

## How Can Man Become Virtuous from The Confucian Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

Human values have always been a fundamental element in supporting a harmonious life in society. Humanistic philosophy, as taught by Confucius, stresses moral virtues and an ethical way of life that promotes. Though there are many things in the world that are in contradiction with human values, despite advancements in science and technology cannot ensure that human virtue values remain the primary focus over profits. After all, prioritizing one's own interests over the welfare of society will inevitably cause significant harm and social disintegration. For thousands of years, Confucian thought has been considered capable of shaping the balance of life, justice, filial piety, and ethical behavior in accordance with Confucius' rules to maintain social harmony in China, including when confronted with the country's social-economic problems. Then, from a Confucian standpoint, how can man become virtuous, and what lessons can we learn? Another question is, what, according to this philosophy, distinguishes humans? Confucius laid great emphasis on moral education to cultivate an individual as a person. His moral education aimed to improve character and behavior, training people to become completely virtuous and 君子 (jūnzǐ). According to Confucius, a man will be able to become virtuous by cultivating the teachings of virtue along with his own self-development, and the environment is a significant influence on a person's behavior. Both now and in the next decades, a leader who is conscious of virtue values and is concerned with the subject's well-being and national unity, in addition to self-development and self-cultivation efforts in carrying out the five virtues, is also highly needed.

### KEYWORDS

Confucian Perspective; Human; Virtue; Virtuous; Self-Cultivation

### INTRODUCTION

Human values as the basis for supporting a harmonious life are increasingly being weakened and lost with the technological developments and dynamics of human life. Human values are rare items sought after and have become an important topic for scholars to discuss as solid solutions to various problems. More than 2500 years ago, Confucius introduced his humanistic philosophy to the Chinese. Even today, when China is very advanced in various

fields, rivaling other developed countries, some examples such as China has a more mature big data computing and analysis storage capacity; China's infrastructure network facilities conditions and transportation logistics conditions are more complete, more future-oriented new generation of transportation logistics relationship network architecture (Yuning et al., 2023), Confucianism is still very applicable.

Moreover, Confucian thought developed from a popular doctrine in the pre-Qin era to the official learning of the Han dynasty, becoming the authoritative state ideology, and serving as the philosophical foundation for the “great unification” of the Han dynasty (Jian, 2018), and was applied as an imperial examination for civil servant selection which had its beginnings in the Sui dynasty (581-618 CE) but was fully developed during the Qing dynasty (Cohen & Teiser). It appears the central role that the examination system played in the dissemination of the Confucian worldview throughout traditional Chinese society.

In traditional Chinese culture, from about Zhou Dynasty, there are 4 social classes designed to realize the harmonious society. The first class is Shi (scholars), who were the educated class and worked in government. They represented the highest social class, while the other classes only depended on their physical labor to acquire something to live. The second is Nong (farmers); they worked in the field to harvest rice and grain and so on, to support the society. The third one is Gong (workers), whose works included handcrafts, all kinds of instruments, etc; they were important because they supported the two classes mentioned above. The fourth class is Shang (businessmen), who connected the producers and consumers, and found profits from the process (Rudiansyah & Guizhi, 2023).

*The Analects of Confucius*, and other texts associated with him assumed the utmost importance, they were regarded as repositories of knowledge of how the Chinese empire had been governed in the ancient eras, and how the whole Chinese government and society system should be ordered. Confucian teachings are standards of moral conduct that start from the lowest level, from the individual, moving up to the family and society, then to the government. Only with the successful attainment of a moral individual life, could society be reformed. By reforming society, it is possible to reform the institutions, and finally, the state life as a whole will become better and more moral. *In Confucianism, man is the center of universe.*

Confucianism is not religion; Confucianism is moral. Morality is important for people's recognition. Confucianism is regarded as ideal because it is neutral and tolerant and focuses on people's conduct. This makes it acceptable anywhere. Confucius dominant theme philosophy is the perfectibility of humanity. The Confucian philosopher Mencius (孟子; 372–289 BC) who was born about a century after Confucius died (Creel, 1949), affirmed that human nature is good, also believe that humans are naturally inclined toward virtue, and morals in man have been embedded since his born.

