

# FILIAL PIETY IN CONFUCIANISM AND ISLAM: A COMPARATIVE LITERARY ANALYSIS OF QUR'ĀN, HADĪTH, AND FOUR CHINESE CLASSICS

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**Abstract:** This article is an attempt to compare the teachings of Confucius and Islam, specifically *The Four Books*, which are authoritative works on Confucius, and the original sources of Islam, Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. *The Four Books* are the most quoted sources of Confucius' thought, namely *The Great Learning (Da Xue 大学)*, *The Doctrine of the Mean (Zhong Yong 中庸)*, *The Confucian Analects (Lun Yu 论)* and *The Works of Mencius (Mengzi 孟子)*. The focus shall be on the concept of family and filial piety as found in Confucianism and Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. Both the teachings of Confucius and Islam emphasise the importance of virtues, ties and order in the family system, for example, the husband is the head of the family and responsible for the family's existence and security. Islam and Confucianism are both patriarchal, and the husband and men are protectors of the family and deserve much respect. Young members of the family must respect and obey the elders and *vice versa*. To Confucius, these virtues are the heavenly way and must be cultivated and developed accordingly as *li* (礼) or good manners from an early age. The young and old must be treated according to their age. Similar values are also upheld in Islam. However, there are also differences between the two approaches which shall be highlighted as well.

## Introduction

Confucius was born in Shandong (山东), China, in 551 BCE, but his teachings, ethics, and influence have widely spread not only in China, but also Korea, Japan,

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Vietnam, Singapore and other regions in both East and West, and attracted nearly one-fifth of the world's population. The Prophet Muḥammad was born in 572 from the Hashemite tribe in Mecca and brought Islam to the people as a 'comprehensive way of life'. Islam has since the time of Muḥammad spread from Mecca to the rest of the Arabian Peninsula, then to the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Europe, the Americas and the rest of the world. Nearly one-fifth of the world population is Muslim. Due to the widespread practices of the two beliefs within the cultures of mankind, the present research was initiated to compare the concepts, similarities, and contrasts of the ubiquitous family institutions of mankind within Confucianism and Islam. It is naturally worthwhile to study the teachings and ways of lives of these two great teachers, their similarities and differences, due to the following reasons:

- both Confucius and the Prophet Muḥammad are accepted by many as two of the greatest teachers in the history of mankind;
- the progressively massive numbers of followers in each belief;
- both expound the significance of the family upon the individual, and
- while Confucianism stresses on the goodness of life on earth, Islam stresses on this aspect as well and adds to it the goodness of life on earth for the sake of a good result in the hereafter.

### The Methodologies of this Research

The sources of references for Confucianism are *The Analects (Lun Yu, 论语)*, *The Works of Mencius (Mengzi 孟子)*, *The Great Learning (Da Xue 大学)*, *The Doctrine of the Mean (Zhong Yong 中庸)*, *The Book of Changes (Yi Ching 易经)*, and also *Xiao Jing (孝经)*, *Xunzi (荀子)*. These are among the most reliable references, with the first four being *The Four Books* of Confucianism.<sup>1</sup> *The Four Books* were the syllabus of the imperial examinations held in China since 206 BCE, a period which ended in the early twentieth century in the Qing dynasty. Thus was the place of Confucian thought in the various dynasties of China, and *The Four Books* have remained important as sources and references in China, particularly in Chinese studies of Confucianism. A description of *The Four Books* of Confucianism is provided in the following. In the comparative analysis extreme care was exercised when writing down the words of the original texts of these classical texts and the Qur'ān and ḥadīth, and their respective translations, and other Islamic sources.

Philosopher Cheng says, "*The Great Learning* is a book left by Confucius and forms the gate by which the first learner enters into virtue. That we can now perceive the order in which the ancients pursued their learning is solely owing to the presentation of the work. *The Confucian Analects* and *Mengzi* come later. Learners must commence their course with this and then it may be hoped they will be kept

from error.” Thus for Cheng *The Great Learning* is a book of virtues as it describes comprehensively the sincerity of the heart, self-cultivation, the establishment of the family, the management of a good and just nation, and the spread of a happy and peaceful empire.

The second book is *The Doctrine of the Mean*, with the original version entitled *Zhong* (中). *Yong* (庸) denotes ‘the correct course under heaven’ (*tian* 天). This work contains all the thoughts handed down from one to another in the Confucian school. Zisi (子思), the grandson of Confucius, was a student of Philosopher Cheng, who in turn was a student of Confucius. Zisi was afraid of errors in the book that might have been committed during the course of learning. That is why the terms were combined as *The Doctrine of the Mean* in writing and delivered to Mencius. *The Doctrine of the Mean* is thus a very important authoritative book on Confucius. It specifically mentions the path that should not be abandoned once we engage with it and if so, then, it is not the truth.

*The Confucian Analects*, on the other hand, are a record of the discourse, words and acts of ancient Chinese thinkers, namely Confucius and his disciples. These are discussions that were held annually in the spring and autumn<sup>2</sup> from 479 BCE to several dynasties after 221 BCE. The book is the most representative work of Confucianism and continues to be a tremendous influence on Chinese values and thought. *The Confucian Analects* constitutes a comprehensive collection of philosophy, political and economical thought, and educational works. It also contains narrations of the life and difficulties of Confucius and their solutions.

*Mengzi* or the *Works of Mencius* was written by Mencius, born either in 371 or 372 BCE. He is the disciple of the grandson of Confucius, Zisi. *Mengzi* consists of seven parts and offers treatments of the proper regulation of human conducts from the points of society and state.<sup>3</sup> Mencius was born 479 years after Confucius. His personal name was Ke and courtesy name Ziyu (子輿). His era was more anarchic than the Confucius era. He travelled from place to place and taught in the states of Liang (梁) and Qi (齐) and was an invited consultant and minister by the King Huan (King Qi Xuan 齐宣王) of the latter state. He offered very sharp opinions on the ruling of a state. For instance, in one of his arguments with the king, he said: “There is no difference if you kill a person by a knife or a stick, if the ruling party has very thick meat in the kitchen, fat horse in the garden, fish jumping in his pond but at the same time, the common people are dying of hunger in the jungle seeking for food. What is the difference between the cruel ruler who let the common people die of hunger and the thief killing people with a knife or a stick?” He used to give the same types of opinion to King Huan, which fell upon deaf ears. Finally, he resigned and travelled and then retired to write books. He developed the perception of the benevolent (*ren* 仁), a key component of benevolent government, as he was against one big power taking other smaller states by force or war.

