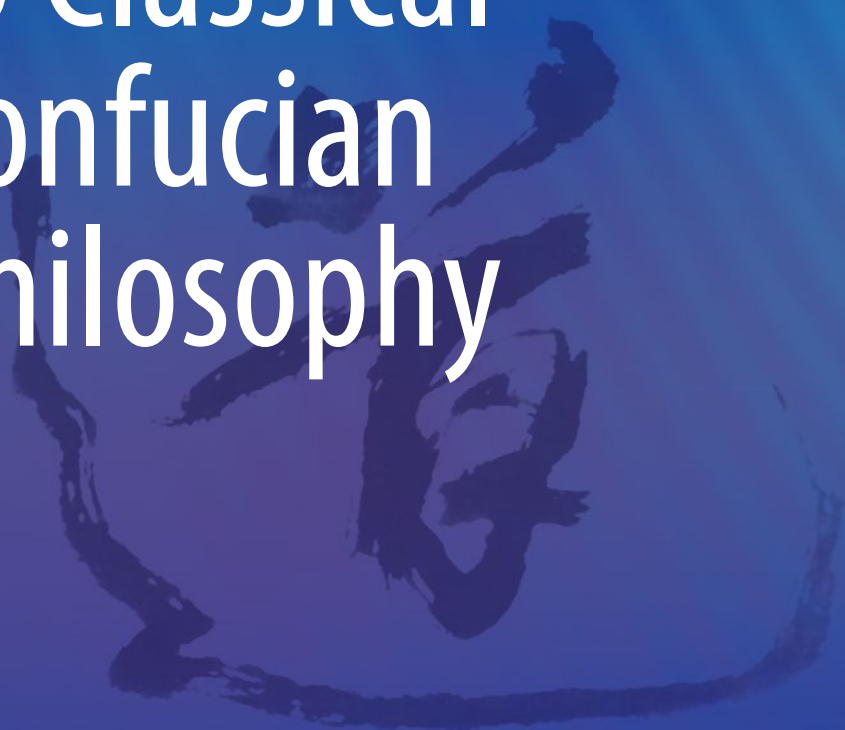


Dao Companions to Chinese Philosophy

Vincent Shen *Editor*

Dao Companion to Classical Confucian Philosophy



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Dao Companions to Chinese Philosophy

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Editor

Dao Companion to Classical Confucian Philosophy

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Classical Confucianism in Historical and Comparative Context

Vincent Shen

1 Introduction

We use the term “classical Confucianism,” or “early Confucianism,” or “pre-Qin Confucianism,” to cover the thoughts, doctrines and practical wisdoms developed in the first stage of Confucianism. Confucianism began with the founder Confucius (551–479BCE), and developed through Confucius’ disciples and his grandson Zisi 子思 (483–402BCE) to Mencius (372–289BCE), and finally Xunzi 荀子 (325–238BCE). Not long after the death of Xunzi, the warring states were all conquered and unified by the Qin Empire (221–206 BCE), in the process of which Confucian books were infamously burned and scholars were buried, most of them Confucian, by the first emperor of the Qin-Empire, and so ended this first period of Confucianism. It is thus distinguished from the later Confucianism of the Han Dynasty (202BCE–220CE), which became a state ideology with the canonization of the early Confucian founding texts, and the Neo-Confucianism that developed from the eleventh to eighteenth Century in Song, Ming and Qing Dynasties, as the revival of Confucianism after its silence for almost eight centuries under the challenges of Neo-Daoism and Buddhism.

Therefore, “early Confucianism” is thus called because of the fact that it is the initial period of Confucianism in Chinese intellectual history. It is also called “pre-Qin Confucianism” because this period of Confucianism ended by the time that the Qin Empire unified China. However, philosophically more important, it is called “classical Confucianism” because all the founding texts, the so-called “Six Classics”

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(*liujing* 六經),¹ were produced in this period, when its early founders lived and developed their thoughts. These texts had been collected, edited and used as teaching materials since Confucius, even if their canonization came later in the Han Dynasty.²

In Chinese intellectual history, classical Confucianism has many dimensions: religious, philosophical, cultural, ideological, political, etc. In this volume, we will focus mainly on its philosophical dimension, putting it in the context of ancient Chinese intellectual history, and sometimes comparing it with Western philosophy, in order to make it more understandable for today's readers living in a time of cultural exchange and dialogue between East and West.

Historically, "Confucius," the name of the founder of this school, was the latinization of *Kongfuzi* 孔夫子 (Teacher Kong) when his works were introduced to Europe by the earliest Jesuits in China from the late sixteenth Century onward. The term "Confucianism" was used to name the school of thought founded by Confucius. However, in China, scholars and common people usually call him simply Kongzi 孔子 (Master Kong), while the school founded by Confucius is called *rujia* 儒家 (school of *ru* 儒), instead of "Confucianism."

It should be noted that, historically, the profession of *ru* existed much earlier than Confucius himself and thus before the rise of Confucianism. *Ru* was a profession or class of people who served as coordinators at public and private ritual occasions and as teachers of rites and related knowledge. The majority came from the surviving Yin 殷 people of Shang 商 Dynasty (1766–1122BCE), a very religious people, which was conquered and replaced by the Zhou 周 Dynasty (1122–221BCE). Since Yin people practiced rituals in their everyday public and private life, the *rus* were very well versed in all details of the knowledge and practice of sacrificial, funeral, ceremonial, and other kinds of ritual. After the Yin people lost their power to the Zhou Dynasty, the *rus* should have been invited by the Duke of Zhou to design and establish the *Zhouli* 周禮 (the Rites of Zhou Dynasty) because of their expertise in the rites from their Shang legacy. Because of their participation in the ritual reform or redesigning of the *Zhouli*, which was a most important political and cultural project of the Duke of Zhou in the early days of Zhou Dynasty, the social status of *ru* from Yin Dynasty was thereby relatively enhanced in Zhou Dynasty; some of them held the office of rites and served as teachers of rites. This explains why the Duke of Zhou was always an ideal and honorable person for the *ru* people. Confucius himself would take his frequent dreaming of the Duke of Zhou as a sign of his younger days' ambition for such positions. However, during

¹ Among the Six Classics, the *Yuejing* 樂經 (Classic of Music) was said to be lost during the reign of the First Qin Emperor, therefore in fact we have now only *Wujing* 五經 (Five Classics).

² In the early Han Dynasty, Emperor Wen 文 institutionalized the Doctor of the *Shujing* 書經 (*The Classic of Documents*) and the Doctor of *Shijing* 詩經 (*The Classic of Poetry*), while Emperor Jing 景 institutionalized that of the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (*The Spring and Autumn Annals*). It was in 136 BC that Emperor Wu 武 institutionalized also Doctors for the *Yijing* 易經 (*The Classic of Changes*) and the *Li* 禮 (*The Book of Rites*), altogether Five Classics, and deinstitutionalized all other doctors of various other schools.

the Spring and Autumn period (722–481BCE), most of the *rus* lost their office and earned their living by serving as private teachers of rites and ritual coordinators. What they taught were the *liuyi* 六藝 (Six Arts): ritual, music, archery, driving, writing, and calculating.

The Chinese family name of Confucius is Kong 孔, and his first name is Qiu 丘, also known as Zhongni 仲尼. His ancestors were from the Yin 殷 people who lived in the Song 宋 State and moved from there to the Lu 魯 State, today's Shandong 山東 area. This family background, together with Yin people's traditional familiarity with rites, explains his early interest in practicing *li* and the fact that, in his earlier career, he served more or less the same function as one of the *rus*. He was indeed the most famous and influential among the *rus*, because he had the largest number of students (said to number 3,000), and systematically organized his teaching materials into six parts. These later became the *liujing* 六經 (Six Classics), which were the founding scriptures of Confucianism. Most importantly, Confucius had laid the philosophical foundation of his teaching of the rituals by a transcendental deduction from *ren* 仁 (humaneness) to *yi* 義 (righteousness) to *li* 禮 (rituality, propriety).

Among the Six Classics, the legendary *Yuejing* 樂經 (*Classic of Music*) was believed to be lost under the reign of the First Qin Emperor (221–207BCE) who threw Confucian books into the fire.³ Thus, more realistically we have only *wujing* 五經 (Five Classics), that is, the *Shijing* 詩經 (*Classic of Poetry*), the *Shangshu* 尚書 or *Shujing* 書經 (*Book of Documents* or *Classic of Documents*), the *Liji* 禮記 (*Book of Rites*), the *Yijing* 易經 (*Classic of Changes*), and the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (*Spring and Autumn Annals*).⁴

The *ru* profession existed long before Confucius came on the historical scene of ancient China. Hence it existed long before Confucius formed a community with his disciples and students of his disciples that had a strong sense of belonging to a school, a school that was later divided into several sects. The original Chinese term of Confucianism or *rujia* 儒家 (Confucian School) appeared only later in the *Shiji* 史記 (*Record of the Grand Historian*) of SIMA Qian 司馬遷 (145–86BC) in 100BC. This means that the term *rujia* appeared only after the end of classical Confucianism.

Concerning the lineage of classical Confucianism in Chinese intellectual history, we should say simply that, in its first phase, Confucius (551–479BC), the founder of classical Confucianism, after his teaching to his disciples, was followed by his grandson Zisi 子思 (493–406BC), and then by Mencius (371–289BC) in the second phase, and by Xunzi 荀子 (298–238BC) in the third phase. These could be seen as

³The *Yueji* 樂記 (*Notes on Music*) in the *Liji* (*Book of Rites*) was arguably, as thus considered by many scholars, a residual part of the *Yuejing* 樂經 (*Classic of Music*).

⁴Unlike the conventional English translation of the *Shijing* 詩經 as “Book of Odes,” the *Yijing* 易經 as “Book of Changes,” we translate those classical Confucian scriptures titled with the word *jing* 經 consistently as “Classic,” thus the *Yijing* 易經 is translated as *Classic of Changes*, the *Shijing* 詩經 as *Classics of Poetry*, and the *Shangshu* 尚書, when called as *Shujing* 書經, we translate it as *Classic of Documents*. For the rest, titled without the term *jing*, I will follow the conventional translation of *Liji* 禮記 as *Book of Rites*, and the *Chunqiu* 春秋 as *Spring and Autumn Annals*.

the three phases in the historical development of classical Confucianism. This volume will focus on the philosophical thoughts developed in these three phases of classical Confucianism.

However, it is worthwhile to mention briefly the later development of Confucianism after the classical period, to be dealt with more pertinently in other volumes of this series. Confucianism in the Han Dynasty was somehow related to the last phase of classical Confucianism because of the fact that it was based on Xunzi's philosophy. Indeed, Xunzi's idea of Heaven as Nature and his combination of *li* 禮 (ritual) with *fa* 法 (law) were followed by most Confucians in the Han Dynasty to serve the Han emperors and to reinforce the political stability of the state. In particular, DONG Zhongshu 董仲舒 (c179-c104BCE) was responsible for making Confucianism the state ideology of the Han Dynasty. For him, Heaven was nature, but, to counter-balance the Emperor's power, he developed the idea of Mandate of Heaven in the form of laws of nature. These laws were constituted by *yin* 陰 /*yang* 陽 and five phases to form an organic whole, in which everything was well connected and things felt and responded to the same class of things. There is precise correspondence between Man and Nature. For DONG Zhongshu, human nature was factual/empirical, not transcendental. History was determined by dynamic change of the five phases. (Chan 1963: 271–288) Another Han Confucian, WANG Chong 王充 (27–100CE) continued the line of naturalistic Confucianism. His criticism of all superstitions of his time, including those of Confucianism, Daoism and popular religions, manifested a rationalistic attitude. Unfortunately, since the end of the Han Dynasty, Confucianism became dormant and less influential for intellectuals, who were led away first by Neo-Daoism, and then by Chinese Mahayana Buddhism.

Then, after almost eight centuries of silence, in the mid eleventh Century, Confucianism began to revive in the North Song 宋 Dynasty as “Neo-Confucianism.” This developed itself through three lines of thought. First, from the five masters of North Song Dynasty, ZHOU Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–1073), ZHANG Zai 張載 (1020–1077), SHAO Yung 邵庸 (1011–1077), CHENG Hao 程灝 (also known as CHENG Mingdao 程明道 1032–1085) and CHENG Yi 程頤 (also known as CHENG Yichuan 程伊川 1033–1107), to ZHU Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) in the South Song Dynasty: this line could be called Neo-Confucianism of the Realist Type. Second, from LU Xiangshan 陸象山 (1139–1193) to WANG Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529): this line could be called Neo-Confucianism of the Idealist type. Third, thinkers from late Ming Dynasty to mid-Qing Dynasty, such as WANG Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692), YAN Yuan 顏元 (1635–1704), LI Gong 李塉 (1659–1733), DAI Zheng 戴震 (1723–1777), etc., constituted Neo-Confucianism of the Naturalist type. These three orientations, the Realist, the Idealist and the Naturalist, constituted the diversity of philosophical discussions of the Neo-Confucianism.⁵

⁵ Here I follow the distinction of these three types of Neo-Confucianism made by Thomé H. Fang (see Fang 1981: 8–11).

2 Five Classics and Their Meaning in Comparative Context

The task of a philosopher could be said to be to make explicit the universalizable meaning of existence implicit in particular beings, events, actions, or stories. Here “universalizable” means being capable of being shared by many different others. Since we do not presume the factual existence of universality pure and simple in this human historical world, to think philosophically for us is not to develop a purely abstract argument in defense of the presumed universality, but rather to reveal the meaningfulness of existence in the historical-local yet universalizable context. It is in this sense that comparison of different philosophical traditions is both doable and inspiring for us finite human beings longing for truth and ultimate reality. Thus we consider it helpful for understanding the meaning of the Five Classics of classical Confucianism to compare them, in this introductory chapter, with the Scriptures in another tradition of the world, that is, the Bible of Judeo-Christian tradition.

It is intriguing for scholars of comparative religion/philosophy to see whether there is something comparable between the mode of revealing of meaningfulness of existence in the Confucian Classics and that in other religious traditions, such as the Judeo-Christian Holy Scriptures. For example, in Confucianism, the dominant school of thought in Chinese culture, can we find in the *wujing* 五經 (Five Classics) something similar to the mode of revealing in the Bible? The discussion of this question is interesting here for us in order to give a comparative context to make explicit the Confucian sense of the meaningfulness of existence for readers now existing in a world of globalization when China is meeting with the West. Short of space, I will take up only the Biblical tradition for the purpose of comparison, while a comparison with the classics of other traditions is also urgently needed and I regret not to be able to do it here. Hopefully the limited comparison here is helpful for extending the understanding of the philosophical depth of classical Confucianism in regard to its mode of revealing the meaning of existence.

In fact, as we will see in the next chapter, there is a movement of thought in ancient China from the revealing of God’s Will in the form of political theology to the rising of a creative humanism, changing thereby the mode of revealing of the meaningfulness of existence. In this context, I shall first put the Five Classics into a broader and comparative context by referring to Paul Ricoeur’s analysis of the concept of “revelation” in the Bible. For Paul Ricoeur, the Bible, conceived as revealing the Words of God, contains various forms of discourse by which revelation is to be expressed: prophetic discourse, narrative discourse, prescriptive discourse, sapiential discourse, and poetic discourse (Ricoeur 1977: 15–54).

First, in regard to the prophetic discourse, there has been a dominant view among Chinese scholars that the Confucians do not play the role of prophet in the Confucian Classics comparable to the Jewish tradition. Among these scholars, Tu Wei-ming is one of the most influential. According to Tu, the Confucian intellectual/officer is

different from the Greek philosopher and the Jewish prophet.⁶ However, this kind of differentiation could lead to mutual misunderstanding between these cultural traditions. Therefore it needs more sophisticated discernment in order that, while comparing their differences, some common concern could become manifest to help in their mutual understanding.

In the Biblical tradition, the prophetic discourse is normally characterized by the predictive visions or unveiling of the future⁷ and the structure of double authorship.⁸ In comparison, we find there was indeed no prophetic discourse in the sense of double authorship in classical Confucian texts. It is in this sense that Tu Weiming is right when he says that Confucians do not play the role of a prophet. This means simply that there was no Confucian prophet speaking the Words of God. However, since the diviners in ancient China interpreted the crackled sign on the bone or tortoiseshell, or the hexagram obtained in operating with the yarrow stalks and its lines and related texts, as good or bad omens, and thereby predicted the future consequence or destiny of a specific human action, they were somehow playing a role like that of a prophet as revealing the will of High God or that of Heaven. This is most clear in the *Fragments of Shang Divination* where we often read texts such as, “The King divined as such... With the approval of *di*” (*di ruo* 帝若), or “*di* does not approve” (*di bu ruo* 帝不若), or “The King makes the divination, and says: the result is auspicious, with the approval of *di*.” (Guo 1978: 745, 1173) Note here *shangdi* 上帝 (High God) passively approved the request or demand of kings and diviners. However, He never took the initiative to reveal Himself, as was the case of God in the *Bible*.

In the *Yijing (Classics of Changes)*, there seems to be an affirmation of a kind of pre-knowledge, foresight, prediction of the direction of how things were going to happen in the future. This was also affirmed in the Chap. 24 of the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (*Doctrine of the Mean*): “It is characteristic of the most entire sincerity to be able to foreknow. When a nation or family is about to flourish, there are sure to be happy omens; and when it is about to perish, there are sure to be unlucky omens.” (Legge 1991: 417) However, we cannot find any apocalyptic literature in Confucian Scriptures, although it is true that we can find some cyclical eschatological idea of catastrophe (*jie* 劫) and prediction in Religious Daoism, worthy of further comparative study elsewhere as to the Chinese and Christian concepts of eschatology, but not in this volume.

Second, in comparison with the Biblical narrative discourse in which God is revealed through the telling of stories, especially the stories of history-making

⁶Tu differentiates Confucians as intellectual/officer from Jewish prophets in several places of his writings, for example, in Tu 2002: 14 and Tu 2004: 152.

⁷The predictive visions of the future includes that of the “last days,” therefore some apocalyptic predictions as revealed by God in the *Revelation to John*.

⁸The structure of double authorship was shown more specifically in the *Prophets*, such as “Listen, you heaven, earth, attend, for Yahweh is speaking” (*Isaiah* 1:2), or, “The words of Yahweh were addressed to me” “So, the Lord Yaweh says this” (*Ezekiel*, everywhere). The double authorship here in question means that, behind the prophet’s mouth, there is God’s Word revealed through it.

events,⁹ we can find this kind of revealing narrative in the Classical Confucian historical texts; those *événements fondateurs* of Chinese people recorded in the *Classics of Documents*, the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, and the three *Commentaries of the Spring and Autumn Annals* (the Zuo's, the Gongyang's and the Guliang's) that were also promoted to the status of *jing* 經 (Classics) in Tang Dynasty. Chinese people in particular are fond of looking into historical founding events for the revealing or manifestation of *dao* (the Way) and the meaningfulness of individual and collective existence. Also, it is very interesting to see that, in the three *Commentaries of the Spring and Autumn Annals*, telling a story was itself providing interpretative commentary on the very succinct texts of the *Annals*. To tell a story is to interpret or to show the hermeneutic function of human reason through the narrative discourse of telling stories which integrate human actions, events, and decisions.

Prescriptive discourse is the third form of expressing God's revelation in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, such as in the Ten Commandments. We find also in the Confucian Classics, both the ideas of cosmic regulation based on the concept of Heavenly *dao* and the codes of human behavior based on the concept of *li* 禮 (ritual) are revealed in a prescriptive sense to show the way to a meaningful life. Even if the authority of the Ten Commandments in Judeo-Christian tradition is based on God, whereas the Confucian *li* is based on ethical requirement, for both traditions there is always the necessary mediation of regulations for the fulfillment of human existence.

However, if viewed from the perspective of Kant's moral philosophy of autonomy, the revealed laws such as the Ten Commandments are seen as a kind of heteronomy. The understanding of the biblical prescriptive discourse as purely external obligation and therefore heteronomy has created a misunderstanding on the part of modern new Confucians vis-à-vis Christian ethics. For example, Mou Zongshan (1909–1995), a modern new Confucian, in following Kant's view, criticizes Christian ethics as a kind of heteronomy, “depending totally on the decision of God” (Mou 1985: 156). On the contrary, Mou and his followers presume Confucian ethics, “like Kant, totally depends on the morality of autonomy” (Mou 1985: 136), because of its foundation in the full unfolding of human subjectivity's self-awareness.

However, we should understand that both Christian and Confucian ethics are relational ethics. Biblical laws are to be understood with the idea of the Covenant that designates a whole complex of relations, the core of which is love and justice. For Jesus, in the Kingdom of love, the Law would be fulfilled to its last iota. For Him, the Law and the Prophets were summed up in the Golden Rule from

⁹Such as the narrative genre of discourse in the *Pentateuch*, the *Deuteronomic History*, the synoptic *Gospels* and the *Book of Acts*, etc. God's revealing here is done through those “history-making events,” or in Jacques Ellul and Paul Ricœur's terms, the “founding events” (*événements fondateurs*), like the election of Abraham, the Exodus, the anointing of David, etc., in the Old Testament, and the birth, teaching, death, and resurrection of Christ for the early Christian church etc. The idea of revelation then appears as connected to the very character of these events and the plots that connect many events into the unity of a story. The faith of Israel and that of the early Christian Church are tied up here in the confession of the transcendent character of such nuclear founding and instituting events, which are seen as the imprint, mark, or trace of God's act.

Deuteronomy: “So always treat others as you would like them to treat you; that is the meaning of the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 7:12). All laws could be summarized in this: “Love God and love others as yourself.” In other words, all laws are completed and subsumed under God’s infinite generosity and unconditional love.

In Confucian ethics, even if virtue is prior to obligation, still the meaningfulness of life cannot go without *li*. Reciprocity constitutes the essence of the golden rule implied in *li*, either negatively as “Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you” (*Analects* 15:24, Chan 1963: 44.), or more positively as “A man of humanity, wishing to establish his own character, also establishes others; wishing to be prominent himself, he also helps others to be prominent” (*Analects*. 6: 28, Chan 1963: 30). However, even if an initial generosity was not absent in Confucianism, and the inner dynamism of humaneness there could be extended to all human beings and all things, still in Confucianism we do not find infinite generosity and unconditional love. Unfortunately, the initial generosity in classical Confucianism was constrained in the relation of reciprocity; and when later in Han Dynasty this was implemented in the framework of hierarchical institutions, Confucianism would have lost its original generosity and love.

Fourth, the Biblical revelation is expressed also in the form of sapiential discourse or wisdom, in the Wisdom Books such as *Job*, the *Proverbs*, the *Ecclesiastes/ Qoheleth*, the *Book of Wisdom*, the *Ecclesiasticus/Ben Sira*, etc. Wisdom fulfills one of religion’s fundamental functions in binding together *ethos* and *cosmos*, the sphere of human action and the sphere of the world, in the very point of their discordance: suffering, and more precisely, in unjust suffering. Wisdom teaches us how to endure, how to suffer. For Paul Ricœur, this is the most profound meaning of the book of *Job*, the best example of wisdom.

