

GENDER BALANCE WITH CONFUCIAN PHILOSOPHY: MY OWN EXPERIENCE OF EMPOWERMENT

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In this narrative, the author shares her still-evolving ideas of using Confucian philosophy when empowering victimized women. She describes her journey of searching for alternative ways of viewing this philosophy, with the hope that social workers will be encouraged to find creative ways of working with clients from Confucian-influenced cultures, especially when assisting those who have been oppressed and victimized by such cultures. While still resentful about how it has been practiced and taught since the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910 CE) of Korea, the author has learned to embrace the essential thoughts behind the philosophy and utilizes it to empower herself and others who have been hurt by misapplications of Confucian philosophy.

Introduction

I was brought up in a Confucian belief system while growing up in South Korea. Unfortunately, I grew to be resentful towards Confucianism, particularly when I began to explore the roots of Korean traditional culture critically and learned that most of it is rooted in Confucianism. I thought that most of the Confucian rules for the proper ways of being a girl or woman came with oppressive restrictions. But in the past couple of years, I have tried to understand it from a broader perspective than what I was led to believe while I was growing up. As my understanding of this philosophy broadened, I learned that some of the ideas I believed were oppressive Confucian principles in fact represented biased interpretations or misapplications. With such realization, I decided to write this narrative to reflect upon how I finally came to terms with Confucianism.

I thought I had come to terms with Confucianism, but I soon realized that I am still confused, frustrated, and resentful about how it has been practiced and taught since the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910 CE) of Korea, which was almost 2,000 years after Confucius (552-479 BCE) conceptualized the philosophy. I shared my frustration towards Confucianism and my developmental process with my colleague, Dr. Edward Canda, who has studied Confucianism and its relationship with social work (Canda, 2002a and 2002b). He suggested that I reflect on a way to be at peace with where I stood in relation to Confucianism, rather than feel obligated to be at peace with

Confucianism itself. That helped me to be more at peace with the flow of my developmental process and to write honestly about that. Finishing this narrative gave me a metaphor of meaning in my life: it closed one door before opening another door that will lead to a new phase in my life dedicated to reconstructing Confucianism.

In this narrative, I candidly expose my journey of searching for an alternative way of viewing Confucianism, especially for those who work with oppressed and victimized women from cultures influenced by the philosophy. My personal effort connects with a recently developing philosophy called Confucian feminism (see Yin, 2006; Rosenlee, 2006). By sharing my thoughts about the phases of my developmental process, I hope to connect with others who have similar interest in deconstructing and reconstructing Confucianism.



First Phase: Consciousness-Raising about Misogynistic Aspects of Confucian Culture

I lived the first two-thirds of my life in South Korea. At home, I did not feel like Confucianism was emphasized by my parents. When my parents taught me and my sisters to be benevolent, courteous, modest, and respectful, they never explained that these values were coming from Confucianism even though they are important Confucian virtues. I thought these teachings were coming from Catholicism, as my parents were Catholic. My mother is a head-strong career woman who not only survived but thrived in Korean academe and in society despite their patriarchal structure. She became a well-known professor in modern literature, as well as a founder of a domestic violence shelter. My father is also a well-known established linguistic scholar who is, to my mind, very conservative. But I think he intentionally kept his conservative male voice weak to maintain peace in a home full of very opinionated women: his wife and four daughters. My parents always told my sisters and me that each of us was better than ten sons. Their statement was empowering for us and carried a lot of weight because our society generally valued sons over daughters. Men had more opportunities in the workplace to be promoted while women faced a glass ceiling. In Korea, there was a slogan everywhere that read, "Regardless of the gender, be happy with one child." This slogan reflected the value system in the 1970s and 80s. The goal of the slogan was to encourage people to have only one child in order to control the birth rate after the baby boom during and after the Korean War. This slogan also encouraged people to care less about the gender of the child because sons were overly valued, while girls were often considered useless or a burdensome for the family. Female infant abandonment, infanticide, and abortion after identifying the sex of the unborn child were social problems of the 70s and 80s. There was an imbalance of gender in elementary schools, where there were at least five to ten more boys than girls in each class. There were 112.4 boys for every 100 girls in the 1980s, according to the available

data from Korea National Statistical Office (2007).