His discourses with the king were recorded in *Mengzi*, yet there are various opinions on the authority of the book. One source indicates that it was written by him with the assistance of his disciples, chief of whom were Wan Zhang (万章) and Gongsun Chou (公孙丑). Another source states that it is simply a collection of Mencius' sayings compiled after his death. The book consists of theories and thoughts in politics, education, philosophy and ethics. It is an important document for the study of Confucianism and its development and is essential reading for an understanding of Confucius and his doctrines.<sup>4</sup>

As far as Islamic sources are concerned, the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* are the main sources of reference in this article. The Qur'ān is a compilation of revelations, from Allah, whereas the *ḥadīth* consists of the recorded sayings, actions and tacit approvals of Prophet Muḥammad. The Qur'ān is the primary source of Islam, with the *ḥadīth* further supporting and illustrating and clarifying concepts of the Qur'ān. Combined, both are seen as the primary sources of Islam, as the *ḥadīth* does not contradict the word of Allah. Other than these two sources, the consensus of scholars and *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) and *qiyās* (analogical reasoning) are included in our analysis of the comparison between Confucianism and Islam.

Particular sources that were utilised included the works of Abdur Rahman I. Doi entitled *Shari'ah: The Islamic Law*<sup>5</sup> which depicts the concept of family in Islam, and Abdullah Yusuf Ali's widely accepted translation of the Qur'ān, as they present very rich sources of Islamic spiritualism.<sup>6</sup> The seminal work by the Malaysian scholar Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, entitled *Islam and Secularism*, was also employed in the research.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, two other books also provided crucial references, by two scholars who are not only knowledgeable in Islam, but also extremely familiar with Confucianism. The first is Omar Min Ke Din's work entitled "Ethical Values of Islam and Confucianism: A Comparative Study".<sup>8</sup> Omar Min, a Malaysian Chinese, is a scholar who, after graduating in Confucianism and Islam has been teaching in this very field since 2003. The second reference is a book entitled *Traditional Chinese and Islamic Thought* by Ibrahim Ma.<sup>9</sup> Ibrahim Ma, also a Malaysian Chinese, is a graduate from a French university and one of the former Vice Presidents of the Malaysian Muslim Welfare Organisation. He has spent his whole life so far researching and writing on Confucianism and Islam in Malaysia.

We also took into consideration the works of many scholars from the past and present in both Confucianism and Islam. For example, from Confucianism, we adopted the concept of *ren* (仁) and *li* (礼) discussed by Wei-Ming in his article "The Creative Tension between *ren* and *li*".<sup>10</sup>

Since the analysis involved the Qur'ān and doctrines of Confucianism, care was taken in preserving their authenticity. Excerpts from the classical sources were extracted *verbatim*, with exact transliterations, and then translations given for each of

them. Textual analyses were carried out on the texts to further extract the finer points that became data in the comparative analysis. In forming any conclusions, precaution was duly exercised to avoid any forms of unwarranted generalisations, which might cause error on the part of the authors. Similar attention was paid to the original texts of the classic four books and their translations. On top of this, the transliterated, translated and interpreted texts of the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* were continuously reviewed by another author/specialist to ensure accuracy and prevent erroneous interpretations and generalisations. From the analysis we were able to extract valuable information which are presented and discussed in the following sections.

### The Concept of Family in Confucianism and Islam

The teachings of both Confucianism and Islam emphasise the understanding and knowledge of individual members in a given situation. It is not easy for all members of a family to practise virtues and live harmoniously as a functional unit which plays a central role both in Confucianism and Islam. Both Confucianism and Islam, as great teachings, present deep insights, virtues, rights, and duties of the family members and the complex relationships among them. The various and often difficult ties of different family members require knowledge and skill to deal with, for those who live under the same roof. It is also essential for the individual to understand human wants, needs and desires and their nature and destiny in the family as a factor in maintaining the balance and harmony of the family.

In the Chinese tradition, with which Confucianism is synonymous, the most frequently used word for the concept of family is *Jia* (家). It refers to a home with a roof over everyone so that they may live together, and also the presence of several domesticated animals such as poultry and goats. Family members living together are recognised as a distinctive unit. According to *Mengzi*,<sup>11</sup> if the house consists of several members – a grandparent, husband, wife and children and others – the chief requirement is that the head must “take care of parents” and support the “wife and children”. Older people must be given priority and treated respectfully and the young must be loved accordingly. In this respect, Islam shares the same view, respect and care for the elders, while giving utmost attention and love to the children.

Confucianism and Islam also show similarities in a number of other features. The family is a place where traditions, teachings and practices, both religious and ethical, are maintained and implemented. The young nurtured and the old respected are the embodiment of traditional values. In terms of wealth and material, the family is the means by which family members of different generations support each other. In Islam, the family is also the place where faith in Allah is maintained and consolidated. These various practices customise the respective faiths. The virtues of Islam – such as the five daily prayers, annual fasting during the month

of Ramaḍān and the recitation of the Qur'ān, the *Sunnah*, and their value systems – are all studied and practised at home, within the family. Children's respect of their parents and other elders and elders' love towards the young are nurtured at home within the family. There are not many differences between individual and communal practices in Islam. For example, the option to carry out the five daily prayers alone or together with others in a communal prayer, both signify acts of submission to God. In Islam, everyone is expected to obey God by following *al-dīn* (the 'correct' religion, i.e. Islam).

In contrast, Confucianism focuses on the man's role to support the family and the young to respect their elders. This is the heavenly way (*tian* 天) as expounded in Confucianism. Both Confucianism and Islam are patriarchal where the husbands are very important. Incomplete families such as a single-parent family or childless family or orphans are not highly valued in Confucianism. Old men without wives, old people without children, young people without parents are considered destitute and categorised as those who should be helped at some points.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Islam also asks its adherents to love, care and feed the orphans and the destitute; thus if all is carried out, no one should be destitute in Islam.

