

Katie Larsell's blog "Confucianism Revealed"

Sunday, December 20, 2009

[Notebook, blog, notebook, blog](#)

It's my intention to use the blog form to create a notebook that fulfills the requirements of the Marylhurst class PMT 576A, Eastern and Native American Rituals.

The blog format will be perfect for this assignment. We were given the option of doing a notebook or a paper on a Eastern Wisdom Tradition. Marylhurst classes almost always require a paper so I opted for the notebook format and the topic of Confucianism.

Of course there are differences between a notebook and a blog. A Notebook is an artifact, and should be beautiful and hand-made. I envision it in a calligraphic hand with occasional cross-outs that emphasize the care of the student. Everything in such a notebook is imbued with meaning; Each picture would be a sketch, done in pencil by the student.

The beautiful, careful artifact isn't my style. However blogs can be beautiful too. A blog that demonstrates my knowledge of Confucianism will also contain personal insights into how the study of Confucianism affects me as a religious person.

A blog invites insights. Continue and see.

Sunday, December 20, 2009

[Organization](#)

This blog will contain individual posts on the thirteen topics that were given with the assignment.

They consist of :

- Supreme Being, Absolute
- Other Deities or Holy One
- Core Beliefs or Tenets
- After-Life
- Core Spiritual Practices
- Theology or Philosophy of Person
- Relation to Others, Community
- Relation to World, Cosmos
- Sacred Sites and Holy Places
- Ministers: Ordained, Other
- Sacred Rituals and Symbols
- Sacred Feasts & Seasons
- Service to Humankind
- Annotated Bibliography

To keep the blog easy to navigate I will use these as post titles. These thirteen posts will be 'just the facts, ma'am' and intended to convey what I have learned about Confucianism. If there is a topic outside of these elements I will add it in as needed. Other posts will give my reactions.

There is a lot to learn here so I had better get started!

Monday, December 21, 2009

[The Western Question: Is it a religion?](#)



Modern scholars have a new criteria for what constitutes a religion:

- 1) Does it have "...a mythic, philosophical, or theological cosmology defining the fundamental structures and limits of the world and forming the basic way in which cultures and individuals imagine how things are and what they mean" (Taylor ix).
- 2) Does it have rituals that are "...crucial to defining the normative human place in the cosmos"(Taylor ix).
- 3) Does it have a spiritual path toward spiritual improvement?

Robert Neville in his Introduction to Taylor's book, thinks Confucianism easily fulfills the first two criteria but knows there is more controversy around the third criteria (Taylor x). Some thinkers consider Confucianism an ethical system and humanistic teaching only.

The whole discussion begs the question though, why do we care if we can call it a religion? Is it so a Confucian practitioner will feel they are doing enough; that their practice is real and valid if Western scholars weigh in and say they are practicing a religion?

I have had a similar struggle with my own concept of God. As I let go of the classical Western supernatural God and embrace a more defuse concept, I find myself thinking "Is this God?", or, "Is there enough here to say I believe in God?". I don't want logical thinking too involved in my definition of God, because strict logic has always led me to atheism. Religion has to come from a different part of me than the logical, categorizing side. With any category comes judgement, even if simply, is this in the category?

Perhaps it's the category that needs stretching, not the concept.

Monday, December 21, 2009

Supreme Being, Absolute



Confucianism has an Absolute that is called Heaven. Obviously Heaven is a translation, but it's unlike many other Confucian concepts which are introduced to the West with their Chinese word and are then roughly translated. The Chinese word remains as part of explaining and naming the concept. Implied in this continued use of the Chinese word is that the translation is an inexact approximation of the concept. Use of the Chinese word reminds you that you need to hold the concept loosely in your mind until you can build a context for it.

Li is explained using the Chinese word. *Li* is the concept of using ritual and propriety to honor family members, ancestors and rulers. *Ren* receives the same treatment, it represents the ideal relationship between two people.

Heaven, however, is often used without its Chinese name, Tien or Tian. Perhaps because Tien is a word with many interpretations. Sometimes when it is used as a pair with Earth as in, Heaven and Earth, it sounds very much like the Heaven of Christian terms. I am not sure why the word Heaven is

used in this way since it causes confusion in Western minds.

