

## A CONFUCIAN READING OF ROMANS 7:14-25

### *Nomos (Law) and Li (Propriety) \**

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In order to do an intertextual reading of Rom 7:14-25, the paper will begin with a brief note on intertextuality, then sketch briefly the situations of the Yellow River Basin and Roman house-churches, in which the pericope found its context of reading. After that, I will suggest an alternative interpretation of the pericope in which Confucius' (551-479 BCE) understanding of *T'ien* and "cultivating selfhood" especially in terms of *Li* will serve as both the readerly intertextuality and the corresponding codes to the Pauline understanding of the Torah in Romans 7:14-25.

### *Intertextual Reading*

Living in multi-faith, multi-text, and multi-cultural contexts, I cannot help but think of the given convention of reading. To do an intertextual reading is not unnatural for me though this constructive reading will hopefully be creative in bringing out new meanings in the focused text.<sup>1</sup> The development of structuralism into post-structuralism or

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Tzvetan Todorov, "Reading as Construction," in Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman, eds., *The Reader in the Text. Essays on Audience Interpretation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 67-82; see also Spike Draisma ed., *Intertextuality in Biblical Writings. Essays in Honour of Bas van Iersel* (Kempen: Kok, 1989). On intertextual reading of biblical texts, see

intertextual reading is also natural for me because structuralism and intertextual readings depend on the theory of semiotic as well as cultural contingent factors of reading.<sup>2</sup> A system of semiotic codes is operative when both social contingencies/conventions and transcendental symbolism/sign are interactive. But these codes are not autonomously universal, rather they are networks framed and conditioned by socio-cultural factors.<sup>3</sup> As such, reading in multi-faith, multi-text and multi-cultural contexts cannot be a reading of the textual code alone, but must include acknowledgment of and sensitivity to the readership, as well as the textual contexts. The audience and textual contexts provide the network and possibility of reading.<sup>4</sup> This view is an extension of Julia Kristeva's notion of intertextuality, or Bultmann's concept of pre-understanding.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, Culler can speak of the intelligibility of a text "in terms of a prior body of discourse...."<sup>6</sup> He also notes the function of intertextuality as an allusion "to the paradoxical nature of discursive systems.... Everything in *la langue*, as Saussure says, must have first been in *parole*. But *parole* is made possible by *la langue*, and if one attempts to identify any utterance or text as a moment of origin one finds that they depend on prior codes."<sup>7</sup> Applying the insight of Culler, one may contend that Romans and Analects exist intertextually in their *parole* but their *langue* are made plain in the

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Michael Worton and Judith Still, eds., *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

<sup>2</sup>On post-structuralism, see Roland Barthes, "Theory of Text," *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 31-47; idem, *Elements of Semiology* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964); idem, *The Pleasure of the Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1973).

<sup>3</sup>Jonathan Culler mentions the readerly orientation of framing the sign in *Framing the Sign: Criticism and Its Institutions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988). Culler writes, "Framing the Sign has several advantages over context: it reminds us that framing is something we do; it hints of the frame-up ... a major use of context" (*Framing the Sign*, ix).

<sup>4</sup>Consult Jonathan Culler's work on the possibility of reading in signs and semiotics: *The Pursuit of Signs. Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 50; *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), 30.

<sup>5</sup>Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 60; Rudolf Bultmann, *Existence and Faith. Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann* (London: Fontana edn., 1964), 342.

<sup>6</sup>Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, 101.

<sup>7</sup>Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, 103.

reader's hermeneutics. While not following the post-modernists, Riffaterre's and Kristeva's, irreducible polyvalency and radical indeterminacy of intertextual boundaries,<sup>8</sup> my paper does put an artificial limit on the signification of *li* in the Analects and *nomos* in the Romans passage. The context of the "situation of utterance" becomes the essential contingency which effects the intertextual reading.