In comparison, we can say that Confucian Classics like the *Analects*, the *Mencius*, the *Zhongyong (Doctrine of the Mean)*, and the *Daxue (Great Learning)* are books of wisdom. However, the true nature of their wisdom consists in offering very rich ideas to inspire human beings in their self-cultivation and harmonization of relationships, dealing with the essential problem of how to lead a harmonious life in society and within the universe. There we find fewer words touching on the problem of suffering. We must wait till Buddhist Scriptures come into China to tell about suffering in the doctrine of Four Noble truths. However, the early Buddhist emphasis on the doctrine of suffering later changed to the focus on Enlightenment and the One Mind in Chinese Mahayana Buddhism. The *Yijing (Classics of Changes)*, especially the *Yizhuan (Interpretations of the Yijing)*, puts its emphasis not at all on suffering, but rather on the harmony and creativity of the universe, and human work as assisting cosmic creativity.

Finally, the biblical revelation also takes the form of hymn or poetic discourse, like the *Psalms* and the *Song of Songs*. For Paul Ricœur, the Psalter may be said to be revealed in the sense that the sentiments or affections expressed in praise, supplication, thanksgiving, and celebration are all engendered by what the human heart allows to exist and become manifest in surpassing *pathos* and suffering discerned in wisdom when it transforms suffering. As Ricœur says, “The revelation is this very formation of feelings that transcends the everyday modalities of human feeling”

(Ricoeur 1977: 30). In the Confucian Classics, it is in the *Shijing* (Classic of Poetry) and the lost *Classic of Music* or its residue in the *Yueji* (Notes on Music) included in the *Liji* (the Book of Rites) that we find similar emotional expressions. The *Shijing*, like the *Psalms* and *Song of Songs*, expresses and thereby interprets through its poetic language human affectivity as the original mode of human existence, thereby revealing the truth or the authenticity of life itself. The recently unearthed manuscripts *Kongzi Shilun* 孔子詩論 (*Confucius on Poetry*) start by saying “Poetry could not be without willing; music could not be without feeling; literature could not be without wording” (Confucius 2001: 123). Also, in the recently unearthed *Guodian Bamboo Slips*, a text entitled *Xing Zhi Ming Chu* 性自命出 (*Human Nature Comes from Mandate*), now attributed to the so-called Zisi-Mencius school, says,

Dao begins with human feeling,
Human feeling is born from human nature,
Those who begin with human feeling,
Will end up with righteousness. (Jinmen Museum 1998: 179)

Thus, according to this recently unearthed text, *Dao* starts to reveal itself through human feeling and accomplishes itself in the ethical relation of righteousness. Also, a careful reading of the *shijing* shows that affective relations between man and woman, subjects and kings, human beings and Heaven, sometimes with love, sometimes with joy, sometimes with anxiety, sometimes with bitterness, sometimes even with hateful blame, depending on the situations by which they are affected and the ways they are treated, these are all expressed through poetic language. Confucius’ comments on the function of poetry seem to have well grasped this web of existence constituted of affective relations, as we can find in the *Shijing*. Here, classical Confucianism is not a stringent political and ethical philosophy, but an affective poetic discourse revealing the authenticity of existence, the primacy of feeling and affectivity over reason and rational discourse, and the primacy of existence over pure thinking.

In summary, we can say that the Confucian Five Classics are somehow comparable to the Judeo-Christian Scriptures in the sense that they reveal also the meaningfulness of existence in assuming a role of prediction or foresight over what is going to happen in the future, the role of unfolding meaning through historical narratives and human actions, and the role of revealing the normative dimension of human existence in compliance with the basic norms of human action. They also play the role of Wisdom Books, such as the *Analects*, the *Mencius*, the *Zhongyong* and the *Daxue*, etc., in which wisdom is proposed to guide the *junzi*’s self-cultivation and harmonization of relationships. Finally, they also reveal the affective dimension of human existence through the poetic expressions of the *Shijing*.

Thus, the *Shijing* (*Classic of Poetry*) singles out affectivity as essential to human existence, exploring thereby the imaginative function of human reason and the manifestation of human affectivity in poetic verses. The *Shangshu* (*Classic of Documents*), the *Chunqiu* (*Annals of Spring and Autumn*) and its three Commentaries show us human historicity and the function of practical reason in judging historical events. There is also a certain hermeneutic function in the Confucian interpretation of the

meaning of texts and historical events either by giving comments or by narrating stories in detail. Also, with the Chapter *Hongfan* 洪範 (Great Model) of the *Shangshu* and the *Yijing*, there emerges a speculative function of Chinese philosophy, related somehow to the archaic religions and cosmology of ancient China. Many of these texts or their contents existed long before the birth of Confucius and Laozi.

Confucius himself taught the *Shijing*, the *Shangshu*, together with *li* (rite) and *yue* (music). He studied the *Yijing* and composed/edited the *Chunqiu* in the later years of his life. However, it was after Confucius that his disciples and the Confucian school as a whole started to take the *Shijing*, the *Shangshu*, the *Liji*, the *Yijing*, and the *Chunqiu* as essential to their teaching and even had them canonized.

3 Characteristics of Chinese Philosophy in Comparative Context

Since this volume focuses on the philosophy of classical Confucianism in the context of Chinese intellectual history, we may ask: what does “philosophy” mean in China? In fact, there is no exact term in Chinese Classics for “philosophy” as in Western civilization. Instead, terms such as *daoshu* 道術 (Dao and art of its realization), *daoxue* 道學 (Learning of Dao), *lixue* 理學 (Learning of Principles), etc., were used by Chinese scholars. The term *philosophia*, when first introduced to China by M. Ricci and his colleagues G. Aleni and F. Furdato, was translated either phonetically as *feilusuoifeiya* 斐錄所費亞 or as *aizhi zhixue* 愛知之學 (the science of loving wisdom). It was a Japanese scholar, NISHI Amane 西周 (1829–1892), who translated “philosophy” into “*tetsugaku*”, which, in Chinese, reads as *zhexue* 哲學. This neologism was first appropriated by LIANG Qichao 梁啟超 who used it to introduce philosophy in his Newspaper published in Yokohama, Japan.

In the Chinese language, *zhe* 哲 means “wise,” while *xue* 學 means “to learn” or “learning” and “science.” Together they mean “leaning to be wise,” or “science of wisdom.” The concept is thus different from the meaning of its Western counterpart “philosophy” as “love of wisdom.” In Western philosophy, according to Socrates, only gods have wisdom, whereas men are only lovers of wisdom, and, if one loves wisdom, it means one does not have yet wisdom in him/herself. By contrast, Chinese philosophers would think that if one does not have wisdom, how could one teach others about it? Only the wise can teach wisdom. Even if no one is totally wise, at least one should be relatively wise to be able to teach others about wisdom. Also, all people should have the potential to become wise, otherwise nobody can receive the teaching of wisdom, no matter how differently the concept of wisdom is conceived by different schools of philosophy.

Even if Chinese Philosophy is very different from other philosophical traditions in the world, however, different philosophical traditions, as expressions of human reason, could also share some complementary features. Therefore, we may, for example, compare Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy in the following ways. First, Western philosophy uses languages based on the alphabetical system

and therefore is more abstract, while Chinese philosophy uses pictograms and ideograms, which express imaged ideas such as *ren* 人 (human beings), *tian* 天 (Heaven), *ren* 仁 (humanness), *dao* 道 (the Way), *xin* 心 (Mind/heart), etc. These ideas are indeed linguistically linked with image, and therefore they are produced by a balanced use of the right side and the left side of human brain in featuring both language and image.

Probably because of its linguistic use of pictograms and ideograms, Chinese philosophy expresses itself by Image-Ideas; therefore it is different from Western philosophy that refers to Pure Ideas. Chinese philosophy prefers metaphors and narratives to the concepts and argumentations used by Western philosophy. Generally speaking, Chinese philosophy, when grasping the Reality Itself in an enlightening insight by human speculative reason, tends to form a kind of Image-Idea, something between a pure Idea and an iconic/sonoric image, and it thereby keeps the holistic character of the manifestation or the intuitive reception of the Reality Itself. The Idea-Image is seen as expressive and evocative of, though never exhaustive of, the richness of Reality Itself and therefore enjoys merely the status of a metaphor.

In other words, Chinese philosophers, when using their speculative reason, grasp intuitively the Ultimate Reality and call it the *shangdi* 上帝 (High God), or the *Taiji* 太極 (Great Ultimate), or *dao* 道, *ren* 仁 (humaneness), *xin* 心 (mind/heart), *cheng* 誠 (sincerity/true reality), *kong* 空 (emptiness), or *yixin* 一心 (One Mind), etc. All these are but metaphorical interpretations of the Ultimate Reality thus grasped intuitively by Chinese philosophers of various traditions, such as Confucianism, Daoism and Chinese Mahayana Buddhism.

In Chinese artistic creativity, by the imaginative function of reason and its poetic transformation, artists would render the Idea-Image into a sort of concrete iconic/sonoric image and thereby materialize it in Chinese painting, music, poetry, etc. This is the essence of Chinese philosophy of art. In moral and ethical actions, the practical function of reason would bring the Idea-Image into the judgment of events and the intervention of one's own action into the course of events and thereby take responsibility of it. This is crucial to Chinese moral philosophy. In their function of historical reason, Chinese historians would take the Ultimate Reality to be manifested through human actions that constitute events, and also through events that constitute historical stories via emplotment. This is fundamental to the Chinese philosophy of history. Stories bring us hope because, somehow or other, the meaningfulness of existence is to be revealed or manifested through stories, although always in a metaphorical way. Through stories of our own and those of many others, we get a kind of access to the Ultimate Reality.

Comparatively speaking, in Western philosophy, the pre-Socratic philosophers such as Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Heraclitus, etc., still kept a very intimate relation with the original Idea-Image, in relating, for example, the idea of *Arche* and *Physis* to water, to the unlimited, to air, to fire etc. However, the main stream of Western philosophy from Parmenides and Plato onward pushed the Idea-Image into pure idea, and then, with logical definition, conceptualized it and related one concept with other concepts logically in propositions. Concepts were detached deliberately from images, things, and events, and defined and related one to another

logically in descriptive and argumentative discourses. By this detachment, concept and argumentation can help the human mind to develop the critical function of reason, in not limiting itself to the particularity of images, things, and events, but paying attention to the abstract universalizability of concepts and the rigor of their logical relation. Although the validity of concepts and argumentation might be absolutized in a way so as to claim for pure universality and rational structure, in fact, they allow us to see Reality and its structure only in an abstract way. By contrast, metaphors, mostly related to one another by poetic phrases and stories, are different from abstract concepts and well-structured argumentation; yet they still keep an intimate relation with images and events.

We may also compare Chinese philosophy with Western philosophy by tracing the respective perceptions of their own origin. When exploring the meaning of existence, ancient Greek philosophy emphasized a disinterested theoretical examination of being and truth, while Confucian philosophy engaged in practical thinking on human nature and destiny. Philosophy, according to Aristotle, had its origin in the Greek notion of *theoria*, the disinterested pursuit of truth and sheer intellectual curiosity. In comparison, Confucian philosophy seemed to be more pragmatically motivated. For Aristotle, the *episteme* began as a result of the attitude of *wonder*, which led to the theoretical construction of scientific and philosophical knowledge. In comparison, Confucian philosophy began with the attitude of *concern*, which led finally to a practical wisdom for guiding human destiny, both individual and collective.

Aristotle pointed out in the *Metaphysics* that the way of life in which knowledge began was constituted of leisure (*rastone*) and recreation (*diagoge*), as it was in the case of Egyptian priests who invented geometry. Aristotle believed that in leisure and recreation, the human being needed not care about the daily necessities of life and could thereby wonder about the causes of things and search for knowledge for knowledge's own sake. The result of wonder was *theoria*.¹⁰ According to Aristotle, the philosophical meaning of *theoria* was defined against *praxis*, or, as Aristotle put it, "not in virtue of being able to act, but of having the theory for themselves and knowing the cause." (Aristotle 1984: 1553, 981b 6–7) On the other hand, it was defined with respect to a universal object, which was seen by Aristotle as the first characteristic of *episteme*, thus leading itself to philosophy and ending up with ontology (Aristotle 1984: 1554, 1584: 982a 20- 982b 10; 1003a 20–30).

Thus, Western philosophy was historically grounded in the Greek heritage of *theoria*, which regarded human existence no longer as determined by diverse practical interests, but as submitted henceforward to a universalizing and objective norm of truth. *Theoria* and philosophy, in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, culminated in the science of ontology, which according to Aristotle investigated "being qua being" as the most general and comprehensible aspect of all beings.

¹⁰Aristotle wrote in *Metaphysics*: "For it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize; they wondered originally at the obvious difficulties, then advanced little by little and stated difficulties about the greater matters, . . . therefore since they philosophized in order to escape from ignorance, evidently they were pursuing science in order to know, and not for any utilitarian end" (Aristotle 1984: 1554, 982b 12–22).

By contrast, Confucian philosophy originated with the attitude of *concern*, which led not to universalizable theories but to *universalizable praxis*. It was because of the concern with the individual as well as the collective destiny that a Confucian mind started to philosophize. The *Great Appendix* to the *Book of Changes*, arguably attributed to Confucius, started to give an explanation of the beginning of the *Book of Changes* and saw its author as in a situation of great care and sorrow with compassionate concern. There we read:

Those who composed the *Yijing* should have great care and sorrow... The study of *Yi* rose at the ending period of Yin Dynasty, the time when the power of Zhou is flourishing, the time when happens the affair of King Wen fighting against the tyrant Zhou. This is why its words are warning against danger. Being warned against danger, one can create peace; on the contrary, he who takes things lightly tends to fall down. The *Dao* of this book is great, and none of the hundred things is omitted. Keeping oneself always vigilant from the start to the end, then in principle there will be nothing to blame. This is the *Dao* of the Changes. (Zhu Xi 1999: 261, 264)

This text shows that in the eyes of its author, the philosophy of *Yi* (Changes) as a serious intellectual activity begins with the attitude of concern in the situation of great care and sorrow, not at all in the situation of leisure and recreation, as Aristotle suggests. It emerges with the concern for both personal and collective destiny. The proposition that “the *Dao* of this book is great, and none of the hundred things is omitted” suggests that Confucian philosophy intends to be a practical wisdom capable of guiding a universalizable *praxis*.

Since whether or not there is universality pure and simple is still a question open to debate, I prefer to use the term “universalizability,” a common concern of which may show us a convergence between ancient Greek philosophy and Confucian philosophy. Even if ancient Greek philosophy concerns itself more with the theoretical universalizability, whereas Confucian philosophy concerns itself more with the practical universalizability, however, both of them try to go beyond particular interest and to transcend the limit of particularity in view of a universalizable value. In a certain sense, both of them target the ideal of universalizability. In this light, *theoria* and *praxis* are different yet complementary in the search of universalizability.

4 The Contents and Movement of Thought in the Following Chapters

This volume offers a handbook on the philosophy of classical Confucianism with both a historical and a systematic approach. Taking into account the newly unearthed materials and most recent scholarship, the first part will present the historical development of classical Confucianism by introducing its rise upon the fading of ancient political theology and the arrival of a creative humanism, and the development of the philosophical ideas of the major philosophers, such as Confucius, Confucius’ disciples, Confucius’ grandson Zisi and the Zisi-Mencius School, Mencius, and finally Xunzi. Together with the historical development, the philosophy in the

Confucian Classics and other major works of these philosophers are analytically and critically made explicit and assessed.

Since there are important philosophical ideas and systematic issues comparable to today's philosophical concerns yet not so much developed by the historical part, we will present them in the second section that deals with feeling and emotion, aesthetic appreciation of music, wisdom in poetry, moral psychology, virtue ethics, political thoughts, relation with the Ultimate Reality, and finally the concept of harmony in Confucianism.

Therefore, following this introductory chapter, I will proceed to discuss the rise of classical Confucianism in the context of early Chinese intellectual history that moved from the political theology of the *Shangshu* to the emergence of creative humanism in the *Yijing*. After having discussed why and how the political theology faded in ancient China, I will focus on the *Yijing*, which evolved from divination to ethical interpretation, and then to philosophical construction, to see human beings as participating in the process of cosmic creativity and leading a meaningful life. Thus the *Yijing*'s emphasis was put upon a human agent's creative interpretation of the cosmic laws and logical structures in the unfolding of human historicity. That is why there is always an ethical core in classical Confucianism, as is well exposed in the *Analects* and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. The fading of political theology and the rise of creative humanism led to the founding of classical Confucianism by Confucius and its development through Confucius' disciples, Zisi-Mencius school and Xunzi, to be discussed in the following chapters.

In Chap. 3, Ni Peimin uses historical, exegetical, and comparative methods to tell the story of Confucius' life and his most important philosophical concepts such as *tian* 天 (Heaven), *ren* 仁 (humaneness or human-heartedness), *yi* 義 and *li* 禮 (appropriateness and ritual propriety), *zheng* 政/正 (political philosophy), and *xue* 學 (learning to be human). Ni does this with the support of his textual analysis of the essential quotations from the *Analects*, sometimes in comparison with Western philosophy, sometimes with the interpretation of today's human experience, thus leading us to a fuller understanding of Confucius's philosophy in a comparative and updated context.

After Confucius, we will move to Confucius' disciples. In Chap. 4, Lo Yuet Keung gives us a vivid description of Confucius' legacy to his disciples. He focuses on the disciples' relations with their Master and among themselves, how Confucius taught them, and how his teaching was received by them. Although not many historical records are available about individual disciples, Lo is able to give us a convincing account of the most important figures among Confucius' disciples such as YAN Hui 顏回, Zengzi 曾子, Mi Zijian 宓子賤, and other disciples from whom it became clear how Confucius' philosophy was passed on to future generations.

After Confucius' disciples, it was Confucius' grandson Zisi who transmitted classical Confucianism to the further major development by Mencius. Recent unearthed bamboo slip texts indicate that there existed a *Si-Meng Xuepai* 思孟學派 (Zisi-Mencius School). In Chap. 5, TSAI Zhenfeng deals with the philosophy of Zisi, and the historical questions related to his masters and his works, and he attempts to answer these questions from recently unearthed texts such as the *Wuxing* 五行

(Five Actions) in order to highlight the specificity of Zisi's philosophy. Also, he explores the characteristics of the continuous development of Zisi's philosophy till Mencius.

In the past, all scholarship on classical Confucianism has jumped from Confucius immediately to Mencius, without explaining what happened in the gap of some 120 years between them. However, in this book, Chaps. 4 and 5 offer our readers a lineage of continuity from Confucius to his disciples, then from Confucius' disciples to Zisi, and then from Zisi to Mencius, as supported by recent unearthed materials.

Chapter 6 by Andrew Plaks deals with the *Daxue* and the *Zhongyong*, which, together with the *Analects* and the *Mencius*, are most familiar to all Confucians of all ages, and have been put together in the South Song Dynasty by ZHU Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) as the Four Books. As is well demonstrated by Andrew Plaks, the *Daxue* and *Zhongyong* are most significant works in classical Confucianism because of their development of the Confucian philosophical discourse with fundamental or core concepts essential to Confucianism in particular and Chinese thought in general: the basic Confucian concepts like *zhong* 中 (centrality), *he* 和 (harmony), *cheng* 誠 (sincerity), the relation between the concepts of *tian* 天 (heaven), *xing* 性 (nature) *dao* 道 (the way), *jiao* 教 (education), and the process of formation of a virtuous life from *chengyi* 誠意 (sincere intention), *zhenxin* 正心 (upright heart), *xiusheng* 修身 (self-cultivation), *qijia* 齊家 (family in harmony), *zhiguo* 治國 (kingdom well-governed), to *ping tianxia* 平天下 (all under heaven in peace), which have become so classically familiar for all Confucians and all educated people in China. Also, they provide the core ideas and issues for the great revival of Confucianism in the Northern and Southern Song periods, in response to the cosmological and spiritual challenges of neo-Daoism and Buddhism since the third Century AD. Plaks discusses the textual history, the meaning of the titles, the structure of the text, the integral arguments, and the interpretations of these two important texts, which are indeed very valuable for understanding their textual, historical and philosophical meanings.

The development from Zisi to Mencius having thus been made clear, Chap. 7 by CHAN Wing-cheuk details further logical and philosophical developments of classical Confucianism by Mencius. He puts Mencius in dialogue with his contemporary philosophers. Chan starts with the four types of analogical arguments, that is, exemplification (*pi* 辟), parallel (*mou* 侔), imitation (*yuan* 援), and extension (*tui* 推), that Mencius uses in his critical conversation with Gaozi in regard to the subject of human nature. Also, Mencius tries to justify his thesis phenomenologically: the feelings of commiseration, of shame and dislike, of respect and reverence, of right and wrong, etc., are pure, transcendental, and ontological feelings. Chan understands these four feelings, in Heidegger's term, as *Seinskönnen* (capacity to be) of man, well illustrated by the fact that a man has a feeling of alarm and distress and tries to rescue a child about to fall into a well, as he explains in Chap. 7. In this way, Chan attempts to show that, with Mencius, Chinese philosophy makes progress toward philosophical argumentation and phenomenological justification.

After Mencius, we move to Xunzi, the last great classical Confucian. In Chap. 8, titled "Xunzi as a Systematic Philosopher: Toward Organic Unity of Nature, Mind,

and Reason,” CHENG Chung-ying attempts to bring out, with an intellectual effort of rethinking and re-evaluation, the theoretical system of Xunzi. This is necessary for understanding the fundamental issues of nature at large, human nature, mind, language, human society, and human government. Starting with Xunzi’s distinction and relation between Heaven and Human, Cheng argues that Xunzi sees human beings as the most dynamic and creative part of nature, and takes the creation of human community and human culture as an absolute must for fulfilling the nature of both the Human and Heaven. Thus, Xunzi offers a systematic framework in which a human person can identify the end and meaning in his or her life, and in which one can relate human rationality and morality to the full development of humanity. In this light, Cheng develops Xunzi’s systematic philosophy that targets the full-fledged development of individual, society, and politics in the universe.

In these last three chapters, it is most interesting to see that Chinese philosophical argumentation and its systematic character come to maturity with *Daxue* and *Zhongyong*’s core conceptual network, Mencius’ philosophical argumentation and justification, and Xunzi’s philosophical system, with which this historical part of classical Confucianism comes to an end. This brings us to the second part dealing with the systematic issues of classical Confucianism.

This part of the book consists of a series of discussions related to some crucial issues in the philosophical system of classical Confucianism. Given that the recently unearthed Confucian text *Xing Zi Ming Chu* 性自命出 (*Human Nature Comes from Mandate*) affirms that “Dao started with *qing* 情 (feeling and emotions),” and that “he who started with feeling would end up with righteousness” (Jinmen Museum 1998: 179), we start with the topic of human feeling. Thus, Chap. 9 by Curie Virag explores early Confucians’ thoughts on feeling and emotion in discussing Confucius, Mencius, Xunzi and the recently unearthed *Xing Zi Ming Chu*’s positive attitude toward feeling, which is quite different from the negative attitude of Mohists and Daoists. Virag has convincingly argued that, because of this positive attitude, early Confucians affirm human feelings as the foundation and starting point of human life itself. They see the human self as in constant interaction with the real things of the world, and thus look at feelings as human response to the external reality.

