

Chapter Six



Conclusion

In this context the best perspective on the foregoing may be gained by clarifying the relation between Islamic ethics, namely *akhlāq* of Islam, and Confucian ethics.

To judge the level of similarities and differences between two traditions, two primary yardsticks may be used, which are in many ways interrelated. One is the degree to which the Confucianism has been religionized; the other is the degree to which it has systematically unified the relation between its God (Heaven) and the world and therewith its own ethical relationship to the world. In the former respect the definition of religion as applied to the world great religions, namely Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam, is also applied here to the judgement of the Confucianism' religiosity. For the fact of overwhelming majority of the world population adhering to these religions approves that these religions have successfully answered the questions posed by man from the time of their advent to this earth till this age. The common characteristics of the world religions are: the first of all belief in the existence of a god or gods, who has/have created universe and man, and has given the latter a spiritual nature which continues to exist after the death of the body; and belief in unseen such as devils, angels, and the life in hereafter; and to Islam and Christianity belief in the total destruction of this world on one unspecific day. Judging by this definition the Confucianism falls short of a religion, which only can be said as an incomplete religion. Interestingly this observation seems coinciding with Islam's claim of that the One God has sent at least one messenger to every particular nation for moral guide, proclaiming "Worship One God and avoid all false deities; "¹ and that those messengers were sent to convey only a portion of messages suited to his own nation. Master Kong

himself claimed to have known the decree of Heaven at his fifty.² He on the one hand recognized the absolute authority of the Heaven; "He who offends against the Heaven has none to whom he can pray,"³ on the other hand he respected Satan and spirits but kept aloof from them.⁴ His disciple Zi Gong 子貢 commented "The master's personal displays of his principles and ordinary descriptions of them may be heard, his discourses about man's nature and the principle of the Heaven cannot be heard."⁵ Obviously what Confucius was inspired by the Heaven was only ethical principle, beyond which he was not inspired. Naturally Confucius' teachings fell short of metaphysical definitions. The consequence of this shortage was serious, for it had to adopt these definitions from other sources especially Buddhism, which provided forthwith victuals to accomplish its own system. The nature of this shortage has placed the Confucianism under a process of constant revision and reinstallation of the whole system. The adoption was firstly done by Han Dynasty 汉朝 Confucian scholar Dong Zhong-shu 董仲舒, supported by the ancient Chinese beliefs, he made the Confucianism a religion nature. This adoption was revised by Song 宋 and Ming 明 Confucian scholars, among whom Zhu Xi 朱熹 and Wang Yang-ming 王阳明 were their representatives. Under irresistible influence of Buddhism, the theories of Confucianism in Song 宋 and Ming 明 period were full of Buddhism notions and beliefs. Buddhism is a well-known polytheism, the consequence of incorporation of much Buddhist theories, especially metaphysical domain, was immense and significant, for the whole Confucian system was colored by polytheism; and was adopted by Song 宋 government and later coming governments as the state religion, which was celebrated by the state and nationals since then till 1911. This celebration was

briefly interrupted by Communist ascendance onto the political power of the Mainland China, and was revived in September 1986 at Confucius' birthplace Qufu 曲阜. It is on the trend of well revival.

The neo-Confucianism in the polytheism outlook underlay a host of deities such as the supreme god (上帝), the god of the earth 土地神, the gods of rivers 河神, the gods of mountains 山神, the god of the sun 太阳神 and the moon 月亮神, the god of medicine, war, literature, fire, artillery, the soil, the furnace, the granary, the god of doors and so on. Besides, ancestor worship is also one of the most important practice of Chinese. Obviously the neo-Confucianism is in sharp contrast to Islamic monotheism, which advocates only One absolute God, who is the source of everything, and everything obeys His command. The neo-Confucianism has weakened the Supreme One's authority and distributed His many rights to other gods, whom in Islamic point view could only be regarded as spirit (*Jinn*, other creature of God), or Satan. The neo-Confucianism attributed godhead to them, upgraded their status but degraded the Supreme One's status. Islam termed this treatment as *shirk*, assigning partner to the One God, hence it is an unforgivable sin in the eye of Allah (subḥānahu wataʿāla).

If the Confucius' teachings are characterized as agnosticism or even monotheism, neo-Confucianism is certainly a polytheism nature. It was assumed that many Confucian scholars of the Ming 明 and Qing 清 period held the view of that the belief in multiple deities and miracles were incompatible with the teachings of Confucius. This observation seems consistent with Confucius' attitude towards Satan 鬼 and spirits 神, who were respected by him, but kept silent in

making any remarks on them. "The subject on which the Master did not talk, were — extraordinary things 怪, feats of strength 力, disorder 乱, and spirits 神" ⁶

It is interesting to note here that Satan 鬼 and spirit 神 were always mentioned together in the Analects. It seems that they were different beings with similar nature in some aspects on the one hand, but they were not the same being on the other. Any further indication on this point was totally absent in this source book.

