

Can Confucianism Add Value to Democracy Education?

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Abstract

Democracy essentially means ‘people ruling themselves’ or ‘self-rule’. In the light of this, democracy education should aim at nurturing citizens well-suited to live in a democracy, that is, capable of ‘ruling themselves’ or ‘self-rule’. Ideal citizens in a democracy should seek to be well-informed, have independent decision-making abilities with regard to community affairs, possess high degree of tolerance of diversity, have respect for the individual, equality and freedom, share a certain degree of consensus with and have concern for others in society as well as care for the general good of society. Certain elements in Confucian thought may be conducive to and congenial with the nurturing of citizens, indeed even better ones, well-suited to live in a democracy, perhaps one with a hue of Confucianism. This paper will examine to what extent Confucianism is compatible with or add value to the ideal of democracy education. In doing so, one has to distinguish between ‘Confucianism as an ideal’ and ‘Confucianism in practice’ as the latter may deviate from the former as inexact implementation of the ideal.

Keywords: Confucianism; democracy; democracy education

Huntington (1991) asserts that traditional Confucianism was either undemocratic or antidemocratic through its ‘emphasis on the group over the individual, authority over liberty, and responsibilities over rights’ (p.24), lacking the institution of rights against the state, having preferences for harmony and cooperation over disagreement, respecting and maintaining hierarchy, with maintenance of order as the central value (p.24). Thus, Huntington (1991) maintains that Confucian democracy may be a contradictory term (p.30). If Huntington is right, then it may be difficult for democracy to develop and mature in Confucian soil as the two are in discordance. In line with this understanding, Confucianism, not only cannot add value to democracy and democracy education, may, perhaps, even be a detriment to the latter. Is this really true? This paper attempts to answer this question. First, it will explore the concept of democracy, thereby deriving the qualities that a citizen in a democracy should ideally possess and evaluate if Confucianism may facilitate the nurturing such qualities, thus concluding whether Confucianism may add value to or obstruct the development of democracy education and democracy.

‘Democracy’ is an evolving concept, originating from the Ancient Greek period. Contemporary conception of democracy is summarized by Abraham Lincoln in the slogan “Government of the people, by the people, for the people”. Dictatorial governments, especially paternalistic ones, can have full support from the people, enjoying high level of legitimacy, thereby being ‘government of the people’. Furthermore, dictatorial (or non-democratic) paternalistic governments may rule to pursue the utmost benefit of the people, thereby being the ‘government for the people’. However, only democratic governments can genuinely be ‘government by the people’, with the latter being the defining characteristic of the former. If this is true, democracy essentially means ‘people ruling themselves’ or ‘self-rule’. In the light of this, democracy education should aim at nurturing citizens well-suited to live in a democracy, that is, capable of ‘ruling themselves’ or ‘self-rule’. Ideal citizens in a democracy should: (1) be or seek to be well-informed, so that they may make well-informed, reasonable and practicable decisions for the society at large, ensuring the quality of their collective decision-making; (2) have independent decision-making abilities with

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regard to community affairs so that they may make policy decisions, without the need of a paternalistic government to make decisions on their behalf; (3) possess high degree of tolerance of diversity because of the idiosyncrasies of individuals in a society, each holding different views and interests, which need to be considered carefully and taken care of seriously by other members of society; (4) have respect for the individual, equality and freedom which are the basic values in a democracy; (5) share a certain degree of consensus with (especially the consensus of adopting democracy as the institution and way of life in that particular society) and have concern for others in society, without which no society, including democratic ones, may operate without disintegration; as well as (6) care for the general good of society, if not, extreme individualism may prevail and there is no room for compromise in a democratic society or even any society. Thus, ideal democracy education, which is meaningful and constructive in democratic societies or societies aspiring to be a democracy, should aim at ‘producing’ educational ‘products’ with such characteristics. We will then proceed to examine whether Confucianism may be conducive to and congenial with the nurturing of citizens well-suited to live in a democracy. In doing so, one has to distinguish ‘Confucianism as an ideal’ (with Confucian philosophy and principles as its essence) and ‘Confucianism in practice’ (especially in the context of Imperial Confucian China) as the latter may deviate from the former as inexact implementation of the ideal.