After the discussion on human feeling and emotion, we move on to their cultivation through music, ritual, and poetry. Chapter 10 by Johanna Liu deals with music, which in ancient China was closely related to *li* (rituals). For Liu, the Chinese character 樂 is endowed with double pronunciations *yuelle* and double meanings music/pleasure. Since the *Yueji* 樂記 (Notes on Music) in the *Liji* 禮記 (Book of Rites) is now proved to be a work produced in Han Dynasty, i.e. later than the classical Confucianism, it is not to be considered a main source for discussing the classical Confucian philosophy of music. Fortunately, the recently unearthed *Xing Zi Ming Chu* 性自命出 provides us with a new insight into the aesthetic meaning of *yue* in classical Confucianism. Thus, Johanna Liu explores in detail the thoughts on *yue/le* 樂 (music and pleasure) in the *Xing Zi Ming Chu* both textually and intertextually (in reference to the *Zuozhuan*, the *Xunzi* and the *Zhouli*) in order to re-define and re-understand the classical Confucian issues of music, such as the ideas of music pursued by Confucian scholars, the place of music in the self-cultivation of *junzi*, the music of Zheng and Wei as new sounds and melodies criticized by the Confucians,

etc. She also will discuss the aesthetic meaning of music by referring to the Confucian theory of *qing* 情 (sentiment/feelings/emotions), and deal with the in-depth relation between *yue* (music) and *qing*.

After music, we will focus on poetry, which occupies a crucial position in the classical Confucian educational program. Besides the traditional discussion on the words related to poetry in the *Analects*, the *Zuozhuan* and the *Mencius*, the recently unearthed bamboo slips of *Kongzi Shilun* 孔子詩論 (*Confucius on Poetry*) add much to our knowledge of Confucius' teaching on poetry. In Chap. 11, I will focus on the hermeneutics of poetry and the wisdom in poetry, which has more philosophical implications and is essential to Confucius' teaching. Confucius' poetic wisdom is to be found in his comments on different kinds of poetry and individual poems, in the way he organizes his teaching on *the Shijing*, especially in his vision of affectivity as a primordial mode of human existence and the function of poetry in self-cultivation and public life. We will also discuss Confucius' hermeneutics of poetry and its development by Mencius.

After the Confucian visions of feeling and its cultivation through music, ritual and poetry, we will move to morality and ethics. In Chap. 12, entitled "Early Confucian Moral Psychology," SHUN Kwong-loi discusses the issue of self-transformation, which means one's own reflective efforts at moral self-improvement. Shun focuses on the psychology of this process within the individual person. For Shun, the early Confucians, in reflecting on concrete situations that involve specific individuals with whom they are in interaction, see clearly that ethical problems generally have their source in the depths of human psychology. This is expressed clearly in all early Confucian texts. Shun discusses first the notion of self, then the three aspects of the early Confucian ethical ideal: *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence), *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites), and *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness). He shows that each of these three aspects of the Confucian ideal involves one's moving away from a certain kind of self-centeredness. Then, he discusses the nature of the process involved in such a transformation and, finally, ways in which one's ethical attention may be properly or improperly directed in such a process.

Chapter 13, by Antonio Cua, will discuss classical Confucian virtue ethics. Here, Antonio Cua's focus is on what he calls "virtues of *junzi* 君子 (superior person)" in the *Lunyu* 論語, with occasional employment of insights from the *Mencius*, the *Xunzi*, and the *Liji* 禮記. Cua starts with a critical appreciation of various interpretations of *junzi* before he presents a map of the virtues of *junzi*. These excellences or personal merits of the *junzi* depict some salient characteristics of *junzi*, with emphasis on the embodiment of the fundamental, interdependent, ethical virtues, and the selective, dependent virtues. Then, Cua proceeds to discuss two ways for dealing with conflict: *tiaohe* 調和 (reconciliation and harmonizing of differences) and the art of *zhongyong* 中庸 (keeping to the centrality). Finally, he discusses the flexibility of *junzi* in the exercise of *quan* 權 (moral discretion) in exigent circumstances.¹¹

¹¹ I should mention here that Antonio Cua was the first to submit his chapter to me, before he sadly passed away, which was a great loss of the academic world of Chinese and comparative philosophy. Indeed, Antonio Cua himself was a *junzi*. Were his spirit still around somewhere, I would like to use this occasion to thank him for this excellent contribution.

Chapter 14 by BAI Tongdong will focus on early Confucian political philosophy and discuss its contemporary relevance. This chapter, based on its analysis of the Four Books, argues that the political dimension of human life should be taken as the key concern of early Confucians, and, seen from their problematic, their political philosophy has a very strong relevance for today. Bai even claims that it is more justified to call the early Confucians “modern” rather than “classical” thinkers in the Western sense. This chapter shows how the early Confucians answer some of the key problems of their times, especially the search for a new social glue, and tries to make explicit the relevance of their thoughts for today. This chapter shows also how the early Confucians answer other key issues of their time, especially the selection of the ruling class. It argues also that the regime proposed by the early Confucians and their philosophical considerations can serve as a critique of contemporary liberal democratic regimes, and that could inspire us to think on ways to a more constructive political system.

In Chap. 15, entitled On Confucian Self-cultivation and Ultimate Reality, YAN Zhonghu discusses, with an approach that is both conceptual and existential, Confucius’ concept of *tian* 天 (Heaven) as the Ultimate Reality. Based on Confucius’ own words, he develops the idea of *tian* as the force behind all natural processes, as a conscious being and as the assigner of a person’s earthly mission. Then he discusses how this concept of Ultimate Reality is involved in the self-cultivation of the three major Confucian virtues of wisdom (*zhi* 知/智), humanity (*ren* 仁), and courage (*yong* 勇) that make a person fully human. Yan’s emphasis on *yong* or courage, a virtue that enables one to face life’s challenges, is most interesting. He claims that Confucius himself demonstrated great courage in the face of danger or death because of his firm belief in the Way of Heaven in much the same way that Christians hold belief in God in the face of existential despair.

In the last chapter of this book, serving as its conclusion, Li Chenyang discusses classical Confucian philosophy of harmony, as well as its program for realizing harmony in the world. He explores the meaning and the ideal of world harmony as illustrated in Confucian classics, and the guiding principles toward world harmony from the Confucian perspective. This chapter is both reconstructive and constructive. It aims to draw on various ideas espoused by ancient Confucian philosophers and to connect the dots in order to present a coherent picture of the Confucian ideal of world harmony. Li claims that, for today, the three classical Confucian principles, that is, the primacy of moral force, empathetic understanding of others, and harmony with differences, together constitute the foundation of Confucian philosophy for world harmony. They are the valuable contributions that Confucians make to the contemporary world.

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Part I
Historical Development

Chapter 2

The Fading of Political Theology and the Rise of Creative Humanism

Vincent Shen

To understand the origin of classical Confucianism in the historical context of ancient China, we need to know first how ancient Chinese thought moved from the religious experience with High God's or Heaven's revealing to the humanist construction of the meaningfulness of human existence. This concerns the way early Chinese people conceived the Ultimate Reality in terms of *shangdi* 上帝 (High God) or *tian* 天 (Heaven) and His/Its revelation. In particular, this was shown through the evolution of their religious experience and the rise of a creative humanism in the process of ancient Chinese history. It is evidenced by such major texts as the *Shangshu* 尚書 (*Book of Documents*) and the *Yijing* 易經 (*Classics of Changes*),¹ and the development of this legacy till the time of Confucius. In order to examine this development, we will also need to touch upon, albeit very briefly, the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*) and the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (*Spring and Autumn Annals*). Thus this chapter will serve the purpose of introducing the basic philosophical ideas in these Confucian Classics and their historical changes.

¹ The Chapter *Hong Fan* 洪範 (Grand Model) in the *Shangshu* 尚書 (Book of Documents), and the *Yijing* 易經 (*Classics of Changes*) were seen by Thomé H. Fang as the two major sources of Classical Confucianism, or Primordial Confucianism as he calls it, at its origin (Fang 1981: 2, 38, 539). The *Yijing*, though usually translated by scholars as *Book of Changes* in the past, is translated here as *Classics of Changes*, to transmit the meaning of the term *jing* as “Classics.”

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1 High God or Heaven's Revealing in Ancient China

Like many civilizations in the world, Chinese culture arose in deep relation with its religious experiences. Etymologically, the term 神 *shen* (God, divinities, or spirit) and all things related to God or divinities, such as 禮 *li* (ritual), 祭 *ji* (religious sacrifice), were all composed of the idea of revealing: the root *shi* 示 meant “the revealing of signs from Heaven manifesting good fortune or misfortune” (*tian chuxiang yi jian jixiong* 天垂象以見吉凶). Now, one of the implicit philosophical questions in this kind of religious experience is: How did ancient Chinese people conceive the Ultimate Reality and what was the relation between human beings and the Ultimate Reality? This is indeed a religious question with deep philosophical implications.

In ancient China the answer to this question was conceived, in particular in the Shang Dynasty (1751–1112BCE), in terms of the High God (*shangdi* 上帝) and His revelation to individuals and various ethnic groups. Historically speaking, in ancient China, there was a very strong faith in a High God, named as *di* 帝 or *shangdi* in the Shang Dynasty, or *tian* 天 (Heaven) in the Zhou Dynasty (1111–249BCE), though always within a polytheistic context. In Shang Dynasty, *di* or *shangdi*, arguably evolved from the Shang people's cult of ancestry, dominated over a pantheon of divinities composed of natural powers (like the sun, Yellow River, mountains, etc.), former lords, and pre-dynastic ancestors.

In the Zhou dynasty, *tian* 天 evolved from *di* into a more universal power symbolized by the physical sky covering universally all things under it. It was no longer limited to the ancestral divinity, but rather was the supreme ruler of both human society and the whole universe, which was still not independent of the surrounding multiple divinities, such as those of mountains and rivers, ancestral spirits, and even those of the stove and the household shrine.² In the period of transition from Shang to Zhou, the concepts of *di* and *tian* were sometimes used interchangeably, although the direction was moving toward the more universal idea of *tian*.

To the earliest Chinese mind, the Ultimate Reality, either as *shangdi* or as *tian*, was accessible to human beings through prayer or sacrifice; also it revealed itself through natural/supernatural phenomena and historical events produced by human action. In ancient China, the earliest form of text that recorded both natural/supernatural phenomena and historical events was from the *wu* 巫. Their functions were very similar to a shaman, supposed to be capable of communicating with the High God, spirits and ghosts and they served as professional diviners, using objects, dream contents, and astronomical phenomena as revealing messages from *di* or *shangdi* or other forms of spirits. Therefore we may call the Chinese earliest historians *wu*-historians (*wushi* 巫史): *wu* conducted and recorded the results of divination, itself an important part of the state ritual, for what was asked in each divination involved important events for the state and public life. This is to say that

²As evidenced by Wan-shun Jia's conversation with Confucius: “It is better to pay homage to the spirit of the stove than to the spirits of the household shrine. What does this mean?” The Master replied: “It is not so. A person who offends against *tian* has no where to pray” (*Analects* 3.13; Ames and Rosemont 1998: 85).

Chinese history started with divinatory records, or records of God's revealing, usually on the shoulder bones of bigger animals such as cows and sheep, and on the tortoise shell, as well as records on the bronze stencils, such as inscriptions on the bronze tripods. These records showed, first, the time and place of the divination and the name of the diviner(s); second, the intended question for the divination; third, the divinatory explanation concerning the revealing of the good fortune or misfortune of the act in question, based on the interpretation of the crackled signs on the bones or tortoise shell; and fourth, words of verification that recorded the facts that verified the revealed divine will.³ These indeed were the first historical records in China. When we come to the transition from late Shang to early Zhou in the twelfth century BCE, there the earliest part of the *Yijing* (the *Classics of Changes*), such as the *guaci* 卦辭 (hexagram dictum), and *yaoci* 爻辭 (stroke dictum), somehow still kept the record more or less this way. These texts in the *Yijing* could be seen as records of divinatory actions, though taken to be and interpreted as the exemplar texts by later generations because they were conducted by Sage-Kings.

As mentioned previously, ancient Chinese people had faith in a High God, the *di* 帝 or *shangdi* 上帝 in the Shang Dynasty, or *tian* 天 (Heaven) in the Zhou Dynasty, and His revealing to human beings their fortune/misfortune when taking a particular course of action. In Shang dynasty, the idea of Mandate from divinities justified the political leaders' power. However, during the time of transition, Zhou people, in order to justify its revolution against the tyranny of the King Zhou 紂 of Shang, though still keeping the idea of Mandate (of Heaven now for Zhou people), would believe that the Mandate was always assured by the kings' virtues. However, even if the Mandate of Heaven was primarily assured by political leaders' ethical virtues, there was still a strong feeling that it was hard to maintain the Mandate, and therefore the practice of asking the advice of Heaven's will via divination was always a part of state rituals. Many poems in the *Shijing* 詩經 (*The Classics of Poetry*) showed deep admiration of King Wen's virtue, though still with a sense of uncertainty because the Mandate was hard to maintain:

*The Mandate of Heaven,
How beautiful and unceasing!
Oh, how glorious
Was the purity of King Wen's virtue!
With blessings he overwhelms us.
We will receive the blessings.
They are a great favor from our King Wen.
May his descendants hold fast to them.* (Chan 1963: 6)

Or again,

*Heaven's Mandate is not constant,
The officers of Yin were fine and alert,
They assist at the libation in our Capital,
.....*

³These records can be seen in the early divinatory texts written on turtle shells and bones, see for example, Wu Haoshen and Pan Yu 1985: 86–87.

*Cultivate your virtue,
 Always strive to be in harmony with Heaven's Mandate.
 Seek for yourself the many blessings.
 Before Yin lost its army,
 Its kings were able to be counterparts to the Lord on High.
 In Yin you should see as in a mirror
 That the Mandate is not easy to keep. (Chan 1963: 7)*

In the first poem we read that the Mandate of Heaven was related to King Wen's virtue and there was an overwhelming admiration for him; however, in the second there was a warning of the difficulty in keeping Heaven's Mandate, which was seen as "not constant." Since the Mandate of Heaven was hard to keep, even by means of one's virtue, there was always need of divine revelation to see God's will, for human virtue was not an absolute assurance of Heaven's Mandate and would never be able to replace God's revealing.

It was arguably certain, as evidenced by all historic records and archeological findings, that Shang people were very religious and always conducted divination to the *di* or *shangdi*. Their kings and princes always practiced divination before any major action was taken, such as an act of war, marriage, diplomacy, travelling, hunting, paying an important visit. Special officers were in charge of divination, named *buren* 卜人 or *zhenren* 真人 (diviners). The results of divination were seen as revealing the will of *di* or *shangdi*, as shown in the *Fragments of Shang Divination*. There we read such texts as: "The King divined as such...With the approval of *di* (帝若)"; "*di* does not approve (帝不若)"; "The King makes the divination, and says: the result is auspicious, with the approval of *di*" (王占曰:吉,帝若) (Guo 1978: 745, 1173).

This was also the legacy of Shang as perceived and understood by the Zhou people. Thus we read in the Chapter *Hongfan* 洪範 (*Great Model*) of the *Shangshu* (*Book of Documents*), supposedly exposing a legacy consisting of nine categories coming down from Shang Dynasty and told by Shang's Viscount of *Ji* 箕 to King Wu of Zhou. In the seventh Category we read,

The Seven Category is the Examination of doubts. Select and appoint officers for divination by tortoise shells and by stalks, and command them thus to divine... The calculation of the passage of events is the function of experts whose duty is to perform the divination. If you have any doubt about important matters, consult with your own heart, with your ministers and officers, with the common people, and the tortoise shells and stalks. (Chan 1963: 10)

It is clear from this text that, according to Shang legacy, divination was used in the process of decision making for any important action to be taken. Divination (with tortoise shells and stalks) played a major role in achieving consensus, together with other components of decision making such as the political leader's judgment (consult with your own heart), consultation with experts (with your ministers and officers), and semi-democratic participation (with the common people). The function of divination in achieving consensus is supported by a later text, the *Shenzi* 慎子, in which we read, "Therefore the purpose of using divinatory stalks and tortoise shell is to establish consensus" (Shen 1972: 2, my translation).

As to the procedure of divination, the king first had to make clear his intention or purpose about what was to be asked before the divination. Then he proceeded to the act of divination by burning a tortoise shell or a piece of the shoulder bone of a cow,

and after it showed a pattern of crackling, he obtained the interpretation of it from the diviners. Usually the same divination was performed by three different persons, of which the agreed results (lucky or unlucky) of two were taken as revealing the will of High God or Heaven. The decision was therefore made on the rule of majority. This was also confirmed by the *Great Appendix II* of the *Yijing* where it was said, “When three people perform together, their number decreases by one. When one person performs alone, he finds a companion. This is to say their words agree with each other’s” (Zhu 1999: 258).⁴ As shown in the *Fragments of Shang Divination*, as well as in the *Book of Documents*, there were cases in which divination was practiced by two persons, the so-called “*er ren gongzhen*” (二人共貞 co-divination by two persons), in which the agreement of the two diviners was essential for making a decision. That is why in the *Great Appendix* of the *Yijing*, it was said, “Two people with the same heart. This is in favor of achieving a decisive resolution like cutting a metal” (Zhu 1999: 241, my translation).

In the early period of Zhou, the tortoise shell was still quite often used in the divination to make decisions, although the final decision regarding a major political act always had to be made by the king himself. For example, in his choice of Hao as Capital of Zhou, King Wu performed the divination by tortoise shell and made the decision, as the *Shijing* reads,

He examined and divined, did the King.
About settling in the capital of Hao.
The tortoise shell decided the site,
And King Wu completed it.
A sovereign true was King Woo! (Legge 1949a: 463)

It should be noted that there were always factors that rendered the result of divination uncertain. For example, sometimes the results were contradictory and therefore no consensus was obtained; or, sometimes a king, following his own desire, did not listen to the result of the divination, or he listened only to the result in favor of his own desire. We will come back to these issues a little later when we discuss the uncertainty of God’s revealing via divination.

2 Political Theology in the Revealed World Image

In fact, the legacy of Shang’s divination was retold by the Zhou historian in the *Hongfan* 洪範 (Grand Model) chapter of the *Book of Documents*. In this document, we find a historical narrative representing a political theology. There was reported the Nine Categories constituting a worldview with an emphasis on the ideal of politics and human affairs as supported by the intelligible structure of the world. It was said there that King Wu of Zhou, in 1121BCE, the 13th year of his reign after having conquered Shang, went to ask Shang’s Viscount of *Ji* about the principle of

⁴There are many available Chinese editions of the *Yijing*. However, for the convenience of reference, I will use Zhu 1999.

achieving good relations among people. Though the Viscount of *Ji* refused to serve Zhou by reason of his fidelity to Shang, nevertheless he told King Wu the wisdom of the Grand Model, as a legacy from the Emperor Yu of Xia dynasty. He said,

I have heard that of old Gun (Great Yu's father) dammed up the flood and thereby created a chaos among the Five Agents. The di was aroused to anger and did not give him the Great Nine Categories. The various virtues and their relations declined in due course, and Gun was executed. Yu thereupon rose to continue the heritage. Heaven gave him the Great Norm with its nine categories. And the various virtues and their relations were regulated. (Chan 1963: 9)

Thus, the *Hongfan* was seen, or at least thus interpreted in the text, as a revelation of the High God to Yu 禹, in giving him a somewhat structural vision of the world in nine categories constituting the earliest Chinese vision and concepts of Nature, human activities and their excellence, politics and good governance according to my classification:

1. Concerning the vision of Nature, we find in the *Hongfan* several categories related to the elements and process of Nature. The first category concerned the five agents or five dynamic elements, namely Water, Fire, Wood, Metal, and Earth that constituted the basic elements of the natural world. They should not be seen as five functions of life as some would presume or as five phases of history as Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104BCE), the Confucian scholars of Western Han Dynasty, would interpret. Also, the fourth category concerned the five arrangements or divisions of time, namely, the year, the month, the day, the stars, and zodiacal signs, and the calendrical calculation. Also there was the eighth category of confirmation from the weather, namely, rain, sunshine, heat, cold, wind, and seasonableness.
2. Concerning human activities and their excellence, there was the second category of five activities, which concerned moral and intellectual conduct and their virtues: “The second category is the Five Activities, namely appearance, speech, seeing, hearing, and thinking. The virtue of appearance is respectfulness; that of speech is accord [with reason]. That of seeing is clarity; that of hearing is distinctness; and that of thinking is penetration and profundity” (Chan 1963: 9). About the happiness and misfortune of human life, we see in the ninth category of five blessings of happiness (longevity, wealth, physical and mental health, cultivation of excellent virtues, and an end crowning a good life) and six misfortunes (premature death, sickness, sorrow, poverty, wickedness, and weakness).
3. Concerning politics and governance, there we find the third category of eight governmental offices, which concerned branches of administration, such as “food, commodities, sacrifices, public works, education, justice, the reception of guests, and the army.” The fifth category of the Grand (Royal) Ultimate will be discussed below. The sixth category of three virtues governed in a way responding to different people and different times: “correctness and uprightness, strong government and weak government. In times of peace and tranquility, apply correctness and uprightness; in times of violent disorder, apply strong government; in times of harmony and order, apply weak government. Apply strong

government to the reserved and retiring, and apply weak government to the lofty and intelligent” (Ibid.). Also, there is the seventh category of the examination of doubts, which we have already mentioned above.

The most important, central to all these nine categories, is the fifth, which concerned the category of the Royal (Grand) Ultimate. We read,

Fifth, of Royal Ultimate, the highest, having established his highest standard of excellence, accumulates the five happiness and diffuses them to bestow to the people. Then the people will keep with you the ultimate standard. Without deflection, without unevenness, pursue royal righteousness; without any selfish likings, pursue the royal way. Without any selfish likings, pursue the royal path.

Without partiality, without deflection, the royal path is level and ease. Without perversity, without one-sidedness, the royal path is right and straight. Seeing this perfect excellence, turn to this perfect excellence. (Legge 1991: 331–332)

As central to all nine categories, the Royal Ultimate was theological in the sense that it was bestowed and revealed by *di* 帝, as was said, “these words stated in the Royal Ultimate were instruction not from the kings but from the *di*” to become the ultimate principle of the royal power, which was to become impartial and universalizable, without deflection, without selfishness. Told to the conqueror by a Viscount belonging to the conquered ethnic group, it might be a request of fairness and impartiality of the conqueror to the conquered. But, beyond that, the idea of centrality or middleness interpreted as impartiality or fairness had its universalizable meaning for all individuals and all social groups toward many others. With it, royal power or political leaders would be able to bring the five blessings, as indicated in the ninth category, to their people as mentioned previously, that is, longevity, wealth, physical and mental health, cultivation of excellent virtues, and a good end crowning a good life, which have long been the core values of Chinese people.

