Confucianism and Chinese Civilization

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In the development of her civilization and institutions China all along, until comparatively recent years, followed her own way and her own ideas whether in religion, or in philosophy, or in art, or in literature, or in law, or in conventions, or in government. As a result, everything Chinese, with all its perfection or imperfection, bears the distinctive "hallmark" of the Chinese people, who thus gradually built up what is known as Chinese culture or the Chinese way of life. While China has developed her civilization and culture entirely by her own effort and in her own way, some nations in the East owe theirs partly, if not wholly, to hers. It is well-known that, though the Chinese were ruled by the Mongols in the Yuan dynasty (1277-1368 A.D.) and by the Manchus in the Ching dynasty (1644-1912 A.D.), these conquerors were absorbed by the Chinese, because of the latter's superior civilization and culture — a vivid demonstration of the theory, "the fittest survives".

All this does not mean that China pretends, or has at any time pretended, to claim perfection, or that she has at all times been immune from doctrines ultimately proved to be unsound or unbalanced or from ideas originally grown on alien soil. First, modesty being considered by the Chinese as a fundamental virtue, they as a people never claim to be more than reasonably-minded and human. Even Confucius, whom his disciples acclaimed to be perfect (1) and posterity acknowledged to be the Sage, declined to be ranked as either, saying: « As to the sage or the man of perfect virtue how dare I consider myself to be one. » (2) He even said: « If I could live a few years longer to make a (profound) study of the Yi (the Sacred Book of Change)... I might be free from great faults » (3), the emphasis being on the word « great ». This does not mean that Confucius really had faults or was imperfect, contrary to the better opinion of his day and since. When he said this he was just like Christ who said: « Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God » (4). But these utterances of his, translated into actions throughout his life, sowed the seed of modesty and humility, which developed into a commonly recognized standard by which men are judged, and the lack of which betrays a lack of Chinese culture. The doctrine of modesty, so far as the Chinese are concerned, is much older than Confucius. The Book of History, one of the most ancient Chinese books extant, concerning which G. Pauthier says: « What must profoundly astonish the reader of this beautiful monument of antiquity is the lofty reason and the eminently moral sense... »

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that inspired it... » (5), contains this precept : « Forsake (what is wrong in) yourself and follow (what is right in) others » (6).

What has been quoted suffices to show that, though the Chinese are naturally proud of their civilization and culture, which had already reached a high level at an early age (7), for instance, in the Han dynasty (206 B.C. — 196 A.D.), not to say the Tang (618 — 907 A.D.) and Sung (960 — 1277 A.D.) dynasties, they are, by tradition, thanks, no doubt, to the precepts of the ancient sages, never so proud as not to be willing and even eager to learn from others. Such precepts are many. For instance, Confucius once praised a man « for not being ashamed to consult (and learn from) his inferiors » (8) and at another time said : « Walking in three together I am certain to find my teacher (in my companions by comparison). I pick out their good points as something to follow and their bad points as something to avoid » (9). As an illustration of this characteristic of the Chinese, during the last sixty years or so, an ever increasing number of young men and young women are annually sent to the West, including Japan (who may well be called China’s former pupil) to study. This characteristic helps to explain the secret of China’s survival over her contemporaries and the fact that her people, though an ancient race, retains always an element of youth, which has, many a time across the centuries, reasserted its virility after a period of seeming senility or decadence, so much so that foreign observers have often said that the Chinese as a nation have the habit of looking at things not in term of decades but in term of centuries.

