



Gentlemen and Hero: A Cross-Cultural Comparative Study of Human Ideal Models

--Taking the Image of the Gentleman in *the Analects of Confucius* and the Image of the Hero in *the Homeric Hymns* as an Example

Mingzhi Geng

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China

E-mail: gengmingzhi@foxmail.com

Abstract. This paper undertakes a comprehensive exploration of two archetypal figures, the Confucian gentleman and the Homeric hero, deeply embedded in the cultural landscapes of ancient China and Greece, respectively. The analysis delves into *the Analects of Confucius* to decipher the intricate qualities defining the gentleman—benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom, and faith. Simultaneously, it examines *the Homeric Hymns* and ancient Greek culture to unravel the heroic code, characterized by courage, honor, strength, and wisdom, epitomized by figures like Achilles and Odysseus. Through a comparative lens, the study identifies shared virtues and principles, showcasing the universal aspects of these human ideal models. Benevolence, righteousness, courage, wisdom, and integrity emerge as common ground, transcending cultural boundaries and resonating in both Eastern and Western traditions. The cross-cultural revelation of these archetypes unfolds, demonstrating their enduring influence on modern Chinese and Western societies.

Keywords: *The Analects of Confucius*; *The Homeric Hymns*; Ideal Models; Cross-Cultural Studies.

1 Introduction

Human societies have long grappled with the notion of ideal models that exemplify virtue, morality, and societal values. The archetypes of the "gentleman" in Confucianism and the "hero" in ancient Greek culture, particularly as depicted in *the Homeric Hymns*, stand as prominent embodiments of these ideals. This paper seeks to engage in a cross-cultural comparative study, delving into the images of gentlemen in *the Analects of Confucius* and heroes in *the Homeric Hymns*, to unravel the nuanced intricacies of human ideals across different cultural landscapes.

1.1 Background

In understanding the ideals of gentlemen and heroes, it is imperative to explore the cultural and philosophical contexts that gave rise to these archetypes. Confucianism, originating in ancient China, has profoundly shaped East Asian thought with its emphasis on moral virtues, social harmony, and ethical conduct. The Analects, a compilation of sayings attributed to Confucius and his disciples, serves as a foundational text reflecting Confucian principles and the image of the "gentleman" within the societal framework.

On the other side of the ancient world, Greek culture, with its rich tapestry of mythology, philosophy, and epic poetry, offers a contrasting perspective. *The Homeric Hymns*, part of the Greek epic tradition, provide insights into the ideals of heroes—figures often elevated to semi-divine status due to their exceptional qualities and deeds. These heroes, as portrayed in the hymns, embody a distinctive blend of physical prowess, moral virtues, and interactions with the divine.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

By scrutinizing the virtues, ethical principles, and societal expectations embedded in the images of gentlemen and heroes, we seek to highlight the unique cultural landscapes that fostered these ideals. Understanding the common threads and divergences not only enriches our appreciation of ancient civilizations but also sheds light on the universal aspects of human aspirations and moral foundations. Delving into the Analects' depiction of gentlemen and *the Homeric Hymns'* portrayal of heroes allows us to explore the nuanced variations in what each society deemed virtuous. Whether it be the Confucian emphasis on familial piety and righteous conduct or the Greek celebration of individual prowess and divine connections, this comparative lens enables us to discern the distinct values that shaped the ideals of the gentleman and the hero. Uncovering these cultural nuances enriches our understanding of the multifaceted nature of human virtue.

2 Points of Convergence; Shared Virtues and Principles

While Confucian gentlemen and heroes from *the Homeric Hymns* originate from distinct cultural and philosophical contexts, there are shared virtues and principles that resonate across both archetypes. Examining the commonalities reveals universal ideals that transcend cultural boundaries and underscore the timeless aspects of human virtue. Let's explore these shared virtues and principles:

