

Confucius on Ren and its Application in Cultural Exchanges Between Cameroon and China

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ABSTRACT

This paper will discuss about Confucius on Ren. Confucianism as an intellectual and spiritual tradition based on the teachings of Confucius is introduced by describing its development in Chinese history, the Confucian writings, and the Confucian lessons on self-cultivation and social harmony. Employed by political leaders to justify their authority and protect the prevailing social structure and political system in imperial China (6th-5th century BCE), Confucianism was often seen as a conservative force against innovation because of its respect for tradition. Confucianism has five principals beliefs including Li, Yi, and Ren which is the main focus of our paper. Ren is defined as humanity, kindness, love, golden rule, and humanism. However few scholars especially from Cameroon investigated about Ren. Additionally, the concept is important in chinese culture as it is considered the cornerstone of moral conduct, emphasizing care, respect, and empathy towards others. It is the virtue that should guide interpersonal relationships. The concept of Ren promotes social harmony and a collective well-being that is achieved through proper conduct and moral behavior. It is deeply intertwined with family values, advocating for filial piety, respect for elders, and the importance of familial bonds. It has influenced the political sphere, with the ideal ruler being one who embodies Ren and governs with benevolence and righteousness. Historically, the concept of Ren has been used to evaluate rulers and their policies, with the expectation that a ruler should govern with the people's welfare in mind. It has shaped the social structure, emphasizing the importance of social hierarchy and the responsibilities that comes with different social roles. Furthermore, it has been instrumental in preserving cultural values through times of change, acting as a constant moral reference point. To fill the gap, this study will examine the core definition of the term Ren, how it is practiced in personal relationships but also how it affects the cultural exchanges between Cameroon and China.

Keywords: Confucius, Ren, Golden rule, Benevolence, Humanism. Humanity, Cultural exchanges, China, Cameroon

INTRODUCTION

Confucius, also known as Kongzi in Chinese, was a Chinese philosopher, politician, and teacher whose teachings on knowledge, compassion, loyalty, and virtue served as the predominant philosophy in China for a millennium. He lived from 551 BCE until 479 BCE. He emphasized the significance of individual ethics and morals. Confucius is regarded as the epitome of the perfect human being. Following Confucius's passing, his followers compiled his teachings into a book called The Analects of Confucius (Lunyu), which remains widely studied and taught in China today. Confucianism, known as Rujia in Chinese, is a moral and social philosophy originating from the teachings of Confucius. Confucius's ethical approach focuses on moral order, the humanity and virtue of ancient Chinese rulers, and gentlemanly education. There are multiple meanings of the concept Ren. The term is often translated as kindness, humanity, or compassion and is regarded as the central virtue in Confucian teachings. According to R. ENO (2015), one explanation is that Confucius's expressions of Ren differ in his many conversations with his pupils. Furthermore, subsequent academics, such as Mencius, provided varying readings of Ren. Mencius believed that the sprout of Ren is an innate sense of compassion and empathy that resides in the human heart-mind (xin), which is responsible for both cognitive and emotional processes. He used the example of a person observing a little child playing near the brink of a well and on the verge of falling in. He felt care for the child's well-being but might not be compelled to act morally by trying to