### *Occasions of Asian Context and Roman House-Churches*

The Chinese narrative begins with the coexistence of tribal groups who lived in the Yellow River Basin. Before the fifth century BCE there was a period of relative peace and prosperity in China. Most of the schools or teachings were developed in the fourth and fifth centuries BCE in order to cope with coexistence and cultural deterioration. The people were looking back to their ancestors for ways (*Tao*) to follow, for a philosophy of life, and a reclamation of serviceable traditions.

The Yin-Yang appeals to the understanding of cosmos as one way to maintain the harmony humans can have with other humans and with nature. The implication of the Yin-Yang teaching is that the real world exists in the midst of flux; real world has goodness and beauty as well as evil and suffering. Also, to cope with the problem of co-existence, people need to seek mutually interdependent and reciprocal lifestyles. Taoism began during the fourth and fifth centuries BCE, when Lao Tze and Chuang Tze attempted to solve the problem of cultural deterioration and conflict by saying that: truth, logos, or Tao is one but everyone has his/her own perspective and only sees part of the truth; as a result, each person has his/her own "lens" on reality, which claims to reveal the truth. The solution is "nothingness." For even Truth comes from it (nothingness), and all shall return to it.

Confucianism is traceable to Confucius (551-479 BCE) who was born in the time of cultural and moral deterioration, in the Spring-Autumn Period.<sup>9</sup> Confucius always looked back to the King of Chou because

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<sup>8</sup>Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); cf. also Julia Kristeva's understanding that a text will absorb the other texts in their intertextual space, Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, idem, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987). See the critique of Culler on the "undefined discursive space" intertextuality designates, Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, 109.

<sup>9</sup>Before that period, in the Chou Dynasty, the King of Chou employed two principles as

of the power of mutuality, harmony and unity he brought through music and *li*.<sup>10</sup> Buddhism came into being as Buddha was struggling with the problem of evil and suffering in the social context of multi culturalism and polytheism. At the core of life there lies *dukkha* (in Sanskrit), "suffering"; even in the midst of joy and ecstasy there is the fact that "this too shall pass." Human life is a story of pain and suffering, similar to the experience of the Jewish people in the exilic period.<sup>11</sup> Emptiness is another name for the Buddhist doctrine of Pratitya Samutpada, Dependent Co-origination, which means nothing exists as a self-subsisting, isolated thing; rather, everything is ultimately a net of relationships.<sup>12</sup> The goal towards universal salvation is the aim of Buddhism, especially Mahayana Buddhism which claimed that the Buddha-nature existed in all things, and that all things are capable of enlightenment. With all these major religions blossoming in Asia, how are Asians going to co-exist with the differences? The situation and problems faced by the Asian people is in a small scale faced by the house-churches in Romans.

Since Romans is not a theological treatise of a circular letter but a situational letter addressing a specific audience,<sup>13</sup> Paul has a "convergence of motivations" in writing Romans to elicit support for his mission to Spain *and* to explain the meaning of his gospel as a way

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the commonground for uniting the people: music as harmony of emotion/feeling; *li* (artistic expression of behavior) such as bowing, nodding of the head itself is nothing, but it expresses respect.

<sup>10</sup>Secondly, Confucius is meditating on the existence of the good. He argued that beauty and goodness are the foundations or the source of music and *li*; and that the potentiality of beauty and goodness reside in every person. But it is up to each one of us to actualize, to cultivate and to express that beauty and goodness.

<sup>11</sup>Every Hindu is aware of that, not just Gotama. Death lies at the end of the road of every human life, and the awareness of that sooner or later forces its way through; that is *dukkha*. All joy, and sorrow, like earthly life in general, is impermanent, and to lead an authentic life this fact must be faced and accepted.

<sup>12</sup>The fundamental cause of *dukkha* is *tanha* (in Sanskrit), "clinging," sometimes translated as "desire." - the not wanting to "let go" that is the cause of the *dukkha*. Ultimate Reality is "Emptiness" *Sunyata*. *Sunyata* does not mean simply the lack of everything, but rather has the quite positive meaning of being the Ultimate Source of all reality, and its, *Sunyata*'s, very "nature" is that of unspecified relatedness in process.

