

Missionary Journal, Christianity and Confucianism

This selection is the ninth of ten sections in an article comparing Confucianism and Christianity. The article was published in a missionary journal printed in the cities of Fuzhou and Shanghai. *The Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal* operated between 1868 and 1912. It was read by English-speakers living in the major cities of China as well as abroad. This selection very favorably compares the fate of women in Christian societies to those in Confucian societies. For example, Christianity uplifts women, Confucianism degrades them; Christian women are beautiful, Confucian women are ugly. The author employs the logic that women as mothers have an indelible impact on society, concluding, "There is little hope of renovating China until the mothers of China are renovated in heart and life." One interesting aspect of this article relates to its representation of women in general terms: whether Confucian or Christian, women are not agents, but rather wholly shaped by the moral forces that surround them.

Source: "The Ethics of Christianity and Confucianism Compared." *Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal* 17 (1886): 377-378.

IX.—Christianity and Confucianism are agreed in regarding the relation of husband and wife as a sacred and exalted one. Christianity places it first in importance, while Confucianism subordinates it to the relation of parent and child. Christ came into the world, born of a pure and devout woman. His tenderness and love towards the women who followed him, and ministered to him, has done much to exalt their place in Christian society. The wife has come to be the companion of her husband. In childhood she has been trained in knowledge, and cultivated in virtue, and when the responsibilities of motherhood come upon her, she is prepared to educate the young lives committed to her care, both by wise precepts and a right example. Good seed is thus sown in the tender years of childhood, which produces beautiful flowers and luscious fruits in later years. Confucianism degrades woman, it neglects her education. The popular saying; — — — — —. "It is the virtue of a woman to be without talent," is a true embodiment of the spirit of Confucianism towards women. This reminds us of the saying in the evil days of American history, now happily past, that "slaves were only injured by being educated," which was true if they were to be kept in slavery. Women in China are kept in ignorance. Among the wealthy they live in pampered idleness; among the poor their lot is one of drudgery. Children are born to them, and committed to their care, but they are themselves but children in knowledge and self-government. They rule with passion and caprice, and the minds of the children in their most impressible years, are fed on husks and chaff. Without steady, judicious government, they grow wild and lawless, or cunning and

hypocritical. They follow their evil impulses, and the evil example set before them, of abandonment to paroxysms of rage, when their wills are in the slightest crossed; and thus in a land of boasted filial piety, filial impiety abounds in all classes of society. There is little hope of renovating China until the mothers of China are renovated in heart and life. Confucianism justifies polygamy. It declares that the greatest act of filial impiety is to be without children. Confucius was the son of a concubine, and the Confucian literature has no word of condemnation for the practice of polygamy. Shun received from Yao his two daughters at once for wives, and emperors and high officers, in an unbroken line, have set before the people, in this regard, an evil example. Women can be divorced for seven reasons; irreverence to the husband's parents, impurity, laziness, barrenness, excessive talking, theft, evil disease. If a husband is stricken down by death in any extraordinary way, it is a meritorious act for the wife to destroy herself, and be buried in the tomb with the husband. There is a tablet in Tungchou near my home, erected by the officers of the city in honor of a woman, who starved herself to death by the grave of her husband. The memory of this commendable act is thus preserved for the imitation of other women. There is no lot so hard in China as that of the young wife. She is yoked in life, without choice of her own, to an entire stranger. For the husband to love the wife is a weakness to be condemned. The son must side with the mother against the wife, and beat her as he would a child, at his own or the mother's caprice. Cases of suicide are continually occurring among the people, where young wives find life insupportable, and they choose self-destruction to end their miseries. So general is the tyranny of mothers-in-law, that young wives are congratulated by their friends, where the mother-in-law has been removed by death. Christianity softens and enriches the lives of women, until the graces of gentleness and purity, of patience and love, write themselves in lines of beauty upon their faces, as they grow old in years. Confucianism neglects the culture of women, and as they grow old in years, their faces grow ugly with the marks of ignorance and neglect, of selfishness and passion.