save the youngster. To cultivate compassion and empathy in Ren and fully establish a moral inclination, one should practice benevolence towards others and spread it to all of humanity whenever feasible. The principle of Ren in Confucianism is a vital and complex concept that has deep significance both historically and in the present day. It serves as the foundation for a moral and ethical existence, stressing the importance of treating others with empathy and reverence. Ren fosters social cohesion by prompting individuals to consider the needs and emotions of others. This doctrine is essential for fostering harmonious and cooperative relationships within families, communities, and society as a whole. As a key aspect of Chinese philosophy, Ren is essential to the cultural heritage of China and other East Asian nations influenced by Confucian principles. Grasping the concept of Ren enables a deeper understanding of the cultural values and norms that have shaped these civilizations. The exploration of Ren offers moral guidance for personal behavior and leadership, providing a framework for making decisions that are not only ethically sound but also beneficial for the welfare of others. The principles of Ren remain pertinent in the contemporary world, where issues such as social justice, environmental responsibility, and global cooperation necessitate a renewed emphasis on ethical conduct and mutual respect. Studying Ren can aid personal growth by encouraging introspection and the cultivation of virtues that promote a more compassionate and empathetic approach to life. Through this investigation of Ren, one can be able to learn more about a philosophy that has shaped East Asian society for millennia and still provides insightful guidance on moral behavior and societal structure. The goal of this study is to contribute to this building, research, and comprehension of the topic being discussed, as many Cameroonian researchers and students did not paid much attention. We believe that Confucianism is one of the best philosophical traditions, and we hope that more others will get interested in it as a result of our study. The methodology we used to write this paper is the research and documentary analysis.

The primary inquiry of our article is to determine the core definition of the idea, Ren. What is the etymology of Ren? The primary goal of our study is to elucidate the various definitions of the term Ren as used by Confucius, its significance, the process of becoming a man of Ren (Junzi), and the application of Ren in society. This paper will analyze the notion of Ren according to Confucius, discuss its practical application, highlight its significance in human relationships, and demonstrate its utilization in cultural interactions between China and Cameroon.

ORIGIN OF REN AND ITS DIFFERENTS CONCEPTIONS

2.1 The Origin of Ren

The concept of Ren is deeply intertwined with other Confucian values such as Li (礼, ritual norms), Zhong (忠, loyalty to one's true nature), Shu (恕, reciprocity), and Xiao (孝, filial piety), all contributing to the virtue or De (德) in Confucian thought. Ren (仁) symbolizes a diligent individual and the Chinese character for the number two. The pair of horizontal strokes also symbolize Heaven and Earth. Ren embodies the essence of human existence through the interactions between two individuals and the connection between humans and nature. Ren in Confucianism is the fundamental virtue that embodies the moral traits that regulate human behavior and interactions with others (Matt Stefon 2016). It reflects the Confucian view of human nature, where each person is seen as a social being whose identity is derived from interactions within the community. It suggests that every human has the capacity to possess Ren and it manifests when a person treats others with humaneness. Confucius transformed the term Ren which originally referred to the handsomeness and bearing of a young virtuous warrior, into a moral concept that signifies uprightness and ethical influence on others. He taught that embodying Ren does not require high social rank, fine appearance, or eloquent speech but rather goodness in one's relationships with others. He suggested that Ren is attainable but also elusive, as indicated by his own admission of not having fully attained it. Ren" has had a profound influence on the moral fabric of Chinese society and, by extension, other East Asian societies that have been influenced by Confucianism. The development of the term was influenced by the social and cultural context of the time, including the importance of rituals, music, and the role of the scholar-official class in government. Over time, the concept of Ren has been interpreted and reinterpreted by various Confucian scholars, and it has become a central theme in Chinese ethical and moral philosophy.

2.2 Different Conceptions of Ren

For Wing-Tsit Chan (1969), Ren or Jen, refers to the specific virtue of a ruler showing benevolence to his citizens. The author states that in the Analects, 58 out of 499 chapters focus on the discussion of Ren, with the term appearing 105 times. Ren is a specific virtue that holds great significance for Confucius. In the "Analects" book, Ren is characterized as having humanity, kindness, love, the golden rule, and humanism.