A large part of Confucian thought falls on the proper orderly running and maintaining of the family. It is concerned with the family and its filial relationships. Confucianism insists on a special order within the family, which is crucial for family prosperity and harmony. The core of the family is that members must understand and maintain the heavenly (*tian* 天) order. The relationship between husband and wife is the foundation of the order and must be established and maintained correctly. As for the relationship between parents and children, there is the principle of hierarchy and patriarchy, the most senior male, who is the husband, must be obeyed and the junior and female members of the family must follow the words of their elders and the male members.<sup>13</sup> Parents are the authoritative rulers. Every member of the family has his or her duties and rights and only when all are in their right positions and perform the respective virtues and duties, is the family said to be in the right order. This is mentioned in *Yi Ching*: "when the family is in order, all the social relationships of the society will be in order".<sup>14</sup> Thus, the family is the nucleus of the entire community, with each family being a piece of the puzzle that would find its exact space in the bigger picture of the community.

Further, in Confucianism the maintaining of the family depends on the proper cultivation of the personality of a person, especially the husband. Cultivating of the personality of a man depends on rectifying the mind. If a person is clouded by feelings of passion, terror, fondness, sorrow and distress, he would not be able to conduct himself correctly. If we are under the influence of our feelings and emotions, our minds would not be 'present'. We see but we do not perceive, we hear but we do not understand, we eat but we do not taste. This is why the cultivation of

our personality is viewed as rectifying our minds.<sup>15</sup> Thus, controlling feelings and emotions is the key to developing proper benevolence (*ren* 仁) and good external behaviour (*li* 礼), to produce a good person in society. Having attained this, a man can automatically establish a good family. He can regulate and manage the family. If one is in fear or in love and cannot control his senses, he cannot behave well and so cannot manage the family.

Islam too emphasises the order of the family. Abdur Rahman I. Doi mentioned that Islam desires to produce a model nation.<sup>16</sup> To do this, maximum attention must be given to strengthen the family. If the foundation of the family is strong, then, the foundation of a nation will be strong. Islam provides an orderly system for the family. It has put every member of the family in their rightful place and charges all individuals – husband, wife, children – to carry out their responsibilities with *taqwā* (God-Mindfulness). The Qur’ān (4:34) states:

Men are protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given one more strength than the other and because they support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient and guard in the husband’s absence what Allah would have guarded.

The Qur’ān asks Muslims to perform the five daily prayers, to fast in the month of Ramaḍān, pay the compulsory alms tax (*zakāh*) and, when possible, go on pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in one’s life (*hajj*). All of these would inevitably cultivate in Muslims love towards Allah and the Prophet Muḥammad. All love and hatred towards others must be proper and limited. Love is subject to Allah and Prophet Muḥammad’s teaching and should be within the limits set by Allah. Love should not blind Muslims to do things forbidden in Islam.

The above Qur’ānic verse shows that Islam shares similar ideologies with Confucianism in terms of the patriarchal role of the family, the male playing a key role in the family. Parents have more life experience and knowledge than children. A husband has the advantage of physical strength and spiritual power over his wife. For Islam, all humans are creations of Allah, and they are the most honoured of all creations. A point of difference between Islam and Confucianism, as the latter does not profess the Creator God and does not see nature as God’s creation. Nonetheless, both Islamic and Confucianism teachings place a very high value on the family, and desire all family members to fulfil their moral virtues and duties within the family, according to their power and strength.

## Parents and Children

Both Confucian and Islamic teachings provide clear guidance in matters pertaining to parents and children. Confucianism, particularly, emphasises the cultivation

of the self as a way of life. To follow the right path, believers must cultivate the individual character, which includes serving their parents and understanding others. However, whether they can fulfil their moral duty successfully would depend on their understanding of the will of heaven (*tian* 天), as *The Doctrine of the Mean* explains, “A noble person cannot but cultivate his person. As he thinks about cultivating his person, he cannot but serve his parents. As he thinks about serving his parents, he cannot but know about human beings; as he thinks about human beings, he cannot but know heaven (*tian* 天).”<sup>17</sup>

In Confucianism, a good son is important. A good son is defined as one who follows the way of his parents and continues to do so after their death. Traditionally, families were hierarchical and the relationship between parents and children was fulfilled primarily through the latter performing duties for their parents. The hierarchical order of Confucianism reflected the social reality and moral requirements of the time. The proper order between parents and children is part of the heavenly (*tian* 天) order and is essential for social and political peace and harmony. Parents must take the lead in educating and cultivating their children. Children must understand the pains of birth and subsequent sacrifices of their upbringing by the parents. Confucianism stresses the order of heaven (*tian* 天) and the relationship between parents and children as a hierarchical order of heaven and earth. This is mentioned in a later Confucian text: “The way of parents and child is rooted in the heavenly (*tian* 天) moral nature [...]. Parents give one life; no bond could be greater.”<sup>18</sup>

Confucius asked the people to remember their parents, be they alive or dead. Once, he reproached a pupil for suggesting that the three year mourning rites be abolished. He argued that the three years of mourning were a means to repay the pains and love of the parents to the children since birth.<sup>19</sup>

In the Confucian tradition, the dire consequence of not fulfilling one’s duty as children was also mentioned in *Xunzi* 5:3, “to be young and yet unwilling to serve the elders, misfortune will follow”.

Confucius’ disciple Zi Xia (子夏) said that a cultured man must exert his service to his parents properly. He demanded that in serving the parents, the children must act in accordance with the properties of *li* (礼).<sup>20</sup> *Li* in Chinese means proper manners, attitude and behaviour. This simply means one must not only love and respect one’s parents, but also observe good attitude and behaviour in treating them. Thus whatsoever we do, speak, stand or sit, especially with older people, our manners and postures must indicate reverence towards the elders and not to ever degrade them because of their age or senility.