Central to Confucianism is the virtue of benevolence, emphasizing love, care for others, and respect for human dignity. A Confucian gentleman demonstrates benevolence by actively helping others, showing tolerance, and promoting the well-being of the community. If a gentleman does not have a benevolent heart, the foundation and significance of all his actions will first be dissolved without benevolence, the foundation and significance of all his actions will first be dissolved^[2] (Changsheng, 2015). Heroes in *the Homeric Hymns*, such as Achilles and Odysseus, display compassion

and concern for others. Their actions often reflect a sense of duty towards their comrades and communities. For example, Odysseus' empathy towards his crew and Achilles' grief for Patroclus highlight their capacity for benevolence. The respect for individuality in the Homeric Hymns gave birth to the idea of democracy. Even in cases that kings or Zeus made a decision they had to take into consideration mortals' and immortals' opinions and reactions. If they did not, then political instability could result as is clearly mentioned in *Odyssey*^[7](Papanikos,2021).

Righteousness in Confucianism refers to moral uprightness and a commitment to justice. This aligns with the emphasis on honor and moral rectitude in the *Analects*. Honor is a pivotal virtue for heroes in *the Homeric Hymns*. The heroes, driven by a sense of honor, engage in epic deeds and uphold their moral values even in the face of adversity. For instance, Achilles' pursuit of glory in battle reflects the heroic commitment to righteousness and honor.

While Confucianism does not explicitly highlight physical courage, the courage of conviction is evident. A gentleman, according to Confucius, remains steadfast in moral principles and demonstrates courage in facing ethical dilemmas. Courage, both physical and moral, is a defining trait of heroes in *the Homeric Hymns*. The valor displayed by heroes like Achilles on the battlefield and Odysseus in navigating treacherous waters underscores the shared virtue of courage between the Confucian gentleman and the Homeric hero.

Wisdom and Prudent Judgment: Wisdom is a core quality of a Confucian gentleman, involving the ability to analyze situations, discern right from wrong, and make informed decisions. A gentleman should not only be a benevolent person, but also a wise person, able to distinguish between right and wrong, understand things, and think quickly. This reflects the mastery of knowledge and the elevation of the cognitive realm, as well as the good character that a gentleman should possess^[6] (Lv Lulu, 2022). Heroes in *the Homeric Hymns*, especially Odysseus, exemplify wisdom in their strategic thinking and intelligent problem-solving. Odysseus' clever tactics, such as the Trojan Horse, showcase the hero's intellectual prowess. Similarly, the hero Odysseus is depicted in the *Odyssey* in the tone of a bard showing his eloquence and agility. Given the basileutic interdependence of words and deeds, odysseus' ability to speak persuasively and authoritatively is perfectly natural^[5] (Harden, 2013),

Faith is crucial in Confucianism, emphasizing consistency between words and deeds. A gentleman keeps promises, maintains integrity, and earns the trust of others. Trustworthiness is implicitly embedded in the heroic code of conduct. Heroes' adherence to their oaths and commitments, such as Achilles avenging Patroclus or Odysseus remaining faithful to his wife, underscores the shared principle of integrity.

In exploring the shared virtues and principles of the Confucian gentleman and the Homeric hero, it becomes evident that, despite cultural and contextual differences, both archetypes embody universal ideals of benevolence, righteousness, courage, wisdom, integrity, and devotion to duty. These shared virtues reflect the timeless aspects of human character that transcend cultural boundaries and resonate across diverse philosophical tradition.

3 Points of Divergence: Differences in Ethical Priorities

While Confucian gentlemen and heroes from *the Homeric Hymns* share certain virtues and principles, there are notable differences in the prioritization of moral codes between these two archetypes. These distinctions arise from variations in cultural contexts, philosophical foundations, and the societal roles these figures play.

Confucianism places a strong emphasis on collectivism and social harmony. Confucian gentlemen prioritize the well-being of the community, family, and society over individual interests. The moral code in Confucianism revolves around fulfilling social roles, maintaining order, and contributing to the greater good. The heroes of *the Homeric Hymns* often embody individualistic virtues. While they may have a sense of duty to their comrades and communities, the heroic code emphasizes personal glory, individual achievements, and the pursuit of honor on a more personal level. The hero's actions are often driven by the desire for individual recognition and reputation.

