

# CONFUCIAN PHILOSOPHY IN SOO CHAM'S *AIR MATA IBU*

*(Falsafah Konfusius dalam Novel Air Mata Ibu Karya Soo Cham)*

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## Abstract

This article aims to analyse elements of Confucian philosophy in Soo Cham's novel, *Air Mata Ibu*. The research was carried out based on the understanding that literature is not merely beautiful but also heavily-infused with an all-encompassing philosophy of life that is to be conveyed to the reader. Therefore, this article attempts to explore Confucian philosophy in this novel by the Chinese-Malaysian writer, Soo Cham (2007). The findings of this study show that the *ren*, *zhi*, *yi*, and *li* concepts of Confucian philosophy, as well as the importance of education, can be applied in human life and are found in this novel.

Keywords: Confucian philosophy, *ren*, *zhi*, *yi*, *li*, education, novel, Malaysian-Chinese

## Abstrak

*Makalah ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis falsafah konfusius yang terdapat dalam novel Air Mata Ibu karya Soo Cham. Kajian ini*

*dijalankan dengan bertitik tolak daripada pemahaman bahawa sastera bukan sekadar bersifat indah tetapi sarat dengan falsafah yang ingin disampaikan kepada pembaca dan merangkumi semua aspek dalam kehidupan manusia. Oleh itu, kajian ini cuba meneroka falsafah Konfusius dalam novel karya penulis Cina, Soo Cam (2007). Hasil kajian menunjukkan konsep yang dibawa oleh Konfusius, iaitu ren, zhi, yi, li dan kepentingan pendidikan dapat diaplikasikan dalam kehidupan manusia dan terdapat dalam novel ini.*

*Kata kunci: Falsafah konfusius, ren, zhi, yi, li, pendidikan, novel, Cina*

## INTRODUCTION

In the history of the founding of China, philosophy plays an important part in the forming of the ethics, values, morals, customs and beliefs of the local populace. Philosophy is an important element of Chinese culture (Cheu Hock-Tong, 2000, p. 21). The term “philosophy” originates from the Greek word “philosophia”, whose root word, “philein” or “philia”, means “love”, and “sophia”, which means “wisdom”. The English word “philosophy” is usually translated as meaning “love of wisdom”. This meaning of “philosophy” was first used by Pythagoras (572-497). Philosophy is a combination of two terms, “philos” meaning “love” and “sophie” meaning “knowledge” (Obaidallah, 1994, p. 3).

According to Plato in Obaidallah (1994, p. 3) philosophy is the knowledge about something that exists, a knowledge that wishes to find real truth. Aristotle (381–347 BCE) said that philosophy is the knowledge concerning truth and that encompasses knowledge, metaphysics, logic, ethics, economics, politics and aesthetics.

Al-Farabi (d. 950 CE) said that *filisafat* (philosophy) is the knowledge about the existential world aiming at discovering the real truth. The Islamic point of view is that philosophy is the effort to find truth. The search for the truth behind the meaning of life is also an aim of Islamic philosophy. The real meaning of life is only known to Allah. Everything that can be thought about using our own mind and intelligence is a personal philosophy, and if not based on the scripture of Allah, it is not absolute and is only considered relative. Therefore, based on human understanding, several kinds of philosophies have arisen, such as liberalism, idealism and capitalism. If a philosophy originates from Allah, then its principles and aims are the same.

Confucius, Lou Tzu, and Mo Tzu are well-known Chinese philosophers. Based on the history of China, in the sixth century, Confucius and Lou Tzu emerged as philosophers who made an active effort to use their wisdom to form more organized political and social systems in China (Cheu, 2000).

Malaysian-Chinese writers, especially novelists, have not received much attention in past research. However, it cannot be denied that there are several researchers that are interested in researching Chinese writers. This includes research by Tan (2010), who completed his Master's thesis, titled *Menentang Hegemoni dan Mempertahankan Identiti Cina di dalam Novel-Novel Terpilih oleh Penulis-Penulis Cina [Opposing Hegemony and Maintaining Malaysian-Chinese Identity in Selected Novels by Malaysian-Chinese Writers]* at Universiti Putra Malaysia. Another such study is "Persoalan dan Pemikiran Tamadun Melayu-China dalam Novel *Air mata Ibu* Karya Soo Cham dari Perspektif Teori SPB4L/K" ["Issues and Thought of Malay-Chinese Civilization in the Novel *Air mata Ibu* by Soo Cham from the Perspective of the SPB4L/K Theory" by Ani (2011). Apart from this, there is Yau (2015) who takes the angle of realism in *Cerpen-Cerpen Dua Penulis Mahua di Malaysia [Short Stories by Two Malaysian-Chinese Writers in Malaysia]* in a study done as a requirement for fulfilment of a Master's degree at Universiti Perguruan Sultan Idris. Siti Norashikin, Nor Azuwan dan Zaitul Azma (2017) have studied "Makna Siratan Bahasa Figuratif dalam Cerpen Melayu Karya Lim Swee Tin" ["The Hidden Meanings Behind the Figurative Language of the Malay Short Stories of Lim Swee Tin"]. Looking at the previous research, the researcher finds that Confucian philosophy has not received the attention of previous researchers. This opens opportunities for researchers to conduct research in philosophy. Therefore, this study will research Confucian philosophy in the novel *Air Mata Ibu* by Soo Cham in order to show appreciation of this prolific Chinese-Malaysian writer who has contributed much to the development of this country's literature. The objective of this research is to classify Confucian philosophy as found in Soo Cham's novel, *Air Mata Ibu*, as well as analyse elements of Confucian philosophy in this novel.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In carrying out this research, the researcher has chosen to use a qualitative method. According to Bogdan and Taylor in Moleong (2004, p. 04), the qualitative method is defined as a procedure of observation that produces descriptive data in written or spoken form by people with certain behaviours,