Besides its social political meaning, the idea of centrality as fairness and impartiality expressed in the category of the Royal Ultimate had also its religious meaning. Similar to Mircea Eliade’s claim that religious man experienced the world as having a sacred centre and sought to live there, the centrality as affirmed in the fifth category was to be seen as the *axis mundi*, the vertical centrality as the centre of the world and as linking together all three cosmic levels: Heaven, earth and the underworld. This justified their belief that their world was holy because it was closest to the center of the universe. Eliade noted that temples might be seen as equivalents of sacred mountains. Religious man might understand his world as being at the center of the world on three scales: country, city, and sanctuary. In this view, in Shang Dynasty, An Yang 安陽 was seen by the Yin people as the center of the world; however, for the Zhou Dynasty, Hao Jing 鎬京 was seen by the Zhou people as the center of the world. There might be other centers of the world according to different ethnic groups.

The words of Viscount Ji marked also the transition from Shang to Zhou. In the text, the term *di* 帝 (High God) was first used, but later changed to the term *tian* 天 (heaven). That is why we should see the *Hongfan* as already a perception of Shang legacy by the people of Zhou. In Zhou dynasty, the concept of *di* evolved into that

of *tian*, a more universal divine power no longer limited to the ancestral divinity, but rather the supreme ruler of both human society and the whole universe. While in the period of transition these two concepts were sometimes used interchangeably, the basic direction was moving toward the more universalizable idea of *tian*.

3 The Decline of Political Theology

The dependence on the revealing of God had declined as the concept of Ultimate Reality underwent a process of change, first from *di* or *shandi* to *tian*, and then the idea of *tian* itself also changed to a more humanistic interpretation. It was not only that institutionally, in the Zhou dynasty, the division of work made diviner and historian two different jobs, which were, again, differentiated into various functions. Also, the divination itself became more technical and was full of uncertainty of God's revealing. These factors explain the fading of political theology and the move toward more humanistic intellectual concerns.

First, in the Zhou dynasty, the division of work became more differentiated and complicated. The *Zhouli* 周禮, a book arguably produced in the Warring States, when discussing Zhou institutions, talked about the distinction between the diviner (*bu* 卜), the priest (*zhu* 祝), the shaman dancers (*wu* 巫, again divided into male *wu* and female *wu*), and the historian (*shi* 史). The *shi* was again divided into great historian (*dashi* 大史) and small historian (*xiaoshi* 小史). It mentioned also the internal historians (*neishi* 內史), and external historians (*waishi* 外史), and royal historians (*yushi* 御史) (see *Zhouli*: 37–41). All these institutional distinctions and functions might be an idealistic plan-making rather than a factual description of the Zhou Institution. However, we can tell at least that from the Zhou dynasty onward, the historians were separated from the diviners. When divested of their religious function of divination, historians in the Zhou dynasty were keepers of royal books and records, and they gave advice to kings and political leaders, based on the experience of the past as shown in these textual records. This was the cradle of all intellectuals, thinkers, and therefore philosophers, before they could rise from among common people in later ages like those after the Spring and Autumn period. The revealing of God's will therefore changed to the revealing of meaning through the interpretation of events, plots and their textual records. The narrative itself revealed meaning by way of interpretation. Indeed, historians preceded the rise of philosophers, and some philosophers had once been historians, like Laozi, who was said to have served as a keeper of the Royal library in Zhou's court.

Second, the decline of political theology was also caused by the uncertainty of the results of divination as to God's revelation. Sometimes the results were contradictory among themselves, and sometimes they depended on the king's choice, as when a king, following his own desire, did not listen to the result of the divinatory, or listened only to the result in favor of his own desire, such as in the story narrated by the *Zuo's Commentary to the Spring and Autumn Annals*. In the 4th year of Duke Xi's 僖公

reign (655BCE), Duke Xian of Jin State 晉獻公 desired to marry Liji 驪姬, a woman famous for her beauty. The tortoise shell predicted that this would be unlucky. However, the milfoil predicted it lucky. The duke said, “I will follow the milfoil.” The diviner of tortoise shell said, “The milfoil is inferior to the tortoise shell. Better follow the latter.” The diviner added that if the duke married Liji, there would be catastrophic consequences. However the duke did not listen to this advice, and married Liji (Legge 1949b: 141–142, translation modified and *pinyin* used). This was a case of a king who listened only to the result in favor of his own desire, which meant, despite the necessity of practicing the ritual of divination, the king wanted to hold his fate in his own hands.

In other cases, the results of divination might be contradictory, which would make the revealing of the Divine will uncertain. For example, in the 7th month of the 6th year of Ai Duke’s 哀公 reign (489BCE), the King Zhao of Chu 楚昭王, while settled in Chengfu 城父, intended to succor Cheng 陳 State; therefore he consulted the tortoise shell about fighting, and got an unfavorable answer. Then he consulted it about retreating, and got another unfavorable answer. Facing these contradictory results, King Zhao said, “If it’s to die all the same, it’s better to die rather than defeating the Chu army. It’s better to die than to turn back to our ally and evade the enemy. If I have to die in both cases, I’ll die at the hands of my enemy.” Then he made a decision to attack (Legge 1949b: 810).

The contradiction of divinatory results showed itself the uncertainty of God’s revealing, and pushed political leaders, as holders of the collective destiny, to appeal to either more humane values, as in the aforementioned case, or more rational explanation. Here is an example of the rational explanation: on the 5th month of the 24th year of Duke Zhao’s 昭公 reign (518BCE), there was an eclipse of the sun, regarding which Zisheng 梓慎 said, “There will be floods.” However, Zhaozi 昭子 said, “There will be drought.” The reason given by Zhaozi was that “The sun has passed the equinox, and the *yang* influence has not predominated. When it does so, it will be in a very great degree, and we must have drought. The *yang* influence, not getting vent, will be accumulated” (Legge 1949b: 701). This is a much more rational, meteorological and astronomical explanation, based on the movement of stars, such as that of the sun over the equinox, and the interchange of the forces of *yin* and *yang*, against the divinatory prediction.

Sometimes the reaction was more humanistic and against any blind belief in God’s intervention. Here is a case of Zichan’s 子產 humanistic response to the divination: According to the *Zuo’s commentary on Spring and Autumn Annals*, in the month of May of the 18th year of Duke Zhao’s reign (524BCE), it was narrated that,

The Star Huo made its first appearance at dusk, On Binzi there was wind, and Zisheng predicted fire would break out there in seven days.... In a few days, messengers from Song state, Wei state, Chen state and Zheng State all reported cases of fire. Bei Zhao said, “If you don’t do as I said, Zheng will suffer from fire again.” The people begged that his advice be taken.... Zichan replied, “The Way of heaven is distant, while the Way of Man near. We cannot reach to the former, what means have we of knowing it? How should Zhao know the Way of Heaven? He is a great talker, and we need not wonder if his words sometime come true. (Legge 1949b: 671)

Zichan's comment that the diviner was a great talker and thereby his words sometimes came true showed a certain probabilistic view on the fulfillment of divinatory prediction. This was also related to the feeling of the uncertainty of divine revelation and the contingency by which a diviner's prediction might just happen to come true. Also, Zichan's thought that the Way of Heaven was far and the Way of Man near, emphasizing a humanistic concern with the Way of man, would lead also to the reasonableness of human words and deeds rather than God's will. It was in this spirit that Zhao Wenzhi 趙文子, after listening to one of Zichan's discourses, said, "His speeches are reasonable. To go against reasonable speeches is inauspicious" (Legge 1949b: 516). Here the good or misfortune seemed to depend on human reasonableness rather than divine will.

Note that all these recorded events happened during Confucius' life time. Confucius (551–479BCE), who in his late 50s was troubled by the difficulties of his exile and therefore focused on the study of the *Yijing*, giving philosophical comments on it and practicing divination using milfoil rather than tortoise shell, knew all these that evoked a more humanistic attitude towards divination.

Third, the successive changes in the concept of Ultimate Reality also laid a metaphysical/religious foundation that did not require reference to divine revelation and led to a stronger sense of its uncertainty. In Chinese religious and philosophical history, not only had the Shang people's concept of *di* or *shangdi* changed to the Zhou people's concept of *tian*, the idea of *tian* itself had also undergone changes after the rise of Confucianism and Daoism. It had changed from its religious transcendental meaning to more human-centered meaning. As said previously, the earlier concept of *tian*, in the *Classics of Poetry* and the *Book of Documents*, as a personal God capable of revealing Himself had changed at the time of Confucius (551–479BCE), who, whilst keeping its religious meaning, focused more on a humanistic concern. Then, through the mediation of Zisi 子思 (493–406BCE) to Mencius (371–289BCE), *tian* was seen more like the highest principle of morality immanent in and therefore accessible to human nature. In the *Zhongyong (Doctrine of the Mean)*, usually attributed to Zisi, the concept of *cheng* 誠, which meant sincerity on the psychological and ethical level, meant also True Reality on the metaphysical level. For Mencius, if one could unfold fully one's heart/mind, one should be able to understand one's own nature, and when one understood one's own nature, one understood *tian*. This means there was a humanistic tendency in classical Confucianism that turned the transcendent *tian* into an immanent principle accessible to human subjectivity, in the process of which political theology would fade away.

All these reasons explain why political theology was replaced by humanism, though still open to divine revelation and the cosmic dynamism. The focus now was on human beings as agents, and on events and stories as revealing their destiny. Certainly something true and meaningful must be revealed in the existential time as constituted of events and human actions, not in the abstract time as form of succession and continuity. The meaning of human life consisted not in revealing a substantial spiritual Being imposing His will on human beings, but rather in human creativity in accord with Dao manifesting itself in the process of the universe.

4 The Rise of the *Classics of Changes*

The *Yijing* 易經 (*Classics of Changes*) is one of the oldest classics of Chinese philosophy. In fact, it was originally a book of divination of the Zhou people. The act of divination concerned the consultation of the oracles of good or bad omen in order to know the good fortune or misfortune of the action to be taken or in people's future destiny. However, even in this act of asking, somehow with a sense of passive waiting for the divine response in terms of revelation, we find already in the *Yijing* the emergence of active participation of human agents, which led eventually to the philosophical construction of a meaningful existence. In the act of divination of the *Yijing*, there was a search for the ethical meaning of the divine revelation and then a deeper concern with the manifestation of the direction of changes. From this concern with the vector of becoming in the universe, there emerged a philosophical interpretation and conceptual construction of creative humanism.

In the Shang dynasty, mostly the tortoise shell or the shoulder bones of cows were used for divination, because they were used in the religious ceremonies and therefore considered to be imbued with mystic powers. Divination was a way of deciphering what came out naturally as signs resulting from the burning and crackling of the tortoise shell or bones, and the results were seen as representing the will of *di* or *shangdi*. When we come to the Zhou Dynasty, there was a change from the use of tortoise shell to that of the milfoil, although in its early period the tortoise shell was still quite often used to make decisions. The divinatory method of *Zhouyi*, when created by King Wen, founder of the Zhou dynasty, still used tortoise shells, as indicated by some of the *guaci* 卦辭 (hexagram dictums) and *yaoci* 爻辭 (stroke dictums). For example, the *guaci* of Hexagram 27 Yi 頤 said, "Second Sixth. Someone gives you a precious tortoise, costing about 100 shells, don't refuse the gift." Or, the *guaci* of the Hexagram Yi said, "First Ninth. Give up your own spirit tortoise, and observe my mouth eating. Bad omen."⁵

Thus the change might have been caused by the fact that tortoise shell was precious and not commonly available. Milfoil or yellow stalks were, on the other hand, more easily accessible. Therefore, at the times of Spring and Autumn (722–481BCE) and Warring States (403–222BCE), divination in consultation with the *Zhouyi* changed to the use of milfoil or yellow stalks. The first historical record of the use of this method is found in the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (*Zuo's Commentary of the Spring and Autumn Annals*). In the 22nd year of Duke Zhuang's 莊公 reign (672BCE), it was recorded that, "In the younger days of Jingzhong 敬仲, the Marquis of Chen had met a Zhou historian who showed him the *Zhouyi*. The Marquis of Chen asked him to perform the divination by stalks [on the future of the boy]. When he found the

⁵For the Chinese text of the *Yijing*, I use the convenient version of Zhu 1999. However, this version, like many other traditional versions, has the fault of anachronism or at least historical confusion by inserting the *tuanci* 象辭 (Judgment Text) under the *guaci* 卦辭 (hexagram dictum), and *xiangci* 象辭 (Symbolism Text) under *yaoci* 爻辭 (line dictum). Now we know there must be at least more than seven hundred years' difference between them. In the following, all the English translations are of mine. I will not specify their pages.

hexagram *guan* 觀 **going toward** *pi* 否 hexagram, he said, “here is the deliverance: we behold the light of the State. This is auspicious for one to be the King’s guest”” (Legge 1949b: 102–103; translation modified).

This historical record showed for the first time that the divination according to the *Zhouyi* was practiced in Chen State, in particular in performing “the divination by stalks.” It is reasonable to presume that, after this method was invented by King Wen, its use was limited only to the Zhou court before it spread into other states. It was around the early years of the Spring and Autumn that other states, such as here the State of Chen, began to practice the *Zhouyi* divination by stalks and took its texts such as *guaci* and *yaoci* as objects of interpretation in order to reveal the meaning and future development of an event, a person or an issue at stake in the divination. Also, it was first recorded here that, each time the diviners got a hexagram in divination, they used the method of *biangua* 變卦 (in the previous quotation, “the hexagram *guan* **going toward** *pi* hexagram”) to see how things were going to evolve. They then consulted the *gua* dictum and the *yao* dictums in order to know the manifestation of the divine will and its evolution for the decision of the good or bad omen of things and persons in question.

In comparison with the use of tortoise shell, the use of milfoil/yellow stalks was technically more manageable and thereby gave a sense of human participation in knowing the revealing of God’s will and in controlling one’s own destiny.⁶ Since the time of late Spring and Autumn and the Warring States, to consult the *Yijing*, people used milfoil, a divining plant, to obtain a hexagram and its *biangua*, and to consult their *guaci* and *yaoci* and interpret their meaning by him/herself or with the diviner. This depended much on the interpretative function of human reason and the choice made, according to the rules of divination, by human beings in referring also to their reasoning and judgment. In the divination by tortoise shell there was less space for the intervention of human subjectivity, whereas in the divination by yarrow stalks there was more possibility for such an intervention, thus leading to a more humanist construction of a meaningful world. Divination, even though still in use, became more a technique for making decisions and attaining consensus, rather than for revealing God’s will as such. Confucius, who in his later years practiced the divinatory method using milfoil rather than tortoise shell, took more a humanistic and philosophical attitude towards divination, as he said, “I look into the *Yijing* only for its ethical and philosophical meaning” (in Zhao: 269).

5 Divination, Ethical Interpretation, and Philosophical Construction

We have to put the revelation of divine will in the *Yijing* in the context of ancient Chinese people’s effort to construct a meaningful world on both an individual and collective level. I consider the world of meaningfulness in the *Yijing* as moving from divination to ethical interpretation, and then from ethical interpretation to a philosophical,

⁶Thus, this method was used first only in the court of Zhou, before it became more popular in other states, and was last used by Qin state in the West and Chu State in the south.

in particular cosmological, construction. In this process, the uncertainty of God's revealing and the inclination to rely on human factors played a great role in pushing the development of human thought towards rational and philosophical considerations of people's destiny.

This can be seen first from the textual composition of the *Yijing*, which is constituted of two parts: the older part is called the *Zhouyi* 周易 (Zhou's Book of Changes), and the newer part is called the *Yizhuan* 易傳 (Interpretations of the *Zhouyi*). The earliest version of the *Zhouyi* was merely constituted of 64 hexagrams with *gua* (hexagram) dictums and *yao* (lines) dictums. Historically these were the record of divinations in the late Shang and early Zhou periods. The results of these divinations were usually obtained by burning the tortoise shell or ox shoulder bone. However, the textual record of divination done in the past with regard to historical events became the sample texts to be consulted by later diviners. These, like the Shang oracles, could be seen as historical records of early Zhou people's divination, and since these divinations were related to major actions taken by their founding political leaders, they were taken by later diviners as exemplar texts. Therefore, as historical texts, they could be read together with other texts such as *Classics of Odes* and *Book of Documents* to get a more complete picture of China's ancient history. As divinatory texts, these recorded the divinations of Zhou Dynasty's founders, while in later days they began to serve as exemplary divinatory texts susceptible of various interpretations by subsequent generations.

This is to say that, since the early Spring and Autumn period, the *Zhouyi* served as exemplar divinatory texts, seemingly because of the fact that they were done by King Wen, King Wu, and the Duke of Zhou, honored as Sage Kings or Sages by later generations. Thus their status changed from being the textual records of the original manifestation of divine will to that of model texts susceptible to various interpretations, sometimes even conflicting interpretations, by many diviners on different occasions in later times. This was a change from manifestation-revealing to hermeneutic-revealing, though always targeting the will of the divine. In the hermeneutic-revealing, a diviner, with a due process of using divinatory stalks, got one hexagram, which, in the case of *biangua*, changed to another hexagram, and then he consulted the *guaci* (hexagram dictum) to interpret it properly in order to answer the inquirer's question by message of the revealed divine will. Then, he consulted the *yaoci*, i.e. the stroke dictums, and through his interpretation, sought to figure the unfolding of the event by interpreting them one after another.

On the other hand, the *Yizhuan* (Interpretations of the *Zhouyi*) appeared mostly in the late Spring and Autumn and Warring States. Historically they were attributed to Confucius; however, there were some texts produced by later hands, even as late as the time of the Han dynasty, which sought to give a systematic interpretation to the *Zhouyi*. Among these interpretations, the *Xiangzhuan* (象傳 Symbolism Interpretations) almost always gave ethical interpretations of the *guaci* and *yaoci*, while the *Tuanzhuan* (彖傳 Judgment Interpretations), though quite often delivering ethical interpretation, referred from time to time to the cosmological background of ethics. For example, in the Judgment Interpretation of Hexagram 1 *Qian* 乾, it was said,

Great indeed is *Qian* the Original, by which myriad things start to exist. It dominates over the process of the whole universe. It moves the cloud and gives the rain, and all kinds and

categories of things form themselves and change with it. From beginning to end, the sun drives six dragons timely to run over the sky. With the Way *Qian* changes and transforms, each and everything fulfill their genuine nature and destiny, while altogether they achieve an optimal harmony. *Qian* is that which gives birth to myriad things, and that which renders myriad countries peaceful. (Zhu 1999: 30)

We should say that the texts in the First and Second *Xici* 繫詞 (*Great Appendixes*), together with the *Xugua* 序卦 (*Sequence of the Hexagrams*) and the beginning chapters of the *Shuogua* 說卦 (*Remarks on the Trigrams*) were the most philosophical texts in the *Yijing*. They established a systematic interpretation of the *dao* of all things and the principles of human affairs contained implicitly in the *Zhouyi*. It is mostly in these texts that *the Yijing* became a book of philosophy, because here it extended to all realms of existence, not limiting itself to the function of divination and telling the good/bad fortune of human affairs. As to its comprehensive functions, the *Great Appendix* says,

The *Yijing* contains a fourfold *dao* of sages. As to speech, one should be guided by its words; as to action, one should be guided by its changes; as to making utensil, one should be guided by its images; as to divination, one should be guided by its oracle. Therefore the superior man, whenever he has to take a certain action, or to depart for somewhere, consults the *Yijing*, and he does so in articulating his intent in words. The *Yi* responds to his query like an echo; no matter it is far or near, dark or deep, he learns of the things of the future. (Zhu 1999: 246)

As we can see, here divination is only one of the four functions of the *Yijing*. Besides divination, it has also the functions of guiding discourse, taking action, and technological invention, therefore touching upon various aspects of human existence and diverse things in the universe, to which the principles elaborated by the *Yijing* all apply. Thus, the *Xici* 繫辭 says, “The *Yi* 易 is that which has enabled the sages to reach all depths and to grasp the initial moment of all things. Only through knowing its depth could one penetrate all intents of people under Heaven. Only through knowing the initial moment can one complete all affairs under Heaven. Since it is so spiritual, one can achieve all rapidly without being in haste and reach the goal without further ado” (ibid).

In short, the development from the 64 hexagrams, the *gua* dictums, and the *yao* dictums, which constituted the *Zhouyi*, to the *Xiangzhuan* (象傳 Symbolism Interpretations), which were attached to these original texts, was a development from divination to ethical interpretation; then, through the mediation of the *Tuanzhuan* (彖傳 Judgment Interpretations), the *Yijing* turned to the cosmological and comprehensive visions developed in the *Xici*, *Xuguazhuan*, and *Shuoguzhuan*. This was a development from ethical interpretation to philosophical construction.

6 Natural Regularity and Logical Structure

Divination was an act of asking for the manifestation of God’s will with regard to a particular course of action. Unlike God in the Bible, the *shangdi* or *tian* never showed Himself, not even through the mouths of the prophets, but only as interpreted by the

diviners over the signs on bones/tortoise shell, dream contents, natural phenomena, or the hexagrams and their attached texts of explanation, which were always susceptible of human interpretation. In the system of *Yijing*, unlike Shang's *di* or *shangdi* who was said to manifest His will through the crackling of shoulder bones and tortoise shell, the divine will was manifested through hexagrams, their strokes, and texts attached to them in terms of metaphors related to the nature and regularity of things. Therefore, there was an implicit move from the direct manifestation of divine will to the manifestation of the regularity of things and the logic of reasoning with suggestive ethical implications.

Without explicit reference to divine will, the manifestation of the good fortune or misfortune of a certain action when one consulted the *gua* dictums and *yao* dictums was expressed noticeably through two interesting kinds of language. The first is the revelation of change of human affairs through the change of natural phenomena; the second is the reasoning of good fortune or misfortune of human affairs based on the logical structure of the hexagram in question. The first is an analogical understanding of human affairs in comparison to natural phenomena. The second concerns the logical construction of 64 hexagrams through the combination of logical possibilities of undivided stroke and divided stroke, or *yin* and *yang*.

First, let us take the self-understanding of human affairs through an analogical understanding to the becoming of natural phenomena: For example, in the *yao* dictum of the second stroke, undivided, of the *Daguo* 大過 Hexagram, it says, "Second Ninth. Dry poplar sprouts new buds. Old man marries with a young wife. There is nothing disadvantageous" (Zhu 1999: 122, without specific mentioning, the following translations are all mine). And the *yao* diction of the fifth stroke, undivided, of the same hexagram says, "Fifth Ninth. Dry poplar gives birth to new flowers. Old lady marries with a strong man. No blame no praise" (Zhu 1999: 123). The production of shoots or flowers on an old decayed willow tree means the regeneration of life in nature; when this is shown in answering the question of an old bachelor or an old widow who consulted the *Yijing* by way of divination, it means a favorable time for him or her to marry again.

