blood. While religiousness colors nearly all its ideas, it is but of secondary importance, for the ultimate amelioration and settlement of all of man's real-life problems is supposed to be arrived at majorly through secular means rather than through religious ones. With its "prima facie" interest in man's present world, it is the being and doing now that matters most to Orthodox Confucianism. And for this reason, Orthodox Confucianism is charged with praxes, ways or methods applicable to man's recognizing the facts that touch his mundane life, disengaging the web clouding his vision and putting himself onto the right path.

### **Moral Philosophy**

**A moral philosophy with the concept of *ren* serving as core**