When *Tien* is used in a traditional folk way it is a spirit place where the ancestors are ruled over by a supreme ancestor (Shang Ti). (Smith 183) With the ancestors there, Heaven is a spirit rendition of our world, with its own version of influence peddling (take care and reverence your ancestors and they will help you). Ancestors can be influenced with money and favorite foods. This way of looking at heaven has roots that predate Confucianism. All Chinese religions refer to this Heaven and the ancestors in it. Huston Smith's take on Confucianism was that the balance in Chinese society had grown to cede too much control to Heaven. Confucianism brought Chinese thought back into the world; back to Earth. (185)

Heaven in Chinese history has a special connection to Kings and Rulers. The Kings were connected to Heaven in a way that others were not, making them a kind of nexus with Heaven. A King's ancestors were powerful semi-divinities in Heaven. Confucianism democratized Heaven a bit, giving more people access to their ancestors and a way to impact and connect with Heaven. A King's ancestors would be higher up in the hierarchy of Heaven than your ancestors but you still were connected. This access to Heaven was always a special responsibility of Kings and Emperors but was still available to all with identifiable ancestors.

Just as the Christian concept of a monotheistic God can range from the very personal to the highly theoretical, Heaven does also. Some Confucianists, now and in the past, regard Heaven as an ideal rather than actual, and ancestor worship as a way of connecting with their heritage. *Tien* is as plastic as Western concepts of God. One translation of *Tien* is "an impersonal force that watches over human affairs" (Fieser 160).

Neo-Confucianists of the Middle Ages mixed in more of Buddhism and Daoism into Chinese religion. The connection with Heaven still involved the ancestors but the way of connection was influenced by the idea of *qi*. Mencius, an early Confucian sage who lived between 400-300 BCE thought that by living a very good life of honor and right relationship one would create a "flood-like *qi*" that would "...fill the space between Heaven and Earth. It is a *qi* which unites rightness and the Way" (Armstrong 305). In other words, how one lived in right relation, with *ren*, created *qi* which connected one powerfully with Heaven. The ideal was a life that made the connection with Heaven a seamless continuum.

Saturday, December 26, 2009

Other Deities or Holy One



This picture is an impressionistic representation of a Chinese Demon.

While Heaven is the Chinese 'Absolute' there are other symbols of Deity in Confucianism. It's probably important to differentiate between the generic concept of 'Chinese religion' and the Confucian strain of Chinese religion in this discussion.

"Chinese religion' is what I am calling all the common practices and beliefs in China. These concepts are not separate, but combined in any

Chinese household depending on the region, the degree of traditional practice in that household, and class or education level. Certain beliefs, such as Heaven, Ancestor Worship, Ghosts and Demons, Qi and Yin and Yang are a part of the larger landscape of Chinese religion.



Ghosts, local Gods and Demons don't play a large part in classical Confucianism, but they are a part of the Chinese religious landscape, and a household that practices Confucianism may have a statue of a local Deity on their home altar right next to their pictures of ancestors. The Kitchen God, *Zào Shén*, is one Deity that American author, Amy Tan, made famous but there are many others.



As part of Confucianism, a household would have an altar to honor their ancestors. The more remote the ancestor is in time, the more remote and God-like the ancestor. This altar would have pictures of the families' ancestors and an ancestral stone which lists the generations and ties the family to a particular village and lineage. Maintaining this altar and performing the family rituals is an important element of Confucianism.

Ancestor worship predates Confucianism, but for Confucius honoring family, lineage and rituals that supported the family were paramount.

The Kitchen God
Ancestral Stone

Monday, December 28, 2009

Relation to the World, Cosmos



There is an ancient Chinese maxim, *T'ien-jen ho-yi/Tianren heyi* or 'Heaven and the human are One' which came out of the the shamanic experience. In the Shamanic sense of the saying, it meant that a person in a trance or possession was one with Heaven. Later in the Daoist and Confucian philosophies this came to represent less a union but a continuum or communication between the two orders. Both Confucianism and Daoism

appear to be more concerned with harmony between Heaven and Earth than union with Heaven. (Ching 6-8).

Confucianism has much to say about community and human relationships but it deferred to other traditions when it came to the world outside of relationship. Certain Chinese ideas were incorporated into Confucianism over time. During the Han period Confucianism incorporated the idea of *Yin* and *Yang*, the two opposing yet complementary forces. All of the world could be categorized in this way, with rocks as *Yang* and water as *Yin*. It also viewed the five agents of water, fire, wood metal and earth as in a constant contest of change and interaction. Julia Ching notes that this list of ingredients leaves out air, but that "air or qi had always been regarded as fundamental and indeed, all-pervasive (155).

She goes on, "The Five Agents, however, served another purpose. Together with *yin* and *yang*, they formed a system of correlation which integrated life and the universe" (155).

Monday, December 28, 2009

Core Beliefs or Tenets

This picture was on Flickr titled 'my big fat Chinese family'.

Confucian teaching rests on three essential values: Filial piety, humaneness, and ritual.