as well as their resulting behaviours. In connection with this research employs library research, text analysis and the application of Confucian philosophy.

## CONFUCIUS' BACKGROUND

Confucianism was developed by Confucius, whose real name was Kong Chiu, with “Kong” being his family name while Chiu is his personal name. He was also respectfully referred to as Kong Fu Tze. Born in the Lu district that is now known as Shantung in 551 BCE, he died in 479 BCE (Chue, 2000).

According to Tao's Commentary, Confucius was from an upper class family. His father, Tse Shu Le once served as an army officer and died before Confucius was born. After the death of his father, the lives of Confucius and his mother, a highly-educated and noble woman named Yen Cheng Tsai, became more difficult as they faced many obstacles that made him mature quickly in his thinking. Confucius once worked as a policeman at the Lu district court. Not long after that, he left this position to be master teacher and administrator, supporting a worldly philosophy (Lok, 2000, p. 17).

His thought or philosophy is known as *Ju Chia* or Confucianism. *Ju Chia* places emphasis on the pure values or humanity, as well as social regulations. Confucius was of the opinion that a person must have a guide concerning behaviour, which is based on abstract values, to become a “superior” human or “gentleman” (Chun Tze), that is, the “ideal character”. Confucius names these abstract values the *Wu Chang Five Virtues*, that is, human virtues or ethical values consisting of the “Li principle” or “propriety”, *Ren* or *Jen*—“benevolence” or “humaneness”, *Xin*—“faithfulness” or “trustworthiness”, *Yi*—“righteousness” or “justice”, and *Zhi*—“wisdom”. These virtues clearly show that Confucius emphasized an upright character and high morals.

Many works or writings have been produced about Confucius and his philosophy. Most of these are based on the notes of his students or those who studied him (Chue, 2000, p. 7). In other words, Confucius's thought and philosophy was recorded by his students when he taught them.

According to Obaidallah (1994, p. 3) most researchers are of the opinion that the only work truly reflecting Confucian thought is *Lun Yu* (Analects). *Lun Yu* is a collection of all the sayings and notes of Confucius. These notes and sayings were recorded and edited by his students after Confucius passed away. The *Lun Yu* also records matters concerning *Ju Chia* Confucianism.

## PRINCIPLES IN CONFUCIAN PHILOSOPHY

### **The Principle of *Ren***

Generally, *ren* means humaneness, that is, possessing a moral character, being a true human being, loving humankind and possessing the human kindness or empathy, loving one another, doing good, not being envious or jealous, doing good, and carrying out deeds that benefit society. Egotism is set aside by Confucius (Creel Herlee Glessner in Obaidallah 1993, p. 21).

The term *jen/ren* is an important basis in Confucian teaching and is mentioned as many as 100 times in the Analects. Confucius uses the concept and description of *ren* to refer to the highest or perfect moral standard. This clearly refers to a life of highest moral virtue that contains all the other moral virtues such as justice (*yi*), moderation (*chong*), filial piety (*xiao*) shown through appropriate rituals, courage (*li*), honesty, and the like. *Ren* in its wider sense encompasses all the morals in human society. Therefore, Confucius stressed that someone who truly understands the concept of *ren* will also be someone who achieves a high level of wisdom.

### **The Principle of *Li***

According to Creel in Suffian (2003, p. 43) the original meaning of *li* is “to sacrifice”. The concept of *li* was then extended to refer to rituals included in the activity of sacrifice, such as making a sacrifice to one’s departed ancestors. The sacrifice is made in order to honour the ancestors. Next, the concept of *li* was extended to refer to all actions performed in accordance with custom, as well as all actions involving polite behaviour, especially involving rules meant to control the behaviour of rulers and their attendants at the royal court. Therefore, the concept of *li* always refers to the correct conducting of rituals and politeness, as well as the correct manner of receiving guests, honouring other people, and all actions concerning custom and ceremony. Someone who follows these principles of behaviour is considered to have the highest character.

