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## Wisdom from the Confucian Classics for Spiritually Sensitive Social Welfare

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*This article is dedicated to Professor Yi Dong-Jun, Ph.D., of the College of Confucianism and East Asian Studies at Sung Kyun Kwan University in Seoul, Korea on the occasion of his retirement. For 26 years he has been my generous mentor and friend. He is a genuine scholar without whom my learning of the Confucian Way would have been impossible. Thanks are due to the University of Kansas for a sabbatical leave and to Sung Kyun Kwan University for a Visiting Professorship in the spring and summer of 1999, which allowed me to begin this project. I am also grateful to the Academy of Korean Studies for a research fellowship in summer of 2000 that enabled me to continue the work.* [1]

### Abstract

*This article presents key philosophical principles and practical guidelines for social welfare of classical Confucianism as depicted in its traditional foundational texts (the so-called Five Classics and Four Books) written in China about 2000 and more years ago. The philosophical principles include benevolent reciprocity, the primacy of virtue, honoring worthy people, showing affection to one's kin and all people, showing consideration for visitors, and harmonizing humanity with heaven and earth. Practical guidelines for social welfare are illustrated by discussion of general social welfare provisions and regulations for addressing poverty and vulnerable populations. Implications for contemporary social welfare include reflection on cross-cultural differences and commonalities in social welfare and principles for spiritually sensitive contemporary social welfare.*

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### Introduction

Most large-scale societies have for thousands of years been characterized to some extent by authoritarianism, class stratification, patriarchy, ethnocentrism, xenophobic nationalism, religious rivalry, and human domination of the natural world. But these patterns are in a process of rapid transformation (Wilber, 1995). The most recent age of geopolitical power politics, marked by the inexorable march of colonialism, industrialism, and scientific technocracy, has brought all peoples into contact, for better or worse. In its beneficial aspect, it has made life more comfortable materially and it has advanced democracy for many people throughout the world. It has opened the opportunity to extend the well-being of all people in the world community. In its dangerous aspect, this globalization trend has come at the expense of many oppressed and disadvantaged people. It has brought us to the brink of military and ecological disaster for all human beings and all life on this planet (Besthorn, 2001; Cowley, 1996). Contemporary societies must choose carefully how to proceed so that this global social transformation can lead to creative restructuring of human relations, rather than to inhumane destruction of society and nature. Social work can make a significant contribution to this creative world social transformation only if it adopts a humane spiritually-sensitive global perspective.

Unfortunately, professional social work and governmental social welfare programs tend to be constrained by nation-centered and ethnocentric perspectives and agendas. It can be helpful to broaden and refresh our perspectives by examining social welfare approaches in different cultural and historical contexts. On the one hand, we can learn from contrasts and distinctions this way. On the other hand, we can consider whether there might be some commonalities of social welfare ideals that underlie the differences. By the very fact that forms

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of expression may seem unfamiliar due to different historical and cultural contexts, the reader can perceive the underlying ideas freshly and consider how they may apply to contemporary times and particular places. By perceiving the truth beneath the veneer of culture-bound appearances, and reflecting on their resonance in the present age, we can sharpen our awareness of a perennial wisdom for spiritually sensitive social welfare. This effort continues the work of various scholars who have been drawing on insights from East Asian philosophy and religions, such as Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism in order to promote a cross-culturally relevant and spiritually astute understanding of social work and social welfare (e.g. Brandon, 1976; Canda, 2002; Canda & Furman, 1999; Chung, 1992; Koenig & Spano, 1998). Like the view of spiritually sensitive social work developed by Canda and Furman, the Confucian perspective approaches human service as a spiritual path that ennobles the public servant while benefiting society (Yao, 2000). Traditional Confucianism is a spiritual perspective because it relates the understanding of human nature and society to fundamental values that give direction and purpose to life in the context of respect for heaven, spirits, and the earth. Further, traditional Confucianism involves personal, familial, and national religious institutional practices of meditation and rites to deepen spiritual awareness and to maintain harmony with the spirits of the earth, ancestors, and the will of heaven. Many contemporary people influenced by Confucianism may continue certain related customs and social ethics, but may be less aware of the traditional religious aspects. As this article describes, these spiritual and religious qualities are infused throughout the Confucian ideals of social welfare. The theme of Confucianism as a spiritual path in relation to social work education and scholarship is developed further in Canda (2002).

The first purpose of this article is to introduce fundamental ideals and practices of social welfare from the Confucian tradition as a way of broadening our perspective beyond the American and European views that are usually presented in Western accounts of the history of social welfare. Classical texts are presented in more detail than has been done in previous English social work literature. Numerous textual citations are given so that the reader can examine original sources. In the process, readers will become familiar with ideas that continue to influence hundreds of millions of people in East Asia (especially China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam) as well as people of East Asian descent in other world regions (Canda & Canda, 1996; Canda, Shin, & Canda, 1993; Chu & Carew, 1992; Chung, 1992 & 2001). The second purpose is to discuss implications of these insights for spiritually sensitive approaches to contemporary social work and social welfare.

This article looks back to insights from classical Confucianism of ancient China. This was a time when ideals of social welfare were expressed profoundly by scholars who were both philosophers and public servants. This does not mean that ancient Chinese society was necessarily more humane than contemporary societies. Indeed, 2500 years ago, Confucius decried the poor quality of government leaders, the lack of people dedicated to deep learning, and the general moral decline of society (Yao, 2000). He looked back longingly to the ideals of a sagely era more than one thousand years earlier when the great emperors Yao and Shun and Yu ruled. Confucius attempted to infuse the feudalistic patriarchal system with humane heartedness. He looked to the examples of the previous age of sagely kings in order to transmit the wisdom of the past for the benefit of his people and to serve as a model for the future. Whether or not the age of the sagely kings ever existed literally, its ideals as presented in the classics serve to illustrate principles and practice of virtue that can still inspire us.

