

## The contemporary value of Confucius' ethical thought

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**Abstract.** Confucius is a famous thinker in the history of our country. His ethical thought has a very important impacts on the contemporary society and culture. And the ethical thought of the “Li” and the “Ren” is far-reaching significance and great importance in contemporary society. The relationship between the “Li” and the “Ren” is a kind of mutual relation, which has great significance to the construction of harmonious and stable family relations, interpersonal relations and social relations.

### 1. Introduction

Confucius' ethical thought is the foundation and subject of the formation of Chinese moral thought, the ethical thought of the “Li” and the “Ren” is the core. The ethical thought of the “Li” and the “Ren” in Confucius was put forward in order to relieve interpersonal and social relations and meet the needs of the society at that time. And it reflects its value function in the construction of harmonious and stable family relations, interpersonal relations and social relations.

### 2. The Background of Confucius' Ethical Thought

Confucius lived in the Spring and Autumn Period. With the emergence of advanced means of production, sharp contradictions emerged between the working people and the rulers. At the same time, the system of the “Li” and the “music” also disintegrated, so people's moral consciousness began to be generally missing, the society urgently needed new management ideas and methods to alleviate the contradictions between different social strata, and made the social strata to start the moral education. Therefore, Confucius' ethical thought came into being.

### 3. The Connotation of Confucius' Ethical Thought

Confucius' ethical thought start from the concept of the “Li” and proceeds to the concept of the “Ren”. The “Li” has the meaning of etiquette and politeness, and the “Ren” is the highest state that people want to achieve. There is a mutual relationship between the “Li” and the “Ren”, and the ethical thought of “the unity of Ren and Li” plays a vital role in the formation and development of Confucius' ethical thought.

#### 3.1 The Meaning and Characteristics of the Thought of the “Li”

The “Li” has the narrow and broad two senses. The narrow sense of the “Li”, that is etiquette; In a broad sense, the “Li” refers to the degree of order. Before Confucius, there was a distinction between the “Li” and the “Yi”. For example, *Zuo Zhuan: the fifth year of Zhao Gong*, Lord hou of the state of the Jin recorded the words of Shu Qi: Isn't Lord hou of the state of the Lu also good at the “Li”? Shu Qi said: Lu knows the “Li”. Lord hou of the state of the Jin asked: What's it? From the outskirts of the labor as a bribe to the state. And no people broke the rules, why doesn't know the “Li”? Shu Qi said: It is the “Yi”, not may be called the “Li”...” (Lao Siguang, 2015, pp. 84-85). The meaning of the “Li” lies in the establishment of a stable order, only in a stable order, it can “keep its country, carry out its decree, without losing its people”. In today's life, the “Li” also refers to people's daily communication etiquette. That is to deal with the relationship between people in daily communication, we should pay attention to politeness.

The characteristics of the thought of the “Li” are embodied in two aspects. First of all, the “Li” is the “Name”, its purpose is to coordinate all kinds of relations, so that people do their jobs. Confucius put forward that “only by rectifying the name can we save the collapse of order and promote the revival of the “Li” of the Zhou.” (Department of Philosophy, 2004, pp. 17). Secondly, the “Li” is the “politeness”. We should be polite to the working people and respect their work results, which is also advocated by the current society.

### **3.2 The Meaning and Characteristics of the Thought of “Ren”**

Confucius’ thought of the “Ren” has a wide range of meanings and functions in different stages. First of all, Confucius’ thought of the “Ren” advocated the “love people” as the “Ren”. Confucius believed that people should be cared for before property at all times. Secondly, taking the “deny self and return to propriety” as the “Ren”. Confucius emphasized the “Ren”. That is to learn to use what you learn, not to do it for others to see. The process of conforming to and carrying out the “Li” is the process of humanization and the external manifestation of the “Li” under special social conditions. (Guo Qiyong, 2006, pp. 28-29). Thirdly, the “Zhong” and the “Shu” are closed to the “Ren”. The “Zhong” also means doing your best. The “Shu” means to push one’s own heart. The combination of the two is called “the way of Zhong and Shu”. “In fact, there is the “Zhong” in the “Shu” and the “Shu” in the “Zhong”. It is difficult to separate “do yourself” from “push yourself”. This is the two sides of the “Ren”. This is not only the principle of the “Ren” between people, but also the principle of mutual relations between countries, nations and cultures, as well as the universal harmony between human beings and nature. (Guo Qiyong, 2006, pp. 30). Finally, the “Ren” is juxtaposed with the “Yi”, the “Li” the “Zhi” the “Xin”. Confucius would not belittle people’s material interests to satisfy their desires, but believed that people should “take the reason, section to ceremony”.