### **The Principle of *Yi***

The principle of *yi* refers to trust or justice. However, in order to completely understand what *yi* is we must know that just as with any action linked to *ren*, an action can only be characterized as *yi* if it is performed solely for its own value. If someone performs actions for his own or his family’s gain,

or for a particular aim, the action will not be deemed to be a *yi* action. A moral action, whether *ren* or *yi*, does not have conditions and does not have a particular aim, especially one that is meant to bring benefit. Fung asserts that Confucius did not “give” any emphasis to the effect or benefit that can be gained from an action, whether during life on this earth or after death. This is the way that Confucius defines actions that are *yi* and *ren* in nature (Creel in Suffian, 2003, p. 43)

## MORAL PRINCIPLES

For Confucius, moral education is very important for all human beings, from birth till death. Confucius is of the opinion that education is the preparation and the basis to form a well-organized and peaceful society. This education teaches the basic concepts that are upheld and that will result in praiseworthy social relationships which are acceptable to all levels of society. To become a *Junzi/Chun Tze* gentleman, one must also learn good values through education (Obaidillah, 1994, p. 3).

### The Principle of *Zhi*

The principle of *zhi* or wisdom is that one must have knowledge in all kinds of aspects. This is because *zhi* is an effective tool to shape human life. Through wisdom, human beings are able to solve problems that fetter them. This concept of wisdom refers to our awareness to do what is good and right. In the Analects, or *Lun Yu*, the concept of wisdom is explained by Confucius through the following statement:

*Jika melihat seorang yang bijaksana, berusaha menyamainya dan jika melihat seorang yang tidak bijaksana, periksalah dirimu sendiri (Lun Yu), bila melakukan kesalahan, jangan takut untuk memperbaikinya (Lun Yu), bila kamu tahu berlakulah sebagai orang yang tahu, bila kamu tidak tahu katakanlah bahawa kamu tidak tahu, itulah yang disebut mengetahui (Lun Yu); orang yang suka cinta kasih ren tetapi tidak suka belajar, ia akan menanggung cacat bodoh. Orang yang bijaksana tetapi tidak suka belajar, ia akan menanggung cacat kalut jalan fikiran (Lun Yu).*

[If you see a wise person, make an effort to be like him, and if you see an unwise person, examine yourself (*Lun Yu*), when you commit a wrong, do not be afraid to correct it (*Lun Yu*), when you know, act like

someone who knows and when you do not know, say that you do not know, this is what is said to be knowing (*Lun Yu*); one who likes and loves *ren* but does not like to study, will suffer a disabling stupidity. One who is wise but does not like to study, will suffer disabling confusion (*Lun Yu*.)]

(Azmi & Wan Ramli, 2000, p. 1)

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This discussion explains the principles of *ren*, *li*, *yi*, *zhi* as well as morals in the novel *Air Mata Ibu* [*Mother's Tears*] by Soo Cham (2007). This novel deals with the inner turmoil of a mother when her children convert to Islam and marry Malay women. Abu—the term is a form of address for “mother” in the Chinese community—feels that her children no longer care about her, and that their relationship is no longer as it was before. This results in Abu blaming Islam for coming between her and her children. While her other children who have converted no longer celebrate Chinese New Year with her, it is her daughter Sui Yin who continues to entertain her mother’s wishes and who lifts her spirits. The novel ends with Abu and her daughter Sui Yin emigrating to China because Abu can no longer accept her other children who have converted to Islam.

### *Ren in Air Mata Ibu*

Confucius used the concept and description of *ren* to refer to the highest moral standards or the most perfect morals. A life of the highest moral standard will be one that contains all of the moral virtues such as justice (*yi*), moderation (*chong*), filial piety (*xiao*), showing the appropriate respect through rituals (*li*), courage, honesty and the like. Therefore, *ren* in its wider sense covers all moral values in human life. Confucius emphasized that a person who fully understands the concept of *ren* will also be someone who will achieve a high level of wisdom.

Based on an understanding of the concept of *ren*, it can be seen that the novel *Air Mata Ibu* presents many instances which centre on the Confucian *ren* principle. *Ren* can be seen through Sui Yin who loves her mother (Abu). Sui Yin is the one who takes on the responsibility of caring for Abu after her two elder brothers, Soo Sau Yong and Soo Sau Chin, marry and convert to Islam. Both her elder brothers stop visiting their mother. Therefore, the responsibility of looking after her mother falls on Sui Yin, who makes a lot

of sacrifices for the sake of her mother. The sacrifices that Sui Yin makes and the love that she bears for Abu can be seen when Sui Yin makes the effort to obtain flight tickets to China for her mother as Abu no longer wishes to live in Malaysia because she is heartbroken over the actions of her two sons who never visit her after their conversion to Islam. Abu constantly blames this situation on Islam: Islam is the reason that her sons do not love her anymore and because of Islam her sons do not celebrate Chinese New Year with her. Each Chinese New Year, Abu awaits the return of her two sons, only to be disappointed each time. Her sons never come. It is only to Sui Yin that Abu complains about her sons' treatment of her. Because of this, Abu is determined to return to her country of origin. She can count only on Sui Yin to care for her and to make sure she returns to China. In this novel, Sui Yin is depicted as a good child who practices *ren* in her life through service to her mother.