This does not mean we should conform mindlessly to past custom. That would be contrary to the spirit of Confucius who emphasized that learning without careful thinking or consistency with virtue is foolhardy and dangerous (Canda, 2002, Chung, 2001). Mencius, the second greatly influential Confucian teacher, emphasized the importance of adjusting customary practices to particular times and situations (e.g. book 1, part B, verse 16; book 3, part B, verse 2; book 4, part A, verse 17; book 7, part A, verse 26). To use a metaphor from Confucian advice about education, we must study this difficult question with the effort and skill of a woodcutter who is chopping down a tree full of hard knots (Rites, book 16, verse 18). Indeed, debate about the relative merits and mistakes attributed to Confucianism are lively in contemporary East Asian societies (De Bary, 1991; De Bary & Wu, 1998; Reid, 2000).

This article is based on a systematic study of the wisdom of classical Chinese Confucianism, from the times of Confucius (ca. 551-479 BCE) and Mencius (371-289 BCE) through the early Han dynasty (to about 200 C.E.) as depicted in the texts established as the basis for the Confucian tradition and as illuminated by contemporary scholars of Confucianism.<sup>[2]</sup> Although this article can only give a basic introduction to a complex and vastly influential tradition, hopefully it will stimulate the reader to explore the original texts and secondary sources cited here.

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## The Classical Confucian Vision of Social Welfare

### Overview

In the classical Confucian worldview, it is assumed that when all things are properly conducted according to human virtue and cosmic harmony, then everyone in society can have the opportunity to become virtuous, happy and well provisioned. In contrast, when the cosmic and social orders are disturbed or violated, then personal problems, social problems, and natural calamities result. As Mencius put it, there is no difference between murdering people with a sword and killing them with bad government (book 1, part A, verse 4). The classical Confucian vision of social welfare is based on a holistic cosmology that weaves together human beings, all of nature, and the heavenly realm. While this article focuses on the macro aspects of social welfare, especially administration of government, it is important to emphasize that macro social welfare is inextricably linked with the welfare of individuals and families (Canda, 2002). As the two most renowned books of the Book of Rites, Great Learning and Doctrine of the Mean, point out, all social system levels are interrelated in the process of extending benefit to the world (Chung, 1992; Chung & Haynes, 1993). The root of social welfare is cultivation of virtue within each person. This moves in two directions: self-correction and learning (inward) and instruction and help for family, state, nation, and world (outward). Traditionally, the ruler is considered to be in an ideal position to cultivate oneself as a sagely king, so that he would become a "father and mother of the people," serving them competently and lovingly (e.g. Rites, book 29, verses 28-29). [3] In return, people naturally follow his example, are inspired toward virtue, and do their utmost to support each other. Thus, social welfare would prevail for all. The Confucian tradition has often used kings and sages as exemplars for all people to emulate within their own social positions (Chen, 1993; Yao, 2000). In the same manner, this discussion presents descriptions of ideal rulers and social administrators as possible models for everyone in social welfare leadership positions to consider.

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### Guiding Principles for Confucian Social Welfare

Classical Confucianism is concerned primarily with the well-being of society, which is understood as a community of reciprocity between individuals of various social classes and roles (Tu, 1979, 1985 & 1989). There are many guidelines for how society should be ordered and administered to promote social welfare, especially by rulers and officers who were key to proper social administration. In this section, the major principles are presented.

#### *Benevolent Reciprocity*

The principle of reciprocity (shu) means that relations between all people in society should be based on reciprocal expressions of virtue, resulting in mutual benefits. Indeed, the cardinal virtue of Confucianism is ren, often translated as benevolence, goodness, humaneness, or humanity (Chen, 1993; Tu, 1979). Ren refers to the essentially benevolent core of human nature that manifests in the fundamental interrelatedness of human beings and societies and the natural moral inclination to promote the welfare of others. The Chinese character for ren signifies a person with two marks beside, showing that a human being is essentially interrelated with others.

Since patriarchal hierarchy organized classical Chinese society, the form of reciprocity most often discussed in the classics is between leaders and subordinates. This principle can be stated generically as follows: when people in higher social status or management positions treat those in lower positions with care, those below will naturally return respect and cooperation. Enhancement of virtuous character and material benefit will accrue to both mutually. This pattern extends throughout strata of society, so that when the king is correct, feudal lords are obedient, and great officers mediate between them (Rites, book 11, section 1, verse 17). When rulers love benevolence and ministers love righteousness, then government affairs are conducted well, resulting in wealth for society. Likewise, when ministers and subordinates use their utmost strength and ability to serve the ruler, the correct rule recompenses them with rank and rewards. In short, the people need the king to administer peace, but without the people the king has no kingdom (Rites, book 29, verse 11). As the sagely king Yao said to his successor, "If the multitude were without the sovereign, whom should they sustain aloft? If the sovereign had not the multitude, there would be none to guard the country for him. Be reverent! Carefully demean yourself on the throne which you will occupy, respectfully cultivating the virtues which are to be desired in you. If within the four seas there be distress and poverty, your Heaven-conferred revenues will come to a perpetual end" (History, part 2, book 2, chapter 2, verse 17).

Reciprocity applies to all relationships within role sets. According to the Great Learning (chapter 10), the correct ruler does not do to others what one dislikes oneself. In general, a person of noble character (junzi) uses one's own likes and dislikes as a standard in order to know what to do or not to do to others (Analects, book 6, verse 30 and book 12, verse 2). One does not follow bad examples or give bad examples. Good

leaders should be able to empathize with the populace, caring for them like one's own family members. "One's own person reaches to the persons of others; one's own son reaches to the sons of others; one's own wife to the wives of others. If a ruler do these things, the spirit of his conduct will reach to all under the sky. If the course of the great king be thus, all the states and families will be obedient" (Rites, book 24, verse 12).