Second, the constitution of hexagrams, which serves as the logical foundation of manifestation, implies a logic and mathematic of two values, exemplified by an unbroken stroke, —, and a broken stroke, -. It is well known that Leibniz in his article *Explication de l'arithmétique binaire* (Leibniz 1703) claimed that in the hexagrams of the *Yijing* he had found the universality of the binary system based on 0 and 1.

Although the record of a hexagram and its texts was generated historically by the act of divination on a particular occasion, it is amazing that the totality of 64 hexagrams shows a rigorous logical internal structure. This fact has led to many theoretical speculations by scholars. For example, Thomé Fang in his *Logical Problems of the Yijing*, shows that there is a process of logical derivation of the 64 hexagrams (Fang 1987: 1–29). The two constituent strokes, — and -, taken alternatively, generate the two cardinal trigrams, *qian* 乾 and *kun* 坤, through trivergence. In turn, these two congruent cardinal trigrams give rise to their six descendants through selective cross-linkage. On the one hand, the two cardinal trigrams, *qian* and *kun*,

continue to generate hexagrams by alternative superposition. On the other, the other six rudimentary trigrams, by way of super-adding, generate another group of hexagrams. In this way, after 18 steps of logical derivation, we have a system of 64 hexagrams. Fang's explanation, though but one among many tentative theories to show the logic of the *Yijing*, goes well with what is explained in the *Xuogua* 說卦 (*Remarks on the Trigrams*),

Each trigram embraced those three categories, and, being repeated, its full form consists of six lines. A distinction was made of the positions assigned to the *yin* and *yang* lines, which were variously occupied, now by the strong, now by the soft forms, and thus the figure of each hexagram was completed. (Zhu 1999: 268; my corrected translation based on that of Legge 1963: 424)

It suffices to say now that there is a certain logical structure in the *Yijing*, and, by way of logical derivation, we have an open system of 64 hexagrams, in which any two co-ordinate hexagrams are put into a state of perfect congruence explicable in terms of logical correspondence. No matter how scholars may interpret the nature and structure of the structural intelligibility implied in the logic of the *Book of Changes*, there is undeniably a certain kind of logical structure linking the 64 hexagrams.

Thus, in interpreting the results of divination, either the manifestations of divine will or the *dao* of becoming, the language is expressed, first, in terms of metaphors coming from natural phenomena and their regularities, and second, in a systematic logical-mathematical structuration. Thus, the manifestation is constituted of a cosmological meaning and a formal meaning. In both meanings, the major aim of divination is to follow the *dao* of becoming in taking a particular course of action. It is true that the divination targets only the action to be taken and its good or bad fortune. However, the *gua* dictum and the *yao* dictum add also some lessons to human action concerning the cultivation of virtue and the conduct for a meaningful life.

7 Making Explicit the Ethical Interpretation: Human Intervention into Structure

The structural aspect of the *Yijing* is constructed by the logical-mathematical system of hexagrams. Nevertheless, human subjectivity and its inner energy toward a meaningful life could always intervene into the structure, even to the point of reorganizing it. This means the human agent and its search for meaningful existence could give interpretation to the structure, in the sense not only of identifying specific cases that fit the structure, but also serving as an organizing-principle of the structure, or better, structuration. This is shown in the *Xiangzhuan* (象傳 Symbolism Interpretations) and *Tuanzhuan* (彖傳 Judgment Interpretations). *Xiangzhuan* gives almost completely ethical interpretations of the *guaci* and *yaoci*, whereas the *Tuanzhuan* (彖傳 Judgment Interpretations), though quite often delivering ethical interpretation, refers from time to time to the cosmological background of ethics. In the *Xiangzhuan* and

Tuanzhuan, we find several basic concepts, such as *dang* 當 (properness), *ying* 應 (responding), *zhong* 中 (centrality), and *shi* 時 (timing). Based on these concepts, several theories were developed for deciding what is good fortune or misfortune, as shown in the interpretation of *Xiangzhuan* and *Tuanzhuan*.

The first is the *dangwei shuo* 當位說 (Theory of Proper Position), as proposed in the *Xiangzhuan* and the *Tuanzhuan*: An action is of good fortune when it happens in a proper position, of misfortune when the position is improper. Although in the beginning, this interpretation was more concerned with the proper position in the structural hierarchy of a hexagram, later it introduced also the Confucian ethical concept and Daoist cosmic concept of *yin* and *yang*. The main idea of this theory is that the *yang* stroke should be in the *yang* position, that is, on the odd lines; and the *yin* stroke should be in the *yin* position, that is, on the even lines. A hexagram is constituted of six strokes (lines), in which the first, the third, and the fifth lines, counting up from the bottom of each hexagram, are the *yang* position; whereas the second, the fourth, and the sixth lines, counting also from the bottom of each hexagram, are the *yin* positions. The unbroken lines, which are thus called *yang yao*, should take *yang* position as its proper position; otherwise it will be improper. The broken lines, which are thus called *yin yao*, should take *yin* position as their proper position; otherwise it will be improper. To be in a proper position is to have good fortune, whereas to be in an improper position is to have misfortune.

For example, in the 63rd hexagram, the *Jiji* 既濟 Hexagram, all *yang* and *yin* strokes are in their proper positions. That is why the *Tuanzhuan* says, “Advantage for the divination. The strong and soft lines are rightly arranged, each in its appropriate position” (Ibid: 226). On the other hand, in the 54th hexagram, the *Guimei* 歸妹, where all other lines except the first and the sixth are not in their proper positions, the *gua* dictum says that, “It is dangerous to advance in taking action. Not leading to any advantage” (Ibid: 200). And its *Tuanzhuan* says, “It’s dangerous to advance in taking action, because the positions of the lines are not appropriate to them. Not leading to any advantage, because the soft rides upon the strong” (Ibid.).

The second is the *yingwei shuo* 應位說 (Theory of Respondent Position). The theory of proper position does not suffice to explain all fortunate and unfortunate cases. Thus the *Tuanzhuan* introduces the Theory of Respondent Position. This theory says that, when in the groups of the first and the fourth lines, the second and the fifth lines, and the third and the sixth lines, there is a *yin* line responding to a *yang* line, or a *yang* line responding to a *yin* line, then that line with respondent will be a case of good fortune. When, in case of improper position, there is no such a respondent, it will be a case of misfortune.

For example, in the *dayou* 大有 Hexagram, the fifth line is not in its proper position. Nevertheless, the *yao* dictum of its fifth line says it is of good fortune: “Fifth Sixth. The sign is friendly good, honorable, and is of good fortune” (Ibid: 83). The justification is offered by the Theory of Respondent Position in the *Tuanzhuan* that reads, “In *dayou* the soft (*yin*) line has the honorable position of grand centrality, and is responded to by the strong lines above and below” (Ibid: 82). So, the fifth line, a *yin* stroke, becomes the sign of good fortune because of its being in central position and is responded to by *yang* lines. This leads to the following considerations.

The third is the *zhongwei shuo* 中位說 (Theory of Central Position). In the case that there is neither proper position nor respondent position, it would not necessarily go to the misfortunate side, because it could still be remedied by the fact that a stroke occupies the central place in the upper or lower trigram. The Theory of Central Position says that the stroke that appears in the divination in the second line, which is central to the lower trigram, or in the fifth line, which is central to the upper trigram, will be a sign of good fortune. The previously discussed *yao* dictum of the fifth line of the *dayu* 大有 Hexagram is an example. Take another example, in the *weiji* 未濟 Hexagram, the fifth stroke, a *yin* stroke, is not in its proper position, but its *yao* dictum tells of good fortune. To explain this, the *Tuanzhuàn* says, “*Weiji* is a successful divination because the soft (*yin*) line is in a central position” (Ibid: 229). Hence, the Central Position can remedy the case of improper position, while in the case of proper position, it can offer positive reinforcement.

Finally, there is *qushi shuo* 趣時說 (Theory of Acting in Proper Time), which says that the good fortune or misfortune of a hexagram depends on the proper (right) or improper character of the time in which it appears. If it appears at a proper time, it is good fortune; otherwise, it is misfortune. The fact that a stroke is in the central position does not necessarily make it good fortune. It is good fortune when it is at a proper time, and misfortune when at an improper time. For example, in the *Jie* 節 Hexagram, the *yao* dictum of the second line says, “If you are not going out of your house door and courtyard, it will be bad fortune” (Ibid: 218). However, both the second and the fifth lines are in central position, where the *Tuanzhuàn* says, “*Jie*, successful, because the strong (*yang*) and the soft (*yin*) lines are well distributed and the strong line occupies the central position” (Ibid: 217). Nevertheless, the *xiangzhuàn* says, “If you are not going out of your house door and courtyard, it will be bad fortune, because he loses extremely his proper time” (Ibid.). Time is therefore the ultimate criterion for judging good or bad fortune. This goes well with what the *Xici* II (The *Great Appendix* II) says, “The strong and soft lines are the fundamental principle according to which the Changes were founded, while their change and success depend on the properness of time” (Ibid: 252).

It becomes clear now that the *Yijing*, even when it contains an essential structural aspect, will never neglect the role of human agent and human historicity. When human beings attempt to know the good fortune or misfortune of their action, they must pay attention to the logical, numeric, and orderly structures, to the point of even implying something like Leibniz’s *Mathesis Universalis* or Universal Grammar. However, these structures must submit themselves to the interpretation of human beings and their historicity in order to render themselves meaningful. It is based upon this vision that, later, the *Xici* I (*Great Appendix* I) says about the structural factors,

The *Yi* changes through the cross-linkage of lines, and unfold its numeric structure by the reversal and alternative superposition of trigrams. When one could penetrate all cases of change, one may obtain the logical structure of the universe. When one can exhaust the numeric structure, one may determine the meaning of all images under Heaven. If not with this supreme change of all under Heaven, how could it achieve this? (Ibid: 246)

This important text shows the marvelous effect of the combination of structural factors. On the other hand, the *Shuogua* 說卦 (*Remarks on the Trigrams*) also says,

In ancient time, when the sages composed the *Yi*, in order to give assistance to the Spiritual Intelligence, they created the rule for the use of the divining plant. The number three was assigned to heaven, number two to earth, and from these came the other numbers. They contemplate the changes through the *yin* (broken) and *yang* (unbroken) lines and formed the trigrams. From the movements taking place in the strong (*yang*) and soft (*yin*) lines, they created the separate lines or *yao*. There ensued a harmonious conformity to the Way of Dao and virtue to the discernment of what is just and right. They made an exhaustive investigation into the principle of all things to understand the mandate of Heaven. (Ibid: 267; Legge 1963: 423 with my corrections)

This equally important text shows us that there is a dynamic interconnection between the formal and numeric structures and the human agent's self-realization. In following the numeric and formal structures and in giving an interpretation to it, there is a way of discerning what is just and right, to the extent of following the Way and realizing one's own mandate of Heaven.

8 From Ethical Interpretation to Philosophical Construction

The *Zhouyi* represents the process from divinatory manifestation to ethical interpretation, while the *Yizhuan* represents the process from ethical interpretation to philosophical and conceptual construction. It is in the *Yizhuan* that *the Yijing* becomes a book of philosophy, because here it is extended to all realms of existence, not limiting itself to the function of divination and that of telling the good or bad fortune of human affairs. The *Xici I* says,

The *Yi* is that which has enabled the sages to reach all depths and to grasp the initial moment of all things. Only through knowing its depth could one penetrate all intents of people under Heaven. Only through knowing the initial moment can one complete all affairs under Heaven. Since it's so spiritual, one can achieve all in a fast way without being haste and reach the goal without further ado. (Zhu 1999: 246)

Here, we may reconstruct the steps by which the meaningfulness of existence was constructed in the *Yizhuan*. Following the *Shuogua* and the *Xici I*, I will analyze them into the following constructive and progressive stages.

1. Construction of elementary representations: According to the *Xici I*, "The sages were able to observe all the traces on phenomena under heaven, and therefore were able to grasp their forms and contents, and represent things properly. These were then called *xiang* 象 (manifesting representations)" (Ibid: 241). What were to be represented were the greatest natural phenomena in our environmental world: Heaven and earth, mountain and lake, thunder and wind, water and fire etc. In addition, they represent also various things in the environment, such as plants and animals. For example, *qian* 乾 represents heaven, jade, metal, ice, horse, etc; *li* 離 represents fire, sun, lightning, turtle, crab, tortoise, etc.

2. Construction of directions of action: Actions are taken in the nexus of space and time. Since all actions are undertaken in time, therefore the vector of time is the most important direction. In the *Yijing*, the direction of time is conceived in two ways: Toward the past, it is a natural process; toward the future, it is an anticipatory process. The *Shuogua* 說卦 says, “The numbering of the past is a natural process; the knowledge of the coming is anticipation. Therefore in the *Yi* we have both anticipation and the natural process” (Zhu 1999: 268; Legge 1963: 424). As to spatial directions of action, which is always taken in time, eight principal spatial directions are possible for any action, as indicated in the *Shuogua* 說卦: East, South East, South, South West, West, North West, North, North East (Zhu 1999: 269, Legge 1963: 425–426). More detailed spatial directions are elaborated with the complex interaction of hexagrams. In the *Yijing*, spatial direction is crucial for the good or bad fortune of an action, and that is why it is often indicated in the *gua* dictums. For example, it is said in the *gua* dictum of the *kun* 坤 hexagram, “Kun. Great success. In favor of the divination regarding the mare (female horse). If you take the long trip, you will get lost first before you find a host. You will gain some friends in the south west, you will lose friends in the north east. It’s good for the diviner to stay” (Zhu 1999: 39).
3. Representations of the human body: It is the human body that takes action and moves toward different directions. Therefore the human body is represented and situated in the realm of reality. It is said in the *Shuogua* that, “*Qian* suggests the idea of a head; *kun*, that of the belly; *zheng*, that of the feet; *shun*, that of the thighs; *kan*, that of the ears; *li*, that of the eyes; *gen*, that of the hands; and *dui*, that of the mouth” (Zhu 1999: 271, Legge 1963: 429).
4. Construction of human relationships, especially ethical relationships: The *Shuogua* says, “*Qian* is the symbol of heaven, and hence has the appellation of father. *Kun* is the symbol of earth, and hence has the appellation of mother. *Zheng* shows the first application of *qian* to *kun*, resulting in the first of its male, and hence is called its eldest son. *Shun* shows a first application of *qian* to *kun*, resulting in the first of its female, and hence is called its eldest daughter. *Kan* shows a second application of *kun* to *qian*, resulting in the second of its male, and hence is called its second son. *Li* shows a second application of *qian* to *kun*, resulting in the second of its female, thus is called its second daughter. *Gen* shows a third application of *kun* to *qian*, resulting in the third of its male, and hence is called the youngest son. *Dui* shows a third application of *qian* to *kun*, resulting in the third of its female, and hence is called its youngest daughter” (Zhu 1999: 271; Legge 1963: 429–430). Thus there is an ethical network with cosmo-ontological implications. Human beings always act and live in the ethical relationship, they never act and live as isolated individuals, because they exist in the ontology of dynamic relation, in which ethical relations could combine with other dimensions of construction, such as the spatial-temporal. This is illustrated by the fact that, in a traditional Chinese house, the father lives in the room of the North-West corner, the mother that of the South-East, the eldest son that of the East, the eldest daughter that of the South-East, the second son that of the North, etc.

5. Construction of the system of hexagrams: In order that the emblematic representations could cover the whole universe and human existence, there should be an original creativity giving birth to myriad things, as well as the logical derivation of all hexagrams. On the ontological level, *Taiji* 太極 (the Great Ultimate) represents the Original Creative Power that gives birth incessantly to all beings. This is an ontology of creativity in which “To be is to be creative.” On the logical level, this is also the order by which all hexagrams are produced by a process of logical derivation. According to the *Xici*, “Therefore in *Yi* there is the *Taiji* that generates the two primary models. The two primary models generate the four *xiang* 象 (manifesting representations). The four *xiang* generate the eight trigrams. The eight trigrams determine good fortune and bad fortune. Good fortune and bad fortune create the great field of action” (Zhu 1999: 48). Or, again, “The eight trigrams are arranged in order, and they contain images in them. Thereupon they are doubled, thus to contain each the [six] lines. The strong and the soft exchange and extend mutually, and there the change is contained” (Zhu 1999: 252). “The *Yi* changes through the cross-linkage of lines, and unfold its numeric structure by the reversal and alternative superposition of trigrams. When one could penetrate all cases of change, one may obtain the logical structure of the universe. When one can exhaust the numeric structure, one may determine the meaning of all images under Heaven” (Zhu 1999: 246). Although the system of hexagrams was elaborated in the *Yijing* only to the 64th hexagram, it is possible to continue further; thus it is an open system.
6. The Construction of universalizable norms of action: Universalizable standard of action must be established to guide human actions and life praxis. As the *Xici* says, “The *Dao* of this book is great, and none of the hundred things is omitted. Keeping oneself always vigilant from the start to the end, then in principle there will be nothing to blame. This is the *Dao* of the Changes” (Zhu 1999: 264). Here, the terms “great” and “none of the hundred things is omitted” mean the universalizability on the pragmatic level. The wisdom in the *Yijing* therefore results from a deep concern with individual and collective destiny based on practical universalizability, somewhat different from the search for theoretical universalizability in Western philosophy. Both are interested in universalizability, but while the Chinese one is practical, the Western one is theoretical.

Thus the *Yijing* embraces a pragmatism that concerns itself with human action and its good or bad fortune. Since the going-to-the-better or going-to-the-worse is most crucial in human affairs, the *Yijing*'s concern with the fortune or misfortune of human action touches the heart of human destiny. However, even in this humanistic concern, the *Yijing* still remains open to a sense of religiosity in its faith in the Great Ultimate, the Origin of all things, despite the uncertainty of God's revealing. *Yijing*'s philosophy is a philosophy of action, and a philosophy that brings action to the betterment of human beings in the process of history. According to *Yijing*'s philosophy, with its faith in the Great Ultimate and its optimistic trust in cosmic creativity, human beings are invited to participate in the process of cosmic advancement and to

lead a meaningful life in their history, all in emphasizing human responsibility, in the sense of the ability to respond, and their creative interpretation of laws and structures in nature and history.

9 Philosophical Breakthrough: Confucius

Since the ethical interpretation and philosophical meaning in *Yijing*'s later development were somehow related to Confucius, we have to say something about the emergence of classical Confucianism at the time of Confucius, its founder. The time in which Confucius appeared could be properly characterized, in Karl Jaspers' term, as the first "Axial Age," or in Talcott Parsons' term, as an epoch of "philosophical breakthrough." In the late Spring and Autumn period, Confucius' philosophical thought evolved from a philosophy of *li* (rituals) to the philosophy of *ren* (humaneness), then from the philosophy of *ren* to the philosophy of *yi* (Changes). This reading of Confucius' life is confirmed by his own words that indicate the evolution of his thought:

The Master said, "At fifteen, my heart and mind was set upon learning; at thirty I *established myself*; at forty I had no more perplexities; at fifty I knew my Mandate of Heaven. At sixty I was at ease with whatever I heard. At seventy I could follow my heart's desire without transgressing moral principles." (*Analects* 2.4. Chan 1963: 22; with my corrections)

According to my understanding, what Confucius learnt at 15 was *li* (ritual). Since he said, "one should establish himself on *li*" (*Analects* 8:8), he should have established himself at 30 by becoming a *ru* 儒 teaching *li* and serving on the occasions of public and private *li* to earn his living. At 40, he had laid the philosophical foundation of *li* on *ren* 仁, and therefore had no more perplexity. In his 50s, that is, between 50 and 60, in particular after he left Lu state when he was 54 years old, there was a period of time in which he and his disciples endured unstable, troublesome, and even dangerous years of exile, when Confucius studied the *Yijing* closely and consulted it regularly.⁷ This understanding of the self and the nature of things led him to a deeper understanding of his own destiny (Mandate of Heaven), and what other people were saying and feeling while he was in his 60s, and his spiritual freedom in the last few years of his life. From this interpretation of Confucius' short bio-data, the evolution of his thought could be divided into three stages:

⁷The silk text manuscript *Yao* 要 discovered at Mawangdui, Hunan Province, China in 1973 said, "Kongzi is fond of *Yijing* when getting old. When he stays at home, the book *Yijing* is always on his mat; when he travels, it is in his hand bag. Zigong the disciple says to him, 'In the past you taught us that "if one loses virtue whereupon ghost and spirit grow, or if one is far from wisdom and deep considerations, he practice divination more often." I thought this was correct, and made effort to live up to it. Why are you getting old to love it?'....." "Do you believe in its divination?" Confucius says, "Out of my hundred divinations seventy were fulfilled.... As to *Yijing*, I look behind the divination and regard more to its virtue and meaning" (Zhao 2000: 276).

First, from age 15 to his 30s, Confucius' main concern was first learning *li*, and, at the age of 30, earning his living in developing a career of a *ru* by teaching and practicing *li*.

Second, from his 30s to his 40s, his major concern was *ren*, taking this as the transcendental foundation of *li* so as to revitalize Zhouli. At this stage, his intellectual development focused on the philosophy of *ren* and how it gave foundation to *li*.

Third, from his mid-50s onward, Confucius focused on the *Yijing* and History. He ordered, prefaced and gave commentaries to the *Yijing*. Arguably most of the *Yizhuan* could be from the hand of Confucius, either in his writing, or in his teaching as recorded and developed by his disciples. Sima Qian (c.145–90BCE) in his *Shiji* 史記 (*Record of the Grand Historian*) said, “Confucius in the later years of his life was fond of the *Yijing*. He had ordered and prefaced the *Xianzhuan*, the *Xicis*, the *Tuanzhuan*, the *Shuogua*, and the *Wenyan*” (Sima 1976: 609). Here Sima Qian confirmed Confucius' contributions to the *Yizhuan*. Not to indulge in the debates over the question of authenticity, we may say that most of the texts in the First and Second *Xici* 繫詞 (*Great Appendixes*), the *Xugua* 序卦 (*Sequence of the Hexagrams*), the beginning chapters of the *Shuogua* 說卦 (*Remarks on the Trigrams*) and the *qian* and *kun* hexagrams' *Wenyan* 文言, were by Confucius.

As to Confucius' study of history, Sima Qian also told in his *Shiji* that Confucius in the later years of his life said of himself, “A *junzi* would not pass away without a dignified name to remain in the world. Since my Way could not spread in the world, how could I show myself to the future generations?” (Sima 1976: 609, my translation). Upon that, he proceeded to compose the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, in which he put down chronologically and gave his judgment on historical events.

We can say that Confucius, in the *Yizhuan*, focused more on the relation between ethics, cosmic creativity and the Ultimate Reality; his ideas of human affairs, ethics and his laying the foundation of *li* on *ren*, were to be found in the *Analects*; his vision of history was developed in the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, which provides us with his practical and axiological judgment on human actions and historical events. However, these refer always to his basic ideas of *li* 禮, *yi* 義, and *ren* 仁, and that is why a philosophical understanding of these concepts is necessary here.

