



THE PORTRAYAL OF HARMONIOUS SOCIETY AND GOOD GOVERNMENT IN CONFUCIUS (2010) MOVIE BY HU MEI

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Abstract: *Confucianism strongly emphasizes the principles of humanism, morals and ethics to guide humanity in realizing the meaning and purpose of life. More broadly, the principles of Confucianism about humanism, morality will form good social relations and create a peaceful and prosperous life. This article tries to figure out the significance relationship between society and government in creating peaceful human life. As in Confucianism peace itself is created through harmonious social relations in plural social conditions and under good governance. It is important to understand the concept of harmonious society as taught by Confucius by looking at the practice of community relations and a government. The findings of this study are a condition of a harmonious society will be formed when the authorities emphasize the principles of the teachings of humaneness, morality and ethics in regulating government and society. Mutual understanding between government and society through non-exclusionary relationship is also an indicator in achieving harmony and peaceful life.*

Keywords: *Confucianism, Harmonious society, Good governance, Morality*

INTRODUCTION

The decline of the Zhou dynasty in Chinese civilization was marked by the break-up of China into a country with several states and kingdoms. This is also due to the political unrest in which the authoritarian attitude of the clans or groups of Chinese kingdoms and at that time, the government authorities seem to separate themselves and often involved in conflict. On the other hand, ambition of each states and kingdoms to become the strongest one conquering other is also dominant. Under the Zhou king, Chinese civilization was well-developed and well-organized with prosperous society and government.

It was said as a Chinese civilization that implemented morality, ethics value, and ritual reflected by the relationship between government and society. "It was, he (Confucius) imagined, a golden age, a time when rulers governed through moral example, people practiced time-honored rituals, and social harmony prevailed throughout the land" (Gardner, 2014, p. 1). However, as stated in the Chamberlain and Berling, during this historical moment of post-Zhou dynasty, there were also philosophers whom respond to this extreme political unrest such as the moralist like Confucius. The philosophers attempt to provide the basis action in reason



to be followed by the ruler at that time (Berling, 2004, p. 94; Chamberlain, 2009, p. 26).

Confucius was viewed as an influential scholar in Chinese civilization. He is a loyal minister, even a guardian who is very "religious" but not a supernatural figure. This description is based on the book written by Confucius himself, the Analects (Taylor, 2004, p. 23). Confucius teaching does not talk about the spirit of morality for individual and social relation; it also emphasizes the state and society relationship through the Five Relationship and principles (Gardner, 2014, p. 15; Taylor, 2004, p. 50; Wilson, 1900, p. 12). Confucius emphasizes standards of morality and behavior in human life like humaneness, righteousness, propriety/ritual, human nature and filial piety that reflected through the moral cultivation of the ancient sage who get the mandate from heaven to create a balanced and harmonious society under the good governed state.

Nowadays, the phenomenon of Confucius teaching about morality and politics is not only discussed by scholars through their academic journal or historical texts but also through contemporary literary work such as movie. In some cases, it has even become a space to present criticism of socio-political issues and cultural tendencies caused by current modernization (Sukmawati, 2020, p. 10). Bing Xu (2011) in his essay stated that compared to the book, movies tends to have special advantages in communicating their message to audience, often relying on intuition, subtlety, and suspense (Xu,

2011, p. 17). This causes many transformation and changes in the form of works from classical forms such as historical records and poetry into movies. At this stage of transformation, an intertextual relationship will appear that includes the entire context of the object of the literary work. Kolker (2002, p. 128) states that inter-textual in movie are a perception of some texts by considering the culture that developed at that time. It will represent a picture contained in the movie in accordance with the historical context and philosophical values therein.