Living a morally upright life is considered the key to righteousness for humans. Confucianism teaches that individuals who possess high moral values are closer to attaining perfection. Such individuals do not require laws to govern their lives, as they have already achieved a state of moral perfection. However, even though it is believed that human nature is good, why do humans prioritize their own benefits over kindness towards others? Why is there competition between humans? Moreover, why would some humans want to destroy other humans? Does the fundamental reason come from inside or outside of man?

This writing will delve into two questions in relation to the Confucian perspective as follows:  
Q1. How can man become virtuous from the Confucian perspective?

Q2. What makes human apart according to the Confucian perspective?

The aim of this analysis is to provide an in-depth understanding of Confucianism and its philosophical outlook.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This paper will be written using the literature study approach to gain a deep and comprehensive understanding of the problem and observe it from the Confucian perspective. My analysis begins by examining how can man become virtuous from a Confucian perspective, and what lessons can we take that applicable to the live we have today to focus with the research questions. I continue to provide an overview that identifies what sets humans apart from others according to Confucian perspective.

My data is composed of two types. One is the book that covers the entirety of the historical development of Chinese philosophy and culture from ancient times to the present, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* by Wing-tsit Chan. The second is the scholars' thoughts collected from reliable journals. Data sourced from various books, journals, and related website articles are evaluated to find correlations with the subject under discussion. After that, analyze the data and add personal opinions to provide answer to the research questions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Confucius or Kǒng Fūzǐ (孔夫子, "Master Kong") lived between 551 and 479 BC during the late years of the Spring and Autumn Period of China. He was a great thinker, educator and statesman as well as one of the most learned people at that time. Later generations honored him as "the sage of sages" and "the teacher of all ages". Confucius was the founder of Confucianism, a school of moral doctrine that encourages "justice" and "peace". Confucianism had a key influence on later generations and became the core of Chinese feudal culture, representing the Chinese cultural spirit. The social philosophical ideals of the Zhou Dynasty are the fundamental base of Confucian values. Confucius sorted out the books and records of the Xia and Shang Dynasties, and reflected on the Zhou culture, which initiated the broad themes and structure of the Confucian philosophy. His discussions with his disciples were recorded into books like *The Analects of Confucius* (Wu, 2010).

After Confucius died in 479 BC, his disciples collected various writings and oral messages of Confucius to be compiled into a book entitled *The Analects of Confucius*. In the *Analects*, therefore, the reader will find no lengthy discussions of terminology or expositions of ideas. Instead, moral and political concepts are presented in terms of particular individuals, the teacher Confucius and the disciple or other person with whom he is conversing, and the particular circumstances under discussion. And because the participants and circumstances vary in different passages, the manner in which the ideas are conveyed varies accordingly (Huang, 1997). Confucius' aim was to make his students into gentleman (君子). On whom did he undertake to perform this operation? He himself declared that he had never refused to teach anyone, even though he might be so poor that he came with nothing more than a bundle of dried meat as a present (Creel, 1949).

The Five Classics or Wǔjīng (五经) and Four Books or sìshū (四书) collectively create the foundation of Confucianism. The Five Classics and Four Books were the basis of the civil examination in imperial China and can be considered the Confucian canon. The Five Classics consists of the *Book of Odes*, *Book of Documents*, *Book of Changes*, *Book of Rites*, and *the Spring and Autumn Annals*. The Four Books are comprised of *the Doctrine of the Mean*, *the Great Learning*, *Mencius*, and *the Analects*. From the Han to the early Song, the Five Classics grew into thirteen classics. In the early Song, however, scholars focused on the original Five Classics again. By the mid-Song, however, the *Analects*, *Mencius*, *Great Learning*, and *Doctrine of the Mean* began gaining importance and by the early fourteenth century, the Four Book were the texts for the civil examinations (Wilson, 2010).

Confucius reinvented the concept of gentleman or jūnzǐ (君子), man of noble character, emphasizing self-transformation in terms of self-control or self-mastery, personal and governmental morality, and correctness of social relationships (Hung, 2020). The goal of self-cultivation is to become 君子 (jūnzǐ). For Confucius, a 君子 (jūnzǐ) is a morally superior person who, according to the ritual code of tradition, treats others with respect, dignity, and pursues virtue. Confucius did not care to talk about spiritual beings or even about life after death. Instead, believing that man "can make the Way (道, dào) great," his main focus is man.

