

Major Aspects of Chinese Religion and Philosophy

Dao of Inner Saint and Outer King

Bearbeitet von
Chun Shan

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Chapter 2

The Basic Spirit of Chinese Culture and National Faith

Introduction

The Chinese national faith system is basically expressed in the unity of three traditions, that is, Confucianism, Daoism, and Chinese Buddhism. In this unity, Confucianism constitutes the mainstay, complemented by the other two. Confucianism and Daoism are indigenous to China and Chinese Buddhism was introduced from India in its early days by adapting itself to Confucianism and Daoism or Taoism. The key concept of these three traditions is not a personal God, but a sacred relation between Human and Heaven, which is equivalent to the universe. In this faith frame, Heaven symbolizes nature, human ancestor, origin of human morality, and lawgiver to nature and society, and ultimate realization of human being. In this symbolization, we have a clear-cut faith of Integration between Heaven and Human (*tianren heyi*). The relation between Heaven and Human is not one between the Creator and his creatures, but one between ancestry and their offspring, termed as life-community. In this sense, the subject of Chinese faith is both heaven and human. When Chinese leaders follow the principle of life-community, Chinese civilians will respect them as the sons of Heaven, but when they violate the principle of life-community, Chinese civilians will ostracize them in the name of sacred Heaven. The principle of life-community is that of universal love, illuminated from loving family members to other members of the universe. This has been the mainstay of the Chinese traditional faith system.

Relation between Heaven and Human

The Chinese national faith has been based on the *Integration among Confucianism, Daoism, and Chinese Buddhism* (*sanjiaoheyi*). This national faith has witnessed Chinese as a unified nation in her strenuous survival and development to the status quo in which Confucianism is seen as the mainstay, while Daoism and Chinese Buddhism are branches of the Chinese national faith system. All the three traditions

in the Chinese faith system do not hold a personal God as their key sacred concept sustaining their belief, respectively. Instead, they all propose that the relation between Heaven as nature and Man as naturally evolved beings is invariably sacred defying all other secular relations. This sacred relation is traditionally termed as the Integration between Heaven and Human (*tianren heyi*). According to Confucian faith, Heaven is the origin of all lives in the universe, constituting the moral archetype of human morality and the ultimate realization of human lives. Hence, Heaven has been bestowed by Confucian, Daoist, and Chinese Buddhist thinkers with supreme holy features, being different only in different descriptive terms as in Confucian Heaven, Daoist *Dao or Tao*, and Buddhist *Buddha nature*. Since, Heaven is believed as the origin of all lives and sources of all moral values, its extension is cherished as Fate, Mandate, Value, Nature, Reason, Lawgiver, and Savior. All in all, whatever values God has in the western tradition has all been bestowed to the Chinese Heaven; besides, it has some features peculiar only to itself, that is, the intimacy and identification between heaven and human. With this religious experience, Chinese scholars have translated Catholicism as Heaven—Master Religion (*tianzhujiao*) in Chinese. Yet, if we believe these peculiar features to be of faith and religiosity, it must be universal in its quality. Then could it be self-contradictory between being peculiar and universal? Definitely not. In the perspective of China's geographic situation, what we know of China now was historically thought as the whole universe, being acknowledged as under the heaven where the northern tip was separated by great desert, southern tip by tropical forest, western tip by high mountains, and eastern tip by the Eastern China Sea. This naturally protected area was thought to be a holy blessed universe under heaven, and all values generated from this holy geographic situation were thought to be equally universal despite the fact that they are now being realized only to be peculiar to Chinese nation. Therefore, we regard these faith values peculiar to the Chinese as universal in terms of Chinese motivation and sentiment.

That is why all religious values of Chinese faith are thought to be universally correct. In the motivation and sentiment of ancient Chinese scholars, all the values of their faith were generated to be harmonious with what Heaven ordered absolutely for all beings under heaven, so these values were believed to be universally sacred. Such a geographic and religious tradition gives the Chinese all the reason and feeling to believe what *The Book of Poetry*, one of the earliest Confucian *Five Classics*, describes as “All beings under the heaven are given lives by Heaven, All beings under the heaven are given laws by Heaven.” This conviction is further explained in an other case by *The Book of History*, another one of the earliest Confucian *Five Classics*, as “Heaven also blesses his people by nominating their kings and teachers”. These classic statements clearly indicate that all beings under heaven and on the earth are the gifts of heaven in the form of natural evolution, and thus heaven is always blessing them in selecting and sending political leaders for their social affairs and teachers for their moral affairs. In this faith system, both political leaders and moral teachers must follow the goodwill of heaven, loving their people as much as Heaven gave them lives. The goodwill of heaven is much the same as the biological ancestor bearing lives to their offspring. Thus, the Confucian tradition has it that such

sacred goodwill should be harbored as national faith which is termed as *Worship of Heaven and Ancestor for Lives' Sake*. Logically, the worship of this kind is *Carrying out Heaven's Holy Mandate by Each Person*, hence constituting the combination between religious sentiment and secular endeavor of man to cherish lives, family ties, social ethics, and universal love.

