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Jesus the Christ as a *Jun-Zi* in Confucian Perspectives

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A paper Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Theology & Seminary
of Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota, in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of the Master of Systematic Theology

**School of Theology & Seminary
Saint John's University
Collegeville, Minnesota
May 2009**

This paper was written under the direction of

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Jesus the Christ as a *Jun-Zi* in Confucian Perspectives

In this paper, I seek to understand who Jesus is, through the lenses of “*jun-zi* 君子” (best translated as gentleman), a discussion and comparison between the concept of personhood of the *jun-zi* in Confucianism perspectives and the story of Jesus in the New Testament, I believe there is the possibility and implication to present an excellent image of Jesus the Christ as a *jun-zi* within Confucian personhood. Jesus, his ethical norm, high moral standard and religious life are like Confucian *jun-zi*. If we evangelize or evaluate the concepts of traditional Chinese Confucian *jun-zi*, Jesus would appear as a Chinese face to us.

This paper may not be duplicated.

Jesus the Christ as a *Jun-Zi* in Confucian Perspective

I. Introduction

When Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” they replied, “Some say John the Baptist but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” Moreover, he said to them, “Who do you say that I am?” God revealed to Simon Peter the correct answer, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Mt 16:13-17, *NRSV*). From that moment until today, every generation, age and culture has sought to answer Jesus’ question. The Council of Chalcedon proclaimed that Jesus is the only-begotten Son of God in one person (*hypostasis* or *prosopon*) in two natures (*physeis*), complete human and complete deity.¹ However, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*² questions this proclamation asking, “Why the Saviour of the world was born in Asia, has until now remained largely unknown to the people of the continent”³. The fact is that “Jesus is often perceived as foreign to Asia”⁴. Among the reasons are “the absence of an appropriate adaptation to local cultures, and perhaps above all a lack of preparedness to encounter the great religions of Asia;”⁵ the repetition of exclusivist statements throughout the text of the document perhaps shows that the Church’s preparedness to encounter the

¹ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers Press, 1978), 30.

² JOHN PAUL II JOHN PAUL II, *POST-SYNODAL APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION ECCLESIA IN ASIA OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II JOHN PAUL II, TO THE BISHOPS, PRIESTS AND DEACONS, MEN AND WOMEN IN THE CONSECRATED LIFE AND ALL THE LAY FAITHFUL ON JESUS CHRIST THE SAVIOUR AND HIS MISSION OF LOVE AND SERVICE IN ASIA*, (6, November, 1999), No 2.

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_06111999_ecclesia-in-asia_en.html

³ *Ibid*, No 2.

⁴ *Ibid*, No 20.

⁵ *Ibid*, No. 9.

great religions of Asia has not improved. Peter Phan notes that since Christian mission in Asian was intimately bound with Western colonialism, Jesus has been called the Colonial Christ and all-powerful Lord conquering souls and empires for God and implanting his own church.⁶

It is very clear that the document suggests: “Jesus could be presented as the Incarnate Wisdom of God whose grace brings to fruition the ‘seeds’ of the divine Wisdom already present in the lives, religions and peoples of Asia”⁷. Furthermore, the document attributes to the Asian Bishops a desire to “rediscover the Asian countenance of Jesus”, though this is immediately identified as the challenge of how the cultures of Asia can grasp the universal saving significance of the mystery of Jesus⁸. In this spirit, as I seek to understand who Jesus is, I have chosen to see — Jesus as a “*jun-zi* 君子” (best translated as gentleman), based on traditional Confucianism and the life and work of Jesus to answer this question. This paper will initially explore a *jun-zi* from Confucian perspective. Second, it explores the possibility of viewing Jesus Christ as a *jun-zi*. Third, it concludes the research findings that Jesus Christ could be presented as a *jun-zi*.

II. A *jun-zi* in Confucian perspectives

Confucianism is the social, political, ethical, philosophical and religious system based on the teaching of Confucius (551-479 B.C.E) and his successors. Since the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.-220 C.E.), Confucianism was established as state cultural

⁶ Peter C Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face* (New York: ORBIS BOOKS PRESS, 2003), 98.

⁷ JOHN PAUL II JOHN PAUL II, 20.

⁸ *Ibid*, 20.

and religious orthodoxy and the Chinese people have been profoundly and indelibly influenced by their thought and way of life.⁹ For my limited purpose here, which is to build a Christology from the perspective of one particular Confucian theme, it is not necessary to analyze the whole Confucian social, political, ethical, philosophical and religious systems.

