

The Word of “*Harmony*” in Confucianism and Its Meaning to Ethnic Education in Vietnam at Present

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Abstract Confucianism originated from China and was introduced to Vietnam at the early age, which has had a quite big influence on social institutions; also contributed to forming ethic values, core culture – the tradition of the Vietnamese. One of the most important aspects of Confucianism that has influences on social life is the concept of “*Harmony*”. There have been a lot of works and articles on the word of “*Harmony*” and its influence in Vietnam. In this article, the author will clarify the concept of “*Harmony*” as a standard, an ethical value. From that point, the article will show the meaning of the word of “*Harmony*” to ethical education in particular, contributing to comprehensively educating the young in Vietnam at present

Keywords: *confucianism, the word of “Harmony”, ethical education, Vietnam*

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1. Introduction

After more than 30 years of renovation, the economy of Vietnam has achieved a strong development; however, ethics, social culture in general and school ethics in particular has manifestations of degradation. According to the Ho Chi Minh City Institute of Development Studies, school violence has been increasing with the two most common types of violence, which are physical and mental. Moreover, according to statistics of the Department of Children Care and Protection, the abuse and violence of children in school has increased 13 times compared with that of 10 years ago (2009) [1]. School violence and ethical degradation in general have been under high concern of the society. In addition, the exhaustion of resources and polluted ecological environment has been negatively affecting social life and human beings. One of the causes of this situation is that people are so interested in pursuing material and economic values, neglectful of educating mental values, traditional principles of “ethics”, and the word of “*Harmony*” Confucianism mentioned. Researcher Nguyen Hien Le affirmed: “Confucianism regulates every single movement of individuals in the family and society to keep the relationships “*harmonious*” [2]. Thus, the inheritance of cultural and ethical values from the history, including the word of “*Harmony*” of Confucianism to educate ethics and make people live in harmony with each other and with nature is really necessary. The word of “*Harmony*” in Confucianism has a lot of meanings. In the context of this article, we only deeply analyze the word of “*Harmony*” in terms of ethics;

thereby drawing out the basic meanings to ethical education in particular, contributing to comprehensively educating the young in Vietnam at present.

2. Content

2.1. The Word of “*Harmony*” under the View of Confucianism

The concept of “*Harmony*”: In common sense, “*Harmony*” has a lot of meanings. “*Harmony*” is understood as a settlement, concord; equality, togetherness, fairness; without contrary; without scrambling; peace and happiness. According to the Chinese characters, the word of “*Harmony*” (和) is the combination of two words: The word on the left: “禾” is a “*rice plant*” and the word on the right: “口” is a “*mouth*” [3].

For the Easterner, especially Chinese and Vietnamese people, a rice plant plays a particularly important role in life. It is not only a staple food providing food for human survival, but also the formation of community cohesion in fighting against natural disasters, etc. A rice plant is a tropical plant with the most balanced combination between negative and positive capabilities. Due to its hydrophilic properties, a rice plant absorbs the maximum amount of negative air from soil and water. However, a rice plant also receives the maximum amount of positive air and sunshine to produce ears and grains. Thus, that both negative and positive airs are mixed together on a rice plant creates a bumper harvest. Therefore, rice is the best food for humans because it is naturally born with the harmony of both negative and positive airs. From this

deeply hidden meaning, we can see that, the two negative and positive airs are opposite to each other, but in "harmony" with each other in a rice plant forming grains to nourish people. For other plants, none of species attains such an ideal harmony. Other species of plants have more positive air or more negative air. Therefore, only rice plant is a symbol of harmony between the negative and the positive.

A *mouth* (口) is the special organ of human beings used to speak out people's inmost feelings and thinking. A mouth can say good or bad things. According to folklore, sin comes from a mouth and the good things, noble inmost feelings and emotions making human life better and more harmonious also come from a mouth. Therefore, if the word of "口" (mouth) stands alone, it cannot clearly show the reconciliation or love, forgiveness and tolerance. However, if the word of "口" is combined with the word "禾" (the rice is a balanced combination of the two positive and negative airs) to form the word "和" (Harmony), it will show a good harmony among people. Therefore, words from the mouth with an innermost balance and without bias will be good words that are pleasing to the ear and create harmonious atmosphere.

With that meaning, the word "和" (Harmony) has a lot of deep contents. "Harmony" refers to the concord between the two opposing elements to form a unified one. "Harmony" is peace, concord among people, enabling people to realize the values of each other to live together in harmony and to treat each other reasonably, not to be excessive, not to take more rights than others. From that point, the word "Harmony" is honored to be an important virtue: "Harmony Virtue" makes people equal and sincerely cooperative to build a peaceful and happy society. Considering that aspect, "Harmony" is an ethical category of lofty human values.