Abu constantly urges Sui Yin to take her back to China and it is this urging and complaining that is stressful for Sui Yin. According to the laws of Malaysia, only citizens aged 30 and above are allowed to go to China. Therefore, Abu has to wait another year before being able to go back to China. The stress that Sui Yin feels is alleviated somewhat when her housemate, Kamarul, offers to help Sui Yin send her mother back to China. However, everything goes up in smoke as Kamarul cheats Sui Yin by disappearing with the money he has been given, as in the following excerpt:

*Aku turun dari kerusi, menyandar, terjelompok di pintu bilik Kamarul, aku menangis teresak-esak sepuas-puasnya. Terlalu sedih ditipu oleh orang yang terlalu baik denganku. Tidak ku sangka musuh berada di dalam selimutku, gunting berada dalam lipatan kainku. Terbang melayang wangku sebanyak RM3380. Perit!!! Perit !!! Perit !!! Sungguh.*

[I got down from the chair, leaned, fell to my knees at the door to Kamarul's room and cried to my heart's content. I was too sad at being cheated by someone who had been a good friend. I had never expected an enemy in our midst, a wolf in sheep's clothing. My RM3380 had flown out the window. Ouch!!! Ouch!!! Ouch!!! It hurt.]

*(Air Mata Ibu, 2007, p. 211)*

Sui Yin, who adheres to the *ren* principle in life, is unfortunate when she is cheated of all her money by Kamarul. She is unlike Kamarul who

lacks human kindness to the extent that he is willing to cheat Sui Yin of all her money for his own gain. Although Sui Yin completely trusts Kamarul and believes he wants to help her send her mother back to China, Kamarul takes advantage of Sui Yin's desperate situation.

*Ren* is again applied later by the writer in the novel. The close relationship between siblings can be seen through Sui Yin and her relationship with her elder brother, Chin. Chin is willing to carry Sui Yin home when he is afraid she will be too tired to walk the distance of 9 kilometers to their home as they return from visiting a circus. They do not have fare money as Chin dropped his wallet while they were watching the circus. While returning home, Chin has to stop twice because he is tired of carrying Sui Yin. Chin is also willing to carry his sister in pitch darkness by the light of the moon, even though he is tired, to make sure that they reach home safely. Chin's love for Sui Yin is evident in the following excerpt:

*“Tidak boleh, nanti gelap, dah pukul 6.00 ni...Pukul 7.00 nanti, hari dah gelap, susah nak jalan.Tidak apa, Abang Chin dukung kamu. Mari naik belakang Abang Chin.”*

[“It's not possible, it will get dark, it's already 6 o'clock... At 7 it will be dark, and it will be difficult to walk. Never mind, I will carry you. Come, climb on my back.”]

*(Air Mata Ibu, 2007, p. 256)*

This situation is very different from the spousal relationship depicted in the novel. There are frequent quarrels between Sui Yin's parents, Abu and Achek, because of the deaths of Sui Yin's siblings. Abu is forced to come to terms with the deaths of three of her children: Soo Siu Ling, who dies of a fever at the age of two months, Soo Sau Kh'ang, who dies of engorgement after drinking too much well-water, and Soo Siu Yin, who dies of a fever at two years of age. Achek blames Abu for the deaths of their children, accusing her of having an unlucky body. Abu becomes depressed because Achek changes and even openly has mistresses. This is against Confucian teachings that emphasize good relations between husband and wife. Achek's behaviour shows that he does not have any empathy for Abu as he treats her badly. This can be seen in the excerpt below:

*“Badan kau sial! Semua anak yang dilahirkan, mati! “Achek menuding jari ke arah abu kerana terlalu kecewa. Abu yang terkejut,*

*semakin memendam derita. Sejak itu, Achek bukan setakat tidak menghiraukan Abu, malah telah menduakan Abu dengan menyimpan perempuan lain. Hal ini membuatkan hati Abu bertambah derita, tetapi Abu tabah mengharungi ranjau ini, membiarkan apa-apa sahaja yang diperlakukan oleh Achek. Achek tidak pernah pedulikan gelora hati Abu. Dibiarkan hati Abu dihempas badai, bak ombak di Laut China, yang tidak pernah surut. Mujur perempuan tersebut tidak lama Achek simpan. Kuranglah sedikit penderitaan Abu.*

[“Your body is cursed! All the children you bear die!” Achek pointed at Abu in utter disappointment. Shocked, Abu kept suffering her sorrow in silence. After this, Achek not only ignored Abu, he cheated on her with another woman. All this only made Abu suffer even more but she bore this suffering with patience, tolerating whatever Achek did. Achek was never bothered about Abu’s feelings. He broke her heart as if it was a ship wrecked by the waves of the South China Sea that never died down. Luckily he was not with that mistress for long. At least it reduced Abu’s suffering a little.]

