

Self-Cultivation with Conducting Rectification of Names as a Base of Social Harmony (Confucianism Perspective)

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Abstract: *This study highlights the notion of self-cultivation, one of the most important heritages of Confucianism with regard to social harmony. Self-cultivation is the first step for developing society, namely how people should develop the self as a basis for developing family, society and the world. The basis of self-cultivation is ren (humanity). If we can conduct it correctly, then this will lead to social harmony and peace in-practice. Social harmony presupposes diversity. Diversity is an empirical reality. Hence, tolerance in diversity is needed. It is the basis of a family ethics and an ideal society.*

So, in the process of harmonization, there is always a dialogical of understanding between the self and the others based on their role and position. This is related to the another origin concept of Confucius, rectifying names. This is the epistemological foundation. It is not only a theoretical matter, but also a practical one. Rectifying names aims to establish correct names and their correct use for the reason that it is the basis of a family ethics and an ideal society. The use of a name is correct when it is used in a way corresponding to the meaning of the name. And the meaning of a name is established by some public norms of social actions. So, if there is no conformity between the norms establishing the meaning of the name and names, we say it is not correct. With the same way, we also say that if there is no conformity between the names and the attitude or behavior of the people, we say it is not correct.

The objective of such a notion is for people to be aware of their position, role and obligations as a part of society. Briefly, self-cultivation is the correct way to realize the great harmony in reality and one of the solutions for socio-political problems. There is no harmony without diversity.

Key words : *Rectifying Names, Self-cultivation, Harmony, Peace.*

*“In the world within the four seas, all men are his brothers”
(The Analects, XII: 5)*

1. Introduction

Discussing about *self-cultivation* with conducting *rectification of names* for social harmony and peace is discussing about humans existence and their survival in the world. It means, how to reach the harmony and peace in the daily social life with carrying out *self-cultivation* based on humanity which in Confucianism concept called *ren*. And discussing about harmony and peace is discussing about diversity and mutual relationships. This article will highlight one of the great Chinese culture and tradition heritage which have developed more than 2500 years ago and will being existed until

now. This concept is the great valuable contribution of Confucius for human being civilization and development in the world.

As we know, *naming* is the first activity when we are dealing with somethings. It is the primary step of our mind and cognition about somethings. We know something because of name. With using names the mind connects the world of symbols with the world of entities. When we find something, the first thing we ask about it is the name. In the history of mankind civilization, the first learning that God has taught is names of everythings. He taught to the first human, Adam, at the first time before examination. Indeed, God prepared human (Adam) as a leader in the world, but angel and devil refused him. They felt more entitled than Adam to become leader of the world. Then, God examined them by asking to mention names of things. In this examination, angel and devil failed answered God's question, and Adam only who able to mention the names of things.

Tsung-I Dow mentioned that the greatest creative power of the mind is perhaps the creation of names. In the course of history human beings have constantly created and assigned names to objects or events in a process of cognition¹. According to him, the operation of the mind is essentially our thought and the primary step of our cognition is the exercising of judgment through the operation of thought to name a thing or event. At any stage or level in the development of thought, cognition brings both analytic and synthetic modes into unity; that is the moment when we make a judgment, attaching a name which gives meaning².

This is one of the most remarkable statements of Confucius about the *rectifying names* or *rectification of names* which is *the foundational and main key* to understand Confucius notion of harmony and peace or rational coordination of social interaction. Therefore, the starting point of the harmony in society and peace in the world, according to Confucius, is what is called *the rectification of names*, namely designating names appropriately and matching these names to actions such that every single name has a set of responsibilities attached to ensure the harmony. To put it in another way, *rectifying names* aims to establishing correct names and their correct use for the reason that they are the base of an ideal society, while incorrect names and incorrect use of names are the sources out of which grow problems of linguistic, moral, social and political disorder. Names are also a medium for interaction which the division of labour would be impossible. A name makes possible to assure not only the survival of the human species, but also the progress of civilizational development³. So, the self-cultivation with conducting rectification of names is not only a theoretical matter, but it is more a practical matter⁴. Indeed, the objective of such notion is that people be aware of their position, function and obligations as an integral part of society.