In the late 80s, under the influence of my mother, I began committing myself to justice for women, especially around issues of women victimized by intimate partner violence. With this focus, I decided to enter the social work field. Since the grassroots movement against wife abuse and other types of abuse towards women was initiated and organized by feminists who were strongly influenced by Western feminism, I also aligned with Western feminism. By Western feminism I include variations of feminism that are based mainly on the experiences of women in Europe and North America. The more I aligned with feminism, the more I criticized patriarchal Asian culture, Confucianism, and Asian men in general. I eagerly sought evidence that Confucianism was opposed to empowering women or ensuring women's rights.

Some of the old Korean proverbs I heard as a child in school and from the media included: "Upon reaching the age of seven, girls and boys should not sit at the same table."¹ This saying was influenced by the classical Confucian emphasis on differential education and roles for males and females. I was taught that it also emphasized the importance of keeping your virginity and chastity, especially in the case of girls. Also, "If a hen crows, the house crumbles," or "Homes perish when the hen crows," were sayings often used to slow down ambitious girls and to discourage wives from challenging or questioning their husbands' authority at home.² In preparing girls for young adulthood, the culture I was brought up in made it very clear that we were to follow our husbands³ and become sacrificial mothers and submissive wives.⁴ These proverbs and virtues were described by the general public as Confucian philosophy. If so, I could only think that Confucianism was the main instrument for implementing a patriarchal society and family structure, and thus women's oppression.

It is not very difficult to prove that such proverbs oppressing women are indeed an influence of Confucianism. For example, the principle of the Three Bonds⁵ and the Three Obedience Rule⁶ receive most criticism for suppressing women. The Three Bonds are the

legacy of Confucian ethics and they dictate that citizens to follow as rulers lead;⁷ sons to follow as fathers lead;⁸ and wives to follow as husbands lead.⁹ In the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910 CE)¹⁰ period of Korea, women were required to be obedient in three ways, which is also the legacy of Confucius teaching: obedience to the father before getting married, to the husband after getting married, and to the son after the death of the husband. The Three Bonds and the Three Obedience Rule consistently require women to be submissive. Although a "youth" (according to Legge, 1971) or "persons" (according to Ames & Rosemont, Jr., 1998) or a "man" (according to Ho, date not clear) were taught to be filial at home, to respect elders outside of home, to be earnest and truthful, to love all, and to be intimate with the good (refer to Analect 1:7), there were no specific rules for men to follow in relation to significant women in their lives.

While I was working at domestic violence counseling centers in Seoul and in New York for Korean women, I heard many personal accounts from my clients that their abusive partner would often use a "cultural defense" to excuse his violent behavior. The abuser would claim that in Confucian culture, men have the right to discipline, control, own, and expel their wives. Such personal accounts only solidified my negative perception of Confucianism. When wife abusers claim that they are supposedly teaching their wives to follow the basic human relationship principles taught by Confucianism, their abuse may sound justifiable. Indeed, this cultural defense was taken into consideration in the court system in the late 80s in Los Angeles when dealing with wife battering and raping cases among Asian immigrants (Rimonte, 1991). According to this defense, when domestic violence occurred in an Asian family, it was understood to be a cultural difference rather than a criminal activity against a woman. Thus, the cultural defense became an example of how some legacies of Confucianism could be used to sponsor violence against women.