The Confucian central virtue is *ren*, variously translated as “humaneness,” “humanity,” “benevolence,” “virtue,” “kindness” and “goodness”. It is not a single virtue but a combination of many virtues. Asked what *ren* is, Confucius replies that it is the practice of the five virtues (courtesy, breadth, good faith, diligence and clemency)¹⁰. In practicing *ren*, one will become what Confucius regards as the ideal person - “*jun-zi*.” Originally, it designated a member of the aristocracy. Confucius used it to refer to character (Chinese: *de*) rather than birth¹¹. Now we will learn who could be a *jun-zi* by Confucianism.

A *jun-zi* would have an ethical order and a high moral standard. The whole foundation of traditional Chinese Confucian ethical order was based on the ideal of self-cultivation to discover what is morally right, that is the way of heaven. Confucius suggests that the way of heaven is through the study of the tradition, literature, rites, and music of the past (especially of the Zhou dynasty), because Heaven acted in history.¹² It was believed that “self-cultivation alone could solve all political

⁹ Phan, 126-127

¹⁰ *Analects*, XVII: 6. The *Analects and Mencius* were collected the most authentic sources for the life and teachings of Confucius. See *the Analects of Confucius*, trans. Arthur Waley (New York: Vintage Books, 1939).

¹¹ Phan, 129.

¹² *Analects*, VIII: 8.

problems and usher in the perfect society.”¹³ More specifically: “Wishing to govern well in their states, they would first regulate their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they would first cultivate their persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they would first rectify their minds.”¹⁴ When asked about government, Confucius replies: “let the prince be a prince, the minister a minister, the father a father, and the son a son”.¹⁵ Confucian society is regimented by correct relationship between sovereign and subject, between husband and wife, and between parents and children. Therefore, at any rate, for Confucius, filial piety is the foundation and apex of all virtues. Asked how one should treat one’s parents, the Master replies: “Never disobey!” and then adds: “While they live, serve them according to ritual. When they die, bury them according to ritual and sacrifice according to ritual.”¹⁶ To have filial piety is not simply to provide for the parents’ material needs but have respect for them.¹⁷ Filial piety takes precedence over public service, or more precisely, piety toward one’s parents makes a real contribution to the public welfare.

A Confucian *jun-zi*, as a standard bearer of the ethical order, was expected to possess a strong ethical conviction and refined moral sensitivity, in thought as well as in action. The Master (Confucius) said, “To subdue one’s self and return to propriety, is perfect virtue.”¹⁸ This included sacrificing himself to promote virtue: “The determined *jun-zi* of virtue will not seek to live at the expense of injuring their virtue.

¹³ William Theodore De Bary, Wing-tsit Chan, and Burton Watson, *Sources of Chinese Tradition* Vol. I (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 114.

¹⁴ De Bary, Chan, and Watson, 115.

¹⁵ *Analects*, XVII: 11.

¹⁶ *Analects*, XI: 5.

¹⁷ *Analects*, XI: 7.

¹⁸ *Analects*, XV: 7

They will even sacrifice their lives to preserve their virtue completely.”¹⁹ Moreover, the Master said, “A *jun-zi* does not, even for the space of a single meal, act contrary to virtue.”²⁰

A *jun-zi* was expected to conduct himself with the purity of thought and sincerity in purpose, at all times and under all circumstances. He was not only expected to abide by Confucian ethical rules, he was to live and personify them in his daily introspection. Theoretically, there was no distinction between the principle and practice of Confucianism. In practice, there is no distinction between knowing and actualizing Confucianism. If a *jun-zi* failed to live up to Confucian ethics, he would be called a “hypocrite.” Therefore, a *jun-zi* follows rules: he should be humble. He should not seek honor for himself;²¹ he should be fair-minded. He should not seek undeserved award and honor;²² he should be concerned with acting ethically and justly, i.e., “*pingyun*.”²³

A *jun-zi* was a trustee and defender of his endowed class interests, privileges and status. As a fiduciary, a *jun-zi* undertook an affirmative duty to set an example for others and a negative duty to avoid bringing the cultured class into disrepute. In this regard, a *jun-zi* was expected to act in a manner above reproach and to avoid the appearance of impropriety. Failing that, a *jun-zi* could be punished for the appearance of impropriety notwithstanding the lack of any actual wrongdoing. At times, the appearance of impropriety might be deemed to be a more serious transgression than

¹⁹ *Analects*, XV:7

²⁰ *Analects*, IV: 5

²¹ *Analects*, IV: 16.

²² Hao Jing Rong, *The Pinyin Chinese-English Dictionary* (Hong Kong: The Commercial Press, 1979), 285-312.

