

Inquiry Project.

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Topic category: Confucianism

Whether The Confucianism Is A Religion?

In China, religion is becoming a more and more sensitive topic of people's life, because the China political philosophy base is conflicting with religion. Chinese government believe Marxism which is mentioned atheism. However, the Chinese law still recognize some religions in China, which are Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism(Bhattacharji). Our group found that there is no Confucianism, in that list, which is the most important thought in China, whether in history or contemporary. I use "thought," but not " religion" because that is the topic we want to discuss. And we found that it could not be a religion, but also could be.

We choused "whether the Confucianism is a religion" as our question because during our research, we found that some Chinese and American did not believe that the Confucianism is a religion. Similarly, one person in our group also believed that the Confucianism should not be defined as a religion. However, I want to claim that some of their position was based on western scholar's idea about "what is religion?"

We looked up a lot of articles and data, and we were aware of that western scholars had a lot of ideas about "what is religion?" and they gave the different definitions about religion. Paul Tillich, who was the theology professor of Harvard

University, defined religion as a belief in god, and believed the supernatural realities relevant to creatures. Friedrich Schleiermacher, who was a German philosopher, mentioned that religion was an “absolute dependence” on god(69). Also, Friedrich Max Muller, who was a founder of western religious studies, said that religion was an aspiration, and admire of abstract subject, which could be said like god(131). There are three definition above, and they are different. But when we put them together to look at, we can see that all of them mentioned like god, supernatural, or abstract subject, so our group concluded that god is the most representative existence in western scholars’ mind. Following this direction, let’s talk about the Confucianism. Firstly, there is no god in Confucianism, even some people consecrate Confucius as god, but he was a real people that had existed in history. So there is no “supernatural” in Confucianism.

Another reason that we concluded there is no god in Confucianism is that Confucianism is more care about the real life and the relationship between people, and Confucius payed more attention to reality. In some sense, I think he was like a man of realism. What Confucius did was deal with the daily personal problem, but not like to conclude some surreal theory or the origin of universe(Cohen). So one thought of our group was that Confucianism was not a religion because there is a none-god theory and it focused on practical problem but not something like abstract thought like, the two forms and the eight diagrams which were Taoism talked about.

The first viewpoint is based on the western scholar, who were almost believed in theology or god. In China, although there are some scholars also have same

understanding as western, there were still some people believe in another way. One of our group member said that in China, there are two kinds of “religions,” one is “god-based religion,” and another one is “human-based religion”(Our group concluded them, because we cannot find the word in English, or said by English-speaker scholars. But I will explain them). In short, the god-based religion is a kind of religion that involved with god or supernatural. And human-based religion is another type which is based on human and natural, and more reasonable, and people believed in a person, but not god.

If we going this way, our group found that Confucianism could be a religion, by the way, the human-based religion. During my understanding, I think the “human” in Confucianism first is mentioned to Confucius, because people are believed in him but not god, and second is mentioned to a kind of thought which is like “people first” or “people oriented.” The Confucianism is talked more about people and it shaped the Chinese social relationships and moral thought(patheos.com). Confucianism would like to talk about any academic problems without taboos, and it accepted science, and the most important characteristic was that the anti-exclusiveness. Confucianism allowed every other thoughts existed in the society and would like to communicate with them. As I know, almost other god-based religions have exclusiveness and they will attack others theories. So the anti-exclusiveness may be a specialty of human-based religions, but not only for Confucianism. Stop here, it is the second viewpoint that our group have brought up, which was that the Confucianism could be said like a religion, but as a human-based religion.

I have talked about the two views of “whether the Confucianism should be a religion.” During our studies, we found that this is a question that have been discussed a long time in the circles of religion. And every position just hold their point, so that there was no correct and direct answer for that. That is why our group cannot have the same idea, and I just put each idea here, so that it will make sense. However, these two rival camps were in the contemporary. How about in the history? Are there also some discussions like today?

Firstly, the position of Confucianism in history, especially in Han dynasty ruled by Han Wudi, was highly than 21th century. In Chinese feudal society, country had to use religion to control people’s mind so that they will not against the ruling class(*Studies In World Religions*). And in Han dynasty, the only theory or thought that Han Wudi praise highly was Confucianism(Slavicek). And the important role that Confucianism played in Han dynasty was the connection between ruling class and lower class, it made the society stabilization and prosperous(Slavicek). So in the history of Han, it should be a religion. For now, I only can make sure that Confucianism could be called religion in Han dynasty. However, our group found that Confucianism has been mentioned with Buddhism and Taoism side by side in the whole feudal society after Han dynasty. Chinese people called that “Three teachings harmonious as one”(columbia.edu). It is doubtless that Buddhism and Taoism are religions, so when Confucianism juxtaposed with Buddhism and Taoism, it should be a religion. Comprehend the above two points, our group concluded that Confucianism was a religion in history.

It was really confusion for people whether Confucianism is a religion. Nonetheless, when we look at Confucianism without this problem, Confucianism have a lot of influences on Chinese. In history, Confucianism was like a action notebook which told people what should to do, or what should not to do. And it connected people with a good relationship though a right communication way. It has talked about “Great Harmony” which was the best existence form of community. In the “Great Harmony”, every people trust others and no crime, and everything is in the best situation. Even it was just an ideality, it became a direction of where people want to strive. It is a core values of today’s Chinese society. Also, other ideas of Confucianism, such as be kind to somebody and be filial to parents, have deeply effect on Chinese. Some of us might do not know what they advocate was come from Confucianism, but they advocated. It was an evidence that showed us the ideas of Confucianism were grateful and useful, people keep them is not because the ideas are come from Confucianism. People advocate these ideas because these ideas are socially adaptable. Confucianism was like a brand that imprint in Chinese, and it influence people’s aim in life, government’s aim in society, and country’s aim in world.

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