The Chinese word *Dào* is an abstract concept that means a way or a path. Confucians used the term *Dào* to speak of the way human beings ought to behave in society. In other words, *Dào* for them was an ethical or moral way. This meaning is considered more limited than Daoism philosophy (Bloom, 2009). Confucius explains that "if all under heaven have the way" or a particular state "has the way," moral principles prevail. If an individual has "道, dào" or "the way", he or she acts properly and is a person with an outstanding moral character (Creel, 1949).

### **How can man become virtuous from the Confucian perspective**

The emphasis on virtue necessarily raises the question of man's original nature. This eventually became one of the most persistent questions, perhaps the most persistent, in the history of Chinese philosophy. But the question was not specifically discussed until Mencius' time. Here is the earliest reference to it. Since nature has to be regulated, especially in the sense of restraint, the implication is that man's nature is originally indifferent or perhaps even evil, which is quite different from the later-established doctrine that human nature is originally good (Chan, 1969).

"Three Fundamental Bonds (or Cardinal Guides) and Five Constant Virtues" or 三纲五常 (sān gāng wǔ cháng) are separate Confucian terms for the most important human relations and social virtues. In early Confucianism, one who perfectly fulfilled these relationships and manifested these virtues was the highest form of human -- a sage. In the next future, the neo-Confucians later combined these two terms into a single cosmological principle that stood for human social order (Knapp, 2009). The Three Fundamental Bonds deal with traditional society's most fundamental social relationships: father and son, lord and retainer, and husband and wife. As essential relationships, these three serve as shorthand for all human relationships.

The Five Constant Virtues mean the Confucian virtues of benevolence 仁 (rén), righteousness 义 (yì), propriety 礼 (lǐ), wisdom 智 (zhì) and trustworthiness 信 (xìn). Mencius, the Confucian philosopher, notes: "*Benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom are not welded onto me from the outside. They are that which I have always had*" (Mencius 6A.6) (Knapp, 2009). As with the Fundamental Bonds, these five virtues are the most significant ones and thus serve as shorthand for all the Confucian virtues. In other words, the Three Fundamental Bonds designate the social relationships that are essential for arranging human social life, while the Five Constant Virtues are the values required to live a moral life. The five constant virtues (五常) will further be explained below in sequence of importance.

#### 1) Benevolence 仁 (rén)

In the Analects, the central meaning of 仁 (rén) is general love for mankind, as manifested by the proper manner in which one deals with his or her family, friends

and the state. As defined by Kongzi and Mengzi, benevolence 仁 (rén) is a radiating process of love, which starts naturally from within one's family, and extends to more remote social relationships, to include friends and members of society in general (Zhang, 2016).

Confucius said that "rén" could best be demonstrated in how a man lives his life among his peers, specifically to be compassionate, understanding, and sympathetic towards the feelings and sufferings of others. He explains that "rén" is the highest perfection of goodness and that although people may strive to achieve it, few succeed. The Chinese pictograph character for the term is composed of two symbols, that of a man and the number two. Together, these symbols imply that man is unable to exist in the world alone and must live among his peers (Doupe, 2003).

2) Righteousness 义 (yì)

Righteousness or 义 (yì) represents a sense of duty for an individual to act in accordance with societal expectations; it deals with the relationship between an individual and his community. It is a quality that must be recognized and endorsed by other members of a society. It is often used to characterize events of significant social impacts, such as "*an act of Yi*" and "*revolution against a tyrannical ruler, literally; activation of Yi*". As such, 义 (yì) is commonly translated as "righteousness," with a connotation of meeting and defending the standards and expectations of a society (Xu, 2019). 义 (yì) is an objective regulation that we need to obey no matter how we feel. Although 义 (yì) is an obligation, it is not something imposed on us from the outside, but something that arises from our own moral tendencies (Lu, 2021).

Confucius said, "*The superior man understands righteousness; the inferior man understands profit.*" (Analects Book 4: 16). Confucius contrasted the superior man and the inferior in many ways, but this is the fundamental difference for Confucianism in general.