Mencius considered serving parents as the most important virtue of mankind.<sup>21</sup> He also lists five categories which renders a son undutiful and notes that negligence towards parents will bring harm, shame and humility to them:

First, the neglect of parent through laziness of the limbs without attending to the nourishment of the parents, second, the laziness through the game of *bo yi* (不義 ungrateful and not trustworthy) like fondness of drinking wine, gambling and playing chess. Third, the negligence through miserliness in money and other goods or material matter. Fourth, the negligence through the indulgence of sensual pleasure to the shame of parents. Fifth, being quarrelsome and fighting in blind bravery with others until it jeopardises the safety of the parents and family.<sup>22</sup>

Islam is in line with Mencius regarding the above view. Alcohol is forbidden in Islam. So is gambling and illicit sex. A Muslim is asked to work hard to earn an honest living, as Prophet Muḥammad said, “The Prophet David earned a living as a carpenter. This is a good way of living.” The Prophet Muḥammad also encourages Muslims not to beg but to give charity saying “the hand above is better than the hand below”. Where wealth is concerned, Islam tells us that it is merely a trust from Allah. We are born without anything and when we die, we cannot bring anything along with us. A Muslim who owns wealth must pay *zakāh* and is encouraged to contribute to the causes of charity. Islam also asks us to speak only the right thing and when doing so, we must not be rude to our parents and elders.

Both Confucianism and Islam emphasise love in the family. The children owe their existence to their parents, and this includes the provisions of food, clothing and accommodation by their parents.<sup>23</sup> Confucianism stresses the importance of the concept of filial piety or filial love and this has become the backbone of many Chinese families.

Similarly, the Qur’ān also speaks of the love in the family and asks children to always pray for their parents, living and dead. This shows that there are not many differences between Confucianism and Islam in terms of the concept of love in a family. However, from an Islamic perspective, men are the creation of Allah; children are indoctrinated to love and look after their parents. To infringe upon this is a violation and a sin. The role of the mother is also crucial, as she is the caregiver of the children and so deserves gentle words and respect from the children as well. They too must not hurt their mother, and thus respect and love are mandatory for them, as confirmed in the following *ḥadīth*:

Heaven is at the feet of mothers.

This clearly means that the way to paradise for children is via obedience and love for the mother. On the other hand, if children disobey and hurt their parents, the doors of paradise will be closed to them.

Thus, there are practices that overlap in Confucianism and Islam. First, children must support and help the parents. A wise son should bring joy to the parents, and not shame. Second, the children must respect and please their parents. This is the concept

of filial piety, which is highly valued by Confucius.<sup>24</sup> Mencius even mentions that “when one cannot please the parents, one cannot be a human; when one cannot obey the parents, one cannot be a son”.<sup>25</sup> For Xunzi, the goodness of the son is nothing other than respecting and obeying the parents. Only when this happens will you be considered a good son.<sup>26</sup> Filial piety is the main theme of Confucianism. Zengzi, a disciple of Confucius said in *The Book of Rites* (礼), “there are three kinds of filial piety, first, to respect parents; second, not to bring shame to them; third, to support them with food and clothes and others”.

In Islam, when speaking to parents the children must lower their voice and show utmost respect, as mentioned in the following verses of the Qur’ān:

Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him and that you be kind to your parents, whether one or both of them attain old age in your life. Say not a word of contempt, nor repel them but address them in terms of honour, and out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility and say ‘My Lord bestow on them Your Mercy even as they cherished me in childhood.’ (17:23–4)

We have enjoined on men kindness to parents, but if they strive (force) you to worship me with associate which you have no knowledge, obey them not, you have to return to Me and I will tell you the truth of all you did. (29:8)

We have enjoined on man, kindness to his parents, in pain did his mother bear him and in pain did she give birth, the carrying of the child. To his weaning is (a period of) 30 months. At length, when he reaches the age of full strength and attains forty years, he says, “Oh my Lord, grant me that I may be grateful for thy favour which Thou has bestowed upon me and upon both my parents and that I may work righteousness such as You approve and be gracious to me in my issue. Truly I have turned to you, truly do I bow in Islam.” Such are they from whom We shall accept the best of their deeds and pass by their ill-deed. They shall be the companions of the Garden: a promise of truth, which was made to them but (there is one) who says to his parents “Fie to you, Do you hold out the promise to me that I shall be raised up, even though the generations have passed before me (without rising again)?” And they seek God’s aid (and rebuke the son), “Woe to you, have faith! The promise of God is true.” But he says, “This is nothing but the tales of the ancients.” (46:15–17)

In Confucianism, even when the parents have erred, the children’s proper attitudes and ways of dealing with their parents are explicitly mentioned. In this case, Confucius promoted “dissuading with respect as a way to deal with this problem”. This is indicated from the *Analects*, as follows: “In serving your father and mother, you ought to dissuade them in the gentlest way from doing wrong. If you see your advice being ignored, you should not become disobedient but remain reverent. You should not complain even if in so doing you wear out.”<sup>27</sup>

In Islam, as stated in the Qurʾān, the general principle when seeking to change someone and to right the wrong is that one must persuade the errant person with wisdom. Respect for the person is utmost and the use of gentle words to avoid hurting the listener unnecessarily. This is mentioned in 16:125: “Calling to the way of the Lord with Wisdom and beautiful preaching [...]”

However, there are also differences between Confucianism and Islam with regards to parents and children. Confucianism regards children’s disobedience of their parents as going against the nature of heaven (*tian* 天) and earth. Filial piety is a natural rule from heaven that must be cultivated and developed into one’s personality. For Islam, everything is divine and derived from Revelation, and Allah takes charge of the whole universe. He also defines all relationships, including that between children and parents. Disobeying the orders of Allah is a great sin.

There is also the reward and punishment of the afterlife in Islam for those who obey the order and those who do not, respectively, particularly relating to parents and children. This notion is conspicuously absent in the theological teachings and rulings of Confucian thoughts. In Islam, the stress is on the righteous son, that is, faith in the Lord of Creation and proper practices. Thus, the Qurʾān maintains that it is Allah, the Supreme Lord, whose order is that parents must educate their children to be on the righteous path. Children, in turn, should obey their parents as this is the command of Allah. However, if the parents command or guide their children away from Allah, then children have the right to disobey. Confucianism is silent on the belief in an omnipotent god. Confucianism also does not have the concepts of heaven and hell, rewards and punishments by God in the afterlife, and the rising up of the dead in order to make them accountable for all their earthly deeds.