(*Air Mata Ibu*, 2007:10-11)

Lok quotes Tai Chen (2000, p. 20) in *Tamadun Cina: Corak Pemikiran, Sains dan Kesusasteraan* as saying that having desire is not a moral failing. This is evident in the following excerpt:

*“Jika kita mempunyai keinginan untuk hidup, dan kita juga mengizinkan manusia lain hidup, itulah sifat perasaan kasih kepada manusia lain dan berperikemanusiaan ren. Tetapi jika keinginan untuk hidup menjadi begitu kuat dan teguh sehingga seseorang itu tidak mempedulikan kepentingan orang lain dan bersedia mencederakan pihak lain, tindakan dan kelakuan tersebut adalah bertentangan dengan kecintaan untuk manusia lain iaitu ren. Jelas bahawa kita boleh melakukan perbuatan yang bertentangan dengan kecintaan untuk manusia lain kerana kita mempunyai nafsu untuk terus hidup, dan jika nafsu tersebut tidak wujud kita memang tidak akan melakukan perbuatan tersebut.”*

[“If we have the will to live and we allow other people to live, that is love for others and the *ren* type of human kindness. However, if one’s will to live becomes so great and strong that one no longer cares for the concerns of others and is prepared to hurt them, such actions and behaviours are against the love for other people or *ren*. It is clear that

we are capable of doing something that is against the love for other people because we have the will to survive, and if this will were not to exist, we would not perform such actions.”]

This excerpt shows that even a *junzi* has a desire or will, in this case, the will to survive. However, this desire will not be excessive. One who has excessive desire will do things that are against *ren* or the principle of human kindness or love for others. This is exactly what happens to Achek as his own will overpowers him to the extent that he is willing to break Abu’s heart. Achek carries out actions that are against his love for Abu. Achek’s accusations that Abu is cursed are words that hurt Abu’s feelings. This is further exacerbated by Abu’s keeping of a mistress, which makes Abu truly suffer.

### ***Li in Air Mata Ibu***

The Confucian principle of *li* refers to the correct carrying out of rituals, politeness, the correct way to receive guests, of showing respect to others, and any other actions that have to do with customs and ceremonies. Someone who adheres to this behaviour principle is considered as possessing *li*.

In the analysis of *Air Mata Ibu*, this principle can be seen through Abu, who performs rituals of ancestor worship as a sign of gratitude to the gods who have granted her wish to return to China, something she had greatly wished for. This is depicted in the following excerpt:

*Pukul 5.00 petang, Abu memasang colok di hadapan rumah sewaku, bersembahyang mengucapkan terima kasih kepada tuhanNya. Abu hanya bersembahyang setahun sekali, iaitu pada Tahun Baharu Cina, dan haritu, Abu sembahyang mengucapkan kesyukuran kepada tuhanNya kerana memakbulkan kehendaknya, balik ke Negara China, tanah air tercinta yang tidak pernah lekang daripada ingatannya.*

[At 5.00 p.m., Abu lit joss sticks in front of my rental house, praying to give thanks to her gods. Abu only prayed once a year, at the Chinese New Year, but on this day, Abu prayed to thank the gods that had granted her wish to return to her beloved homeland, China, the land that she had never forgotten.]

*(Air Mata Ibu, 2007, p. 299)*

Confucius's arguments concerning the *li* principle can be further strengthened by referring to the views of Ames and Rosemont in *Tamadun Cina: Corak Pemikiran, Sains dan Kesusasteraan* (2000, p. 33) as reflected below:

*Penyembahan nenek moyang sebagai [manifestasi] perasaan keagamaan, [kepentingan] keluarga sebagai unit paling asas [dalam masyarakat], [mempunyai] sikap berperikemanusiaan yang berkuasa perkara ini mungkin boleh dianggap sebagai sikap berperikemanusiaan terhadap dan antara manusia berlainan, iaitu ren, memenuhi tanggungjawab seorang anak kepada ibu bapanya (xiao) [yang merupakan] asas nilai-nilai manusia, [dan kepentingan] memenuhi fungsi upacara, perhubungan dan kegiatan tertentu (li), kesemuanya merupakan strategi bagi memenuhi suatu matlamat. Dan matlamat berkenaan ialah pencapaian keadaan harmonis [dalam masyarakat], sambil menjaga keadaan harmonis tersebut (he).*

[Ancestor worship as a [manifestation] of religious feelings, [the importance of the] family as a basic unit [of society], [possessing] the characteristic of a strong human kindness that can be considered as humaneness towards and among other people, that is, *ren*, fulfilling of a child's duties to his or her parents (*xiao*) [which is] a basic human value, [and the importance of] fulfilling certain rituals and actions (*li*), all are strategies to fulfil a certain aim. And this aim is to achieve harmony [in society], while at the same time taking care that this harmonic situation continues on (*he*).]