In addition, "Harmony" also shows the *level*. The Chinese book writes: "... Happiness, anger, care, joy when not released is called neutral (balance); when released at adequate level, called harmony (gentleness). Balance is the great root of all things in daily life. Gentleness is the common way of people to follow" [4]. The emotions of happiness, anger, care, joy are the born nature that the human beings are granted. These emotions not released are when people are in the state of nature, so "neutral" is the state not yet activated, the original born nature. When activated, it is the time for people to express their emotions, because of the contact with the external environment through sense organs to bear different emotions (happiness, anger, care, joy, love, dislike, etc.). Thus, the opposite emotional states such as love - hate, anger - care... are also manifestations of neutrality, a normal phenomenon in human psychology. Moral people do not mean that they have to remove negative emotions such as: anger, hate, etc. According to Confucianism, every emotion becomes right, good when it is released in proper circumstances. It means that people should be happy in a happy situation, angry if it is worth being angry, sad if it is worth being sad, etc. as long as those emotions are not excessive, do not make the spirit become oscillated, incorrect and unrighteous. When emotions are released at an adequate level, it will certainly be "harmonious".

Therefore, "harmony" is the necessary emotional level that people have to train and practice a lot to achieve.

It can be said that the concept of "harmony" is simply interpreted in the relationship among people, expressing human values, ethics and community cohesion. In addition, "harmony" is also understood as the principle of heaven and earth, the general order for the whole universe. "Harmony" is also the harmony in society, the universal, harmonious ideal of society, the harmony of the relationships: king - servant, father - son, husband - wife, brothers & sisters, friends, etc.

With the meaning of human culture, harmony will bring a happy life to friends and concord to the relatives; people encourage and support each other to create a peaceful and friendly society. Tu Lo once asked, "How is a person who supposed to be the intellectual like?". Confucius replied, "People who encourage each other, live in harmony with each other, can be considered as the intellectual. Friends must encourage each other; brothers must always be in accord" [5]. Harmony creates a harmonious and stable order, the spiritual foundation to promote society develop. In general, "harmony" under the view of Confucianism contains a profound humanity, promoting the values of ethics and human and culture of human beings, for the sustainable development. Therefore, we need to cultivate, develop and apply the word of "harmony" in the context of society with rapid, complex and unpredictable changes in order to maintain stability and harmony and to ensure sustainable social development.

2.2. The Meaning of "Harmony" in Confucianism for Ethical Education of Vietnamese People at Present

Vietnam is located adjacent to the great civilizations (China, India). The Vietnamese are very interested in receiving and exchanging world culture. Chinese Confucianism, including the word of "Harmony" not only penetrates into the minds of great men in the Vietnamese history, but also imbues in social, cultural and traditional activities, etc. The typical characteristic of agricultural culture is appreciating the sentiments and ethics, so the Doctrine of the Mean, after being introduced to Vietnam, is also consistent with the friendly nature of Vietnamese people. With the principle of considering harmony as a precious asset (A bad compromise is better than a good lawsuit), in life, "one tries not to tread on others' toes". Appreciating the concord, avoiding confrontation, making concessions, "If you are patient in one moment of anger, you will avoid 100 days of sorrow" is the common psychology of Vietnamese people.

The beauty of the above ethical tradition has been preserved and used flexibly by the Vietnamese till now. However, nowadays, science and technology developing as a rainstorm has dominated and changed many values of human life. With that tremendous change, many people have suffered from psychological disorder, got lost in their own thinking and feelings and moral degradation, causing consequences not only for themselves but also for society. The disagreement among people, between individuals and society has caused constant wars and conflicts, which is

increasingly complex with many sophisticated and modern forms. On the other hand, development of technology and techniques has consequently resulted in the fact that people are exploiting natural resources more brutally and more sophisticatedly. In order to make the human life meaningful, with the spirit of promoting the positive values of the tradition and proper and flexible application in modern social life, we need to draw the learning lessons from the word of "*Harmony*" in Confucianism to contribute to building a happy, peaceful and prosperous society.

Today, we are witnessing a paradox in the modern society that is: people live in a society where the conditions of physical conveniences are increasing but tolerance is poor; a society whose wealth increases but the value of human beings decreases; a society whose people speak much but love very little, even feel hatred for people and so on. The human beings in society are increasingly losing humanity because of contradiction and conflict that may arise in families, schools and society. The relationship among people is no longer in balance, but in dissonance. The emotionless "culture" is increasingly widespread, with the gradual disappearance of *adjectives* such as "harmonious", "patient", and "tolerant" in human behavior. Instead, it is selfish, narrow-minded occupied in the human soul, etc. It is an alarming state of degradation of social ethics. Therefore, strengthening the education of the ethical values of Confucianism in general, the word of "*Harmony*" in particular will contribute to correcting human behaviors. People need to be aware that even high growth rate of economy and materials also becomes meaningless if we live a life without human sympathy, human relationship and harmony; it even can attract people into the abyss of ethical and cultural decay, or people may lose the noble human part of a man. Facing with that situation, appreciating the value of "*Harmony*" and educating the word of "*Harmony*" of Confucianism is very urgent.