The interesting point in Confucius notion of the self-cultivation with conducting rectification of names is that there is interdependence between a single name and other names. So, in some sense, this form of holism also extends the notion of harmony. The rectification of a single name has to be integrated with the rectification of other names. That is why Confucius mentioned names in the plural form, not in singular form when he answered Zilu's asking⁵. In other words, a single name cannot be correct independently, separated from the correctness of other names. There is dialogical

¹. Tsung-I Dow, 1995, p 117, *The Twofold Phenomenon In Naming: A Reflection From The Confucian-Taoist Yin-Yang Dialectical, Monistic Perspective*, in Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Editor), 1995, *Heaven, Earth, And In-Between In The Harmony of Life*, in the World Phenomenology Institute, published under the Auspices of the World Institute for Advanced Phenomenological Research and Learning, A-T. Tymieniecka, President, Springer-Science+B usiness Media, B.V.

². Tsung-I Dow, 1995, p 117, *The Twofold Phenomenon In Naming: A Reflection From The Confucian-Taoist Yin-Yang Dialectical, Monistic Perspective*.

³. Tsung-I Dow, p, 125, *The Twofold Phenomenon In Naming: A Reflection From The Confucian-Taoist Yin-Yang Dialectical, Monistic Perspective*.

⁴. John Knoblock, p, 601, *Xunzi, A Translation and Study of the Complete Works, Volume 2*.

⁵. *The Analects of Confucius* (version 2.2), Robert Eno (translator), 2015, XIII, 3, p 67. Zilu said, "If the ruler of Wei were to entrust you with governance of his state, what would be your first priority." The Master said, "Most certainly, it would be to rectify names". Robert Eno give a notice : This states one facet of what is known as the doctrine of the "rectification of names".

understanding between names themselves; in the sense, not only that if someone uses a name it has to respond to an interlocutor for the reasons to use the name the way it did, but he must also be able, when requested, to relate this use to the use of other names. Hence, there is a harmony here, harmony between the names themselves. Harmony always contains of diversity. Even, there is no harmony without diversity. So, in this context, harmony is not only the objective of the rectification of names, but it is also a paradigm, it is *an episteme*.

Confucius' notion of correctness of names has derived a notion of social order and peace. Both social order and peace are prerequisite for gather harmony. That human being can not exist by him/herself. Human being has to able to make a social relation with the other human being. How to make a social relation is how someone behave to others in daily life. And how to behave to others is how to know and have humanity. This is the meaning of *the great harmony*. The good relationship between humans being is the key to reach the great harmony and peace.

2. Self-Cultivation

Indeed, as mentioned above that self-cultivation with conducting the rectification of names can only be evaluated in relation to the action prescribed by the norms that set the meaning of those names. Furthermore, the self-cultivation will lead to *good self-attitude* in relation to the others. *Self-cultivation* as the basis for governing the state and bringing peace to the world⁶. *Self-cultivation* leads people to have the virtues of honesty, sincerity, sympathy to others, and so on. The point is to come to humanity, an ethical attitude in relation and interaction to the others⁷. This interaction aiming at *self-cultivation* should be carried out constantly and every time. The main aim of Confucius' notion is not only to set the meaning of the notion of *self-cultivation*, but to put this notion at work, so that to every person becomes a *chun tzu* (perfect human). The results of this aim is attaining a good family relationship and a good social relationship which in the Confucianism context called *the great harmony*.

Self-cultivation is a premier step to be a perfect human (*chun tzu*) before regulating family, society and state. It is an obligation for everyone and each person in the state, as we can find in The Great Learning, verse 6 : From the Son of Heaven down to the mass of the people, all must consider the cultivation of the person the root of everything besides⁸. *Self-cultivation* is a personal ethics that give contribution to participate in social harmony⁹. *Self-cultivation* is not something we practice for our private satisfaction or because it leads us to some sort of enlightenment. It is meant to allow us to act, and act properly, in our family, our neighborhood, and our country¹⁰. A good *self-cultivation* will lead people to a good self-attitude and behavior, then it leads to a good family attitude and behavior, then it leads to a good social attitude and behavior. Then, it leads to a good government attitude and behavior, and finally, it leads to a peaceful world. Peace in the world will not be able to achieved if there is no harmony in what the Confucianism concept takes to be the minimal unity of social cohesion ; namely family. A peaceful country is only possible when the people are in peace. Peaceful society is only possible when the families are in peace¹¹. Peaceful families only possible if each member of the families understands their rights and obligations, in accordance with using the name as it bears. So, I believe that the society would be better if we talked about *self-cultivation with conducting the rectification of names*. Self-cultivation allows the presence of a genuine friendships interaction between all members of society.