<sup>13</sup>Karl P. Donfried in the book *The Romans Debate* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977) has edited and collected essays which are representative of these two camps; the former may be argued by T.W. Manson, Günther Bornkamm, Robert J. Karris, and the latter by Jacob Jervell, Wolfgang Wiefel, and Donfried himself.

of bridging conflict between the Jewish and the Gentile Christians.<sup>14</sup> The Roman house-churches, whom Paul probably knows quite well<sup>15</sup> were not unified (cf. 15: 7-13). There was conflict in their treating of one another in these ethnically, ideologically, and religiously mixed congregations. Romans 14:1-15:13<sup>16</sup> suggests that the conflict is between "the weak," the Law-observant Jewish Christians and "the strong," the Law-free Gentile Christians. Romans 15:1-6 and 7-13 show that "Gentile" and "Jewish" are not only ethnic but also Law contingent terms or labels. That is, most of the Jewish Christians at Rome<sup>17</sup> laid emphasis on the traditional observances of their ancestral faith;<sup>18</sup> most of the Gentile Christians felt it unnecessary to subscribe to the Torah because they were now "in Christ". The dominating issue Paul deals with in this epistle is the Jewish-Gentile Christian relationship (cf. 1:16, 2:25-29, 1:7, 8:33, 9:6-13, 11:5-7, 28-32. In writing about the righteousness of God, Paul is saying that both Jews and Gentiles need the righteousness of God; Paul is not talking about individual status before God. As a pastoral theologian in the concreteness of a missionary situation, he exhorts the Roman Christians to live and cooperate for the sake of the Spanish mission and so that both Jews and Gentiles (11:17-24) can eventually worship God together (15:8-12). Indeed, God is the God of Jews and the Gentiles (cf. Rom 3:29).

### *Law in Romans 7:13-25*

Bearing in mind the setting of Romans, I construe the experience of Paul in 7:1-12 as describing not the problem of the law *per se* (such as its inadequate or conflictual nature), but his past desire to conform to

<sup>14</sup>Cf. "Paul's thought is geared to a specific situation and...his arguments cannot be divorced from the need of the moment" (25) *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 71-74. Recently, A.J.M. Wedderburn has argued in a more inclusive manner than the above that Paul's writing of Romans has multi-reasons and "a cluster of different interlocking factors." (*The Reasons for Romans* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988], 142.)

<sup>15</sup>In chapter 16, Paul greets most of the thirty individuals by name. Therefore, Paul is able to write to their local, specific situation. However, T.W. Manson disagrees and suggests that chapter 16 is an addendum to the manuscript to the church of Ephesus; K.P. Donfried and R.E. Brown have successfully given a rebuttal to Manson's argument. See, T.W. Manson, "St. Paul's Letter to the Romans - and Others," *Romans Debate*, 1-16.

<sup>16</sup>For discussion on the literary problem proposed by R.J. Karris on these passages and Marcus' rebuttal, see R.J. Karris, "The Occasion of Romans", *The Romans Debate*, 75-99; Marcus, "The Circumcision," 70-71.

<sup>17</sup>The Jewish Community at Rome began to emerge not long after the accession of Claudius.

<sup>18</sup>For example, some Roman writers tell us so. Suetonius, Augustus 76.2.

the expectation of the law "for the purpose of prideful control [as for example, is evidenced] in the Roman house church situations."<sup>19</sup> Rom 7:13-25 then describes "the profound dilemma of [Paul's] former life. He had sought to do the will of God and had passionately devoted himself to conformity to the law but found that he ended up in hostile reaction against God."<sup>20</sup> However, the use of the present tense and the issue of vv.14-25 in contrast to vv.2-13 seem to reveal more than Paul's past struggle with the Jewish law as a Jewish-Pharisaical Christian, since the present tense denotes not only the past action of Paul but the present action of the readers who share Paul's same action.<sup>21</sup> The identity of the "I" as a powerful rhetorical device deserves further clarification.<sup>22</sup> The "I" in the pericope is Paul the Pharisee whose action is representative of the Jewish- and Gentile-Christians in Rome. He who seeks to obey the Torah with zeal, but who finds in light of the present "in-Christ" experience that his blamelessness before the Torah does not necessarily indicate his righteousness before God and people.<sup>23</sup> The truth of the matter is, his strict conformity to the Torah only results in his hatred for the Church of God.

