INFLUENCE OF THE BIBLE AND CONFUCIUS ANALECTS
(Investigation into the Roots of Differences between Chinese and American values)

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Abstract

There are lots of differences between the U.S. and China, one of these notable differences is their traditional values. The origins of their values are different from each other, which have influenced people in different ways. These differences can lead to cultural misunderstanding, but there still stand chances for people to seek harmony in diversity. This paper intends to find similarities in differences from the perspective of traditional values showed in the books of *the Bible* and *Confucius Analects*. Based on the idea that different nations are characterized by the cultivation of different values, this paper will show different influences reflected in two countries. Meanwhile a trend of integration is emerging. Despite all the differences, the most significant fact is that people learn from each other out of sincerity and respect, and in turn the process itself contributes to cultural prosperity.
Key Words

The Bible
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Similarities
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Introduction

On the threshold of this new era, the world is becoming an integrated entity. This trend is clearer as time goes by. Today, it is impossible for any nation’s culture to develop without absorbing the essence of other cultures. This paper intend to revitalize those excellent features in American and Chinese cultures to find similarities in differences. The ultimate goal is to develop cultural harmony in diversity. The Bible and the Confucius Analects are two influential books in the U.S. and China. Nowadays ideas and values in the Bible and the Confucius Analects individualism, collectivism, self-reliance and consideration are still applicable. Though there are lots of barriers and obstacles in intercultural communication chances are that we can break them. As a collectivist country, public consciousness of privacy are increased extensively day by day in China. Meanwhile Confucius ideas of sincerity, correctness of social relationships are accepted by Americans. For those who want to know more about a totally different culture, value is an important factor. To avoid cultural misunderstandings and boost intercommunication, the author hope people can find ways to develop cultural harmony in diversity by finding more similarities in differences. It is by learning from each other, share with one another that people in America and China gain mutual benefit from cultural exchange.
People’s knowledge about how did different languages come into being is unclear. In *the Bible*, at first the whole earth was of one language and of one speech. When people travelled east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and they decided to build a city and a tower whose top reaches to the sky, but these all ruined after God saw through their intention. God went down and confused their language, so that they could not understand each other’s speech. He scattered them abroad on the surface of all the earth. They said, "Let’s make ourselves a name, lest we be scattered abroad on the surface of the whole earth.” They may be scattered abroad, but they do make themselves a name eventually. Their efforts to making the whole world a better place never stop. Tough God was afraid when people tried to break down the barrier of communication, he could hardly prevent people from craving communication and unity. With the development of the science and technology, the estrangement between people from different countries are reducing by the day. In the year of 1905, Zamenhof created Esperanto was one leap of realizing the unity of global language. Now, distance of communication between people has shortened because of the development of the Internet. The world is becoming an integrated entity, this trend is irresistible, no one can keep this world from moving forward, not even God.

America and China are two different nations characterized by the cultivation of different cultures. The United States of America is currently the most powerful and influential country in the world. Religion has been part of American social and cultural life from the very beginning. It has played an important role in shaping the
national character in the U.S. One survey shows that fully 92 percent of American said they believe in God. Though later, American religion had become much more varied in its make-up, American, by and large, still follow the long-held conviction—“In God we trust.” American values and ethics have been greatly influenced by the Judeo-Christian traditions and *the Bible*, which is widely regarded as a book of great value. It is also taken as an encyclopedia of life. It has influenced people throughout the ages with its unending significance. So far, values in *the Bible* has been developed as individual freedom, equality, self-reliance, responsibility, justice. Some of them are becoming American character. Unlike values in America, Chinese values are tightly intertwined with Confucianism, which has greatly influenced Chinese thinking patterns. Confucian philosophy, which Chinese ethics are deeply rooted for thousand years, was developed from Confucius teaching collected in *Confucius Analects*. Confucius emphasized on justice, sincerity, correctness of social relationships and so on. The main ideas of Confucius Analects are 仁 (humanity), 忠 (loyalty), 孝 (filial piety), 礼 (ritual norms), 中庸 (reconciliation between extremes or opposites) and 仁政 (enlightened and benevolent governance with rites and morality). Among all values in *Confucius Analects*, collectivism, modesty, loyalty and consideration, benevolence, are closely interrelated to ordinary people.

**INDIVIDUALISM & COLLECTIVISM**

Take a good look at *the Declaration of Independence*, main aspects of American
value can be found easily in it, ”We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. ”As a core value, individualism emphasizes individual freedom, self-reliance, privacy, equality, which are reflected in American's daily life. Individualism has a long history in American culture, it contains the meaning of pursuing individual interests and undertake ones own responsibility at the same time. Individual freedom is the cornerstone of individualism. Freedom refer to the human desire and the ability of all individuals to control their own destiny without outside interference from the government, ruling class, the church, or any other authority. Self-reliance is generally regarded as the basic of individual freedom. It was brought along in the early and mid-19th century by American settlers, who had to learn to depend on themselves more than others. As a result, they developed a “D.I.Y.” spirit by building their own houses, inventing their own tools, making their own clothes… Today, this strong belief is still be stressed as a traditional value. Children over the age of 18 often make living by taking part-time jobs and make decisions on their own. Moreover, Americans value the idea of privacy so much. In Genesis of Bible, the first thing that Adam and Eva did after they tasting fruit of wisdom was picked leaves to cover their bodies because of awareness of privacy. Taboos like age, income, marriage…still not on the list of favorite topics in the U.S. This makes Americans look unapproachable sometimes, in fact, they just don’t feel like being watching or bothered by others. ”All men are created equal.” is stated in the Declaration of Independence of the USA. Equality, as a indispensable
value in America, means that each individual has the right to equal opportunity and freedom from any kind of discrimination, thus, equality is the idea of equal treatment and respect. Everyone can achieve his “American dream” in the USA as long as he puts all of effort to it. This may explain why immigrants have traditionally been drawn to this miracle land.