Sacred Faith Based on Family Ties

Since, all beings including human being are the result of natural evolution at the goodwill of Heaven, Man must be grateful to Heaven for his life, and this is well believed as *Gratitude to Life*. Hence, the Confucian tradition firmly holds that this *Gratitude to Life* is universally applicable to all secular beings under heaven, so it must be abided by as the universal moral law, which is clearly stated in the expression as *in the crystal universe, the law of Heaven is glaringly visible*. However, as we relate this conviction to humans in his individuality, the immediate and frequent experience and feeling comes most dear in family ties, that is, a son got his life from his father, who carries the biological bond from his ancestor, who then in the final context from Heaven as the initial origin of life. In this logical context, human lives might be secular, but if he projects his life to the family ties tracing it to its earliest origin, he inevitably links this secularity to the sacredness of Heaven. Thus, family ties prove to be the very base that man can identify himself with the sacredness of Heaven. The immediate family life from your parents can very comfortably lead you to your ancestor and Heaven, from parental blood feeling to history of genealogy, and finally to holiness of Heaven. That is the very reason why every man should worship his ancestors together with Heaven, believing his ancestor's soul has already ascended to Heaven and thus inviting his ancestor's blessing from Heaven. In this understanding, family ties are the mediators between man and Heaven in the principle of life-bearing and blessing, by which the sacredness of Heaven frequents each family member when he esteems and cherishes his parents' devotion and love for his own life and he carries on the same family mission to his own children. Thus, by performing religious rituals to worship Heaven and ancestor, the Confucian scholars affirm that everything obtains its being from Heaven and human his life from his ancestor who in turn his own life from Heaven. Although, this affirmation may not be necessarily agreeable with biology and archeology evidences, it agrees with the family ties sentimentally and psychologically. Family ties testify to the value of each individual life and fulfill the kinship in its sacred sense. The forefather of Chinese historiography, scholar Sima Qian once concluded that "Heaven is the beginning of Man, while father and mother are the source of human life. Emotionally when man is thrown at the end of his power and wit he will invariably trace back to his beginning and source for psychological comfort. So we intuitively shout out for Heaven when we are stuck out of a sudden, we cry out for

parent when we are hurt physically to the extreme”.¹ His observation also hints at the sacred function of family ties in transforming human physical trouble into spiritual peace. Therefore, Confucian scholars always stress kinship as the paramount principle of all lives by which family ties are also believed to be that between heaven and human.

Kinship Expanded from Family to Country and to Ecological World

In the Confucian tradition, family is the basic unit of existence and continuation of life, while the country and society are the family of an expanded model, all of them being the consequence of Heaven in its evolution. In this idea, the sentiment and worship a man has for Heaven, is much the same as he should have for family, country, society, and the ecological world, since they are all platforms and sources of human life. From the scope of immediate experience and physically felt credibility, family could be the best place to testify the sacredness and value that Heaven exhibits in secular lives. When western people regard the church as the national incubator for their morality, they believe that the church is a kind of family where God shares sacredness with his believers.² In the Chinese tradition, the tender love of parents to their children and grateful love of children to their parents, are sentiments and values identical to those of Heaven, both constituting the absolute universality. This mundane ethics abided by in the Chinese family is identical to the holy principle of Heaven, so every Chinese family can be a western *church* in terms of nursing sacred love. People may wonder how the Chinese nation can survive vigorously for thousands of years with her largest world population without equally populated churches as there should be in the West? The reasonable answer could be that every family there has been performing as church relating ordinary human lives to the sacred mandate of Heaven. Thus the value nursed in the family should be consequently expanded to the country, society, and universe. In the perspective of the country, the sacred principle goes that leaders should love and care their subordinate civilians like parents do to their children, while ordinary civilians should respect their leaders as children respect their parents. Also, in the biological world or simply in the universe, every being should follow the principle of parent and children and brothers and sisters, loving each other, respecting each other, being friends to each other like kinship members in the family context. That is what Mencius declares: “To expand your respect towards your own parents to other’s parents, to offer tender loving care to your

¹ Sima Qian, “Biographies of Qu Yuan and Jia Yi, Historical Records (*shiji, quyuan jiasheng liezhuan*),” in *The Twenty-Four Histories* (Version of Simplified Chinese Characters) (Beijing: Zhong Hua Shu Ju Press, 2000), Vol.84,p.1933.

