

# On Limits of Confucian Conception of Immortality and Supporting Path from Christian Everlasting Life

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**Abstract:** Live or die, to be or not to be, it's the fundamental question that human as such a finite existent has to face. The ultimate discourse of philosophy and religion consists in the essential intention of human spiritual existence, which is to transcend the finitude of life, and thus achieve its eternal purpose. On this question, the expressions of Confucianism and Christianity specially differ. For Confucians, there are three pursuits of secular immortality: firstly, to engrave oneself on the historical memory through leaving great merits, virtues, and doctrines behind; secondly, to establish one's genealogical succession as a perpetual continuation; thirdly, to realize the spiritually infinite ideal state of the harmonious unity between heaven and men in union with the cosmos. This conception of immortality is morally humanistic, naturally moralistic, aesthetically existentialistic, of which the basic characteristics are non-individuality and historical haecceity (Daseinheit). The eminence and limit of Confucian thinking are all included in this very conception. Meanwhile, in Christianity there is a yearning for everlasting heavenly life, which is based on individuality of the faithful, while transcending the temporal realm. This hope provides a possible supporting path beyond the empirical reasoning of Confucians.

**Key Words:** Confucian Conception of Immortality; Christian Idea of Everlasting Life; Historical Memory; Genealogical Succession; Harmonious Unity between Heaven and Men

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Man is an existent in time. Every individual human life unfolds and fulfills in time, while passing and ending in it. Death is the ultimate termination that human in this world cannot surpass, so he has been thrown by the awareness of temporal finitude, that is, of biotic finitude, into the opposite of existence, where comes the challenge of nothingness. To be or not to be, live or die, this harsh question reveals the perennial expectation of overcoming finitude, which is a discourse about the ultimate concern of hope. Undoubtedly, it's a religious discourse supported by ultimate beliefs. Only human could have this sort of discourse, since only human has antecedently present awareness of

death, and ego-oriented awareness of freedom, through which he could overcome the limits of animal existence and enter transcendent existence of spirit. Therefore, this is a humane question that originates from the spiritual nature of human existence.

However, since human existence is unfolding in variety of cultural occasions and patterns, there are respectively varied modes of expression or realization of the ultimate concern, which conversely shapes people's perceptions and cognitions of living existence. In this aspect, Confucianism and Christianity have their own dimensions of ultimate concern, between which there is obvious and enormous diversity. The concern of Confucianism is a worldly pursuit of immortality, while the concern of Christianity is a heavenly yearning for everlasting life. It is the very difference of these two concerns that opens up a space for coexisting and interreferring.

Revolving around the pursuit of immortality in Confucianism, I will followingly give an elucidation of its all three levels, that are historical memory, genealogical succession, and the harmonious unity between heaven and men. And then, I will examine it in the perspective of Christian hope for heavenly kingdom. In this way, the significance of Christian idea of everlasting life as an supporting path in the context of Chinese culture may be confirmed.

## **1. The Confucian Conception of Immortality: Historical Memory, Genealogical Succession, Harmonious Unity between Heaven and Men**

Taking the philosophical point of view, if the perennial topic of ultimate concern presupposes the antecedent presence of awareness of death, the teaching of Confucianism doesn't start from "death", nor does it focus on the sempiternity of afterlife after death; on the contrary, it sets off from "living", focusing on how this-worldly life shall unfold so that it could gain immortality after one's death. "While you do not know life, how can you know about death?" "While you are not able to serve men, how can you serve their spirits?"<sup>[1]</sup> These quotations from Confucius imply that the most principal and important affair is how to arrange and manage this life-world, and the immortal meaning and value of human life course solely hinge on these arrangement and management. Although this pursuit of meaning and expectation of value surpass individual personality, it's still in this life-world, not somewhere outside. From the perspective of "life" rather than "death", it seeks the eternal meaning and immortal value of "living", that are the immortality and sempiternity acquired in a sense transcending individual life and death, co-subsisting with human species and sharing brilliance of the sun and the moon. It is completely different from the idea of everlasting life, of resurrection and hope for a heavenly kingdom, in which the Christian eschatology breaks through the secular reasoning.

Concretely speaking, the Confucian conception of immortality contains three aspects:

First of all, immortality means that the conducts of this life will not disappear with the death of the individual, but contrarily leaving historical influence beyond the individual's transient life, thus acquiring immortal meaning and sempiternal value in the historical memory. Here, the most typical

[1] Xian Jin, *The Analects (论语·先进 Lunyu Xianjin)*, tr. James Legge.

understanding is the so-called “three immortals”. This view first appeared in The Zuo Tradition of Spring and Autumn Annals (春秋左氏传 Chunqiu Zuoshi zhuan): “The noblest of all is to establish virtue; the posterior is to establish merit; the posterior is to establish doctrine. Not abolished with length of time, these are called immortal.” [2] Although every life will meet its end, but while its merits, virtues and doctrines enduring in the world forever, it could be described as dead without decay. Xu Gan (徐干) of the Eastern Han Dynasty also has an approximate statement of immortality in Balanced Discourses (中论): “The Ancients have said that one may be dead without decay. His body is decomposed, but his way of life still exists, so he could be called immortal. The shaped body is connaturally a thing would spontaneously degenerate and perish, its life span is of no more than a few decades whether being longevous or not. However, establishing virtues and integrity or not means a difference of several thousand years. There is no comparison between them.” [3] Life will end, but it can be preserved without decay by establishing virtues and conserving the way of life.

Confucius did not use the word “immortal”, but there is conception of immortality in his sayings. In The Analects, he talked about the immortal significance of Guan Zhong’s merits, and Boyi and Shuqi’s virtues, which earned the praise of indefinitely future generations. [4] So there is a saying, “The man of honor dislikes the thought of his name not being mentioned after his death.” [5] Human life can only be retained for a lifetime, but the reputation of virtue could remain immortal for posterity. But this does not mean that one should chase fame: “The man of honor is distressed by his inability. He is not distressed by men’s not knowing him.” [6] “The man of honor learns for himself, not for being known by others. However, if his name is not mentioned after his death, it will be cognoscible that he hasn’t factually do something good.” [7] If someone possesses both virtues and talents, cultivates his character, ordines his family, administrates his country, pacificates the world, and benefits the later generations, he will naturally leave his name to pass on after death, as if still alive. Therefore, the death of a man of honor is but a rest, not a stop, shall be called finish, not death. The death of a man of honor is but cessation of mundane activity, not termination of its influence. Thus Mencius said, “The man of honor has a life-long anxiety and not one morning’s calamity. . . And in what way is he anxious about it? Just that he maybe like Shun.” [8] It is to anxious about whether or not one can follow the example of Shun the Sacred King, to legislate the world and to transmit to the later generations. In the early Han Dynasty, Han Ying tied the immortal

[2] Twenty-fourth Year of Duke Seang, The Zuo Tradition of Spring and Autumn Annals (左传·襄公二十四年 Zuozhuan Xianggong No. 24 year), tr. James Legge.