In the early Joseon dynasty, in order to stabilize the nation, the government tried to restrict divorces based on the Confucian notion that family is the smallest unit of the society,

and that stable families would create a stable society and nation. For example, separation and then abandonment of wives were regulated with strong punishments, according to the early Joseon Dynasty statute called, *Dae Myong Ryul*.¹¹ As part of the regulations on marriage, there were certain occasions where a husband could expel a wife, such as when a wife ran away, had an affair, battered a husband, or committed one of the Seven Unforgivable Sins.¹² The Seven Sins included: disobedience to parents-in-law;¹³ inability to bear children, particularly sons;¹⁴ promiscuity;¹⁵ extreme jealousy;¹⁶ incurable disease;¹⁷ engaging in gossip;¹⁸ and thievery.¹⁹ To prevent husbands from abusing this law, there were three occasions where a wife was protected from being expelled even if she committed one or more of these seven sins. Three unexpellable occasions²⁰ included: a wife having fulfilled her duties as a daughter-in-law for three years after her parents-in-law's death, a wife having contributed to the wealth of the family; and a wife no longer having family of origin to return to. According to *Dae Myong Ryul*, if you divorce your wife without legitimate reasons or if you do not divorce your wife regardless of legitimate reasons, either way, you would get punished with exactly the same sentence. This statute was called "failure to righteously abandon a wife,"²¹ and it lasted until the end of Joseon dynasty (1392-1910 CE).

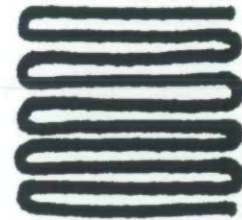
While a husband had all of the above mentioned reasons to expel his wife, the legal system made it far more difficult for a wife to leave her husband, according to *Dae Myong Ryul*. Only if a husband ran away could a wife file for divorce. If a husband battered his wife, the wife was to ask for an agreement from her battering husband for a divorce in order to get approval from the government. Regulations regarding divorce laws seemed to reflect stiff application of one of the Three Bonds Confucian principle mentioned previously of a husband leading and a wife following²² regardless of the husband's virtue or the wife's well-being. Divorce laws have been changed considerably since then, and yet wife abuse cases today still reflect the application of rules around the Seven Unforgivable Sins and punishments given to wives by their husband.

For example, precipitating factors for wife abuse are identified from a study of women's hotline users in South Korea (Women's Hotline, 1997). Out of 734 cases of serious spousal abuse reported, reasons victims gave for the abuse they have experienced included: talking back to the husband (42%), complaining about a husband's drinking (24.7%), interrupting a husband's behavior (17.5%), and telling a husband that they despised him (15.7%). All of these reasons suggest relationship difficulties when cultural norms are violated.

I also felt confident that Confucianism was a major instrument in establishing laws oppressive towards women during the Joseon Dynasty because there were some passages in the *Analects of Confucius* that appear to be misogynistic. In one such passage, Confucius removed a female minister from his list of able ministers; perhaps he did not view the woman, the wife of King Wu, as capable of the job. Confucius stated, "In King Wu's case with a woman, perhaps his wife, among them, there were really only nine ministers (*Analects* 8.20²³ translated by Roger & Rosemont Jr., 1998)." This seems similar to the practice of making women invisible in modern customs. For example, my mother-in-law to this day says when describing her grandchildren, "I have three grandsons and a girl," as if there is no term for granddaughter, or as if a granddaughter is not counted as a grandchild. Another passage that included Confucius' perception of women is the following: "Only girls²⁴ and petty people²⁵ are hard to rear. If you are close to them, they behave disrespectfully; if you keep a distance from them, they become resentful" (*Analects*, 17.25²⁶ translated by Ames & Rosemont, Jr., 1998)."

In addition to two passages found in the *Analects*, I believed that the concept of the cosmic forces *yin*²⁷ and *yang*²⁸ contributed to women's oppression. This concept became widespread by the Han Dynasty's (202 BCE-220 CE) Confucianism in China, and the Joseon Dynasty's (1392-1910 CE) Neo Confucianism²⁹ in Korea. The term, *yin* and *yang*, originally represented two of the six cosmic forces during the Spring and Autumn

period³⁰ in China (722-481 BCE; Yee, 2003). As two opposite and fundamental forces of the universe, in popular thinking, *yin* has been aligned with female gender and *yang* with male gender. While growing up, I felt that the beneficial functions of *yang*—sun, top of the hill, warmth, light, strength, and masculinity—have been emphasized, glorified, and valued by Korean society. I thought that characteristics of *yin*—moon, valley, coldness, darkness, weakness, and femininity—were not perceived as necessary or good forces in the society. Feminist scholars often criticize the problematic gender stereotypes associated with *yin* and *yang* as supporting a cultural climate for degrading women and violence against women (e.g., Song & Moon, 1996; Son, 2006).



