

ARCHIVE FOR SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

January, 2016

Volume 5, Number 2



ARCHIVE FOR SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

VOL.5, NO.2

JANUARY, 2016

ISSN 1118-5698

Published in
Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
Faculty of Arts
University of Calabar, Nigeria

In Collaboration with
International Study Centre for Professional,
Remedial and Continuing Education Ltd
G.P.O Box 2897, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria
Website: www.iscprce.com
E-mail: contributionsforafripentecost@gmail.com

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UTILIZING THE ESSENTIALS OF CONFUCIAN MORALS IN THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC BUREAUCRACY

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the social challenges bedeviling Nigeria in the 21st century. Some of these challenges are poverty, corruption, insecurity, instability and among others. Modern Nigeria is increasingly and excruciatingly aware of the fact that these challenges are fast becoming global paradoxes. Besides, they have assumed human face with the corresponding economic and political tonality. In the same vein, the paper also surveys China and its people in the past fifty years and today. We discovered that there have been astronomical growths and developments as a result of their sincerity, back-breaking work and commitments. The paper therefore adopts comparative, historical and interpretative models leading to the fact that the major factor that catapults China to the present level is the internalization of Confucian moral virtues. To this end, this paper postulates that Nigeria should borrow a leaf from these Confucian virtues and domesticate them into Nigerian bureaucracy through the establishment of 'Ethical Institute of Public Bureau'. This method, if well-structured and well marshaled, would make Nigeria an 'African Tiger' now that there is bilateral tie between China and Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: Confucianism, Poverty, Corruption, Ethics, Bureaucracy, Nigeria, China.

INTRODUCTION

In a country well governed, poverty is something to be ashamed of. In a country badly governed, wealth is something to be ashamed of (Umejesi, 2010: 162). The foregoing, statement was made by Confucius, the founder of Confucianism in China during the warring states. Paradoxically, in the 21st century the challenges to Nigerians, apart from the perennial search for social – political stability and progress, are that they are romantizing with poverty and wealth. Modern Nigeria is increasingly, excruciatingly and disparagingly conscious of the fact that poverty and corruption are

fast becoming global paradoxes. As a matter of fact, poverty and corruption in the Nigerian Public bureaucracy has assumed the face of a child, man, woman, value, religion, ideology and morality. Besides, poverty and corruption in the Nigerian public offices have both economic and political tonality that distinguishes them from others. Currently, they become social identity and cultural authenticity (Alamu 2010:55).

In retrospect, about fifty years ago, the economy of China was a suspect, its people were impoverished with low education, and health amenities were rare. Today, the tables have been turned. China has developed its resources with back-breaking work by its people which provides labor as far as Middle East to earn foreign exchange and its exports have outclassed many developed nations in the world market (African Concord, 1986:31). In fact, development in China today is on daily basis. These astronomical developments are rooted in Confucian school of virtues. Umejesi (2010:162) buttresses further that "the teachings of Confucius have had a lot of effects on China" According to him, "The teaching of Confucius spread even to Japan. In fact, it was Confucian teachings that elevated China to the status of the greatest nation on earth.... Even when China recoiled into herself, in isolation, the Confucian ideas still dominated her way of life" (163). The positive changes experienced by China as a result of the Confucian morality can be borrowed by Nigeria for her public bureaucracy. This is necessitated consequent upon the bilateral ties between China and Nigeria.

CONFUCIANISM: A PANORAMIC OVERVIEW

Confucianism as a philosophical moral order was founded by Kung Fu Tzu ('Confucius' as Latinized). Confucius (551-479BCE) was a Chinese moral philosopher who was a contemporary of Buddha (560BC) and lived when the conduct of Chinese officials were greatly corrupt (Alamu 2004:318). During this period the mighty Chou dynasty (1122-256BCE) had degenerated into a system of loosely - bound feudal states that were engaged in continuous and interminable warfare, much to the distress of the common people. Thus, this high stake of turmoil and suffering as a result of the warring states weakened both its welders and its target, bending and submitting themselves to the whims and caprices of the aristocracy.(319).

Occasionally by these situations 'hundred schools' bloomed in China. Consequently, two schools of Lao Tzu - the old master (Taoism and Kung - Fu - Tzu Confucian (Confucianism) gained prominence in China. Lao Tzu adopted mystical approach of inactivity, while Confucius adopted pragmatic approach so as to restore peace in the Chinese society (319). Yin Yutang further informed us that what made Confucius triumphed over other hundred schools was because: "The Confucian teachers had something definite to teach as the Confucian pupils had something definite to learn, namely, historical learning, while other schools were forced to air merely their own opinions" (*Mankind Search for God* 1990:178).