The realm of the “Ren” takes the “Sheng” as the highest, which is also the embodiment of the characteristics of the “Ren”. In the specific context, Confucius regarded the “Ren” and the “Sheng” as the same realm, the highest realm of personality. humanity is called “a man of achievement”, which is the all-powerful man. “a man of achievement” is a collection of knowledge, incorruptibility, courage, versatility in a body. This is a realistic, practical, and well-rounded person who has both virtue, ability, and skill. He is also known as a worthy”. (Guo Qiyong, 2006, pp. 31-32). The “Ren” is also called the gentleman, it is beyond the natural person’s moral some higher morality, and it is different from evil person and worthy. Sage and gentleman are real people, they are the same as real people in the natural desire, their noble is only different in the pursuit of spiritual realm, that is beyond nature and utility.

### **3.3 The Dialectical Unity Relationship Between the “Li” and the “Ren”**

The relationship between the “Li” and the “Ren” is important and significant to the formation and development of Confucius’ ethical thought. “Confucius believed that the relationship between the “Ren” and the “Li” was an interrelationship, which is the “Ren” was the internal basis of the “Li”, and the “Ren” made the observance of the “Li” become a moral consciousness from the heart. The “Li” is the concrete moral standard of the “Ren” externalized and the basic guarantee of the “Ren” realization. The two are not contradictory to each other. They can depend on each other and go hand in hand.” (Li Zhengyu, 2014, pp.10-11).

The “Ren” is absolute, the “Li” is relative; the “Ren” is common way, the “Li” is changing way; the “Ren” is subjective while the “Li” is objective. The “Ren” embodies the unity of the “Ren” and the “Li”, and also shows that the “Ren” is the internal basis of the “Li”.

## **4. The Contemporary Value of Confucius’ Ethical Thought**

Confucius’ ethical thought of the “Li” and the “Ren” has played a positive role in People’s Daily life. It mainly reflects the contemporary value of Confucius’ ethical thought from the three aspects of harmonious family, interpersonal and social relations. Only when family relations and interpersonal relations are harmonious and stable, social relations can be more harmonious and

stable. Therefore, it is the great value for the establishment of harmonious and stable social relations to closely link Confucius' ethical thoughts of the "Li" and the "Ren".

#### **4.1 Built a harmonious and stable family relationship**

Confucius advocated to maintain family harmony and stability, filial piety should be adhered. *The Analects* of Confucius said: "the Gentleman works business, the establishment of the "Dao", its for the root of the "Ren"." (Cheng Changming. 1996). That is to say, Confucius believed that every virtuous person should honor his parents and love his elder brother, be kind to his parents, live in harmony with them, be humble and happy. Confucius called for a harmonious and stable family relationship: respect for elders, harmony with parents, brothers and sisters, so that the whole family is harmonious and stable. Family harmony and stability is the basis and premise of social harmony and stability.

#### **4.2 Built a Harmonious and Stable Interpersonal Relationship**

In modern society, interpersonal relationship is very important. Confucius believed that a gentleman should not only have the virtue of the "Ren", but also the morality of the "Yi" and treat others with the "Li". Confucius put forward that the "Li" should be used as the standard to realize the distribution of social benefits to regulate the conflict of interests between human and society, and the "Yi" and the "Li" should be unified. Therefore, Confucius believed that human relations were harmonious and unified under the regulation and restriction of the "Li". It is of great significance to realize ideal personality, perfect spiritual realm and establish harmonious and stable interpersonal relationship.

#### **4.3 Built Harmonious and Stable Social Relations**

The construction of harmonious and stable social relations, that is to say, the construction of a society suitable for the moral behavior of the present society, it should follow the Confucian ethical thought of the concept of the "Li". Confucius believed that as a member of society, people should abide by and perform a series of human behavior norms, namely the "Li". The "Li" is a reliable guarantee to maintain social order. People should do things according to the requirements and norms of the "Li". A real person, who knows what to do and what not to do and follows moral principles is valuable and worthy of respect. The unity of the "Li" and the "Ren" is the true embodiment of the value of Confucius' ethical thought.

### **5. Summary**

Confucius' ethical thought has always occupied an important position in the society, which the ethical thought of the "Li" and the "Ren" is far-reaching significance and have important value in the development of contemporary society. The ethical thought of the "Li" and the "Ren" has established the characteristics of human external behavior norms, which first highlight the value of human beings. Secondly, while affirming the individual value of human beings, they also highlight the social value of human beings. The unity of the "Li" and the "Ren" is the true embodiment of the value of Confucius' ethical thought. Therefore, only when family relations and interpersonal relations are harmonious and stable, social relations can be more harmonious and stable. The construction of harmonious and stable social relations must be closely linked with Confucius/ethical thoughts of the "Li" and the "Ren".

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