²³ Hao, 285-286.

the impropriety itself. Another key tenet of Confucian ethics is that he leads people by example. Thus it was said: “On his department there is nothing wrong; he rectifies all the people of the state. Yes; when the ruler, as a father, a son, and a brother, is a model, then the people imitate him.”²⁴

A *jun-zi* was expected to *bao*. The concept of “*bao*” or “requit” was a fundamental postulate in the Confucian ethical scheme.²⁵ The idea of *bao* generally required that the benefactor who received benefits from others show gratefulness by repaying.²⁶ Confucius said: “How will you then requite kindness? Requite injury with justice, and kindness with kindness.”²⁷ The idea and ideal of *bao* permeated every kind of relationship in China - emperor and subject, father and son, husband and wife, brother and brother, and between friends. Positively, the benefactor’s kindness, benevolence, and special considerations are repaid with gratitude and appreciation, manifested as loyalty and dedication by a *jun-zi*. Negatively, it means “*bao chou*” “to revenge (oneself)”. A Chinese saying claims that “a *jun-zi* would revenge his father’s death, until he would kill his father’s killer.”

A *jun-zi* was expected to keep to his role and place in society. A *jun-zi* was expected to keep to his place *shoufen*. In Chinese, the character *shou* is to hold or (keep). The character *fen* refers to one’s rightful entitlement. The phrase *shoufen* thus means to keep to what one is entitled to, not reaching beyond one’s limit or craving beyond one’s means.²⁸ The complementary idea is *anfen*. The character *an* is to be at

²⁴ De Bary, Chan, and Watson, 14-16.

²⁵ De Bary, Chan, and Watson, 26.

²⁶ Richard D. Alexander, *The Biology of Moral System* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter Press, 1987), 93-94.

²⁷ *Analects*, XIV: 36.

²⁸ 吴泽炎, *辞源*, (台湾:台湾商务出版社, 1993), 433.

peace with a given state of being, including one's station in life. Thus *anfen* is to be at ease with one's place in society, to be satisfied with what one has.²⁹ *Anfen* stands for *anfen-shouji* meaning "abide by the law and behave oneself". While *anfen* is to abide by the law or not go beyond one's bounds (i.e., keeping with external social norms), *shoufen* is to keep to one's place or know one's station in life (i.e. stick to one's internal moral compass).³⁰ An *Anfen-shouji Jun-Zi* would have to follow three rules. First, he should be comfortable in whatever station of life he found himself. Thus it was said, a *jun-zi* does what is proper to the station in which he is, he does not desire to go beyond this in a position of wealth and honor, and he does what is proper to a position of wealth and honor. In a poor and low position, he does what is proper to a poor and low position. A *jun-zi* can find himself in no situation in which he is not himself.³¹ Second, he ought not to aspire beyond his assigned place (role) in the society. Thus it was said: "A *jun-zi*, in his thoughts, does not go out of his place."³² Third, he should not over-reach into other people's office and affairs: "He who is not in any particular office has nothing to do with plans for the administration of its duties."³³

In addition to a philosophical level, "*anfen-shouji*" reflected and reinforced the traditional Chinese view of the world - there was a place for everything and everyone in the cosmic order. A person's place in the society was provided for by nature and

²⁹ 吴泽炎, 435.

³⁰ Hao, 202.

³¹ *The Doctrine of the Mean Chapter XIV: 2*. See, James Legge, trans. *The Four Books: The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean, Analects, The Works of Confucius*, (Taiwan: Culture Book Press, 1981).

³² *Analects*, XIV: 28.

³³ *Analects*, XIV: 27.

given at birth. A *jun-zi* was to follow the law of nature and not disrupt it.³⁴ Continuity was preferred over change. Harmony was stressed over asserting oneself. Stoicism in the face of adversity was better than doing something to change the order of things.³⁵ Thus it was said: “Let the states of equilibrium and harmony exist in perfection, and a happy order will prevail throughout heaven and earth, and all things will be nourished and flourish.”³⁶ Therefore, an *anfen jun-zi* was expected to deal with his personal problems and frustration privately and not display his anger publicly. He was further expected to assume responsibility for his own failures and not blame others for his own shortcomings.

Having the same meaning as “*shoufen*”, Confucius calls other words the “Rectification of names” which goes beyond the correct use of language and the need for words to correspond to reality. More important, it requires that people act according to their proper standing and relationship to others. More precisely, one’s social standing is determined by one’s relationship with others, and these in turn dictate certain duties that must be conscientiously carried out in order to achieve justice. In other words, there must be a “Rectification” between one’s relationship and one’s behavior.³⁷

A *jun-zi* was expected to exercise self-control. A *jun-zi* under Confucian rule was expected to be always in self-control. This means that he was expected to know what was right from wrong and act accordingly. Confucius said: “A *jun-zi* understands what

³⁴*The Doctrine of the Mean*, I:4. See, James Legge, trans. *The Four Books: The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean, Analects, The Works of Confucius*, (Taiwan: Culture Book Press, 1981).