As the object of this research, there are so many descriptions of ethics, morals and human behavior in term of state and society relationship that are conveyed through contemporary literary works. One of which is Confucius Movie (2010) by Hu Mei. The researcher sees how Chinese philosophy is taught through a representation of state relationships and people's lives. This movie also shows how the relation between society and the State in practice was portrayed based on moral values and ethical life taught from generation to generation. In the context of Chinese tradition with the nuances of celestials, this movie reflects Confucius's efforts in uniting several kingdoms which at that time were divided and conquering each other. Confucius showed his wise and prudent attitude in managing the empire and tried to unify Chinese civilization without war. Such phenomenon is interesting to study because in addition to show the character of the Confucius himself, a lot of social values reflected through

the role of Confucius in this movie also can be learned. In this paper, the researcher wants to see how the portrayal and representation of good government according to Confucius, and what the concept of the harmonious society depicted in the Confucius movie. The researcher borrows the theory of representation by Stuart Hall to re-represent the idea of harmonious society and issues related to government and harmonious society in the movie. The idea later on will be analyzed through John Dewey's theory about the harmonious society on Confucian Democracy.

Stuart hall (1997) divides his theory of representation into three approaches which are first, reflective approach, means reflection of the true meaning of the idea or object; second, intentional approach which refers to the private expression of the author; and third, constructivist approach which means interpretation generated from the system of language to represent particular concept/idea. Constructivist approach itself is very much influenced by the semiotic approach pioneered by the Swiss thinker, Ferdinand de Saussure, and the discursive approach associated with philosopher and historian from France, Michel Foucault. In the constructivist approach, a person interprets a sign, symbol or visual based on the concept imagined and then expressed through the language system. The sign itself has its own cultural dimension so that the conceptual systems of speakers' culture and language are needed in order to construct the interpretable meaning to the audience.

According to Stuart Hall (1997), representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It links concepts and language which enables audience to refer to either the 'real' world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events, (Hall, 1997, p. 17). The term representation refers to something that is described, explained and imagined through signs, symbols or particular ideas so that it forms a similarity in our mind/senses. The basic assumption of the theory of representation put forward by Stuart Hall is how the transmission of meaning through language is conveyed which then forms an imaginary in accordance with the cultural context. It becomes a process that shows the framework of interpretation to the audience so as to produce a meaning based on the audience's interpretation. In other words, Stuart Hall expressly defines representation as the process of producing meaning by using language that is adapted to a particular cultural context, "representation connects meaning and language to culture" (Hall, 1997, p. 15).

This approach connects ideas/concepts of individual mind in understanding signs, objects or symbols both in the imaginary world and reality through systems of representation. There are two processes of system of representation namely, first, mental representation where all objects, people and events are correlated with a set of concepts/ideas in our minds, and second, language as the media to process and express in constructing

meanings. However, this research will use the constructivist approach to analyze the representation of harmony and good governance. The application of the Stuart Hall representation theory in this research is to explain how the depiction of the concept of harmonious society is represented through the dialogue of characters, scenes and events displayed in the Confucius movie which then analyzed the relevancies.

Confucius Movie (2010) by Hu Mei

As China becomes increasingly globalized in the early twentieth first century, the release of "Confucius" movie by a veteran female director of Hu Mei, has provoked much of discussion about the relevance of Confucianism to contemporary Chinese society (Lee, 2011, p. 27). Confucius (2010) movie by Hu Mei tells the journey of a thinker, teacher, leader, politician who dedicates himself as an educator in his country. This movie displays many lessons of sacrifice, sincerity, reciprocation, politics, family, nationalism, and morality in human life. Kong Qiu (Confucius) was well-known for his capability in science and military strategy. He was asked by the king of Lu kingdom to assist in resolving various royal political problems as a mayor of Lu kingdom. Kong Qiu made many breakthroughs and it can be identified through several scenes and events happened throughout the movie such as eliminating the barbarian tradition of burying slaves with their masters, devising strategies when facing the deception of the Qi kingdom, and building royal defense weapons so that he was succeeded in returning the three cities without war. His courageous

thoughts against injustice led King Lu to promote his position as minister of interior and defense in the Lu kingdom. When Kong Qiu began his work in politics, he planned to destroy the walls of three families that were considered to accentuate the elite of the nobility and cover up the hypocrisy of the government. However, this plan was opposed by several royal parties until finally he was expelled from the Lu kingdom.