Thus, faith and proper practices are important in Islam. Confucius did not mention faith in an omnipotent god and rewards of hell and heaven after death. However, he does indicate similar ideas in the mention of heaven after death and the emphasis of the way of heaven and earth, as we have discussed earlier.

Below is a verse from the Qurʾān, showing the importance of faith and proper practices. Thus, whether a father or son worships Allah, the way of Allah or Islam is most important, and faith in Allah is crucial as well. They are part and parcel of Islam; a Muslim father and son must be accountable to Allah. Says the Qurʾān (31:13–14):

Behold, Luqmān said to his son by way of instruction: “Oh my son, join not others in worshipping (other) with Allah for false worship is indeed the greatest wrong doing. And we have enjoined on man to be good to his parents. In travail upon travail, did his mother bear him and in years twain was his weaning: Hear the command, show gratitude to Me and to your parents. To Me is the final goal.”

## Husband and Wife in Confucian and Islamic Teachings

Confucianism and Islam traditionally provide for the blissful living of a man and woman based on the marital tie of husband and wife. It is a foundation upon which a family thrives and propagates by having children. The relationship between husband and wife is the pillar supporting an orderly life. In the Old Testament,<sup>28</sup> the union of Adam and Eve, the first pair of human beings, gave rise to the birth of Cain and Abel. The Qur'ān also mentions the creation of man as a vicegerent of God (*khalīfat Allāh*) and the tie between Adam and Eve. This is the Islamic perception of family.

The view of man as a creation of Allah is absent from Confucianism, but its perception of the family is based on heavenly order. There is some degree of similarity as well as difference, in the concept of family between Islam and Confucianism. In the family order of Confucianism, the sequence of hexagrams in *The Book of Changes* shows that the relationship between a husband and wife is the basis of family. The union between a husband and wife is extended to children, and therefore, the way of union of a husband and wife must not be other than long lasting.<sup>29</sup> Xunzi goes further in arguing that the relationship between a husband and wife is the source of good, familial and social relations. The way or orderly relationship between a husband and wife cannot be incorrect, for it is the relationship between lord and minister, father and son.<sup>30</sup> If the husband and wife are not on the right track or their relationship is disrupted, it will certainly cause chaos in the family and society: then father and son will distrust each other, the ruler and the ruled will be in conflict and divided, and invasions by other stronger nations and disasters might follow.<sup>31</sup>

Islam also emphasises that the peaceful family is essential for a peaceful society. Islam asks the people to uphold virtues and prevent evil (*munkar*) as the major objectives of life. By the term *munkar* actions are meant which are disapproved by Allah, such as children disobeying, hurting, and betraying their parents. A society is necessarily made up of a great number of families. If these families do not administer themselves according to *al-dīn* (i.e. the religion of Islam), naturally, there will be no peace in society, and subsequently in the nation and greater mankind.

Both Confucianism and Islam have the wisdom of requiring the maintenance of family order. The tie between husband and wife involves the roles, duties and limits of the husband and wife. Both parties must exhibit mutual understanding and respect for each other. The Qur'ān (49:13) emphasises mutual understanding of gender differences and division of duties between a husband and wife, as follows:

[...] We have created tribes and nations, male and females for you to understand each other [...].

From the above verse, the husband's and wife's understanding of their respective strengths, weaknesses, and limits in terms of their differences sets the foundation of the family, community, and nation. Within the smallest unit, i.e. the family, the husband's understanding of the wife is the key so as not to burden her too much in the family. Similarly, the wife should also understand the limits of her husband.

On the whole, both Confucian and Islamic families are patriarchal. Since men are physically and mentally stronger than women, the husband is the leader of the family and the leader of the administration of the family, the bread earner, while the wife is the administrator of the home and other domestic affairs. Thus, the wisdom of women is seen in the management of the household and performing duties for other members of the family, and her demonstration of virtues towards other family members. In Islam, if this is properly fulfilled, there would be spiritual equality between the husband and wife which would lead to a harmonious family life. The Prophet Muḥammad said, "If a wife performs the five daily obligatory prayers, and looks after the trust of the family and the wealth of her husband, her reward is equal compared with the toil of the husband." The duties and responsibilities of a husband and wife are thus different but equal.

In Confucianism, as in Islam, family harmony and prosperity are the result of family orderliness. In *The Book of Changes*, the relationship between husband and wife is the vital foundation of the family, just as stated in Islam. The wife's loyalty and perseverance are defined as the tie that holds the family together.<sup>32</sup> The tie between a husband and wife is regarded as the union of heaven and earth; they are two opposites, and when they unite, they should strive for harmony for their union. Mengzi also mentions that husband and wife is the most important relationship.<sup>33</sup>

According to the Confucian model of heaven and earth, the relationship of husband and wife shows the dominant nature of the husband in the family, whereas the wife's role would be "obedience and docility" toward the husband.<sup>34</sup> However, their roles are parallel in nature in the sense that the husband is not authoritative, but firm and different.<sup>35</sup> Thus, this is similar to the Muslim family – the husband is the bread earner, whereas the wife takes charge of household matters, as discussed previously, which includes looking after the children and their education, and preparing the family's food and clothing. Xunzi, however, said that the different roles and duties of a husband and wife are ordered and set unlike animals. For animals, there is no proper separation of sexes and duties.<sup>36</sup>

The division of duties between a husband and wife is not only evident in Confucianism, as Islam teaches the same thing. Both teachings indicate that the home is a life union of two people of opposite sex. The wife's responsibility is the home and the husband is to work to earn their living. The wife's role is confined to household matters, while the husband works for the home and performs other community work. In contrast, in ancient times, there could be no system of union

between man and woman. Men live similar to animals without division of duties, but with the development of time, and with revelation and guidance from Allah, particularly in Islam, men gradually developed proper rules regulating marriage and division of duties, defining and emphasising the relationship between husband and wife in the family. Men eventually abandoned the way of non-division of duties of the sexes. Xunzi said that if there were no governing virtues for the union of man and woman, “[p]eople would suffer the grief of losing any means to marital union and the calamity of the contention of sex”.<sup>37</sup>

From an Islamic perspective, Allah created men and women so that they can find their partners and provide companionship to one another, love one another, have children and live in peace and tranquillity according to His commands and guidance.