3) Propriety 礼 (lǐ)

Commonly translated as "rituals", "rites", "customs", or "conventions". Propriety 礼 functions primarily as a social regulator in the realisation of the Confucian objectives — namely, the perfection of the self, the establishment of order within one's family (which the Confucian understood as the basic unit of a society), and the restoration and preservation of social order (Leong, 1998). Compared with 仁, 义, and other Confucian values which possess complex philosophical meanings in both depth and abstraction, propriety 礼 has a noticeable sense of practical "concreteness". In contributing to moral lives, propriety 礼 has negative and positive functions in working upon human nature. On the negative level, it prevents conflict and harm, and generates proper and harmonious human relations.

For this function, the basis of propriety 礼 is desire and the evil aspect of human nature; that is to say, in its external operation, ritual is meant to balance and harmonize desires so that on the one hand, they will not become out of control, thus endangering others and public life, and on the other hand, desires still could get fulfilled through following proper and healthy ways. On the positive level, propriety 礼 promotes the realization of genuine moral and religious feeling in human nature (Lu, 2021).

4) Wisdom 智 (zhì)

Wisdom is the characteristics of having knowledge, experience, and good judgment in any given situation. A person is considered intelligent and has wisdom when he/she can make a sound decision based on his/her prior knowledge and learning

experiences. In the Analects, wisdom is related to being able to appraise people and situations rightly. *“Wisdom allows a gentleman to discern crooked and straight behavior in others (Analects Book 12: 22)”* Confucius explains the virtue of wisdom as “knowing others”. And knowledge is the basis for properly “selecting” others, defining wisdom as the virtue that is the basis for selection. But it is also about judging the situations correctly (Chen, 2020).

Confucius said, *“Devote yourself earnestly to the duties due to men, and respect spiritual beings, but keep them at a distance. This may be called wisdom.”* (Analects, Book 6: 20) (Chan, 1969). According to what he said we also may understand that we have to respect properly the spiritual beings as their position as spiritual beings and living humans should cherishing and taking lessons from them as a form of filial piety, but what is more important is the virtues and behavior of living human beings. because living humans still have an opportunity to become a *junzi* while spiritual beings do not, this is related directly to both 理 and 智.

5) Trustworthiness 信 (xìn)

In the Analects, trustworthiness is referred to some thirty times and its basic meaning is as follows. First, being honest and not deceiving and accordance between one’s speech and actions. Second, keeping one’s word and carrying out one’s promises. One of the pre-conditions of carrying out one’s promise, is not turning one’s back on what is right. Confucius says, if one keeps one’s promise without paying attention to what is right, then it is not real trustworthiness, but the way of the petty man (Y. Wang et al., 2020).

Trustworthiness is not the highest ethical concept. It occupies a subordinate position as compared with humaneness, ritual propriety and righteousness and serves a supplementary role to these moral concepts. For example, “[employ] humaneness to treat affairs, trustworthiness to persevere.” (Zuo Zhuan “Ninth Year of Lord Cheng”) (Y. Wang et al., 2020). Trustworthiness is also an important aspect of the good governance of the state. Confucius said;

*In guiding a state of a thousand chariots, approach your duties with reverence and be trustworthy in what you say; keep expenditure under proper regulation and love your fellowmen; employ the labour of the common people in the right seasons. (Analects Book 1:7)*

Most important of all, Confucius evolved the new concept of ren / jen (仁) which was to become central in Chinese philosophy. All later discussions on principle and material force may be said to serve the purpose of helping man to realize 仁. In the first place, Confucius made 仁 the main theme of his conversations. In the Analects, 58 (fifty-eight) of 499 chapters are devoted to the discussion of 仁, and the word appears 105 times (Chan, 1969). To Confucius the man of 仁 is the perfect man, he is the true *chün-tzu* (junzi; the ideal man of the society).

Moreover, self-cultivation is the basis for moral development in person and leads to the formation of social unity. Confucian ethics are based on the human relationship within society. In learning self-cultivation, a person will understand how he is supposed to maintain his relationship with others, including respecting others’ opinions as taught by virtue of benevolence. If everyone succeeds in doing this self-cultivation, there will be harmony in society, and later on, social harmony will lead to social unity. About “harmony” here is, people’s joy, anger, and sorrow are shown before others, but they behave in a calm and controlled way, this can be called “Harmony” (LU, 2022).