Concerning criterion (1) an ideal citizen in a democracy should be or seek to be well-informed (as democracy cannot work well if the citizens are benighted), ‘Confucianism as an ideal’ may have much to contribute. In order to have well-informed citizens, the fundamental route is to put emphasis on education. There has always been a high Confucian priority being put on learning and education (de Bary, 2007), with the aim of personal moral self-cultivation through learning the Chinese Classics. Also, universal education is a Confucian ideal (Lee 2000, p.12). Confucius believed that though some may be born wise, the majority *can* acquire knowledge by putting effort, though not everyone *will* do so. “Confucius said, ‘Those who are born with knowledge are the highest. Next come those who attain knowledge through study. Next again come those who turn to study after having been vexed by difficulties. The common people, in so far as they make no effort to study even after having been vexed by difficulties, are the lowest’”² However, the Confucian ideal of learning for moral self-cultivation may be distorted in practice---in traditional China, learning was pursued extrinsically primarily for passing official examination to gain access to high offices, instead of moral self-cultivation, and the Confucian ideal of universal education was never practiced in Imperial China, with education, in reality, limited to the few who were rich, while the majority remained illiterate. This may pose a serious obstacle to the successful development of democracy which even if implemented, with the mostly illiterate people ruling, unsound policies might probably be instituted. When put in the contemporary context, Confucian faith in education and ideal of universal education lay a robust foundation for nurturing ideal citizens in a democracy who are educated and seek to be well-informed, perhaps, with certain Confucian education adaptations to avoid anachronism, (such as broadening the subject matter from mainly studying the Chinese Classics to other subject matters relevant to the contemporary world such as science, computer knowledge etc.) (de Bary, 2007), though the manifestation of Confucianism in traditional China might be at odds with democracy education and democracy.

Let’s examine the second aim of democracy education---to nurture students who possess the independent decision-making abilities with regard to community affairs. Very often, contemporary students from a Confucian culture, such as Hong Kong students, are characterized as putting incessant efforts on rote-learning and being too examination-oriented that they neglect anything outside the examination syllabus. According to Reagan (2000), in traditional China, by 12, a student would have memorized the basic texts, consisting of 400,000 characters; he will then learn the commentaries about the text, and eventually, learn the proper form for essay-writing for civil service examination. This essay-writing form, the “eight-legged essay” was highly formal and rule-governed that highly stifled creativity and independent thinking (p.112). It is not true that Confucius discouraged innovation, independent and critical thinking, but these should be done *after* grasping the fundamentals of knowledge acquired through learning. “The Master [Confucius] said, ‘There are presumably men who innovate without possessing

² *Analects* XVI.8. D.C Lau’s translation (Lau 1983: 165).

knowledge, but that is not a fault I have. I use my ears widely and follow what is good in what I have heard; I use my eyes widely and retain what I have seen in my mind. This constitutes a lower level of knowledge.”³ In fact, a Confucian ideal student is expected to possess independent thinking, creativity and takes initiative to learn. “The Master [Confucius] said, ‘.....When I have pointed out one corner of a square to anyone and he does not come back with the other three, I will not point it out to him a second time’”⁴. “The Master [Confucius] said, ‘If one learns from others but does not think, one will be bewildered. If, on the other hand, one thinks but does not learn from others, one will be in peril.’”⁵ However, one may ask to what extent had/has Confucian ideal or philosophy of education been faithfully implemented or accurately reflected in actual educational practices in traditional China or indeed any Confucian societies, contemporary or ancient. The answer may probably be the actual manifestations of Confucian education philosophy merely grasp the formality while overlooking the essence of the Confucian education ideal. The formality of memorization was over-emphasized in actual Confucian practices, without enough encouragement of understanding. Thus, students know how to regurgitate the text, without grasping the fundamentals of knowledge (which is supposed to lay the foundation for later-stage independent thinking, critical thinking and innovation, operating on justified and reasonable grounds, according to Confucius). Thus, ‘Confucianism as a philosophy and ideal’ may add value to democracy education in aiming at nurturing students with independent thinking that rests upon sound knowledge base, being innovative and constructive, rather than making bewildered judgements and unjustified criticisms, without making constructive suggestions that may change the world for the better in a democracy. However, actual Confucian educational practices, traditional or contemporary, may be found wanting in nurturing independent thinking which is essential for citizens in a democracy who are expected to be capable of ‘self-rule’.