Among his signs is this, that he has created for you mates from among yourselves that you may dwell in tranquillity with them and He has put love and mercy between your hearts, and in that are signs for you to reflect. (Qur’ān 30:21)

And God has made for you mates of your own nature. And made for you, out of them, sons and daughters and grandchildren and provided grandchildren. And provide for you sustenance of the best: will they believe in vain things and be ungrateful for God’s favours. (Qur’ān 16:72)

Since Islam propagates an ordered and virtuous way of life, the family system is well defined. Celibacy is not a virtue in Islam or a means of getting closer to God, as practised in other religions. This is confirmed in the following *ḥadīth*:

The Prophet Muḥammad said, “O you young men, whosoever is able to marry, should marry for that helps him to lower his gaze and guard his modesty.” (al-Bukhārī)

The Prophet Muḥammad also said, “Modesty is part of *īmān* (faith).” (al-Bukhārī)

He further said, “marriage is my tradition, whosoever keeps away from it, is not of my followers”. (al-Bukhārī)

From the above verses of Qur’ān and traditions of Prophet Muḥammad, there do not seem to be major differences in terms of the practices of the family as a way of living compared with Confucianism. However, the contrast exists in which infringements of the family code are against the ways of Heaven (*tian* 天) and Earth for Confucianism. For Islam, they would be against the code of Allah and invite punishment in the hereafter. As for Confucianism, the faith does not mention anything regarding life after death.

Marriage also makes a difference for man and woman in both Confucian and Islamic teachings. A man and woman without any union have to observe many norms or restrictions in their social interaction and contacts. Unmarried men and women

should not mix unnecessarily and break the codes of the respective faiths. These codes are strict even in the pre-Confucius era in China, and were widely accepted as the norm. In *The Book of Mengzi* it is written: “In giving and receiving, men and women should not touch each other.”<sup>38</sup> In the book of Xunzi,<sup>39</sup> it is mentioned that the separation between men and women is said to be one of the criteria which differentiate human beings from animals. That means free mixing of the sexes is only an attribute of animals. Islam certainly supports this as it requires Muslim men and women to dress properly and avoid the traps of falling into undesirable interactions between them.

In marriage, the roles of the husband and wife become mutually supplementary. The emotional needs of the husband and wife for each other can be met, and they may also rejoice in each other’s companionship.<sup>40</sup> Xunzi, however, states that rejoicing must be guarded against slipping into promiscuity and prevent the proper relationship between man and woman from flourishing.<sup>41</sup> There is a list of duties a wife must follow and her attitudes, words and behaviours must reflect herself as a respectful woman and an obedient wife.<sup>42</sup> These virtues are further explained in *The Book of Rites* (禮) such as listening to (*ting* 听, or listening) the husband, being faithful or chaste (*xin* 信), and showing obedience (*cong* 从, or serve) to her husband and in-laws.<sup>43</sup>

Mengzi also mentioned that it is the wish of all parents to get their children married, something that is necessary to control sexual desires according to proper rites. Thus, those who bore holes to peep at others, climb over the walls to meet someone of the opposite sex in their lust, and those who cannot wait for the consent of both parents and negotiations of a middle man (go between) are condemned by the parents and others in society.<sup>44</sup>

Confucius was also cautious of the attraction between the opposite sexes in unmarried relationships. He criticised men for submitting to beauty or being more attracted to appearances than to the good characters of the opposite sex. This could lead to undesirable events, even disasters. He equated a woman to “*Xiao Ren*” (小人) or low men (base person or villains) and difficult to deal with.<sup>45</sup> Confucius stressed that he had not yet met a man who was fond of virtue as much as he was attracted by the beauty of women<sup>46</sup> and he called on men to guard themselves against the attraction of feminine beauty.<sup>47</sup>

Islam also condemns sexual behaviours or encounters between unmarried couples, and prohibits free mixing of the sexes to prevent adultery. This religion always asks us to keep our sexual desires under control by fasting as one of the means to do so. The Qur’ān also asks us to lower our gaze so that we will not be susceptible to the beauty of the opposite sex, as discussed earlier, and thus avoid lustful thoughts. Women should also not expose their bodies as described in Islam or attract men by

her ornaments, except to her husband or close relatives. This is mandated in Islam, as mentioned in the Qur'ān 24:30–1:

Say to the believing men, that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty, they will make for greater purity for them and Allah is well acquainted with all that they do. And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what appears thereof; that they should draw their veil over their bosom and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husband's sons, their brothers and brothers' sons.

According to Abdullah Yusuf Ali, “guard here means to distance from illicit sex. The rule of modesty applies to men and women. A brazen stare by a man to a woman is a breach of refined manners. When sex is concerned, modesty is a good form. It is not only to safeguard against the weaker sex but also to guard the spiritual good of the stronger sex. The requirement of modesty is the same for the female, due to differentiation of the different sexes in nature, temperaments and a social life, a greater amount of privacy is required for women than men, especially in matters of dress and covering the bosom.”<sup>748</sup>

Islam also commands us not to go close to any woman or be involved in any situations which can lead to adultery. We are also asked not to be alone with a person of the opposite sex in a room or any isolated place without a third person. The Qur'ān 17:32 says:

Nor come nigh to adultery: for it is a shameful deed and an evil, opening the road to other evil.

Abdullah Yusuf Ali mentions that adultery is evil, and is a means of other evils prohibited in Islam. Thus, the Qur'ān asks us not to go near any situations that may lead to adultery. Naturally, this means Islam frowns upon the free mixing of both sexes as this could potentially lead to promiscuity. It is also forbidden for an unmarried man and woman to be together in a room or in an isolated area, as mentioned earlier, because it can lead to adultery by means of the ample opportunity at hand for the couple. Adultery is not only a shameful thing in a Muslim community, but it also causes the loss of self-respect and respect of others. It opens the road to many other evils, as proposed by A. Yusuf Ali. Worse, it could shake or even destroy the foundations of the family. It works against the interest of the illicit child that might be born. It may cause feuds, loss of reputation and property and even murders. This grave sin must not only be avoided, but any approach or temptation to it must also be refrained.