Secondly, though China ultimately and for over two thousand years adhered to one school of thought, namely, Confucianism, she went through a number of others. People in the West have marvelled that the 5th, 4th and 3rd centuries in Europe should have seen the rise in the Mediterranean countries of such great figures as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. In China this period is known as « The Period of the Philosophers », just as the corresponding period is so known to Western scholars, and within this period lived and worked the great thinkers by the score, headed by Confucius who, though not wholly successful in his lifetime (and which prophet has ever been ?), taught doctrines which ultimately moulded Chinese thought and Chinese way of life which have persisted ever since. All these thinkers, apart from Confucius, or rather their teachings, had their heyday at different times. For instance, according to Mencius, the last but most brilliant orthodox transmitter of Confucian doctrines, living in 4th century B.C., « the words of Yang Chu and Moh Teh permeate the whole world (i. e. the empire). People in their discussions adhere either to Yang or to Moh. Yang’s doctrine is « everyone for himself », which would mean ignoring (allegiance to) the Sovereign, whereas Moh’s doctrine is « to love all equally », which would mean ignoring (one’s special duty to) one’s father (i. e. parents). But to ignore Sovereign and father (i. e. parents) would be (like) a beast » (10). This shows that the philosophy of the two thinkers criticized must have been very prevalent; otherwise Mencius would not have used such strong words in its denunciation, which, so far as the doctrine of Moh Tze is concerned, is rather too severe. Measured by the
Confucian standard the latter’s doctrine is of course defective, because it is at variance with human nature and to that extent is impracticable. Nevertheless, the teaching of Moh Tze is in its essence against selfishness, so much so that at one time Mohism was likened to Buddhism. His most notable pronouncement in this connection is:

« If one has the same regard for the house of another as he has for his own, who will commit theft? If one has the same regard for the person of another as he has for his own, who will inflict injuries on others? If one has the same regard for the family of another as he has for his own, who will cause disturbance? If one has the same regard for the country of another as he has for his own, who will make war? » (11)

At the same time it is, strictly speaking, incorrect, as is often supposed, to say that Moh Tze preached the doctrine of « Universal love », as distinguished from « Equal love ». The former, properly speaking, belongs to the Confucian School, which preaches Yun (perfect benevolence) and Shu (to act to others as one would act to oneself), and enjoins that men should from their days of youth learn to « abound in love to all » (12). The distinction between the two may be small, but is enough to create a nuance all the same. It is indeed on the very notion of being « equal », as distinguished from « universal », that Mencius was averse to the Mohist doctrine; for it would be unnatural that one should love another man’s parents exactly like one’s own — a distinction which Moh Tze himself admitted by implication in one of his philosophical illustrations that « A bondman who serves his parents does not merely serve men, nor does the fact that a man who loves his beautiful younger sister mean that he loves a beautiful woman » (13).

The teaching of the Confucian School conforms to nature or Natural Law and thus takes into consideration, good or bad, human nature. Though it always aims at the highest, it does not lose sight of « reality » and become merely « idealistic ». That is, perhaps, why it has survived other schools of thought, though it may have at different periods suffered « ups » and « downs », just as the number of people going to church may vary at different times, and why even after twenty-five centuries it is still found « practical » in spite of the change of circumstances and the advance of science. Take the doctrine of « universal love » for instance, the Confucian School says: « I respect my own elders, therefore I respect others’ elders; I treat with tenderness my own youths, therefore I treat with tenderness the youths of others » (14). One will find that the idea of starting from the nearest to the farthest, in the cultivation of virtue, permeates the whole teaching of the Confucian School. The Great Learning (« a book for adults forming the gate through which one enters the avenue of virtue ») taught from time immemorial in Confucian schools, self-improvement as the first step in all improvements is vividly and logically stressed, to wit:

« The ancients, wishing to improve the world, first governed well their own states; wishing to govern well their own states, they first put their families in order; wishing to put their fami-
lies in order, they first improved morally their own persons; wishing to improve morally their own persons, they first rectified their hearts; wishing to rectify their hearts, they first purified their thoughts; wishing to purify and make sincere their thoughts, they first perfected their moral knowledge. The perfection of moral knowledge lies in the profound and conscientious study of (the true meaning and reasons of) things (and affairs)...