However, the position Confucius occupied was not that of a savior but as one who put the people back in touch with the ancient "I transmit but do not create. I believe and love the ancients" (318). As a result of this, he postulated "the way of the leader" (*Mankind Search for God* 1990:180). This self-evaluation by Confucius is typical of the man and his teaching, which have placed him well above other sages in China. His

religious philosophy known as Confucianism still influences China till date. Confucianism is defined as: "The system of teaching of Confucius and his disciples characterized by central emphasis on the practice and cultivation of the cardinal virtues of filial piety, kindness, righteousness, propriety, intelligence and faithfulness that historically has formed the basis of much of Chinese ethics, education, statecraft and religion" (Umejesi 2010 :150). In fact, the essentials of Confucian doctrines are captured by this definition. To this end, Confucianism and its ideal essence on leadership have persisted and laid an ethical basis for political, socio-economic culture of contemporary China (Theodore and James 1986:17).

THE ESSENTIALS OF CONFUCIAN MORALITY

As earlier observed, the essentials of Confucian doctrines are captured by the above definition, which has brought out at a glance the contour of the whole essence. As a successful teacher, Confucius believed that his ideals on the ethics and morals could save the troubled world of his time, if he and his students could be employed in the government by the rulers. It is worth-asserting that the essentials of Confucian virtues include *Li* and *Jen*, education, self-control, filial piety, kindness, propriety, faithfulness, accountability, benevolence, intelligence *et cetera*. In the light of the foregoing, Confucius postulated *Li* meaning the way of the leader' or rectification of name and *Jen* depicts perfect gentlemen (McDowell and Stewart, 1982:79). By the way of the leader" Confucius meant the ability and the will to control situation coupled with the understanding of the implication of the name of the leader to get things done appropriately. Furthermore, a disciple of Confucius, Mencius once accosted his master of what he would do if he were asked to rule a state bedeviled with gross insensitivity. He said the only thing needed is 'the way of the leader' or rectification of names'. Supporting this submission, Obi (1987:50) noted: "The solution is simple. It lies in the rectification of names. When the leader is truly leader, the minister truly minister, the teacher truly teacher, the father, father, the son, son, the student, student, then - only then - shall society, be restored".

Each name-policeman, soldier, president, lawyer, civil servants -contains moral implications which constitute the essence of that class of profession which the name applies. The essence of the leader perhaps is what 'leader truly ought to be or the way of the leader (Sage 1996:31). The way of the leader, Confucius believed at its most fundamental level, comes from within. The ability to lead is generated within the context of a person's ethical and philosophical framework in consonance with ones followers and constituencies; it is a function of character not an accident of birth or a prerogative of position. This character of a strong and able leader can be developed only through careful, intentional practice (Alamu 2004:320). Donald Krause, extracting his understanding of the 'the way of the leader' applied the: "Analects of Confucius to understand the nature of the leadership as the will to control events, the understanding of the implication of name of the leader to chart a course and the power to get a job done co-operatively using the skills and abilities of other people" (Odimegwu 2002;5).

In essence, if a leader does things according to the way of a leader then, he is truly a leader. There is a correlation between his name and actuality. Therefore, this

Confucian virtue affirms that every name in social relationship denotes certain responsibilities and duties. The leader of men essentially thinks of his character, self-cultivation, nomenclature, and is humble, and deferential to superiors, generously kind and always just. Also, leader promotes those who are able and instruct those who do not have it and they will be anxiously willing to be led (McDowell and Stewart 1982:88). Without any equivocation, the leader of men is not contentious, rather "he contends only as in competitions of archery and when he wins he will present his cup to his competitor" (88). Confucius postulated that a true leader should ensure that he is diligent and faithful to his followers and unconditionally makes sacrifices for the total well-being of his followers. On the aspect of the *Jen*, Confucius emphasized that the perfect gentlemen is regarded in high esteem, which he cultivates as a true leader who proffers solution to social ills in the society. Confucius tersely enunciated who the perfect gentleman is: "The (leader) and indeed every man should without thought of personal advantage, unconditionally, do what he ought to do. And be what he ought to be. He should extend himself so as to include others" (Fung 1996:46).

Jen also means benevolence. According to Confucius, there are five cardinal virtues: benevolence, righteousness, prosperity, wisdom, and trustworthiness, but benevolence, or *Jen* in Chinese, is the greatest (Umejesi 2010:154), the *Analects* of Confucius help expatiate on this further.