In the Book of Changes, the complementary yet hierarchical relationships between social statuses is represented by the relative position of the lines of a hexagram, which is a symbolic design composed of six parallel lines. The top line represents the sage, who has transcended attachment to the world yet can advise those who administer government. The fifth line (second from the top) represents the king, who should seek advice from the sage. The fourth line is a high official, who advises and serves the king and supervises the lower officials, including an official (represented by the third line) who mediates between central authority and officials in the countryside (represented by the second line). The first line represents the common person (Wilhelm & Baynes, 1967)

### *Primacy of Virtue*

Leadership according to virtue is fundamental to the ideal of proper social administration. The Doctrine of the Mean (verse 1) states that the first and foundational rule for good government is to cultivate virtue in oneself. Virtue begets virtue (Rites, book 17, section 2, verse 9). The Confucian understanding of virtue (te) is that it is a moral quality of people that has the power to transform self and world (Ivanhoe, 2000; see Mencius, book 7, part A, verse 1; book 6, part A, verse 5). The ruler's virtue affects the fine quality of cultural expressions as well as the character of the people. When a ruler is virtuous, the rippling effects powerfully transform the people and the world by harmonizing society according to benevolence and balance with nature (Rites, book 4, verses 14-16). When the state is governed according to propriety, society develops based on mutual consideration and harmony between people. Employment is assured for all. Even nature resonates with virtue, responding with good weather and environmental conditions. Heaven, earth, and human beings are brought into harmony by means of rites that convey a sense of righteousness and truthfulness. Transformative virtue is invisible, like heaven, but it sways others by its truthfulness, awesomeness, and good example (see also Analects, book 12, verses 14-19; book 13, verses 2 and 13; book 15, verse 5). So Confucius said that the sagely king Shun could rule merely by taking the royal stance of looking south because his virtuous administration and character were well established. A conversation between the exemplary king Shun and his successor Yu, and the minister Yih, illustrates the importance of virtue in social administration:

Yu said, "Accordance with the right is good fortune; the following of evil is bad: -- the shadow and the echo." Yih said, "Alas! Be cautious! Admonish yourself to caution when there seems to be no reason for anxiety. Do not fail in due attention to the laws and ordinances. Do not find your enjoyment in indulgent ease. Do not go to excess in pleasure. In your employment of men of worth, let none come between you and them. Put away evil without hesitation. Do not try to carry out doubtful plans. Study that all your purposes may be with the light of reason. Do not go against what is right to get the praise of the people. Do not oppose the people to follow your own desires ...." Yu said, "Oh! think of these things, O emperor. Virtue is seen in the goodness of the government, and the government is tested by its nourishing of the people" (History, part 2, book 2, chapter 1, verses 5-7).

If leaders wish to succeed, they must employ 'four instruments for presiding' (Rites, book 23, verse 4): harmony, in which the people are pleased by the ruler's orders; benevolence, in which both superiors and subordinates love each other; confidence, in which people obtain their desire without seeking it; and rightness, by which all harmful operations of heaven and earth are removed.

When leaders do not cultivate virtue, their social administration results in social malady. Without cultivation of virtue, "The strong press upon the weak; the many are cruel to the few; the knowing impose on the dull; the bold make it bitter for the timid; the diseased are not nursed; the old, young, orphans and solitaries are neglected: -- such is the great disorder that ensues" (Rites, book 17, section 1, verse 12). Cultivation of virtue has implications for the personal lifestyle of leaders, because they should set good example and not live in ways that deprive others. Persons of noble character should live economically, without extravagant dress, houses, diet, or other possessions. They should live simply and work hard in order to share their advantages with the populace (Rites, book 24, verses 4-5; Analects, book 13, verse 9).

The primacy of virtue means that the ruler loses the mandate of heaven to lead if the ruler's orders are not in accord with the will of heaven (Rites, book 29, verses 44-48). His words of caring and his deeds must be consistent. As the Great Learning (chapter 9, verse 4; chapter 10, verse 23) puts it, goodness obtains the decree of heaven while lack of goodness loses it. The Book of History includes many stories of corrupt rulers who brought ruin on themselves and their people, thus justifying the punishment of heaven and social revolution. For example, King Yu said to his assembled officers, "Stupid is this prince of Meou, ignorant, erring, and disrespectful. Despiteful and insolent to others, he thinks that all ability and virtue are with himself. A rebel to the right, he destroys all the obligations of virtue. Superior men are kept by him in obscurity, and mean men fill all the offices. The people reject and will not protect him. Heaven is sending down calamities upon him. On

this account I have assembled you, my multitude of gallant men, and bear the instructions of the sovereign to punish his crimes" (History, part 2, book 2, chapter 3, verse 20). Mencius pointed out that inept and corrupt leaders invite social protest (book 4, part A, verses 3, 4 and 16; book 7, part A, verse 31).

In the Book of Changes, Commentaries on hexagram number 49, "Revolution," suggest that when a social condition is outmoded and conflict is rife, then political revolution led by a great person in accord with both heaven and humanity can result in justice. Indeed, the Commentary on the Decision refers to a time of revolution as being natural as the transforming operations of heaven and earth that bring about the completion of four seasons (Wilhelm & Baynes, 1967).

The Great Learning sums all this up by saying: "Virtue is the root; wealth is the result .... Accumulation of wealth is the way to scatter the people, and letting it be scattered among them is the way to collect the people" (chapter 10, verses 7-9). The Great Plan in the Book of History (part 5, book 4, verse 14) includes a beautiful poem that summarizes the virtuous Royal Way (wang dao) of government:

Without deflection, without unevenness,  
Pursue the Royal righteousness;  
Without selfish likings,  
Pursue the Royal way;  
Without any selfish dislikings,  
Pursue the Royal path;  
Without deflection, without partiality,  
Broad and long is the Royal path.  
Without partiality, without deflection,  
The Royal path is level and easy;  
Without perversity, without one-sidedness,  
The Royal path is right and straight.  
Seeing this perfect excellence,  
Turn to this perfect excellence.

#### *Honoring Worthy People for their Service to Society*

The entire corpus of classical Confucian writings represents honor to worthy persons, as they relay wise people's advice and admonish leaders of society to live according to it. This is because worthy people are necessary for the flourishing of government and society (Mean, chapter 20, verses 1-5; Mencius, book 4, part B, verse 7).