Second Phase: Lost and Rootless

Bashing Confucianism slowly led me to reject my history, my upbringing, and in the end, myself, for being part of a chauvinistic and misogynistic Confucian culture. This created a sense of emptiness and rootlessness in me. I began feeling burned-out and helpless as a social worker and advocate for Korean women. I did not know how to empower and heal survivors of intimate partner violence who were coming from the same Confucian cultural background as mine. That was when I became curious about modern Confucian scholars' perceptions towards women. I thought that if there are still male and female scholars studying and teaching Confucianism today, there must be something valuable to offer that can help me feel less rootless.

I began observing the work and lifestyles of male and female Confucian scholars, which portrayed an alternative practice of Confucianism. I realized that I might be taking in some feminist discourses that discounted the whole of Confucianism philosophy without

thinking critically. So I began studying Classical and Neo-Confucianism and realized that many Confucian principles criticized by certain feminists were not consistent with the other main principles of Confucianism. For example, I remember learning in high school that we ought to cultivate ourselves to become benevolent,³¹ righteous/appropriate,³² courteous,³³ and wise³⁴ which is a way³⁵ to become a virtuous person or noble-minded person.³⁶ I learned that these were the cardinal virtues of Confucianism. As I thought more about this, I was confused about the disconnect between how I was taught to be virtuous through adherence to Confucianism, and how chauvinistic and abusive men claimed that their privilege to dominate came from Confucianism. It seemed as if there were two very different forms of Confucianism at work.

I began to realize that some of the tensions or self-contradictions that arise from simplistic criticisms of Confucianism were the main cause of violence against women among East Asians. For example, it accepts the demeaning stereotype of East Asian cultures used in the so-called cultural defense by abusive men. It has the danger of encouraging women's oppression, devaluing Asian heritage, and destroying culture-specific styles of women's identity. On a personal level, I felt that it demolishes my own identity, where I've come from, and the person I've become. If in fact Confucianism values men over women and gives rights to husbands to control their wives, then East Asian victims of violence against women can only be healed by disconnecting themselves from their own heritage and feminine identity. This process further victimizes women. It allows no room within our cultures to escape from the violence. Though it may sound too extreme, the only choice seems to be to sever their relationships with the batterers as well as the traditional cultures, thus also with the family and the community as a whole. This leads to further isolation for the victim which is self-defeating and unhealthy. This is what I have observed while working with Korean American survivors of intimate partner violence in New York. I have seen them leaving their husbands, their neighborhoods, and their Korean churches

claiming that they cannot possibly associate with people sharing a belief system that condones wife abuse and women's oppression.

As a practitioner and a scholar, my priorities have included preventing intimate partner violence and identifying culturally competent practice for people affected by intimate partner violence. While doing this work, I wondered if there were any possibility to utilize the cultural backgrounds of Asian women to empower them and to assist them in fighting against gender inequality and violence against women. As a Korean woman, I felt that this could also help me personally move beyond feeling lost and rootless between the Confucian and feminist aspects of my identity.

Angella Son (2006) argued that Confucianism has been a major influence in creating a subordinate role for women in Korea. She applied Kohut's psychology (1971, 1977) to explain how the societal expectation of women's subordination and societal disdain towards women's ambitions contribute to their arrested development of the self. She concluded that Confucian-influenced society prevents women from developing a cohesive self and causes women to experience a split between feelings of grandiosity and low self-esteem, as well as a pervasive sense of shame which may lead to a narcissistic personality. Her observations helped me understand why I felt pulled between Confucianism and feminism while feeling shame and guilt over either aspect of my identity. Yet, she suggested that women influenced by Confucianism can preserve the constructive aspects of the philosophy while freeing themselves from its patriarchal influences. Then they may be able to celebrate the feminine self with pride and joy. However, she did not explain what these constructive aspects of Confucianism were. Therefore, I recently have begun to explore the positive contributions of Confucianism and to understand its fuller meanings and historical contexts.