The Confucius movie, which tells about the journey of Confucius as a minister during the Lu emperor, can also be studied through reflecting the 5 norms of relationship based on Confucian teachings. The virtue relationship based on Confucianism consists of: (1) the king's relationship with his ministers; (2) the relationship between father and child; (3) husband's relationship with his wife; (4) brother and sister relationships; and (5) relationships with fellow friends. This movie has been discussed in Manhattan, New York in a series of Confucius Institute of Pace University anniversary events. It produced a compiled representation essay entitled "From Philosophy to Cultural Icon" which raised a major theme about the revival of Confucianism and the formation of cultural identity of contemporary China in the globalization era. Some essays discussed in this conference are from Ronald K. Frank, about the humanistic portrayal of Confucius movie, Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, focusing on the attention to the political subtext portrayed in the movie, Renqiu Yu in his article "Lets read The Analect after watching Confucius" using the historical

framework to portray the modern Confucianism era.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

State and Harmonious Society in Dewey's Reconstruction

In ancient Chinese tradition and philosophy, people believe that a system of government in one area reflects the order of a government in the sky governed by Goddess. The Chinese posited a relationship between the order of society and the harmony of heaven; the heaven and the way in which they were ordered became an idealized mirror of earthly concepts (Chamberlain, 2009, p. 70). Governance is managed by a king and some of his officials. The ruler or king and his officials must govern his community and lead his country based on the mandate received by the king and apply the values of ancestral teachings. This mandate itself was studied by the king and his officials by interpreting various phenomena and signs of nature. This means that there will always be a mutually influential relationship between social life and Nature. The relationship between the authorities, society and nature itself is basically causality, if a ruler is bad in managing the government, then society and nature will experience collapse and destruction.

In the discourse of social relationship, ruler/authority and society, an American philosopher John Dewey (in Tan, 2004) explained the goal of harmonious society in forming a social and state relationship. An ethical and moral approach is needed as well. He uses the term "Family Fidelity" in

analogizing an ideal community and well-governed state. The fundamental aspect of Confucian teaching is humanism or attitudes concerning human existence, building relationships with families and communities. Confucianism also emphasizes the essence of his teachings on the attitude of respect for family members, the community, such as the attitude of children towards parents and others. This is understood as the concept of filial piety (*xiao*) which means devotional attitude towards older people. The core of this concept actually is how to maintain the ethics and morals of a family both in internal relationship (member of family and relatives) and external relationship (to the community). This concept is also understood more broadly as a moral which emphasizes not only on a child to his parents, wife to husband, sister to her brother or vice versa in a family range, but also in a state or government range such as emperor to the society and to his official. The morality taught by Confucius greatly influenced the Chinese civilization can also be tracked from ancient Chinese tradition, where every individual who has a high position and power must prioritize his ethics and morality when managing a society and state. If the filial piety concept is applied by every individual, surely families, communities and even countries are in harmony and peace will be realized.

"Family fidelity" refers to an attitude of respect and obedience between society and the ruler while family means the attachment between one individual in a family

unit, and a society towards its ruler in an empire unit. However, the relationships in the family are fundamental to all that consists of the "five relationships" in the Confucianism teaching namely husband and wife; parent-child; older brother-elder brother; friends, and state to subject. In this hierarchy of social relations, each role has a task in accordance with their respective contexts. The virtue of filial piety or the devotion of children to their parents in family unit, reciprocity and responsibility between subordinates and superiors are the fundamental aspect to the concept of human relations as well. This concept refers to the social attitudes that have been strongly emphasized by Confucius to this day in forming an ideal family and community as explained in the Book of Rites the Great Learning, "peace under heaven" and "peace and harmony is created through the openness of society (Non-exclusionary) and well governed states" (Tan, 2004, p. 76). Since the good governance will establish when the rulers and authorities applied the moral-based order and behave.