[3] On Ephemerality and Longevity, Balanced Discourses (徐干 XU Gan: 中论·夭寿篇 Zhonglun Yaoshou pian).

[4] Xian Wen, The Analects (论语·宪问 Lunyu Xianwen), tr. James Legge, “Guan Zhong acted as prime minister to the duke Huan, made him leader of all the princes, and united and rectified the whole land under heaven. Down to the present day, the people enjoy the gifts which he conferred. Without Guan Zhong, we should now be wearing our hair unbound, and the lappets of our coats buttoning on the left side.” Ji Shi, The Analects (论语·季氏 Lunyu Jishi), tr. James Legge, “The Duke Jing of Qi had a thousand teams, each of four horses, but on the day of his death, the people did not praise him for a single virtue. Boyi and Shuqi died of hunger at the foot of the Shou Yang mountain, and the people, down to the present time, praise them. Is not that saying illustrated by this?”

[5] Wei Ling Gong, The Analects (论语·卫灵公 Lunyu Wei Linggong), tr. James Legge.

[6] *Ibid.* .

[7] Zhu Xi (Song) 2011: *Synthetic Commentary on the Four Books* (四书集注 *Sishu jizhu*), *Synthetic Commentary on the The Analect* (论语集注 *Lunyu jizhu*). Beijing: China Book Bureau, 155.

[8] Li Lou II, Mengzi (孟子·离娄下 Mengzi Lilou xia), tr. James Legge.

meaning came from virtues and integrity with the cosmos. Using Bigan's, Liu Xiaohui's, Boyi and Shuqi's martyrdom for loyalty, honesty and probity as an example of virtues and integrity, Han Ying said, "Those three (loyalty, honesty, probity) exists in corporeal lives, their fame flows through the world, resting together with the sun and the moon. The heaven couldn't reduce them, the earth couldn't increase them, and in the tyrannical ages of Jie and Zhou they couldn't be defiled. However, it doesn't mean one should abhor living and love death." [9] Furthermore, a paragraph from Zhang Zai can best represent the immortal meaning of "establishing doctrines": "To ordain conscience for Heaven and Earth. To secure life and fortune for the people. To continue lost teachings for past sages. To establish peace for all future generations." [10]

Summarizing previous statements, it is thus evident that "immortality" includes meanings from two levels. The first is the immortality from the formally concrete level, such as "establishing merits". With tremendous merits established during his lifetime, the meritorious has kept his reputation from fading away after he passed away, and being remembered through his achievements. The second is the immortality from the formally abstract level, such as "establishing virtues" and "establishing doctrines". The virtuous has made an undwindled example for posteriors by his great personality and noble morality; the sagacious has founded, expounded and spread the way of sages by writing books and establishing doctrines, continuing the orthodoxy of civilization and traditional edification, thus perpetuating himself in the continuation of history. For Confucians, the three immortals are not separate, but actually united. In the tradition of Confucian introspective learning (为己之学) and the unity of cognition and action (知行合一), a truly sagacious man must be virtuous, a meritorious man truly venerated by later generations must be virtuous at the same time; and establishing merits, virtues and doctrines are all based on the Way. Among them, the core and substance of immortality consists in the immortality of virtues and the immortality of the Way. Otherwise, it is impossible for doctrines to educate generations, and merits to be celebrated through the ages.

It is the ideal state of personality pursued by men of honor or sages that, to persist with history through the historical memory of merits, virtues, doctrines, and the Way, coexisting with heaven and earth, sharing brilliance of the sun and the moon. As the words of Luo Lun of the Ming Dynasty, "It is only sage that could be dead without dying out, persisting together with heaven and earth, and shining together with the sun and the moon." [11] It embodies the Confucian attitude and view of life which is oriented to moral excellence, as saying that "Heaven, in its motion, (gives the idea of) strength. The man of honor, in accordance with this, nerves himself to ceaseless activity." [12] "The (capacity and sustaining) power of the earth is what is denoted by Kun (坤). The man of honor, in accordance with this, with his profound virtue supports (men and) things." [13] It is in this pursuit of

[9] Zhang Dainian 2005: *Anecdotes of Hanshi* (韩诗外传 *Hanshi waizhuan*), *The Outline of Chinese philosophy*. Nanjing, Jiangsu Education Press, 439.

[10] Zhang Dainian 2005: *Quotations* (语录 *Yulu of Zhang Zai* (Song)), *The Outline of Chinese philosophy*. Nanjing, Jiangsu Education Press, 317.

[11] Zhang Dainian 2005: *Collection* (文集 *wenji*), *Luolun* (Ming), *The Outline of Chinese philosophy*, Nanjing, Jiangsu Education Press, 440

[12] *I Ching* (周易 *Zhouyi*), tr. Zhang Shanwen 2006: Taiyuan, Shanxi Ancient Books Publishing House, 2.

[13] *Ibid.*, 10

the sagacious ideal state, a unhurried and unperturbed attitude towards death is fostered: “If a man in the morning hear the right way, he may die in the evening without regret.”<sup>[14]</sup> It is always a worthy death to die to fulfill one’s duties in the right way, as Mencius says: “Death sustained in the discharge of one’s duties may correctly be ascribed to the mandate of Heaven.”<sup>[15]</sup> As long as living up to the immortal meaning and value exceeding living, although the life may be short, there would be no regrets to die. Accordingly, behind the Confucian pursuit of immortality it is conformity with Heaven’s mandate and the Way of Heaven.

Secondly, Confucian conception of immortality also has the simplest and basic concern, which is the biotic continuation in genealogical descendants. While the establishment of merits, virtues, and doctrines pursued in “three immortals” is an excellent view of life prepared for men of honor and sages, which is the high-grade self-exceeding to reach historical and cosmic realm by means of self-improvement and self-accomplishment of moral personality, it is virtually something that the common people may aspire to but can never attain. In that case, how could they also break through the limit of individual death, thereby having a share in the immortal life? The answer is related to the genealogical notion of endless offsprings, which wholly corresponds to the Confucian social-ethical system sequentially revolving around the patriarchal consanguinity.