« It is not in the nature of things that, when the source is in confusion, what has to be derived from it can be in good order. That a person who cares little for what is of greater interest (to himself) and (at the same time) cares much for what is of lesser interest (to himself) is a case that has never existed. » (15)

In other words everything has a starting-point, so that if one wishes to reform others, one should first reform oneself — « Charity begins at home » as one says. Therefore if a person is taught to love his fellow men, he should first of all be taught to love those who are nearest to him and to whom he owes the greatest obligation. The idea of starting from the near to the distant seems to find an echo in the use of the word « neighbour » in the doctrine « Love thy neighbour », meaning, of course, thy fellow men; for it is obvious that if a person cannot love his neighbour, in the strictest sense of the term, he can hardly be expected to love mankind in general, of which his neighbour is one. An adequate understanding of this is a requisite for the comprehension of one of the most important doctrines of the Confucian School, namely, filial piety which, in the words of Confucius, « marked the dawn of civilization » (16), and which, it may be said, forms part of the basis of Chinese civilization. It marked the dawn of civilization because there must have been a time when helpless parents were simply left to die without the concern of their children — a period which could hardly be called civilized — and there must also have been a time when children, for the first time, began to feed willingly their helpless parents, whence men differed from lower animals and civilization may well be said to begin. And if one remembers that one's parents are one's nearest neighbours, the doctrine « Love thy neighbour » has its first and foremost application in the form of filial piety. In other words, filial piety, as advocated by the Chinese Sage, is no more and no less than the first and most necessary step in the practice of « Universal love »; for unless men have learned to observe the doctrine « Honour thy father and thy mother », they can hardly be expected to « honour » unselshly their fellow men, though they may address one another as « comrades » — a term which in fact means much less than that of « brother » or « sister » by which the Chinese of both sexes have been wont to address one another ever since the Confucian pronouncement of the saying, « Within the four seas all are brothers » (17). Indeed, according to the Confucianist, even in order that children may learn to love and respect God, they should first be taught to love and respect their parents; because as the immediate benefaction and instruction that a child first receives must normally
come from his parents, it is necessary first to develop in him the elementary sense of duty due to them before he can be made to understand intelligently the higher duty due to God. Analogical to this is the idea that underlies the doctrine of ancestral worship which forms part of the Confucian faith. Some people may think that such worship is due to superstition or meant to immortalize one’s ancestors; but it is not so either in origin or in fact. It is believed that if men are taught to have an affectionate regard even for their parents who are dead, they will understand more readily the duty of being affectionate to their parents who are living. Thus the doctrine aims at fostering filial piety, which being considered as the root of virtue may bring forth other virtues.

Much space has been allotted to the discussion of these doctrines; because they furnish the key to the understanding of Chinese civilization and culture, which are bound up with Confucian teaching. It may be asked, apart from Confucianism, what others have contributed to making Chinese civilization what it is. This is of course a large question which can be answered only in a summary way. But it may be said at the outset that such contribution is mixed: it may be positive, that is, part of it, however small it may be, has been embodied in the Chinese way of life, or negative, that is, it has been tried and finally discarded as unsound, yet, as it has thus indirectly strengthened the belief in other doctrines proved to be sound, it is to that extent, a contribution.

Thus understood, it may be stated that the various systems of philosophy or schools of thought that have contributed to Chinese civilization range from « Individualism », as preached by Yang Chu, to « Equalism » or « Universalism », as preached by Moh Tze, both of which have already been mentioned. Leaving out those that are of minor calibre, mention must be made of Han Fei, head of the Juridical School, and Lao Tze who taught « the Way » and the doctrine of « doing nothing » as sometimes characterized. The former, a prince by birth, lived in the 3rd century B.C. Though a pupil of the great Confucian philosopher Hsun Tze, he regarded, as futile and out of tune with the times, the Confucian doctrine of government by benevolent rule and preached the doctrine of government by law sternly enforced in the form of reward and punishment, saying, for instance, « no State can be always strong or always weak : those which are strong in the enforcement of law will be strong; those which are weak in the enforcement of law will be weak » (18). His belief in the efficacy of law was so complete that he seemed to ignore the fact that law was after all to be enforced by men upon whose merits good government must ultimately depend — a fact that is stressed by the Confucian School. He also counselled some system of intelligence service and secret police, and that no person, however closely related, should be trusted. His political philosophy in short is a precursor of the gospel of the Totalitarian State. As observed by a contemporary sinologue during the last war, the modern « ism » which claims to establish a « New Order » has in the light of Chinese history taught nothing new: its gospel is in essence a reflection of the philosophy of the Juridical School headed by Han
Fei. Though the philosophy of this School flourished for a time, it was finally discarded, when Confucian doctrines after suffering a setback again prevailed.