The Prophet Muḥammad said as reported by ‘Abd-Allāh b. Mas‘ud: I asked the Prophet “O Allah’s Apostle, which is the biggest sin? He replied: To set up rivals with Allah by worshipping others, though He alone has created you.” I asked, “What is next?” He said, “To kill your child lest it should share your food.” I asked, “What is next?” He said, “To commit illegal sexual intercourse with the wife of your neighbour.” (al-Bukhārī)

Thus, we can see very clearly, the similarities of the two teachings against the free mixing of the sexes. In this matter, both Islamic and Confucian teachings ask their followers to guard the right order, virtues, and duties of all members in the family.

### Conclusions: Commonalities and Differences

In brief, Confucian and Islamic teachings have their own distinctive ways to develop the personality, establish the family, and maintain the rules of a peaceful society, a peaceful nation and an empire. Although the means to achieve them differ, the objectives are the same. The Muslim foundation lies in the faith in Allah and recognises Him as the Lord, and the rewards and punishment in the hereafter, whereas, Confucianism takes good personality, establishing a family and building a nation as the ways to heaven (*tian* 天). It is very difficult to define *tian* as Confucius’ teachings have not provided a detailed one for the term. Confucius said if you go against *tian*, there is no way to pray for salvation. Further, there are no concepts of heaven and hell as reward and punishment, respectively, in Confucianism. Thus, Confucianism is rather a secular faith that emphasises life on earth.

There is another difference in Confucian teaching compared to Islam, that is, Islam is a revealed religion and the originality of the teaching has been preserved from the outset. The five daily prayers, fasting in the month of Ramaḍān, and going for pilgrimage have remained, passed on to later generations of Muslims beginning from the Prophet Muḥammad. The Qur’ān is still the same as it was in the time of Muḥammad, from its oral form to the written. Islam is still represented by the Qur’ān and supported by the *ḥadīth*.

Confucianism has been very much influenced by Buddhism, Taoism and even Western thoughts, as opposed to Islam, whose teaching and origin are strictly preserved by the never changing Qur’ān despite the varying cultures of its adherents all over the world. Scholars of Confucianism like Han Yu (韩愈, 768–824) attempted to defend the teachings of Confucius but unsuccessfully. In fact, now, Confucianism has absorbed plenty of new ideas from Buddhism and Taoism, which are prevalent in China, specifically, as it is the birth place of Confucius and Confucianism.

Islam and Confucianism share many similarities in the concept of family and cultivation of personality of all members of the family as their objectives. The acceptable way of relationship between family members in Confucianism is known

as the 'Heavenly Way' (*tian* 天). Confucianism advocates for a patriarchal system of family with the husband as the leader of the family. There is also the division of duties among members in the family and virtues expected of each of them. The wife must obey the husband and children must respect their parents. All good behaviours, respect and love within the family must be cultivated into the personalities of the 'way of heaven'. The husband must also work hard to support and sustain a harmonious living for the family. Intimacy and physical contacts are only allowed for married couples, between a husband and wife. If people of the opposite sex mix freely without marital bonds, it is the way of animals for both Islam and Confucianism. It is similar to the division of duties of the husband and wife within a family with the man having the leadership role.

Islam demands from its followers to perform the five daily prayers, to fast in the month of Ramaḍān, pay alms (*zakāt*), go on pilgrimage (*hajj*), among others, and to develop a good Muslim personality. Confucianism also advocates the development of good personality in mankind but by other means. *The instilling of a good personality is a common point between the two teachings, requiring man to possess great virtues.* However, the difference lies in the meanings of the term 'heavenly (*tian* 天) order' in Confucianism. In Islam, the children must obey the parents and the wife must listen to her husband, and both husband and wife must shoulder their respective duties.

In Islam, the division of duties between the husband and wife of the family can be implemented smoothly if all submit to the Will of Allah. In Islam, however, there is no such heavenly (*tian* 天) order as in Confucianism, but obedience to Allah will cause all members of the family to submit to Islam, and thus setting the family harmony in order.

For Muslims, believing in Allah and fulfilling their respective duties within the family is synonymous. There is reward and punishment from God in the Hereafter, and this automatically keeps undesirable behaviours in check and thus the family is preserved.

In Confucianism, failure to be responsible for the heavenly order will only invite punishment in *this* life, as Xunzi said that to be young and not serve the elders will invite misfortunes. There is also the suggestion, as described earlier, that if the family is not strong, even the nation might be invaded, as the family is the basic unit of the nation. When the family weakens, the heavenly order will be affected, weakening the nation.

In contrast, there is the concept of *tawḥīd* in Islam or the concept of the uniqueness of Allah that further defines and establishes family order. This is not present in Confucianism. In other words, Confucianism does not have the ideas of life or creation of birth and death by God. The concepts of orderliness of Heaven (*tian* 天) and Earth too are rather vague and open to interpretations. However, the cultivation

of personalities of Confucianism in a family whether as a responsible wife and virtuous children is upheld and similar to the objectives of life in this world. Islam not only has this objective but extends it to the afterlife, contrary to Confucianism which emphasises human life on earth. In other words, the goal is the same in both Islam and Confucianism except there is no concept of the hereafter in Confucianism.

Confucianism and Islam also follow different ways of cultivation of the personality. Followers of Confucianism cultivate their personalities by following good manners or *li* (禮). *Li* refers to the performance of good manners towards one another until they become habitual or norms in daily life.

A verse from the Qur'ān (17:25) says:

Your lord knows best what is in your hearts: If you do deeds of righteousness, he will be most forgiving to those who turn to Him again and again (in true repentance).

As the concept of God does not exist in Confucianism, there are also no concepts of repentance or asking for the forgiveness and salvation of God. However, according to Confucius,<sup>49</sup> it is hard to deal with a woman and a mean man.

The verse above seems to degrade women since it criticises them as difficult to live with, comparable to living with a mean man. Since the time of Confucius about 2,500 years ago, women were not treated well in society. It went to such an extent that not having the women educated was a virtue. In fact, the situation has changed only recently. A survey conducted in Malaysia indicates that most of the grandmothers in Chinese society did not have any formal education. Besides, Chinese women in the past used to bind their feet tightly, as it was commonly taken as a virtue for women to have small feet. Nobody protested against this. This is not due to Confucius or his teachings but to the weakness of women in the feudal society.