As is well known, Confucianism does not pursue equality, but upholds filial piety (孝, xiào), humanity (仁, rén), and harmony (和, hé). It does not advocate egalitarian love, but differentiated love (差等之爱, chà děng zhī ài). In social systems and interpersonal activities, Confucianism stresses ritual observation and urges people to practice the spirit of differentiation so that there is affection (親, qīn) between parents and child, righteousness (义, yì) between ruler and subject, different function (别, bié) between husband and wife, proper order (序, xù) between senior and junior, and fidelity (信, xìn) between fellow citizens. The Confucian ideal is to establish a harmonious, rather than egalitarian, society in which individuals can cultivate virtue and take care of each other (Fan, 2011).

*The Master said, while his father is alive, observe his intentions. After his father is dead, observe his actions. If after three years he hasn't changed his father's way of doing things, then you can call him filial. (Analects Book One - Introduction:11)*

For Confucianism, the Confucian religious faith expressed in the form of *filial piety* (孝, xiào) serves as the ontological foundation for the cultivation of virtue and self-transformation. Filial piety is the most important and concrete expression of the Confucian religious faith. To be filial is to remember where we are from and seek to pay back the debts we owe to our ancestors and parents for the precious gift of life we have been given by properly conducting religious ceremonies in their honor. Generally, Confucians hold that there are three necessary acts of filial piety. The first is to honor one's parents, the second is not to humiliate their reputation, and the third is to take good care of them (Q. K. Wang, 2011).

Confucius said, "A son should always keep in mind the age of his parents. It is an occasion for joy [that they are enjoying long life] and also an occasion for anxiety [that another year is gone]" (Analects Book 4: 21) (Chan, 1969). According to this, we can see how his teachings place great emphasis on filial piety (in particular) to parents and how the presence of parents is highly valued, even until their absences. This filial piety is the foundation for a human being who wants to cultivate himself according to virtues so that he can reflect a good influence on others outside the family. Confucius realized that if this virtue was not practised and respected, the family as a social unit would fall into ruin, as he had seen happen to many prominent families in his lifetime (Doupe, 2003).

The values in Confucianism cover all aspects needed in establishing harmony between humans and society and government, therefore this teaching is widely used and became the fundamental ideology of the state until it reached the limit of its glory in 1911 (the Xinhai Revolution) which ended China's last imperial dynasty, the Manchu-led Qing dynasty. Up to that time, Confucianism had a special place in most China's imperial dynastic history.

As man is the center of the universe and as the main idea of Confucianism is the importance of having good moral character, it is appropriate to cultivate virtues to become human beings with high moral standards so that they become the source of goodness for those around them. The virtue of humanity is still something abstract unless it is involved in actual human relationships. Clearly stated in Confucianism that man cannot live alone (solitary) but with other human beings. They are tied to their parents, their siblings, their children, as well as rulers to their subjects, and so on. Thus, it is principal to maintain social harmony to create peace and happiness that those will return to themselves.

There are *five universal ways* [in human relations], and the way by which they are practiced is three. The five are those governing the relationship between ruler and minister, between father and son, between husband and wife, between elder and younger brothers, and

those in the intercourse between friends. These five are universal paths in the world. Wisdom, humanity, and courage, these three are the universal virtues (Chan, 1969). The five relationships explicitly acknowledge the importance and value of such voluntary and consensual relationships. Also, abundantly clear that Confucianism gives priority to those relationships that are found within the household, and to those relationships in which there is a clear benefactor and beneficiary (Bell, 2010).

Confucius believed that a virtuous person could transform anyone who did not practice Confucian ideals, simply by living amongst them for a period of time thereby exposing them to virtue (Doupe, 2003). A fully benevolent person will be disposed to recognize the suffering of others and will act appropriately. also, a genuine benevolent ruler will notice how his policies will affect his subjects, and will only pursue policies consistent with his subject's well-being.