The teaching of Lao Tze is on a different plane. The date of his birth is controversial, though it is commonly believed that he was a contemporary of Confucius. What interests us here is of course his philosophy rather than his «pedigree». Until recently he was more fascinating, if not better known, than Confucius to Western scholars, though the reverse is true so far as Voltaire and his contemporaries are concerned. In his Dictionary of Philosophy Voltaire paid Confucius this homage:

> Without assumption he explor'd the mind,
> Unveil'd the light of reason to mankind,
> Spoke as a sage and never as a seer,
> Yet, strange to say, his country held him dear. 

While the date of the birth of Lao Tze is controversial, his writings known to posterity are scanty, the only piece in existence being the Tao Tek King, a fruitful source of philosophical speculation both at home and abroad. What fascinates Western scholars in his teaching is, no doubt, his originality in thought and in style, his paradoxes, and his shrewdness of observation which embodies in various degrees essential wisdom. Above all it affords a spiritual refuge for those who are disappointed in life. Taken as a whole, its weakness, if it may be so said, is that it may do well for individuals, as such; but if everybody were to follow it there would be no society, as everybody would mind only his own business. It has now become a sect, known as Taoism, and a class of men, not of the scholar type, have adopted it as a profession, being thus known as Taoist «priests» and earning their living by performing rites at funerals or thanksgivings, though this development would certainly be a surprise to the philosopher Lao Tze, if he were alive, and though these «priests» invariably receive their education first from the Confucian schools. To the scholar, however, Taoism is merely a system of philosophy, which no doubt has a large influence on the Chinese outlook of life. As instances of this School of philosophy the following may be quoted:

1. Namelessness is the origin of the Universe; naming is the mother of all things (19).
2. If things difficult to obtain are not prized, people will not steal; if what is desirable is not seen, the mind is not disturbed (20).
3. It is when you do not dispute that nobody in the world can dispute with you (21).
4. All things of the Universe grow out of something, which itself grew out of nothing (22).
5. More laws there are, more thefts (i.e. offences) there will be (23).
Another factor that has contributed in some degree to Chinese civilization is Buddhism which came from India as early as the 3rd century A.D. and flourished in the Tang dynasty (618-960 A.D.), so much so that the famous scholar Han Yu took alarm and denounced it in a celebrated essay well-known to Western scholars of Chinese history. But gradually Buddhism becomes a sect confined to Monks and Nuns who, like the Taoist « priests », earn their living by performing rites at funerals or thanksgivings. While a Buddhist priest is such in a hundred per cent of the term, for instance, adopting celibacy, living on a strictly vegetarian diet, and leading an entirely secluded life confined to the monastery or nunnery, the Taoist « priest » leads a life exactly the same as the ordinary mortal and is a « priest » only when he puts on his Taoist robe and cap. No wonder, as a religion Buddhism has a greater influence than Taoism on the people, particularly as the former preaches Heaven and Hell. But to the scholar it is, like Taoism, merely a system of philosophy.

Apart from Buddhism, which adapted itself to the Chinese way of life, there are two other religions also not native to China : Mohammedanism and Christianity, each having a good number of adherents. Thanks to the spirit of tolerance and universal brotherhood inherent in the Confucian faith, which has prevailed as the national religion for centuries, and to which by far the bulk of the nation adhere, all people of the different sects or faiths live together in harmony. The average man in China thinks that all respectable religions, as they all teach the supreme duty of loving one’s neighbour, are for the good of mankind. « Freedom of Conscience », though of tardy growth in the West, has been part and parcel of Chinese life since the dawn of civilization.