That it was sin and not the Torah which brought about death in a person "under the Torah" (i.e. Jew) is shown in vv. 7-13. Then (γάρ in v.14) Paul continues to show how the Torah is used by sin to cause death even among Jewish-Christians in Roman house churches (behind the identity "I" of the Pharisaic Paul), because they seek to fight for the Torah, i.e. to gain the righteousness of the Torah. The Gentile Christians' behavior is also sinful (behind the behavior of the "I") in the sense that,

<sup>19</sup>Robert Jewett, *Romans, Genesis to Revelation Series* (Nashville: Graded Press, 1986), 74; and his *Romans, Basic*, 84-89. Paul Achtemeier has a similar but more general view than Jewett. Achtemeier (*Romans* [Atlanta: John Knox, 1985], 120-26) sees the passage describing Paul's experience as a persecutor of the Christian church and possibly including also those who are trapped under the Law.

<sup>20</sup>Jewett, *Romans, Genesis*, 75; and *Romans, Basic*, 87.

<sup>21</sup>After I finished writing this article, I found that Seifrid's research came to the same conclusion; see his "The Subject of Rom 7:14-25," 317-18, and Stanley E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament with Reference to Tense and Mood*, Studies in Biblical Greek 1 (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 75-109.

<sup>22</sup>For history of research, see E. Stauffer, "'Εγώ", *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [hereafter *TDNT*] II: 343-362; Seifrid, "The Subject of Rom 7:14-25," 317-18.

<sup>23</sup>See Seifrid, "The Subject of Rom 7:14-25," 320-323 on Paul's use of confessing "I" of early Judaism in Rom 7:14-25. See the parallel Qumran material Seifrid gives in pages 322-23.

though the Gentiles do not have the Torah, they do have "law" revealed to them in their conscience (inner conviction).

Despite that, Paul's frustration does not reveal that the fault is the Torah's. On the contrary, he affirms the holiness and goodness of the Torah and attributes his frustration to Sin and his "sinfulness." His devotion to the Torah, his own cultural and religious tradition, has blinded him to the new act of the righteousness of God in Christ, who is the savior of the Gentile world.<sup>24</sup>

Paul finds the victory over his dilemma in 8:2 ὁ νόμος τοῦ πνεύματος τῆς ζωῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. The new Torah of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus is more inclusive than the tradition of Torah and is essential for the co-existence and salvation of both Jews and Gentiles (i.e. all people).

The issue at stake in the pericope is how to affirm the holiness and the goodness of the Torah, and at the same time, to deny the Pharisaic interpretation that Gentiles should keep the Torah for salvation. This pericope therefore serves to remind the Jewish Christians not to abuse the law (as Paul once did) but to live in the Spirit before God and with Gentile Christians. It also reminds the Gentile Christians not to take pride in their own traditions and consider themselves strong and others weak. For both Jewish and Gentile believers are now in Christ Jesus (8:1). For the law of the Spirit has led both the Jewish and Gentile Christians into victory over sin and death (8:2-13) and into the confession that they are all children of God (8:14). And those who are in Christ (7:25) in the Spirit (8:2) do not abrogate but fulfill the Torah (8:4).

In Rom 7:13-25, Paul intends to demonstrate by the personal example of a Pharisee, how one should view the righteousness of God, not by means of the tradition of the Torah but by the "law" (or Torah) of the Spirit. The comparison and contrast of the two laws, Torah and Spirit (the new Torah), in 7:14-25 and 8:1-11 respectively, is most significant. It is Paul's realization that he as a Pharisaic Christian now should move from the Pharisaic view of the law to the law of the Spirit. Therefore, the Spirit is mentioned over a dozen times in the beginning of chapter 8 alone. Paul declares that "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set him free from the law of sin and death" (8: 2). Paul considers

<sup>24</sup>Gaston, *Paul and the Torah*, 33.

himself among the "us" who "walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (8: 4).