Confucianism rests on the belief that human beings are fundamentally good, and teachable, improvable, and perfectible through personal and communal endeavor especially self-cultivation and self-creation. Confucian thought focuses on the cultivation of virtue and maintenance of ethics. Mencius (孟子; 372–289 BC, a Chinese Confucian philosopher) is the best-known for his claim that *"human nature is good"*.

Mencius addresses the problem of human wrongdoing when his disciple Gongduzi asks,

*"We are the same in being humans. Yet some become great humans and some become petty humans. Why?"*

Mencius replies, *"those who follow their greater part become great humans. Those who follow their petty part become petty humans."*

Gongduzi persists, *"We are the same in being humans. Why is it that some follow their greater part and some follow their petty part?"*

Mencius replies, *"It is not the function of the ears and eyes to reflect, and they are misled by things. Things interact with things and lead them along. But the function of the heart is to reflect. If it reflects, then it will get it. If it does not reflect, then it will not get it. This is what Heaven has given us. If one first takes one's stand on what is greater, then what is lesser will not be able to snatch it away. This is how to become a great person."*

Confucius taught others about his philosophies about life. His theories and principles were spread throughout China by his disciples. He concentrated on man. His primary concern was a good society based on good government and harmonious human relations. To this end he advocated an excellent government that rules by virtue and moral example as opposed to coercion or punishment. His criterion for goodness was righteousness as opposed to profit. For the family, he particularly stressed filial piety, and for society in general, proper conduct or li (propriety, rites) (Chan, 1969). For Confucius, the good life was an endless ambition to attain moral perfection (仁). The first principle of Confucianism is to act according to it; it is the ultimate guide to human action, and the other virtues follow it.

Confucius teachings emphasized the learning of moral education and the manifestation of what has been learned. Confucius laid great emphasis on moral education to cultivate an individual as a person. His moral education aimed to improve character and behavior, training people to become completely virtuous. According to Confucius, a man will be able to become virtuous by cultivating the teachings of virtues along with his self-development.

It is often said that Confucianism teaches only the *"negative golden rule,"* not to do to others what one does not want them to do to him. However, the golden rule is here positively stated, that is, to do to others what one expects others to do to him. There is no question

about the positive character of the Confucian doctrine which is clearly stated in terms of conscientiousness and altruism (Chan, 1969).

### **What makes human apart according to the Confucian perspective**

Confucius said, "By nature men are alike. Through practice they have become far apart" (Analects, Book 17: 2) (Chan, 1969). This is the classical Confucian dictum on human nature. It is understood from this passage that humans naturally carry good, no exception. As Mencius' said, "All things of the same kind are similar to one another." (Mencius, 6A: 7). But there are events (which Confucius called "practice") that happen to humans and then affect them. So as a matter of fact, humans are naturally good, what causes them to have bad or evil characters is the influence of the environment outside of themselves.

According to Mencius, the path to perfection begins with cultivation of the heart/mind (心, xīn), an innate faculty that allows us to discriminate between right and wrong. It operates in harmony with "vital energy" (氣, qì), a universal force that pervades all phenomena and that promotes both personal morality and social harmony. Those who cultivate their heart/mind through study and practice of morality increase the power of their vital energy, which becomes a "flood-like qi" (浩然之氣, hàoránzhīqì) in sages (*Humanity - Asian Thought - Human Nature: Good Or Evil?*, n.d.).

Opposition to the statement that human nature is good based on the Legalism (founder: Xunzi / Hsün Tzu, c. 310—c. 220 B.C.E.) (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, n.d.), that humans are actually born with an evil character. Humans are inherently evil and inclined toward criminal and selfish behavior. In such circumstances, humans must be governed by strict laws. In the view of the Legalists, attempts to improve the human situation by noble example, education, and ethical precepts were useless. Instead, the people needed a strong government and a carefully devised code of law, along with a policing force that would stringently and impartially enforce these rules and punish harshly even the most minor infractions (Wheeler, n.d.).

The Legalists, contended that human nature is evil and that unless people are regulated by laws and punishments they will go astray. Society only functions harmoniously when the populace fears the apparatus of state control, and the Legalists counseled rulers to keep their subjects in line by publicly inflicting harsh punishments on those who transgress the laws and by maintaining a powerful and pervasive police force and a network of spies (*Humanity - Asian Thought - Human Nature: Good Or Evil?*, n.d.).