It can thus be seen that in the development of her civilization China has tried many « isms ». It is no conservatism, as is sometimes supposed, that the Chinese as a people are slow to accept « new isms » and, as history has shown, always revert to Confucianism; because so far as « ism » is concerned there is hardly any that has not in one form or another been known to them and tried, while Confucianism, they find, is so true to nature that life without it would be meaningless.

With the above discussion it may now be stated that the teaching of Confucius, as summed up by his leading disciple Tseng Tze, is : « To fulfill to the utmost one’s duties as man and to act to others as one would act to oneself » (24). Confucius himself never claimed to be a religious founder, though posterity acknowledges him to be the Founder of the Yu jiao, religion of the cultivated man, which may be said to have been the State religion of China ever since. The words « may be said » are used because it is a religion without an organized hierarchy of priests or a system of prayers characteristic of religion in the strictest sense. As said by Voltaire he « spoke as a sage and never as a seer ». Nevertheless Confucianism is a faith which includes belief in a Supreme Being or Heaven (24a), having been embraced for centuries and centuries by hundreds of millions of intelligent beings whose civilization might easily be the earliest among nations, and for which many people have made, and are still
ready to make, the supreme sacrifice. As I said in *China Moulded by Confucius* (25), « if such a faith were not considered to be a religion, that word would indeed be beyond comprehension ».

It is, however, true that Confucius spoke seldom about God and nothing about a future life but always about man, or rather the duties of man, and much about the present life. His idea is that, since we are living on this planet and life is short, we should occupy ourselves more with our duties that are immediate than with questions concerning a future of which, to be truthful, we have no knowledge, and which, to be wise, we should trust to God, if we believe in Him. In other words, wisdom points to the utmost fulfilment of one's duties, such as to do good and love one's fellow men — the surest means of being in accord with the will of God and winning His approval and blessings.

Confucian teaching covers, of course, a wide field. Apart from religion in the sense explained, ethics, and philosophy, of which instances have been given, it concerns government, family, individuals, and international relations, e.g.:

**Government** : « The people is first in importance, the State next, the Ruler last » (26). « Good intention alone is not enough in Government, nor can law prevail by itself » (27). « Good government by law inspires the people with fear; good government by instruction inspires them with affection » (28). « If one gains (the affection of) the people, one gains the country; if one loses (the affection of) the people, one loses the country » (29). « If the people are guided (merely) by laws and order among them is enforced (merely) by punishments, they will try to evade them and have no sense of shame. If they are guided by virtue and order among them is enforced by *Li* (i.e. moral rules of correct conduct) (cultivated in them through instruction) they will have the sense of shame and also reform themselves » (30).

**Family** : « The constant duties of universal application in human relations are five and the requisite virtues for their fulfilment are three. The duties between Sovereign and subject, between parents and child, between husband and wife, between brothers (31), and between friends are the five constant duties of universal application. Wisdom (sense of those human relations), Benevolence (sympathetic conception of those duties of human relations) and Courage (vigorous application of one's mind towards those duties of human relations) are the three requisite virtues of application, while the sole means of attaining these virtues is to be true (to one's conscience) » (32). Above all, is the doctrine of filial piety which has been discussed.

**Individuals** : Under this heading there is nothing more important than the moulding of a man to be the *Jiun Tze*, the model man or the perfect gentleman. « The *Jiun Tze* does not, even for the space of a single meal, deviate from virtue. In moments of haste or pressure, he would adhere to it; in hours of danger or confusion, he would adhere to it » (33). The abiding rule of conduct recommended for life is : « Do not do to others what you do not wish to be done to yourself » (34).
International Relations: « If a man's words are sincere and truthful, and his actions are honourable and earnest, his conduct will be acceptable even in uncivilized countries » (35). « When the Great Principle (the ideal social order that Confucius had in his mind) prevails, the world is like one home common to all; men of virtue and merit are to be elected to be rulers; sincerity and amity pervade all dealings between man and man; people shall love not only their own parents and own children, but also those of others, the aged, the young, the helpless widows and widowers, the orphans, the destitute, and the sick shall be well provided for and well looked after, while the able-bodied shall exert themselves in their aid; men shall be appropriately employed and women suitably married; one detests that things are abandoned or wasted on earth, but, when gathered or stored up, they are not to be retained exclusively for oneself; one detests that exertion does not proceed from oneself, but its fruits are not to be regarded exclusively as one's own. Thus there will be no, and no cause for, conspiracy, robbery, theft, or rebellion, and no need to bolt one's outside door. This is a true Commonwealth» — Confucius, Book of Li, Bk. XXI, Title Li Yun, ch. 9 (36).