The ruler should honor meritorious people in practical ways with respect and reward (Mean, chapter 20, verses 13-14). Leaders honor others by living impeccably themselves. They should avoid the seductions of slander, glamour, and wealth while upholding virtue. This will help leaders to avoid errors of judgment and to be open to good advice. A virtuous ruler attracts and recruits excellent ministers and helpers. A sufficient number of ministers and officers should be appointed to complete tasks and orders. Although public servants should not seek selfish gain, they should be rewarded according to their merit with pay and promotion (Rites, book 14, verse 4; book 21, section 1, verses 13-14; book 24, verse 4).

Meritorious ministers are those whose actions are guided by the words of the people (Rites, book 27, verses 10-16). They use their utmost strength to serve (Rites, book 44, verse 4). They put the doing of duty according to propriety as first importance. Salary and profit come secondarily (Rites, book 27, verses 31-32). Indeed, the person of noble character does not take all to which one is entitled, but leaves benefits for other people. Worthy ministers and officers serve as an opportunity to benefit society (Analects, book 4, verse 14 and book 20, verse 2; Rites, book 29, verse 25). They are courteous, economical, benevolent, sincere, humble, and diligent. They are not acquisitive of power, wealth, or credit. They give honor and praise to others and give place to other worthy people. In doing all this, the worthy minister is pleased, whether or not the ruler acknowledges the service. Acknowledgment is left to the will of heaven. They are loyal without being colluding, morally upright while being deferential, distinguished yet at ease, and they are generous but discrete (Rites, book 29, verses 30-34). When an administrator lightly breaks friendship with the poor and the general populace, but strongly holds on to the rich and powerful, such a person clearly does not love what is worthwhile or despise what is wrong (Rites, book 30, verse 21). Worthy ministers mentor their subordinates, excuse minor faults, and appoint wise people to assist them (Analects, book 13, verse 2). They honor their obligations, economize expenditures, and employ labor without exploiting it (Analects, book 1, verse 5).

The minister serves as a reminder to the ruler about virtuous behavior when necessary (e.g. Mencius, book 1, parts A and B passim). In the Book of Rites, the minister is advised to remonstrate with the ruler privately. If not heeded, the minister should try two more times. If this still does not succeed, the minister should leave the ruler's service (Rites, book 1, section 2, part 3, verse 1; Analects, book 4, verse 26). However, remonstrance should be sincere. If a minister far away from the ruler remonstrates, it may be mere sycophancy (Rites, book

29, verse 38). On the other hand, the minister near to the ruler who does not remonstrate when necessary is merely holding office for self-serving gain. Ministers should be careful to gain the confidence of the ruler before giving advice, so as not to seem malicious (Analects, book 19, verse 10). Ministers should never deceive a ruler, but should advocate for virtue as necessary (Analects, book 14, verse 22). The wise King Shun explained the importance of ministers and their advice to his successor Yu: "My ministers constitute my legs and arms, my ears and eyes. I wish to help and support my people .... When I am wrong, it is yours to correct me; -- do not follow me to my face, and, when you have retired, have other remarks to make." (History, part 2, book 4, chapter 1, verses 4-5).

All manner of artisans and skilled workers should also be encouraged and rewarded. This can be accomplished by daily evaluating their work, conducting monthly examinations, and paying for work completed (Mean, chapter 20, verses 12-14). Reward of meritorious workers allows for the development of sufficient resources for society. The earlier discussion of rewarding able ministers has relevance to rewarding anyone for work well done.

#### *Showing Affection to one's Kin and to all People as Extended Family*

The administrator should begin the expression of benevolence with one's own kin (Mean, chapter 20, verse 13; Rites, book 14, verse 4). They should be given honor, generous support, and consideration for their needs and feelings. The result will be no family quarrels that could disrupt practice of government. However, this does not mean that leaders should practice nepotism. On the contrary, nepotism has been one of the causes of the fall of dynasties (History, passim). Confucius placed emphasis on respect for and compliance with parents (Analects, book 2, verses 5-8; book 4, verse 18; book 13, verse 18). However, guidelines for filial remonstrance with parents show that care for family must be placed in the context of virtue, not preferential familism.

Virtue beginning in the family spreads out to the welfare of others. The highest degree of filial piety is the sharing of benefits for all people (Rites, book 21, section 2, verses 9-13). Teaching in one's family becomes the basis and example for teaching others in virtues (Learning, chapter 9). Honoring one's parents becomes the basis for honoring all of advanced age (Rites, book 21, section 1, verses 13-14). Honoring one's elder brothers becomes the basis for honoring all elders. And caring for one's children becomes the basis of care for all the young.

#### *Showing Consideration for all Visitors and Foreign Leaders*

Visiting dignitaries should be treated hospitably (Mean, chapter 20, verses 13-14). They should be warmly greeted, kindly treated, and bid farewell with proper consideration. Those who are competent and good should be commended. Those who have difficulty should be assisted. As a result, visitors will be attracted from far and wide.

The mirror situation of the foreign visitor is the envoy to another place. Confucius advised that envoys should never disgrace their king (Analects, book 13, verse 20). They should speak with loyalty and trustfulness and act with sincerity and reverence (Analects, book 15, verse 6). They should provide aid to those who need it rather than to the wealthy (Analects, book 6, verse 4). And they should prepare themselves by scholarly learning (Analects, book 13, verse 5).

The leaders of other states should be appreciated and honored (Mean, chapter 20, verses 13-14). This can be accomplished by helping them to continue the line of family succession, to revive states fallen into decay, to bring order into confusing situations, and to support them in times of trouble (see also Analects, book 20, verse 1). Times should be reserved for their visits and the ruler should give them gifts generously while only expecting small gifts from them. This will result in a natural inclination of others to return respect.

#### *Harmonizing with Heaven and Earth*

The relation between heaven, earth, and humanity is like that of parents to children, with heaven as father and earth as mother. Other creatures are also connected with this pattern. For example, it is said that it is contrary to filial piety even to cut a tree or kill an animal at the wrong season (Rites, book 21, section 2, verse 13).