The top portion of the character for *xiao*, or filial piety, shows an old man and underneath, a young man supporting the old man (Oxnam 1). The young should support the old, that is the natural order of things. However it's also reciprocal as it is in this country. We take care of our children and hope that they in turn take care of us when we need them.

Filial piety is the honoring of the family bond between a child and his or her parent.

In Classical Confucianism this is the relationship between a father and son. Humaneness is the goal but it is all built on Filial piety. A famous saying attributed to Confucius says:

If there is righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character.

If there is beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home.

If there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation.

If there is order in the nation there will be peace in the home. (Smith 174)



Confucius

Although this poem is built on the quality of an individual's heart, it immediately puts that person in relation with the family. In Confucianism this idea that the nation was dependent on family piety was not a bromide, but a true belief.



Ren is the second Confucian virtue that Oxnam translates as humaneness. He states: "I prefer to translate it as humaneness or humanity because the character is made up of two parts. On the left is the element that means a person or a human being. On the right the element that represents a number two. So, *ren* has a sense of a person together with others. A human being together with other human beings, a human being in society" (2). Huston Smith translates *ren* as 'human-heartedness' (172). *Ren* is first developed in the family between a father and a son, between a wife and husband and between an older brother and younger brother. There are mirror relationships involving daughters and mothers, however, they are not mentioned. It is disheartening (there is the heart word again) that Confucianism was so silent about women and their role in his system.

Another important relationship that requires *Ren* is between a ruler and his ministers. Again, how the nation is ruled is dependent on the quality of relationships and the practice for cultivating relationship begins in the family.



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The intensity of focus on the bond between people sacralized it. One way to maintain that sacredness was through the third value of Confucianism, *Li*, or ritual. Huston Smith writes that *li* also means propriety, doing things correctly (174).

Oxnam translation the Chinese *li* symbol as ritual, based on the character of *li*: "On the left side of the character, *li* is the element indicating prognostication or pre-saging. On the right, you have a ritual vessel" (3). *Li* as propriety is a generalization from ritual.

Of the three foundational values, ritual is less doable in this modern age. This particular virtue cannot be done as fully as it once was. This is also the virtue that was most dependent on class status. A rich family could spend a great deal of time in ritual observance; in fact the Emperor spent almost all his time performing rituals. Confucianism is returning to modern China as a strong religious force after being suppressed during the communist era. It will be interesting to see what is done in this modern age to transform the ritual component of Confucianism to maintain the sacralized bonds between people.



A Chinese country family.

Tuesday, December 29, 2009

[Theology or Philosophy of Person](#)

Confucianism is a practice of self-cultivation. A Confucian is always trying to be a more harmonious person. The final stage of development is Sagehood. Taylor writes, "The commitment to sagehood is a commitment to the moral responsibility of becoming a person of goodness, an individual who, in reverential attitude, experiences a fundamental unity between himself and Heaven, earth and the ten-thousand things" (56) Sage-hood is a mindfulness of place, knowing exactly who you are, and the continuity around you. It is a mindfulness of respect and connection.

Historically Confucianism was about the privileged class in China. Confucius himself was most concerned with teaching his principles to Kings and Rulers. In 605 CE Emperor Yang of Sui instituted an exam system; to be a part of the government, functionaries were required to pass a test of Confucian principles (Armstrong 372). The exam system democratized government service, but it took money and time to acquire the education necessary to take the exam. This

way of looking at education, though, as a means to advancement was quite individualistic. Students took exams and passed or failed them on their own.



Although Confucianism is about self-cultivation, it is different cultivation from the individuality of the West. Western individuality is about cultivating the distinct self. Knowing thyself in the West means knowing what unique gifts one has and then developing those gifts, even if they disrupt the family or the social order. The Western hero isn't necessarily out to hurt her family but if that is what she needs to do, we have movie after movie encouraging us to do so! Confucianism is not about that kind of self-

cultivation. It is about being aware of your place in the web of existence, especially your place in the human community. By your cultivation of that place in the web, you strengthen the whole web. It is as if you are adding shine, strength and beauty to your connections and that increases your own *shen* or soul. Heaven looking down can see how strong this web of connection is and approves of your 'making' of the world. Are you making yourself or your connections; they are all the same!

The Confucian individual also accepts power relationships in a spirit of humility, even love. In contrast, in the West we are all of equal value, with of course, some more equal than others. Power and class make us uncomfortable because we have no acceptable way to deal with them. Confucianism accepts and cultivates love and respect across power differentials. Children are required to respect elders, women their husbands, and all people their leaders. Obviously this is an ideal and I will leave it up to others, with more actual experience of this system to point out its limitations.

