

# CONFUCIAN ETHICS IN MODERN SOCIETY: APPROPRIATING CONFUCIANISM IN CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSES

**Manuel B. Dy, Jr.**

Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines

## Abstract

The task of this paper is to show the relevance of Confucian ethics to modern society. We now live in a global society, characterized by the development of technology, market economy, the rise of democratic forms of society, and instant communication overcoming the limitations of space and time. Yet the same globalization has brought forth a widening gap of the rich and the poor, the degradation of nature, the migration of peoples away from their families, a consumerist society, and the subjugation of the individual and the state to the world order. While we cannot avoid the globalization process, we can address specific issues arising from the process. This paper will limit itself then to issues pertaining to the family, the state, nature, and to the cosmos (cosmopolitanism).

## บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้ต้องการแสดงให้เห็นความสัมพันธ์กันระหว่างจริยธรรม แบบ ขงจื้อและสังคมนิยมใหม่ ปัจจุบันเรามีชีวิตในสังคมโลกไร้พรมแดนซึ่งขับเคลื่อน และหมุนไป โดยความก้าวหน้าทางเทคโนโลยี เศรษฐกิจแบบตลาด การเกิดขึ้นของ ประชาธิปไตยหลายรูปแบบ และการติดต่อสื่อสารที่รวดเร็วฉับพลัน ซึ่งก้าวข้าม จิตจำกัดด้านสถานที่และเวลา แต่โลกาภิวัตน์ได้นำมาซึ่งกับการขยายช่องว่าง ระหว่างคนรวยกับคนจน การลดระดับความสำคัญของธรรมชาติ การอพยพย้าย ถิ่นฐานของประชาชนทำให้ต้องห่างไกลจากครอบครัว สังคมบริโภคนิยม และ การจัดระเบียบปัจเจกชนและรัฐตามระเบียบของโลก ในขณะที่เราไม่อาจหลีกเลี่ยง ขบวนการ โลกาภิวัตน์แต่เราก็สามารถจัดการกับปัญหาต่าง ๆ ที่เกิดจากขบวนการ

โลกาภิวัตน์นี้ได้ บทความนี้ครอบคลุมเฉพาะเนื้อหาที่เกี่ยวข้องกับครอบครัว วัฒนธรรมชาติ และความเป็นพลเมืองโลก

The task of this paper is to show the relevance of Confucian ethics to modern society. We now live in a global society, in a borderless world engineered and propelled by advances in technology such as the internet and the cellular phone, resulting in a freer but interdependent market economy, homogenization of cultures aptly called “mcdonaldlization or cocacolalization of cultures”, the rise of democratic forms of society such as civil society, and instant communication overcoming the limitations of space and time. Yet the same globalization has brought forth a widening gap of the rich and the poor, the degradation of nature, the migration of peoples away from their families, a consumerist society, and the subjugation of the individual and the state to the world order, to becoming a citizen of the world. While we cannot avoid the globalization process, we can address specific issues arising from the process. This paper will limit itself then to issues pertaining to the family, the state, nature, and to the cosmos (cosmopolitanism).

The sources of Confucian ethics are basically the Four Books: the Analects of Confucius, the Book of Mencius, the Doctrine of the Mean, and the Great Learning. From each of these sources I intend to appropriate a Confucian ethics applicable to the family, the state, the environment, and the world at large.

## **Analects and Filial Piety**

*Ren* ( ) is the primary virtue in *Analects*. Without *ren*, the other virtues of wisdom, righteousness and propriety would make no sense. *Ren* is translated as benevolence, human-heartedness, humanity, and when Confucius was asked for the meaning of *ren*, he said, “It is to love human beings”.<sup>1</sup> Etymologically, the character is made up of two characters: *ren* ( ), meaning “human being”, and *erh* ( ), meaning “two”. Thus, *ren* pertains to interpersonal relationships, to the love that should unite them.