We know that in the Confucian ethical system, “filial piety and fraternal duty” (孝悌 *xiaodi*) is the foundation of human ethical relations. One of the multiple understandings of filial piety is having inheritors. Mencius said, “There are three things which are unfilial, and to have no posterity is the greatest of them.”<sup>[16]</sup> On the one hand, the continuation of life is to extend one’s own life by producing lives of descendants, the bloodline thereupon could be carried on by posterity in despite of individual ego’s death. On the other hand, extending one’s life is not just for the individual, since the continuation of the familial life is more important than the individual. Each individual in the familial sequence is but a moment and does not have a completely independent position of meaning. Therefore, the focus of so-called immortality isn’t on the extension of individual life, but on the continuation of collective life, and the existence of the individual is realized in virtue of the existence of other people’s lives. If the idea of “three immortals” is to achieve the persistence of moral personality through integrating into social history and cosmos, so that the continuation of descendants is the transmission of patriarchal bloodline through natural procreation. While the former manifests the significance of immortality in a spiritual and moral dimension, the latter shouldn’t be completely summed up as to manifest immortality in the sense of mere corporeality. In fact, the transmission of patriarchal bloodline contains two dimensions, one natural, the other ethical. It contains both the continuation of natural life and the inheritance of the familial spirit, namely “soul of family” (家魂 *jiahun*), which is an intellectual and ethical heritage such as the familial erudition, indoctrination, instruction, tradition, moral teaching, and housekeeping, being imbued with the significance of immortality in the spiritual and moral dimension. Even for the man of honor who pursues the three immortals, the succession of the patriarchal lineage is also a basic concern.

[14] *Li Ren, The Analects* (论语·里仁 第四 *Lunyu Liren No. 4*), tr. James Legge.

[15] *Jin Xin I, Mengzi* (孟子·尽心上 *Mengzi Jinxin shang*), tr. James Legge.

[16] *Li Lou I, Mengzi* (孟子·离娄上 *Mengzi Lilou shang*), tr. James Legge.

The patriarchal bloodline and the familial succession which uses filial piety as the ethical bond are expressed through the ancestral worship and inheritance of the ancestors' legacy as well. Thereout, sacrificial rites are given full attention. From the Confucius's statements as "While you do not know life, how can you know about death?" and "While respecting spiritual beings, to keep aloof from them,"<sup>[17]</sup> Confucianism adopts an ambiguous and prudent attitude the world after death. The Confucians neither drastically deny it nor fanatically favor it; they reverently obey the ritual of sacrifice, without getting too close. The essence of this attitude is to be indifferent to the world after death, but caring only about the memorial service for the deceased and its influence on the contemporaries. When Fan Chi asked what filial piety was, Confucius replied, "That parents, when alive, be served according to propriety; that, when dead, they should be buried according to propriety; and that they should be sacrificed to according to propriety."<sup>[18]</sup> "The filial piety is being good at succeeding predecessors' ambition, and being good at narrating predecessors' deeds."<sup>[19]</sup>

Offering ritual sacrifices to ancestors as expression of filial piety is in complete consistency with Confucian concern of immortality by continuing ancestral lineage. The successive patriarchal genealogy embodies breeding and upbringing the coming lives, serving and supporting the living parents, and also recollecting and worshiping the dead ancestors. Respectfully supporting parents is of filial piety, ceaselessly continuing posterity is of filial piety, worshiping ancestors is of filial piety as well. The coherent succession of past, present, and future generations rests with those three generations. As without future generations, the patriarchal genealogy would be closed; without a present generation keeping their morality of filial piety, the ethical order would fall into uncivilized brutality, betraying the forefathers. This succession depends on the past generations as well, since that to inherit the ancestral legacy and make ancestors live in contemporary minds through the sacrificial rituals of recollection, appreciation and supplication is to maintain and strengthen the foundation of the patriarchal lifeline. Hence, Confucius asserts a wholeheartedly pietistic attitude while at the sacrifice, "He sacrificed to the dead, as if they were present. He sacrificed to the spirits, as if the spirits were present."<sup>[20]</sup> "I consider my not being present at the sacrifice, as if I did not sacrifice."<sup>[21]</sup> As the Doctrine of the Mean said, "Thus they served the dead as they would have served them alive; they served the departed as they would have served them had they been continued among them. It is the height of filial piety."<sup>[22]</sup>

On the whole, the Confucian concern for immortality expressed by genealogical succession and ancestral worship is closely related to this-worldly life. The ancestral worship does not pursue the heavenly bliss after death, but prays for the secular protection and benediction of the ancestors. Its spiritual character is pragmatical and rational, rather than religious and mysterious.

Finally, the Confucian concern for immortality can also be apprehended through the conception

[17] Yong Ye, *The Analects (论语·雍也 Lunyu Yongye)*, tr. James Legge.

[18] Wei Zheng, *The Analects (论语·为政 Lunyu Weizheng)*, tr. James Legge.

[19] Zhu Xi (Song) 2011; *Synthetic Commentary on the Four Books (四书章句集注 Sishu zhangju jizhuan)*, *Notes and the Doctrine of the Mean (中庸章句 Zhongyong zhangju)*. Beijing: China Book Bureau, 28.

[20] Ba Yi, *The Analects (论语·八佾 Lunyu Bayi)*, tr. James Legge.

[21] Ba Yi, *The Analects (论语·八佾 Lunyu Bayi)*, tr. James Legge.

[22] Zhu Xi (Song) 2011; *Synthetic Commentary on the Four Books (四书章句集注 Sishu zhangju jizhu)*, *Notes and the Doctrine of the Mean (中庸章句 Zhongyong zhangju)*. Beijing: China Book Bureau, 28.

of the harmonious unity between heaven and men in union with the cosmos, thus its humanistic and religious nature could further be discovered. If the three immortals have moral humanistic through the social-historical approaches, and the genealogical succession has ethical naturality by means of patriarchal consanguinity, the harmonious unity between heaven and men has aesthetical existentiality by the achievement of the ideal state of existence.

