

Confucius Institute

Opening Ceremony

February 13, 2008

It is a high privilege and great honor for me, on behalf of the Board of Directors, alumni, faculty, staff, students, and friends of Valparaiso University to welcome everyone to this very special event. We are gathered to witness Valparaiso University inaugurate the Confucius Institute. We are particularly privileged to welcome special guests who represent the Peoples Republic of China. They include Jianfeng Xiao, vice president of academic affairs; Zhengxiang Yao, dean of International College; and Gengqi Zhou, director of the office of international programs at Zhejiang University of Technology. Permission to host a Confucius Institute on the campus of Valparaiso University was granted by the Chinese Ministry of Education and the National Office on the Teaching of Chinese as a foreign language. It is especially noteworthy that Valparaiso University is only one of 39 institutions of higher education in the United States that has been granted permission by the Chinese Ministry of Education and the National Office on the Teaching of Chinese as a foreign language to sponsor a Confucius Institute on its campus.

Confucius was born in 551 BC and died in 479. The Chinese people honor him as a thinker, political figure, educator, and the originator of the RU School of Chinese Philosophy. His teaching and writing created the basis for later Chinese philosophers to reflect upon the education and behavior of an ideal man. This tradition of thought

described how such an ideal man should live and conduct himself with others. This tradition of thought also considered the nature of the society in which an ideal man should live and the forms of government in which he should participate. Fung Yu-lan, a noted 20th century authority on the history of Chinese thought, has likened Confucius and his influence in the history of Chinese philosophy to that of Socrates in western thought.

Confucius taught that men are responsible for what they do and especially for how they treat others. Confucius claimed that his thought was not new, but most scholars of his writings suggest he did not simply repeat old ideas. Rather much of his thinking seems to have been original to him and those thoughts demonstrate departures from the ideas and actions of other thinkers during the period in which he lived.

The political philosophy of Confucius emphasized that a ruler should learn self-discipline, rule his people through his own virtuous example, and treat them with love and respect.

What seemed to trouble him most was that he believed the political constructions of his era had broken down. He suggested this destruction had happened because those who possessed power and used it, as well as those persons who were placed in subordinate positions, did so by claiming titles for which they were not worthy.

Confucius emphasized education and study. He expressed his unhappiness with all who have faith in natural understanding or intuition. It was his position that real

understanding of a subject came from long and careful study of that subject. He wanted to create men who acted gracefully, spoke correctly, and demonstrated integrity.

Dr. O.P. Kretzmann, the fourteenth president of Valparaiso University, described Valparaiso University as occupying the crossroads between Athens and Jerusalem. If he were still living today, and if he were still president at this time, given the globalization that has transpired since his original statement, and also given the rising awareness of the philosophical traditions of the East, perhaps he would say today that Valparaiso University is located at the crossroads of Athens, Jerusalem, and Queli, the birthplace of Confucius, located in Qufu, which was the then capitol of the state of Lu in the Zhou kingdom of China almost 2,500 year ago. In alphabetical order, the traditions of Athens, Jerusalem, and Queli now find their crossroads at Valparaiso University. The name of the latter city in that threesome represents not only the thinking of Confucius but all Eastern philosophies and philosophers that human kind needs to acknowledge if we are going to function effectively in the modern world.

Therefore, as we consciously include the name of this city as a symbol and as an appropriate representative of eastern thought and philosophy, we do so to honor the thoughtful citizen of the world Queli produced and the honored position Confucius holds in his native country. We also include its name to give meaning to the rightful place of honor and respect eastern thought merits as we collectively pursue the life of the mind and as we consider the positive qualities and virtues men and women are to exemplify in their public and private lives.