

## Asian Community: Confucius Thoughts and Neo-Confucianism

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Translated by Wenting Yang

The founder of Chinese Culture University, Dr. Chang Chi-yun stated in the preface of his book *孔學今義 Confucianism: A Modern Interpretation* that “In five thousand years of Chinese history, Confucius thoughts is the axis to inherit the past and usher in the future. One cannot fully understand the origin, development, and future of Chinese culture, if one does not understand Confucius thoughts.” In order to further increase the our students’ understanding of Chinese culture, Principal Hsu Hsing-Ching invited Professor Wang Junn-yann, Chair of Department of Chinese Literature and Chair of Graduate School of Chinese Literature to deliver a speech on “Asian Community: Confucius Thoughts and Neo-Confucianism” for our 12th lecture. Chair Wang Junn-yann received his Ph.D. from Chinese Culture University and he has enormously profound knowledge on the intellectual and thought history of Han, Sui and Tang, and Yuan and Ming Dynasties. In this lecture, Chair Wang focused on four dimensions: first, the historical reason that Confucius discovered “仁 (benevolence)”; second, Confucius thoughts on education, politics, law, history, and religion; third, six contributions of Confucius thoughts; fourth, three outline of Confucius thoughts: benevolence (仁 *Jen*), righteousness (義 *I*), and ritual (禮 *Li*). Chair Wang provided a detail explanation for the content and development of Confucius thoughts. The summary of Chair Wang’s lecture is as follow:

Chinese culture is integrated by three schools of thoughts, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, and the main trunk is Confucianism. People in Chou (周) dynasty inherited traditions from Yin Shang (殷商) dynasty that respecting and believing god and ghost. People in Chou dynasty valued the worship of ancestors and emphasized family kinship. Duke of Chou advocated rites and music and he establish etiquette system of Chou dynasty. To be specific, Duke of Chou expanded the order of family kinship between father and son (emphasizing “親親之殺 (The decreasing measures of the love due to relatives)”) to the hierarchic order between monarch and subjects (emphasizing “尊尊之等 (the steps in the honor due to the worthy)”). After King Ping moved the capital eastward to Wangcheng, the etiquette system which characterized the hierarchic order between father and son and the hierarchic order between monarch and subjects was gradually collapsed. For example, subjects killed their monarch and son killed his father. Confucius witnessed the chaos resulted from the collapse of etiquette system and he reflected on that the etiquette system was mere formality and there was no substance. Therefore, Confucius proposed there should be moral content and performance of benevolence, righteousness, and ritual. He proposed these moral content should be a new content and new form of Chou system and Confucius thus created new moral direction of Chinese culture. Based on his thoughts, education philosophy, political philosophy, law philosophy, history philosophy, art philosophy, and religion philosophy in Chinese Confucianism were developed. These philosophies focused on moral values and are committed to cultivate moral personality. The ultimate goals of these philosophies are to regulate the family, rule the state, and ultimately head for pacifying the whole world with moral personality. Hence, Confucius created the fundamental direction of Chinese Confucius thoughts.

Mencius asserted the innate goodness of the individual and “exhaustion of dedication, learning the nature, learning the weight.” Mencius internalized Confucius’s ideas of benevolence, righteousness, and ritual and asserted that these moral values are innate in human nature and asserted that these innate goodness of human nature based on morality of heaven. Mencius completed moral theory of Confucianism by emphasizing that morality is autonomous morality from inner nature and emphasizing the contingency and judgment of morality in reality conditions. On the other hand, Xun Kuang discussed morality from natural sensitivity and emphasized the importance of heteronomous morality. He advocated to learn moral norms through perception and called for reestablishing ethic norms in order to respond to chaotic Warring States period. He proposed “transformation and development of human nature” advocating that people should cultivate their temperament through perceiving morality rationally. People’s natural sensitivities can be cultivated and then can satisfy the demands of new ethic order. “Li-yi system (system of ritual and righteousness 禮義之統)” should be established as the standard of social moral norms. His thoughts created the social meaning of heteronomous morality in Confucianism.

Tung Chung-shu in Han Dynasty faced a united Han Empire. Tung proposed “interactions between heaven and mankind,” which inherited the moral value core of Confucianism in Pre-Chin Period and integrated Yin Yang cosmology into a Confucianism. Tung advocated “Yang is superior to Yi” to respect the legitimacy of Emperor and meanwhile he created advocated a theory of disaster to balance the legitimacy of Emperor. Emperor Wu of Han accepted Tung’s thoughts and adopted policy of “rejecting the other schools of thought and respecting only Confucianism.” In other words, Tung reinterpreted Confucianism and expanded Confucianism’s influences in Han Dynasty through the supports of political power. Although the mainstream in Wei, Jin, Nan-bei, Sui and Tang dynasties were Buddhism and Taoism, national regulation system and social order was still based on Confucianism.