In connection with this, through the worshipping of the ancestral spirits, Abu has achieved *ren* and fulfils the duty of a child towards its parents (*xiao*). According to Confucius, ancestral worship is one of the ways through which one expresses appreciation for the contributions of the ancestors who have died. He believed that this practice was a good one, and that it should be passed on from one generation to the next.

### ***Yi in Air Mata Ibu***

According to Confucian philosophy, the *yi* principle refers to trust or justice. Fung asserts that Confucius did not emphasize on the effect [or benefits that can be gained from] a particular action, whether in this word or in the hereafter. This is how Confucius defined actions that are *yi* and *ren* in nature.

Based on the researcher's observations, *yi* can be seen in Sui Yin, who carries out her entrusted task even though she is extremely in need of money. Sui Yin needs RM500 to buy Abu's ticket to China. At one time, Sui Yin contemplates embezzling money from the bank where she works as a supervisor and bank teller. Sui Yin has plenty of opportunity to take money as she is in charge. However, due to her honest character, Sui Yin does not take any money from the bank. This honesty and trustworthiness is exemplified in the following excerpt:

*Zoop! Pintasan fikir menendang sel-sel neuronku. Pinjam duit bank! Ambil duit itu daripada laci tellermu, hari gaji nanti, ganti balik. Aku tidak fikir panjang lagi, nekad, aku akan pinjam duit bank yang di bawah kawalanku sepenuhnya sebagai pegawai penyelia dan teller, sementara pengurus, pegawai bank dan pegawai audit di cawangan kelolaanku. ...*

*Berselirat neuron-neuronku, simpang-perenang, lalu terimbas wajah pengurus negeri, memeriksa wang tunai peti tellerku. Tiba-tiba naluri takut menyelinap, menyusup, menguasai diriku. Aku bayangkan, jika tertangkap, aku akan dibuang kerja, seluruh warga bank akan memandang rendah kepadaku. Aku malu. Aku malu ... Aku ambil keputusan, tidak jadi ambil... Aku takut.... Aku takut... Tiba-tiba terfikir pula hendak melakukan urusan pelarasan kredit ke dalam akaunku. Kemasukan palsu wang tanpa simpanan. Fikir punya fikir, bimbang urusan palsu ini akan ditemui juruaudit bank. Tertangkap, habislah aku. Akhirnya aku ambil keputusan untuk meminjam wang daripada Mak Mah.*

[Zoop! A quick thought kicked into my neurons. Borrow the bank's money! Take the money from your drawer and return it on pay day. I didn't think long, I had made up my mind: I would borrow the money, of which I was fully in charge as a supervisor and bank teller, moreover as the manager, bank officer and auditor of my branch....

My neurons were in knots, in chaos, and the face of the state manager, checking the money in my teller box, crossed my mind. My instinct slipped in, ducked in and overtook me. I imagined being caught, I would lose my job, everyone at the bank would look down on me. I would be ashamed. I would be ashamed.. I decided then that I would not take it... I was afraid.... I was afraid... Suddenly I thought of

performing a credit adjustment to my account. A false deposit without actually depositing money. I thought and thought about it but I was worried the auditor would discover this false transaction. If I got caught, that would be it for me. In the end, I decided to borrow money from Mak Mah.]

(*Air Mata Ibu*, 2007, pp. 206-207)

Based on the above example, we can surmise that the *yi* principle of trustworthiness and justice must be held on to unwaveringly. It concerns someone who plans to do something that will erase their dignity and self-worth but who finally chooses to uphold moral principles and build his own personality from being good to being better; this is what is stressed by Confucius in this principle.