Even Mencius, the second most authoritative person after Confucius, had a great mother. She moved several times so that Mencius could live near a school, the most suitable environment for learning. When Mencius came home one day attending only half a school day, his mother who had been weaving by hand for half a day, immediately took a pair of scissors and ripped the cloth that she had been weaving into two. Mencius asked, "Mother why did you do that?" The mother answered, "You go to school and come back half a day and did not complete the school day. There is no difference, if I had weaved the cloth and cut it off and abandon it as you going to school and coming back after half a day." Such is the great mother who cared for her son and taught him to be a good person.

In Islam, there is no degrading of women:

O mankind, we created man and woman, tribes and nation in order for you to understand each other; surely the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. (Qur'ān 49:13)

In this verse, Allah declares that all men and women, tribes and nations should try to understand each other, since they are equal, and the most pious are those closest to Allah regardless of age or gender.

Islam, however, seeks to develop virtuous human personalities by having them follow the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad. In terms of faith, the Muslims believe in Allah, Messengers of Allah of whom Muhammad is the last, the angels, the divinely revealed Books, the Qur'an as the last book, life in the hereafter, and divine predestination. This makes a faithful Muslim family different from the secular Confucian family.

## Notes

1. See James Legge (transl.), *Hua ying tui chao Ssu shu: Ta hsueh, chung yung, lun yu, meng tzu. The Four Books: The Great Learning; The Doctrine of the Mean; Confucian Analects; The works of Mencius* (Taipei: Wen hua tu shu kung Ssu, 1962).
2. 春秋时期
3. James Legge, *The Work of Mencius. Chinese Classics* (London: Trübner, 1861).
4. *A Selected Collection of Mencius* (Beijing: Sinolingua, 2006), 3–5.
5. Abdur Rahman I Doi, *Shari'ah: The Islamic Law* (Kuala Lumpur: A.S. Noordeen, 1984).
6. Abdullah Yusuf Ali (transl.), *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* (Beltsville MD: Amana Corporation, 1991).
7. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993).
8. Omar Min Ke Din, "Ethical Values of Islam and Confucianism: A Comparative Study", unpublished MA thesis (Kuala Lumpur: Akademi Islam, University of Malaya 2002).
9. Ibrahim Ma, *Traditional Chinese and Islamic Thoughts* (Brunei: Da'wah Islamic Centre, 1999).
10. *Philosophy East and West* 18, nos 1–2 (January–April 1968), 29–39.
11. *Mengzi* 1.7: 老吾老, 以及人之老; 幼吾幼, 以及人之幼... 不推恩无以保妻子.
12. *Ibid.*, 1B: 5.
13. Hexagram 37, *The Book of Changes*, known as *Yi Ching* 易经.
14. *Yi Ching* 易经, text 37; see *The Book of Changes*, transl. Richard Wilhelm (London: Arkana, 1967), 143–4.
15. James Legge, *The Chinese/English Four Books* (Changsha [China]: Hunan Publishing House, 1994), 11, Chapter Seven of *Da Xue*, 大学.
16. Doi, *Shari'ah*, 129.
17. 故君子不可以不修身; 思修身, 不可以不事亲; 思事亲, 不可以不知; 思知人, 不可以不知天. Chapter 20, *Zhongyong* (中庸), 30, quoted in William Theodore de Barry and Irene Bloom (eds), *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From Earliest Times to 1600* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, 2nd ed.), 1: 336.
18. *The Book of Filial Piety*, *Xiao Jing* (孝经) Chapter 9, in: de Barry and Irene Bloom (eds), *Sources*, 1:326.
19. *Analects* 17:21 “三年之丧, 期已久矣...予也有三年之爱于其父母乎?”
20. See *ibid.*, 1:7 “贤贤易色; 事父母, 能竭其力...吾必谓之学矣。”
21. *Mengzi* 7:19 “事孰为大? 事亲为大...事亲若曾子者, 可也。”
22. *Ibid.*, 8:30. 孟子曰: “世俗所谓不孝者五, 惰其四支, 不顾父母之养, 一不孝也...好勇斗狠, 以危父母, 五不孝也”
23. *Analects* 1:7; 2:5, 7 子夏曰: “贤贤易色... 吾必谓之学矣。”; 孟懿子问孝。子曰: “无违。”.....祭之以礼; 子游问孝。子曰: “今之孝者...何以别乎?”
24. *Ibid.*, 2:7 子游问孝。子曰: “今之孝者...何以别乎?”

25. *Mengzi* 7:28 “...不得乎亲，不可以为人；不顺乎亲，不可以为子。...”
26. *Xunzi* 2:12.
27. *Analects* 4:18 “事父母几谏，见志不从，又敬不违，劳而不怨。”
28. *Genesis* 4:1–2.
29. *Yi-Ching* 易经 or *The Book of Changes*, 540–5.
30. *Xunzi* 27:40.
31. *Ibid.*, 17:7.
32. 易经 *Yi-Ching*, hexagram no. 38.
33. *Mengzi* 5A: 2.
34. *Ibid.*, 3B: 2.
35. *Ibid.*, 5A; 4.
36. *Xunzi* 5:9.
37. *Ibid.*, 10–1.
38. *Mengzi* 7:17 淳于髡曰：“男女授受不亲，礼乎？”孟子曰：“礼也。”
39. 5:10 礼义不修，内外无别，男女淫乱... 而日切磋而不舍也。
40. *Huan: Xunzi*, 10:6.
41. *Yin Luan* 淫乱, *Xunzi* 17:7.
42. *Mengzi*, 孟子3B: 2.
43. Sun Xidan, *Liji Jijie* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1989), 2:607, 707, 709.
44. *Mengzi* 3B: 3.
45. *Analects* 17:25 “唯女子与小人为难养也，近之则不孙，远之则怨”
46. *Ibid.*, 15:13 “已矣乎！吾未见好德如好色者也。”
47. *Ibid.*, 16:17.
48. Ali (transl.), *The Meaning*, 904–5.
49. *Analects* 17:25 “唯女人与小人为难养也，近之则不孙，远之则怨。”