*Ren*, however, has two aspects, *chung* ( 忠 ) translated as conscientiousness, and *shu* ( 恕 ) translated as the Golden Rule.<sup>2</sup> The two cannot be separated; the first is our duty to oneself (being true to oneself) and the latter, our duty to others. *Chung* and *Shu* cannot be separated just as genuine love for oneself cannot be separated from love for others.<sup>3</sup>

*Ren*, however, begins in the family. “Filial piety and brotherly respect are the root of humanity (*ren*).<sup>4</sup> The family plays a pivotal role in Confucian ethics such that when

The Duke of She told Confucius, “In my country there is an upright man named Kung. When his father stole a sheep, he bore witness against him”. Confucius said, “The upright men in my community are different from this. The father conceals the misconduct of the son and the son conceals the misconduct of the father. Uprightness is to be found in this”.<sup>5</sup>

This Analect has been misinterpreted to mean that for the sake of the family, one may break law. What Confucius simply wanted to emphasize is that the family is the basic unit of society. “Few of those who are filial sons and respectful brothers will show disrespect to superiors, and there has never been a man who is not disrespectful to superiors and yet creates disorder”.<sup>6</sup> By all means, the love in the family should be extended to the community, to the non-kin members of society. Mencius said, “Treat with respect the elders in my family, and then extend that respect to include the elders in other families. Treat with tenderness the young in my own family, and then extend that tenderness to include the young in other families”.<sup>7</sup> Thus, with regards to brotherly respect, in most oriental societies, we address the non-kin superior as “elder brother” or “*kuya*” in Filipino.

It is in the practice of filial piety that is problematic in our modern society today. Filial piety consists in taking care of elderly parents, which for Confucius is not just providing material support and comfort to one’s parents, for “we support even dogs and horses. If there is no feeling of reverence, wherein lies the difference?”<sup>8</sup> What matters is the attitude of love.<sup>9</sup> This is why we Asians are reluctant to commit our elderly parents

to institutions. But how can we do this when both husband and wife have each their own work, and likewise the children are preoccupied with school or their jobs? The solution is to hire domestic workers who may be trusted to care for the elderly parents with reverence and love. This trust, however, necessitates the treatment of the domestic worker as valued members of the family. Here the Golden Rule clearly applies for both the couple and the domestic worker. More than respect and fairness, there is mutual concern and caring between the couple and the domestic worker.<sup>10</sup>

## **Mencius and Governance**

Mencius is known for his theory of the original goodness of human nature. The whole of Book Six, part I, argues for this innate goodness of human nature. But Mencius is also known as the “outer king” in contrast to Confucius as the “inner sage”. Mencius applied his theory of innate goodness of human nature to the state in the notion of the compassionate government. What counts as the most important element of the state is the people. The Mandate of Heaven given to the ruler is also the voice of the people. Mencius may also be the first philosopher to justify a revolution. When the people overthrows a tyrannical ruler, the people are not committing murder for, following the rectification of names of Confucius (the ruler must act as a ruler, the father as a father, etc.), the people are not killing a human being but an animal. By considering the people as the most important element of the state, Mencius may be considered as the first democratic philosopher in the history of philosophy. What is important in governing a state is what benefits the people rather than one’s own profit, for the ruler has a compassionate heart-mind that cannot bear to see his people suffer.

[Mencius replied to King Hui of Liang], “Why must Your Majesty use the term profit? What I have to offer are nothing but humanity and righteousness. If Your Majesty ask what is profitable to your country, if the great officers ask what is profitable to their families, and if the inferior officers and the common people ask what is prof-

itable to themselves, then both the superiors and the subordinates will try to snatch the profit from each other and the country will crumble.<sup>11</sup>

Governance in our modern times does not pertain only to the state but also to business and civil society. What Confucian ethics prescribes to us in governing any society is service to the people, not self-interest. Again, the Golden Rule applies in governing a people.

King Hsuan of Ch'i said, "I have a weakness. I love wealth". Mencius replied, "...If Your Majesty love wealth, let your people enjoy the same, and what difficulty will there be for you to become the true king of the empire?" The King said, "I have a weakness, I love sex". Mencius replied, "...If Your Majesty love sex, let your people enjoy the same, and what difficulty will there be for you to become the true king of the empire?"<sup>12</sup>

This of course is easier said than done. In our complex globalized world today, the leader is beset with problems of corruption and poverty. Will it suffice the leader of any society to lead by example?

Mencius said, "Humanity subdues inhumanity as water subdues fire. Nowadays those who practice humanity do so as if with one cup of water they could save a whole wagonload of fuel on fire. When the flames were not extinguished, they would say that water cannot subdue fire. This is as bad as those who are inhumane. At the end they will surely lose [what little humanity they have.]".<sup>13</sup>

Clearly, the way to combat structural injustice is structural reforms. One must harness the efforts of others as well. The leader in today's globalized world must learn to empower the people to combat poverty and corruption.