You can imagine what types of arts, family and government this philosophy would develop. In the arts there would be no nihilistic visions but a careful crafting of ritual images. Collaborative arts, such as orchestra, would thrive. Families would support their members but might also stifle the gifts of individual members especially if they were low on the power scale (women, children, the uneducated). However, all would know where they fit in the family and, if they lived long enough, would eventually become an elder and be respected. In government it allows leaders to govern without much questioning from their constituents. At the same time, leaders would be expected to take care of the people, not because the people are watching but because they are responsible for them.

Tuesday, December 29, 2009

[Service to Humankind](#)

Confucianism is a Wisdom tradition that has influenced the mind and hearts of the Chinese people. Many Chinese have criticized Confucianism for being elitist, or too focused on the family (Armstrong 270). It has been criticized for being too oriented toward the past. Modern Western entrepreneurs have criticized Confucian-influenced education in China for being too focused on traditional achievement and not on creative problem solving. Feminists have criticized it for maintaining and reinforcing a hierarchy that oppresses women.

There is truth to all these claims, however, Confucianism can claim much good. It has given the world several [religious classics](#). Along with Confucius' own **Analects** are the **Five Classics**:

1. *Shu Ching* (Classic of History) - collection of documents and speeches dating from the Later Han Dynasty (23-220 CE)
2. *Shih Ching* (Classic of Odes) - collection of 300 poems and songs from the early Chou Dynasty (1027-402 BC)
3. *I Ching* (Classic of Changes) - collection of texts on divination based on a set of 64 hexagrams that reflect the relationship between Yin and Yang in nature and society
4. *Ch'un Ching* (Spring and Autumn Annals) - extracts from the history of the state of Lu 722-484, said to be compiled by Confucius
5. *Li Ching* (Classic of Rites) - consists of three books on the *Li* (Rites of Propriety)

The other important classics are the **Four Books** (which includes the Analects):

1. *Lun Yu* (Analects) of Confucius
2. *Chung Yung* (Doctrine of the Mean)
3. *Ta Hsueh* (Great Learning)
4. *Meng Tzu* (Mencius) (Fieser 153-180)

Confucianism codified the Golden Rule. In the Analects Confucius says "do not do to others what you don't want done to you." I am sure if Confucius had know it would be constantly compared to other Golden rules around the globe, he would have given it a more positive grammatical turn!

Confucianism gave the Chinese people a positive philosophy of leadership that Chinese rulers held as their ideal even if they didn't always follow it. When a ruler used Confucian philosophy and had the wisdom to apply it properly, the kingdom thrived. Confucianism wasn't the only philosophy available to Chinese leaders. In the Chinese Kingdom of Qin in 340 BCE a competing philosophy, Legalism, was employed to defeat and consolidate the other Kingdoms of China (Armstrong 335). This philosophy was a starkly rigid interpretation of the law. It was based on the idea that punishment was **the** important deterrent and must be employed without compassion, but with impartiality, to get the best results. Legalism never completely went away after this victory but Confucianism came back into the public sphere and provided a check on

pragmatic leadership.

Confucianism has also supported the dignity and importance of family in China. It is a philosophy that supports education, the arts, self-improvement and filial piety. It reinforces respect for the elderly and as a result elderly parents and relatives are honored and well cared for in countries influenced by Confucianism.

Tuesday, December 29, 2009

Sacred Feasts and Seasons

Confucianism is known more for its filial piety and ancestor worship than as a seasonal religion. This post on 'Sacred Feasts and Seasons' will need to lean on traditional Chinese festivals with a connection with Confucianism. It is telling how little is written in books or on the internet about Confucian 'Feasts and Festivals'. It may say as much about the way Western media and scholars divide up the pie of Chinese religion than anything. Anything religious is portioned out as Confucianism, Buddhist, popular and Dao. The bit that is named Confucianism is generally philosophical and related to particular Sages and their writing. Anything loud and fun is given over to the other religions especially the 'popular' section.

REUTERS (Enny Nuraheni) Kuala Lumpur

Chinese New Year is an important two week festival in the early spring. The third day of Chinese New Year is the biggest feast of the year. A place is laid at the table for Taigong and Taipo, the two archetypal male and female ancestors. No one can eat until the ancestors at the shrine are honored and fed. This was the ritual I demonstrated in class.