It is different in the case of Kamarul who is untrustworthy and who goes against the Confucian *yi* principle. Sui Yin places all her trust in Kamarul to help her send her mother to China but this hope is dashed when Kamarul absconds with all the money given to him. Sui Yin is extremely upset about Kamarul's actions. Her disappointment can be seen in the excerpt below:

*Yang amat memilukan hatiku ialah tergamaknya rakan serumahku, Kamarul yang berhati syaitan menipu aku dengan menjanjikan untuk mempercepatkan urusan penyediaan dokumen perjalanan abu dan aku, berumpangan, kononnya pengarah imigresen kawan rapatnya sebelum berjaya kuhantar abu balik. Lebur wangku RM 3380 yang sehingga kini aku tidak menghalalkan si penipu itu, makan wang aku, bukan mudah aku mengumpulnya. Sehari aku menangis apabila aku pasti aku telah tertipu. Tangisan tidak berguna lagi, nasi telah menjadi bubur. Ia satu iktibar bagiku, pengajaran yang tidak pernah aku lupa sehingga kini, iaitu jangan bergantung kepada orang lain. Aku tidak mahu lagi menjadi seperti pepatah, harapkan pagar, pagar makan padi, harapkan kawan, kawan makan kawan.*

[What saddened me the most is that my own housemate would do this to me. Kamarul, the devil-hearted, had cheated me with the promise of expediting the documentation for myself and Abu. He had claimed that the director of Immigrations was his good friend. My RM3380 went up in smoke. I would never forgive him for it, this cheat, who had taken my hard-earned money. I cried the entire day when I realized I had been cheated. But there was no use crying over spilt milk. It

was a lesson for me that I have never forgotten since, that is, never to depend on anyone. I did not want to be duped again by a false friend.]

(*Air Mata Ibu*, 2007, p. 4)

### **The Importance of Education in *Air Mata Ibu***

The researcher finds that the importance of education is illustrated through Sui Yin's sister-in-law, who emphasizes the importance of education for her children. Sui Yin's sister-in-law wakes up early to make sure that the children do not miss out on schooling, which promises them a better life in the future. Sui Yin's sister-in-law practices this Confucian teaching, as depicted in the following excerpt:

*Kakak iparku bangun, keluar ke ruang anak-anaknya tidur, mengolang-alingkan tubuh Shimah, Atan dan Udin, mengejutkan mereka untuk bersedia ke sekolah.*

[My sister-in-law got up and went to the room where her children were sleeping, and shook Shimah, Atan dan Udin to wake them up and get them ready for school.]

(*Air Mata Ibu*, 2007, pp. 270-271)

Sui Yin's sister-in-law's attitude agrees with Obaidellah's opinion (1994, p. 43) that one who wishes to become a *Junzi/ Chun Tze* gentleman should also learn some pure values through education.

This is in contrast to the attitudes of Sui Yin's own parents who do not emphasize on their children's education. Sui Yin's parents may have succeeded in bringing up their children to be filial. However, they fail to provide them with the best education. Abu and Achek are not concerned about their children's education. They leave their children to decide whether they wish to study or not. The children's report cards are signed by the children themselves. Achek never even bothered to know what results his children achieved in school. Because the parents are unconcerned about their children's education, Sui Yin's elder brother, Chin, worked to make money from the time that he was in school. Chin worked all kinds of jobs, from selling ice to selling dried cuttlefish and rubberwood. After he has enough money saved up, Chin helps Abu buy things. Chin constantly thinks

of ways to make money. The following excerpt depicts the disinterest of Abu and Achek in their children's education:

*Abuku tidak pernah mengingatkan kami betapa pentingnya belajar rajin-rajin. Kami belajar mengikut naluri masing-masing. Teringin belajar, kami belajar; tidak teringin, kami tinggalkan, abu tidak pernah mengawasi pergerakan dan tindak tanduk kami. Kami amat bebas melakukan apa sahaja-melayari perjalanan hidup sendirian, tidak pernah disuruh belajar; apatah lagi hendak memantau pembelajaran kami. Kad keputusan peperiksaan, kami tandatangan sendiri.*

[My Abu never impressed on us the importance of studying hard. We studied according to our own inclination. If we wanted to study, we studied; if not, we did not. Abu never checked on our movements or actions. We were free to do as we pleased, left to live life according to our own devices, never forced to study, and our education never monitored. We signed our report cards ourselves.]

(*Air Mata Ibu*, 2007, p. 214)

*Semasa achek masih hidup pula, Achek menandatangani apa-apa sahaja tanpa menghayati kandungannya. Aku membawa pulang banyak telur ayam markah kosong semasa di darjah satu, tidak ada teguran langsung daripada Achek, seolah-olah telur-telur ayam itu tidak membawa sebarang makna dan kesan kepada Achekku. Achek tidak kisah apa yang kami peroleh, tidak tahulah, sama ada Achek tengok ke, tidak tengok, telur-telur ayamku itu ataupun dia tandatangan sahaja, tanpa melihat apa-apa yang tercatat dalam kad keputusan peperiksaan itu. Inilah hasilku; hasil daripada tidak pernah membaca buku, asyik menunggu dan menyaksikan Achek mengacau dan menyusun jubin buah mahjung, dua-dua ketul bertindih-tindihan, bunga menghadap ke bawah, membina tembok sepanjang dua kaki di hadapannya.*

[When Achek was alive, he would sign anything without reading it. I would bring big fat zeroes in Standard One, Achek never said anything about it, as if the zeroes meant nothing and had no effect on him. Achek never cared what marks we got, I'm not sure whether he saw the zeroes in my report card or didn't, or merely signed it without looking. Those were my results; the results of never reading a book, merely waiting and watching Achek mixing and arranging

his mahjong tiles in pairs, one atop the other, their patterns facing downwards, in a two-foot-long wall before him.]