³⁵ *Ibid*, I:4.

³⁶ *Ibid*, I:4

³⁷ Phan, 130.

is right.”³⁸ This also means that a *jun-zi* was always reflective and self-critical, to exercise personal and internal self-control. Confucius said rhetorically, “I have not yet seen one who could perceive his faults and inwardly accuse himself.”³⁹ A *jun-zi* makes demands on himself; the inferior man makes demands on others.”⁴⁰ When a *jun-zi* failed himself he was expected to take steps to ratify his own mistakes, including seeking internal-sanction and self-reform. “A *jun-zi* thinks of sanctions; the inferior man thinks of personal favors.”⁴¹ In practical terms, diligent self-control serves three functions: self-correct, self-regulation and self-examination. A *jun-zi* needs to control his own conduct and to correct his own mistakes in order to be an example to others. “If he cannot rectify himself, what has he to do with rectifying others?”⁴² Collaterally, “before a man can regulate and discipline others he must learn to regulate and discipline himself.”⁴³ Self-examination promotes self-confidence as it earned others’ respect and enhanced one’s public image. “When internal examination discovers nothing wrong, what is there to be anxious about, what is there to fear?”⁴⁴ These Confucian self-control principles derive from the larger principle that a *jun-zi* (gentleman) was expected to be always in pursuit of self-cultivation and perfection.⁴⁵

A *jun-zi* was expected to unite with heaven and to know the will of heaven. A *jun-zi* was expected to unite with God. The traditional Chinese idea is that human nature was originally good. The three characters which begin the Confucian classics

³⁸ *Analects*, IV:16

³⁹ *Analects*, V:26

⁴⁰ *Analects* XV:20.

⁴¹ *Analects* IV:11

⁴² *Analects* XIII:13

⁴³ De Bary, Chan, and Watson, 114.

⁴⁴ *Analects*, VII, 4:3.

⁴⁵ “*The Text of Confucius*” VI:4. See *The Four Books* (James Legge, trans. Taiwan: Culture Book Press, 1981).

read “At the beginning, human nature was good and honest”. The basic goodness of human nature was taken up by Mencius and Gau-tzu⁴⁶. Later the Chinese tradition advocates self-cultivation to achieve the perfect human life. As we see above, the core of Confucianism is “*ren*” that contains two meanings. One is to “gain your humanity through yourself” suggesting that if one wishes to achieve humanity, one must be benevolent; that is give of oneself. Another way to self-cultivation is to build and keep honest relations with others through the self-cultivation of the good. In *the Doctrine of the Mean*⁴⁷ it is stated that honest relations are cultivated through one's self. Honesty is to be drawn from one's natural instincts through careful contemplation. Besides the spirit being honest, all things of the world are also permeated with honesty; therefore, honesty is not only for self-cultivation but also for all things on earth. Honesty is internal and through self-cultivation yields kindheartedness. Honesty is also external and through the development of wisdom achieves all things on earth. Kindheartedness and wisdom are the intrinsic things of human nature; they are the things which unify the external and internal.⁴⁸ If such a word could be used in reference to Confucianism, it consists solely in realizing the full human potential in oneself through moral self-cultivation and assisting others to become a *jun-zi*.⁴⁹

A *jun-zi* was expected to know God's will. The ancient Chinese conceived of Heaven (God) as both a natural and supernatural entity. It is said that the sky was so high, huge, and mysterious that people were unable to touch and understand it, and

⁴⁶ Chinese Publishing House, ed. “Mencius” in *Concise Edition of the Chinese Philosophy* (Beijing: Chinese Publishing House, 1973), 6. 1-3.

⁴⁷ Zisi, “*Doctrine of the Mean*” in *Concise Edition of the Chinese Philosophy* (Beijing: Chinese Publishing House, 1973).

⁴⁸ Zisi, 579.

⁴⁹ Phan, 96.

yet, it controlled people's everyday lives and social events, such as changing society and the emperor.⁵⁰ In the *Analects*, besides referring to the sky, Heaven is the meaning of providence, nature and God. Heaven is the dispenser of life and death, wealth and rank.⁵¹ Confucius himself was unwilling to discover Heaven,⁵² though he admitted that heaven produced the virtue that was in him⁵³ and that he did not know the “decrees of Heaven” until the age of fifty.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, he believes if it is the will of Heaven that the way shall prevail, then the way shall prevail, if not then it must perish.⁵⁵ He even believes that he was known by Heaven.⁵⁶ As to the will of Heaven, a *jun-zi* must learn to know and submit to it patiently, because “he who has put himself in the wrong way with Heaven has no means of expiation left.”⁵⁷ Therefore, a *jun-zi* would achieve a full humanity and unite with God and know God’s will through his moral self-cultivation. A *jun-zi* would realize the greatest idea of Confucianism: “Inner Sage and Outer King”. The Inner Sage is one who has achieved virtue within self, and the Outer King is one who has done great deeds for the world.⁵⁸