Etymologically, the Chinese character *li* 禮 is composed of both 示 and 豐, in which the sign 示 signifies the enlightening or a signal coming from *shangdi* or *tian* (Heaven) to reveal a good or bad omen of individual and collective destiny, while the sign 豐 represented two wine cups used in the ceremony of libation, mostly religious. Religious rituals were rife in Shang Dynasty. Notice that, from Shang to Zhou, different people in the social hierarchy performed different religious ceremonies: for example, the King or Son of Heaven performed sacrifice to Heaven, princes and marquises to mountains and rivers, and common people only to their ancestry, each having their codes of behavior in their daily life.

Thus, in its actual meaning, *li* has three essential aspects: first, as the sacrificial ceremonies; second, as the social and political institutions; and third, as codes of

daily behavior. Sacrificial ceremonies were ways to communicate with the divinities or deities; social and political institutions were organizational structures to set up a social order out of human beings' tendency to chaos and conflict, and codes of behavior regulated human action and attributed value to a specific action in question. All together, we can say that the functions of *li* were to communicate, to establish order and to render values. In these senses we can relate these three meanings to the ideal dimension of *li*. In its ideal meaning, *li* in Zhou Dynasty, the so-called Zhouli 周禮, represented an ideal of Zhou civilization established by the Duke of Zhou, in the process of communication with the divine and many other human beings, according to which a civilized society should develop in an order imbued with a sense of beauty or harmony.

It is obvious that *li* was not created by Confucius and it never came to his mind to create a new system of *li*. He himself admired the rich meaning and content of Zhouli, saying that "The Zhou dynasty looked back to the precedent two [Xia and Shang] dynasties. Such a wealth of culture! I follow the Zhou" (*Analects* 3.14, Ames and Rosemont 1998: 85). What Confucius endeavored to do was to revitalize Zhouli by making it meaningful again in basing it on the self-awareness of each and every person's inherent and transcendental ability. Here the term "transcendental" means that which was within human ability prior to experience and that rendered experience possible.

Confucius tried to revitalize Zhouli by tracing back to its transcendental origin and basing it on *ren*, which signified the sensitive interconnectedness between a human being and other human beings, nature, and Heaven. *Ren* manifested human beings' inner self and responsibility, in the original sense of the ability to respond in and through his/her sincere moral awareness. Also, it meant the intersubjectivity giving support to all social and ethical life. Thus, we may understand that, with *ren*, human being has an inner dynamism of generously going outside of one's self to many others, in the meanwhile he will not lose his/her own self. That is why Confucius said that *ren* is not remote from or difficult for any human being; as soon as an individual willed for it, *ren* was already there within him/herself (*Analects*: 7.30). By this, Confucius laid a transcendental foundation to human beings' interaction with nature, with society, and with Heaven.

And then, from *ren*, Confucius derived *yi*, righteousness or dutifulness, which represented for him respect for many others and the proper actions toward each of them. Not much was said by Confucius about *yi*, though what was said was very essential to Confucianism: "A superior man makes righteousness (*yi*) the substance of everything; he practices it according to ritual order (*li*). He brings it forth in modesty. And he carries it to its conclusion with faithfulness. He is indeed a superior man!" (*Analects* 15.18; Chan 1963: 43 with my corrections). Notice here that *li* was that which a wise and good man used to carry out or practice *yi*, which was seen by him as the substance of everything. For Confucius, *yi* was also the criterion by which good men and base guys were discerned (*Analects* 4.16). Upon rightness was based all moral norms, moral obligations, our consciousness of them, and even the virtue of always acting according to them.

Now, from *yi*, Confucius derived *li*, the ritual order or proprieties, which represented the ideal meaning of harmony with a sense of beauty, and the actual meaning of codes of behavior, social institutions, and religious ceremonies. Youzi 有子, a disciple of Confucius, once said, “Among the functions of propriety (*li*) the most valuable is that it establishes harmony. The beauty of the way of ancient kings consists of this. It is the guiding principle of all things great and small” (*Analecets* 1.12, Chan 1963: 21). We could presume therefore that Confucius understood *li* as an overall concept of a cultural ideal, as harmony with a sense of beauty, or a graceful order leading to beauty and harmony. With it, human life in the past is worthy of keeping in memory; in the future, worthy of expectation; and in the present, full of meaningfulness.

10 Meaningfulness of Historical Events: The *Spring and Autumn Annals*

The *Spring and Autumn Annals*, authored by Confucius in the last years of his life, shows us the meaningfulness in human actions, events, and stories and the role human agent plays in the historical events. There the *dao* is to manifest through human actions that take place as events, and the emplotment that combines different actions and events into a story as an understandable narrative unity. Implicitly, there is a historical ontology that shows the *dao* in history, already made explicit in the *Yijing*.

In Confucius’ time, historians of each state recorded their own historical events and established their own Annals. Confucius seemed to have consulted all the records of the past, especially those of Lu 魯 State. He said of himself, “To transmit but do not create. I am trustful and devoted to antiquity” (*Analecets* 7.1). In his *Annals*, Confucius not only recorded historical facts, but more importantly he gave his judgments from his moral standards based on *ren*, *yi*, and *li*. That is why it was said that the rebellious ministers and stealers of power all dreaded his *Annals*. Therefore, by “transmit” he meant not only to organize historical materials to transmit factual accounts, but also to transmit them with value judgment. This seemed very laborious work, and he put a lot of energy into the composition of the *Annals*. That’s why he said that “in the future generations, it is by the *Annals* that people know my merit; it is also by the *Annals* that people would blame me” (Sima 1976: 609).

Since the wording of Confucius’ *Annals* was very compact, there were three interpretations of Confucius’ *Annals*: The *Zuo’s Commentary*, the *Gongyang’s Commentary*, and the *Guliang’s Commentary*, all done in the Warring States period, most probably by developing the teaching of Confucius in the *Annals* transmitted by Zixia, one of Confucius’ disciples. These three commentaries were so classical that they became themselves part of the *Confucian Thirteen Classics*. In giving commentaries on Confucius’ *Annals* they made clear a reading of history with moral

judgment. For example, in November of the 22nd year of Duke Xi's reign (637BCE), Confucius wrote,

"In winter, in the 11th month, on the *jishi* 己巳 day, the first day of the moon, the Duke Xiang of Song fought with an army of Chu near the Hong River, when the army of Song was disgracefully defeated."

To this record, *Zuo's Commentary* reads as follows:

An army of Chu invaded Song in order to relieve Zheng. The Duke of Song being minded to fight, his Minister of War remonstrated strongly with him, saying, "Heaven has long abandoned the House of Shang. Your Grace may wish to raise it again, but such opposition to Heaven will be unpardonable." The Duke, however, would not listen to advice, and in winter, in the 11th month, on the *jishi* day, the first day of the month, he fought with the army of Chu near the Hong River.

The men of Song were all drawn up for battle, before those of Chu had all crossed the river, and the Minister of War said to the Duke, "They are many, and we are few. Pray let us attack them, before they have all crossed over." The duke refused; and again, when the minister asked leave to attack them after they had crossed, but when they were not yet drawn up, he refused, waiting they were properly marshalled before he commanded the attack.

The army of Song was shamefully defeated; one of the duke's thighs was hurt and the warders of the gates were all slain. The people of the State all blamed the duke, but he said, "The superior man does not inflict a second wound, and does not take prisoner of any of the gray hairs. When the ancient had their army in the field, they would not attack an enemy when he was in a defile. And though I am but a poor representative of a fallen dynasty, I would not sound my drums to attack an unformed host." (Legge 1949b: 183)

Note that Zuo's commentary had the special hermeneutic method that by narrating the story without giving any explicit argument using abstract terms, it gave its interpretation of the meaning of Confucius' succinct text in the *Annals*. This means that in Zuo's commentary, telling a story itself is already doing a hermeneutic work, that is, giving interpretation or rendering meaning to a text difficult to understand. However, the reader, through reading the events put together in a plot narrating a story, such as this one of the Duke of Song's war against Chu army, could feel strongly his moral standard out of his humanness and rightness as expressed in emphasizing the ritual of doing war.

Now, we can compare this with the *Gongyang's Commentary*, which says about the same text of Confucius:

It sufficed to date an appointed war. Why does it here mention the first day of the moon? When the *Spring and Autumn Annals* used more words generously not to save words, it means the action itself is upright. In what sense is it upright? The Duke of Song had an appointment of war with the Chu army to fight at Hong River. When the Chu men were crossing the river to come to him, his officer of war reported to him, "Pray to attack them before they all cross the river." The duke of Song said, "No. I heard that a superior man does not put others in danger. Even if I am only a representative of a fallen dynasty, I cannot bear to do it." When the Chu men all crossed the river but not yet drew themselves up, the officer of war again said, "Pray to attack them while they are not drawn up well." The Duke of Song says, "No. I heard it, the superior man does not attack a not well drawn up army." Then the Chu army was well drawn up, and the duke of Song called the drum for attack, thereupon the Song army was disgracefully defeated. Therefore, a superior man puts the emphasis on not attacking the unlined-up. He will not forget the *li* in facing a crucial event. He has the attire of a king but without good ministers and subjects under him. We can say that even a war done by King Wen is not more moral than this one. (*Gongyangzhuan* 1965: 28)

This commentary of the *Gongyang* was composed of two parts, though well mixed into one story: a narrative part and a moralizing part in the form of textual explanation. The story telling part was similar to the Zuo's commentary; however, the explanatory part rendered explicit the moral meaning of it, as to Confucius' admiration of the uprightness of the Duke of Song by allowing more words making precise the time in which the event happened, and by comparing Duke Xiang of Song to King Wen of Zhou.

It is a general style of the *Gongyang* to mix up moralizing discourse with the story-telling of historical discourse. A sensitive reader, in reading the story told by the Zuo's commentary, could already understand or make explicit the moral implication of it. In comparison, the *Gongyang* would be more helpful for those who are not sensitive enough to read out the moral in the story. Also, it puts down a clearer and stronger Confucian moral philosophy of history. The text of the *Gongyang's Commentary* started with the idea of *Dayitong* 大一統 (Great Unification) under the leadership of King Wen. That's why in the above text the same idea was repeated by saying that "even a war done by the King Wen is not more moral than this one."

Short of space, I shall not delve into the depth of *Guliang's Commentary*, which is constituted also of a narrative part and a moralizing or explanatory part. Just let me take the same story as an example, the *Guliang* in its moralizing part gave the comment that, "Human beings as humans depend on his language.... Language as language depends on its trustfulness.... Trustfulness as trustfulness depends on the *dao*. The most precious in *dao* is its timeliness, and its implementation depends on the situational power" (*Guliangzhuan* 1965: 24). This comment seemed to praise Duke Xiang of Song as trustworthy in his words for the appointment of war. Nevertheless, it also blamed him for not knowing the situational power for implementing the *dao*.

Later, from *Gongyang's Commentary* was developed a kind of reformative ideology. In particular, *Gongyang's* idea of *dayitong* 大一統 (Great Unification) was developed in Han Dynasty, during the time when Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104BCE) was making Confucianism the state ideology of Han, excluding all other schools of thought, under the reign of Emperor Wu 武 (158–87BCE), to become a progressivist vision of history developing to a "Great Unification." Dong Zhongshu interpreted Confucius' *Spring and Autumn Annals* as divided into three Ages, the transmitted-heard age (of the past), the heard-about age (of the present), and the envisioned age (in the future), thus a progressively evolutionary vision of history. Also, he saw Confucius' *Annals* as promulgating some historical laws for future dynasties as well as embodying the natural laws. This interpretation of history as evolving through Three Ages was developed in the later Han Dynasty by He Xiu 何休 (129–182AD) in his *Chunqiu Gongyang Zhuan Jiegu* 春秋公羊傳解詁 (*Notes and Explanations of Gongyang Commentary*). According to He, Confucius, in the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, proposed three stages of historical development. First, the Age of Disorder (*juluan shi* 據亂世), in which one was familiar only with one's own country, and taking other Chinese states as foreign. Second, the Age of Rising Peace (*shengping shi* 升平世), in which all highly civilized Chinese states become one, taking the uncivilized countries as foreign. Finally, the Age of Great Peace (*taiping shi* 太平世), in which all Under Heaven, including the close and the far away, the small and the great, are as if forming one country.

This vision of the Great Unification was very inspiring both philosophically and politically for the Chinese people. This ideology based on its philosophy of history was revitalized in the late Qing period by Kang Yuwei 康有為 (1858–1927), and keeps on inspiring Confucian political movement even till very recently in China.

11 Conclusion

In ancient Chinese intellectual history, the revelation of meaningfulness of human existence moved from political theology to creative humanism. The ultimate reality in the form of political theology was *di* or *shangdi* (High God), which moved, when the creative humanism emerged, to *Taiji* (Great Ultimate), the Original source of creativity to be realized in human actions, events, and stories in the cosmic process. In other words, it moved from the *Book of Documents* to the *Yijing*, which played a crucial role in Chinese religious and philosophical history. Turning itself away from the passive awaiting of and dependence on the High God's revealing, always uncertain and sometimes contradictory, the *Yijing*, evolving from divination to ethical interpretation, then from ethical interpretation to philosophical construction, had directed its thoughts to a meaningful world constructed by human creativity, even if still referring to the Great Ultimate. The *Yijing* appealed to cosmic laws and intelligible structures to understand human destiny, always with the possibility of human interpretation and intervention. In the philosophy of *Yijing*, there was an optimistic trust in the Great Ultimate and its creativity in the natural and human world. Human beings were invited to participate in the process of cosmic creativity and lead a meaningful life, emphasizing human responsibility and creative interpretation in the unfolding of human historicity.

With this emphasis on human moral effort, decision, and responsibility, there was always an ethical core in classical Confucianism, so well exposed in the ethical insights of the *Analects* and the ethical historicism of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. Thus, for the *Analects*, the fundamental ethical values such as *ren*, *yi*, *li* and other virtues constituted an onto-ethical meaningfulness of existence, to be realized in human self-cultivation, society and governance. For the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, the meaning of existence was to be manifested through major human decisions, actions, historical events and stories, and judged in reference to some basic Confucian moral values. The fading of political theology and the rise of creative humanism led to the founding of classical Confucianism by Confucius and its further development through Confucius' disciples, Zisi-Mencius School and Xunzi, to be discussed in the following chapters.

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Chapter 3

The Philosophy of Confucius

Peimin Ni

1 Introduction

If any single person has exerted more influence on the entire Chinese philosophical tradition than anyone else, it must be Kong Fuzi, better known in the West by the Latinized term, Confucius (551–479 B.C.E.). While “Kong” is his family name, “Fuzi,” close in meaning to “master,” is a respectful way of addressing the man. His given name, Qiu, is rarely applied in references to him.

Though the time in which Confucius was born was a chaotic period, it was the golden age of the Chinese philosophical tradition. The glory of the early Zhou 周 Dynasty was declining, but still fresh in the minds of the people. The founders of the Zhou, King Wen and his son Duke Zhou, laid the foundation for a humanitarian government in emulation of the ancient sage-kings and refined the feudal ritual system. By the Spring and Autumn period (770–476 B.C.E.), however, the social order of the Zhou was crumbling. It was against such a historical background that China had its most glorious period in philosophy. Not only were the founders of the two most influential philosophies in Chinese history, Confucianism and Daoism, born during the period, many other brilliant minds brought about the so-called “hundred schools of thought,” making the time comparable to ancient Greece in terms of the importance to their respective civilizations.

Confucius was born near Qufu 曲阜, a town in the state of Lu 魯 in China known for its preservation of the early Zhou rituals and music. Little about his parents is known for certain. It is commonly believed that his father was a low ranking military officer, who died when Confucius was only 3 years old. His mother, from whom he received his primary education, raised him in a relatively humble situation. Confucius set his heart upon learning at the age of 15, and since that time he was a

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determined learner. He is believed to be the first person in the history of China to set up a school that offered, in today's term, "liberal education" in an institutional way. According to a likely exaggerated account, he had over 3,000 students during his life time, and 72 of them became conversant with the "six Arts" that he taught – ritual, music, archery, charioteering, writing, and arithmetic.

Confucius considered himself a "transmitter" rather than a creator. According to him, the wisdom that he taught was already entailed in the ancient traditional rituals, the history, music, poetry, and the limited written works, which were, though corrupted over the ages, still largely available. He is believed to have edited some of the most basic Chinese classic books, including the *Book of Rites*, the *Book of History*, the *Classics of Odes*, the *Classics of Music*, and the *Classics of Changes*. Though his teachings are inseparable from these traditional works, Confucius is actually an innovative and even revolutionary thinker of the time. With deep understanding and insights about what was most valuable in the tradition, he creatively reconstructed the tradition and through him, the works became a set of canons that the later ages would abide by. But above all these other works, his own major teachings, recorded and collected by his students and their students into the book known as *Lunyu* 論語 (the *Analects*), later became the most sacred canon of all in traditional China.

With a strong sense of mission and ambition to bring the world into a harmonious order, Confucius spent a considerable amount of his life traveling around, often with his close disciples, trying to implement his humanistic ideas in political affairs. However, he was deeply disappointed with the rulers. Having survived some life-threatening situations, he finally returned to his home state Lu at the age of 68, and died 5 years later with no anticipation of his subsequent fame as China's first and foremost teacher, a supreme sage, and a "king without a crown."

His teachings were carried on and developed by the persistent effort of his followers, especially Meng Zi 孟子 (Latinized as "Mencius," 390–305 B.C.E.) and Xun Zi 荀子 (325–238 B.C.E.). Tested against the rival schools of thought and having endured sweeping attacks from the First Emperor of Qin Dynasty (reigned from 221–209 B.C.E.), Confucianism was finally recognized as the official state ideology during the Han Dynasty around 100 B.C.E. Since then, though with ups and downs, Confucianism enjoyed the status of being China's principles of morality, of law, of government, of education, and of life in general, which everyone was supposed to follow, from the emperor down to the ordinary people. During the Song and Ming Dynasties (roughly from the tenth – thirteenth century and the fourteenth – seventeenth century respectively), Confucian scholars brought another upsurge of Confucianism by their creative interpretations of it in response to the challenges from its strong rivals, Daoism and Buddhism, and further consolidated its dominant position in China. The status of being an official state ideology, however, was not simply a blessing to Confucianism, for once endorsed as an official doctrine it could hardly avoid being dogmatized and became alienated as a means for political advantages. Most of the repressive practices of the feudalistic China were conducted under the name of Confucianism, though in most cases they were contrary to the real spirit of the Master's own teachings.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, with the arrival of Western material powers and ideas in China, Confucianism was criticized and considered to be responsible for all that was backward and benighted in China. In the recent decades, however, a rival voice has been growing stronger in scholarly circles and public media. Accompanied by the success of the four “small dragons” in Asia – Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan, where Confucianism retained its strong hold, the interest in Confucianism revived. It is characterized by Mou Zongshan and other Confucian scholars such as Tu Weiming as the “Third Epoch of Confucianism,” succeeding the first one, represented by Confucius himself and his immediate followers such as Meng Zi and Xun Zi, and the second, represented by the Song and Ming Confucians. With a critical re-appropriation and transformation, many contemporary Confucian scholars believe that Confucianism can provide valuable philosophical resources for addressing disturbing situations in the post-modern world.

Since the philosophical ideas in the *Analects*, the “Bible” of Confucianism, are contained in excerpts put together with no apparent logical order and with little articulation, they need to be unpacked and re-organized so that contemporary readers who are accustomed to the discourse style of writing in philosophy have less difficulty in assessing and appreciating them. Doing this, however, involves the risk of cannibalizing the dynamic system, in which the passages are related like different sides of a crystal that reflect the lights of each other. Readers of this article are therefore cautioned to pay special attention to the mutual entailment of the ideas, and not to treat them simply as distinct parts of a system.¹

2 *Tian* 天– Heaven

The word “Confucianism” is unknown to most Chinese, because in China the school is referred to as “*ru jia* 儒家” – the school of *ru*, where “*ru*” refers not to Confucius, but to the practices and the way of life most distinctively represented by him. There is neither dependency on deity worship nor priesthood in Confucianism, and Confucius himself is deemed as a model human being rather than a god. There are indeed Confucian temples all over China, but they are more like memorials than monasteries. This significant fact shows that Confucianism is different from most religions and is less likely to develop into fundamentalism.

Confucius’ own attitude toward issues regarding deities and life after death is partly skeptical and partly pragmatic. He says, “To say you know when you know, and to say you do not when you do not. That is knowledge/wisdom” (2/17). It was said of him, “The Master did not talk about strange phenomena... or supernatural

¹ The translation of the Chinese texts in this chapter is mostly based on the English books listed in the bibliography at the end, often with some modifications, or, in the case of direct quotes from Chinese texts, my own. Citations from the *Analects* will be given simply in parentheses with the chapter number and the section number. For example, “(2/1)” means Chap. 2, Sect. 1 from the book of the *Analects*.

beings” (7/21). His advice is to “Keep a distance from supernatural beings while showing them due reverence” (6/22). “If you are not yet able to serve other people, how can you serve supernatural beings?” “If you do not yet understand life, how can you understand death?” (11/12) It is evident that the Master did not conceal his lack of knowledge about matters related to supernatural beings or to life after death. He refrained from speculating or conjecturing about things that he had no knowledge about. At the same time, he remained open to the possibility that there might be deities. When Confucius offered sacrifice to his ancestors or to other spirits, he did it as if the spirits were actually present. He said, “If I am not fully present in the sacrifice, it is no different from not having done the sacrifice” (3/12).

Confucius’ focus is always on this life and this world. When his disciple Zigong asked whether those who were dead had consciousness, the Master is reported to have responded with these remarks:

If I were to say that they do have awareness, I am afraid that those who are filial to their parents and grandparents would send off the dead ones as if they were alive [and hence have lavish burials]. If I were to say that they don’t have awareness, I am afraid that those who are not filial would discard the dead ones unburied. Ci [Zigong], do you want to know whether people have awareness after they die? When you die, you will eventually know. It will not be too late to know by then. (Sun and Guo 1998: 21)

The response interestingly contains no direct answer to Zigong’s question about the afterlife. All that concerns him is how those who are alive would behave. It seems that for the Master, as long as one lives a decent human life in this world, one will have nothing to regret, whether there is an afterlife or not. This attitude is also reflected in another passage in the *Analects*. When his disciple Zai Wo inquired, “The 3 year mourning period on the death of one’s parents is already too long, ... surely a year is enough,” the Master replied, “Would you then feel at ease [*an* 安] eating fine rice and wearing colorful brocade?” (17/21) Clearly the Master’s concern is not so much about pleasing the spirits, much less about knowledge pertaining to the existence of the afterlife. His concern is about the appropriateness of one’s own feelings and dispositions.