As Confucianism strongly emphasizes the principles of humanism, morals and ethics in guiding mankind, the principles of Confucian teachings on humanism and morality will establish good social relations and create a life of peace and prosperity. The important thing in the projection of governance in Chinese civilization, especially as illustrated in the Confucian philosophy literature, is to maintain the relationship between society and government in order to create a peaceful human life. As taught by

Confucius, peace is created through harmonious social relations under plural social conditions and under good governance and governance, so it is important to understand the concept of a harmonious society by looking at the practice of public and government relations. A harmonious society and a prosperous life will be formed if the government authorities emphasize the principles of humanitarian teachings, morality and ethics in governing government and society. Mutual understanding between the government and society through non-exclusive relationships is also an indicator in achieving harmony and a peaceful life.

Humanity: A Fundamental Aspect of Harmony

In the Confucius movie, Hu Mei depicts Confucius as a humanitarian figure who highly upholds for human values and emphasizes humility in ethics. On the other hand, his actions also show that he is a person who highly respects the traditions and heritage of the ancestors. It can be identified by looking at the scenes and events throughout the movie such as conversation between Confucius and rulers, people and his students. Through these depictions, Confucius shows his wise attitude when initiating a rejection of barbarian rituals of burying slaves alive with their deceased masters. In the scene where Confucius has a meeting with other executives of the kingdom to discuss about the status of sacrificial tradition, he said that the practice of this barbarian ritual was a habit that was already irrelevant to the present and contradicted the principle of humanity (Ren) taught by the Duke Zhou.

Figure 1. Confucius opposes the ritual of burying servants



The scene where Confucius opposes this ritual is shown when he followed the state official's and he explained that if a bird which the feather falls out and imperfect is released from sacrifice because of the mercy of a ruler, how can a human being with dignity and self-esteem exalted must be sacrificed sadistically only for following the tradition from generation to generation? The rationality given by Confucius to this rejection provides a more human understanding of personal virtue and social ritual.

Figure 2. All ministers are meeting to discuss about their hereditary ritual



Confucius here considers harmonious social relations as the basis of good governance; tradition and ritual settings should be restored through ritual practices that can strengthen the quality of self, morals, ethics and respect to advance compassion in the world. In Dewey's point of view, rituals and ceremonies which become a part of *Li*, must be

rooted in religious values while acknowledging its social, habitual aspects. In his definition, "experience as art/rites" as the art of Chinese human association actually refers to the concept of Master You teaching in The Analects "achieving harmony is the most valuable function of ritual practice" (Tan, 2004, p. 80).

There is also an intellectual approach in integrating the dimensions of morality and humanity into the structure of the political order where Confucius wants to apply appropriateness (*Yi*) and parity through ancestral rituals that have always been carried down for generations. Ritual in the context of this movie is interpreted as a medium to connect the bonds between family (ancestors) and community (social) with the belief in getting a prosperous life. There was an attempt by Confucius to interconnect this family-social relationship and cosmological universe in other terms according to John Dewey, art or rites or ritual should be the form of "intellectual habits", which puts up stability between intelligent effort and the mystical belief in equal. Here I want to borrow the idea proposed by Joseph Lee that in Confucianism, political authority must be based on moral practice and moral authority (Lee, 2011, p. 28). In other words, the government will create prosperity and harmonious society when the government is managed through the ethical idea of Humanity/benevolence (*Ren*), ritual practice (*Li*), and appropriateness (*Yi*).