In concluding this discussion of the Confucian *jun-zi*, the Confucian model of personhood is a *jun-zi*. A *jun-zi* is a person of *ren* which means full humanity. He has a profound knowledge of five classical books. He is a person of “*anfen-shouji*” and “*Rectification of names*”. Such a person is devoted to his self-cultivation commitment and holds a persevering determination toward his ethical stand and seeks the will of

⁵⁰ 孙星衍, *尚书今古文注疏*, 中华书局 1986 年版.

⁵¹ *Analects*, XII:5.

⁵² *Analects*, V:12.

⁵³ *Analects*, VII:22.

⁵⁴ *Analects*, II:4.

⁵⁵ *Analects*, XIV:38.

⁵⁶ *Analects*, XIV:37.

⁵⁷ *Analects*, III:13.

⁵⁸ Phan, 96.

Heaven. He would take every step in his life seriously and work very hard to make steady progress in order to make his dream come true. He always exercises self-control to take a right way of life according to the will of Heaven. Such a person is seldom relaxed; he is cautious and watchful over himself even when he is alone. He is a Master of life. He preaches what he has authentically practiced. He loves his parents and respects all people according to his social class level. He would feel splendid happiness by sharing his success with his family and friends. He would repay his benefactor's kindness, benevolence, and special considerations with gratitude and appreciation, manifested as loyalty and dedication. He would not do to others what he would not want others to do unto him; he would think about and bear in mind what others would like when he is pursuing his own advancement. He would take rules and rituals seriously and insist on them. He knows God's will and unites with God. He believes that "under the sky and on the earth all people are one family" and teaches that if everyone takes the duties of universal obligation according to ritual⁵⁹, they will get the perfect harmony in this world - the "Great Unity"⁶⁰ (Chinese "*da-tong*").

III. Jesus as a *jun-zi*

Raymond Brown's research tells us that scholarship has not accepted a universal position on the relationship of Jesus' own Christology to the Christology of his

⁵⁹ Phan, 130.

⁶⁰ The Great Unity was practiced, the world shared by all alike. The worthy and the able were promoted to office and people practiced good faith and lived in affection. Therefore they did not regard as parents only their parents, or as sons only their own sons. The aged found a fitting close to their lives; the robust their proper employment; the young were provided with an upbringing; the widow and the widower, the orphaned and the sick, with proper care. Men had their tasks and women had their hearths. They hated to see goods lying about in waste, yet they did not hoard them for themselves; they dislike the thought that their energies were not fully used, yet they used them not for their private ends. Therefore all evil plotting was prevented and thieves and rebels did not arise, so the people could leave their outer gates unbolted. This was the age of Great Unity. See Phan, 96-97.

followers.⁶¹ Even in the New Testament there is not a uniform Christology.⁶² Currently, some theologies use the approach of functional Christology by starting with the historical and human activities of Jesus in Nazareth, then moving to the divinity of Jesus. Ontological Christology deals with the person (essence, nature and will) of Christ. Definitely, the functional-ontological Christologies cannot be separated from each other, for they condition each other.⁶³ Karl Rahner has developed two basic approaches to Christology: Christology from above and Christology below. Christology from above is thinking about Jesus Christ by beginning with his divine nature and then moving on to understand the incarnation. The Church's teachings and various Christological statements engage me to use my language and culture to express the image of Jesus Christ as a *jun-zi* without distorting him (through a colonial and foreign image of Jesus), but by refining his image to that of a Chinese face of Jesus.

According to the Gospels, Jesus was born in a Jewish family at Bethlehem. He grew up in Nazareth and was called a Nazarene. After his birth, his mother Mary and his foster-father Joseph brought him up to Jerusalem for their purification according to the Law of Moses. They offered a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons to the Lord. He lived with his parents who were people in humble circumstances, artisans living by their labor. So we know that Jesus was reared in poverty, and was himself a mechanic, a worker in wood. According to Jewish tradition, he went to the Temple in

⁶¹ Raymond Brown, *Introduction to New Testament Christology*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 15.

⁶² Phan, 135.

⁶³ Walter Kasper, trans. Matthew O'Connell, *The God of Jesus Christ* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2007), 171.