Third Phase: Expansion

As I recall my childhood, I remembered that my parents were modeling ways of keeping balance between a husband and a

wife, or *yang* and *yin*. My mother has always worked outside the home as a prominent Korean modern literature scholar. While she was away for conferences, my father prepared meals for me and my sisters. Often it was my mother who disciplined us, and my father who quietly and gently consoled us when we were grounded. However, such role behaviors were not static; the *yin* and *yang* sides of both my parents were constantly shifting to keep our family going. After reflecting on my upbringing, I realized that there must be an adaptive way to interpret the relationship between a husband and a wife dictated by Confucianism.

Indeed, many Confucian scholars argue that roles of men and women, such as *yang* and *yin*, should be complementary rather than hierarchical (Guisso & Johannesen, 1981; Black, 1986; Pao, 1979). Misinterpretation and application of the *yang* and *yin* concept on my part as, well as by many people with limited understanding of Confucian teaching, can be explained by the fact that there are significant differences in the historical context between social and cultural practices in the Joseon dynasty in Korea and Confucius's original teachings. For example, the Three Bonds should not be interpreted without the context of Mencius's Five Relationships. The principle of the Three Bonds—namely, the authority of the ruler over the minister, the father over the son, and the husband over the wife—emerged in Confucian literature almost four centuries after Mencius's (372-289BC) Five Relationships (Tu, 1998). The Five Relationships are love between father and son, duty between ruler and subject, distinction between husband and wife, precedence of the old over the young, and trust between friends (Mencius 3A:4, cited in Tu, 1998). Unlike the male dominating conception of the husband-wife relationship in the Three Bonds, Mencius's idea of the distinction of the husband and wife is based on the principle of mutuality; the underlying spirit is thus not dominance, but division and complementary aspects of labor. In other words, the husband and wife have equally important though different roles.

This functional distinction alludes to "male activity" as existing in the public, economic, and political domain, and "female activity" as

existing in the private, family, and household domain. This did not require a hierarchical meaning in an agrarian economy, because in Confucianism the concept of family is seen neither as completely separate from nor as secondary to the public domain. Indeed, family is the center for cultivating benevolence and good character for individuals and society. The separation of men and women's spheres as outside and inside the home before the rise of a market economy was not problematic, since both functions and roles were valued equally. However, in a market economy, the outside function of making money naturally began to carry more weight than the inside function of taking care of children and doing the household chores. With the rise of modernization and development of a free market economy, the characteristics stereotypically connected with *yang*—earning power, leadership, aggressiveness, and being involved in the outer world—were valued more than characteristics of *yin* and women's domestic roles. Thus Confucians who are not willing to adapt to changing modern circumstances should be criticized for condoning the subordination of women, but not the whole of Confucianism.

On a personal level, this more nuanced understanding has aided my own identity clarification. I am exploring how to reconstruct a cultural view of Confucianism based on its virtues of benevolence and reciprocity, including the complementary and equal relationship between male and female. Balance is the answer I found in one of the Confucian Classics.

The Doctrine of the Mean³⁷ is full of Confucius teaching on keeping balance: cultivating oneself to be without excessive inclination to either side of a dichotomy and to admit to no change. He elaborated the importance of being in "the state of equilibrium and harmony" (Mean 1.5, translated by Legge, 1971). After reflecting on the following words of Confucius reported in the Doctrine of the Mean, I found it difficult to argue that Confucianism endorses violence against women or wives. Confucius said, "When one cultivates to the utmost the principles of one's nature,³⁸ and exercises them on the principle of reciprocity,³⁹ one is not far from the path.