The Confucian school of Zisi and Mencius claims that what Heaven has conferred is called the nature, so one should preserve the mandate of Heaven to perfect his nature. Between the way of Heaven and the way of men, the mandate of Heaven and the human nature, there is one principle pervading them all, so knowing people is knowing Heaven, serving people is serving Heaven. In terms of knowing, "He who has exhausted all his mental constitution knows his nature. Knowing his nature, he knows Heaven." In terms of acting, "To preserve one's mental constitution, and nourish one's nature, is the way to serve Heaven."<sup>[23]</sup> Sincerity is shared by both Heaven and men, "Sincerity is the way of Heaven. The attainment of sincerity is the way of men."<sup>[24]</sup> Sincerity is that whereby things are completed, "Heaven and earth are quite great, but without sincerity they couldn't produce the things; sages are quite erudite, but without sincerity they couldn't educate the people."<sup>[25]</sup> Entering the ideal state of sincerity, one can attain the harmonious unity between heaven and men, hit what is right without an effort, apprehend without the exercise of thought, and naturally and easily embody the right way; he can complete himself and things, combine things with his ego, unite the inner and the outer, assist the transforming and nourishing powers of Heaven and Earth, and participate in the flowing progress of the cosmos. In this sense, the human existence surpasses not only the individual finitude, but also the limit of social interpersonal relationships, and gets into the highest state of existence of cosmic "citizen of Heaven" or "Heavenly man".<sup>[26]</sup> This is a perfect and coherent, free and unlimited, ultimate and transcendent state of existence. It's also a state of aesthetical existence, in which one forgets things and himself both, melts the subjective and the objective, excludes any shortage, and detaches himself from banality and vulgarity. In this ideal state, being and non-being are interlinked, life and death are without distinction, Heaven and men are united, revealing the humanistic and religious nature of this state.

At this point, the Taoist thought has the most typical and amplest expression, which is not contradicted by Confucianism. Since the Song Dynasty, there has been asyncretic confluence of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, so we could take the relevant discussion of Zhuangzi as an example to further present this idea. (Especially considering Christianity as a foreign frame of reference, citing Zhuangzi's viewpoint to make the views of related issues better expressed is conducive to our elucidation of Confucianism. After all, Confucianism and Christianity represent two different religious ethics of existence on the whole, thus the union of Confucianism and Taoism can

[23] Jin Xin I, Mengzi (孟子·尽心上 Mengzi Jinxin shang), tr. James Legge.

[24] Zhu Xi (Song) 2011; *Synthetic Commentary on the Four Books* (四书章句集注), *Notes and the Doctrine of the Mean* (中庸章句). Beijing: China Book Bureau, P32

[25] *Synthetic Explanation of Xunzi* (荀子集解), Wang Xianqian (Qing), Bu Gou (不苟篇第三), *Zhuzi Jicheng* (诸子集成) 1986; Shanghai, photocopy edition of Shanghai Bookstore, 28-29.

[26] Zhu Xi (Song) 2011; *Synthetic Commentary on the Four Books* (四书章句集注), *Synthetic Commentary on Mengzi* (孟子集注). Beijing: China Book Bureau, 347.

better represent the overall Chinese tradition as opposed to Christianity. ) Zhuangzi advocates leaving material forms, removing knowledge, and becoming one with the Great Pervader(大通), which is called sitting and forgetting all things. Entering this ideal state, it feels like rising for the first time at a bright dawn, seeing brightness suddenly emerges from darkness, apprehending that “Heaven, Earth, and I were produced together, and all things and I are one.”<sup>[27]</sup> One who identifies the cosmos with himself, rules over heaven and earth, holds all things in his treasury, who simply has his lodging in his body, whom his ears and eyes serve but as conveying emblematic images of external realm, could have a thorough comprehension of all the secrets, and would never exhaust his mental thoughtfulness.<sup>[28]</sup> “Being such, he mounts on the clouds of the air, rides on the the sun and the moon, and rambles at ease beyond the four seas. Neither death nor life makes any change in him, and how much less should the considerations of advantage and injury do so!”<sup>[29]</sup> If one had achieved this, he would transcend the temporal realm and comprehend the truth: “After this, he was able to banish all thought of Past or Present. Freed from this, he was able to penetrate to the truth that there is no difference between life and death.”<sup>[30]</sup> In Zhuangzi’s view, the highest ideal state of life is surpassing the secular matters, not constrained by things, not changing for things, seeking enjoyment in the formless condition of heaven and earth, with one’s self unaffected by death and life, and mind unaffected by misfortunes and losses. “What is death? What is life? What is meant by the union of Heaven and Earth? Does the spiritual intelligence go away? . . . He chiefly cared to occupy himself with the spirit-like operation of heaven and earth, and did not try to rise above the myriads of things. . . Above he seeks delight in the Maker; below, he has a friendly regard to those who consider life and death as having neither beginning nor end.”<sup>[31]</sup> Surpassed life and death, united with heaven and earth, moved with the spiritual intelligence, detached from the secular world without leaving it, this is the ideal state of greatest beauty and bliss, which is the state of the True man or the Perfect man. “The comprehension of this is the most admirable and the most enjoyable (of all acquisitions). The getting of the most admirable and the exercise of the thoughts in what is the most enjoyable, constitutes what we call the Perfect man.”<sup>[32]</sup> Zhuangzi’s thought undoubtedly expresses an eternal and aesthetical ideal state of artistic existence, which makes life to surpass the finitude of life and unite with the cosmos. Beyond the abyss brought by the life and death, it obtains the highest bliss and perfects the supreme existence in the horizon of ultimate concern.

For Confucianism, the ideal state of most beautiful and blissful eternal existence is also a sort of “great benevolence”. The bliss of beauty is also the benevolent bliss, aesthetics and morality are still united. While the Taoists insist on the naturalistic position that “Heaven and earth do not act from any wish to be benevolent; they deal with all things as the dogs of grass are dealt with,”<sup>[33]</sup> the Confucians grant heaven and earth a “benevolent heart” and “benevolent virtues”, emphasizing that

[27] The Adjustment of Controversies, Zhuangzi (庄子·齐物论 Zhuangzi Qiwu lun), tr. James Legge.

[28] The Seal of Virtue Complete, Zhuangzi (庄子·德充符 Zhuangzi Dechongfu), tr. James Legge.

[29] The Adjustment of Controversies, Zhuangzi (庄子·齐物论 Zhuangzi Qiwu lun), tr. James Legge.

[30] The Great and Most Honoured Master, Zhuangzi (庄子·大宗师 Zhuangzi Da zongshi), tr. James Legge.

[31] Tian Xia, Zhuangzi (庄子·天下篇 Zhuangzi Tianxia pian), tr. James Legge.

[32] Tian Zifang, Zhuangzi (庄子·田子方 Zhuangzi Tian Zifang), tr. James Legge.

