

Crisis of Civilization. The Manifestation of the Beauty of Humanity. The Legacy of Ancient Chinese Philosophy

From Benevolence and Righteousness to Proper Rite

By [Jenn Zhu](#)

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I have once written a long story based on part of my own life experiences and some other real materials which might have caused some stir among the people who happened to have read it, in which the protagonist is a gentle and kind-hearted lady with good education, however, never made her way out. Fortunately, she is still alive, and gained wisdoms that enable her to see things better than before.

In her early years, she went abroad to study and work, but didn't find the right way. Then she went back to her home country to start a new life after the new millennium. It was fine at the beginning, but a few years later, she began to feel that her world of life was falling apart.

Although the story is far from enough to tell all the unfortunate things she has gone through, it is already enough to make a civilized society shudder. We can't help but watch the devils boldly marching in daylight, because no one could stop them, and there is no existed law to nail them down. Once again, human civilization is wandering in low spirit. It is tied out by its own high-tech products, with its basic morals and wisdoms lost. People tend to become very self-centered and rely on the external power of high-technology too much which has jeopardized the inner power of themselves. Maybe it's time to contemplate and bring back our self-control and our lost wisdom.

Benevolent people are compassionate and helpful. They treat people equally and put themselves in other people's boats. And proper rite can teach a social person how to act in ways of true benevolence and righteousness.

To decide whether or not we are helping others is not based on what you say or upon your motivation manipulated by others. People carry on things with selfish purpose would also claim that they were helping others, while some people who are obliged to help but were actually not helpful at all, instead making things more difficult for others should listen to the targeted and stop the intervention right away. That is to say, we should follow certain rules. At least, for example, respect others.

As the ancient Chinese sage said, the only maxim that can be used for life is: do not treat others the way that you don't want them to treat you.

You should put yourself in other people's shoes at all time.

If you are a determined and mature adult, while others always impose their own will upon you, will you be happy about it? If not, then you should allow others to make their own decisions. As the old saying goes, it's better to respect and listen than aggress and intervene.

Because everyone has their own different stories in this world, and it's usually the person himself who knows his own story best. Even if they made wrong judgment call once or twice at beginning, it would only harm one person. Isn't it said that "He who has broken his arms three times makes a good surgeon." ? People will learn the lessons from their failures and improve. However, if a society encourages some privileged people to forcefully, or even break the law to interfere with other people's life, sometimes under the claim to help, it will not cause only one single victim, but lead to a very bad chain of reactions and overall malign social effect.

Western philosophers, started from the explanation of nature to the study of human society, has experienced many different schools of philosophies, with some schools as rivals against each other. When it came to the modern society, there appeared the concept of "egoism", the theory of laws that demonstrated the principle of rationalism of the main philosophical schools, and the theory of will etc al, all of which mark the progress of human understanding of the nature, themselves and the human society, and especially revealed the depth of Western analytical culture and the endless effort and high spirit in their study of the universe and human beings.

Chinese philosophy is originated from Fuxi's Primordial Eight Diagrams to explain the principles of human society and the nature which emphasizes the unity of man and nature. Then Emperor Wen of Zhou dynasty established the Posterior Eight Diagrams to further the study. Later generations began to establish a theory based on benevolence, righteousness, propriety and music around the same principle which reveals the interaction of "Yin and Yang".

Chinese scholars continued to improve the theory by making it to adapt to the contemporary dynasties. However, all the new schools were rooted in the original principle. Because almost any self-conscious individual tend to fight for the interest of their own, which the ancient Chinese people had known a long time ago, so they came to realize that wealth can only be produced and accumulate during time of peace. That is to say, only were the society stable could it prosper. In order to maintain social stability, they must establish a set of rules of propriety, which will not only bound its people to obey, but also make them to follow willingly with respect. That is what Chinese people did, and maybe this is the difference between Chinese law and western law.

The ancient Chinese people grew up in this kind of social rules, so even if they didn't go through formal legal study, it was still not likely that they would cross the boundaries without knowing its consequences. Punishment could come from all sides. That's the case especially during the peace period. And there is no lawyer as an occupation in Ancient China, as the ancient scholar functioned as the legal clerk. But the western laws are different.