2.2.1-Ren as humanity

Originally, the term ren was used to describe a masculine or powerful characteristic, especially in relation to rulers. Ren also denotes the kindly demeanor of the monarch towards his subjects (Karyn L. Lai 2008). Under Confucian influence, the name Ren evolved to represent a moral quality inherent in human nature. Early Confucian philosophy shows diversity in the use of the term "humaneness" to refer to humanity in general, humaneness as a distinguishing trait of humanity, or the basic human virtue of compassion. This attribute has been described in various ways, but typically as an innate predisposition or a facet of collective socio-political existence. Humanity is the quality or characteristic that pertains to being human. It is a sentiment of benevolence and empathy towards others, as per Google's definition. Ren is the capacity to prioritize the well-being of others while also showing reverence for oneself and the cosmos at large. In Analects 11:11, Chi-lu (Tzu-lu) inquired about helping the spiritual beings. Confucius questioned how one might help spiritual beings if they are not yet capable of serving other human beings. "I venture to ask about death." Confucius stated that, without a thorough understanding of life, it is impossible to comprehend death. This is regarded as the most renowned statement on humanism.

2.2.2 Ren as love or benevolence

According to Matt Stefon in the Encyclopedia Britannica (2016), Confucius's teachings emphasize that love is demonstrated through a person's deeds and responsibilities within their society. Treat people with the same love, judgment, and care that you would give to yourself. True love is achieved when you desire for others what you desire for yourself and when you safeguard others as you would safeguard yourself. In Analects 12:22, Fan Ch'ih inquired about humanity. Confucius stated that it was to love humanity. He considered Ren to be a virtue that encompasses love. In the Analects 4:3, he stated, "Only the man of humanity knows how to love people and hate people". Confucius advocates for universal love, tempered with a discerning evaluation of individuals' actions. Ren is to be loved with convictions. Confucius believed it was important to understand what and how to love.

2.2.3 Ren as Golden Rule

The concept of Ren (仁) in Confucianism can indeed be seen as akin to the Golden Rule, which is a principle of ethical behavior common to many cultures and religions around the world. The Golden Rule is often expressed in various forms, such as "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," or "Treat others the way you would like to be treated." Its functions based on the premise that there is a widespread consensus among individuals regarding their desires. In Analects 6:28, Tzu-kung inquired about the opinion of a ruler who generously bestows benefits on the people and may provide salvation to all. Do you consider him a humanitarian? Confucius questioned, "Why limit oneself to being just a person of kindness? He is undoubtedly a sage. Even the sage-emperors Yao and Shun did not achieve it. One who embodies humanity and seeks to build his own reputation also shapes the reputation of others. Similarly, desiring to stand out himself, he also supports others in standing out. Judging others based on what is familiar to us might be referred to as a way of understanding humanity". Avoid treating others in a way that you would not want to be treated. Just like the Golden Rule, Ren emphasizes reciprocity in relationships. It encourages individuals to act towards others with the same kindness, respect, and consideration they would wish for themselves. It involves an empathetic understanding of other's feelings and situations. It is about putting oneself in another's position and responding with compassion and care, which is a core aspect of the Golden Rule.

No one will have any grievances against you, not in the state nor in the family (Analects 12:2). Confucius emphasizes that love is demonstrated through a person's deeds and the fulfillment of their duties within society.

Treat others with the same love, judgment, and care that you would give yourself. True love is achieved when you desire for others what you desire for yourself and when you safeguard others as you would safeguard yourself. In Analects 12:22, Fan Ch'ih inquired about humanity. Confucius stated that it was to love humanity. Confucius considers Ren to encompass love as a virtue, as shown in Analects 4:3 when he mentions that only a person of humanity understands how to both love and detest people. Confucius promotes unconditional love, but tempers it with a critical assessment of people's actions. Ren loves with integrity. Confucius believed it was important to understand what and how to love.