[33] 5<sup>th</sup> Chapter, Dao De Jing (道德经·五章 Daodejing 5)



“Benevolence is the heart of heaven and earth when producing things,”<sup>[34]</sup> and “The great attribute of heaven and earth is the giving and maintaining life.”<sup>[35]</sup> On the one hand, this universally moralizes and emotionalize the cosmos and the nature, with the passion of benevolence as the substance, on the other hand, the benevolent heart of the cosmos conversely supports the worldly life of human being. Heaven and earth are so merciful, life is so fragrantly beautiful, one doesn’t have to abandon life and pursue silent nothingness, nor does he have to painfully repent and convert to God; what he needs is just living in the world and entering the unity of heaven and men, by which he may enter the most beautiful and most good state of benevolence and blissfulness. It not only constitutes the ultimate situation of formidable rendezvous between Heaven and men, but also constitutes the highest recognition of this situation, which is the feeling of benevolent bliss opened by the rendezvous between Heaven and men. It is the aesthetical state of the mind-nature, and the moral state of benevolent love, and the metaphysical and religious state with infinite affection of Heaven, earth and the spiritual intelligence. This existential experience and attitude, which is both moral and artistic, humanistic and religious, sensual and transcendent, allows Confucians, instead of seeking immortality outside the human world, to seek ultimate adscription within it.

Here we see that the ultimate existence of aesthetical meaning is achieved through “mental enjoyment” (游心 you xin), which is transiting in the hyper-time of mind, breaking though the limits of current temporality, ascending and reaching the artistic-religious eternity of highest bliss. This is an eternity in the mental state, an eternity in experience, an eternity can only be chanted in poetry. All the same, it cannot be attributed to the illusory imagination, but a true and clear attitude of existence creatively transformed from the hyper-temporal experience of the soul; it is to use the free and infinite state of mind, stand in the daily mode but surpass the daily life, settle down and get on with one’s pursuit in the ideal state of the harmonious unity between Heaven and men. Therefore, it is possible for Confucians to celebrate the accidental living in ordinary life, unhurriedly and cherishedly.

In summary, the Confucian concern for immortality persists in the historical memory through the historical influence produced by one’s conducts during his lifetime; it is also continued in later generations by the genealogical succession and ancestral worship; still, it could be, through the infinite and free mental experience and spiritual ideal state of the harmonious unity between Heaven and men, to transcend the current daily life into an eternal realm. It can be found that, in one aspect, all of this is happening in the present world, and it is realized in the history of mankind. It can transcend the existence of individual life and surpass any specific period and community, but it does not surpass the temporal totality of mankind and its history. Therefore, the Confucian concern for immortality has a very deep awareness of human history, knowing people, valuing life, and detachedly respecting the world of spirits after death, which reflects a pragmatism and rational spiritual character. However, this historical awareness is not trapped in the isolated self-consciousness of anthropocentrism, but is connected with the boundless cosmic consciousness, in which Heaven, earth

[34] Zhu Xi (Song) 2011; *Synthetic Commentary on the Four Books* (四书章句集注 *Sishu zhangju jizhu*), *Synthetic Commentary on Mengzi* (孟子集注 *Mengzi jizhu*), Beijing: China Book Bureau, 222.

[35] Xi Ci II, *Book of Changes* (周易·系辞下传 *Zhouyi Xici xia zhuan*), tr. Zhang Shanwen 2006; Taiyuan, Shanxi Ancient Books Publishing House, 193.

and humanity are all blended into an integral whole, the space and time overlap and integrate together in the duration of the past and present, constituting a comprehensive world-view. In other aspect, it also reflects that the Confucian understanding of human beings is not radically based on individuality, but is carried out in relations. Man is a member of social-ethical relationships, and a member of the cosmic nature as well. The immortality of life doesn't consist in individuality, in other word, the immortality of individual life does not consist in preserving the individual persistence in the sense of self-identity, but in its perpetuation in the social-historical memory, which will shine forever like the brilliance of the sun and the moon. Therefore, the Confucian pursuit of immortality, as a this-worldly concern, is a process of respecting Heaven and obeying its mandate, and also a process of relying on Heaven and getting on with one's pursuit. It is of a humanistic nature, while being religious as well.

## **2. At the limit of Confucianism: The Christian Hope for everlasting life**

As a discourse of ultimate concern, the Christian hope for an everlasting life in heaven has widely different characters and expression compared with Confucianism. If the Confucian pursuit of immortality starts with "living", and finally gain this-worldly immortality by (and only by) means of a variety of conducts in this life (for example, the historical contribution of merits, virtues, and doctrines, the succession of posterity, and the existential state of the harmonious unity between Heaven and men), the Christian hope for everlasting life starts with death, depending on the soteriological and redemptive power of God to break the chain of death in this life, to open the heavenly kingdom of the world to come or an after-life. For Christianity, any conduct in this life, no matter it is to establish merits, virtues, and doctrines, to continue the ancestral bloodline, or to artisticize the existence, couldn't be a path for an individual to enter the everlasting life in heaven. Therefore, while the Confucian immortality can only be accomplished by personal might and self-cultivation, the Christian everlasting life must rely on God's power and the path of faith.

Related to this, Confucianism does not inquire into death itself, "While you do not know life, how can you know about death?" "While you are not able to serve men, how can you serve their spirits?" The world after death is beyond the horizon of Confucianism all along. Compared with this, the mindset of Christian theology is, "While you do not know death, how can you know about life?" "While you are not able to serve God, how can you serve men?" Actually, this is also a character of Western philosophical thinking, Heidegger and Scheler are all theoretical representatives of this aspect.

Facing such dissimilar beliefs of existence and modes of discourse, what's the significance of the Christian tradition of faith seen from the perspective of the Confucian tradition as such? This question can be conversely transformed into another question, which is, from the Christian point of view, what's the limit of Confucian concern for immortality? Under this consideration, it can be discovered that Christianity has provided a supporting path at the boundary of Confucianism. Let's talk about it.

First, fundamentally speaking, the Confucian concern for immortality rests on the whole rather

than on the individual. The individual immortality not only needs to be accomplished through the path of the whole, but also needs to gain its significance as a part of the holistic immortality. In fact, as Confucianism lacks concepts of a transcendent God and an everlasting life in heavenly kingdom, its understanding of personal life and death can only stay in this life, therefore about whether there is an afterlife after the individual death, it neither knows nor cares. In this case, the so-called concern for immortality by no means can rest on the finite and mortal individual person, but has to be realized by relationships with history, with others, and with heaven and earth. In other words, it works by being as a member of a larger whole.