Other Feasts during the year have to do with ancestors and family:

- In the fall, the seventh lunar month is devoted to the Hungry Ghost festival. In this festival the ancestors are honored and fed, while the hungry ghosts of people who do not have family or died under unfortunate circumstances are discouraged from coming to the house.

hungry ghost -Kyoto National Museum



- Winter Solstice or the Dongzhi festival is traditionally a clan gathering. People gather together in their ancestral villages (at least they should, modern Chinese may not do this but think they should), share a meal and renew ties. Its religious significance has to do with Yin and Yang. It celebrates the return of Yang energy with special, aggressive foods.



bluelight.ru - child enjoying Dongzhi

- April 5th, is called Tomb Sweeping day or Mourning Day. People return to their ancestral village and clean the tombs of their ancestors. They bring a picnic lunch of food for the ancestors, offer it and then eat it themselves. (Chinese do not believe in wasting food.)



Qingming Festival or Clear Bright Festival, Ancestors Day or Tomb Sweeping Day China

Tuesday, December 29, 2009

[Sacred Sites and Holy Places](#)

Sacred geography for a Confucian would be their home altar and the village which contains the burial tomb of their ancestors. These two places are where they connect with Heaven by honoring their ancestors. The Ancestral Stone in a home altar contains the *ren*, part of their soul, of the Ancestors.

Other Confucian sites are more problematic because of the recent historical dislocation of Confucianism in China. The era of communist China almost destroyed Confucianism. The practices of this venerable tradition were pushed underground. In the beginning of the Communist era, Confucianism was denigrated as old-fashioned. However, during the later Great Leap Forward anyone associated with traditional ways was publicly mocked or imprisoned. This story isn't over, with the recent political changes and economic development in China, many Chinese religious observances are coming back. A good discussion of this can be found at Speaking of Faith, in an interview with [Mayfair Yang](#). The Speaking of Faith site has several podcasts and links to interesting websites that document China's very recent opening to its religious past. Confucianism, in the form of rituals and ancestor worship, is returning to China. It is happening so fast that it is hard to find a credible discussion of it; this is one.

Public sites in China are treated more as historical at this point, rather than used as holy sites. A case in point is the temple at Confucius' birth place [Qufu](#) in Shandong province. It was sacked during the Cultural Revolution as Confucius was denounced as a class enemy. An enormous statue of Confucius was dragged through the streets and smashed with sledge hammers. His grave was dug up to show he wasn't actually buried there. The temples have since been restored but the statues and ancestral tablets destroyed by the Red Guards have not been replaced. It has been named a [UNESCO World Heritage site \(scroll to the bottom of this page and click on the bottom link for a 360 view \)](#). (Hays)

Here is a brief description by UNESCO: "The temple, cemetery and family mansion of Confucius, the great philosopher, politician and educator of the 6th centuries B.C., are located at Qufu, in Shandong Province. Built to commemorate him in 478 B.C., the temple has been destroyed and reconstructed over the centuries; today it comprises more than 100 buildings. The cemetery contains Confucius' tomb and the remains of more than 100,000 of his descendants. The small house of the Kong family developed into a gigantic aristocratic residence, of which 152 buildings remain. The Qufu complex of monuments has retained its outstanding artistic and historic character due to the devotion of successive Chinese emperors over more than 2,000 years." (Hays)

In 2005, a large celebration—with tens of thousand of participants, costumes and 100 scholars discussing the relevance of Confucian—was held in Qufu. In 2007 over 3,000 people showed up in Qufu to celebrate Confucius's 2,557th birthday with speeches, dances, recitations and sacrifices of a pig, a bull and a goat. The dancers wore costume replicas of those worn 2,000 years ago in the Han Dynasty and prostrated themselves in front of the sage's statue. Recently the state announced that they would do this celebration monthly because it is so popular -- with tourists and the people. (Hays)

It is hard to know what this celebration means. It does show a great deal of interest by the Chinese government in the reconstruction of this site. Government sponsorship of Confucianism is not a new thing, it's a long tradition in China. Rather than considering this a worship ceremony, it's probably better to consider it the start of official China's reconnection with its past.

Korea

Korea has the most Confucian temples of any country. They are used for historically accurate ceremonies twice a year and are being maintained as tourist sites.

Taiwan

Taiwan takes great care of its Confucian temples. Two of these temples have well designed web sites. The [Taipei Confucian Temple](#) gives a complete history of its building, which is not that old. Both the Taipei Temple and the Taiwan Temple are state supported and regularly perform rituals to Confucius -- twice a year. The [Taiwan Confucian Temple](#) has a delightful virtual reality tour of its grounds and architectural elements. The Taiwanese government has a

political interest in maintaining these temples and it is hard to say based on the health of these two institutions how vital they are to Confucianism in Taiwan.