Confucius learned from the ancient texts that the importance of ruling the people was through ethical inspiration rather than coercion. Many rulers and government ministers in Confucius's era advocated the use of military power to address external threats and strict punishments to deal with internal disorder. Confucius did not completely dismiss the use of force, but he regarded it as a last resort, and as ultimately ineffective when used as the primary method of governing. Confucius said;

*"Lead the people with governmental measures and regulate them by law and punishment, and they will avoid wrongdoing but will have no sense of honor and shame. Lead them with virtue and regulate them by the rules of propriety, and they will have a sense of shame and, moreover, set themselves right." (Analects Book 2: 3) (Chan, 1969).*

It is the lack of cultivating virtues in individuals that causes the growth of individualism and prioritizes profit over harmony in societies. When people pursue their self-interest at the expense of others, everyone suffers, hence, the proper action for individuals in their environment is to contribute to the common good so that everyone might thrive. In light of

tragedies like the Cultural Revolution and the current rise of political repression, what China needs more than anything is whichever theory gives the strongest argument against tyranny and for the protection of the individual (Angle, 2021).

## CONCLUSION

As we approach the end of this article, I would like to provide a few points that may contribute to the discussion. Confucius and his philosophy have played a significant role in shaping Chinese civilization for thousands of years and have also had a profound influence on the Chinese educational system. Confucius' fundamental teachings about self-cultivation and human behavior in society have been able to adapt even into the 21st century. His focus on man aimed to improve character and behavior, training people to become completely virtuous. Advances in technology and science need to go hand in hand with human values, therefore between the state advances and the peace of living in the society need to be integrated so that human welfare is achieved from both sides.

Learning virtues is a way to understand how to bring back harmony in society, in order to replace individualism, which brings many harms, such as self-righteousness, corruption, and unhealthy competition. *However*, in order to optimize the prospect of achieving desired goals, it is imperative to take into consideration the environmental conditions, as well as the individuals who are involved in their execution. An idealistic approach is undoubtedly commendable, but a nuanced understanding of the practical limitations is essential to ensure that our objectives are met in an effective and efficient manner.

According to Confucius, a man will be able to become virtuous by cultivating the teachings of virtue along with his own self-development. To be a virtuous human, one must realize and learn the virtues that have probably been inherited in him to designate social relationships and make efforts to cultivate himself according to the virtues in order to live a moral life. The heart is the key to consciousness; keep the heart alive in order to understand and practice the 5 virtues to become a virtuous man. This philosophy has great relevance even today.

Humans have the capacity to pursue sage or wisdom, but due to various reasons, most become corrupted and fail to actualize this potential. Becoming a virtuous man is the process of developing innate tendencies toward the five virtues. These tendencies manifested themselves in distinctively moral emotions correlated with the virtues. If we reflect upon these manifestations, we can cultivate our inherent capacities into fully formed virtues.

The negative environmental conditions in society tend to damage human personalities; any bad behavior arises from within as a result of being influenced by external things. With the result that even a human being basically carries good qualities, if he can be affected by an externally evil environment, then he can lose his good human nature. This can lead to rupture between human beings, increasing individualism, and national disunity.

As a human being who wants peace and harmony in life, the proper act is to cultivate the five human virtues in oneself first. Cultivating their virtues through the study and practice of morality will enable them to understand the difference between right and wrong so that they cannot be influenced by a bad external environment. A wise person is one who is willing to learn for his own improvement. This is more proper than just correcting other people or the environment without criticizing himself or herself first.

The results will be reflected on others so that it will have a good effect on creating harmony, both for oneself and others, because giving kindness to others is the same as doing good to oneself. In society, it is important to have a leader who is aware of virtues and values, and draws up policies for his subjects that focus on the subject's well-being and national unity, not their personal benefit.

We conclude by recommending that individuals who are aware of Confucianism should not only be scholars but also entrepreneurs, children, and housewives, since the primary message is to save the world through moral ethics. If the country's leaders recognize this carefully and take the necessary action first, it may be accomplished, in order to cultivate harmony amongst societies, which is necessary for a nation to become united as a whole and establish its sovereignty.

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