## ***The Doctrine of the Mean and Environmental Protection***

A major cause of the social injustice today is the mindless over-exploitation of mother earth's common resources (minerals, farmlands, petroleum, trees, the air we breathe and the water we drink) to satisfy our wants and not taking into consideration the needs of others too for their survival in the present and future generation. Wasteful consumerism has brought problems of pollution, garbage disposal, floods, loss of bio-diversity, the endangering of many species, and climate change.

While it is true that it is in the *Tao Te Ching* that we can find an environmental ethics, the Confucian classic *Chung Yung or The Doctrine of the Mean* also prescribes our proper attitude and treatment of Mother Nature.

Chung-ni (Confucius) said, "The superior man [exemplifies] the Mean (*chung-yung*). The inferior man acts contrary to the Mean. The superior man [exemplifies] the Mean because, as a superior man, he can maintain the Mean at any time. The inferior man [acts contrary to] the Mean because, as an inferior man, he has no caution".<sup>14</sup>

*Chung* literally means "centrality" and *yung* literally means "universal and harmonious". What is central refers to human nature, and what is universal and harmonious refers to human nature's relation with the universe. Together, *chung-yung* means there is harmony in human nature and this harmony grounds our moral being and is the foundation of the cosmic order, sustaining the regenerative processes of all the myriad creatures in nature. The human being and Nature form a unity. To maintain this harmony, the human being must act and live in moderation in his ordinary day-to-day affairs *Yung*, after all, also means "ordinary".

The quality that unites the human being and Nature is *cheng*, translated as sincerity or integral wholeness.

It is due to our nature that enlightenment results from sincerity. It is due to education that sincerity results from enlightenment. Given sincerity, there will be enlighten-

ment, and given enlightenment, there will be sincerity.<sup>15</sup>

Only those who are absolutely sincere can fully develop their nature. If they can fully develop their nature, they can then fully develop the nature of others. If they can fully develop the nature of others, they can then fully develop the nature of things. If they can fully develop the nature of things, they can then assist in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth. If they can assist in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth, they can thus form a trinity with Heaven and Earth.<sup>16</sup>

In order to live a life of moderation, we need the virtue of sincerity. Sincerity involves strenuous learning and practice, tested in ordinary words and deeds. It is the spiritual foundation of our mundane dealings with Nature. Our dealings with Nature for the most part of our ordinary life assume the mediation of technology. It is also through technology that we relate to others. Technology in itself is neither good nor evil; its morality depends on how we make use of it. We can use it to dominate and kill others. We can use it excessively such that we become enslaved to it. We can use it as a facade to hide or manipulate the truth. Or we can use it to develop our nature, the nature of others, the nature of things, and assist in the transformation and nourishing process of Mother Nature.

### **The Great Learning and Cosmopolitanism**

The globalization process in our world today entails forming a world community living in peace amidst diversity of cultures. This is the issue of cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism, derived from the Greek word '*kosmopolites*' meaning 'citizen of the world', has many different versions, covering the fields of politics, economics and ethics. Nonetheless, the core idea remains that all beings belong to a single community, regardless of political affiliations, and that this world community should be cultivated.<sup>17</sup> That all beings belong to a single community would make all human beings "global citizens" and this global citizenship carries an ethics of responsibility in order to cultivate this world community.

The *Ta Hsueh* or *The Great Learning* or *The Highest Order of Cultivation*<sup>18</sup> contains such a cosmopolitan ethics, uniquely different from the Western global ethical theories that present conflicts between duties to the family and compatriots or the state, on one hand, and duties to all human beings, regardless of affections and political identities, on the other. What qualifies it to be a cosmopolitan ethics is that it speaks of values or virtues that are universal and it explicitly advocates peace in the world, although 'world' in the historical context of the text refers to the whole of China, at this time, made up of different states.

But first a word about the title. *Ta Hsueh* ( ). 'Hsueh' literally means 'learning' and 'Ta' means 'big', 'great'. 'Ta Hsueh' can mean then three things: 1) higher learning, 2) adult education, and 3) education for the great man. Although all three are acceptable, it is the third that is preferred in accordance with the content of the text.