Jerusalem every year with his parents. After the incident in the Temple, at the age of twelve, when he seemed to be causing his parents grief by remaining behind in Jerusalem without their knowledge, the child Jesus was said to return home and there “was obedient to them” and “increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor” (Lk 2:51-52). Hence, he was familiar with all the Jewish traditions regarding honoring God and family life with the injunction of the Torah concerning the duties of children towards their parents.⁶⁴ He certainly knew the commands, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mk 12:29-30) and “honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you” (Dt 5:16).

Like a Chinese *jun-zi*, Jesus had Jewish ethical norms and a high moral standard, yet according to his family background, he was not a *jun-zi* as a member of the aristocracy. Indeed he was a perfect *jun-zi* with his virtue. He was presented in the Temple. His parents offered a sacrifice to God according to the Law of Moses. He practiced his religious tradition and went to Temple every year. He cultivated himself and learned his Jewish Torah which God’s action presents in his life and their history. He observed God’s commandments to honor God with his heart, soul, mind and strength and respected and obeyed his parents. Especially, after the incident in the Temple at the age of twelve, he became an “*anfen shouji*” person; he completely

⁶⁴ Phan, 136.

obeyed his parents and increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

Jesus Christ was a *jun-zi* for his virtue of “*ren*”-- “benevolence (Mt 20:28, Lk 19:10),” “kindness (Mt 8:1-4, 14:13-21, Jn 4:4-39),” “goodness (Mt 22:35-40, Jn 6:35),” “tenderness (Mt 12:46-50, Lk 5:12-16),” “compassion (Lk 5:12-14, 7:11-15, Jn 11: 33-38)” and “full humility (Mt 20:25-28, 23:10-12, Mk 9:33-35, Lk 18:9-14)”. Jesus was unlike any religious leader of his time. He was the most impartial person that the world has ever known. He chose for his followers and companions the most inconspicuous and humble men of his day, eleven fishermen and one tax-collector. He had a special and particular liking for poor. He loved to keep company with the sinners, the marginalized of human society. He loved children. He said: “Let the children come to me; and do not stop them” (Mt 9:14). He had compassion for the widow at Nain and her dead son (Lk 7:13-15). He was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved by the death of his beloved friend Lazarus and cried for him (Jn 11: 33-38). “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without shepherd” (Mt 9:36). There are in the Four Gospels many recorded incidents which make us marvel at the profound tenderness and compassion of Jesus. A leper came to him and said, “Lord, if you choose me, you can make me clean” (Lk 5:12). Jesus, touched with compassion, said, “I do choose, be made clean” (Lk 5:13). To the woman who touched him he said, “Daughter, your faith has made you well, go in peace” (Mk 5: 34). Of the sinful woman who shed tears over his feet and wiped them with her hair, Jesus said, “Because she loved much she is

forgiven much” (Lk 7: 47). The rank and file of the religious leaders of Jesus’ day found fault with him because they thought a religious leader should associate only with the refined, cultured and high class of human society. To their criticism he retorted, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what it is, I want mercy and not sacrifices, the Son of Man came to call the sinners and not the righteous to repentance” (Mt 9:12-13). Jesus was a real *jun-zi* for his virtue of “*ren*”. He loved all people regardless of gender and social class, especially and particularly the so-called sinners and religious and social marginalized. By contrast, Confucian *jun-zi* prefers to love good people and persons who had same social class with him. He would overtly express his disapproval of bad actions and bad people.⁶⁵ Therefore, Jesus totally broke Confucian *jun-zi*’s conditional love and determined love. He evaluates a high step of the virtue of Confucian *jun-zi*.

Jesus was also a humble *jun-zi*. He asked nothing for himself. All the world’s historic leaders set out to conquer people for selfish purposes: they wanted to dominate men and women, to annex continents, to enslave people, to have prestige by forced allegiance. But he emptied himself (*Kenosis*) from all worldly glory, disdained riches, and charged no fee for his services. To the man who would follow him for mercenary purposes, Jesus said, “Foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has no where to lay his head” (Mt 8:20). He denounced with all the power at his command the corrupt religious practices of his day, the self-honoring and self-righteous who put worldly glory above that of God’s. Jesus did not come to get,

⁶⁵ *Analects*, IV:3

but to “give!” “I come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly” (Jn 10:10). He denounced self-honoring and laid bare and showed by the way he lived that indeed “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Lk 6:38, 12:23). The message of Jesus’ drawing power is derived from the fact that the more you give the richer you become, and the more you collect the poorer you are.