Wednesday, December 30, 2009

Sacred Rituals and Symbols

Temple Rituals

The official rituals of Confucianism, the ones created for temple worship, are beautiful, precise rituals that are now viewed, by many, as historical reenactments. The picture above is from the Taipei Confucian Temple where considerable time and energy have been spent reproducing the original Confucian rituals.

These rituals are performed once a year and they include performance art: music and dance. A complete [list of actions](#) of the temple ritual shows the precision of the performance. The temple officials carefully paired the ritual down from 90 minutes to one hour for modern audiences.



The Emperors of China were always intimately connected to ritual. It was an ideal that the Emperor would do nothing but ritual. These rituals were formal, beautiful and important. The Yellow Emperor, Huang Di, it was said, ruled by 'doing nothing' (Armstrong 370) meaning he delegated tasks but did the rituals that kept the Kingdom right with Heaven.

One symbol of Confucianism that grew up centuries after his death, is his own likeness. (pictured on the right).

Confucius himself was revered as a Sage/Demi-God/God/Ancestor.

The Confucian temples all contain his likeness.

House Rituals

Many important rituals take place in the home at the family altar. It's difficult to find out how much these rituals are practiced on a daily basis. Home rituals take place on feast days and during changes in peoples lives. The alter contains two important symbols. Pictures of ancestors and the Ancestral Stone.



Rites of Passage

Rituals are performed at key times in a families life. Most common are at a birth, Capping (son reaching 14 yrs. old), marriage, and death.

Wednesday, December 30, 2009

Ministers: Ordained, Other

Confucianism is a fairly broad tradition with many different religious authorities. There doesn't appear to be exact match with the term Minister. Still, here are some of the religious leaders that are part of this tradition.

The father, or chief elder in the home. In any family there is someone who is most honored. Usually it is the father or Grandfather of the family. They run the in-home family rituals, especially the rituals that honor the ancestors.

A government official, or leader. In Confucianism there has always been a connection between leadership and Heaven. This connection isn't very explicit in either China or Taiwan (Taiwan's post-revolution leaders were Christian) at this time, but there are echoes of it in Chinese history. The Emperor had a department of ritual and himself participated heavily in ritual. As Confucianism strengthens in China watch for the ruling elite to reclaim this tradition more explicitly.

The teacher. Confucianism has always honored education. Teachers are honored as transmitters of knowledge and role models. Now that Confucianism is being revived, Confucian teachers are no longer a phenomena of the past. The new Confucian teacher expects the same respect and uses the same methods as early teachers.



A Confucian Pre-School

The Confucian Priest. The temples do have priests with special knowledge of rituals. In temples without much financial support, true in much of China, these priests are more like caretakers looking after the physical temple. A Confucian priest at the state supported Taipei Confucian temple however, would be a respected ritual specialist.

The Sage. A Sage is both an ideal that every Confucian can aspire to, and the title of a respected religious elder. Julia Ching writes that a striving for human perfection or self-transcendence is the goal of all Chinese religion (230). The Sage loves the "...quest for wisdom or moral perfection, and this in turn, is especially discovered in those social virtues that govern family relationships as well as relationships outside the family. The sage finds the absolute in the relative, discovers the transcendent in immanence" (Ching 68-69). Very famous Sages are known from China's history: Confucius, Mencius, and Zhuangzi.



Grandmother - Taipei Fine Art Museum

Wednesday, December 30, 2009

[Relation to Others, Community](#)

A Confucian relates to other people first through the prism of their family. A person's family, both alive and in Heaven, comprise a special set of relationships and cultivating those relationships is the beginning of all relationships. Often when reading Confucian Sages one gets a sense of logic applied to human relationships. They want to know the very beginning of humaneness, and then what is the next step, and then the next. Where does it all begin? Well, it begins with the family.

Ancestor worship both honors the family but also connects the Chinese to place and to clans; it is the nature of ancestors that a large number of people will share a common ancestor.

The next level of importance, analogous to relations in a family, is relation to authority. Kings and government officials deserve special respect. Relations with authority builds from the filial bond. Those in authority are like parents and it's important to give them the respect you would give a parent. They, in turn, respect you by receiving the gift of your regard and providing ethical leadership.

A Confucian is always aware of hierarchy and supports it. Consequently, as society changes, especially with the change in women's status at work and in the family, Confucianism will need to change.

Being a good supporter of a hierarchy is not the same as loving your neighbor. Although Confucius made the connection between the special relationships (the five: parent to child, husband and wife, older sibling and younger sibling, friend to friend, and householder to

official) and society as a whole, there has always been discussion in China about this area of ethics.

