In Search of Political Wisdom in a Disordered World: A Cross-textual Reading of *Ecclesiastes* with Confucius' *Analects*

By
Elaine Goh Wei Fun

Thesis presented to the Faculty of
South East Asia Graduate School of Theology
/ATESEA Theological Union
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree
Doctor of Theology

20th Sept, 2013

Table of Contents

Abstract 7

Chapter One Introduction 8

1. The Relevance of The Thesis 9
2. Definitions 12
   - 2.1 Wisdom 12
   - 2.2 Politics and Political Wisdom 13
   - 2.3 Cross-textual Reading 15
   - 2.4 *Ecclesiastes* as a Wisdom Text 15
   - 2.5 *Analects* 《论语》 as a Wisdom Text. 17
   - 2.6 A Disordered World 17
   - 2.7 Limitations and Scopes 18
3. The Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Political Wisdom: Some Notable Parallels 20
   - 3.1 From Egypt 23
     - 3.1.1 *The Harper's Songs* 23
     - 3.1.2 *The Instructions of Any* 24
     - 3.1.3 *The Instructions of Ankhsheshonqy* 25
   - 3.2 From Mesopotamia 26
     - 3.2.1 *The Counsels of Wisdom* 26
     - 3.2.2 *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi* 27
     - 3.2.3 *The Dialogue of Pessimism* 28
   - 3.3 The Aramaic *Proverbs of Ahiqar* 29
   - 3.4 Conclusion to the Parallels od Political Wisdom: Wisdom in Cross Cultures and Texts 31
4. A Cross-textual Suggestion and Research Methodology 35
   - 4.1 An Engagement of Cultural Currency 35
   - 4.2 A Cross-textual Hermeneutics on Political Wisdom 38
   - 4.3 Contextual Considerations 41
5. Previous Research 43
   - 5.1 Cross-textual Hermeneutics between the Bible and Ancient Chinese Literature 43
   - 5.2 Comparative Studies: the Thought Worlds of Christianity and Confucianism 52
6. Research Approaches 54

Chapter Two ***Ecclesiastes*** **and Political Wisdom** **57**

Introduction 57
1. *Ecclesiastes* at A Glance 58
1.1 Structure, Theme and Genre 59
1.1.1 Structure 59
1.1.2 Theme 61
1.1.3 Genre 67

1.2 *Ecclesiastes* and Old Testament Wisdom 71

1.3 Social Political Background 74
1.3.1 Persian Dating 74
1.3.2 Political Culture and Courtly *Sitz Im Leben* 77

2. Political Ideas in the *Ecclesiastes* 81
2.1 Instructions and Admonitions On Courtly Behavior 84
2.1.1 Eccl 5:8-9 [Heb 5:7-8] 84
2.1.2 Eccl 8:2-9 88
2.1.3 Eccl 10:4-7 94
2.1.4 Eccl 10:16-20 96

2.2 Reflections On Socio-Political Reality 102
2.2.1 Eccl 3:16-17 102
2.2.2 Eccl 4:1-3 105
2.2.3 Eccl 4:13-16 109
2.2.4 Eccl 9:13-16 113

3. A Reading of *Ecclesiastes* as Political Wisdom 117

Conclusion 122

Chapter Three ***Analects*** **and Political Wisdom** **123**

Introduction 123
1. *Analects* At A Glance 124
1.1 Structure and Theme 124
1.2 Social Political Background 129
1.3 On Defining Politics in *Analects* 133

2. Political Ideas in *Analects* 135
2.1 Instructions and Admonitions on Virtuous Governance 136
2.1.1 Moral Guidance 136

2.1.2 Leadership by Example 139
2.1.3 Appointment Based on Competence 142
2.1.4 Trustworthiness 144
2.1.5 On Humanness 146
2.1.6 On Righteousness 149

2.2 Reflections on Socio-Political Reality and Political Involvement 154
2.2.1 Moral Requirement of a Person 154
2.2.2 Propriety as a Way to Maintain Order 158
2.2.3 The Middle Path as Method 164
2.2.4 Virtuous Living as a Way of Life 168

3. A Reading of *Analects* Political Wisdom: Governance Based on Collective Attributes and Managerial Competence 170
3.1 Humanness (仁 *Ren*) : the Essence of Political Maneuvre 170
3.2 Propriety (礼 *Li*) : Proper Political Behavior 172
3.3 Righteousness (义 *Yi*): Doing the Right Things and Doing Things Right 175
3.4 The Exemplary Person (君子 *Junzi*): a Moral and Political Construct 177
3.5 Political Wisdom in *Analects*: An Assessment 179

Conclusion 183

Chapter Four *Ecclesiastes* and *Analects* at a Crossroads 184

Introduction 184
1. Criteria for Establishing Correspondence between Texts 184

2. A Cross-textual Reading of *Ecclesiastes* with Confucius' *Analects* 186
2.1 From Their Social Political Background 186
2.1.1 The Need for Order 186
2.1.2 The Need for Justice and Righteousness 189
2.1.3 The Merging of Pedagogics and Politics 194

2.2 On Political Leadership 198

2.3 On Political Behavior 201

2.3.1 Relationship 201
2.3.2 Discretion 204

2.4 On Political Rhetoric 207
2.4.1 Metaphors and Imageries 208
2.4.2 Parallelism 210
2.4.3 Literary Contrast 214

2.5 Religious Consciousness in Politics 219

3. How *Ecclesiastes* and *Analects* Enlighten Each Other: An Assessment 223
3.1 *Ecclesiastes* 223
3.2 *Analects* 225
3.3 A Dialogical Imagination 226

4. The Crossings: In Search of Political Wisdom in a Contextual World 230
4.1 The Necessity of Political Leadership and Wise Management 231
4.2 Theological Anthropology 232
4.3 Human Endeavor is Crucial 233
4.4 This-worldliness in Focus 234

Conclusion 234

Thesis Conclusion 235
Bibliography 237

Abstract

Various cross-textual readings have been attempted between the Bible and Chinese literature. This study centers on the political wisdom of *Ecclesiastes* and of *Analects* with an approach in cross-textual hermeneutics. It is the intention of this study to demonstrate that, both texts offer wisdom pointers with regards to human survival amidst uncertain socio-political realities. In this study, the biblical text (*Ecclesiastes*) and the native text (*Analects*) are read in the context of the author as a Chinese Christian reader. **Chapter One** introduces the vibrant interaction of biblical wisdom literature within the ancient Near East where, some of their political connections will be highlighted. The openness of wisdom literature will then be proposed to support this present effort of cross-textual research. **Chapter Two** focusses on the reading of eight passages that communicate Qoheleth's political wisdom on *Ecclesiastes*. **Chapter Three** centers on *Analects*, and the reading of some notable passages that relate to Confucius' political ideas. **Chapter Four** seeks to demonstrate the dialogical dynamics between the two corpora based on some hermeneutical connections. At the conclusion, one's understanding is found to be examined, critiqued, and reclaimed by both biblical and native texts. Based on the distinctive and collective political insights of both wisdom texts, this study suggests a contextual idea of living wisely by a reader who stands in both of her faith and native traditions.