The Way of learning to be great (or adult education) consists in manifesting the clear character, loving the people, and abiding in the highest good.

Only after knowing what to abide in can one be calm. Only after having been calm can one be tranquil. Only after having achieved tranquility can one have peaceful repose. Only after having peaceful repose can one begin to deliberate. Only after deliberation can the end be attained. Things have their roots and branches. Affairs have their beginnings and their ends. To know what is first and what is last will lead one near the Way.

The ancients who wished to manifest their clear character to the world would first bring order to their states. Those who wished to bring order to their states would first regulate their families. Those who wished to regulate their families would first cultivate their personal lives. Those who wished to cultivate their personal lives would first rectify their minds. Those who wished to rectify their minds would first make their wills sincere. Those who wished to make their wills sincere would first extend their knowledge. The extension of knowledge consists in the

investigation of things. When things are investigated knowledge is extended; when knowledge is extended, the will becomes sincere; when the will is sincere, the mind is rectified; when the mind is rectified, the personal life is cultivated; when the personal life is cultivated, the family will be regulated; when the family is regulated, the state will be in order; and when the state is in order, there will be peace throughout the world. From the Son of Heaven down to the common people, all must regard cultivation of the personal life as the root or foundation. There is never a case when the root is in disorder and yet the branches are in order. There has never been a case when what is treated with great importance becomes a matter of slight importance or what is treated with slight importance becomes a matter of great importance.<sup>19</sup>

*“The Way of self-cultivation, at its highest level, is a three-fold path: it lies in causing the light of one’s inner moral force to shine forth, in bringing the people to a state of renewal, and in coming to rest in the fullest attainment of the good”.*<sup>20</sup> The three cardinal principles of the *Ta Hsueh* are “to illustrate illustrious virtue; to renovate the people; and to rest in the highest excellence”.<sup>21</sup> “To renovate the people” (*hsin min* ) is replaced at times by “loving the people” (*ch’in min* , literally meaning “to be intimate” or to “treat as kin”), as in the original version of the *Ta Hsueh* in the *Li Chi (Book of Rites)* and in the later versions that claimed to be the original. In any case, whether renewing the people or loving the people, the point is to do good to the people. Doing good to the people may seem at first glance to be addressed only to rulers, but the way of learning or self-cultivation is for everyone.

The three cardinal principles are in reality one, which is to illustrate one’s illustrious virtue or to let one’s inner moral force to shine forth or to manifest the clear character. The way to do this is to love the people or to renovate the people. And to abide in the highest good is none other than to manifest one’s illustrious virtue in the highest perfection.

When asked why the learning of the great man should consist in manifesting the clear character, the Neo-Confucian philosopher Wang

Yang-ming said,

The great man regards Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things as one body. He regards the world as one family and the country as one person. As to those who make a cleavage between objects and distinguish between the self and others, they are small men. That the great man can regard Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things as one body is not because he deliberately wants to do so, but because it is natural to the human nature of his mind that he do so. Forming one body with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things is not only true of the great man. Even the mind of the small man is no different. Only he himself makes it small.<sup>22</sup>

The cosmopolitan ethics of the *Ta Hsueh* is based on the Mencian insight of the innate goodness of human nature because it is endowed by Heaven, and this includes not only a responsibility to humankind but also to all beings in the world, sentient beings like the animals, living beings like the plants, and non-living things like tiles and stones. Thus, a person would feel alarmed and commiseration when he sees a child about to fall into a well,<sup>23</sup> feel an “inability to bear” when he observes the pitiful cries and frightened appearance of birds and animals about to be slaughtered, feel pity when he sees plants broken and destroyed, and feel regret when he sees tiles and stones shattered and crushed.<sup>24</sup>

The way to manifest the clear character is to love or renovate the people. This is because human nature is originally good and clear, our mind-heart (hsin 心) being rooted in Heaven-endowed nature before it is obscured by selfishness and greed. Getting rid of the obscuration of selfish desires is to restore the condition of forming one body with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things, and loving the people is “to put into universal operation the function of the state of forming one body”.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, only when I love my father, the father of others, and the father of all men can my humanity really form one body with my father, the father of others, and

the fathers of all men...Only when I love my brother, the brothers of others, and the brothers of all men can my humanity really form one body with my brother, the brothers of others, and the brothers of all men...Everything from ruler, minister, husband, wife, and friends to mountains, rivers, spiritual beings, birds, animals, and plants should be truly loved in order to realize my humanity that forms one body with them, and then my clear character will be completely manifested, and I will really form one body with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things. This is what is meant by 'manifesting the clear character throughout the world'. This is what is meant by 'regulation of the family', 'ordering the state', and 'bringing peace to the world'.<sup>26</sup>