The third goal of democracy education is to cultivate students’ tolerance of diversity. It has often been criticized that Confucianism preaches conformity, ‘harmony’, rather than pluralism and diversity, censoring disagreements and opposing views, thus being a detriment to democracy and democracy education. This criticism rests largely upon the misunderstanding of the Confucian conception of *harmony* and the equating of Confucian manifestations with the Confucian ideal. In fact, the very concept of *harmony* in Confucian philosophy incorporates diversity and the tolerance of diversity. According to Confucius, “Exemplary persons value harmony but not conformity; petty persons value conformity but not harmony”⁶. It is precisely in harmony that there are diversity and tolerance of diversity---different musical instruments make different sounds that blend together into orchestral harmony; a good cook combines ingredients of different tastes that mingle together in harmony, with each retaining its own distinctiveness and difference (Nuyen, 2005; Nuyen, 2002). In Confucianism (as an ideal), it is ‘*harmony in diversity*’ (Bell 2008, p.120) that is being sought after, though in practice, often, it was/is uniformity and conformity that is, in reality, being campaigned for in name of ‘harmony’ in traditional China, as well as in contemporary China, usually to maintain the status quo or buttress the ruling clique by eliminating opposing views. However, this will not, in anyway, negate that ‘Confucianism as a philosophy and as an ideal’ will have much to contribute to democracy education through its advocacy of *harmony* as a way out of diversity, with each unit retaining its distinctiveness, while being concordant with other different units, forming a whole which is even greater and better than its components. This perspective from *harmony* may be of much value to Western liberal democracies that may tend to overlook minority rights and interests in its running.

Let’s turn our attention to whether Confucianism has anything to contribute to the fourth goal of democracy education as highlighted earlier---nurturing students that have respect for the individual, equality and freedom. We will first discuss Confucian conception of the individual. Huntington (1991) asserts that traditional Confucianism put emphasis on the group over the individual (p.24), with no conception of or little respect for ‘the individual, thereby making it difficult for democracy to flourish in a Confucian society. Huntington’s view may perhaps be

³ *Analects* VII.28. D.C Lau’s translation (Lau 1983: 63).

⁴ *Analects* VII.8. D.C Lau’s translation (Lau 1983: 57).

⁵ *Analects* II.15. D.C Lau’s translation (Lau 1983:15).

⁶ *Analects* XIII.23. Quoted in Bell, Daniel A. (2008) *China’s New Confucianism: Politics and Everyday Life in a Changing Society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p.110.

resting on the perception of ‘Confucianism in operation’ in traditional China which may differ from the Confucian ideal or philosophy. According to Nuyen (2005), Confucian teachings and philosophy “are geared towards separate identifiable individuals, thus presupposing individuality. It does see the self as individual, or an entity distinct from others in the society.....” (p. 171). Confucian philosophy or ideal does not see the individual as detached from or being adversarial to the social, instead the Confucian individual is a relational one or is an individual-in-context, being in reciprocal relations to and integrated with others in the human community, that is, the social (Rosemont 2004; Hall and Ames, 1999; King 1985). Thus, ‘Confucianism as an ideal’ does respect the individual, however, the individual has a hue of the social. Actually, no individual in the real world exists in a ‘vacuum’, having no relations with, not affecting or being affected by others in the human community. By stressing the individual-in-context, the Confucian ideal individual may serve as a balance to the over assertion of the individual rights as protection from the collective, thereby preventing the development of extreme individualism, that is, putting the individual over the collective, disregarding and being detrimental to the collective. A healthy relation between the individual and the collective in a democracy (or indeed any society) requires the respect of and a balance of the individual and the collective, with individuals in a democracy not only always voting out of individual interests and concerns, but out of a balance between individual and collective interests, leading to a better world for all individuals in society. Confucian perspective of the individual may have much to contribute to nurturing citizens in a democracy who try to strike a balance between the individual and the collective, preventing the development of rampant individualism, thereby adding value to democracy education.