Collectivism can be found everywhere in Chinese daily life. Different from individualism in American society, collectivism concentrate on the whole community’s interests more than individual’s. To achieve uniformity and conformity, all the individuals must cooperate with each other for a common goal. Thus, Chinese culture is labeled as “we” culture. Chinese people are good at establishing harmonious relations, they believe that individual cannot survive in any isolated way of life, only when they stick together, consider their community as a whole can they survive and thrive. To get along with others, they should be more considerate of others than of themselves. In Chinese literature, it is easy to find proverbs or parables show proof of collectivism, such as 人多力量大 (many hands make light work); 众人拾柴火焰高 (a lot of people to collect wood make a continuous fire); 独木不成林 (one person alone cannot accomplish much). In some ways, loyalty and consideration are the outcome of collectivism. Loyalty means to put oneself in the position of others and offer help to achieve their goals. Consideration is necessary when people deal with relations between friends and family members in collectivist society. Another special characteristic belongs with Chinese people is modesty. Advocated by the greatest thinker, educator and philosopher Confucius, modesty has been brought along and
Confucius thought that modesty is a quality against pride. For a society to sustain itself, modesty is required, because pride resulting in complacence and then lead to destruction, as in the saying: 満招损，谦受益 (Complacency spells loss while modesty brings progress). Last but not least, benevolence, also known as humanity is also deeply rooted in China. Confucius once said, ”Benevolence is the humanity.” It is believed that benevolence is the important procedure to realize the highest goal to the effect that “the whole world is one community.” Benevolence means to love people, it can be accumulated bit by bit in daily life by putting oneself in the place of another. Now, people in China and Chinese communities overseas their every act may be originated in *Confucius Analects*.

Chinese nation has a long history, despite the ups and downs in lives, Chinese has always been idealistic, and have never stopped to learn from others. ”Wherever three persons come together, one of them will surely be able to teach me something.” Confucius once said, ”I will pick out his good points and emulate them, as for his bad points, I will reform.”(三人行，必有我师焉，择其善者而从之，其不善者而改之) By saying this Confucius meant we should always be ready to learn from others. Chinese people have been following this principle not only in their dealing with person around but also at the relationship to other countries. With reform and the opening-up policy, China has taken in many exotic features. For example, there was no such word or concept like privacy in Chinese traditional culture. It was not until 1983 that the term “privacy” was first showed in Chinese dictionary. It is said that privacy was being
held back by the collectivism, but with the development of cross-cultural communication, people’s awareness of privacy has been increased, especially the young generation. They start to find ways to defend their rights of privacy. Take the changing lives of Chinese undergraduates for another example, since the beginning of the Chinese reform and opening-up policy, the values of Chinese undergraduates have changed tremendously, they are no longer a group of young people who are over-conventional in feudal society. Nowadays, students in Chinese universities and colleges are very open-minded, they accept new things easily, especially when they are coping with culture from America. One survey made in Xi’an International University shows that more than half of the undergraduates prefer American pop music, movies, TV series now, from which they find ideal ways to release pressure. They consider American lifestyle a more comfortable way to live life without thinking too much and just enjoy the moment which is totally different from old Chinese lifestyle. They talk about NBA on the dinner table in KFC, they wear T-Shirts with printed pictures of American celebrities, features, symbols on them, they are huge fans of Taylor Swift, Katy Perry, Rihanna, Eminem. Even cheerleaders are becoming popular in universities and colleges. Meanwhile, many Chinese characteristics appear in American society. The popular drama series REVENGE started with one proverb from the Confucius Analects, ”Before you embark on a journey of revenge, dig two graves.” (子曰: “攻乎异端，斯害己也。”) They also quote, ” Do unto others” from the Bible, coincidentally, back in 504 BC Confucius hold one similar view, “己所不欲，勿施于人。“(Do not do to others what you don’t want to do.) Examples can be found
in other forms, for instance, there is a proverb in the lyrics of a famous song ROLLING IN THE DEEP, “You reap just what you’ve sown.” Correspondingly, Chinese version of this proverb is “自食其果”, which share the exactly same meaning. The meaning behind these proverbs have influenced people in not only America but also China down the ages.

In conclusion, different values in various cultures are precious heritage to any of nations. Chinese culture has enriched itself by absorbing new elements from American culture, and in turn has contributed to the prosperity of American culture and vice versa. As a matter of fact, people learn from each other out of sincerity and respect, and in turn the process itself contributes to cultural prosperity.

With the exchange of cultures, lots of problems are emerging in the process of intercommunication. Like every sword has its two sides, culture has its excellent and vulgar aspects. Due to globalization, cultural exchange have made an inexorable march of progress. How to treat exotic cultures and values properly has become an irresistible problem. Under the circumstances, culture and value should be treated rationally, borrowed and learned selectively, instead of accepted blindly and passively. To take a correct attitude towards traditional culture, one should keep a clear head and abandon those thoughts behind the times instead of maintain those decadent ideology and carry forward the rubbishy tradition simply because they come from classical works. Only in this way can people in the U.S. and China mutually benefit from cross-cultural exchange.
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