Chinese Sages that came after Confucius all addressed this issue slightly differently. Mozi, a Sage from a different class than Confucius, preached non-violence and *ren* for all. Armstrong writes:

As with Confucius, the single thread that held his philosophy together was *ren*, but he believed that Confucius had distorted this compassionate ethic by limiting it to the family. In his view, the clan spirit of the aristocracy was at the root of many of the current problems: family chauvinism, competitions for prestige, vendettas, and sumptuary expenses. He wanted to replace the egotism of kinship with a generalized altruism. Everybody must feel toward all others exactly what he felt for his own people. "others must be regarded like the self," he said; this love must be "all -embracing and exclude nobody"(270).

A hundred years later, Mencius, as he is known in the West, defined *ren* as benevolence, and claimed that it flowed naturally from all people. *Ren* needed cultivation and one began with family but needed to generalize from those relationships. That generalized feeling would create more feeling. Armstrong writes:

The Golden Rule was crucial. This was the virtue that made the *junzi* (mature person) truly humane and brought the individual into a mystical relationship with the entire universe. "All the ten thousand things are there in me," Mencius said in one of his most important instructions. "There is no greater joy for me than to find, on self-examination, that I am true to myself. Try your best to treat others as you would wish to be treated yourself, and you will find that this is the shortest way to benevolence [ren]" (305-306)

Wednesday, December 30, 2009

[Annotated Bibliography](#)

This annotated bibliography covers the major references used to write this blog. There are other references that are handled by using links within the blog. Links are used when the connection is a specialty or novelty resource intended to extend the experience of the blog. For example, when discussing ritual, I linked to a web page that gave a detailed list of each element of a ritual. In another example when discussing sacred geography, I linked to a delightful site that allows the viewer an interactive look at the UNESCO site Qufu.

*Armstrong, Karen. **The Great Transformation: The Beginning of our Religious Traditions.** New York: Knopf, 2006. This book describes the beginning of the older Wisdom Traditions: Judaism, Daoism and Confucianism, Greek philosophical rationalism, Hinduism and Buddhism. Her thesis is that these traditions were tested and forged during the Axial Age of 900 to 200 BCE in responses to changes in human civilization. All these traditions were quite different but they all developed the religious quality of compassion. In Confucianism compassion is called *ren*.*

Ching, Julia. **Chinese Religions**. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993. Ching begins her book with a chapter titled 'Europe and China Compared'. Unfortunately or fortunately, depending on your point of view, this comparison stretches through the whole book. At times this is helpful in understanding a concept. At other times it makes the Chinese concepts conform too much to Western lines. It is most unfortunate when Chinese religion is being fit into Western definitions. Is it eminent or immanent, is this mystic similar to that Western mystic? Is Buddhism the most Western of Eastern religions (she says yes)? However, she does describe all of the religions of China with insight and energy. This book was written before the Chinese revival of Confucianism, and therefore does not address it.

Cohen, Myron and Stephen F. Teiser, faculty consultants. **Living in the Chinese Cosmos: Understanding Religion in Late-Imperial China (1644-1911)**. The Asia for Educators Program at Columbia University. <http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/cosmos/main/credits.htm>. This is a wonderful on-line resource for putting Chinese religion in context. It covers the split between Confucianism, Popular, Taoism and Buddhism. There is discussion of the class system and how it affects (and affected) Chinese religion. It's very understandable but not pitched at a simple level. The dates cover the most recent stretch of time before the Communist revolution and do not pretend to cover modern day beliefs.

Fieser, James. **Scriptures of the World's Religions**. City: McGraw-Hill Humanities/Social Sciences/Languages, 2007. This contains scriptures from all the world's Wisdom Traditions. For Confucianism it contains the Analects written by Confucius. It also contains the writings of Mencius, Xunzi, Yang Xiong, Han Yu, Zhou Dunyi, Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming. There is also a strong section of Daoist scriptures. Each section contains some discussion of the tradition but for the most part the scriptures stand alone. It's a great book, however, these resources are now available at multiple websites.

Hays, Jeff, "**Facts and Details: Organized Confucianism**"

<http://factsanddetails.com/china.php?itemid=87&catid=3&subcatid=9>. Jeff Hays is an English teacher in Japan. He created this web site dedicated to Japan and China for fellow travelers. He wanted to provide the type of information he was looking for as he traveled but could not find. His site contains well organized information about Confucian temples and schools.

Oxnam, Robert, "**Three Confucian Values**" President Emeritus, Asia Society <http://pascal.iseg.utl.pt/~cesa/Three%20Confucian%20Values.pdf>. This is a teaching lecture that cuts to the chase on what Confucianism is about. Very readable, and it gives the Chinese characters for the different values and shows their roots.