Confucian philosophy believes in the equality of man by nature. “The Master [Confucius] said, ‘Men are close to one another by nature. They diverge as a result of repeated practice.’”⁷ Mencius said, “...The sage and I are of the same kind...”⁸ Confucius was an advocate of equality of opportunities, especially educational opportunities. “The Master [Confucius] said, ‘I have never denied instruction to anyone who, of his own accord, has given me so much as a bundle of dried meat as present.’”⁹ The Confucian society is often characterized as hierarchical, thus very unequal. However, according to Nuyen (2002), a hierarchical structure that assigns unequal power and rewards does not negate equality as equality can be understood along Aristotelian lines of incorporating the horizontal aspect (equals should be treated equally) and the vertical aspect (‘unequals’ should be treated unequally)---the unequal treatment of different individuals in the Confucian originate from the fact that they are ‘unequals’ (p.131). However, the question is whether, in a Confucian society, the criterion for distinguishing ‘unequals’ for determining unequal rewards, honour and power are relevant ones. If so, it will not be problematic as everyone will receive rewards in proportion to what they deserve. In ‘Confucianism in practice’, very often, it is the social position or social role one finds oneself (whether as a father, elder brother) that is used as the criterion relevant for determining rewards, respect and honours in reality, sometimes leading to unjust, unloving fathers or elder brothers getting undeserved respect and rewards. However, Confucian philosophy asserts that it *should* be the degree of exercising virtues by a person (instead of social position) that is to be used as the criterion for allocating rewards in terms of love and respect from others---“[H]uman individuals differ from one another in the degree to which they possess and exercise the virtues...It is the Confucian conviction that, all things being equal, those who are more sincere, making greater effort, or accomplish more than other in practicing the virtues should receive more love and respect than others” (Fan, 2003). Though this Confucian conviction and ideal of rewarding in accordance to one’s virtue is often neglected, in reality, in practice even in a Confucian society, it may serve as a legitimate goal of democracy education---educating voters who vote for representatives of the people running the government (enjoying power, prestige and rewards) who are virtuous and upright. In this way, democracy will run better than if the representatives of the people selected by the voters are mere orators or self-interested politicians, without public service motivations.

⁷ *Analects* XVII:2. D.C Lau’s translation (Lau 1983: 171).

⁸ *Mencius* VIA:7. D.C Lau’s translation (Lau 1984: 231).

⁹ *Analects* VII:7. D.C Lau’s translation (Lau 1983: 57).

Democracy needs to rest on the respect of freedom, especially the freedom to make decisions concerning public affairs and, in an indirect democracy with a representative government, the freedom to elect any candidate for public offices that one finds appropriate. According to Isaiah Berlin, negative freedom refers to freedom from restraints. Does democracy imply an unlimited degree of freedom to act without any restraints? Perhaps not. Indeed it is difficult for a society, including a democratic one, to operate, or merely to survive if its members are free to act in any way without any concern for others in society. This may lead to the formulation of the social concern limit as restraint to freedom to act. Confucianism is not incompatible with the allowance of freedom to make decisions concerning public affairs and the freedom to elect an appropriate candidate for public offices. In fact, Confucian concern for the social may serve as a complement to the exercise of such freedoms to prevent extreme selfish decisions, without concern for others in society, which may be detrimental to the society, threatening its survival and operation. Such a social dimension to the exercise of freedom put forward by Confucianism may be a legitimate goal of democracy education or moral education in a democracy. In fact, considerations of social interests as a restraint on individual freedom often take place in a western democracy in practice, for example, government in western democracies appropriate private land for the construction of public infrastructures, thereby limiting people's freedom to use their land; conscript young adults into the armed forces to protect the country, thereby limiting their freedom to choose their way of life, at least during the conscription period etc. (Nuyen, 2000).