⁶. Xinzhong Yao, 1999, p 4., Confucianism and its Modern Values: Confucian moral, educational and spiritual heritages revisited,

Journal of Beliefs & Values, Vol. 20, No. 1.

⁷. Lee Dian Rainey, 2010, p 198, Confucius & Confucianism, The Essentials, Blackwell, UK.

⁸. The Great Learning, verse 6.

⁹. Loubna El Amine, 2015, p 151, Classical Confucian political thought: A new interpretation, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2015.

¹⁰. Lee Dian Rainey, 2010, p 198, Confucius & Confucianism, The Essentials, Blackwell, UK.

¹¹. The Great Learning of Confucius, verse 4 - 5.

The self-cultivation is a personal ethics which reflects family ethics and social ethics. The concept of *li* (propriety) is more than just a matter of habit and behavior. It is the soul of life and moral values. The soul is *ren* (humanity). *Li* (propriety) determines a person's attitude about how things should be carried out. In this point, we find the difference between Cratylus and Confucius concept about names. According to Cratylus, a name 'will fit' to certain object, while according to Confucius a name 'must' match with that is named. Hence, in Confucianism, the acting of rectification of names should be conducted constantly, time by time, every time. A human being is called a human being when he is in the relationship with other human being gently. *Li* (propriety) is the basis of social ethics. That thought leads us to understand that peace in the world will not be achieved if there is no harmony in the family, and that it has to be started from the self, as the smallest unit of society.

In Confucianism, *self-cultivation* is the important base to present justice and peace, because the foundation of *self-cultivation* is *ren* (humanity). The Confucian ethics is based on the human existence in the relation with the others, with the society. This is the special ethics of Confucianism concept which different with the West ethics which only based on the human existence personally and individually. In this context, Thomas Hosuck Kang said that when we look at him from ethics his ethics is based on a relation system, or a concept of belonging : Human being to human being; human being to family; human being to community; human being to society; human being to the state, and human being to the world, human being to the universe. Confucius was, in a sense, the father of Oriental ethics, Oriental philosophy, Oriental sociology, Oriental anthropology, and many other fields. In contrast with Western ethics is based on personal and individual human beings who are only related to God, Confucian ethics is based on human beings in the community and society. Human beings are thinkable only in the relation of humans being. Hence, without community and society, human beings cannot exist¹².

The family system is the *micro-structure* of the world. The family is a castle of human beings. Without the family there is no society. The family is the root of the human race, while the world is a *macro-structure* of the family¹³. The question that must be answered is how can the social concept of Confucianism of the rectification of names be able to implemented in relation with the aims of attempting to build some means of achieving unity in the cultural diversity ?

3. The Great Harmony

The problems in the social life are very complex. One of the social problems in the modern social life is identity crisis. The identity crisis occurs because of *self-cultivation* is not complete. Someone didn't know their function and position. They did something but not in accordance with the name it bears. Human beings lose their grip on living. In addition, the establishment of religious beliefs is crushed by a materialistic beliefs. They believed that material is the only measure and standard of truth, while religious beliefs or spirituality are regarded as nothing more than a secondary need to meet the demands of social life.

Someone just will return to religious spirituality if the real anxiety really pushes him. Actually, they believed, only religious spirituality that has been tested and able to provide enlightenment for the upset people. It means that religion actually has the ability to provide a sense of calm and security, giving a real identity, thus convincing humans so that they exist.

We can get the right knowledge about human nature only when we consider it as a system of social life and study it from an ever-evolving and comprehensive point of view. We must analyze it from its social position and relations, because human beings are the first existence of all social existence, but social life is the essential quality of human existence. This does not mean that Confucius did not considered the individual free will. As Thomas Hosuck Kang said, human beings

¹². Thomas Hosuck Kang, 1997, p109, Confucius & Confucianism, Questions & Answers, Confucian Publications, Washington.