(1) See China Moulded by Confucius by the same author (Stevens & Sons, Lond.) p. 73.
(2) Analects, Pt. VII, ch. 33.
(3) Analects, Pt. VII, ch. 16.
(4) St. Matthew, ch. XIX, 17.
(5) Livres Sacrés de l'Orient, Intro., p. X.
(6) BK. IV, Title Da Yu Mu, N° 3. Da Yu Mu means the tombstone of the Yu (2205 B. C.) on which the words quoted were found.
(7) « If we go back to the 15th century, we shall find that the standards of civilization, as the term is usually understood, was still much higher in China than in Europe; while Marco Polo... has left it on record that the magnificence of Chinese cities, and the splendour of the Chinese Court, outvied everything he had ever seen or heard of. Pushing back into antiquity, we easily reach a time when the inhabitants of the Middle Kingdom held learning in high esteem, while our own painted fore-fathers were running naked and houseless in the woods, and living on berries and raw meat. » Herbert A. Giles: The Civilization of China, p. 117.
(9) Analects, Pt. VII, ch. 21.
(10) Mencius, BK. III, Pt. II, ch. 9, s. 8.
(13) Moh Tse, Bk. XI, Sion Chu, N° 45.
(15) The Great Learning, SS. 4 and 7.
(17) Analects, Pt. XII, ch. 5.
(18) Han Fei, ch. 6 (Bk. II).
(19) Tao Tek King, ch. 1.
(20) Ibid., ch. 3.
(21) Ibid., ch. 22.
(22) Ibid., ch. 40.
(23) Ibid., ch. 57. For more of his selected sayings see China Moulded by Confucius, pp. 104-110 (Stevens & Sons, Lond.) or La Chine, Œuvre de Confucius (Bacconnière, Neuchatel) or China Das Werk Des Konfuzius (Rascher Verlag, Zurich).
(24) Analects, Pt. IV, ch. 15. See commentary and particularly commentary in ch. XIII of the Chung Yung.
LE CONFUCIANISME ET LA CIVILISATION ChINOISE

Dans le développement de sa civilisation et de ses institutions, la Chine a suivi, tout au long de son histoire jusqu'à une époque relativement récente, sa voie et ses idées propres. Il en résulte que tout ce qui est chinois porte la marque distinctive du peuple de Chine, qui a édifié ce qui est connu comme la culture chinoise par ses efforts propres et à sa mode. Les conquérants mongols et mandchous ont été absorbés par les Chinois en raison de la supériorité de la culture de ceux-ci. Ceux-ci ne prétendent cependant pas à la perfection, ni qu'ils aient été à l'abri d'idées originaires de l'étranger.