HOW TO PRACTICE THE REN

Confucius advocated for continuous self-betterment by developing qualities like Ren and engaging in personal introspection, which he viewed as the route to wisdom and enlightenment. Ren's philosophy encompasses multiple dimensions in its implementation. The first is demonstrating kindness towards others. Nurture empathy and thoughtfulness toward others. Pay close attention to their needs and provide kindness. Secondly, Respect: Show respect to all individuals, irrespective of their social standing, age, or circumstances, as Confucius did not differentiate between individuals based on their wealth or poverty when selecting his pupils. Additionally, acknowledge and value diverse viewpoints and ideas. Thirdly, engage in self-cultivation by developing virtues like patience, tolerance, and understanding. Strive for continual enhancement of your character. Construct a scenario that prompts an individual to break free from their usual behaviors and guides them in developing into a more virtuous individual. Yan Yuan inquired about Ren in Analect 12.1. The Master emphasized the importance of self-control and adherence to propriety, which is known as Ren. If one could master themselves and embody the principles of LI for a day, they would receive a response from the world. Since Ren originates from oneself, how could it possibly originate from others? Individual moral principles: Possess a robust moral framework. Make ethical choices in your everyday life, guided by the ideals of kindness and justice. When someone injures you, respond with kindness. Retaliate injury with justice, and repay kindness with kindness. Fourthly, promote ongoing education and training as they enhance personal development and contribute to a more educated society. Fostering social cohesion: Strive to create harmonious connections in society. Engage in conflict resolution and contribute to creating an inclusive community. Engaging in meditation and Tai Chi can assist individuals in cultivating calm and awareness, leading to the development of inner serenity and empathy. Offering incense, flowers, or food to ancestors or deities is a method of expressing thanks and humility, as well as connecting with the spiritual realm.

Ren involves ongoing self-betterment and constructive engagement with others. It is founded on the profound principles of benevolence and reverence for people.

THE IMPORTANCE OF REN IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Ren is the pinnacle of qualities in Confucianism, embodying the ultimate achievement of all other moral values. It is a kind of expression that encompasses both internal and external aspects. The practice of Ren is crucial in several parts of daily life, especially in personal relationships. Love and intimacy are founded on the values of Ren, which include compassion, respect, and sacrifice for the betterment of one's relationship. Friendships built on mutual trust, loyalty, and respect help individuals cultivate their sense of Ren and provide support during challenging circumstances. Respecting and being grateful to parents and elders is crucial for upholding harmony and order in families and communities in terms of filial piety. Experiencing love from family members can foster kindness towards others. Respecting the boundaries of family members and having one's own boundaries respected fosters integrity. Ren also needs the capacity to forgive others for their errors and to pursue reconciliation via sincere conversation and shared comprehension under the component of forgiveness. Ren acts as a moral guide, directing individuals towards ethical choices and promoting virtuous behavior towards others. Ren is crucial for fostering peaceful connections in society. It promotes the cultivation of empathy, understanding, and reverence towards others. Ren in Good Governance: Confucius advocated for leaders to demonstrate the values of Ren to gain the respect and trust of their followers, rather than resorting to force or compulsion. Social responsibility includes a duty towards disadvantaged members of society, like the impoverished and the ill, and the obligation to strive for social justice and equality. Confucius viewed himself as a moral role model whose teachings may motivate people to lead a virtuous life and benefit the community.