Another important point should be fingered out here is distinction between spirit 神 and Heaven 天 (or transcendent being). It should be clear from the foregoing discussions that the Heaven to Confucius served as a personal god who had absolute authority on man and the world. "He who offends against Heaven has none to whom he can pray." ⁷ He had absolute respect to the decree of Heaven 天命; whereas spirit 神 was placed at lower degree, normally associated with Satan 鬼. Hence, one may immediately relate these notions with Islamic notions of *Jinn* and Satan, whereof spirit 神 resembles *Jinn*, another creature of Allah, and *gui* 鬼 resembles Satan with *Iblīs* as their supreme commander.

One of the articles of Islamic fundamental beliefs is predetermination. Likewise, a close examination of the Confucian doctrine as conceived by Confucius (孔子) and Mencius (孟子) and developed by most of the Confucians through the succeeding centuries will disclose that it contained a subsystem of religious ideas based on belief, apart from Heaven 天, spirit 神 and Satan 鬼, in predeterminism or fate (ming 命), a concomitant to the supernatural concept of the Heaven. The concept of the fate was a part of early Chinese culture, and occupied a prominent place in the Confucian interpretation of life, both by Confucius, Mencius, and subsequent Confucians. The fate was mentioned thirteen times in

the Analects, one of them is "If my principles are to advance, it is so ordered. If they are to the ground, it is so ordered;"⁸ another is "Death and life have their determined appointment; riches and honor depend upon Heaven."⁹ Obviously the predeterminism is an established belief of Confucius, who even placed it as one of indispensable conditions of being a profound person. "Without recognizing the ordinances of Heaven, it is impossible to be the profound person."¹⁰ This definition is, to a large degree, comparable with Islamic definition of man's very existence, which is to recognize his Creator Allah.¹¹

These characteristics underlying the great religions of the world have led, despite its this-worldly and rationalistic orientation to many human problems, many scholars, both Sinologist and Confucians, to treat Confucianism as a religion. The religiosity of the neo-Confucianism is still more beyond doubt.

As afore discussed that both Islam and the Confucianism, at least outwardly, share the almost same attitude toward education. Through out Confucian history in China the examination system developed by it was the most remarkable contribution of Confucian China to the world; likewise Islamic scholastic system is, to a large extend, an important source of Western education. The contributions of two systems resulted in popular modern educational system of the world.

Completely absent in Confucianism was the definition of creation of man and universe, which is one of the most important premises of all religions and any branches of philosophical theories. The absence of the definition or failure to entertain it meant incompleteness or absurdity of a religion or a philosophy. This is exactly the case with the Confucianism, which has left ample room for the development of other sorts of ideas, religious or metaphysical, whilst the origin

of man was scarcely treated in the whole history of the Confucian tradition, the origin of the universe was somehow discussed by some Confucian personage like Zi si 子思, Zhu xi 朱熹, Wang Yang-ming 王阳明 and so on. In Zhong Yong's mode of thinking, Zi si advocated that "absolute sincerity" 至誠 implies certain attributes of God. Its 26th chapter reads:

"Therefore absolute sincerity is ceaseless. Being ceaseless, it is lasting. Being lasting, it is evident. Being evident, it is infinite. Being infinite, it is extensive and deep. Being extensive and deep, it is high and brilliant, it is because it is extensive and deep that it contains all things. It is because it is high and brilliant that it overshadows all things. It is because it is infinite and lasting that it can complete all things. ..." (Zh. 26: 1 - 5)

故至誠无息，不息则久，久则征，征则悠远，悠远则博厚，博厚则高明。博厚所以载物也，高明所以覆物也，悠久所以成物也。

It seems that the "absolute sincerity" is a creative source of all things. This appears inconsistent with also Zhong Yong's assertion of that sincerity is only a quality of ethical values, which are indispensable to the process of self-cultivation. This connection can only lead one to think that "absolute sincerity" is an inward creativity rather than an outward creativity. Being the nature of this orientation, it becomes prominent without any display, produces changes without motion, and accomplishes its end without action. Otherwise it is inconceivable that a specific quality can create a material object like the universe.

This explicit inconsistency directly led the latter Confucian scholars like Zhu Xi 朱熹 and Wang Yang-ming 王阳明 adopted two notions li 理 and qi 气, which were totally alien to Confucius, to explain the origin of the universe and man, asserting that true essence li 理, which is ever-lasting embraces qi 气 (atmosphere), the movement of which generates all material objects¹².

The li 理 theory was further developed by contemporary neo-Confucian scholars, it could not be influential enough to convince other Confucians.

In strong contrast to the negative stand of Confucianism towards the social position of woman, Islam grants them a tremendous position in an Islamic community. The Confucianism asserts:

“Of all people, women and mean man are the most difficult to behave to. If you are familiar with them, they lose their humility. If you are maintain a reserve towards them, they are discontented.”