This may bring us forward to the Confucian discussion on the fifth goal of democracy education---consensus with and concern for others, instead of being too self-centred, pursuing merely selfish ends. Confucian philosophy preaches deep concern for others---treating others in the way you would like others to treat you and do not treat other in ways that you yourself find unacceptable in similar situations. "Tzu-kung asked, 'Is there a single word which can be a guide to conduct throughout one's life?' The Master [Confucius] said, 'It is perhaps the word "shu". Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire.'"¹⁰ Confucian teachings advocate treating one's family members, especially the old and the young, well and extend such type of treatment to elders and youngsters of other families, that is, treating all within and without one's family well. Mencius points out: "Treat the aged of your own family in a manner befitting their venerable age and extend this treatment to the aged of other families; treat your own young in a manner befitting their tender age and extend this to young of other families, and you can roll the Empire on your palm".¹¹ By emphasizing a concern for others in Confucianism (as an ideal), it is easy to build consensus with others. Thus, 'Confucianism as a philosophy' does have much to contribute to democracy education in this aspect. Yet, in reality, 'Confucianism in practice' may mean putting the interest of one's family above that of others, that is, being family-centred, without extending love and concern beyond one's family, falling short of the Confucian ideal. Though difficult to implement, the Confucian ideal of treating all with care and concern may act as a guiding principle for the implementation of democracy education so that citizens in a democracy will not think and vote merely out of self-interest and will be willing to take into consideration others' views and concerns, thereby reaching a compromise acceptable to all eventually.

We will turn our attention to another related aim of democracy education---care for the general good of society. Confucian teachings stress self-cultivation, and extend the excellent character to regulate the family, the government, the empire and the world. The "Great Learning" chapter of the *Book of Rites* asserts: "Those in ancient times who wanted their pure and excellent character to shine in the world first proper the government to the empire; desiring to bring proper government to the empire, they would first bring proper order to their family; desiring to bring proper order to their families, they would first cultivate their persons."¹² Confucius suggests a *gentlemen* has concerns for the general good for the society with an appropriate attitude. In *Analects* XIV: 42:

Tzu-lu asked about the gentleman. The Master [Confucius] said, 'He cultivates himself and thereby achieves reverence.'

¹⁰ *Analects* XV:24. D.C Lau's translation (Lau 1983: 155).

¹¹ *Mencius* IA:7. D.C Lau's translation (Lau 1984: 17).

¹² *Book of Rites* 43.1/164/25, translated in Hall and Ames (1999, 175); quoted in Tan Sor-hoon (2004) *Confucian Democracy: A Deweyan Reconstruction*. Albany: State University of New York, p. 31-32

‘Is that all?’

‘He cultivates himself and thereby brings peace and security to his fellow men.’

‘Is that all?’

‘He cultivates himself and thereby brings peace and security to the people. Even Yao and Shun would have found the task of bringing peace and security to the people taxing.’¹³

The Master [Confucius] said of Tzu-ch’an that he had the way of the gentleman on four counts: he was respectful in the manner he conducted himself; he was reverent in the service of his lord; in caring for the common people, he was generous, in employing their services, he was just.¹⁴

All these merely reflect the Confucian ideal to strive for. However, ‘Confucianism in practice’, as inexact implementation of the Confucian ideal may be in discordance with the nurturing of the concern for others in *society at large*. ‘Confucianism as an ideal’ advocates self-cultivation and then extend the good character to proper the family, then the state, then the whole world. However, in practice, a Confucian may stay at the level of family, and does not extend his/her concern and care to the state and the world. Prominent Chinese thinkers, such as Liang Qichao and Sun Yat-sun, in the modern period, believed that “popular participation in governance was handicapped in traditional China because people’s loyalties were mostly limited to family and village, having almost no active engagement with the state”(De Bary, 2007). Thus, while western societies might be threatened by the over-emphasis on the individual, traditional Confucian society in practice might be threatened by over-stressing the family and the immediate community, without extending one’s care and concern to the state and the world. Both may not be healthy for the development of democracy which demands citizens’ concern for public affairs and the general good of society as well as a willingness to participate in public policy-making. Though ‘Confucianism in practice’ may to a certain extent be incompatible with democracy, this does not in any way preclude that Confucianism philosophy may add value to democracy education in the aspect of fostering care and concern for others in society as discussed above.