He who can practice five things in dealing with the empire may be accounted to have benevolence; the five things are politeness, liberality, good, faith, diligence and generosity. Being polite, you will not be slighted, being liberal you will win people, having good faith, you will be trusted by others, having diligence, you will be successful; being generous, you will be worthy to employ others (*Analects*, XV:6).

Education according to Confucius is a panacea to the myriad of social ills in his fatherland. In the mind, the best and successful schools would be those that turned out what he called "a stream of unselfish, high minded, public-spirited young man, holding that the study of books and the acquisition of skills were quite necessary but useless, if not dangerous, unless the pupils character was also trained" (Umejesi 2010:152).

Confucius also opined that self-control is one of his fundamentals. He reasoned that a person who cannot rule himself has no right whatsoever to rule others. He maintained that anybody capable of controlling his thought and actions is on the way to happiness, regardless of the person's social status. (13). Furthermore, politeness is another virtue of Confucius; he expected his pupils to be polite and courteous to everybody, whether rich or poor, young or old, friend or foe. Self-consciousness is also a virtue. He observed that one should watch oneself more when he is alone than in the midst of others. He held that character is formed when we are alone than when we are with other people. Followed by that is humility. He contended that it is crucial to be humble so as to show example to other companions who would always learn something from you (153). Self-cultivation is another Confucian essential, which commences with education and knowledge. It is an antidote to all social ills. This is

summed up in this paradigm:

When true knowledge is achieved, and then the will becomes sincere, when the will is sincere, then the heart is set right., when the heart is set right, then the personal life is cultivated, when the personal life is cultivated, then the family life is regulated, when the family is regulated, then the national life is orderly, then there is peace in the world from the emperor down to the common men, all must regard the cultivation of the personal life as the root or the foundation (*Mankind Search for God*, 1990:11).

The Confucian ideal as reflected in *Li, Jen* and filial piety can be stated as follows:

Kindness in the father, filial piety in the son; Gentility in the eldest brother humility and respect in the younger, righteous behavior in the husband, obedience in the wife, humane consideration in elders, deference in juniors; benevolence in rulers, loyalty in ministers and subjects (182).

The foregoing fundamentals have formed the basis for Chinese public bureaucracy. Umejesi (2010:163) asserts appositely that qualifications for public offices are based on the teachings of Confucius and people who sincerely devote their time to study could pass these examinations. This "Confucian schools of virtue" becomes a prerequisite and a benchmark for qualification into public offices in China. In this school, morals are taught and the subsequent penalties attached to them, especially public executions to those who are found guilty of corruption (164).

The emergence of Chinese Communist Party founded by Mao Tse - Tung in 1949 weakened and resisted Confucianism. This lasted for fifty years during which, China was battling with Communist ideology. But on the death of Chairman Mao, interest in the religion was restored. Even, the new trends in secularism have not extinguished the deep influence Confucianism has had on the Chinese people for over 25 centuries. An authority in Chinese society has said that "while Confucianism has been under attack, particularly during the last fifty years, much of it is alive in Chinese morality, benevolence, respect for family and state... No one can conceive of Chinese culture without the influence of Confucianism" (Thomson 1969:35). To this end, the major factor for the astronomical developments in China as one of the "Asian Tigers" is the practical internalization of Confucian essentials.

NIGERIAN PUBLIC BUREAUCRACY

Hornby (2000:149) describes bureaucracy as "a system of government by departments which are managed by state official, not by elected representatives". Therefore, Nigerian public department can be seen as a position held in trust for people as a whole. It is the office associated with a distinctive process of administration and regulation of human conduct in a mapped out territory. Public office is guided and protected by the Constitution of the nation or agreed regulation of the people in a society, some maybe written while some may be conventional. Nigeria as a nation has been plagued by abuse of public office by the majority of those entrusted with its right.

Thus, this abuse started when the Nigerian government came into being as a result of the British amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914 and became independent in 1960. It is the post-independent Nigeria that we are concerned with in this paper. The Public offices had always been corrupted from the period of independence till now (Adetona 2004:200). The state of affairs today is even more worrisome because poverty and corruption in governance have assumed an alarming proportion and the operators of the public offices are driven by it.

POVERTY IN NIGERIA

Alamu (2010:56) asserts that the concept of poverty is analogous to starvation, destitution, hunger, and suffering. Consequently, the extent and tenacity of poverty in Nigeria addresses the nexus between the rich and the poor, Nigeria has a population of than 180 million people, and the poverty level is dismal with a *per capita* growth of less than 1 percent a year in the last two decades (57). Thus, millions of Nigerian people cannot feed very well, and Sahlins (1974:59) describes the paradox of poverty in the Nigerian society. "One-third to one-half of humanity are said to go to bed hungry every night. In the Old Stone Age, the fraction must have been smaller. This is the era of hunger unprecedented".