Humanity should exist in harmony with heaven and earth and extend benevolence to all (Mencius, book 1, part A, verses 19, 23, 36, 45, 46). Harmony with heaven and earth (and dependence of humanity on them) is reflected in the numerous descriptions in the Book of Rites regarding sacrificial ceremonies to be offered to heaven and earth at various times of the year, in accord with the seasons. These ceremonies address spiritual realms interwoven in a cosmic pattern with living humans: deceased ancestors, powers of earth and sky that affect the daily course of life and agriculture, and heaven as a divine principle both transcendent of the world

and immanent within humanity as our essential nature of virtue. Confucius said that with the proper offering of ceremony and music, people are not injured by the spiritual powers and people have no cause for dissatisfaction (Rites, book 29, verses 54-55.). The Doctrine of the Mean records that Confucius said we should always act as if we are within the sight of spiritual beings, for though invisible, they are abundant and rich in power and pervade all things (chapter 16, verses 1-5). "The earth supported all things, while heaven hung out its brilliant signs. They [the people] derived their material resources from the earth; they derived rules (for their courses of labour) from the heavens. Thus they were led to give honour to heaven and their affection to the earth, and therefore they taught the people to render a good return (to the earth)" (Rites, book 9, section 1, verses 21-22). Their sacrifices gave thanks to the source of their prosperity and led their thoughts to the source of all being. Even hunting was regulated ceremonially, "to bring their wills into subjection, and thus make them not to pursue animals (in an irregular way)" (Rites, book 9, section 1, verse 22).

On a practical level, in respect for the natural harmony, wise leaders do not make people live in places and ways that are contrary to their native habitat (Rites, book 7, section 4, verse 16). All items of livelihood should be used at their proper season. "On account of all this, heaven did not grudge its methods; earth did not grudge its treasures; men did not grudge (the regulation of) their feelings. Heaven sent down its fattening dews; earth sent forth its springs of sweet wine; hills produced implements and chariots... All this resulted from no other cause but that the ancient kings were able to fashion their ceremonial usages so as to convey the underlying ideas of right, and embody their truthfulness so as to secure the universal and mutual harmony. This was the realization of it."

Harmony between heaven, earth, and humankind provides the environmental context necessary for fulfilling the eight purposes of government: provision of food, commodities, sacrifices, public works, education, criminal justice, courtesy to guests, and the military (The Great Plan in the Book of History, part 5, book 4, verses 7 and 39-40). This enables people to achieve the sources of happiness (long life, prosperity, physical and mental health, virtuosity, and obedience to heaven) and to avoid the sources of distress (premature death, sickness, mental distress, poverty, wicked behavior, and weakness of will toward goodness).

According to the Analects (book 7, verse 21), Confucius did not talk much about heaven or spirits. However, his conversations presume the range of beliefs and practices described above. The main point in the Analects is that he focused on matters of virtue close at hand to human experience, though not to the neglect of spiritual powers, such as ancestors, nature spirits, and heaven itself (book 7, verse 25). Confucius regarded heaven with great respect and set his own life development to connect with the will of heaven (Analects, book 2, verse 4).

The broad principles for social welfare presented in this section set the framework for an extensive set of practical social welfare policies and programs recorded in the Confucian classics. Confucian ideals for social welfare practice will be illustrated by discussion of general social welfare provisions and recommendations for addressing poverty and vulnerable populations.

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## **Classical Confucian Social Welfare Policies and Programs**

### *General Social Welfare*

Society should be organized and regulated according to the standards of virtue. The "loving vigilance" (Rites, book 14, verse 4) of leaders brings a general benefit upon all people, as we have discussed. In particular, rulers should allot land, housing, food and drink, fair administration of criminal justice and opportunity for gainful labor to all people. Concomitantly, they should promote benevolence and civility in the populace (Rites, book 3, section 3, verses 13-15 and section 4, verse 1). Laborers should have time for relaxation and should be employed at proper times (Rites, book 18, section 2, verse 23; Analects, book 1, verse 5, and book 20, verse 2). Leaders should show kindness to people far and near, listen to their needs, and remember the hardships of the populace in the heat of summer and cold of winter, in order to promote their ease (History, part 4, book 27, chapter 2; part 5, book 25, verses 4-6; book 28, verse 4). Indeed, there is an intimate connection between the will of heaven and the common people. "Heaven hears and sees as our people hear and see; Heaven brightly approves and displays its terrors as our people brightly approve and would awe; -- such connection is there between the upper and lower worlds. How reverent ought the masters of the earth to be!" (part 2, book 3, verse 7).

Several types of especially vulnerable groups are often mentioned in guidelines for social welfare. These include the poor, people of advanced age, orphans, widows and widowers, the bereaved, children, people with disabilities, and people defeated in war (e.g. History, part 5, book 9, verses 2-4; and Rites, book 3, section 4,

verse 1; book 3, section 5, verses 1-14; book 17, section 3, verses 19-22; book 21, section 1, verses 13-14; book 21, section 2, verses 18-21).

### *Mitigating Poverty*

Social administrators are exhorted to redress poverty and provide well for the populace (Mencius, part 1, book A, verse 7). As a worthy king said, "I will not employ those who are fond of wealth; but those who are rigorously yet reverently labouring for the lives and increase of the people, nourishing them and planning their enduring settlement I will use and respect" (History, part 4, book 7, verse 10). In times of scarcity, the ruler and nobility should not indulge in extravagant things, ceremonies, or displays of wealth (Rites, book 15, verse 55). Border taxes and construction projects should be reduced (Rites, book 11, section 1, verses 6 and 11). Expenditures by the state for ceremonies should be adjusted according to the resources available, so the "masses will not be afraid" (Rites, book 8, section 1, verse 4). Insufficiency of resources to conduct ceremonies properly should motivate the ruler to revive and renew resources for the people (Rites, book 24, verse 11). Confucius lamented that differences of wealth too often lead to strife and discontent (Rites, book 27, verses 2-3). He said that the sages had set regulations so that poverty would not lead to stealing and feeling deprived and so that riches would not lead to pride and disorderly behavior. As the Book of History says, a great king is able "...to give up one's opinion and follow that of others; to keep from oppressing the helpless; and not to neglect the straitened and poor" (part 2, book 2, chapter 1). Since poverty is often greatly increased at times of natural disaster, ministers were established to deal with provision of food, regulation of water, and to cope with floods, famine, and disastrous weather (e.g. History, part 2, book 1; part 2, books 2 and 4; part 3, book 1). The Book of History gives many accounts of ways that kings established preventive measures for dealing with floods, famine, and disastrous weather.