(*Air Mata Ibu*, 2007, p. 216)

### ***Zhi in Air Mata Ibu***

In *Air Mata Ibu*, Soo Cham applies the principle of *zhi* by depicting the elder brother, Yong, as wise in dealing with problems that Sui Yin faces. Yong's wisdom in dealing with the case of a nurse injecting Sui Yin with the wrong medication can be seen when he does not want to take legal action against the nurse. This is because Yong prefers to teach the nurse a moral lesson. Yong is of the opinion that a moral lesson is more effective than legal action. This can be seen in the following excerpt:

*Berikutan itu, ramai orang telah mencadangkan kepada Abang Yongku untuk menyaman jururawat berkaitan tersalah menyuntik ubat ke dalam badanku. Samar-samar kedengaran oleh kokleaku, perbualan antara pembantu-pembantu hospital. Katanya, sepatutnya botol ubat yang sebelah kanan untukku tetapi telah terambil botol yang sebelah kiri. Abang Yong tidak menyaman, katanya, jururawat itu tidak sengaja, dia manusia, tidak lepas daripada melakukan kesilapan. Setiap yang berlaku adalah takdir. Atas persepsi ini, Abang Yong, tidak hendak menyaman jururawat itu walaupun ada yang mendesak, menyuruh Abang Yong menyaman jururawat itu dengan alasan untuk mengajar dan memperingatkannya supaya pada masa-masa akan datang, kesilapan itu tidak berlaku atau berulang lagi. Tanpa hukuman, ingatannya akan cepat sirna; dengan hukuman, dipercayai akan berkekalan. Iaitu setiap hukuman, ada pengajarannya.*

[Following this, many people suggested to my brother Yong to sue the nurse who wrongly injected me. It barely reached my cochlea, the conversation of the hospital attendants. They said that my medication was in the bottle on the right but the nurse had taken the one on the left. Yong did not want to sue, saying that the nurse had made a mistake, which was human, and that she was only human. Everything that happened was fated. It was because of this that Yong did not want to sue the nurse even though others urged him to do so, to teach her a lesson that in the future such incidents would not happen again. Without punishment, she would quickly forget. With punishment,

she would remember always. That is, every punishment contained a lesson.]

(*Air Mata Ibu*, 2007, pp. 70-71)

When it comes to punishment and character, Obaidellah (2004, p. 23) in China: Isu dan Hubungan Luar quotes Confucius's explanations on this matter:

*Hukuman hanya boleh membuat manusia mengelak diri daripada melakukan kesalahan tetapi tidak boleh membuat manusia memahami bahawa melakukan kesalahan itu adalah sesuatu yang memalukan. Pendidikan akhlak lebih baik daripada hukuman. Ia dapat membuat rakyat mematuhi peraturan serta rakyat berasa malu.*

[Punishments can only make human beings avoid wrongs but cannot make people understand that committing wrongs is shameful. The education of character is better than punishment. It can make the people obey rules and experience shame.]

## CONCLUSION

The analysis shows that Confucian teachings are very aptly applied in Soo Cham's novel *Air Mata Ibu*. The five Confucian concepts of *li*, *ren*, *yi*, *zhi*, and the importance of education can be applied to the novel under study. The *ren* principle can be seen in the close relationship between mother and daughter. For example, Sui Yin is willing to sacrifice so that her mother is able to emigrate to China, which is Abu's fervent wish. Secondly, the love between the siblings is seen through the elder brother carrying his sister home on his back for several kilometers as he does not want her to get tired. The *li* principle can be observed in the character of Abu, who prays to express her gratitude to the gods who have enabled her to return to China. Finally, the *yi* principle of being trustworthy in one's duties can be seen in Sui Yin herself in her work as a bank officer. Even though she is desperate for money, Sui Yin holds fast to the *yi* principle and does not embezzle funds to buy tickets to China. The importance of education is illustrated through the character of Sui Yin's sister-in-law, who places much importance on the education of her children. Her children are taught to wake up early to go to school. Further, the principle of *zhi* is illustrated when Yong does not want to take legal action against the nurse who mistakenly injected Sui Yin

with the wrong medication. Instead, he prefers to give the nurse a moral lesson to give her space to think about the mistake that she has made. All five Confucian principles are applied in Soo Cham's *Air Mata Ibu*.

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