Ehusani (2002:152) opines reasons for this level of poverty by saying that Nigeria is faced with all-powerful individuals who acquire, exploit, embezzle, misappropriate and exploit to an insatiable level to the extent that the common good and national consciousness is always compromised. Here, Nigeria becomes fragmented, it souls goes on break, and its people are left with no option but to wonder and sigh about their present and their future. In other words, many powerful individuals - both military and civilians have hijacked both economic and political power with no option for the masses. He avers stoutly that:

Our past has been so heavily inundated with the circumstances of a conquered and devastated society that only those with hearts of stone fail to acknowledge the obvious. For even the deaf can hear the ominous quiet of unbearable angst in the land, even the masses alongside the stinking riches of the elect of the system. Our past has seen monumental waste in resources and steady flight of human development (155).

In the light of above, it is expedient to assert that the blind and the deaf can see and as well hear the ominous quite of unbearable anxiety in the society as a result of the unprecedented level of poverty and corruption. Even the military junta helped in the monumental waste of resources and the people are wallowing in squalor. Nigeria, once a well-respected country in the comity of nations, and a key role player in international relations has become a pariah nation having been raped by military and civilian parasites. Ours is a culture of poverty (Alamu 2010:58). Today, majority of the masses go to sleep hungry and those who cannot surmount the hunger, either go into begging or become criminals. No wonder, the crime waves in our society are being spearheaded by unemployed graduates both male and female. The stark reality is that the military and civilian elites have plagued Nigeria into the situation we are now consequent upon

exploitation, embezzlement, favoritism and unparalleled greed.

CORRUPTION IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC SPACE

Kirkpatrick (1983:1090) sees corruption among others as "rotteness" putrid matter, impurity, bribery. Corruption is sometime understood as bribery, which is defined as a price, reward, gift or favor bestowed or promised with a view to pervert judgment or corrupt the conduct especially of a person in a position of trust". However, bribery is a dimension of corruption, and is not the only *raison de etre* for an abuse of office. This definition is comparatively broad. It covers three aspects of corrupt practices, bribery, embezzlement and abuse of public trust, which may include pranks associated with inflated contracts and over - invoicing. Such sharp practices are devised to unlawfully siphon public wealth into private coffers through the connivance of officials and suppliers, contractors or conmen and women (Alamu 2011:6).

Corruption as a practical and realistic concept has many fangs especially in the areas of bribery and kickback, nepotism and favoritism. In other words, "corrupt practices will embrace receiving of kickbacks, misappropriation of funds, nepotism, extortions, employment patronage and so forth. In Nigeria, it is interesting to note that these various forms of corruption have grossly affected political and socio-economic facets of lives. Here, its causes must be identified so as to facilitate the quest for solution. Among them is greed, unemployment, poverty, moral decadence in the polity, liberal political economy with its pillar being liberalization or deregulation, Privatization of public enterprises, inflation, non-accountability of the office holders and lack of transparency. Corruption as a bane to democracy rears its ugly head through acute unemployment to grinding poverty with an appalling state of insecurity and political instability, and its impact on all the facets of the society (Alamu 2011:7). The Political Bureau, set up under the Ibrahim Babangida regime, corroborated and summed up the magnitude of corruption in Nigeria thus:

It pervades all strata of the society from the highest level of the political and business elites to the ordinary person in the village. Its multifarious manifestations include the inflation of government contracts in return for kickbacks, fraud and falsification of accounts in the public services, examination malpractice in our education institutions, including university, the taking of bribe and perversion of justice among the police, the judiciary and other various heinous crimes against the state in business and industrial sector of our economy, in collusion with multi -national companies such as over-invoicing of goods, foreign exchange swindling, hoarding and smuggling. In fact, everywhere, one wonders if "corruption is not a Nigerian person" (Oyeshile 2000:55).

Corruption in Nigeria soars like fern in the open field. To this end, Nigeria, celebrating her centenary of amalgamation and 54 years of independence, is corruptly crawling in all her endeavors. From the above, corruption can be described as inappropriate action by any person who ordinarily should have some sets of rules and regulation binding on

him. In strict adherence to this paper, two aspects are to be examined (a) Abuse of privileges and rights of office and (b) Misappropriation of priorities and funds.