First of all, educating the word of "*Harmony*" must start from the family. Confucianism has referred to the "*Harmony*" in the family and appreciated harmonious families, "*considered the spouse's consent as the root of a peaceful society*" [6]. This perfectly matches with the traditional ethics of Vietnamese Nation. Our forefathers often advise and educate the concord between husband and wife, brothers to love and support each other through folk-songs and proverbs such as: "Harmony between wife and husband always results in success"; "Brothers in accord bring family's happiness" [7]; "Mutual help between brothers and sisters"; "Consensus would bring success", etc. It is a very good tradition. However, at present, we are witnessing the most heartbreaking scenes happening right in the family. The family violence is increasing. According to the statistics of the Department of Familial Affairs - Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, within 5 years (2011-2015), there were more than 31,500 cases of family violence each year. In 2012 there were even 50,766 cases, 1.5 times more than the annual average [8]. The cause of that tragedy is that family members have lost their common voice. Each person only focuses on his/her own interests, but forgets the concord and blood relationship, resulting in contradiction

and conflicts. In addition, the rapid development of society makes people get lost in the circle of competition and development. It also makes the word of "*patient*" disappear in the people's mind. They lose the harmony with themselves (losing the ability of recognizing the limitation and wisdom), then discord with people and firstly with their relatives. Therefore, in each family, the parents themselves should evaluate the word of "*Harmony*" as a basis. Parents must be examples of living "harmoniously", always take the "*harmony*" for teaching and resolving all conflicts and disagreements in the family. Parents may love daughters more than sons, respect the first child more than the following child, etc. but absolutely not "bias", that is, defending one person too much, and causing personal disagreement. Parents need to be fair, clearly treat and respect the rights and obligations of family members in the same way. Parents need to connect every member of the family by love, spirit of peace and tolerance, so that each person can feel the noble blood relationship and restrains the self, personal benefits. Fulfilling the above conditions, family education would become complete, comprehensive and sustainable.

For schools, despite the advantages that modern education brings about, now the school's educational environment is not as pure as before. One of the most typically aggravating issues for society is school violence. According to the latest statistics of Ministry of Education and Training, in one school year, there are 1,600 cases of students fighting in and out of the school (about 5 cases per day) [9].

Cases of students hitting teachers, teachers hitting students, friends hitting friends have occurred. At the end, the reason is because people lack the spirit of "*harmony*" and patience. Therefore, "*harmony*" must be placed back, must be thoroughly grasped in the daily conduct of each person. First of all, for manager levels, a leader must be a person of "*harmony*", must be able to control the individuality, respect community's benefits; no private feelings shall be applied and it is necessary to properly release. In addition, "*harmony*" is also a leadership art that a leader needs to flexibly apply, to appreciate the concord among people, to balance between "obligations" and "benefits" for every member, and to follow the principle of "A bad compromise is better than a good lawsuit". Among members and teachers in the school, the word of "*harmony*" poses the need to be harmonious with each other; teachers and students need to keep intimate and harmonious relationship, to be "harmonious" but not "biased", "harmonious" but not "soluble", as Confucius says: "harmonious but not soluble" [10]. That means ensuring diversity, but also balancing different opinions, different things to maintain the attitude of tolerance and altruism. It is not recommended to divide in to factions, but it is necessary to create a common voice in the community, create a unified, harmonious unit, consider human to be the basis and respect people's benefits. It can be said that it is the attitude of fairness, "*harmony*" of parents in the family, teachers in the school, which is a practical example, with great meaning for children to learn and follow.

A healthy, harmonious school environment combined with the spirit of "*harmony*" in family education will be an important foundation for shaping the noble personality,

reducing heartbreaking and immoral cases in the society, contributing to bringing a new face of national ethics.

3. Conclusion

During the process of building and defending the country, the Vietnamese always love "*Harmony*" and always set "*Harmony*" as the target of developing social life. Harmony is a principle of behavior, an ethical standard that helps people balance all relationships, from family to society. In the present context, more than ever, the word of "*Harmony*" in Confucianism with its positive meanings should be respected, preserved and promoted. Appreciating the concord among people, harmonious relationship among people is considered a central issue in today's ethical life. Living and following "*Harmony*" is the continuation of the good traditions of our forefathers and the Confucian doctrine, contributing to preserving and building a more stable and sustainable development; Ensuring the harmony between economics and ethics, between reason and emotion, between individuals and society.

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