This life in the Spirit is therefore primarily communal and ethical, only secondarily individual and ritual. In other words, the way of the Spirit is practised not in terms of the zealous conformity of religious rites accomplished through the Torah but in terms of the whole person, whose renewed relationship with God becomes expressed in his/her encounter with his/her neighbor in and through the Spirit.

### ***Intertextuality Between Confucian And Pauline Thought***

The book Confucius (551-479 BCE) loved, *The Book of Odes*, says: "T'ien gave birth to the multitude of people, where there is a thing, there is a principle; that is why people hold to rightness and like this natural, beautiful virtue." (Ta-ya, III: 3, 6; 505 and 541) This religio-philosophical understanding of human life assumes that all humans come from T'ien the Creator, and that morality is endowed from T'ien. Confucius did not mention this poem in the Analects, but a similar concept of this "transcendence/immanence" of T'ien is expressed in the Analects.

Confucius' religious-metaphysical understanding of ultimate reality is couched in the bi-polar conception of T'ien. Donald L. Alexander writes,

T'ien is the symbol<sup>25</sup> of the universal creative life-principle inherent in the universe whereby the world of all living things comes into being.... The second dimension will be called the temporal pole; that is, T'ien is the symbolic expression of the concrete function of the universal principle of creativity. In other words, Confucius recognized the intrinsic value of human nature in congruence with the creative power of the universe.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>To Dr. Alexander, the word "symbol" means "any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for conception -- the conception is the symbol's meaning. A symbol, then, is a form in which reality discloses itself to our consciousness. The symbol is not itself reality but its manifestation; and yet the symbol is not another thing but the epiphany of that thing which is not without some symbol. Hence, the symbol encompasses and unites both the symbolized thing and the consciousness of it." ("The Concept of T'ien in Early Confucian Thought," *His Dominion* [1985]: 12-13.) Cf. Liu Shu-hsien, "The Use of Analogy and Symbolism in Traditional Chinese Philosophy," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 1 (1974), 313-38 and Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," *A Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach*, William A Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt, eds. (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 168.

<sup>26</sup>Alexander, "The Concept of T'ien," 11.



Notice that the "creativity" aspect of *T'ien* is transcendence, yet the all-pervading and all-integrating spontaneous life-force is immanence.<sup>27</sup> The transcendent and immanent notions are similar to God the Creator (or Father) and the Holy Spirit, respectively, in Christian theology. The immanence of *T'ien* is the closest we can get in the Confucian thought to the notion to Holy Spirit in Christianity. This is the Tao of Heaven, that is, the way of the Spirit, which not only gives birth to people but continues to regenerate and sustain them.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, one stands in awe of the greatness and creativity of *T'ien*.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, in this eschatological age, we are living in the Spirit who is the Creative Force binding us all in the confession that we are the children of God.

In one sense, Confucius wants to preserve the traditional value and culture of knowing and doing the *T'ien Ming*. On the other hand, he wants each person to be renewed by the power of that mandate which has been long established by the sages from past dynasties.

Fung Yu-lan also argues that "Confucius was in fact a great reformist thinker who instilled a new spirit into the traditional forms."<sup>30</sup> In other words, a mere transmitter of tradition in its outer form could never sustain and forge the way of life which exerted its influence on Chinese society for the last two millennia and likely for more to come. Rather, what Confucius intends is to reinterpret his ancestral tradition in light of its meanings and moral principles for the sake of creative and lively appropriation.<sup>31</sup>

### *Torah and Li*

Paul in Romans is not eliminating the Torah. In fact, he is affirming that the Torah is holy and good. But Pauline interpretation of the

<sup>27</sup>Alexander, "The Concept of T'ien," 14. Cf. Mencius 5.A.6.2.