Participation in a democracy is the best form of democracy education as a type of experiential learning or learning through participation. If Confucianism may bring about improvements in the working of democracy, then it may facilitate the best form of democracy education through experiential learning. Can Confucianism add value to democracy? Confucian political theory rests on the faith that human nature is good (Li, 2006; Lu, 1996; Hansen, 1972) and educating the people to practice the principles of *ren, yi and li* (i.e. humanity, righteousness and rules of propriety) as the basis of governing (Liu, 2001). There will be no need for a sophisticated system of laws and punishment to act as a deterrent to wrongful acts and an elaborate system of rights to give weapons to each individual to defend oneself from others’ intrusion since all individuals are virtuous and have a moral restraint on their actions. The ruler rules by setting moral example for the people:

The Master [Confucius] said, ‘Guide them by edicts, keep them in line with punishments, and the common people will stay out of trouble but have no sense of shame. Guide them by virtue, keep them in line with rites, and they will, besides having a sense of shame, reform themselves.’¹⁵

The Master [Confucius] said, ‘In hearing litigation, I am no different from any other man. But if you insist on a difference, it is, perhaps, that I try to get the parties not to resort to litigation in the first place.’¹⁶

¹³*Analects* XIV:42. D.C Lau’s translation (Lau 1983: 147)

¹⁴*Analects* V:16. D.C Lau’s translation (Lau 1983: 41)

¹⁵*Analects* II:3. D.C Lau’s translation (Lau 1983: 11)

¹⁶*Analects* XII:13. D.C Lau’s translation (Lau 1983: 113)

Confucian political theory rests on an ‘ideal world scenario’---all are by nature good, all can be educated to be virtuous, all act virtuously and there is little need of laws to restrain people and punish wrongdoings. However, in reality, some are immoral or sometimes act immorally even with education. Without an elaborate system of laws, many will engage in wrongdoings. This is especially serious if the ruler is immoral or acts immorally, adversely affecting the interest of the people, bringing about disastrous consequences and the people have to overthrow the despot in rebellions, often involving bloodshed as in the case of the fall of dynasties in ancient China. Thus, the Confucian political theory ‘targeted at an ideal world’ (in which all or most are virtuous, including the ruler) without trying to ‘prevent the worst’ in which some are or occasionally evil and need to be prevented by elaborate system of laws and rights.

Democratic political theory, on the other hand, rests on assumption that human beings are by nature evil. Thus, in a democracy, there may be time limit to the executive’s office, separations of power, check and balances, rule of law, elaborate system of individual rights to ‘prevent the worst’, preventing those in power from abusing power, adversely affecting the interests of the people, for their own benefit. It may be true that democracy may ‘prevent the worst’, but far from being ideal---a world in the which those holding office are virtuous and rule with a public service motivation, benefiting the people, even at the expense of one’s own interest, and the people in general are moral, with little or no disposition to break laws or perform evil acts. In this way, Confucian political theory by ‘targeting at an ideal world’ may add value to democracy which ‘prevents the worst’, with the two being compatible with each other. In the hybrid of the two, while we have laws, rights, separations of powers etc. to ‘prevent the worst’, simultaneously, we educate the public and the elected rulers to have moral and virtuous dispositions, that is ‘targeting at an ideal world’, so that laws, rights, punishments need not be often invoked to protect the individual and the public from abuses of power. Confucian philosophy expects the rulers to be virtuous and upright and to rule the people by example. This may act as a guide to for people voting for candidates in democratic elections, not only voting for those who are merely capable of ruling technically, with good oratory ability or superb political communication strategies, but for candidates with high integrity and a virtuous character. Such hybrid may be considered democracy with a Confucian hue, a whole better than each of the two individual parts.