- (a) Abuse of privileges and rights of offices; every public office has some rights and privilege attached to it. Any attempt by an incumbent holder of such office to misuse the rights and privileges are also overstretched, each of such action also constitutes corruption.
- (b) Misappropriation of priorities and funds: when an office holder misappropriates, priorities of activities willingly or against the general wish of the people, he has corrupted, the office and has become non-trustworthy. So also when he misappropriates funds entrusted in his care against the desire of the generality of the people. Any other actions of officeholders that connote wickedness or dishonesty (while in office) also constitute corruption (Adetona 2004:200).

More often than not, a handful of Nigerian public office holders are guilty of the above sets of rules and regulations. In sum, virtually all the successive governments from amalgamation period till now have set up agency to tame or checkmate corrupt practices or conduct in the system. Since then till date, much has not been achieved, and corruption has been elevated to the status of gold and adorned purple as a carnival in the open field without rules and limitations

UTILIZING CONFUCIAN VIRTUES TO CURB CORRUPTION IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC SPACE

Flowing from the Confucian virtue of the way of the leader, those in public office in Nigerian should imbibe and cultivate moral character, piety, human-heartedness, self-discipline, purposeful accomplishment, indispensable for qualitative bureaucracy. Moreover, piety which is a household name in China should be brought to Nigerian public bureaucracy. This can be displayed in sincerity, trustworthiness, trustfulness for pious office holders who are reliable and be counted upon to honor their duties and obligations. 21st century bureaucrats should be ready to serve, adopt constitutional model of leadership, and resolve amicably difficult paradoxes in order to create synergy, while aligning organizational elements and empowering people to unlock their enormously gifted talents, ingenuity, intelligence and creativity (323).

Again, self-sacrifice should form primarily a duty which must be exhibited faithfully. Leadership must be by example and not just by tenets. Like in China, leaders focus more on responsibilities with full awareness of the varied qualities that are needed for a good job than devoting time on rights and benefits to be derived (323). Furthermore, self-control is another panacea to the problems of poverty and corruption in Nigeria. A bureaucrat should be able to control his thoughts and actions especially when there is the tendency to defraud the government regardless of the person's social status. Self-consciousness is also germane here because a bureaucrat needs to watch himself more when he is alone than in the midst of others. Followed by that is humane disposition. Confucius contended that it is crucial to be humble so as to show example to other companion who would always learn something from you.

Education and self-cultivation is antidote to the myriad of social incubus in Nigeria. Like Confucius, the best and successful schools in Nigeria should be those who turn out, "a stream of unselfish, high minded public-spirited young men, holding their studies, and the acquisition of skills as important as character (Umejesi 2010). On the part of accountability, a bureaucrat needs to be responsible and accountable. If this is strengthened, there would be transparent dealings with the public office.

Importantly, all the agencies recruited to tackle poverty and corruption should be strongly encouraged, empowered and remained independent in their assignment without interference. Government agencies should as matter of strong commitment and dedication punish corrupt officials regardless of the antics of their collaborators. Alamu (2011:13) argues that the issue of zero tolerance on corruption and poverty should not be seen as "traitors" rather faithfully and religiously executed and internalized like "Caesars's wives who must live above board".

Finally, qualifications for public offices are solely based on the teachings of Confucius in China and people who sincerely pass these examinations are employed in the Chinese public service. Thus, Confucian school of virtues becomes a prerequisite and a benchmark into public offices in China, likewise an 'Ethical Institute of Public Bureau' should be established in Nigeria where potential public officers would be trained for the task ahead. This will include acquisition of morals and the consequences on fraudulent practices. In China, there is public execution while in Japan, it is guillotine. Therefore, in Nigeria, imprisonment or death penalty should be the consequence of corrupt practices. Once, these are well fashioned out and incorporated in the "Ethical Institute of Public Bureau", every public officer will be conscious of what is expected of him or her.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

From our effort so far, we have discovered that poverty and corruption have ravaged Nigeria and they have crumbled the very structure of governance in the nation. These have actually retarded the growth and progress of the nation. At 53, Nigeria is still crawling as a result of poverty and corruption. Nigerians must in fact and indeed domesticate zero tolerance to poverty and corruption, and give Nigeria a soul, develop for it a virtue and a direction to follow, away from the false and ephemeral lip-service paid to anti-corruption crusade since her independence. Consequently, the attainment of a corrupt free society in Nigeria though is an uphill and herculean task, but it would afford leadership of strong will, purpose, dedication and respecters of the rule of law who must use all state apparatus to entrench and impose it on the populace. Finally, this paper advocates that "Ethical Institute of Public Bureau" should be established in Nigeria as a reminiscent of Confucian school of virtues that made and still makes China as one of the 'Asian Tigers', where development is taking place on a daily basis. If Nigeria can borrow a leaf from China, within a decade, Nigeria will indeed be an 'African Tiger'.

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