<sup>28</sup>Cf. *Shih-Ching, The Chinese Classics*, James Legge, transl., 4: 352, 505 and 352.

<sup>29</sup>Chung Yung 33, Analects 16:8 and Alexander, "The Concept of T'ien," 15.

<sup>30</sup>Quoted by Alexander, "The Concept of T'ien," 10. Fung Yu-lan observes that "Confucius took the principles underlying the writings of the Ch'un Ch'iu and of the other early histories, and drew from them the doctrine of the Rectification of Names, thus rationalizing the Ch'un Ch'iu. The great contribution of Confucius to Chinese civilization, indeed, has been the rationalization he has given to the originally existing social institutions." (*A History of Chinese Philosophy*, tr., Derk Bodde (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 1: 36.

<sup>31</sup>Cf. Alexander, "The Concept of T'ien," 10-11.

Torah in Romans 7 in the light of the Spirit and the Christ-event does not merely accept the Torah as it is. Certainly, Paul's view of Torah is not the same as his contemporary Jewish friends' view. More importantly, the age of the Spirit and *T'ien* compels us not to absolutize our belief (culturally or religiously) and create an idol of it, but to examine the truth afresh always as the creative One reveals and intervenes in the eschatological moment.

In terms of the Pauline language of the Torah, perhaps we can supply equivalent Confucian language of *li*. To the Jews such as Paul, the tradition is no doubt the Torah, that which is divine and upheld by Jews as covenantal with God. Jews consider the Torah as a divine gift unique to Jews alone for it marks them as religiously and culturally Jews. The Chinese consider their tradition as best couched in the word *li*, the proper and holy way of doing things (thus, propriety also).

Etymologically, the ideograph *li* symbolizes a sacrificial act. Wing-tsit Chan points out that it originally meant "a religious sacrifice."<sup>32</sup> However, the earliest available dictionary meaning of *li* is "treading" or "following." Specifically, it indicates the act or ritual whereby spiritual beings are properly served and human happiness obtained.<sup>33</sup>

Neither Paul nor Confucius wishes to discard traditions altogether. What they are advocating is to let *jen* be the fundamental motive of our action and relationship while respecting the revelatory nature of the Torah and *Li*. To live a life of *li*, a cultured yet natural pattern of interpersonal relationship that "works through spontaneous coordination rooted in reverent dignity,"<sup>34</sup> is the same as using the Torah (and *Li*) but not imposing it on others. Paul's ethic is neither legalistic nor antinomistic but love, empowered and guided by the Spirit.

Paul pinpoints the greatest danger of religious people: those who inherited a long tradition of sacredness and religious values often in their piety and religiosity hurt and persecute people in the name of the very God they seek to please. In other words, it is possible that we love God and yet do not love people; it is possible to be set right with

<sup>32</sup>See Chu Hsi, *Reflections on Things at Hand*, tr. Wing-tsit Chan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 367.

<sup>33</sup>*K'ang-hsi tzu-tien* (Taipei: I-wen Book Co, 1957), 1920.

<sup>34</sup>Fingarette, *Confucius*, 8. Cf. Analects 2:3, 13:3.

God and not be right with people. In Confucian language, *li* is good and perfect and holy. Confucius says, "Merely to feed one's parents well ... even dogs and horses are fed." (Analects 2:7) That means merely fulfilling *li* is not sufficient; we need to do more.

### *Co-existence in the eschatological pneumatic community*

If the law in Romans 7 finds its root in the Jewish tradition, the *li* in the Analects finds its meaning in the ancestor culture of Confucius. The book Confucius loved, *The Book of Odes*, says: "*T'ien* gave birth to the multitude of people, where there is a thing, there is a principle; that is why people hold to rightness and like this natural, beautiful virtue." (Ta-ya, III: 3, 6; 505 and 541) This religio-philosophical understanding of human life assumes that all humans come from *T'ien* the Creator, and that morality is endowed from *T'ien*. Confucius did not mention this poem in the Analects, but a similar concept of this "transcendence/immanence" of *T'ien* is expressed in the Analects.