Good Government and Non-Exclusionary Community

Berling (2004) explains the concept of harmony as the basis of moral and ethical teachings taught by Confucius to humanity. He emphasized the framework of individual understanding in maintaining the reciprocal relationship among people not the legal or government constitution. For Confucians, they emphasize an aspect of fellow relationships, both in group and individual relationships. Therefore, in forming a good relationship, a good ethical and moral approach is also needed, especially in heterogeneous social spheres. As for harmony according to the Berlin, is the hallmark of the realized Confucian social order (Berling, 2004, p. 104). The notion that harmony would be easily achieved if a leader could show moral and ethical values in his government to the community was also cleared by some Confucianism-scholars. The harmony taught by Confucius in the Chou dynasty era as an image of bringing different voices or notes out of discord and into a pleasing balance. Harmony is neither sameness, nor agreement but it is about complementing each other. The concept of harmony is also written in the Confucius analects, "the exemplary person seeks harmony (he), not sameness (tong) ..." seeks harmony but does not follow the indiscriminating crowd (he er bu liu). "As harmony in the sense of a minister's views complementing the views of his ruler, is distinguished from the barrel, the minister and ruler having identical views; It is harmony that leads to good government" (Tan, 2004, p. 76). The historical China recorded in the

Spring and Autumn Annals, the harmony is explained when a Minister has a different view from his ruler, then both can be said to be harmonious if those with different views can work together and accept each other's opinions to make a decision

As Dewey reconstructs his idea of Confucian harmony which basically highlights the values of coexistence of unity and diversity, and the ideal government in Confucianism must be built on moral leadership and emphasize humanitarian values, not subject to absolute power" (Bell, 2018, p. 119; Tan, 2004, p. 125), to create a harmonious government, there should not be an exclusionary value in term of the horizontal or/and vertical relationship, leadership/authority to its community and vice versa, or leaders to leaders, a communal group to others group. Since Confucianism developed the concept of *Tian Ming* (Heaven's Mandate) to explain the origin of political authority, it also empowers people and gives them a frame of reference for criticizing the authoritarian rules.

Figure 3. Confucius has a dialog with Lao Tze



The figure of Confucius (Kong Qiu) depicted in the Confucius movie is basically a respectable figure who is determined to establish a political

situation of government based on moral principles which he learnt from Chinese ancestors. The character represented in Confucius is an idealistic and principled figure. He is very strict with his words. In the event where Confucius has a dialog with his spiritual master, Laozi to reconsider his actions, he remained adamant to his stand as he promised. His efforts to instill moral values into political practice began with the improvement of ritual practices that previously were far from human values as explained in the previous chapter. As described in several scenes of this movie, the states relationship between one kingdom and another was vulnerable to chaos and invasion. Even in the scene when Confucius and King of Lu were invited to an alliance meeting by the king of Qi, the king of Qi secretly wanted to attack Confucius and his entourage, but due to diplomatic skills and strategies prepared by Kong Zi, the attack was finally canceled.

Figure 4. Confucius planned a war strategy



Confucius' wisdom encompasses everything from political diplomacy, moral teaching, humanity, and he believes that Chinese civilization can be united without having to fight. His wisdom can be identified through the conflicts of this movie. The conflict in this movie began when Confucius assumed the split of the Chinese

kingdom was caused by the separation from the clans of the noble families to show the strength of their respective families. Confucius saw that these three families were strongly portrays the feudalism political structure so he intended to unite the three families by breaking down the royal separation wall. This exclusive attitude of each family also results the segregation of power between one group and another group. Furthermore, Confucius saw this royal wall as an authoritarian symbol, showing off power, the tyranny behind the wall that covered the cruelty and ugliness of a kingdom. The concept of good government expected by Confucius is a fair government of all beings, open to the people and other kingdoms, working together and not toppling each other. This concept can be created if the community, the leader with courtesy can respect the law and choose leaders with integrity and dignity when dedicating themselves to the state government.

CONCLUSION

As the analysis conducted above, the researcher highlights the concept of Confucianism (morality, harmony, humanity) is used as a basis for political legitimacy in order to create a good governance and harmonious society in the long history of the Chinese civilization. The researcher would like to conclude that the portrait of the ideal concept of government and society displayed in this Confucius movie can be understood implicitly from some events featured in scenes such as the renewal of ancient Chinese ritual practices that contradict humanitarian teachings, an

authoritarian political system in which the ideology of feudalism is deeply rooted and struggles for power. To achieve a good and prosperous governmental order, there must be harmonious relations between officials and the people, fair laws, and rulers should be principled in morals, ethics, humaneness and benevolence in regulating the state.

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