La modestie est considérée par les Chinois comme une vertu fondamentale. Confucius lui-même a refusé de se ranger parmi les hommes parfaits et les sages. Cette modestie et cette humilité se sont développées en critères d'après lesquels les hommes sont jugés, et dont l'absence traduit un manque de culture chinoise. Mais cette doctrine de modestie est plus ancienne que Confucius. Fiers de leurs traditions, les Chinois ne se refusent pas à apprendre d'autrui, ils en sont même avides. Leur race quoique très ancienne garde toujours un élément de jeunesse qui réaffirme sa virilité après une période d'apparente sénilité ou de décadence. Ensuite, la Chine qui depuis deux mille ans adhère à la même école de pensée, le Confucianisme, a été traversée par bien d'autres courants d'idées. Après vingt-cinq siècles, la doctrine de Confucius est toujours considérée comme un enseignement de vie pratique, en dépit du changement des circonstances et de l'avancement de la science, parce qu'elle est conforme à la nature et à la loi naturelle, et ainsi prend en considération la nature humaine, bonne ou mauvaise. Le perfectionnement de soi est enseigné de temps immémorial dans les écoles confucéennes comme étant le premier pas dans la voie de tous les perfectionnements. Celui qui désire réformer les autres doit d'abord se réformer lui-même. S'il veut apprendre à aimer autrui, il doit d'abord apprendre à aimer les proches. De celui qui n'aime pas son voisin, on ne peut guère attendre qu'il aime l'humanité. L'un des points les plus importants de la doctrine de Confucius, c'est la piété filiale qui, selon les termes de Confucius, marque l'aurore de la civilisation et sert en partie de base à la civilisation chinoise, parce
que la civilisation a commencé la première fois que, à la différence des animaux inférieurs, les enfants ont commencé à nourrir volontairement leurs parents en détresse.

L'idée qu'il faut partir de ce qui est rapproché pour aller à ce qui est plus éloigné trouve son application dans l'enseignement de l'amour pour les parents qui précède celui de l'amour pour Dieu. De façon analogue, l'idée sous-jacente à la doctrine du culte des ancêtres, qui fait partie de la foi confucéenne, repose sur la croyance que, si on enseigne aux hommes d'avoir des égards pour leurs parents défunts, ils comprendront plus aisément leurs devoirs d'affection pour leurs parents en vie. La doctrine vise donc à préconiser la piété filiale qui est considérée comme la source de la vertu.

On s'est demandé ce qui, en dehors du Confucianisme a contribué à faire de la Civilisation chinoise ce qu'elle est; cette contribution est double : elle peut être positive, en ce sens qu'une part si petite soit-elle en a été incorporée dans la vie chinoise, ou négative, en ce sens qu'après essai elle a été écartée et a ainsi indirectement fortifié la foi dans les doctrines qui se sont révélées saines à l'épreuve.

Le Taoïsme a revêtu certaines formes de culte populaire avec des prêtres et des cérémonies, mais pour l'homme cultivé il est resté comme bien d'autres doctrines un système de philosophie. Le Bouddhisme qui lui aussi s'est extériorisé de la même manière, et bien qu'il se soit confiné aux monastères, s'est adapté aux modes de vie de la Chine. Deux autres religions, le Mahométisme et le Christianisme ont été accueillies en Chine dans l'esprit de tolérance et d'universelle fraternité inhérent à la foi confucéenne. Pour le Chinois moyen, toutes les religions respectables, qui enseignent le devoir suprême d'aimer le prochain, existent pour le bien de l'humanité. La liberté de conscience est reconnue en Chine depuis l'éveil de sa civilisation.

Dans le cours de son développement, elle a fait l'essai de tous les « ismes ». Ce n'est pas par esprit de conservation que les Chinois comme peuple sont lents à accepter de nouveaux « ismes », mais parce que comme l'histoire le prouve, ils retournent toujours au Confucianisme, en raison du fait que celui-ci est si fidèle à la nature que la vie sans lui serait dépourvue de sens.

Le Confucianisme est peut-on dire la religion d'Etat de la Chine depuis toujours. « Peut-on dire » disons-nous, car c'est une religion sans une organisation hiérarchique de prêtres, ni système de prières, lesquels caractérisent strictement une religion. Néanmoins le Confucianisme est une foi qui inclut la croyance en un Etre Suprême ou un Ciel, et pour laquelle bien des gens ont fait et sont encore prêts à faire le sacrifice suprême. La sagesse consiste à accomplir au maximum ses devoirs, tels que ceux de faire du bien et d'aimer son prochain, car c'est le moyen d'être d'accord avec la volonté de Dieu et de gagner son approbation et ses bénédictions.

Le Confucianisme n'est pas seulement une religion, une morale et une philosophie; la doctrine s'étend aussi au Gouvernement, à la famille, aux individus et aux relations internationales.