Loving or renovating the people must be brought to its highest fulfillment, reaching a point of dynamic equilibrium. Abiding in the highest good is "to manifesting character and loving people as the carpenter's square and compass are to the square and the circle, or rule and measure to length, or balances and scales to weight".<sup>27</sup> The highest good is the moral standard that is inherent in our mind-heart, termed by Wang Yang-ming as the Principle of Nature.<sup>28</sup>

*"Only when one comes to understand this point of rest can one reach a state of unwavering stability. Having reached this unwavering stability, one can then enjoy an unruffled quietude; having attained this state of quietude, one can then achieve an inner calm; once one has achieved this inner calm, one is then in a position to exercise one's capacity to deliberate clearly. And it is the capacity for deliberation that provides the basis for all moral attainment".<sup>29</sup>* This stability, quietude, calmness necessary for moral deliberation is particularly relevant for the cosmopolitan person living in our technological world today. The cosmopolitan person is so constantly within reach by information, messages, calls, twenty four hours a day, through the internet, cellular phones, and the mass media, that he needs this peaceful repose to deliberate on what is in accord with the highest good. Quieting down has become a necessity for one to remain sane amidst the fast pace of the virtual world.

*“From the Son of Heaven down to the simplest commoner, all are guided by a single principle: that the cultivation of one’s individual character constitutes the core of all attainment”*.<sup>30</sup> For everyone, from the emperor to the common man, the root is the cultivation of the personal life. For the *Ta Hsueh*, global citizenship begins with the cultivation of the self. World peace, order of the state, and regulation of the family are the branches. As what the lyrics of the popular song says, “let there be peace on earth, let it begin with me”. But why is the cultivation of the personal life the root of the regulation of the family, the order of the state and world peace? The commentary of Tseng Tzu offers us an enigmatic explanation:

The Master has stated: “As a judge hearing litigation, one should put oneself in the place of others. As a matter of categorical principle, however, one should act so as to eliminate litigation altogether”. In this way, men who are bereft of the truth will be in no position to present arguments interminably and one can, accordingly, instill awe for justice in the hearts of the people. This is what is called: ‘understanding the fundamental core of moral cultivation’.<sup>31</sup>

The original source (Analects 12:13) has the Master saying, “in hearing litigations, I am as good as anyone. What is necessary is to enable people not to have litigations at all”.<sup>32</sup> At first glance what is meant here is something like a preventive medicine, that to prevent any litigation from happening at all, one should cultivate oneself. Further reflection, however, requires us to put this statement into a positive general principle of “one should put oneself in the place of others”. Again based on the Mencian faith of the innate goodness of human nature, cultivating this innate goodness entails a commitment to the various spheres of the other, the family, the state, and the rest of the world. “What the true seeker of cultivation finds within himself is his own inalienable integration into the universal patterns of men and things”.<sup>33</sup>

The cultivation of the personal life consists in rectifying the mind-heart, making the will sincere, extending one’s knowledge and investigat-

ing things.<sup>34</sup> Although each has its own function, they are really one affair.<sup>35</sup>

That the cultivation of the personal life consists first in rectifying the mind-heart means that one's personal relations must not be governed by animosity and resentment nor must he harbor feelings of fear and trepidation, anxiety and grief. Otherwise, "one looks but does not see, listens but does not hear, eats but is not aware of the flavour of his food".<sup>36</sup> For Wang Yang-ming, the mind-heart is the "clear and intelligent master of the person" and to cultivate the personal life means for the body to do good and get rid of evil, but this, the body by itself cannot do without the mind-heart, the master, desiring to do good and get rid of evil.<sup>37</sup> Thus, to cultivate one's personal life one must first rectify one's mind-heart.