Confucius’ this-worldly attitude does not mean that there is no spiritual dimension to his thought. He firmly believes that his mission is bestowed by *tian* 天, usually translated as “heaven” (9/5). For this mission, one should be determined to travel a journey that is not supposed to end before one’s death (8/7), and the aim is even more important than life itself (15/9). Scholars have varying interpretations of the Confucian notion of *tian* with regard to whether it is personal or impersonal, transcendent or immanent. While some have gone so far as to claim that it resembles the Christian notion of a personal and transcendental God, others claim that it is entirely impersonal and immanent, no other than the natural order of the universe displayed through the change of the seasons and dynasties and the like. Still others hold opinions somewhere in between, maintaining that the Confucian *tian* is “immanently transcendent.”² While these conflicting interpretations reflect the ambiguity in Confucius’ notion of *tian*, scholars generally agree that it is important to look at the notion’s historical emergence. *Tian* is a notion that Confucius’ early

² See Huang (2007) for a comprehensive summary of the controversy.

Zhou predecessors used to replace and to depersonalize the Shang Dynasty notion of *Shang Di* 上帝, “Lord-on-High.” Even though the notion of heaven found in the Zhou literature such as *Shu Jing* 書經 (the *Book of History*) and in the *Analects* still carries with it the sense of a being that governs worldly affairs, it already showed itself in the realm of this world rather than being entirely transcendent. The will of heaven was no longer considered so much as the will of an anthropomorphic deity that issues orders and gives blessings and sanctions from above; it immanently exhibited itself in popular consensus and in regular patterns of discernible social and natural events, and it could be affected by the moral undertakings of the people. From a passage in the *Shu Jing* that says “Heaven sees through the eyes of the people, heaven listens through the ears of the people,” we can see that what appears to be anthropomorphic here is rather more anthropogenic. In the *Analects*, Confucius is quoted as saying “Does heaven speak? And yet the four seasons turn and the myriad things are born and grow within it” (17/19). Most scholars take this passage as evidence that for Confucius, heaven is the principle according to which natural events take place. The same philosophical implication is contained in the *Classics of Changes*. Divination based on reading the pattern on tortoise shells after they are heated, or yellow stalks after they are scattered, entails the belief that everything in the universe is governed by the same principle, whether in an intentional or in a purely naturalistic way. The *Classics of Changes* also entails the view that humans can affect their destiny through their own activities. It tells people not only what situation they are facing, but also, given the specific situation, what kind of action should be taken. Under such a notion, rulers were considered sacred only so long as they were able to continue to be “entrusted” with *tian ming* 天命, the mandate of heaven.

Because heaven displays itself through worldly phenomena, it is possible for humans to know its mandate. Confucius says: “At the age of 50, I knew *tian ming*” (2/4). He did not explain specifically how he came to know it, but he shows a strong confidence that heaven has bestowed virtue/virtuosity upon him (7/23). Since the word for virtue/virtuosity, *de* 德, also means power, his confidence might be derived from his faith in the power given to him by heaven. Even though otherwise heaven often appeared to be at odds with him, the Master believed that “It is human who are able to make the Way great, not the Way that can make human great” (15/29). This statement also sheds light on the notion of “the Way” (*dao* 道), because it suggests that the Way is a trajectory, a mode of acting, which is itself road building, rather than a metaphysical entity that is purely objective and external to human conduct.

This feature of the Confucian spirituality is naturally accompanied by a strong sense of anxiety and responsibility, a realization of a close interdependence between people’s fortunes and their own conduct. Not only do people have to rely on themselves for their own fortune, they also have to take the responsibility of affecting the fortune of other people, depending on how great their influences can be. The more power one has, the more one is accountable. As contemporary Confucian scholar Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 says, in other religions piety is a state of the mind when one dissolves one’s own subjectivity and throws oneself entirely before God, yet in the Confucian spirituality, as the embodiment of heaven, human subjectivity becomes highly concentrated and piety becomes staying sincere to one’s own responsibility

(Xu 1984: 22). The *Analects* records that Yao, an ancient sage King, said to his successor: “On – you Shun! The line of succession conferred by heaven rests on your person. Grasp it sincerely and without deviation. If all within the four seas sink into dire straits, the honors bestowed on you by heaven will be terminated forever.” King Tang of the Shang Dynasty said in a sacrificial ceremony, “If I personally do wrong, let not the 10,000 states be implicated; if the 10,000 states do wrong, the guilt lies with me alone!” (20/1) This sense of subjectivity is well displayed in the well-known passage by the Song Dynasty Confucian Zhang Zai 張載:

To establish heart-mind for heaven and the Earth,
 To shape destiny (*ming* 命) for the common people;
 To revive the lost scholarship for ancient sages,
 To generate peace for ten-thousand generations to come.

The word *ming* 命, a term usually translated as “destiny” or “fate,” also appears many times in the *Analects*. Since the word also means decree or mandate, and is sometimes used as an abbreviation for *tian ming*, it is easy to confuse the two. *Ming* is different from the mandate of heaven in that the latter is more of a moral imperative, and the former is more of a definite order or sequence of certain phenomena. For instance, when a natural event happens beyond a person’s control, it would be considered *ming* (see, for example, 6/10 and 12/5). Similarly, whether the Way eventually prevails or not, given the human efforts involved, is determined by *ming* (14/36). Since heaven is more like nature that is beyond personal control, so what is by *ming* is also by *tian*, heaven.

Confucius fully recognizes the fact that, even though humans do not have full control of everything, we can make great differences to our life within certain limits. On the one hand, as Mencius puts it, “he who understands *ming* does not stand under a wall on the verge of collapse” (*Mencius*: 7A/2). On the other hand, one can actively change one’s *ming* by various means. For example, the *Analects* tells us that when Confucius’ disciple Sima Niu 司馬牛 lamented, “Everyone has brothers except me,” another disciple Zixia 子夏 said to him: “Life and death are a matter of *ming* (destiny); Wealth and honor lie with heaven. The exemplary person is deferential and faultless, respectful of others and refined, and everyone in the world is his brother. Why would the exemplary person worry about not having brothers?” (12/5) By becoming a morally exemplary person and redefining what it means to have brothers, Zixia showed Sima Niu how he could gain control of his *ming*, or *minging* (ordering) his *ming* (destiny)!

Even those who take *tian* to be entirely immanent would not take Confucianism as simply a secular humanism that is complicit with the status quo, and hence would not reject the view that Confucius advocates transcendence in the sense of going beyond the status quo or the surface appearance. The spiritual aim of Confucius is often characterized in the phrase “the unity of heaven and human.” Compared to the Christian aim of going to Heaven and being united with God, the transcendental creator, but not becoming God oneself, the Confucian unity is to become sacred oneself through the unity and it is achieved through one’s relatedness with other people in this world. Confucius never felt that a lack of personal immortality would

lead to the lack of meaning for life, for a life may go infinitely beyond its narrow, personal biological span. A common application of this broad notion of immortality is the continuation of one's family line, which Confucians also honor. Among the things that are considered bad to do to one's parents, the worst is to have no heir, says Mencius (*Mencius*: 4A/26). Another bad thing to do to one's parents is to behave immorally and to make the parents feel ashamed. Both of these "bad things" done to one's parents need to be understood as an extension of the parents' own immediate personal state of existence to the way they "exist" in others. That Chinese people take how others regard them very seriously, and that they expect their children to bring honor to their family and community, are clear indications of their conception of themselves. Their existence extends to the lives of other people. Confucius' saying that "If for three years [of mourning] one does not change from the way of his father, he may be called filial" (1/11) can also be understood in this light, for it is a way in which the father continues to be "alive." Confucius may very well be aware of the notion of "Three Immortalities" that existed in his home state, Lu, according to which one can become immortal by establishing words for others to keep in mind, achievements for others to benefit from, and virtue/virtuosity for others to follow (see Chan 1963: 13). All these three immortalities are achieved relationally through continued existence and manifestation of one's efficacy in the community and in history rather than personal survival after death. Confucius' endorsement of this idea is indicated in the *Analects*. He says, for example, "Exemplary persons despise the thought of ending their days without having their names properly established" (15/20). In the context of his overall teachings, one's "name" clearly relates to how one continues to "live" in the lives of others, particularly through the three ways mentioned above (see, e.g. 16/12).

Obviously this kind of immortality, or the unity between heaven and human, is not guaranteed or dependent on the mercy of a deity and is not attained in another world. It is dependent on oneself in this life and this world. It is therefore, as Herbert Fingarette puts it as the title of his influential book on Confucianism, "secular as sacred" (see Fingarette 1972). But dependence on oneself does not mean solitary effort. One needs to pursue it in the course of one's life within the community. To be more specific, this is to be *ren* and practice *li*.

3 *Ren* 仁 – Human-Heartedness

Central to Confucius' philosophy, the word "*ren* 仁" appears frequently in the *Analects*. Yet nowhere can one find a precise definition of it, nor have translators reached agreement on any satisfying English translation. Whether one takes it as "benevolence," "human-heartedness," "authoritative person/conduct," "altruism," "humanity," or "goodness," there always seems to be something that is left out, or something not quite fit that would creep in. *Ren* seems to be an ideal that even the Master himself claimed never to have fully reached (7/34), and yet it is so close to

everyone that the Master says, “Is *ren* far away? No sooner do I seek it than it has arrived” (7/30).

Some observations, however, can help us to get a good grasp of it. First, as “*ren*” is occasionally used in Confucian texts interchangeably with “human” or “person,” – *ren* 人 – which is, in Chinese, homophonic to it (see *Mencius*: 1B/15 and *Zhongyong*: Chap. 20), we have reason to believe that “the distinction between the two terms [人 and 仁] must be qualitative: two distinguishable degrees of what it means to be a person” (Hall and Ames 1987: 114). As in English, “human” is sometimes used in Chinese to carry the moral expectations for being a human, and thereby making the expression “a human should be like a human” more than a simple tautology. For this reason “*ren* 仁” can be interpreted as a quality that makes a person an authentic human being, which every biological human should strive toward.

Second, the Chinese character “*ren* 仁” consists of two parts, “person 人” and the number “two 二.” This etymological analysis, say Ames and Rosemont, “underscores the Confucian assumption that one cannot become a person by oneself – we are, from our inchoate beginnings, irreducibly social” (Ames and Rosemont 1998: 48). Indeed, many descriptions of *ren* in the *Analects* are about interpersonal relations. “*Ren*” is to “love people” (12/22), says the Master, and the method to be *ren* is “*shu* 恕” – comparing one’s own heart with other hearts with compassion (6/30). The interrelatedness of a person is so important to Confucius that some contemporary Confucian scholars believe that for Confucius, one does not *play* the roles of being a father, a friend, a teacher, etc.; one *is* these roles (see, for instance, Rosemont 1991: 72). They argue that the Confucian concept of a person is different from those who take humans as atomic, autonomous individuals.³ *Ren* is essentially relational, and the *ren* person defers to his or her relationship and interaction with “the other” for the completion of oneself. No one can become fully human in isolation, nor can one say that what happens to others has nothing to do with him or herself. This relational dimension in the concept of the individual serves as an important philosophical foundation not only for the social and political philosophy of Confucius, but also for his ideas of religiosity or spirituality.

Third, we observe that, while Confucius never offered any definition of *ren*, he gave different answers to different disciples when they asked about it. This would indeed be puzzling and confusing if *ren* were understood as a concept to be grasped by the intellect. However, it would be totally understandable if it is more like an art or a disposition that needs to be mastered, embodied, and displayed in one’s life, including in one’s gestures and manners. The Master’s different answers should be seen as practical instructions offered in accordance to each of the disciple’s particular needs for their attainment of *ren*.

³Of course this raises both the philosophical question about whether such a notion can be consistent with human subjectivity, namely human beings as decision makers, as initiators of our actions, etc., which Confucius certainly acknowledges, and the interpretive question about whether Confucius does not at the same time also think that humans are individual entities. P.J. Ivanhoe, for instance, raises a number of objections to this interpretation of the Confucian notion of self (see Ivanhoe 2007 and Rosemont’s response in the same book).

These three observations lead us to the conclusion that *ren* is a quality pertaining to one's caring disposition toward others that has to be developed and fully embodied before a biological person can become an authentic human being. *Ren* is more associated with one's heart and the whole bodily disposition than with rational knowledge or decisions. It must be embodied, and not merely understood and followed as a universal principle or imperative. For this reason, it is a matter of cultivation rather than gaining propositional knowledge, and by its nature unsuitable for conceptual formulation.

Twice when asked about *ren*, Confucius answers "Do not impose upon others what you yourself do not want" (12/2, 15/24). It is known as a negative version of the "Golden Rule," – it is "golden" because it seems to capture what is moral at a substantial level, and can be considered a general rule of conduct after which other rules would follow; it is "negative" because it tells people what *not* to do. Actually Confucius provides a positive version of it also, for he says: "If you want to establish yourself, establish others. If you want to promote yourself, promote others" (6/30). However, we must be clear that Confucius never took it as a rule, much less "Golden." He "rejects ... inflexibility and rigidity" (9/4, see also 15/37), and he states clearly that a morally exemplary person, *jun zi* 君子, "is never for or against anything invariably. He is always on the side of the appropriate" (4/10). Confucius himself was characterized as a sage who acted according to circumstances rather than rules (*Mencius*: 5B/1). The art of flexibility is deemed by the Master so highly that he says, to find a partner good enough in the exercise of *quan* 權 (discretion) is more difficult than finding a partner good enough in taking a stand or in the pursuit of the Way (9/30). The word "*quan*" originally means "scale," and thus the action of "weighing" or "making discretion" as well. According to *Gong Yang Zhuan* 公羊傳, a Chinese classic dated probably to the Warring State period (476–221 BCE), "*quan* means moral goodness resulting from transgressing well-established canons" ("The 11th Year of the Duke of Heng"). Indeed, to take the teachings as the "Golden Rule" would result in the problem of basing rights and wrongs on personal unqualified likes and dislikes, and thereby subject to counterexamples that are contrary to our moral intuitions. For a person who likes to be bribed, the Golden Rule (positive version) would not only permit him to bribe others; it would obligate him to do so. For a judge who does not like to be put in jail, the Golden Rule (negative version) would make the criminal justified in disputing such a punishment. Confucius is not at all uncritical about one's desires and wants. In fact one of Confucius' major descriptions of *ren* is "To restrain the self" (12/1). For Confucius, cultivating one's heart-mind is almost a life-long journey. He says that he himself did not reach the state where he could follow his heart's desire without overstepping the line until the age of 70 (2/4).

How should we take the Confucian "Golden Rule," if it is not meant to be a rule at all? Let us look at the contexts where the statements are found. When a disciple asked, "Is there one expression that can be acted upon throughout one's entire life?" the Master replied, "There is *shu* 恕. Do not impose on others what you yourself do not want" (15/24). In another passage, right after the statement of his positive version of the "Golden Rule," the Master says: "Taking an analogy near at hand is the

method of becoming *ren*” (6/30). The word “*shu*” consists of two parts, the upper part “*ru* 如” means “like,” “as if,” “resemble,” and the lower part, “*xin* 心,” means “heart-mind.” This etymological analysis helps us to understand that for Confucius, the application of the “Golden Rule” is to take one’s own heart as an analogy near at hand, and to extend one’s considerations to the wants and needs of others empathically.

According to such a reading, the “Golden Rule” statements in the *Analects* should be read as no different from “*shu*,” a *method* to be *ren*. Even though there is no guarantee that the method will lead to right actions all the time, it helps a person to become sensitive to the interests of others. Unlike a rule which allows no exceptions and is typically *imposed upon* the agent as an obligation and *proscribing* certain acts, a method is *mastered* by the agent, *enables* the agent to perform the right action, and is certainly not to be used when its application is unwarranted.

This leads us back to a notion we mentioned earlier – *de* 德, or virtue/virtuosity. Often, *ren* is considered as a virtue in Confucianism, and due to its central place, Confucianism is taken as a version of virtue ethics comparable to Aristotle’s, since both of them focus on building the moral agent, and not on formulating rules of conduct. Both Aristotle’s *areté* (virtue) and Confucian *de* are dispositions or abilities required for living an excellent life, and both need to be embodied through constant practice so that they become almost like our second nature. Both philosophers agree that the virtuous person possesses the ability to discern particularities in individual situations that are not subject to formulations of rules. However, there are important differences between the two. Based on a teleological metaphysics, the Aristotelian virtue is a matter of moral obligation for people to develop for the sake of fulfilling the pre-established *telos* (aim) of a human being. The Confucian *de*, on the other hand, is more a power or an art that enables a person to develop their human potential creatively as authors of their own life.

Another important difference between Aristotle and Confucius is that Aristotle places intellectual virtue at the center of his theory, taking rationality to be a defining feature of being a human and contemplation to be the most distinctive human activity. The Confucian *de*, on the other hand, centers on the affective aspect of caring and loving, and Confucius takes the cultivation and manifestation of proper emotions and attitudes to be more important for a human than the use of the intellect. Confucius characterizes *ren* as to “love the people” (12/22). Even though this love is similar to moral duty in that, unlike the way a mouse loves rice, it extends beyond personal interests, it differs from moral duty in that love must be out of the heart, and not merely out of the rational faculty of the mind. Whether in daily life or in governmental affairs, a *ren* person is always considerate and has others’ interests at heart. In running a government, the *ren* ruler “is frugal in his expenditures and loves his subordinates, and puts the common people to work only at the proper season of the year” (1/5). In daily life, a *ren* person “loves the multitude broadly” (1/6). She “does not exploit others’ fondness of her, nor does she exhaust others’ devotion to her” (*Book of Rites*, Chap. 1. 1987: 11). She “does not intimidate others by showing off her own talent, nor belittle others by revealing their shortcomings” (*Book of Rites*, Chap. 32. 1987: 293).

Just like the “Golden Rule,” love by itself does not guarantee that what it dictates is always morally right. One of the Confucian qualifications for a proper love is to love with distinction. The Confucian understanding of relatedness is reciprocal but not symmetrical. It starts locally and concretely from family love and extends outward without limit. The abstract idea of everyone being equal is therefore not only foreign to Confucius, but would also be considered misleading. Confucius differentiates according to relationships and social roles. “When his stables caught fire, the Master hurried back from court and asked, ‘Was anyone hurt?’ He did not inquire after the horses” (10/17). It does not mean that he cared nothing about animals. “The Master fished with a line, but did not use a net; he used an arrow and line, but did not shoot at roosting birds” (7/27). It only means that in comparison, we are closer in relation to our fellow human beings. Among humans, he also believes that one should start with loving one’s own parents and gradually extend the love to others according to the degrees of closeness in relations. Not only is it more natural for us to care more about those who we consider to be one of “us,” it is also the starting point for extended love. The *Analects* states clearly that filial piety (*xiao* 孝) is the very root of a proper social order. “The morally exemplary person concentrates his efforts on the root; for the root having taken hold, the Way will grow therefrom. Aren’t filial piety and fraternal deference the roots of becoming human-hearted indeed?” (1/2) Here we find the love to be both a characteristic of the *ren* person and a method of becoming *ren*. By practicing *ren*, *ren* grows. If we do not start our love from the immediate context of our life and with those who we immediately encounter, it will not start at all.

This methodological function of filial piety shows that it should not be simply taken as a moral imperative or principle. Confucius’ endorsement of his fellow villagers’ way of dealing with their own family members’ misconduct by mutual concealment (13/18) becomes a defense of injustice if we take it to be an ethical principle, but it becomes sacrificing a branch for the sake of saving the root when we treat it as a method of becoming *ren*.⁴ The Confucian strategy is, as Mencius puts it beautifully, to “Treat the aged of your own family in a manner befitting their venerable age and extend this treatment to the aged of other families; treat your own young in a manner befitting their tender age and extend this to the young of other families, and you can roll the Empire on your palm” (*Mencius*: 1A/7).

Confucius also differentiates love according to circumstances. He would rather help the needy than make the rich richer (6/4). Unlike “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” or Jesus Christ’s exhortation to turn the other cheek, Confucius repays ill will with *zhi* 直, uprightness or straightforwardness, or, taking the word *zhi* as a verb, “to straighten,” “to correct,” or “to help grow.” If you repay ill will with kindness, says the Master, “then how would you repay kindness?” (14/34. See also 19/3). The proactive attitude of helping the wrong-doer to correct the wrong

⁴There is a heated debate on the issue in the recent years, initiated by Liu Qingping’s criticism of Confucian morality as a basis for favoritism toward one’s own family, and hence is opposed to the principle of justice. See *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* (2008) for a collection of essays on this controversy.

provides us with a thought-provoking alternative to merely sticking on social justice or to “love your enemy” by letting them continue to do harm.

Ren is also what makes a person worthy of respect and the basis for respecting others. Unlike the Kantian who conceives humans as ends in themselves because, as rational beings, humans can make free choices and hence are the source of all values, or the Christian who believes that humans have dignity because we are made in the image of God, for Confucius, human dignity is more an achievement than a natural quality given by nature or by God. For Confucius, one earns respect from others by being respectful oneself. “If one is respectful, one will not suffer insult” (17/6, 1/13). Confucius says, “The exemplary person does not speak more than what he can accomplish, and does not behave across the line of proper conduct, people revere him without being forced to” (*Book of Rites*, Chap. 27. 1987: 277). The respect one deserves is therefore in proportion to the wellness of one’s cultivation. It does not mean that for a well cultivated person, no one will initiate insult, but rather that the insult will only display the insulter’s own lack of humanity. When someone spoke disparagingly of Confucius, Zigong made the following remarks:

This is in vain. Confucius would not be hurt. The superior character of other people is like a mount or a hill which can still be stepped on, but Confucius is the sun and moon which no one can climb beyond. When people cut themselves off from the sun and moon, what damage does this do to the sun and moon? It would only demonstrate that such people do not know their own limits. (19/24)

This teaching reminds everyone to cultivate themselves and not to disrespect others, even those who are not well cultivated. Repeatedly Confucius reminds his students to set strict standards for themselves and to be lenient to others (see 15/15, 4/14, 14/30, 15/19, and 15/21). Viewed from this perspective, one’s respect for others is more a requirement for one’s own humanity than a moral act based on judging others.

No passage in the *Analects* embarrasses contemporary Confucians more than 17/25, where Confucius says, “It is only *nü zi* 女子 (typically taken to mean ‘women’) and petty persons who are difficult to provide for. Drawing them close, they are immodest, and keeping them at a distance, they complain.” Modern advocates of Confucianism, like their opponents, take the saying to be descriptive, and denounce it as sexist. Putting aside whether the term “*nü zi*” refers to women in general or only to female servants, as some scholars have speculated (since at the time “*fu ren* 婦人” was a more common term for women in general),⁵ few have noticed the instructive message beneath the surface that can be found by relating it to other passages in the *Analects*: Can one be like the Master, as described by his disciples, “respectful and yet at ease” and “commanding but not ferocious” (7/38), so that even the most difficult to provide for are “pleased, if close, and attracted, if at a distance” (13/16)? Reading the passage as a reminder to cultivate oneself rather than a description of fact, this passage looks more consistent with the rest of the book and the overall spirit of Confucianism.