¹³. Thomas Hosuck Kang, 1997, p 60.

are thinkable only in the relation of human beings¹⁴. According to Confucius, names are related to all social dimension and Confucius has a serious concern to individuality and sociality for getting social order and harmony through human relationship. Thomas Hosuck Kang has claimed that Confucius was the first one who found this concept throughout the history of mankind¹⁵.

Actually, the nature of human being consists of three things: (1) the position of nature, namely human being is as a personal being and creation of God; (2) the composition of nature, namely human being is consists of soul and body; and (3) nature of nature, namely human being is as individual beings and social beings. Each of them is a mono-dualist, two is united. The three mono-dualists is united in what was called a mono-pluralist, unified plural¹⁶. That means that all aspects in human being must run in a harmony, fair and balanced way because each person has rights to be fulfilled. The goal of human life is to achieve godly character. In the context of Confucianism, godly character is become a *chun tzu* (perfect human).

The balance of the relationship between body and soul is complementary such as melodies in musique, namely they did affirmation each others. So, this balance leads to harmony of the individual-social relationship which will be followed by the total harmony of an independent divine being. Hence, the concepts of harmony and balance which in the Eastern thought are central, in Western thought are explained by equilateral triangles, in which the inner and outer circles become concentric: the dividing line is also the high and the heavy lines¹⁷. In real, reality means the appropriateness of working with ideals and self potential. Philosophically, harmony presupposes the existence of different things and implies a certain favorable relationship among them¹⁸.

In Confucianism, a human can only be called a human if a human being is able to establish good relations with other humans. This means that human existence depends on the extent to which a human person humanizes others, respects others, upholds the dignity of humanity. Some verses in the Sacred Book of *Shi Shu* discussed this matter. For example, that someone who wants to go forward cannot go forward alone, he must also advance others. When you go out your front gate, continue to treat each person as though receiving an honored guest. When directing the actions of sub-ordinates, do so as though officiating at a great ritual sacrifice. Do not do to others what you would not wish done to you. Then, there can be no complaint against you, in your state or in your household¹⁹. What you would not wish done to you, then do not do it to others, because in the world with-in the four seas, all men are his brothers²⁰. This is the meaning of humanity (*ren*) of Confucianism.

The concept of *ren* as the core of Confucian moral teaching is the true humanity which every human being possesses the fundamental characteristic for all orders which is reflected in human actions. *Ren* also refers to *benevolence*. Benevolence means to love mankind. Human being should follow the humanitarianist spirit and start from the self to cultivate harmonious relations with the others and with the nature²¹. *Ren* is the way of human conduct, the way in which humans social life go on, humanity. Man is supposed to love his fellow men and treat others as he does himself²². It is the Confucian morality which is the highest principle of humanity. Basically, the *ren* exists in relations to the mankind.

¹⁴. Thomas Hosuck Kang, 1997, p109, Confucius and Confucianism, Questions and Answers, Confucian Publications, Washington, D. C.

¹⁵. Thomas Hosuck Kang, 1997, p111, Confucius and Confucianism, Questions and Answers, Confucian Publications, Washington, D. C.

¹⁶. Notonagoro, 1997, p 13, Pancasila Secara Ilmiah Populer, Bumi Aksara, Jakarta.

¹⁷. Damardjati Supadjar, 1996, p 6, Nawangsari, Yogyakarta.

¹⁸. Chenyang Li, 2006, p 584, The Confucian Ideal of Harmony, in Philosophy East and West, Volume 56, Number 4, October 2006, pp. The University of Hawaii Press.

¹⁹. The Analects of Confucius (version 2.2), Robert Eno (translator), 2015, XII, 2, p 62.

²⁰. The Analects of Confucius (version 2.2), Robert Eno (translator), 2015, XII, 5, p 62.

²¹. Gong Dafei, 1991, p 314, Confucius Humanitarianist Ideas and the Contemporary International Community, in Confucianism and The Modernization of China, (Edited by Silke Krieger, Rolf Trauzettel), v. Hase & Koehler Verlag Mainz, Germany.

²². Gong Dafei, 1991, p 315.