So, in the existential pattern of human and cosmic mode of thinking which is penetrating the past and the present, and jointing Heaven and men, there contains the existential awareness and experience which has double effects: in the great circle where Heaven, earth, and men interlock end to end in an infinite loop, one can stare afar and feel himself in a perfect whole, having a aesthetic feeling of eternity in union with the cosmos and the nature, and in retrospect feel lonely, insignificant, transient, perishable and grief. For the former, one can put himself under the protection of the patriarchal ethics of genealogical succession, and of the historical tradition of the whole human society, to gain some sort of continuously infinite support; the human world further exists in the flowing progress of the great cosmic transmutation, to gain some sort of eternal and holistic support of heaven, earth, and men uniting together. All of this makes the Confucian immortality an immense conception intermingledly constituted with the coalition of Heaven and men, the concept of social history, and the concept of cosmos under the mandate of Heaven. However, for the latter, since individual existence is always finite, of mine (as *Jemanigkeit*), and one-time, it in the absence of divine power and ignorance of afterlife has to bear the individual death belonging to itself and then cease to be, no matter how does the individual integrate into social history and cosmic nature, how many offsprings the individual has produced. It is no surprising that Li Shangyin said, "Without the life after being scried, this life is going to cease," with bewilderment and sorrow; and Chen Zi-ang said with loneliness and sadness, "Behind me I do not see the ancient men, Before me I do not see the ones to come. Thinking of the endlessness of heaven and earth, Alone in despair, my tears fall down." Here, the question of the sempiternity or immortality of the individual person after death is suspended and vacant all along, and gets no real examination and attention.

However, the Christian everlasting life is the persistence of the individual life, in which one's soul and body united, surpassing this life's death and gaining the resurrection in the world to come. It is not the intentional existence of one's life realized through media of other people and history, but a regain of this unique and intact individual life. The faith of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection is the sacred proof of this hope for everlasting life. It can provide a path towards individual perpetuation apart from the integral continuation of Confucian historical memory and familial succession. In Confucianism, I only exists as a spiritual influence in the historical memory, or as a genetic factor in the posterity; but in Christianity, I exists as an intact individual composited of soul and body. The eschatology of death and resurrection unfolds the ultimate possibility of zoetic existence, constituting the perennial hope for individual to perpetually keep his identity. It is Christianity that provides a unique identity for every individual facing the absolute God, and surpasses the membership of any organization, country, community or nation; and just by facing God, one can break through the death

that separates soul and body, regain an intact and unique everlasting life.

If the Confucian immortality manifests an empirical reasoning actually supported by a deep relationship with the life-world, then the Christian everlasting life manifests a transcendent faith, which breaks through the logic of real world. However, when the unique individual life faces the deconstruction of death, the self-consciousness can not truly admit and accept that one can gain immortality of intact individual life in the historical and patriarchal succession, or in an aesthetical experience of the present existence. Thus when Confucianism cannot provide a real support for the transient life, Christian faith of individual everlasting life can provide another supporting path, as long as one has this faith.

Thus, the Confucian immortality cannot rest on or realize in the person, for the individual is mortal anyway in this life; if there is no afterlife freed from the chain of death, then the pursuit of immortality can only realize in this life-world; without conducts of this life, there is no immortality to be handed down, so to be immortal or not all depends on this life's situation, and has nothing to do with the unknown and undecided afterlife. However, to realize immortality in this life-world has its considerable limitation and severity.

Look at historical memory first. As discussed above, the "three immortals" of establishing merits, virtues and doctrines through historical memory are positioned at the level of sages, and could only be achieved by sages. But throughout the ages, how many people have ever been sages? In fact, whether it is to establish a peaceful world for future generations to live, or to establish a high morality for future generations to admire, or to establish epoch-making doctrines for future generations to be educated, its concern for immortality is invariably so outstanding that ordinary people cannot achieve, which means most people are unable to surpass death and realize immortal life through this path. Fundamentally speaking, it's not the immortality of the individual life as such, but the immortality of the value of the individual life. It is easy to conceive that normal people cannot make their lives produce that sort of perennial value or historical influence. Even under the presupposition of the essential goodness of human nature, Confucians don't insist on a principal distinction between sages and normal people, so that "all men may be Yaos and Shuns," its completion still must be premised on the basis of time. Confucius clearly acknowledged the difference between "born with the possession of knowledge", "know the knowledge by study", and "acquire the knowledge after a painful feeling of their ignorance". Since life time is exactly limited, people only live once, and the one-off life is only a short period of time, it is surely possible that people except for those who are born with knowledge will not be able to become Yaos and Shuns who completely possess merits, virtues and doctrines during all of their lives. So Confucius talked about that Guan Zhong for his epochal merits, and Boyi and Shuqi for their exemplary virtues, had hitherto earned the praise of people, while common people died unknown. How, then, could one realize the immortal value of his own life, let alone the immortality of his individual life in itself?

Just for this, Kant who insists on moral autonomy and establishes morality on the basis of liberty as autonomy, at last has to face the question of Summum Bonum in order to explain the accordance of virtue and happiness, and for the problem of moral fulfillment, he has to invite back God who he has excluded in the realm of theoretical reason, using the postulates of the existence of God, the immortality of soul, and the free will as the guarantee in the realm of practical reason. Similarly, if

one cannot accomplish the pursuit of immortality by establishing merits, virtues and doctrines during his lifetime, does he need hope for afterlife? The answer should be affirmative. Christian hope for an everlasting heaven can undoubtedly be a supporting resource. It can provide an eternal value neither by estimating individual's secular conducts or social contribution, nor using them as measure of gaining immortality or not. On the contrary, it promises everyone a future life, a universal hope bearing the menace of death, to satisfy their ultimate concern and support their transient life in this world. Of course, all of this presupposes faith. The transcendent faith needs one to break the logic of experience, to give the whole life to an unpredictable God. So faith needs courage and devotion as well. To believe or not is a personal affair, which can only depend on one's own intersection with God.

Moreover, though Confucian idea of three immortals surpasses the space-time of individuals, nations and ages, it cannot surpass the human history as a whole of the past, the present, and the future. The Christian eschatology otherwise claims that human history has a beginning and an end, the secular history of humankind is only a phase in the theological frame of creation-fall-salvation, and will at last return to the sacred history, when there will be a new heaven and a new earth, breaking the worldly life blocked by death and opening the heavenly kingdom of eternal resurrection. Thus the sacred history supports the secular history, and the Kingdom of God is the ultimate promised land of human society. In this aspect, the modern theologian Jürgen Moltmann claims a comprehensive eschatological system, which is developed through four spheres: personal eschatology (eternal life), historical eschatology (the Kingdom of God), cosmic eschatology (new heaven and new earth), and divine eschatology (glory).<sup>[36]</sup> Life of individual, life of humankind, life of the nature, and life of God will gain fresh beginnings and future in the end. This is his theology of hope.<sup>[37]</sup>