To rectify the mind-heart, one must make the will sincere or achieve "a state of integral wholeness within one's innermost consciousness".<sup>38</sup> This means allowing no self-deception to occur and always be "watchful over oneself when alone".<sup>39</sup>

When the inferior man is alone and leisurely, there is no limit to which he does not go in his evil deeds. Only when he sees a superior man does he then try to disguise himself, concealing the evil and showing off the good in him. But what is the use? For other people see him as if they see his very heart. This is what is meant by saying that what is true in a man's heart will be shown in his outward appearance. Therefore the superior man will always be watchful over himself when alone.<sup>40</sup>

For Wang Yang-ming, the reason the mind-heart, though originally good, needs to be rectified by making the will sincere is because "incorrectness enters when one's thoughts and will are in operation.

Now in order to make the will sincere, one must extend his knowledge. This is because "what arises from the will may be good or evil, and unless there is a way to make clear the distinction between good and evil, there will be a confusion of truth and untruth".<sup>41</sup> To extend one's knowledge is to extend one's innate knowledge of the good to the utmost. The innate knowledge of the good does not permit any self-deception. And

so, “the only way to distinguish good and evil in order to make the will sincere is to extend to the utmost the knowledge of the innate faculty”.<sup>42</sup>

Extending one’s innate knowledge of the good to the utmost, however, consists in the investigation of things. Extending one’s innate knowledge does not take place in a vacuum but is an event directed to a thing. “To investigate is to rectify. It is to rectify that which is incorrect so it can return to its original correctness”.<sup>43</sup>

*“Only once one’s moral character has been cultivated can one’s family be put into proper balance”*.<sup>44</sup> The commentary briefly explains this by our tendency to be partial towards those we love and partial towards those we despise. Thus, “there are few people in the world who know what is bad in those whom they love and what is good in those whom they dislike. Hence it is said, ‘People do not know the faults of their sons and do not know (are not satisfied with) the bigness of their seedlings’”.<sup>45</sup>

*“Only once one’s family has been put into proper balance can one’s kingdom be brought to a state of orderly rule”*.<sup>46</sup> The Commentary simply but lengthily explains this by referring to the fact that one cannot teach others to be good if one’s own family is in disorder. Thus, “the man of noble character accomplishes the moral instruction of his entire country without so much as stepping out of his own house”.<sup>47</sup> This is because filial piety is the basis for serving the ruler, brotherly respect the basis for serving one’s superiors, and deep love the basis for treating the multitude.<sup>48</sup> Referring to the ruler and officials, “one watches over a newborn babe”, like a mother who does not have to learn how to nurture children before getting married.<sup>49</sup> To individual families, the teaching also applies. “When the individual families have become humane, then the whole country will be aroused toward humanity. When the individual families have become compliant, then the whole country will be aroused toward compliance”.<sup>50</sup> “And, conversely, should the members of a single family be greedy and recalcitrant, this will give rise to a state of anarchy throughout the entire kingdom”.<sup>51</sup> Clearly, the basic unit of society is the family.

The global person must take care of his family first in order to serve better the country. This is because

the man of noble character must first possess a quality

within himself before he can demand it of other men, and he must himself be free of certain undesirable trait before he can censure it in others. For it is inconceivable that one can be able to give edifying instructions to others, when within one's own breast one harbours a glaring lack of mindfulness for the concerns of one's fellow man<sup>52</sup>

By being a good father, son, elder or younger brother, one can be a moral exemplar to one's countrymen.<sup>53</sup>

*“Only once one's own kingdom is in a state or orderly rule is it possible for the entire world to enjoy enduring peace”.*<sup>54</sup> The long Commentary explains the meaning of this statement in four strokes or terms: 1) the measuring square, 2) the Mandate of Heaven, 3) inner moral force as the root, and 4) sense of honor.

1) The man of noble character “possesses the way of ‘measuring by the carpenter's square’”.<sup>55</sup> He respects the aged and the elders with respect and shows compassion towards the helpless, and thereby the people at large practice filial respect, respect for elders and compliance. The way of “measuring by the carpenter's square” means that what one does not like in one's superiors he does not practice it towards his subordinates; what one does not like in one's subordinates, he does not practice it towards his superiors; what he does not like in front of him, he does not practice it to those behind him; and what he does not like in those behind him, he does not practice it to those in front of him. “Behavior that one finds abhorrent when observed in others, on one's right or on one's left, ought not be practised in one's dealings with those on the other side”.<sup>56</sup> Clearly, this is another way of formulating the Golden Rule in a negative manner, do not do unto others what you do not want them to do unto you.