In responses to the challenges from heavenly theory of Taoism and the ideology of the mind of Buddhism, Neo-Confucian Chang Tsai absorbed “theory of *chi*” of Taoism and stated “the great void equals *chi*.” Chang reinterpreted heavenly theory of Confucianism, as endless, seemingly invisible but existed. Moreover, Chang also absorbed the delicate parts of the ideology of the mind of Buddhism. Chang discussed the superiority and limitation of “Spirits of heaven and earth” and “spirits of *chi*” and led to the peak of Neo-Confucianism.

Chu Hsi inherited Cheng I and asserted “dichotomic view of 理 *Li* and *Chi*” and “心 *Hsin*, 性 *Hsing*, and 情 *Ching* trichotomy.” Chu emphasized perceiving everything’s *Li* through heart (心 *Hsin*) and then people can understand the *Li* of heaven, clarify *Hsing* and *Li*, and cultivate morality through knowledge. This is similar to Xun Kuang’s thoughts that knowledge can establish heteronomous morality. Wang Yang-ming’s thought “*Hsin* is *Li*” is similar to Mencius and emphasized autonomous morality that morality was from inner conscience, the lively correspondence of moral conscience, in order to break increasingly rigid moral value and attempted to regain the inner substance and energy of morality mentioned in Confucianism in Pre-Chin Period. Wang Fu-chih inherited Chang Tsai’s theory of “*Chi*” and proposed the concept of “*Chi* of Heaven and Earth” to integrate Confucius, Mencius, Tung Chung-shu, Chu Hsi, and Wang Yang-ming’s thoughts. He also combined Mencius’s “view of goodness of human nature” and Xun Kuang’s “view of evil of human nature” and reconciled autonomous morality and heteronomous morality. He proposed argument of “constant renewal of character, destiny descends daily” which integrated inborn goodness of

human nature and acquired morality practice. He was a famous philosopher of Neo-Confucianism.

Chinese culture is extensive and plural. The mainstream is Confucian thought and the core of Confucian thoughts is moral value. For two thousand years, Confucianism absorbed thoughts of different periods and changed according to them. Confucianism became the most energetic spiritual content of Chinese culture.

Both teachers and students were impressed with Chair Wang's lecture that he explained the Confucianism smoothly and thoroughly. For our students, it is the best chance to learn required basic education.

Principal Hsu added that in the process of modernization after Western culture entered East Asia in mid-19th century, China, Korea, Japan all faced the problems of cultural clash and acceptance. For example, basic thought “中體西用 Chung Ti hsi Yung” of “洋務運動 Self-strengthening movement” in late Ching Dynasty means that introducing and applying the Western advanced science and technology while keeping the Chinese traditional thought, culture, institution as basis. Korea also adopted similar thoughts calling “東道西器 DongDo-SeoGi (eastern morality and western instrument).” Japan turned from “Wakon-Kansai (Japanese spirit with Chinese Learning)” to “Wakon-Yosai (Japanese spirit with Western learning)” in the Meiji Restoration Era which encouraged Japanese people to learn Western culture and maintain traditional culture at the same time. That is to say, it was the formation and evolution of common knowledge in the whole East Asian Culture sphere.

Takeishi Nobukazu (武石信一), second year graduate student from Graduate school of history asked that as the development of society turns to AI, is moral thoughts of Confucianism still useful? Chair Wang utilized historical examples to explain that Confucianism has been through long-term examinations in Han, Tang, Song, Ming, Ching dynasties and has not been eliminated. Thus, it proved that morality has eternity, penetration, and extensibility. Nowadays society mainly based on capitalism; however, capitalism does not include morality. Indeed AI development is very amazing tool but if it was controlled by people who do not have moral conscience, it could be more terrible than atomic bomb. On the contrary, if it was controlled by people who has moral conscience, it will contribute to the whole mankind. Thus, it actually requires more morality in the country of AI without doubt. Chu Hsiang Ying, senior student from Department of Japanese Language and Literature asked that China has established Confucius Institutes in the world and how was their effects and influences? The content of this lecture was very plentiful and full of knowledge and it stimulates lively discussion.

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