

Discovering the Art of Xin

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My mom would often tell me, “Stay true to yourself, you hold the power to do what is right.” As a child, I let this go in one ear, out the other. Not fully capable of understanding its truth.

I watched my mother be my guide of personal conviction. A living example of Xin. Of honesty, of integrity, of fidelity, and of the ability to stand confident in the decisions we make. I watched her do this in her daily life, in small everyday acts, but also more broadly in her existence through society. It stays with me to this day and is something close to my heart; Xin as a virtue defining character and guiding me through life.

Her words often come back to me, their significance slowly unraveling and becoming known to me, as I live out my life, grow and mature. Her words and her manifestation of Xin plays a large part in how I view my participation as a meaningful actor in this world. I believe we hold deep meaning as humans, and thus our deeds and actions hold deep meaning as well. We hold the power to lift someone up or tear someone down. We have the opportunity to add good to the world through the way we live life. So, while I remain a beginner in the process of practicing Xin, it so far has given me a deep sense of self. Awareness of Xin causes deep conviction, and has allowed me to actively stand firm in the truth of being and living a life that I am personally proud to take ownership of. I’ve gained a sense of contentment; that as long as Xin is a guiding virtue, I know that whatever I am doing, or wherever I am existing, is exactly where I need to be. Simply because I stay true to my Xin. While at the time I did not connect my mother’s morality to the virtue Xin, I have found much beauty in the discovery of Xin through my past. The awareness of Xin is not a destination but a lifelong journey. The formation of Xin is consistent, dynamic, and ever evolving. One I hope to dedicate my whole life to channeling. My mom

taught me that it is a slow burn, a constant re-dedication to doing what is right. Xin truly is an art.

I utilize Xin to guide me the same way it guided my mother. In big picture pursuits but more importantly in small daily occurrences. The depiction of Xin through my mom is a large reason why I developed a passion for human rights and social justice. My mom helped me understand that the change I seek starts with me. My decisions hold power. For a few years I volunteered with an organization to fight human trafficking (in the form of sexual exploitation and child labor). This volunteer experience allowed me to actualize this power in personal decisions and desires. I studied the perpetuation of human trafficking in Southeast Asia (and within Eastern culture), in order to compare and contrast this issue in America and Western culture. With this, I was able to demonstrate the role of our personal actions and how certain societal decisions aid in the continuation of a market for trafficking. In other words, Western countries (primarily the United States) hold immense power in the continuation of social issues abroad. Thus, this experience greatly shifted my perspective on my personal choices in life. For example, to buy fair trade clothing is a change making decision and has the potential to decrease the market for many forms of trafficking. Something as little as what we choose to buy has a great impact. And as I mentioned above, through the embodiment of Xin I've learned that the change I want to see in the world starts with me, with my everyday choices and moral decisions.

Xin, however, was not always a recognizable virtue in my life. The Confucian ideal of Xin was a very controversial topic in my family. I grew up Christian, taught to identify with Jesus and the Bible above all else. My father a pastor, and my mother actively involved in the institution of church. For me, it was extremely taboo to talk about, connect with, or understand any virtues not related to the Christian Bible. Thus, I was not able to fully conceptualize Xin

until I got older. Growing up, I had a limited view of virtues and only had the opportunity to unravel and understand virtues through the lenses of Christianity. While there are similarities between the virtues present in Christianity and in the Five Constant Virtues formulated by Confucius, it is hard to fully connect with one without the context of the other. The addition of Xin from Confucius does not replace my Christian beliefs but enriches them. They both interact and benefit one another. A common quote from Confucius is, “I want you to be everything that's you, deep at the center of your being” (Khurana, 2024). Which reminds me of another from Confucius, “To know what you know and what you do not know, that is true knowledge” (Khurana, 2024). In the Bible, Mark 8:36 says “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul” (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001, Mark. 8:36). The emphasis on authenticity and self-awareness is present in both Confucianism and Christianity, each able to illustrate this idea uniquely. Connecting Christian ideals to Confucian ideals broadened my perspective of Xin, how to contextualize it, how to actualize it, and how to describe it.

In the past, I couldn't put into words the virtue I saw in my mother. I did not know the resonance with Xin was something that existed. I understood my mom saying to me, “Stay true to yourself, you hold the power to do what is right” through my limited scope of Christian values and morality. But in recent years, I found freedom in the ability to dive deeper into the wise words of my mother through an awareness of Xin. I think oftentimes we know what is right. We know what it means to stay true to ourselves, to our communities, and to the world. But I found that sometimes we simply have trouble putting this to words and articulating it, because Xin is more than words. An adaptation of Xin is an all-encompassing expression, a living active virtue and not a mere description. I saw this dynamic and influential virtue at work in my mom, I just didn't know it at the time and neither did she. Xin is a way of life that is powerful in practice and

inspires us to stay true to what we know is right. I have first-hand experienced the power of Xin through my graduate studies as well as my volunteer experiences. I am grateful that I get to associate with Xin and bring Xin back into day-to-day life of Western culture and society.

References

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