This creativity of *T'ien* has many elements corresponding to the Pauline understanding of the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the believers in Romans. For example, both *T'ien* and the Holy Spirit are the symbols and persons of the mysterious existence of God. Both dwell in persons, not just to present them with the descriptive truth but to convey for them the vision of reality which is embodied in the concept of creativity and continuous re-generativity. And both by virtue of the creative role of *T'ien* seek to establish a wholeness of life for all.

The creativity of the Spirit is most concretely seen in how Confucius remolds the idea of *T'ien*. From this starting point, we can understand why Confucius is the reformer and not the mere preserver of ancestral tradition of "*Li*," just as Paul was in respect to the Torah.

Tu Wei-Ming has used Wayne C. Booth's "the rhetoric of assent"<sup>35</sup> to interpret the Analects and come to perceive the "commonality, communicability, and community of the human situation."<sup>36</sup> What he means is that Confucian ontology is not an atomic-mechanistic split conflict of flesh versus the spirit, but a more holistic concept that

<sup>35</sup>Wayne C. Booth, *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974).

<sup>36</sup>Tu, *Confucian Thought*, 82.

through symbolic interchange, we are called into the "fiduciary community" of sharing intentions, values, and meanings. Tu Wei-Ming offers a perceptive observation here: "The symbolic exchange wherein self-identification and group awareness in both cognitive and affective senses take place thus becomes the primary milieu. [Hence, we must have] a willingness to participate in the creation of sharable values."<sup>37</sup> This "fiduciary community" of "sharable values" is the "beloved of God" community in Christ to whom the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Roman house-churches belong.

One does not find in the Analects that all persons will always finally agree. On the contrary, it is natural that diverse personalities have differing visions of the Way.<sup>38</sup> Even among Confucius' disciples, for example, the paths of self-realization are varied.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the "strong" and the "weak" in Romans are not encouraged to be other than themselves as each must hold true to their own "measuring rod of faith."<sup>40</sup> However, the singularly crucial point for both groups is "the continuous process of symbolic exchange through the sharing of communally cherished values with other selves."<sup>41</sup> This similar Pauline and Confucian emphasis is presupposed by their understanding of human nature. In the Analects, for example, the self is a center of relationships rather than an isolatable individual.

In other words, the self is a dynamic, open organism which actively seeks human community for wholeness of life and is transformed through the person of the Spirit. Tu Wei-ming says, "It [self-transformation] is not a quest for pure spirituality nor is it a liberation from the flesh, the mundane, or the profane."<sup>42</sup> The task of that transformation, as seen in Romans 7 is to accept vulnerability and to support our fellow beings. Living a bondage-free life from sin and death does *not* move us nearer to God while simultaneously further away from our neighbors; it moves us to God *and* one another.

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<sup>37</sup>Tu, *Confucian Thought*, 83.

<sup>38</sup>Cf. Tu, *Confucian Thought*, 83.

<sup>39</sup>Cf. Tu Wei-ming, "The Confucian Perception of Adulthood," *Daedalus* 105 (Spring, 1976): 110.

<sup>40</sup>Jewett, *Christian Tolerance*, 62.

<sup>41</sup>Tu Wei-ming, *Confucian Thought*, 83.

<sup>42</sup>Tu, *Confucian Thought*, 133.

One must be careful, therefore, not to speak of the Confucian notion of the human as only a social being without any personal selfhood or identity. Confucius sees both processes of becoming human - socialization and individuation - as equally essential and mutually supportive. Zehua Liu and Quan Ge observe that, "The former means that the development of the individual is impossible unless there is a process of social adaptation; the latter indicates that the individual is the entity in which the process of socialization is to be incarnated - otherwise, there would be no meaning to 'socialization.'"<sup>43</sup> In other words, Paul does not advocate different factions to dissolve their uniqueness or particularity; Paul is asking them to "greet one another with holy kiss" (16:1-16) despite their differences.