Confucius agreed that poverty should be eliminated (Analects, book 16, verse 1); but he put this goal in the context of the primacy of virtue. He said that leaders should gain the confidence of people by providing for adequate food and military defense. He also criticized leaders who are stingy or begrudging in distributing resources (Analects, book 20, verse 2). However, if extreme circumstances force a priority among these, then food and military defense should be sacrificed before virtue (Analects, book 12, verse 7). He also explained that while poverty and humiliation should be avoided for the people, if they cannot be overcome in ways that concord with the Way of benevolence, then they should be endured (Analects, book 4, verse 5). Likewise, he said that it is a shame for some people to live in luxury when their society is out of harmony with the Way (Analects, book 8 verse, 13). He said that a noble-minded person would rather die than betray benevolence (Analects, book 15, verse 9). On the other hand, when a society is in accord with the Way (dao) of benevolence, it is a shame for people to live in poverty. In conditions such that poverty for a person is temporarily unavoidable, Confucius said that the noble-minded person endures it and continues to follow the Way, without becoming desperate or resentful (Analects, book 1, verse 15; book 14, verse 10; book 15, verses 2 and 32). One might summarize the Confucian attitude as: material poverty is undesirable and poverty of virtue is even worse (Mencius, book 5, part B, verse 5; book 7, part A, verse 9).

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### **Implications for Contemporary Social Welfare**

So far this article has distilled the essential teaching of classical Confucianism for social welfare. It is clear that Chinese culture developed an extensive ideology and governmental approach to promote social welfare more than 2000 years ago. Likewise, other cultures influenced by Confucianism, such as Korea, also developed formal social welfare systems during the past 2000 years (Canda & Canda, 1996; Canda, Shin, & Canda, 1993). One implication of this is that accounts of the historical development of social work and social welfare should include these East Asian examples in order to counter the false impression that Western societies have any priority or exclusive claim to social welfare traditions. Traditional East Asian social welfare systems should be explored in detail so that we can learn from their advantages and disadvantages for application in the continuing development of social welfare both East and West. Unfortunately, in East Asian history, ideas from Confucianism have often been distorted and selectively applied to support various kinds of social oppression that are far from the intentions of Confucius and Mencius. Debates on the applicability of Confucianism to contemporary societies are occurring in East Asia and elsewhere (Chung, 2001; De Bary, 1991; De Bary & Tu, 1998; Gong, 2001; Tu, 2001; Wang, 2001). In keeping with principles for learning from Confucianism proposed by Canda (2002), the following implications apply ideals of classical Confucianism to contemporary society and social work in a manner that honors the original insights while adapting them to democratic societies and social work values.

A second implication is that in order for people to understand social welfare ideologies, programs, and

practices that are culturally unfamiliar, it is necessary to set aside personal opinions and professional theories and models that are culturally limited. It is likely that the reader of this article would have encountered symbols, beliefs, practices, and manners of expression that seemed antiquated, perplexing, or objectionable. In order to think critically about unfamiliar cultural patterns, it is necessary first to immerse oneself in them nonjudgmentally until culturally appropriate understanding is achieved. This is particularly true when social welfare ideologies are interwoven with explicit religious and metaphysical symbols and beliefs, since people often invest their own religious commitments with strong emotion. Spiritually sensitive social work requires the practitioner to cultivate an inclusive mentality and culturally competent way of relating to different spiritual perspectives (Canda & Furman, 1999). Once cultural familiarity is achieved, then respectful mutual critique between partners in cross-cultural and interreligious dialogue can occur.

A third implication relates to cross-cultural similarities of social welfare ideals. It is striking how similar are the fundamental values that underlie both Confucian and Western spiritual traditions of welfare as found in Judaism and Christianity. For example, it is obvious that people East and West have recognized the intrinsic value of loving, serving, and uplifting others, not only on a person-to-person level, but also through organized institutions of social welfare. Confucian benevolence (ren) is not so different from Western concepts of love and social responsibility. It may be worth exploring whether there is something fundamental and universal to human nature, as the Confucians posit, that propels us toward a stance of caring for each other within multifarious cultural expressions. Canda and Furman (1999) referred to this as the “common humane heartedness” (p. 28) that is evident when exploring commonality among core values of diverse spiritual perspectives as well as when looking deeply into one’s own heart.

Several principles derived from Confucian teaching can inspire contemporary social welfare. In stating the principles, the veneer that is limited to the particular cultural and historical conditions of ancient China has been removed in order to highlight their perennial significance. This is consistent with the Confucian idea that traditional teachings should be adapted to fit varying times and circumstances. The principles are worded to bring out the deep implications of the original teachings for a vision of dignity and justice for all people. The intention is not to offer a definitive and final understanding of them, but rather to give a starting point for all of us in world partnership to continue working out the implications.

#### Figure 1: Peace Hexagram



Hexagram number 11 of the Book of Changes, “Peace,” can serve as an inspiration for the renovation of ancient Confucian wisdom in contemporary times. This hexagram symbolizes the dynamic yet peaceful coming together of heaven and earth when the Way of benevolence is coming to prominence. In terms of seasons, this is like the early springtime of vigorous new beginnings. In the symbolic structure of the hexagram, heaven, usually above earth, has come beneath it in humility. Earth, usually below heaven, has risen above it in prominent strength. As earth settles downward and heaven rises upward, they meet each other in creative interaction. At this powerful time of cosmic union, the wise leader can complement the transforming energies of heaven and earth, spreading their gifts among all the people. This hexagram can represent the overturning of patriarchy and oppression and the peaceful coming together of all people. The formerly powerful become humble. The formerly restricted and oppressed ascend. This is like the present world era of emerging democratization, global mindedness, and worldwide community building. If wise people can work well with the potential of this era, great benefits can result for the welfare of all humanity.