What you do not like when done to yourself, do not do to others” (Mean 13.3, translated by Legge, 1971). “It is said in the Book of Poetry, ‘Happy union with wife and children, is like the music of lutes and harps. When there is concord among brethren, the harmony is delightful and enduring. Thus may you regulate your family, and enjoy the pleasure of your wife and children’” (Mean 15.2, translated by Legge, 1971). Although Confucius did not specifically dictate men to follow women as he did women to men,⁴⁰ he did emphasize that a man should cultivate himself before imposing regulations onto others. A wise man would cultivate himself to please his wife and children and to keep his home harmonious.

The more I reflect on the notion of justice and relationship rules taught by Confucianism, I realize that *yin* and *yang* are indeed complementary. One is not better than the other or in control over the other. Without *yin* force, *yang* alone will not bring equilibrium and harmony to the society. In Confucianism, neither husband nor wife has the right to coerce or control the spouse. Both should complement each other’s function in the family and society. Further, according to classical Confucian teachings, traditional life styles, family roles, and social patterns need to be adapted as circumstances change (Canda, 2002b).

As Tao (2000), Ni (2002), and Yin (2006) argue, I have gained awareness that oppression against women is not necessarily a fundamental part of Confucianism. Tao, Ni, and Yin also suggest that both Confucian ethics of benevolence and the care-oriented feminist ethics focus on human relatedness and mutual care and nurturing. Both emphasize the importance of situational and personal wisdom to connect with the others, character building through self-cultivation to be humane, and flexibility rather than rigid rule-following (See Li, 2000). Ni (2002) states that if we understand the human-heartedness as the general principle of Confucianism, we cannot possibly say that the oppression against women is an indispensable part of Confucianism. A truer understanding of Confucianism led Ni and me to discard the discriminatory element and replace it with the recognition of women’s equal status. This is

not only possible with Confucianism; it is arguably something society must teach to make Confucianism more self-consistent (Ni, 2002). Ni’s argument empowers me and gives me a direction for further reflection and research. I now have a better understanding that Confucianism contains women-empowering elements. I hope to utilize the common cultural heritage I share with my clients from Confucian cultures to assist in healing their wounds.



Fourth Phase: Reconstruction

In both South Korea and the USA, I observe a common attitude that anything new is valued and glorified while anything old is thrown away. I wonder, then, how we can utilize the teaching of classical Confucianism, which I have discussed above as containing time-tested truths much needed today, in re-socializing our youngsters, in empowering women, in establishing balance between women and men, and in cultivating the complementary roles of women and men in a way that is relevant to contemporary life. Confucius stated that “Reviewing the old as a means of realizing the new or cherishing one’s old knowledge, so as continually to be acquiring new⁴¹ (Analects, 2.11; translated by Ames & Rosemont, Jr., 1998).” Classical Confucianism teaches us to be flexible in accord with the time, place, and circumstances when applying traditional principles (Canda, 2002a).

My wedding ceremony comes to my mind as an example of adapting a beautiful tradition to modern times. My wedding included both Western tradition (Catholic mass) as well as some parts of Korean tradition. At the Korean traditional wedding ceremony, commonly only relatives of the bridegroom are honored by receiving bows from the newlywed couple while relatives of the bride either work in the background or watch the ceremony among

guests. At our wedding, my parents-in-law invited my parents to be honored and to receive our bows. This was the very first time my parents were ever included this way, even though my three sisters got married before me. This is what I would call a reconstruction of the old tradition to value gender equality and balance.

Some Confucians value the sacrifices our mothers have made and still are making. They argue that sacrificial mothers hold homes together. If half the population is constantly requiring sacrifice from the other half of the population to maintain equilibrium and harmony, I wonder how long society will last. It seems more appropriate for both men and women to cultivate themselves to be virtuous, benevolent, righteous, appropriate, courteous, and wise, before imposing these Confucian principles on others. Dr. Yi Dong-Jun (2007 February) elaborates on the original teaching of Confucianism, particularly the principle of cultivating oneself, which enhances people's welfare (see *Analects*, 14:42⁴²). This is a strong message that can be utilized to prevent violence against women. Detailed directions on cultivating oneself are described in the Great Learning; the following passage is just one of many examples:

"The ancients, who wished to illustrate virtue throughout the kingdom, first ordered well their own States. Wishing to order well their States, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts. Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things" (The Great Learning, I.4, translated by Legge, 1971).