Confucius says, "Virtue does not exist in isolation; there must be neighbors" (Analects 4:25).<sup>44</sup> "In order to establish oneself, one helps others to establish themselves; in order to enlarge oneself, one helps others to enlarge themselves." (Analects 6.28) The process of learning to be a sage does not take the form of linear progression but that of gradual integration. Specifically, one authenticates one's being, not by detaching from the world of human relations but by making sincere attempts to harmonize one's relationship with others.

The human is transformed by participation with others in communal ceremony. And that is the mandate of heaven, that all may live in righteousness and orderliness in relation to others as a society of sacredness.

### *Co-Existence In Multi-Text And Multi-Faith Contexts*

The way to life and freedom for Jewish and Gentile Christians is through the Spirit. How can the Jews and the Gentiles and many fractions of the Roman house churches live in harmony? This is also Confucius' concern in the splintered society at his time. Confucius says, "The person of humanity is naturally at ease with humanity." (Analects 4:2). In the Christian language: the Spirit wills us to become

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<sup>43</sup>"On the 'Human' in Confucianism," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26 (Spring 1989): 319.

<sup>44</sup>In the first instance, this link is to the general reciprocal good faith and respect among men (*shu* and *chung*); in the second instance this reciprocal good faith is given a specific content: it is that set of specific social relationships articulated in detail by *li*. In short, where reciprocal good faith and respect are expressed through the specific forms defined in *li*, there is *jen*'s way. Cf. Fingarette, *Confucius*, 42.

fully human in our loving relationship with others. The Torah is not abrogated but fulfilled by a lifestyle guided and controlled by the Spirit (cf. Rom 13:8).

The power of the Pauline gospel is, therefore, that which grants righteousness to all who place their faith (trust) in Christ. That faith and grace must be concretely expressed in our "faith" (trust) and "grace" towards one another so that all might come to worship the One God, ὅτι ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ δι' εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα· αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν.

### ABSTRACT

The article begins with the a summary of debate about the interpretation of Romans 7:14-25 and offer an alternative interpretation through a Confucian reading of the pericope. The major portion of the article is an intertextual hermeneutics of *nomos* (law) in Romans 7 and *li* (propriety) in the *Analects* from a Chinese Christian perspective. It will be argued that the Pauline view of life in the Spirit is primarily communal and ethical, only secondarily individual and ritualistic. This view is read through the Confucian perspective of *li* (propriety). To live a life of *li*, a cultured yet natural pattern of interpersonal relationships that works through spontaneous coordination rooted in reverent dignity is the same as using the Torah without imposing its requirement on others.

Such a reading will render a hermeneutical implication that the greatest issue confronting religious people is that those who have inherited a long tradition of sacredness and religious values often in their piety and religiosity hurt and persecute people in the name of the very God they seek to please. In other words, it is possible for one to love God and yet not love people; it is possible to be set right with God and not right with people. The hermeneutical implication is supported with examples of the problem of co-existence in the multifaith context of the Asia-Pacific region.

## 撮 要

作者首先總結羅馬七章 14 至 25 節解釋上的論爭，然後再從儒家角度詮釋這段經文。本文大部分是從中國基督徒角度以文本互涉方法詮釋羅馬書七章的「律法」和《論語》的「禮」。作者認為保羅眼中的屬靈生活基本上是屬於群體和倫理層面的，其次才是個人和禮儀層面。這觀點是從儒家的「禮」的角度出發。要過有「禮」的生活，就是一種過培養但不假飾的人際關係，透過蘊含在敬虔尊嚴自然協調而表現出來。這與律己以嚴，待人以寬的做法相同。

這解釋提出一個詮釋的含意：宗教人士遇到的最大難題，就是這些承繼了歷史悠久的神聖傳統和宗教價值觀，有所謂敬虔和宗教情操的人，他們以取悅神為名去逼迫和傷害別人。換言之，愛神而不愛人、與神和好而與人不和是可能的。在亞太區不同信仰群體共存所引起的問題，正好說明這詮釋的含意。