Smith, Huston. **The World's Religions**. San Francisco: Harper, 1991. Huston Smith's essay on Confucianism in this book is such a joy to read. This was my first introduction to Confucianism and read it on my own as evening, night-stand reading several years ago. It is such a generous essay; with a clear message of how Confucianism fit into Chinese society, dealt with issues no other religion addressed, but still was transcendence. After reading this, I had no patience with the "is Confucianism a religion?" essays.

Taylor, Rodney. *The Religious Dimensions of Confucianism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990. This book is a collection of Dr Taylor's essays on Confucianism. His thesis is that Confucianism is a religion and that its highest expression is the making of a Sage.

Sunday, January 3, 2010

[Practical Blogging, Or How Well did this Assignment Work](#)

Using the blog format was harder and more time consuming than I had anticipated. I found myself getting stuck on the technical details. The whole idea was to create an electronic version of a notebook. That meant to me that it should look as if I sat down and dashed-off entries casually and personally. The blog should also look good, and link to cool websites.

Well that wasn't exactly the notebook as defined in the assignment. I had glossed over the part of the notebook assignment that included diagrams and charts. This blog contains none of those; perhaps I had confused notebook with diary. Hopefully my lack of diagrams and charts will be made up for by pictures and links. Not every entry contains links, but the ones that are included are fun, interesting additions to the experience. By the time I was reminded of the diagrams and charts part of the notebook assignment, I was committed to doing the blog.

The look took time. Finding pictures and putting them on the blog was new to me. As a consequence I learned all about the new editor at Blogger.com where I housed my blog. I discovered that the new editor was 'new and improved' in so many ways but didn't for some reason have a spell checker like the old editor that I knew well. Others had discovered this and been outraged, I found out when I looked on the user forum. Their rants didn't seem to be producing any change in Blogger management. Periodically I would run into a problem and have to track it down via the forums. To make up for the lack of a spell checker, I started writing it using the Firefox web browser which has its own spell checker, my saved websites for referencing however, were all bookmarked on Internet Explorer. When I wrote the entries I would switch back and forth between Firefox and Explorer. I got into a rhythm bouncing back and forth and, while at first it was annoying, it served as kind of a filing system, making my job easier in the end.

There were funny little problems with connecting the blog posts. Each one is created separately and sometimes I would write something, then think "did I already write that?" and find it difficult to check. I was in the blog editor to do the writing, but to check the other entries meant closing the editor and going and finding a particular post. I found short cuts and ways around these difficulties but it was always a little awkward. The editor is not WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) so once I published an entry, I had to read it in its final version and then go back to the editor to change anything I might see that I didn't like. I did a lot of editing, then checking, then editing then checking.

The learning I took away from this was an appreciation for how different the world of books and the world of the web are. The two mediums are a little awkward around each other. Still, one

finds books referenced copiously on Wikipedia. Of the books I used I found Karen Armstrong surprisingly useful, considering she is writing about the Axial Age, and my old Huston Smith. I looked at a lot of bad web-sites on Chinese religion, but many universities have good religion web-sites. The ones I referenced, especially *Living in the Chinese Cosmos*. gave me information I couldn't find anywhere else. Since I wanted to find those special links, I spent more time searching and discovering on the web than I normally would. For papers I usually spend most of my time with books, not websites.

My habits may change, however, web searching is still an art and takes up oodles of time. The other thing about a site like *Living in the Chinese Cosmos* is that it is made to be updated. The information that I quoted for this assignment on websites, might not be there tomorrow whereas a published book, referenced to the page will always have that organization. I knew that before, but I find working with something makes me 'realize' more completely what I carry around in my head as information.

Sunday, January 31, 2010

[Blog gets A, Can't do better than that](#)

I was allowed to do this blog on Confucianism instead of a paper for a Religious Studies class at Marylhurst. I just received the grade today.

Since blogs show the most recent post first, it ends oddly with my reflections on how the assignment went. I thought I had better put in a little explanation of what is going on. A reader may want to start with the oldest post and work their way forward. I imagine that putting together a Blog like this will be a fairly standard assignment some day, right now there is still a preference for academic papers.

It was fun, hard work and, well, I got an A.



Honorable Student

As a class assignment I built an altar to honor my ancestors. I used instructions I found on the web for the New Years feast. I put rice before my Irish and Swedish ancestors.

I wanted to put a thimble full of Jim Crow in front of Grandpa Paul. He would have loved his Granddaughter honoring him that way and after 35 years without it -- has probably built up a powerful thirst.