Xinzhong Yao said that morality has been characteristic of Confucian theory and practice. It was on the foundation of Confucianism that various codes of moral life, rules of propriety, patterns of behavior and guide lines for social and daily life were produced and enhanced. Confucianism underlined, and perhaps to a smaller extent continues to underline, the basic structure of society and community, to orient the life of the people and to define their moral standards and ethical ideal in most parts of East Asia²³. The prerequisite for achieving perfection as a human being is the necessity of freedom. Freedom is the center of dynamics for human existence. Freedom is a characteristic of self-identity and expression of humanity. The basis of any moral principle is the dignity of the human person endowed with reason and freedom of self-determination, but the human person also is vulnerable by nature. Individual freedom and self-determination must be related to the common good²⁴.

The concept of freedom in Confucianism can not be separated from what Sastrapratedja calls *common good*. Freedom in Confucianism is freedom within the boundaries and framework of social relations. The individuality is one element of happiness, but individual freedom must be limited, and the limit of individual freedom is belong to the other freedom. So, the individual freedom should not allow to be a distraction to others. When each of individual freedom met freedom of the others, so we called it sociality. Individuality dissolves in sociality. The identity of 'I', 'you' and 'they' dissolved to be 'we', but their identity as an individual remains inherent.

The freedom contains the meaning of responsibility, order and involvement. Hence, it means recognition of plurality and diversity. The acknowledgment of plurality means the attitude of plurality. Freedom must be interpreted in a relational framework with the others, where the social responsibility must be possessed by every member of society. This is then formulated by Confucius as *the great harmony*. What Confucius wants with *the great harmony* is only possibly occurs if humans individually base their life orientation to become perfect human beings (*chun tzu*). The perfect man is a man who is able to uphold the dignity of his humanity (*ren*), human beings who uphold human rights values. The perfect human is the real man which develop *the civilized society*. In the other word, *chun tzu* human is an ideal term for human relationship.

The orientation of his life is not on what can be obtained from others, but on what can be done (given) and accommodated for others. Only *chun tzu* human has the ability for transforming society towards peace. If there is righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character. If there is beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home. If there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation. If there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world²⁵. In fact, everyone can become a good Confucian as long as his behavior and attitude is in accordance with *ren* and his/her name. So, self-cultivation with conducting *the rectification of names* is the correct way to realize *the great harmony* in reality and one of the solutions for socio-political problems.

4. Conclusion

Harmony in social life is such as the orders implemented which that is a mutual agreement between all members of society. In harmony, there is diversities and tolerance. Both diversities and tolerance are built up in harmony. So, when we say keep diversity and keep tolerance, it means keep harmony too, because it consists of diversity and tolerance, automatically. Therefore, it is correct when there is the enforcement of the rule of law or orders as an effort to ensure the attainment of harmony in social life. The enforcement of the rule of law also means that all members of the society should to play their role participatory in accordance with the 'name' which they possessed.

The concept of the Confucian social harmony is a derivation from the concept about and cannot be removed from the basic concept of humanity (*ren*) which is realized first with *self-cultivation*,

²³. Xinzhong Yao, 2005, p 32, An Introduction to Confucianism, Cambridge University Press.

²⁴. M. Sastrapratedja, 1997, p 29, Violence, Justice, and Human Dignity, in The Human Person and Society (Edited by Zhu Dasheng et al), The Council For Research in Values & Philosophy, Washington D.C. USA.

²⁵. Smith, Huston, 1991, p 174, The World's Religions Our Great Wisdom Traditions, A Division of Harper Collins Publishers, Harper, San Francisco.

family system and social system. Harmony is a logical consequence of applied Confucian ethics in the social life. This harmony is based on humanitarian or *ren* as a fundamental principle of the whole thought of Confucianism. Humanity is placed within the framework of the relationships with other human beings, so that *ren* is the ideal framework in human relationships.

Order, harmony and solidarity are prerequisite for arising the social cohesion in the community and the requirement for the realization of a society that is strong and independent that in the context of Confucianism is referred to the great harmony. The order of the social life of the community will only be realized if each individual in social community basing its moral quality on *ren* (humanity), *yi* (righteousness), *li* (propriety), *xiao* (filial piety), *zhong* (loyalty). But, before people done somethings, *self-cultivation* with conducting the rectification of names is the first one which must be done.

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