Underpinning Confucian political philosophy is the concept of *Minben* (people as the root), emphasizing that the ruler should take good care of the interest of the people, ensuring their prosperity, while the ruler is of lesser importance than the people:

But for one in authority over the people not to share his enjoyment with the people is equally wrong. The people will delight in the joy of him who delights in their joy, and will worry over the troubles of him who worries over their troubles. He who delights and worries on account of the Empire is certain to become a true King.¹⁷

Those with constant means of support will have constant hearts, while those without constant means will not have constant hearts. Lacking constant hearts, they will go astray and get into excesses, stopping at nothing. To punish them after they have fallen foul of law is to set a trap for the people. How can a benevolent man in authority allow himself to set a trap for the people? Hence a good ruler is always respectful and thrifty, courteous and humble, and takes from the people no more than is prescribed.¹⁸

Mencius said, ‘It was through losing the people that Chieh and Tchou lost the Empire, and through losing the people’s hearts that they lost the people. There is a way to win the Empire; win the people and you will win the Empire. There is a way to win the people; win their hearts and you will win the people. There is a way to win their hearts; amass what they want

¹⁷ *Mencius* IB:4. D.C Lau’s translation (Lau 1984: p.31).

¹⁸ *Mencius* IIIA:3. D.C Lau’s translation (Lau 1984: p.97).

for them; do not impose what they dislike on them. That is all. The people turn to the benevolent as water flows downwards or as animals head for the wilds.¹⁹

Mencius said, ‘The people are of supreme importance; the alters to the gods of earth and grain come next; last comes the ruler. (*Mencius* VIIB:14)²⁰

According to Confucian philosophy, the one who enjoys the Mandate of Heaven should rule. The will of the people is the barometer of the Mandate of Heaven, that is, “the ruler [has] to perceive the Mandate of Heaven through the hearts and feeling of the people” (Liu 2001, p.53). If the ruler is despotic, thereby losing the hearts of the people and the Mandate of Heaven, the people may rebel to overthrow the government according to Confucianism. As discussed earlier, the defining characteristic of democracy is ‘government by the people’. Though *Minben* of Confucian thought falls short of ‘government by the people’, it is a concept that aims at ruling to pursue the utmost benefit of the people, thereby enjoying the full support from the people, that is, *Minben* is in concordance with ‘government for the people’ and ‘government of the people’. However, in the long run, ‘government by the people’, with the people ruling themselves or electing their rulers, is the best guarantee of ‘government for the people and of the people’ (incorporated in the concept of *Minben*) since non-democratic governments *may not always* put people’s interest first, whereas in a democracy, whenever the elected ruler disregards people’s will and interest to an intolerable level, the people may vote the ruler out of the office without bloodshed. In fact, elections may be regarded as the institutionalization of rebellions (as incorporated in the concept of *Minben*), replacing incompetent rulers peacefully through the voting system, instead of involving bloodshed as in rebellions. Putting in another light, democracy (government by the people) may be the best means to *Minben* (‘government of the people and for the people’) as an end in the long run. In this way, the concept of *Minben* may serve as an end (that centres on the people) for democracy and democracy education, adding value and perfecting them by defining the ultimate ‘good’ for the latter.

In conclusion, in order to answer the question whether Confucianism can add value to democracy education, one needs to distinguish ‘Confucianism as an ideal and philosophy’ and ‘Confucianism in practice’, with the latter being inexact manifestations of the former. It may be said that ‘Confucianism in practice’ may perhaps be at odds with the democracy ideal, thus has little to offer, or even obstructs democracy education to a great extent. However, ‘Confucianism as an ideal and philosophy’ may add value to democracy and democracy education by perfecting and complementing them. Certain elements in Confucian thought may be conducive to and congenial with the nurturing of citizens, indeed even better ones, well-suited to live in a democracy, perhaps one with a hue of Confucianism. Though it would be futile to identify Confucianism as a democratic theory, certain traces of the Confucianism as an eastern cultural heritage can be blended with ‘democracy’ as predominantly a western construct, with the two complementing each other, forming democracy with a hue of Confucianism, representing an Oriental-Occidental integration which may perhaps serve as an even better alternative than western liberal democracy. After all, both Confucianism and democracy are evolving ideologies, adapting and perfecting themselves to suit the 21st Century.

¹⁹ *Mencius* IVA: 9. D.C Lau’s translation (Lau 1984:145).

²⁰ *Mencius* VIIB:14. D.C Lau’s translation (Lau 1984: 291).

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