Filial piety, or the reverence for one's parents and ancestors, is a cornerstone of Confucian ethics. Confucian gentlemen prioritize family obligations and duties, viewing filial piety as a fundamental virtue. Fulfilling familial roles and responsibilities is seen as integral to moral conduct. While familial relationships are acknowledged in *the Homeric Hymns*, heroes often embark on quests and epic adventures that take them away from their families. The heroic code places greater emphasis on personal exploits, and familial obligations are sometimes secondary to the hero's quest for individual glory.

Courtesy refers to the rules and rituals of social life. courtesy is the norms of speech and behavior of a gentleman and the code of and behavior of a gentleman. It manifests itself externally as adherence to norms and internally as respect for order^[3] (Deng Tiantian, 2020). In *the Analects of Confucius*, it is written that "the use of rites is to emphasize harmony." This means that the role of rites is to maintain social harmony and stability. A gentleman should follow all kinds of Courtesy norms as a way to restrain his words, deeds and behavior, and show modesty, respect and respect for others. At the same time, Courtesy is also an important guideline for a gentleman to deal with interpersonal relationships. The gods of Olympus in the Homeric Hymns were not bound by morality and courtesy; they were always capricious, giving vent to their feelings and expressing their emotions without restraint. Even obscenities from the life of gods tell some truth about them^[9] (Shcherbakov, 2021). Up to a point, Aphrodite in the Hymn is like the essentially frivolous divinities of the Iliad, and her seduction of Anchises resembles in many details Hera's seduction of Zeus in Iliad 14^[8] (Schein, 2013).

Confucianism emphasizes maintaining social harmony by adhering to prescribed social roles. The moral code for a gentleman involves fulfilling roles such as ruler, subject, parent, child, husband, and wife with virtue and propriety. Social order is paramount in Confucian ethics. The heroic code in *the Homeric Hymns* often involves disrupting existing social order in pursuit of individual goals. Heroes may challenge authority, go on quests that lead them away from societal norms, and prioritize personal glory over strict adherence to established social roles. The Aeneid self-consciously takes the founding of Rome (*condere Romam*) and encases it in the foun-

dational glory of Aeneas, the paradoxically 'new' ancestral hero: Rome's success, and successors, are rooted in him, and in his epic^[4](Greensmith, 2021).

Confucianism does not place significant emphasis on a personal relationship with the divine. The focus is more on moral conduct, virtue, and human relationships. Rituals and ceremonies are seen as means to maintain social order rather than direct interactions with the divine. Heroes in *the Homeric Hymns* often have direct interactions with gods and goddesses. The Trojan War was not only a war between the Greeks and the Trojans, but also between the camp of Athena and the camp of Apollo. The patronage and help of the Olympian gods had a great influence on the development of the war. The younger brother builds up Hector's self-esteem by telling him that he will not die today; the gods have not actually said that, but Hector rests assured and is overjoyed at the prospect of winning fame without risk^[10](Wesselmann, 2021).The relationship with the divine is integral to the hero's journey, and divine intervention or favor plays a crucial role in their quests. The hero's actions may be influenced by or in defiance of divine will. Yet, not only is Heracles one of the foremost 'heroic' figures of Greek myth; according to other sources, he also famously survived death and lived on with the Olympians^[1] (Barker, 2014).

Confucianism emphasizes the importance of justice as part of the moral code. Justice, in Confucian terms, involves treating others with fairness, equity, and moral rectitude. A gentleman upholds justice for the greater good of society. The heroic code in *the Homeric Hymns* often leans towards personal vendettas and individual notions of justice. Heroes may seek revenge for personal grievances, and the concept of justice is sometimes intertwined with the hero's pursuit of honor and glory. The morally ambivalent conduct of epic heroes illustrates how difficult it is for a group to temper selfish needs and the behavior of individuals. Every performance of the oral epic indicates how traditional patterns of behavior should or may be adapted to the current situation. Epic heroes do not repeat such desirable patterns in their conduct because they are unable to follow common rules very often they have to break these rules^[11] (Zieliński, 2020).