We should say that the horizon of Christian theology is far beyond the limits of Confucian human history and provides an absolutely transcendent and sacred dimension and an absolute hope for an everlasting afterlife. It is the disruption and termination of all hope of this life, and the basis and aim of all hope of the present world. According to Augustine in *The City of God*, without basing on the absolute hope, the meaning and value of present hope couldn't be truly understood and estimated; without aiming at the absolute hope, the present hope may give way to desperate grief in case of destruction. Human life is not restrained within this present life, people should not live for this present life as well. Opening the sight of the absolute future with God the Creator, all the present pursuits of human should accept the contrasting and evaluation of absolute hope. According to Ernst Troeltsch, "If we regard the salvation within this world as completed, the faith of salvation would be an empty and self-deceiving word. So eschatology has an essential significance for the faith of salvation in the beginning."<sup>[38]</sup> Salvation or resurrection is not only to change and renew present life by believing in Christ, but to enjoy the everlasting life in the end of world. Therefore, not only

[36] Jürgen Moltmann, tr. Zeng Nianyue 2002; *Das Kommen Gottes*, Hong Kong, Logos and Pneuma Press.

[37] Jürgen Moltmann, tr. Yang Deyou, Dong You etc. 1991; *Theologie der Hoffnung*, *Collection of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Western Religious Philosophy Works*, eds. Liu Xiaofeng et al., Volume three, Shanghai, Shanghai SDX Joint Publishing.

[38] Ernst Troeltsch, tr. Zhu Yanbing ect. 1998; *Christian Theory and Modernity*, ed. Liu Xiaofeng, Hong Kong, Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, 200-201.

the individual death, but also the death of human history and the cosmos would be overcome in the eternal feast of God's resurrection.

Let's then have a look at the genealogical succession. To continue one's life through descendants is a sort of path for common people to gain immortality. However, the genealogical succession is, rather than the continuation of individual life, more like a continuation of familial lineage. In the continuation of generations, the individual life acts always as a moment, being concealed rather than manifested, of the genealogy which shows itself in history with the patriarchs. Even for the continuation of one's individual life, any particular offspring is a new life differing from one's own. The so-called continuation is no more than the inheritance of some physiological and psychological genes, since one cannot completely copy oneself in posterity. Therefore, the biotic immortality realized in this way is still much restricted. If there is no offspring, the bloodline will be cut off.

The Christian conception not only breaks through the social borders such as class, rank, nation and race, and also breaks through the natural limit of consanguineous kinship. Jesus said clearly that who loves one's father, mother, children and brothers more than him cannot be his disciple. (Lk. 14: 26) The hope for everlasting life in heaven consists in the salvation and grace of divinity, neither does it hinge on individual's moral efforts in this life, nor does it have anything to do with the continuation of patriarchal bloodline. The hope for everlasting life in heaven is the fracture of the hope in present life, thus it is the absolute hope for the world to come. Therefore, it totally interrupts the limitation and restriction of the Confucian biotic continuation which is realized by the production of descendants. It doesn't matter whether have children or not, since just by being adopted child of the Heavenly Father and entrusting one's life into the eternal life of God, one can obtain the gift of everlasting life in afterlife.

Finally, look at the harmonious unity between Heaven and men. "Heaven, Earth, and I were produced together, and all things and I are one," ascending to the way of Heaven and descending to all things underneath, obeying the mandate of Heaven and accomplish the way of men, and finding enjoyment in the boundary between Heaven and men, it is certainly surpassing the domain of the lesser self and entering the realm of the greater self. Under this existential attitude, one could stand within the world while having high aspirations of above the worldly affairs, and originate from finite life while to become "citizen of Heaven" by connecting human life with infinite cosmos, so that he would either belittle death and value life, covering death with life, or surpass both life and death, melting the two opposites in a game. To govern one's life by mental enjoyment, it is an exquisite posture full of existential feeling of artistic aesthetic; it is also a perfect, coherent, free, infinite, ultimate and transcendent state of existence, a supreme state of goodness, beauty, and bliss, of which the nature is both humanistic and religious. This is also the fundamental reason why Cai Yuanpei proposed to "replace religions with aesthetic education", because aesthetic education is a kind of worldview education which incorporates the direction of ultimate concern, can also play functions of religions and serve their purposes.

However, the beautiful and blissful ideal state of perpetual existence needs a prominent and perfect personality as its subject, which requires extremely excellent savvy and wit, otherwise it is impossible to freely penetrate the life and death and enter the state of life game. This is the sainthood pursued by Confucians, or the state of the True Man pursued by Taoists. Therefore, whether it is

viewed from the idea of three immortals, or from the eternal state of the harmonious unity between Heaven and men, the ultimate concern of Confucianism can be described as a meritocratic valuation; for the common people who deeply immerse in everyday vulgarity, this ideal state of existence is hard to reach. Furthermore, the artistic state of beauty and bliss is essentially a mental state, along with existential experience and existential attitude transformed from it. Judging from the modern hermeneutics, it is also a kind of existential comprehension that transmutes an instant into eternity. However, if the ultimate existence such as the mandate of Heaven or the divine dimension is missing, it is entirely possible for this state to slip into the abyss of nihilism. In fact, it is not scientism but the time fragments of modern or post-modern aestheticism which constitutes the greatest challenge to the ultimate eternity, because the modern momentary aesthetic experience deconstructs the formidable boundary between Heaven and men, the ultimate situation of existence between the sacred and the profound, and its feelings about the Summum Bonum.

Moreover, the state of the harmonious unity between Heaven and men as a supreme state of present existence is essentially a sort of mirror of benevolent heart or mirror of righteous heart which is used for speculation on life and death. Through the mental vision from the great benevolence or the great Way, it attempts to dissolve the problem of death by eliminating the boundary between life and death or covering death with life. For example, Confucius's teaching of to know life rather than death is to suspend death with a prudent and realistic attitude, thus stranding the inquiry into death; Zhuangzi then equally dissolves the problem of death by treating life and death as the naturally spontaneous cycle of the seasons, his attitude is to enjoy the life as games that "my life is spent in toil on it (which is the great Mass of nature), and at death I find rest in it,"<sup>[39]</sup> understanding what was appointed and according with what is changing, meeting the procession of life and death as "the procession of the four seasons from spring to autumn, from winter to summer."<sup>[40]</sup> Nevertheless, although life and death are natural phenomena, and benevolent heart and righteous heart are excellent, yet for life, their meanings are completely different. Life is a positively affirmative value for the individual self, and death is its negatively private value, the distinction of them is fundamentally the problem of one's to be or not to be, and it cannot be universally dissolved. This is still related to the issue of individual consciousness. The more conscious and more explicit the unique individual consciousness becomes, the more obvious and more intense the the awareness of existence and nothingness is, and the more grave and more inevitable the challenge of to be or not to be will become.