Jesus was unlike Confucian *jun-zi* in regard to “*bao*” (to be served) from social service and others who have received benevolence from him. On the other hand, again Jesus did not come to be served, but serve (Mt 20:28). He taught his disciples to pay the Temple taxes (Mt 17: 24-27) and pay taxes to the emperor. He said, “Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mk 12:13). Moreover, he said, “when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing” (Mt 6:3). He was also unlike Confucian *jun-zi* for “*bao chou*” “to revenge (oneself).” Jesus taught,

You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’. But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on (your) right cheek, turn the other one to him as well. If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand him your cloak as well. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for two miles..... You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you..... For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? (Mt 5:38-47)

Confucian golden rule is, “Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you.”⁶⁶ However, Jesus teaches, “And as you wish that men would do to you, do so to them” (Lk 6:31). This powerful teaching I have never found in traditional Chinese

⁶⁶ *Analects* XV:23

culture. Jesus' teaching lifted Confucian virtue "*bao*" up a high step. Jesus himself came to fulfill the law and the prophets (Mt 5:17-20). His life also perfectly embodied the commandment to love. As the lover of men and women, Jesus heals the afflicted (Mt 4:23-25, 8:2-17; etc.) and offers encouragement (Mt 6:2 -34, 7:7-11). He forgives sin (Mt 9:1-8) and exhibits mercy (Mt 9:10-13, 27-31, 12:1-8, 12: 29-23). He shows compassion (Mt 9:36, 12:20, 14:14, 15:32) and gives rest to the weary (Mt 20:28, 26:28). Jesus is the exemplar in love. It follows that Matthew would have concurred with the author of 1 John, who wrote, "We love, because he first loved us".

Jesus was a "*shoufen jun-zi*" to keep his role and place and take his "Rectification of names" for performing his duties in all society. He learned and observed Torah and respected his parents. He taught his disciples to pay taxes and love their neighbors as themselves, even love their enemies. On the other hand, Jesus seemed angry with his mother for even seeking him at the age of twelve, when he went missing for several days, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Lk 2:49). At the famous wedding in Cana, when his mother mentioned that the wine gave out, Jesus replied: "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come" (Jn 2:4). He also predicted that his teachings would lead to brother killing brother (Matthew 10:21) and followers hating members of their own family (Luke 14:26). When we read these statements to be against filial piety and ethical norms, how do we understand that Jesus was a *jun-zi*?

Peter Phan insists that these should not be taken as denying respect and love toward one's parents; Jesus behaved toward his heavenly father with the most tender

love and affection, according to John's Gospel which describes in the most intimate terms the relationship between Jesus and the Father. Moreover, the synoptic gospels tell us that Jesus called God Abba (Mk 14:36). He totally communicated with his heavenly Father (Mt 26:39). In the garden of Gethsemane, he manifested complete obedience to his heavenly Father (Mt 26:39). And dying on the cross, he thoroughly entrusted himself to his Father (Lk 23:46).⁶⁷ Jesus' attitudes seem a paradox for obeying the Law of Moses and the Chinese ethical norms. In fact this attitude shows Jesus had a special identity---humanity and divinity. He completely obeyed his heavenly Father's commands, so that he could lead a people to perfection as God desired. Furthermore, Raymond Brown's statements can help us to understand these questions. He insists that Mark or other synoptic gospels emphasize Jesus as true man. Evangelists showed Jesus' limited knowledge: Jesus does not know who touched him (Mk 5: 30-33, Lk 8:45-47, Matt 9:22), and he does not give detailed description of the afterlife (Mk 9:48, Matt 25:41, 8:12 and 13:42, Lk 13: 28), the prediction of the betrayer, Judas (Mk 14:10-11, Matt 26:25, Jn 6: 70-71 and 13: 27) or of his passion, crucifixion, and resurrection.⁶⁸ But this limited knowledge of Jesus is not present in John's Gospel; Johannine Jesus knows all things, such as the betrayer Judas, his hour, and so on. Because the Johannine Gospel colors Jesus as true God, there are no limitations for Jesus. Brown says that no one Gospel would enable us to see the whole picture, and only when the four are kept in tension among themselves has the church

⁶⁷ Phan, 139.

⁶⁸ Brown, 32, 42, 49

come to appreciate who Jesus is.⁶⁹ Therefore, each individual evangelist wished to interpret and preach Jesus to his particular and different audiences. We receive the whole picture of Jesus--- full humanity and full divinity from the four Gospels. We understand that Jesus had two natures (human and divine) in one person. When we read those statements against filial piety, we should know that Jesus did not just have a human nature, but also a divine nature. He wanted us to live out a perfect life as his heavenly Father's image. So Jesus was a perfect *jun-zi* to realize his duties according to his “*shoufen*” and “Rectification of names” --- humanity and divinity to perform his mission in the world.