(A. 17: 25)

唯女子与小人难养也，近之则不逊，远之则怨。

Despising attitude towards woman is obvious. This attitude was further developed by later Confucian scholars to an extent that women were deprived of all kinds of right, social, political, as well as economical. They were considered inferior to men. Their illiteracy was officially encouraged. Good virtue of a woman was her illiteracy. Whereas Islam treats them quite naturally, considering women to be equal to men as human being and as his partner in his life. In Islamic law Shari^{ʿa}, a woman is an independent, unique individual in her own right. She has the same responsibilities as the man towards herself, Allah and other human beings, and will bear independent judgment, good or bad, in the Hereafter. Unlike the Confucianism, in Islam a woman has right to do her education, to seek employment, to inherit and to conduct independent ownership and legal transactions. However all these rights are stripped from a Confucian woman.

Thus, the incompleteness of the Confucianism is explicit and significant. It only provides a social-political and interpersonal relation ethics. Its failure in providing a complete philosophy for human life is obvious and grave.

It should be perfectly clear from this presentation that major similarities between Islam and the Confucianism lie in the social-political and interpersonal relation ethics. Beyond this the Confucianism falls short to deal with. Perpetually adopting new notions for covering its defects, it always reforms its theory by filling what it lacks and keeping what it possesses. This ever-changing process, like its ever-deepening process of self-cultivation, of renewal of its theory is temporarily stopped by China's political change in 1949. But if anyone thinks that the Confucianism is no longer relevant in modern China of the 1980's and other Confucian communities, they would be surely mistaken. From Taiwanese government's claim of having heritage of the Confucian teachings, Singapore's writing Confucian teaching into their secondary school text books, Japanese patriarchal business management, South Korean substantial practice of traditional Confucian ceremonies, to China's celebration of the anniversary of Confucius' birthday in Qufu 曲阜 of Shan dong 山东 province in 1986, all manifest that the Confucianism is surviving and reviving well. Numbers of Chinese streaming into Qufu, where Confucius lived and taught in the 6th and 5th century B.C., to show their growing awareness and pride in their cultural heritage is vastly increasing.

Besides, the Confucianism is undergoing a thorough and grim testing. Its values, which were publicly practiced in the feudal time of the Confucian societies, are now severely challenged by modern Western values. A full revival of the old Confucian practices, particularly li 礼 rituals is a big question since the rituals have been practically abolished for nearly a century long. Kingship polity is no more functioning in any modern Confucian communities. The whole context of li 礼 rituals needs a totally fresh redefinition. Unlike Islamic values, which are

sued to all times, all places, and all situations. Its fundamentals, five pillars practiced today by all Muslims are exact practices of Muslims who lived one thousand and four hundred years before, when Islam was conveyed by its Prophet to the whole world.

Another rigorous situation facing the Confucians is the fact of that with the development of modern sciences and technology and frequent migration worldwide, multi-religious and multi-racial communities are rapidly emerging phenomenon throughout the world, Confucianism, especially its absolutism and authoritarianism outlook, definitely needs a overall reconstruction. It has to learn to be tolerant to other people with different faith when it is to be practically applied to the Confucian societies.

The reconstruction of the Confucianism is an extremely heavy task for modern Confucians, for it has to break up its old system and build a new Confucian system, in which process adoption of new definitions for filling up its old vacuum is unavoidable. Alternatives are countable, either building its own structure based upon the ancient Chinese belief, or adopting from the great world religions (Islam, Christianity and Buddhism) and modern western philosophies which are built upon ancient Greek philosophies; amongst which adoption of Buddhism and modern western philosophies are already proved to be failures. Incorporating its ethical system into the ancient Chinese belief is a never done job, yet if it is done will result in recognizing oneness of god, which is very basic assertion of Islamic and Christianity and Judaism. Therefore, alternatives for adoption are limited. Still more the limitation is larger since the very basic beliefs of Christianity, particularly its theory of Trinity and the recorded matters in the Bible concerning

newly established scientific facts, are proved false. Judaism has been claimed by Jewish people to be the religion for a selected people. The remaining choice is only Islam.

Islam is an only authentic religion revealed by One True God, Allah (subḥānahu wataʿāla) to the whole humankind. Apart from its *al-tawḥīd* message and ethical values which are mostly consistent with Confucian ethical values, the scientific facts contained in its book Al-Qurān have astonished a lot of modern scientists in various fields, which are often the courses for guidance leading them to accept Islam as their way of life. The more sciences are developed, the more authentic nature of Islamic message is proved.

It is very explicit from foregoing comparison that the Confucianism has already contained a considerable part of ethical values, which are advocated by Islam. The agreement between them is very clear. If Confucians move a step further towards recognizing oneness of god, its agreement with Islam will reach a significant stage, where they may find that their acceptance of Islam is only an easy move.