#### *Benevolent Self-cultivation is the Root of all Welfare*

If we are to create conditions of well-being for our families, communities, nations, and world, we must first create them for ourselves. The social activist and social welfare administrator should start with cultivation of virtue in oneself and immediate family and social relationships. From this foundation, it is possible to extend benefit out to all others. Without this foundation, our social service activities and institutions all rest on weak and unsteady ground.

This principle also means that virtue takes priority over selfish profit. Any social welfare arrangements that encourage selfishness (e.g. egotistical individualism or familism, corporate greed, religious elitism, or chauvinistic nationalism) are to be discouraged. Any social welfare arrangements that promote a balance of

individual human rights and mutual responsibility for care between people are to be encouraged. Social development indicators should include measures of virtuous mutually beneficial social relationships, rather than mere increases of material production and consumption.

#### *The Path of Humane Heartedness is for all People*

The path for cultivating our humanity is there to be followed by all people. In classical Confucian terms, this means actualizing our inherently benevolent nature in daily life for the purpose of helping others to do the same. The traditional teachings targeted the royalty, nobility, and scholars with this message, because they were in the best positions to apply this understanding to social governance and to influence the population broadly with virtue. They were also in positions of power with most potential to do harm if they were not virtuous. This situation was created by the tradition of social class stratification, feudalism, and patriarchy.

However, Confucius did not intend that virtue is the special privilege of elites. As this article has shown, the elites were encouraged to cultivate virtue for the benefit of all and were admonished, and even stripped of legitimacy or overthrown, if they did not do so. Further, Confucius placed more emphasis on quality of character than on social standing. Thus, the term junzi (noble person) became generalized from class nobility to nobility of character. Since all people share the fundamentally benevolent nature, the way of cultivating it is open to all. The person on the path of cultivating virtue is the truly noble person. One of the main reasons to promote overall social welfare is to provide social environmental conditions that are conducive to each person's quest for spiritual fulfillment.

It makes sense in the contemporary situation of democratization to regard the ideals of the sagely ruler as ideals for all to follow. Everyone can be encouraged to cultivate her or his wisdom, benevolence, nobleness, and capacity for leadership. Likewise, everyone occupies positions of leadership in various life situations at home, work, and general citizenry. This means that everyone can come to share influence in the formation of a virtuous society and world. Everyone becomes co-responsible for social welfare. Professional social workers, social administrators, and social policy makers have special responsibility, given their formal positions of authority, to use their positions for the empowerment of others.

#### *Social Welfare Should Extend to all People and all Beings*

No one should be excluded from social welfare and no one should be given special privilege or advantage over another. The classical Confucian texts exhort us to be loving and caring within our own families first, but then to extend this to all people under heaven as our relatives. Social welfare should embrace all categories of people in each society, with special attention to people who are vulnerable due to suffering, exploitation, discrimination, and oppression. National social welfare policies also should take into account the international and global context, so that global welfare is promoted. Further, as human welfare is a reflection of cosmic harmony, the relationship between living humans and all other beings should be considered in order to create ecojustice, that is, justice and well-being for all beings in the planetary ecology and beyond. We owe our existence to the fruits of heaven and earth and all our fellow creatures. We must act respectfully and responsibly toward them.

#### *The Needs of the Populace Should Determine Social Policy*

Government and social institutions exist to serve the people. In traditional terms, the ruler is to be the parent of the people. People do not exist to serve those with political and economic power. All officials of governmental and business institutions should recognize their roles as nourishers of the people. The actual needs and goals of the common people need to be assessed and addressed in social programs and policies. This should be done by listening carefully to all constituencies and responding to their needs and goals without favoritism or discrimination. Social policies and arrangements designed primarily to benefit the rich and powerful betray the principle of benevolence. Officials who do not act in the spirit of benevolence should be replaced. Social policies that do not serve the needs of the people should be changed.

#### *Benefits of Social Arrangements Should be Mutual*

Any given social structure should include arrangements of relationships that provide mutual benefit to people. For example, whether a culture emphasizes social organization that is hierarchical and community-oriented (as in classical Chinese society) or horizontal and individual-oriented (as in democratic societies), all members of the families and other social groupings should benefit by the customs and behaviors. Responsibility and benefit should be mutual and complementary, even though the functions of people in different roles vary. The hierarchical structuring of relationships in classical Confucianism is culturally relative, but the underlying moral principle of reciprocity is transcultural.

Also, when there are conflicts in a social situation, all the parties should be brought into a problem-solving mode that seeks the benefit of both. In current parlance, this is a win/win style of solution making (Canda & Furman, 1999). Competition to have victory at the expense of someone else is contrary to humaneness.

#### *True Social Welfare is More than Material Comfort*

The Confucian classics make the legitimacy of social administrators contingent on their ability to provide for the material comfort of the populace. Except in times of widespread calamity, society should be ordered so everyone has the material prerequisites for pursuing the Tao of benevolence. Even under conditions of poverty, the noble person should stay on this path. From this perspective, material comfort and fair distribution of resources for all in society are necessary; but this is not sufficient for genuine social welfare. A person who has riches and power but lacks virtue is morally impoverished. The person with few things, but great virtue, is much richer.

Therefore, social welfare activities, policies and programs should be guided by virtue in their formation and have virtue as their goal. The nature of virtue is widely contested in the contemporary world. Some question whether virtue is itself an obsolete concept. But the Confucian wisdom warns that the human being without virtue loses humanity. Without virtue, we become dehumanized because we deny our fundamental nature and reduce ourselves and others to material objects. Without virtue, we run the risk of destroying humanity and the planet, as selfish and short-sighted plans wreak havoc on the world.