Jesus was unlike a *jun-zi* exercising self-control for discerning a right moral action from wrong. A *jun-zi* corrected his action in order to be an example to others. Because Confucian *jun-zi* did not know where the original wrong comes from, he was cautious and watchful over himself even when he was alone.⁷⁰ Because of sinful human nature after the fall, humans cannot achieve full humanity without God's grace. Jesus was sinless. Jesus never did anything wrong, not even once. No matter what temptations came to him, he refused to sin. He lived among us without sin. He has always remained pure and perfect *jun-zi*. Not only is Jesus Christ the greatest *jun-zi* that ever lived, he is also an example for all people.

Jesus was unlike a *jun-zi* needing to know the will of heaven and unite with heaven through his self-cultivation or by heaven's benevolence. Jesus was a God. He came from God, descended from heaven, and came in the flesh. For the Word became

⁶⁹ Brown, 123-124.

⁷⁰ *The Great Learning*, VI. See, James Legge, trans. *The Four Books: The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean, Analects, The Works of Confucius*, (Taiwan: Culture Book Press, 1981).

flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. . . And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace (Jn 1:1-18). He became a true *jun-zi*. He was not only a *jun-zi* of the “Inner Sage and Outer King” who did the great deeds for the world, but he was true God as well as true human who came to proclaim the reign of God.

Again, he lived among us without sin. He also suffered the same kind of physical pains that we suffer. He also experienced emotional pain. He even wept about the city of Jerusalem (Jn 11:35). He was ignored, unappreciated, unloved, misunderstood, and even despised -- even though he did nothing wrong, and always loved everyone (1 Pet 2:23). He had all glory and honor! He did not seek self-honoring. He let himself be like a perfect, innocent lamb that hurt no one; he was crucified, died and resurrected to reveal God’s love for us. Therefore, he realized his teachings, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” (Jn 15:13). Because Brown insists that Jesus was a true man, his teachings are truly persuasive, for we would know that he laid down his life in agony as we lay ours down. Jesus shows us what it is to be human and God, because he is God. He brings the kingdom for us, which offers a life not shaped by sin, but shaped by God’s love.⁷¹

Right now, he lives in Heaven with his heavenly Father and intercedes for us (Rom 8:34). The Bible tells us that one day he will return to earth to become the rightful king of the entire world. The earth will be filled with God’s glory and justice. Life will become peace and happiness. Even the dangerous animals will become

⁷¹ Brown, 151.

harmless (the wolf will lie down with the lamb, Isa 11:6). There would be a hope for living.

IV. Conclusion

Through a discussion and comparison between the concept of personhood of the *jun-zi* in Confucianism perspectives and the story of Jesus in the New Testament, I believe there is the possibility and implication to present an excellent image of Jesus the Christ as a *jun-zi* within Confucian personhood. Jesus, his ethical norm, high moral standard and religious life are like Confucian *jun-zi*. If we evangelize⁷² or evaluate the concepts of traditional Chinese Confucian *jun-zi*, Jesus would appear as a Chinese face to us. He is the greatest master that he attained a state of the perfection of the human character. Jesus is a real *jun-zi* for his virtue of “*ren*”. He loved all people regardless to gender and social class, especially and particularly the so-called sinners and religious and social marginalized. He is a *jun-zi* united with God. He raises the traditional Chinese attitude “Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you” by the more positive commands “whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them” (Matt 7:12), and furthermore “love your neighbors as your self.” His powerful teaching gives people hope to live, “all nations are brothers and sisters” and “under the sky and on the earth we are one family” in perfect harmony in this world - the “Great Unity” (Chinese “*da-tong*”). Furthermore, Only He could save

⁷² As Francis emphasizes in his book, *Shape a Circle Ever Wider*, we also need to be conscious of the fact that not everyone necessarily sees the world in the same way. All cultures are capable of expressing the good news of Christ. At same time, all cultures are in need of being continually evangelized – even those that have a long history of contact with Christianity. Mark R. Francis, *Shape a Circle Ever Wider: Liturgical Inculturation in the United States*, (Chicago: Archdiocese of Chicago, Liturgy Training Publications, 2000), 18.

human beings, because He was and is God. Because of the natural human condition and sinfulness, we understand, as it is stated, he suffered, was crucified, died and was buried. On the third day He rose again, ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end. I believe that Jesus Christ gives human beings hope of eternal life. He became man to divinize humanity. Human beings can share God's divinity and obtain the eternal life through His grace. Jesus does not only fulfill all Chinese people's desire eternal life and reestablish the "golden age of Great Unity" for the common good and absence of evil. He also gives all Chinese people a hope that each person will be united with God and the ultimate happiness for humanity--- the reign of God.⁷³

⁷³ Phan, 97.

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