2) Practising the Golden Rule is for those who holds sway in a kingdom to keep the Mandate of Heaven. To keep the Mandate of Heaven is tantamount to gaining the confidence of the people, acting as ‘father and mother of the people’, loving what they love and despising what they despise.<sup>57</sup>

3) To gain the confidence of the people is to hold inner moral force as the root, as the only true treasure or wealth. And this holds true

for the man of noble character, whose first concern is his inner moral force. Possessing the requisite moral force, he will have sway over the people, will be in control of the land and the wealth it produces, and will have command of its use.<sup>58</sup> This wealth will be dispersed widely instead of being concentrated in the hands of the few, and people will thus be brought together.<sup>59</sup> With the inner moral force as the root, qualities of human kindness and tolerance adhere to those in governance. Tolerance here means rejoicing in the talent of others and loving it as if it were one's own, thereby showing his capacity to safeguard the descendants for all their generations and the common people. Kindness here means the capability of "both loving men and of hating men", employing the worthy and removing from office and banishing the wicked.<sup>60</sup> Such a person possesses a path of single-minded devotion and good faith toward others. In the production of wealth, "a man motivated by human kindness uses his wealth to develop his personal character, whereas a man who lacks human kindness will expend his personal capacities in amassing wealth".<sup>61</sup>

4) The person who holds dear the virtue of human kindness will have subordinates having a sense of honor (righteousness). With people having a sense of honor, the affairs of the state will reach its completion. "A proper kingdom does not hold material benefit to be its primary advantage, but rather holds a sense of honour as its true advantage".<sup>62</sup>

Following the above four strokes does not seem to clarify how the peace throughout the entire world is dependent on the regulation of the state, unless we take into consideration that the entire world at the time of the *Ta Hsueh* is the middle kingdom of China. By extrapolation, if the whole of China with its states is the entire world, then world peace is dependent on the states practicing the Golden Rule, the virtues of caring, kindness, tolerance and sense of honor.

What we can gather from the *Ta Hsueh* is a cosmopolitan ethics that is developmental in character, starting from the cultivation of the personal life and ending in the promoting enduring peace in the entire world. The writer of the text does not see any conflict arising from one's commitment to the family, the state, and the entire world. In fact, everything starts from the cultivation of the personal life which involves an engagement with the other, starting from what is near to the farthest in the horizon of one's relationships.

The writer of the *Ta Hsueh* specifically addresses the person in authority in the family, the state and the kingdom but insists that the way to lead is by first cultivating one's personal character. It is obviously a leadership by example.

But what makes the *Ta Hsueh* a cosmopolitan ethic is that it is addressed to everyone who belongs or wants to belong to the whole humankind, and even to the whole of nature. Such a person must first cultivate the innate goodness of his nature in order to be of service to humankind and to the rest of nature. But for those in authority, it makes sense to remind them that leadership is servant-leadership, that the Mandate of Heaven is not a divine right but mandate of the people, a responsibility to be of service to the people. The goal of governance, whether familial, national or global, is ultimately to make its subjects happy and good, that those in positions of authority are there to love the people, not to gratify themselves.<sup>63</sup>

The distinguishing mark of the cosmopolitan ethics of the *Ta Hsueh* is the emphasis of the cultivation of the personal life as the foundation. This is based on the Mencian doctrine of the innate goodness of the mind-heart. But on second thought this is not uniquely Asian for it is also the wisdom of Solomon, "as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he".

Finally, the *Ta Hsueh* speaks of universal values of the Golden Rule, compassion and generosity, tolerance and sense of honor. These are values that make one a citizen of the world.

*A great man is one who feels that he belongs to a unity which includes the universe and the different kinds of beings.*

Wang Yang-ming<sup>64</sup>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Analects, 12:22.

<sup>2</sup>Analects 4:15.

<sup>3</sup>If they are separated from each other, one is bound to misinterpreting one or the other as in the case of Kant. "It (GR) cannot be a universal law since it con-

tains the ground neither of duties of oneself nor of duties of kindness to others (for many a man would readily agree that others should not help him if only he could be dispensed from affording help to them), nor finally of strict duties towards others; for on this basis the criminal would be able to dispute with the judges who punish him, and so on". *Groundwork of a Metaphysics of Morals*.