They have been divided into nature law and nation law long time ago. For them, the nature law that everyone should abide by in the same way may be mainly practiced through religion. Humans possess some basic senses of telling good from evil even before they have

developed their logic and reasoning, which fact leads to the formation of nature law. The nation law is the law formulated by the state to maintain the operation of the political machinery, and it is the embodiment of rationality. But any thing created by man must have loopholes to poke through, so if religion loses its influence, it would inevitably lead to malfunction of the nation law by fighting against the “sinners” alone. Chinese propriety rules are combination of nature law and nation law.

Therefore, it could be more effective sometimes in maintaining the stability of society. Its purpose is to make the society well function, instead of making up issues. There is a popular saying “If the people do not bring the issues up, the officials will not intervene”. That is to say, in civil cases, as long as the parties feel that they can solve the case by themselves, the officials usually will not take the initiative to intervene.

Today’s world is at the era of rapid development of science and technology, also the era of knowledge explosion. People’s cognitive and knowledge level have improved unprecedentedly. Although religion still plays an important role in providing comfort to people’s soul and promoting world peace etc al, and even some religions have evolved into multiple branches by incorporating the elements of science, still they are confronting doubts and negation of new generations, because some of their theories conflict with many contents of modern civilization, which leads to the loss of their believers. Even among the believers, religion has lost its superior authority and great influence. **Consequently**, the commandment of religion lost their power of control. In this kind of society, what people follow are the work morals established under the market economy and capital operation, which is actually a set of game rules by all means to achieve the job goals. Of course, these rules can help them achieve their individual short-term goals and gain profits during a certain period of time, but any behavior against the nature laws will inevitably cause adverse consequences to the whole society, and this consequences will inevitably return to its perpetrators themselves sooner or later. So, in the long run, it will result in multiple losers and eventually lead to the failure of the whole society. Especially in a society of high-speed communication of information, any unreasonable action upon the society will soon come to light, and are very likely to face their consequences shortly after.

The ancient Chinese rules of propriety which are based on benevolence, righteousness, propriety and music are closely related to everyone’s life, can be directly integrated into the daily function of the society.

The ancient Chinese sage said:

the truth of benevolence is the truth of kinship;

the truth of righteousness is the truth of brotherhood;

the truth of wisdom is the truth of knowing both;

the truth of propriety is to demonstrate the above two in a proper manner;

the truth of music is to praise the above two and reveal the happiness during their practice of the propriety.

That is to say, benevolence is to serve parents, extended to their superiors etc al; righteousness is to listen to brothers and sisters, extended to trustable friends, colleagues and acquaintances who might have more life experience and wisdom; propriety is to

practice the benevolence and integrity by applying the social etiquettes, national or family rites, and making them appealing to the common sense of people, thus they should be appropriate, elegant and pleasant.; music is the expression of inner feeling due to such great pleasure produced during the proper practice, that people can't help singing and playing the instrument to share their praises. Some might say that many religions are practicing in the same way too. Yes, but they mostly do it in churches and temples. And The ancient Chinese propriety was working in daily life of everybody, from the emperor to the peasants.

If we can sincerely respect and assist our elders, would they not treat you kindly? If we show our admiration and respect to your brothers or other people who are more experienced than you and by chance we know, they will naturally promote you and try their best to help you. The Chinese say: a gentleman dies for someone who truly understands him. If we really know someone, and show sincere admiration to their integrity and respect to their talents and abilities. Of course, they will treat you as their confidants, and wouldn't mind dying for you, precisely, is dying for the same beliefs and purposes of life. In fact, these two kinds of relationship can simplify all relationships in the world. If we can handle them well, we should have no worries in our life provided that there were not too much external intervention and disturbance. Therefore, as it was mentioned above: the truth of the wisdom, or in another words, a wise person should keep in mind that these two things - benevolence and righteousness cannot be ignored. The question is how to make them work in current world? It will come down to the next question of **how to create effective propriety rules for current world by borrowing wisdom from ancient Chinese people and other cultures.**

The four books and five classics, the Analects of Confucius, the Daode Ching of ancient China, and various important literature and documents developed by the followers of neo-Confucianism can provide very valuable information about Chinese propriety. At the same time, the outstanding philosophical theories and relevant literature materials of all other countries in each century are also very important references. In a world of global village, humans have developed unprecedentedly stronger interconnection with and interdependence upon each other . Therefore, the rules of one nation will undoubtedly affect the lives of other nations, and the propriety of other cultural nations must also be reflected in the rules of that nation. It seems that more and more people are beginning to realize that we people on earth need a set of new rules to avoid falling into the fate of lasting worldwide chaos.

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