Through reconstructing Confucianism by expanding my understanding of it, I have learned to appreciate where I come from, how I was brought up, and who I have become. I have come to appreciate my *yin* and *yang* characteristics. This appreciation allows me to utilize both energies to keep balance within myself. This change also has an impact on my husband. As I constantly assess my part in keeping equilibrium and harmony in my marriage, I have noticed that he too reflects on his function and roles in our relationship. By realizing this whole process, I have reached new ground in feeling that I have been empowered by Confucianism. By being empowered, I feel more confident that I can assist other women in their healing process.

Conclusion and Implications for Social Work Practice

The process of self-cultivation in Confucianism is a social act because it requires us to see ourselves in interactions with other human beings (Chang, 1998). Self-cultivation requires a social order that enables the development of a person, while it simultaneously contributes to develop and maintain that order (Cheng, 1987, 1998). Moreover, the goal of self-cultivation is not merely personal growth or moral perfection. It is not just for a person's self interest. Rather, self-cultivation is a way for a person to make herself or himself available to the society—to contribute to the social order that makes moral transformation of everyone possible (Cheng, 1998). "Self-cultivation inspired by *ren* is not only a means for Chinese and other Asian women to gain a sense of agency but also contributes to the development of agency of other female members of the society" (Yin, 2006, p. 14).

Although I have more learning and cultivating of virtue ahead of me, I now have a better and broader understanding of what Confucianism is and can be. I continue to oppose misogynistic misuse of Confucian teachings or popular customs. I am still resentful that historically and currently, there are so many women who are victimized and oppressed. The distorted and wrongful use of Confucianism provided perpetrators some

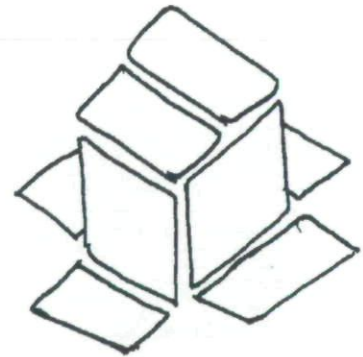
grounds for rationalizations for their abusive behavior towards their wives. However, I will not let misinterpretation and malpractice of Confucianism destroy my whole cultural heritage or my self identity. As I develop a perspective as a Confucian feminist, I can enhance my culturally sensitive practice with clients who come from Confucian cultural backgrounds. Interventions for intimate partner violence perpetrators and survivors could include reconstructing people's understandings of Confucianism, especially the concept of *yin* and *yang* and how Confucian philosophy guides men and women to be complementary and adaptive. By doing this, a misogynistic "cultural defense" is less likely to be used to justify violence against women. Survivors can find strength and resources to overcome abuse by drawing on their heritage rather than being ostracized and re-victimized under negative cultural stereotypes.

Truly culturally competent intervention for both victims and batterers would not simply blame Confucianism for violence against women. Instead we can identify specific cultural traditions, social institutions, and individuals' abusive behaviors that come from misinterpretation and malpractice of Confucianism. In helping both men and women clients to re-envision Confucianism, we may actually help them to decide whether they wish to adapt Confucian tradition in a healthy way or to depart from it. In either case, this will be a matter of client self and family cultivation, rather than cultural and identity confusion or destruction, as I have learned through the stages of my life outlined in this essay.