THE APPLICATION OF REN IN CULTURAL EXCHANGES BETWEEN CHINA AND CAMEROON

The contemporary cultural exchange between China and Cameroon started in the 1970s (ZHOU Hai-jin 2011), with the first cultural exchange activities including art exhibitions and performances by Chinese acrobatics, sports, martial arts, and football delegations visiting Cameroon. China and Cameroon have organized various art exhibitions and cultural performances. For instance, Chinese film weeks were held in Cameroon in the 1980s, showcasing Chinese cinema to Cameroonian audiences. Several government-to-government cultural agreements have been signed over the years, indicating a formal commitment to cultural exchange. For example, in 1983, China and Cameroon signed a cultural exchange plan for 1983-1984, and in 2008, they signed another cultural agreement for 2008-2010. In 1983, China and Cameroon signed a cultural exchange agreement that outlined the specific directions for cultural, educational, and news exchanges between the two countries. Those agreements typically include provisions for mutual visits by cultural delegations, performances by art troupes, art exhibitions, and other forms of cultural collaboration. In July 2008, the Minister of Culture from Cameroon, Ms Mina, visited China and signed the execution plan for the cultural cooperation agreement for 2008-2010 with her Chinese counterpart, Mr Cai Wu. This plan detailed the specific policies for exchanges and cooperation in culture, education, and news between China and Cameroon. It likely facilitated high-level visits, such as those by Chinese cultural advisors and ministers to Cameroon, and by Cameroonian ministers to China. The plan have included visits by Chinese art troupes and dance troupes to Cameroon for performances, as well as the participation of the Cameroon National Dance Troupe in events in China, such as the Shanghai World Expo in 2010. The agreement specified financial arrangements for the exchange programs, such as covering international travel expenses by the dispatching party and local expenses by the hosting party. The execution plan was not limited to the listed activities and allowed for additional initiatives agreed upon by both parties to expand cooperation in relevant fields. Any issues or disagreements that arose during the implementation of the plan were to be resolved through diplomatic channels. The execution plan was set to be effective from the date of signing until December 31, 2010. High-level cultural delegations have been exchanged between the two countries, including visits by Chinese cultural ministers and Cameroonian cultural ministers, fostering mutual understanding and cooperation. There have been numerous bilateral projects in various fields, including infrastructure, agriculture, and education, which have contributed to the cultural exchange by bringing people from both countries together to work on common goals. Both countries have celebrated each other's cultural events and festivals, further deepening the understanding and appreciation of each other's cultures.

The Confucius Institute was established in Cameroon at the University of Yaoundé II in 2007. The Chinese language teaching facility was founded in 1995 through the collaboration of China and Cameroon. Supported in China by Zhejiang Normal University and in Cameroon by the University of Yaoundé II. The lectures first took place at the Institute of International Relations of Cameroon, which is one of the professional schools affiliated with the University of Yaoundé II. The course became popular and was moved to the University of Yaoundé II in Soa in 2019. The Confucius Institute is primarily located in three cities in Cameroon: Yaoundé, Maroua, and Douala. The Confucius Center in Cameroon provides various language courses, including an undergraduate Chinese course, an optional Chinese course for university, secondary, and elementary students, a Chinese course for civil servants, and a Chinese training program for managers. Various Chinese cultural training classes are offered, such as Taijiquan, calligraphy, paper-cutting, Chinese painting, traditional Chinese opera, and traditional Chinese massage techniques. The institute hosts a range of extracurricular cultural events such as Spring Festival celebrations, Lantern Festival performances, calligraphy competitions, Chinese food festivals, Wushu competitions, Hanyu Qiao competition (offering to the winner a month of Chinese language learning in China with all expenses covered), and The Voice competition featuring only Chinese songs. The facility provides a library that is open to all those learning languages. Annually, the institute administers the Chinese language tests known as HSK (hanyu shuiping kaoshi) and HSKK (hanyu shuiping kouyu kaoshi). These tests are crucial for evaluating trainees language proficiency and for scholarship applications. Scholarships are available to everybody and granted by the Chinese government and Hanban. Over time, collaboration between the Confucius Institute and Chinese universities has grown. Currently, international students, particularly those from Cameroon, have the opportunity to apply to over 50 universities affiliated with the Confucius Institute (Momo Ngomba J 2017). The establishment of the Confucius Institute in

Cameroon has played a significant role in promoting Chinese language and culture. It has become a hub for cultural activities, including language courses, cultural lectures, and festivals.

CONCLUSION

This paper was about Confucius on Ren. We noticed that the meaning of the word varies with his different discussions with Confucius's disciples. Ren is defined as humanness, humanity, love or benevolence, or golden rule. It can be practiced in many aspects of life, such as kindness towards others, respect, self-cultivation, and so on. We have also demonstrated the importance of Ren in personal relationships. For example, friendships based on mutual trust, loyalty, and respects allow individuals to develop their sense of Ren and to support each other in difficult times. We have also shown how the Ren is applied in cultural exchanges between Cameroon and China. We choosed the case of the Confucius Institute to show how it's applied in the field of education.

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