<sup>4</sup>Analects 1:2. Wing-tsit Chan translation.

<sup>5</sup>Analects 13:18. Wing-tsit Chan translation.

<sup>6</sup>Analects 1:2. Wing-tsit Chan translation.

<sup>7</sup>*Mencius*, 1A:7. Wing-tsit Chan translation.

<sup>8</sup>Analects, 2:7.

<sup>9</sup>Analects, 2:8.

<sup>10</sup>Daniel A. Bell contrasts the treatment of Western employers and ideal Chinese employers (English speaking). Western employers treat their domestic workers with respect, allow more personal space, treat them on equal terms. Chinese employers treat their domestic workers as valued members of the family, Daniel A. Bell, *China's New Confucianism* (Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 78.

<sup>11</sup>*Mencius*, 1A:1. Wing-tsit Chan translation.

<sup>12</sup>*Mencius*, 1B:5. Wing-tsit Chan translation.

<sup>13</sup>*Mencius*, 6:18. Wing-tsit Chan translation.

<sup>14</sup>*The Doctrine of the Mean*, 2. Wing-tsit Chan translation.

<sup>15</sup>*The Doctrine of the Mean*, 21. Wing-tsit Chan translation.

<sup>16</sup>*The Doctrine of the Mean*, 22. Wing-tsit Chan translation.

<sup>17</sup><http://standfordencyclopediaofphilosophy>. Accessed September 21, 2009.

<sup>18</sup>This is the translation of Andrew Plaks, *Ta Hsueh and Chung Yung (The Highest Order of Cultivation and On the Practice of the Mean)* (Penguin Books, 2003).

<sup>19</sup>Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book of Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 86-87.

<sup>20</sup>Translation by Andrew Plaks, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>21</sup>Translation by James Legge, *Confucius, Confucian Analects, The Great Learning and The Doctrine of the Mean* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1971), p.

<sup>22</sup>Wang Yang-ming, "Inquiry on the *Great Learning*" in *Instruction for Practical Living and other Neo-Confucian Writings*, translated with notes by Wing-tsit Chan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 272.

<sup>23</sup>*Book of Mencius*, 2A:6.

<sup>24</sup>Wang Yang-ming, op. cit., p. 272.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 273.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 273-274.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 275.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>29</sup>Translation by Andrew Plaks, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>30</sup>Translation by Andrew Plaks, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>31</sup>Translation by Andrew Plaks, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>32</sup>Translation by Wing-tsit Chan, op. cit., p. 88.

<sup>33</sup>Andrew Plaks, "Notes on the *Ta Hsueh*" op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>34</sup>Here I follow the sequence of Wang Yang Ming rather than that of Chu

Hsi.

<sup>35</sup>Wang Yang-ming, op. cit., p. 277.

<sup>36</sup>*Ta Hsueh*, chapter 7, translation by Andrew Plaks, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>37</sup>Wang Yang-ming, op. cit., p. 277.

<sup>38</sup>*Ta Hsueh*, chapter 6, translation by Andrew Plaks, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>39</sup>*Ta Hsueh*, chapter 6, translation by Wing-tsit Chan, op. cit., p. 89.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 89-90.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 278.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 278-279.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 279.

<sup>44</sup>*Ta Hsueh* translation by Andrew Plaks, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>45</sup>*Ta Hsueh*, translation by Wing-tsit Chan, p. 90.

<sup>46</sup>*Ta Hsueh*, translation by Andrew Plaks, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>48</sup>*Ta Hsueh*, chapter 9, translation by Wing-tsit Chan, p. 91.

<sup>49</sup>*Ta Hsueh*, chapter 9, translation by Andrew Plaks, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>50</sup>*Ta Hsueh*, chapter 9, translation by Wing-tsit Chan, op. cit., p. 91.

<sup>51</sup>*Ta Hsueh*, chapter 9, translation by Andrew Plaks, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.* p. 17.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>63</sup>James Legge, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>64</sup>Wang Yang-ming, *Answers to Questions Concerning the Book Ta-hsueh* quoted in Carson Chang, *Wang Yang-ming* (New York: St. John's University Press, 1970), p. 34.