² Donald M. Bishop, “The Role of Religion in American Society,” in *The Communication (jiaoliu)* (Beijing: edited by American Embassy, 2000), Vol.1,p.29.

kids as well as other's, should such principle universally applied, one can rule the world under the heaven as easy as turning his palm. It is stated in *The Book of Poetry*, 'To set up a good example for your wife at home, then to influence positively on you brothers, then you can rule your country as harmoniously as home.' Such statement reveals the possible merits initiated by one's heart. Therefore, if you have a heart to expand and share grace with both your family members and the people in the world, you can unite the four seas at your disposal; if not, you can not secure your wife and children at home. The ancient saints were distinguished in this expansion of good-wished heart".³ This universal yet religious love generated from family experience is the mainstay faith of the Chinese nation, which idealizes as the Confucian motto "self regulating, family establishing, country ruling and world harmonizing". In the Chinese faith system such statements as 'All Beings under the heaven are of the same origin and hence of equal value, All beings under the heaven are just the intimate members of one big family, so China should be endeared and self-cherished as one person, Love in the family should be transformed into devotion to country. Government officials should devote to their country as children to their parent. All people under the heaven are just my brothers and sisters, and all beings are just like our human being. Integration between Heaven and Man.' These convictions of religious universality are the expressions of the equal value between being secular and sacred. That is how the Chinese could take secular as sacred and finally reach universal harmony.

Sacredness and Initiative of Human Life

As known to us all, the Christian faith typically strikes a contrast between God as the Creator and all beings in the universe as Creatures, the faith principle in this tradition being established by *other force*. The Creator by virtue of *other force* than the Creature created the whole universe with human beings included with original sin. This *other force* of the Creator may also expel his creature out of their Eden, the Paradise. He could punish his creature by introducing the Deluge to human beings or condemning them to hell eternally or saving them at doomsday. All these wishes are the miracles of the Creator of his own accord. The Creature is all the more passive before this *other force*. Logically, the faith of this sort is established by the principle of force, that is, they believe in God in fear of his punishment. In contrast, the Chinese faith is different in its origin, that is, all universal beings including the human race are just given birth by the goodwill of Heaven, for they are the offspring of a process of a universal evolution instead of any sacred miracle, all beings in the universe partaking of the sacredness of Heaven and depending on their respective inner initiative for their lives. The universal

³ Liang Hui Wang Shang, *The Works of Mencius*. (*mengzi, lianghuiwang shang*).

evolution of inner initiative of every being has been constantly stressed by *Yijing* or the *Book of Changes*, one of the Confucian *Five Classics*, as “Heaven represents the male principle of the universe while Earth the female one. So Heaven initiates the process of universe, the coordinated movement from the Earth gives birth to everything”.⁴ This process of the universe of lives bears much similarity to babies born in the human family way, demonstrating fully the unity of sacredness of Heaven and secularity of the family way of living. That is the very reason why the *Doctrine of the Mean*, one of the Confucian *Four Books*, underlines its first sentence as “The universal nature has been destined by heaven’s mandate”, which indicates that secular human nature is initiatively bestowed with sacredness of Heaven and this sacred initiative is also deeply rooted in human nature enabling him to motivate himself, to verify his holy nature, to experience the mandate of Heaven and to finally unify himself with Heaven. The faith of the Confucian style at this point may liberate believers to break away from his superstition towards external Sacredness as other force and encourage the believer to turn to his inner heart to experience the sacred value of Heaven. Therefore, the Chinese faith tradition does not cherish any blind worship toward other sacred forces than his intuitional intelligence; their believers are not seen as fanatically seeking after the so-called paradise to the detriment of family, country, and ecological world. Chinese believers often seek the unification between Heaven from outside and the Intuition from their inner heart so as to see the sacredness of Heaven and not violate the secularity of the human intuition at heart. In their religious dialectics, the loss of intuition at heart would instantly invalidate the holiness of Heaven. The individual intuition in the human heart bases every believer to evaluate the sacredness of Heaven, to examine the miracle invoker as mountebanks or even curse kings and emperors as universally hated thieves. If the miracle invokers, kings or emperors conduct themselves against human intuition, they are equally regarded as harmful to the sacredness of Heaven, and should be despised as demons. Thus, leaders at any level should love their masses as their own children, as does the emperor, *son of Heaven*, to his subjects, *the people of Heaven*. If a person who violates the universal law of loving each other like family members in this universe family, then anyone is simultaneously endowed with sacredness by Heaven to carry out his holy order to oust the violator from his post, and even eject his human qualification. This is what Confucian scholars convince as “Heaven sees clearly when human eyes see it clearly and Heaven hears clearly when human ears hear clearly”.⁵ Humans will see through all the dirty tricks of imposters and not be cheated by any cooked evidence just by their intuition and common sense. Finally, this respect towards secular life can harmoniously exhibit the sacredness of Heaven while coexisting peacefully with social progress in terms of science and democracy.

⁴ Xi Ci Xia, *The Book of Changes* (zhouyi, xicizhuan xia).

⁵ Wan Zhang Shang, *The Works of Mencius* (mengzi, wanzhang shang).