There is no doubt that, the existential awareness of Western culture, no matter philosophical or religious one, all highlights the individuality, thus further highlights the deep reflection and attention on death. Philosophers regard the issue of death as the fundamental question of the existential philosophy, the unique existentiality which distinguishes human and other animals is the antecedent presence of the awareness of death which brings about the transcendence. So Scheler put forward his "living-toward-death", which proposes that the awareness of death constructs the essential element of human existential structural consciousness; Heidegger also mentioned "being-toward-death", and

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[39] The Great and Most Honoured Master, Zhuangzi (庄子·大宗师 Zhuangzi Da Zongshi), tr. James Legge.

[40] Perfect Enjoyment, Zhuangzi (庄子·至乐 Zhuangzi Zile), tr. James Legge.

regarded it as the essential feature of the existence of Dasein. It is the antecedent presence of the awareness of death that manifests the finitude of human existence, thus brings about the attempt and pursuit for the surpassing of finitude, which constructs the nature of human spiritual existence.

Here, together with western philosophy, Christianity is different with the Confucian attitude of suspending death. Facing death directly and focusing on it, Christianity thus forms the perennial tradition of eschatological theology, which insists on a path of grace and faith, to enter heaven with God and gain the eternal bliss. The gate of heavenly kingdom is a future door opening for everyone; with no need of sanctity and sagacity, anyone who piously follows Jesus Christ, receiving divine inspiration and truth in faith and charitably living in the world, could gain the hope for an everlasting afterlife. It is not to seek for an unceasing influence of self in the world with an meritocratic measure of ultimate value and an eximious gesture of achieving morals and merits, but to expect for God's salvation from this world which is shrouded in sin and death with a humble and obedient attitude, thus to enter heaven and gain the everlasting life of this person. For the other way round, it constitutes the fountain of peaceful and blissful life in this world, or the ultimate support to bear all pains, even destruction. Just as John MacQuarrie once said, even though the fate of world is death, "Our faith and hope of God is not limited within the boundary of time and space, not only from one generation to another, but from infinity to infinity."<sup>[41]</sup> Just for this reason, Moltmann said, Christianity is thoroughly eschatological and is hope, "In Christian theology there is only one true question, the question about the future."<sup>[42]</sup> It means that the end of the world is not an end but a beginning, a new start, for the end of the world is a promise in the resurrection of Christ. The promise of the future, the future is the hope, one shall go forward in hope, meet God in hope and gain the everlasting life.

In brief, the discourse of ultimate concern originates from the limit of human life which is caused by death. However, Confucianism and Christianity have different attitudes towards death. Confucianism does not take death as a problem and form problem awareness from it. Confucianism does not meditate on death as seriously as on life, but with the conscious awareness that minimizes, conceals and suspends this problem, puts mind and vigor into the present life. On the contrary, inquiry into the problem of death is useless and meaningless. In the moral idealist attitude that men of honor should do what is right and keep themselves from what is wrong, to inquire into the world after death is in principle what is wrong. One should know that what should be done is but in this worldly life. In this case, the immortality of life can only be strived for in this life, and the verity of immortality consists only in that the conducts of this life have the significance surpassing this life and this existence. However, the unique life of the individual would have itself lost forever, there has only its value and influence that remains.

As for Christianity, death is a severe problem laying ahead of life, also a theological problem of existence related to sin and penalty. Therefore, for bearing death's destruction to life, and for facing the denial of non-being to being, Christianity provides a path of faith from nihility to eternity, from

[41] John MacQuarrie, tr. He Guanghu 1998: *Principles of Christian Theology*. Hong Kong, Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, 467.

[42] Jürgen Moltmann, tr. Yang Deyou, Dong you etc. 1991: *Theologie der Hoffnung, Collection of 20th Century Western Religious Philosophy Works*, eds. Liu Xiaofeng et al., Volume three. Shanghai, Shanghai SDX Joint Publishing, 1775.



death to life, by virtue of the sacred and transcendent word of Christ's resurrection. For every individual, no matter peers or plebs, this opens a unique and wholly of mine possibility of hope for everlasting life, and it may after all be accepted as an alternative support other than the concern for immortality of Confucian meritocracy. However, it is a transcendent way of existence different from Confucian empirical reasoning in character, which demands a faithful attitude towards life. Having faith is to have the courage to bear nothingness and even death, which Tillich called the "courage to be",<sup>[43]</sup> it can only be from the transcendent God.

About the faith in God and its power, the modern theologian Paul Althaus said, "Every victory human obtains from fighting against miseries and sins is fragmental. Who would break the spell of death for us? Who would overcome the atrocity and depravity repeated in every era? These chains which bind us cannot be unfastened by us. Actually, mankind never have the power to radically collapse evilness. Only the creative conducts of the living God have this kind of power. He will break the historical construction one day, and rebuild it in the glory of heaven of life and truth. And only then, the desire of mankind can finally be accomplished."<sup>[44]</sup>

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[43] P. Tillich, tr. He Guanghu 1999; *The Courage to Be, Collections of Tillich*, Volume One. Shanghai, Shanghai SDX Joint Publishing, 265

[44] Paul Althaus, tr. Yang Deyou, Dong You etc. 1991; *The Significance and Purpose of History: From a Christian Point of View, Collection of 20th Century Western Religious Philosophy Works*, eds. Liu Xiaofeng et al., Volume three, Shanghai, Shanghai SDX Joint Publishing, 1516-1517.

**中文题目:**

**儒家不朽观及其限度与基督教永生观及其支援**

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**提要:**生与死、存在与不存在是人这个有限存在者不得不面对的根本性问题, 如何超越生命的有限性以实现其永恒的意义成为人类精神性生存的本质意向, 也构成哲学和宗教讨论的终极话语。儒家和基督教在这个问题上有着各具特色的表达, 在儒家可谓现世不朽的追求, 即通过功德言的历史性影响进入历史记忆; 借助血脉相传构成子孙万代的生命延续; 和宇宙万物一体实现天人合一的无限境界。这一不朽观具有道德人文性、自然人伦性、审美存在性, 其根本特质在于非个体性和历史此在性, 包含着儒家思想的卓越和限度。在基督教可称作天国永生的盼望, 它既是立足于个体的, 也是超越现世的, 但要通过信仰的途径, 在儒家经验理性之外提供了一条可资参考的支援路径。

**关键词:**儒家不朽观; 基督教永生观; 历史记忆; 血脉相传; 天人合一