**happiness/福(Fú)**

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| Final Remarks | WENG Naiqun, Gerald Cipriani | 31 May 2022 |

WENG Naiqun: Whether in the socio-cultural contexts of the Chinese mainland or of Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, including politics, economy, religion, urban and rural community organizations and family living patterns, great changes have taken place. In today's Chinese society, the decline of traditional ceremonial rituals associated with the word "Fu" is difficult to revive. The dispersion and mobility of the population in the original rural communities and the increased mobility of the urban family population in the residential areas have led to the disappearance of the previously stable pattern of community households. This has been a corresponding change in the expectation of "the five blessings have descended upon the house" and to enhance the harmony and cohesion of the neighborhood community through the holding of annual ceremonies related to "blessings" in the past. In this sense, the traditional meaning of the word "Fu" is constantly "alienated" and is mixed with more personalized content of wishes.

Gerald Cipriani: It would be of course a pointless exercise to strive to establish at all cost similarities between two clearly unrelated entities or, for that matter, two different versions of an ostensibly common concept as they transpire in their respective languages. Still, the fact that the Western word ‘happiness’ is commonly translated in Chinese as幸福 (xing fu) suggests that they must be some degree of similarity, or perhaps echo, between the two terms. The compound 福 indicates that ‘happiness’ in a Chinese linguistic context does not amount to a form of pleasure resulting from some favourable material conditions and even less to mere hedonistic satisfaction. 福 appears to belong to the paradigm of “blessing”or “fortune”, which has across history consistently (but not only) referred to the family’s well-being in terms of longevity, health, love, prosperity, harmony and filial piety. The ethicality of this “unchanging essence” of Confucian origin is arguably where the Western conception of “happiness” in its virtuous dimension comes as close as can be to the Chinese idea of 福. For example, the virtues Aristotle sees at the source of happiness include friendship, benevolence, civic awareness, fairness, or resolve. Are not these elements what guaranties harmony and balance within a community of individuals, albeit not necessarily the family? Are not Aristotle’s conceptions of education and self-cultivation as means by which one can learn how to become virtuous and therefore live the “good life” (i.e., a happy life) in society akin in principle to the ethical teaching of Confucius? Moreover, is not the moral rather than material dimension of the Western notion of “happiness” as it developed from ancient Greece to modernity via the Middle Ages and the Enlightenment revealing some measure of similarity with the ethical texture of 福 in traditional Chinese cultures? In fact, and perhaps more daringly, it may even be possible to see in the “forms” of 福 such as family welfare, educational achievement, sport awards, and good health the same degree of materiality that has also contributed to conceiving “happiness” in Western cultures. This would even suggest that regardless of the traditions, ideas of happiness/福have always implied an apparent material/virtuous dualism that is in truth no more than a principle of interdependency – but whose polarities have varied in emphasis depending on the epoch and the location. This explains why, in spite of certain elements of correspondence, conceptions of happiness/福 are also formally ingrained in their spatial and temporal contexts. On this account any attempt to extract and abstract from such contexts a model to be applied universally and eternally on communities may well lead to the kind of barbarism that amounts to anything but welfare and virtue.