This principle also reminds us that we need to manifest virtue in the implementation of our social welfare policies and social work agency programs. As Confucius said in the Analects, the person who distributes resources stingily or begrudgingly lacks nobleness. If we strip the people we serve of their sense of dignity, we dehumanize them.

#### *The Way of Humane Heartedness is a Life Long Path*

Confucius said that the benevolent person carries the heavy responsibility of cultivating humaneness continuously until death (Analects, book 8, verse 7). To use a Confucian metaphor, the Tao of Humanity is the road laid out by heaven supported by earth. It is our responsibility to travel it. All people are on this human life road—we can choose to tread it wisely and compassionately, or we can compete with others and hurt them along the way, or we can sit down in defiance or frustration and refuse to move on. But the Confucian insight is that we are all on this road and that there is a good way to walk it. This is the ultimate social welfare: when everyone has the material and social supports necessary to take this spiritual journey.

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## **Conclusion**

The vision of Confucius and Mencius was one of a social utopia that would arise from ways of cultivating personal character and conducting family life, government, and wider social relations in a manner harmonious between heaven, earth, and humanity. Unfortunately, as they lamented, this spiritually sensitive approach to social welfare was not realized in their own time. It has never been realized fully since. However, this vision can exhort us to continue our progress toward achievement of the ideals. The details of the vision, of course, must change with time. However, it is remarkable how the principles and proposals for social welfare culled from Confucian classics are as profound and relevant today as more than 2000 years ago. Though the presentation of them in this article is influenced by the particularities of the author's vantage point, their perennial significance can be perceived easily by anyone who cares to look at the teachings with the eyes of benevolence. As the Korean scholar of Confucianism, Professor Yi Dong-Jun (personal communication), said, it does not matter so much for contemporary social welfare to promote the name and forms of Confucianism per se. If this serves people well, that is good. If not, then the name and forms are not necessary. However, the essential spirit of benevolence (ren) must be carried faithfully from age to age, for that is the foundation of humanity.

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## **Endnotes**

[1] In addition, I received helpful advice and encouragement from the following scholars: Lew Seung-Keuk, Park Seung-Hee, Han Sang-Jin, Thomas Kang, Daniel Stevenson, and Mark Setton. I wish to thank those who assisted with field study, literature search, language interpretation, and proof reading of various drafts of the manuscript: Hwi-Ja Canda, Yi Suhn-Nyung, Kris D'Atri, Mitsuko Nakashima, and Kim Kyung-Mee.

[2] In order to reflect the original ideas that underlie all the various forms of Confucianism, this study relies on the Five Classics (Yi Jing, Book of Changes; Shu Jing, Book of History; Shi Jing, Book of Poetry; Li Ji, Book of Rites; and Chun Qiu, Spring and Autumn Annals) and the Four Books (Da Xue, the Great Learning; Zhong Yong, Doctrine of the Mean; Lunyu, the Analects of Confucius; and Mengzi, the Book of Mencius). These books have served as the foundation of Confucian education for hundreds of years. There are many debates about the origins, authenticity of authorship, and alterations of these texts over the centuries (Chen, 1993; Yao, 2000). However, they have been given great authority and influence as the core of classical Confucian teaching. The author studied all of these classics over a period of 26 years in multiple English translations with guidance from scholars of Confucian philosophy. During 1999-2002, the texts were reviewed for content specific to social work, social welfare, and education. Relevant passages were labeled and organized according to subtopics. Scholars of Confucianism in South Korea and written works by experts in Confucian philosophy were consulted to check accuracy of the author's understanding. However, any shortcomings belong to the author.

In this article, Chinese words will be italicized and rendered into English by using the pinyin system, except in quotes that use a different system or in words that have become accepted into English.

Numerous citations from Confucian texts are given in this article. In order to avoid confusion related to multiple translations, the following translations will be used when indicating chapter and verse for particular classics, unless another source is specified: Changes = Wilhelm & Baynes, 1967; History = Legge, 1960, volume 3; Poetry = Legge, 1960, volume 4; Rites = Legge, Chai & Chai, 1967; Learning = Legge, 1960, volume 1, book 2; Mean = Legge, 1960, volume 1, book 3; Analects = Lau, 1979; Mencius = Lau, 1970.

[3] In most quotes from Chinese texts, and in many comments about rulers and leaders, male gender terms are used. This is because during classical Chinese times, most (not all) people in positions of public social leadership were men. However, the intention of this article is to extrapolate the ideals of leadership and social administration for all people, men and women.

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Confucianism is a Chinese quasi-religion and of Confucian beliefs, developed by Confucianism teachers, including Confucius and Mencius, through the history of Confucianism, into what it is today. Wudi ruled that to be an official scholar, people had to teach the Confucian classic texts called the Five Classics. According to tradition, the Five Classics were penned by Confucius. Modern scholars, however, doubt that any of the material can really be ascribed to Confucius himself. The Five Classics are Confucius Social Wisdom - Free download as PDF File (.pdf), Text File (.txt) or read online for free. Confucius Social Wisdom. Confucius came and he talked of duty, he talked of action and not just idle action, but wise action that leads to a happy populace and restores social order. Confucius' Social Wisdom is a phenomenal amalgamation of Confucian understanding and a wise interpretation of human nature: How should a person behave as the unit of a family, a society member and as a ruler? How social relationships can be brought in harmony? Why some societies succeeded while the others failed? Chanakya's Political Wisdom Confucius' Social Wisdom. Kabir's Spiritual Wisdom. Presenting. Social Wisdom. Wisdom guru pavan choudary. Author of the world acclaimed book - When You Are Sinking Become a Submarine. A wisdom village presentation. Books from Wisdom Village Publications envision to enhance and enrich their readers with life changing experiences from the business, mind, body and soul genres. They strive towards holistic development. Editorial Coordinator Anu Anand. Copyright © Pavan Choudary , 2009. All rights reserved.