These differences in the prioritization of moral codes between Confucian gentlemen and Homeric heroes highlight the distinct cultural and philosophical foundations shaping these archetypes. While Confucianism underscores social harmony, collectivism, and the fulfillment of social roles, the heroic code in *the Homeric Hymns* leans towards individualism, personal glory, and interactions with the divine. These nuanced distinctions contribute to the rich diversity of ethical frameworks across cultures and traditions.

4 Conclusions

In delving into the profound realms of the Confucian gentleman and the Homeric hero, this dissertation embarked on a journey through the rich tapestry of Eastern and Western cultural ideals. Through an in-depth analysis of *the Analects of Confucius* and Homer's epics, we uncovered the nuanced qualities that define the gentleman and the hero as paragons of virtue and character in their respective traditions. Rooted in

Confucian philosophy, the gentleman embodies a harmonious and socially responsible figure, guided by ethical principles that have left an indelible mark on the cultural and social fabric of China. Conversely, the exploration of the Homeric hero revealed a heroic code characterized by courage, honor, strength, and wisdom, reflecting the individualistic and valorous ethos of ancient Greek culture. Heroes in *the Homeric Hymns*, epitomized by figures like Achilles and Odysseus, symbolize the pursuit of glory, justice, and personal excellence.

References

1. Barker, E., & Christensen, J. (2014). Even Heracles Had to Die: Homeric 'Heroism', Mortality and the Epic Tradition. *trends in classis*, 6(2), 249-277. https://seltzerbooks.com/felson/Children_of_Zeus_in_the_Homeric_Hymns_Ge.pdf.
2. Chang Sheng. (2015). Viewing Primitive Confucian Sentiments from the Gentlemen of the *Analects of Confucius*. *Ningxia Social Science* (03), 186-189. <https://kns.cnki.net/dm8/Detail?v=5832abf25d43c01e48b2be937c769e5245142ea8c10feab438a708d0b9319af>.
3. Deng, Tiantian. (2020). From the *Shangshu* to the *Analects of Confucius*--The Transformation and Fixation of the Confucian Category of "Gentleman". *Studies in Ethics* (04), 73-78. doi: 10.15995/j.cnki.llyxj.2020.04.011.
4. Greensmith, E. (2021). Beginning at the End in Imperial Greek Epic. *Arethusa*, 54(3), 379-397. <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:6c3ea03e-702f-4380-9715-e3da8759c693/files/sz64tn59d>.
5. Harden, S., & Kelly, A. (2013). Proemic convention and character construction in early Greek epic. *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 107, 1-34. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24615590>.
6. LV Lulu. (2022). From the *Analects of Confucius* to see the structure of the gentleman thought system of Confucius. *Journal of Qilu Normal College* (04), 125-133. <https://kns.cnki.net/dm8/Detail?v=5832abf25d43c01e9955265477649df305ea841fa51453ed0e8bd8eb185fbff1>.
7. Papanikos, G. T. (2021). Collective decision-making in Homer's *Odyssey*. *Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, 7, 59-84. <https://www.athensjournals.gr/mediterranean/2021-7-1-4-Papanikos.pdf>.
8. Schein, S. (2013). Divine and human in the *Homeric Hymn* to Aphrodite. *MOM Éditions*, 50(1), 295-312. https://www.persee.fr/doc/mom_0151-7015_2013_act_50_1_3349.
9. Shcherbakov, F. (2021). When Homer ceased laughing: epic humour and the means of its apology in antique allegorism and symbolism. *The European Journal of Humour Research*, 9(2), 63-73. <https://www.europeanjournalofhumour.org/ejhr/article/download/476/525>.
10. Wesselmann, K. (2021). Homeric Heroes Speaking in Lists: Comical Characterisation through Catalogues. *Lists and Catalogues in Ancient Literature and Beyond: Towards a Poetics of Enumeration*, 107, 281. <https://www.academia.edu/download/67267352/HomericHeroesSpeakingInLists.pdf>.
11. Zieliński, K. (2020). Odysseus--Trickster and the Issue of the Compatibility of the Image of the Hero with Its Function in the Traditions of the Oral Epic. *Studia Religiológica. Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego*, 53(3), 181-202. <https://www.ejournals.eu/pliki/art/17833/>.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