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- ¹ 男女七歲不同席 mentioned in chapter 內則 (Chinese Pinyin Romanization—C: *Nei ze*) of 禮記 (C: *Li ji*)
- ² China has a similar saying, “If married to a rooster, a woman should follow the rooster, and if married to a dog she should follow the dog (嫁雞隨雞, 嫁狗隨狗 C: *jia ji sui ji, jia gou sui gou*).
- ³ 女必從夫 (Korean new Government Romanization—K: *yeo pil jong bu*)
- ⁴ 賢母良妻 (K: *hyeon mo yang cheo*)
- ⁵ 三剛 C: *san gang*
- ⁶ 三從之道 C: *san cong zhi dao*; cited in 儀禮, chapter 喪服禮, which is Zhu Xi (朱熹)’s report on Confucius teachings
- ⁷ 君爲臣剛 C: *jun wei chen gang*
- ⁸ 父爲子剛 C: *fu wei zi gang*
- ⁹ 夫爲婦剛 C: *fu wei fu gang*
- ¹⁰ 朝鮮王朝
- ¹¹ 大明律 C: *Da Ming Lü*; This was the statute of Ming Dynasty (明 1368-1644 CE) of China and King Taejo (太祖 1335-1408 CE) of Joseon Dynasty translated and implemented it in Korea during his sovereignty.
- ¹² 七去之惡 or 七出; K: *chil geo ji ak*, cited in 儀禮, 大戴禮, and 孔子家語 as general principles
- ¹³ 不順舅姑去 K: *bul sun gu go geo*
- ¹⁴ 無子去 K: *mu ja geo*
- ¹⁵ 淫行去 K: *eum haeng geo*
- ¹⁶ 嫉妬去 K: *jil tu geo*
- ¹⁷ 惡疾去 K: *ak byong geo*
- ¹⁸ 口舌去 K: *gu seol geo*
- ¹⁹ 竊盜去 K: *jeol do geo*
- ²⁰ 三不去 K: *sam bul geo*
- ²¹ 疏薄正妻罪 K: *so bak jeong cheo joe*
- ²² 夫爲婦剛
- ²³ “Only when the dynasties of T’ang and Yu met, were they more abundant than in this of Chau, yet there was a woman among them. The able ministers were no more than nine men (according to Legge (1971) translation)”
- ²⁴ 女子 C: *nu zi*
- ²⁵ 小人 C: *xiaoren*
- ²⁶ “The Master said, ‘Of all people, girls and servants are the most difficult to behave to. If you are familiar with them, they lose their humility. If you maintain a reserve towards them, they are discontented.’” (according to Legge (1971) translation)
- ²⁷ 陰
- ²⁸ 陽
- ²⁹ or the doctrines of 朱子學 (C: *Zhuzi xue*) or 性理學 (C: *Xingli xue*)

³⁰ 春秋時代

³¹ 仁 C: *ren*

³² 義 C: *yi*

³³ 禮 C: *li*

³⁴ 智 C: *zhi*

³⁵ 道 C: *dao*

³⁶ 君子 C: *junzi*

³⁷ 中庸 C: *Zhong Yong*

³⁸ 衷 C: *zhong*

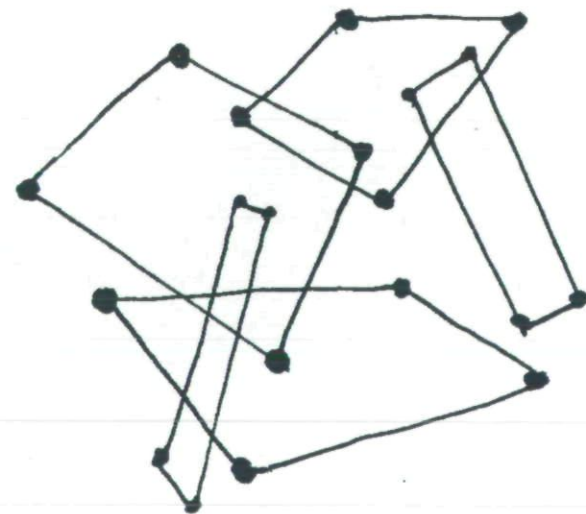
³⁹ 恕 C: *shu*

⁴⁰ The obedience in three ways; 三從之道 C: *san cong zhi dao*, cited in 儀禮, chapter 喪服禮, which is Zhu Xi (朱熹)'s report on Confucius teachings

⁴¹ 溫故知新 C: *wengu zhixin*

⁴² "They cultivate themselves by bringing accord to the people" (修己而安百姓 C: *xiuji eran baixing*) translated by Ames & Rosemont, Jr. (1998)

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