⁵ Refer to Li’s *The Sage and the Second Sex* (Li 2000) for the issue about Confucianism and gender, and pages 3–4 of the book for the specific issue about interpreting “*nüzi*.”

4 *Yi* 義 and *Li* 禮 – Appropriateness and Ritual Propriety

While *ren* is the internal quality or disposition that makes a person an authentic person, *yi* 義 is the appropriateness of actions that typically originates from *ren*. For being appropriate in one's action, however, one also needs the guidance of *li* 禮, ritual propriety, for otherwise a person of *ren* can still go astray. "Not being mediated by the observance of the ritual propriety, in being respectful a person will wear himself out, in being cautious he will be timid, in being bold he will be unruly, and in being forthright he will be rude" (8/2).

The word *li* originally meant holy ritual or sacrificial ceremony, and it is used by Confucius to mean more broadly behavior patterns established and accepted as appropriate through the history by a community, including what we call manners, etiquette, ceremonies, customs, rules of propriety, etc. The metaphor of holy ritual serves as a reminder that the most ordinary activities in our life can also be ritualistic or ceremonial, and it is the ceremonial that sets human activities apart from those of animals. The way we greet each other, a handshake, for instance, is ritualistic, for it is not a mere physical touching of hands. We stand up to greet our guests, and walk them to the door as they leave. These are rituals because, from the point of view of efficiency, they can be spared in most cases. We address people in a certain manner, though practically, calling someone's attention can be done in many other ways. We even look at each other according to some implicit rules – at a very young age we start to learn that it is impolite to stare at people, especially at certain parts of their body. When a disciple asked about filial conduct, the Master replied: "Those who are called filial today are considered so because they are able to provide for their parents. But even dogs and horses are given that much care. If you do not respect your parents, what is the difference?" (2/7) By serving food and dining with respect and appreciation in a proper setting, mere physical nourishment becomes a ceremony, and thereby becomes human.

Indeed the learning is basic but not at all primitive. As any "*zhi* 質" (basic stuff, substance, inside principles, or characters) needs certain "*wen* 文" (refined pattern, form, style, and outside appearance) to exist and unfold, appropriateness (*yi*) needs ritual propriety (*li*) to be its form of expression. "An exemplary person takes appropriateness as the *zhi* [substance of his conduct], and carries it out in the form of ritual propriety" (15/18). "When there is a preponderance of *zhi* over *wen*, the result will be churlishness; when there is a preponderance of *wen* over *zhi*, the result will be pedantry. Only a well-balanced admixture of these two will result in an exemplary person" (6/18). When someone said, "Exemplary persons should focus on the substance, what do they need refined form for?" Confucius' disciple Zigong replied, "Refined form is no different from substance; substance is no different from refined form. The skin of a tiger or a leopard, shorn of hair, is no different from that of a dog or a sheep" (12/8). According to this interpretation, the refined form and the substance of an exemplary person are so closely connected to each other that not only *should* they match each other, without one the other cannot exist! An appropriate conduct must have a refined ritual form, otherwise it would not be appropriate; and a ritual form cannot be considered refined unless it is appropriate.

As the Master says, “In referring time and again to observing ritual propriety, how could I just be talking about the presence of jade and silk?” (17/11) Learning rituals is no different from learning to be a human. Humans are like raw materials – they need to be carved, chiseled, grounded, and polished to become authentic persons (1/15). Learning ritual propriety is such a process. By practicing ritual propriety, a person can be transformed and established (8/8). Most people learn their basic moral lessons at a young age, not by studying Kantian formulations of categorical imperative or utilitarian calculations, but by repeated use of rituals such as saying “thank you,” which increases one’s sense of appreciation, and “I am sorry,” which increases one’s sensitivity to others’ pain. Not only does the skill of dealing with sophisticated human relationships have to be learned from actual life, and in this sense it is not merely a matter of remembering what is right and wrong in the brain, the habit of rituals is not something extrinsic to the person, but the result of transformation of the person. Through the process not only does one *know* what is expressive of humanity but one also *becomes* an excellent human. Only from this perspective can we understand and appreciate the passages in the *Analects* that give detailed accounts of how the Master greeted his guests, dressed himself, ate, sat, etc. The subtlety and complexity of the coordinated ritual acts are certainly beyond what can be capsulated in any abstract principle. This matter of ethical importance, nicely captured by Joel Kupperman as the “style” of life, is unfortunately neglected by most Western ethical theories (see Kupperman 1999: 26–35).

In his influential work, *Confucius – the Secular as Sacred*, Herbert Fingarette articulates the significance of the Confucian teachings about ritual propriety by referring to J. L. Austin’s work in the early 1960s on a class of linguistic actions called “performative utterances.”⁶ Fingarette says that the lesson of Austin’s work is not so much about language as it is about ceremony, for all the performative uses of language are ceremonies or rituals or they are nothing. They cannot be done out of ritual context. “No purely physical motion is a promise; no word alone, independent of ceremonial context, circumstances and roles can be a promise.” “In short, the peculiarly moral yet binding power of ceremonial gesture and word cannot be abstracted from or used in isolation from ceremony. It is not a distinctive power we happen to use in ceremony; it is the power *of* ceremony” (Fingarette 1972: 12, 14). In an apparently puzzling conversation, Confucius compared his disciple Zigong to a sacrificial vase of jade (5/4). According to Fingarette, the passage reveals the profound significance of ritual propriety, for the vessel’s sacredness does not reside in the preciousness of its beauty; it is sacred “because it is a constitutive element in the ceremony.... By analogy, Confucius may be taken to imply that the individual human being, too, has ultimate dignity, sacred dignity by virtue of his role in rite, in ceremony, in *li*” (Fingarette 1972: 75). Outside of a certain ritual setting, a vessel would not be sacred, no matter how beautiful it is. Of course the analogy should not be taken so far as to mean that one can be sacred by merely being in a ritual setting

⁶The utterances are not acts of descriptions about certain facts or acts of instructions to induce some other action; they are the very execution of the acts itself. A promise is a typical example – the utterance of “I promise” is the very act of promising.

without personal cultivation and active participation in the ritual. It is typical that before a holy ritual takes place, the participant has to take a shower, fast for a certain period of time, and meditate for a while to calm the mind and make the will sincere. If placement alone was enough to confer the holiness, all those processes would be simply meaningless.

As all ritual practices involve encountering others, the passage also implies that no one can become sacred in solitude. It is through ritual propriety that social activities and human relations are coordinated in a civilized, and hence, sacred way. The Master says, "Achieving harmony is the most valuable function of observing ritual propriety" (1/12). Harmony (*he* 和) is different from conformity (*tong* 同). "The exemplary person pursues harmony rather than conformity; the petty minded is the opposite" (13/23). Just like simply adding water to water would not make a delicious broth, or playing the same note would not make beautiful music, diversity is a precondition for harmony. While the parts forced into conformity are in agreement with each other at the cost of their individuality, the parts of a harmonious whole mutually enhance each other without sacrificing their uniqueness. People in harmonious relations *participate in* social activities and construction. They are not merely *constituents of* them.

Of course, harmony also presupposes something fundamental that the participants will have to agree upon. Confucius made it clear that "People who have chosen different Ways (*dao*) cannot make plans together" (15/40). The harmony of a broth is dependent on the condition that no ingredient is sharply at odds with other ingredients. This requirement would be very difficult to meet and problematic if the universal agreement is expected to be in the form of principles stated in words. The principles often tend to be either too rigid to allow for differences and creativity or too thin (abstract) to be practically meaningful. The practice of ritual propriety, however, is ambiguous and leaves maximum space for uniqueness and creativity. A handshake in itself does not specify what is agreed upon, and yet a certain trust and mutual recognition can be established through it. Not only can the meaning carried by a handshake be richer than any agreement on a principle, it will not lose mutuality for the sake of having an agreement, nor will it lack emotional content for the sake of retaining rationality.

The ritual order envisioned by Confucius implies social hierarchy, and for this reason it is often criticized as elitist and opposed to human equality. But it is supposed to be one of reciprocity and deference to excellence rather than a rigid order of aristocracy. The Master is himself a role model: "At court, when speaking with lower officials, he was congenial, and when speaking with higher officials, straightforward yet respectful. In the presence of his lord, he was reverent though composed" (10/2). In these rituals the social roles and relationships are confirmed and communicated, the responsibilities that come with them are accepted, and human-heartedness is displayed. Those who are in superordinate positions enjoy more status of authority while bearing more responsibility, and those who are in subordinate positions enjoy more protection and less responsibility but are expected to return the former with respect and wholehearted devotion (*zhong* 忠). This does not mean that the subordinates will always have to obey their superiors. Confucius says, "In political matters, if no one says anything different from what their ruler says, it is fine when what the ruler says is good, but it would ruin a state if what the ruler

says is not good” (13/15). Even though he did not have a concept of modern democracy, he believes that:

when a state has subjects who dare to stand up and appeal to the King, it will not be in danger. When a father has a son who dares to speak up, he will not deviate from ritual propriety. When a person has friends who dare to speak up, he will not take inappropriate action. Hence how can we say that the son is filial, if he obeys whatever his father says? How can a subject be considered whole-heartedly devoted if he follows whatever his King orders? Those who examine what they are expected to follow, that is what filiation and whole-hearted devotion means. (*Xun Zi* 1967: Hsun Tzu, Chap. 29)

Confucius himself even endorsed King Wen and Duke Zhou, who overthrew their corrupted king and became rulers themselves.

Though Confucius values traditional ritual proprieties so highly that he says, “If for a single day one were able to return to the observance of ritual propriety, the whole empire would defer to *ren*” (12/1), nowhere did he say that they must be unchangeable. When asked about the root of observing ritual propriety, the Master replied, “What an important question! In observing ritual propriety, it is better to be modest than extravagant; in mourning, it is better to express real grief than to worry over formal details” (3/4). The principle behind this is the humanitarian spirit, *ren*, not mere traditional formality (see also 9/3, 11/1).

To Confucius, ritual propriety is no less aesthetic than it is educational or social-political. He often puts the word *li*, ritual propriety, together with *yue or le* 乐, a word that, when pronounced as *yue*, means aesthetic activities such as music, dance and poetry, and when pronounced as *le*, means happiness or joy (see 11/1, 16/2, 16/5, 17/11). Ritual ceremonies were traditionally composed of dance, song, and music. The beauty of the music, the dance, and the songs which constitute the rituals reinforces the ethical and social meanings of the rituals by giving them an aura of sacredness. At a more fundamental level, the persons who are refined by rituals and the social order resulting from and exemplified by ritual proprieties can themselves be considered artistic. Refined by ritual propriety, a person will have the grace that enhances the natural beauty of the body profoundly. To the contrary, lacking proper manner, the natural beauty of a person will diminish dramatically, and in extreme cases, to nothing but what is of the flesh. An unsightly behavior is always opposed to ritual propriety, and a conduct in accord with ritual propriety is always elegant and aesthetically pleasing.

The beauty of the social order resulting from ritual propriety is compatible to the beauty of the natural world, in which objects are different but mutually dependent, and they rise and fall rhythmically. The beauty of each object is dependent upon its place within the whole, in relation to its environment. The surrounding can enhance or reduce its beauty, depending upon how it is placed within the environment and in relation to everything else. By ritual propriety, humans can correspond and interact with each other artistically, like performers in a well-conducted orchestra, in which the artistic performance of each is aesthetically dependent on and enhanced by her cooperation with and coordination within the whole.⁷

⁷Readers may refer to Neville (2008) for elaboration of the modern significance of the Confucian idea of ritual.

5 *Zheng* 正 – Political Philosophy

Confucius' humanitarian spirit is well exemplified in many teachings in the *Analects*. He clearly says that one should “love the multitude at large” (1/6). He teaches his disciples that an exemplary person should be gracious in deporting himself, deferential in serving his superiors, generous in attending to needs of the common people, and appropriate in employing their services (5/16). This is the Confucian ideal society:

When the great Way prevails, a public and common spirit is everywhere under the sky. People of talents and virtue are chosen, trustworthiness advocated and harmony cultivated. People love not merely their own parents, nor treat as children only their own children. The aged are provided till their death, the able-bodied all have places to utilize their ability, and the young have the means for growing up. Widows, widowers, orphans, childless, disabled, and ill, all sufficiently maintained. Men get their share and women have their homes. People hate to throw goods of value away upon the ground, but see no reason to keep them for their own gratification. People dislike not putting their strengths into use, but see no reason to use them only to their own advantage. Therefore schemings diminish and find no development; robberies, thefts, rebellions, and treason do not happen. Hence the outer doors need not be shut. This is called the Grand Union. (*Book of Rites*, Chap. 9. 1987: 120)

What is needed for achieving such a Grand Union is basically *ren* (human-heartedness) and *li* (ritual propriety). This section will serve as a further elaboration and clarification of how the principles are applied in the social-political realm.

Confucius explicitly placed the use of administrative and law enforcement as inferior to the way of ritual propriety and moral excellence for securing social order. First of all, during that particular historical era, it was unlikely that the rulers could sanction anything except through arbitrary and power driven orders from above, whereas ritual propriety, a repository of past insights into morality, was already there as a tradition, actualized in custom in the society. More importantly, “Lead the people with administrative injunctions and keep them orderly with penal law, and they will avoid punishments but will be without a sense of shame. Lead them with virtue/virtuosity (*de* 德) and keep them orderly through observing ritual propriety, and they will develop a sense of shame, and moreover, will order themselves” (see 2/3). Compulsion and punishment can only ensure outward conformity, at best. People will stay out of trouble not because they are ashamed of doing wrong, but because they fear the punishment, and in places where legal enforcement cannot reach or no one else is around to see, they may still do wrong. However, if the social order is secured by virtue/virtuosity and ritual proprieties, an internal supervision will develop, which is much more effective in its penetration into people's lives, saturated as a way of life itself. The Master said, “In hearing litigation, I am no different from anyone else. But if you insist on a difference, it is that I try to get people to have no need to resort to litigation in the first place” (12/13). He did not mean to be just idealistic and optimistic. Litigation is often needed when things are not going well, but it tends to inflict ill feeling and animosity, a side-effect hard to avoid even in the most fair court rulings.

Families are small societies on the bases of which the larger society is structured. If the person can be a good member of a family, that person can be a good member of a larger community; if the person can regulate the family well, that person can

rule a country well. When someone asked Confucius, “Why do you not actively search for a career in governing?” the Master replied,

the *Book of Documents* says, “It is all in filial conduct (*xiao* 孝)! Just being filial to your parents and befriending your brothers is carrying out the work of government.” In so doing a person is also taking part in government. How can there be any question of my having actively taking part in governing? (2/21)

Extending the family model to the art of ruling, Confucius believed that the way to conduct *zheng* 政 (to govern) requires one to be *zheng* 正, a homophone that means “being proper,” “straight,” “orderly,” or “to correct,” “to make straight.” When the Master was asked about the order of importance among the following three things for an effective government – sufficient food to eat, sufficient arms for defense, and that the common people have confidence in their leaders, he put confidence in leaders at the top. “Death has been with us from ancient times, but if common people do not have confidence in their leaders, community will not endure” (12/7). The words *zheng*^{-to govern} and *zheng*^{-being correct} are not merely homophonous; they have an intrinsic affinity. He believes that “the excellence of the exemplary person is the wind, while that of the petty person is the grass. As the wind blows, the grass is sure to bend” (12/19). In public affairs, if those who are in superior positions are fond of ritual propriety, the common people will be easy to command (14/41), so easy that they will even follow without any command (13/6). “If there was a ruler who achieved order without taking any action (*wu wei* 無爲), it was surely Shun. What did he do? He simply assumed an air of respectfulness and faced due south. That was all” (15/5).⁸ “Being proper in their own position, what difficulty would the rulers have in governing? But if not able to set themselves proper, how can they set others proper?” (13/13. See also 12/19 and 12/17).

This is the Confucian notion of *wu wei* – action by non-action, a notion more well known for its Daoist affiliation. It is non-action because the agent does not seem to be making efforts or exerting any force at all. While the Daoist *wu wei* is to do things naturally and spontaneously, the Confucian *wu wei* is to accomplish the intended results by ritual proprieties enlivened by their *de* – virtue/virtuosity. Here we may take up a troubling passage in the *Analects*, “the common people can be made to follow a path, but not to know 民可使由之,不可使知之” (8.9), to illustrate the importance of reading Confucius holistically. A careful reading reveals that the key word “*ke* 可” in this passage may be taken either as “be permitted to” or “can.” The first reading would make the passage read “the common people are permitted to follow a path, but not permitted to know.” Based on this reading, critics of Confucianism argue that Confucianism is authoritarian, elitist, and opposed to human freedom and democracy. Though no government can afford to have total transparency (if a government were to reveal all threats to the public as soon as they were reported, it would cause the public to panic and lead the society into chaos), it is still wrong to keep the common people entirely in the dark. Confucius does think that common people are in the dark and do not know what is good for them (see 15/25); but it is

⁸Shun was an ancient sage king that Confucius revered greatly. According to traditional Chinese ritual, south is the direction to which the superior’s seats face.

precisely because of this that he thinks they should be educated (see 2/20, 13/9, 13/29, 13/30). His principle of education is to provide teachings for everyone who shows a sincere willingness to learn and to do this without discrimination (15/39). It would be totally inconsistent to interpret the saying as wanting to have the common people kept in the dark.

Taking “*ke*” to mean “can” and reading the passage as saying that common people can be made to follow a path but cannot be made to know the path still leaves a number of different ways to explain the reason for it. One is that common people are low in intelligence and lack the ability to know it. Another, held by Cheng Yi 程頤, argues that the reason that common people cannot be made to know the path is that this kind of knowledge is knowledge of/as virtue. Unlike knowledge gained through hearing and seeing, which can be understood by one’s mind, knowledge of/as virtue has to be experienced in one’s heart so that the person is willing to act accordingly. By its very nature, knowledge of/as virtue cannot be taught but has to be attained by oneself (*zide* 自得). Still another explanation, offered by Zhu Xi 朱熹, maintains that the sage cannot go door to door to explain the reason to everyone. It is simply impractical.⁹ While all these readings have some plausibility, a most convincing reading, maintained by a number of Confucian scholars such as Dai Xi 戴溪, He Yan 何晏, and Zhang Ping 張憑, is that the saying is about the sage’s way of transforming people. The sages can make the common people follow them like having an invisible spiritual force that excites and motivates people. When the common people plow the land to get their food, or dig their well to get their water, they do not think that the power of their Emperor has anything to do with them. If there were something for the common people to know, it means that the ruler’s way is still visible and not very effective (see Dai 1999: 9). Here the whole passage is understood as advice, consistent with Confucius’ teachings about *zheng*: it is better when people are made to follow the path naturally by the magical forces of examples of excellence and by ritual proprieties than by visible forces.

Since ritual propriety is dependent on clarification of roles, Confucius takes *zhengming* 正名, ordering or rectifying names, seriously, so that each person will know what is expected of him or her in a given web of particular relationships. When asked what would be the priority in bringing order to a state, Confucius replied, “Without question it would be to order names properly” (13/3). Using names, for Confucius, is like implementing strategies or devices that stipulate expectations and norms of conduct. “The ruler must rule, the minister minister, the father father, and the son son” (12/11). Each “name” carries with it a certain norm that whoever bears the name is expected to follow, and others are also expected to treat them accordingly. This is why Confucius advises people to “speak cautiously” (2/18). It is said that when Confucius was editing the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, he paid special attention to the use of words, since words carry the force that can affect reality. An important feature of this Confucian pragmatic orientation toward language is that it focuses on the acceptability of names, or, as Chad Hansen puts it, “social-psychological techniques for shaping inclinations and feelings that direct

⁹ See Huang (2008) for a detailed analysis of these interpretations.

behavior in accord with a moral way” (Hansen 1985: 495). It does not aim at trying to get to the truth in a correspondence sense, nor to invoke proofs or propositional knowledge. In this orientation, reality is supposed to match words, or term-beliefs, and the aim of the rectification of names is to ensure that, as pegs of role expectations, the names are acceptable, and people will have proper dispositions to respond to them. In contrast, in the referential use of language familiar to the Western philosophies preoccupied with obtaining truth and knowledge, sentential beliefs are supposed to match reality, and the aim of rectification is to ensure that they capture what is true.

It would be inadequate to take Confucius’ teachings as merely advocating a social and political order, because they also aim at achieving personal freedom and aesthetic creativity. It is true that in the works of Confucius, there is no word close to the Western idea of “freedom.” Meanwhile, ritual propriety seems to serve as intangible rope that even limits what one can and cannot think or will. Furthermore, Confucius’ emphasis on ritual propriety and the importance of acting in accordance with one’s roles in the web of social relationships seem to place limitations on individual freedoms. However, actually Confucius has a different understanding of freedom. In his famous short autobiography, Confucius says, “At the age of 70, I was able to follow my heart-mind’s (*xin* 心) will (*yu* 欲) without overstepping the line” (2/4). The statement entails that for Confucius, freedom does not mean the lack of any “lines” of conduct that constrain what one can and cannot do, nor the ability to deliberate between alternatives and act upon what one chooses. For him, freedom is a cultivated spontaneity that frees one even from making choices because one would know what the proper lines are and would not have any intention of overstepping them! In this state of existence the “lines” to the person would be no more than “No smoking” signs to non-smokers. Just as any decent human being would not deliberate on whether or not to kick an innocent child for fun, a well cultivated person will have no need for deliberation in most cases (see Kupperman 1999: 102–114). Indeed, an uncultivated person is like a novice chess player who does not know what to do when faced with all available alternatives, and hence would not be considered by Confucius as having any real freedom. One who is totally indifferent to alternatives would be like Buridan’s ass, which starved to death between two equally good piles of hay because it could not find a reason to go to one pile and not the other. Of course, the freedom of cultivated spontaneity is not a natural state that people are born into and can simply enjoy without having to earn it, nor is it a matter of knowing all the relevant facts and making deliberate choices. One has to develop proper inclinations or dispositions, which is to learn proper rituals and cultivate *ren*. “Those who know are not perplexed,” says Confucius; but that is not all. He also says that one must be *ren* to be free from anxiety, and courageous to be free from fear (9/29).

Taking one’s own right as an autonomous choice maker for granted and making demands on external conditions is not Confucius’ way of assuring freedom. Though he clearly does not think that people should submit to whatever is imposed on them, he believes that “If one sets strict standards for oneself and makes allowances for others when making demands on them, one will stay clear of ill will” (15/15; see

also 1/16, 4/17, 15/21 and 20/1). Confucius even describes *ren*, the central quality of an exemplary person, in part as “reforming the self” (12/1). Not having the person cultivated to a certain level of maturity, the availability of alternatives could even endanger the person.

Of course for Confucius freedom is not a personal matter. Just as water is a necessary condition for one to swim, and adjusting bodily movement according to the nature of water increases one’s freedom in the water, specific relationships with others are a necessary condition for an individual to be free within the given social environment, and adjusting the relationships according to ritual propriety increases one’s freedom in it. A person is so inseparable from others that her domain of choice is itself defined and transformed by her interaction with others. It is with this understanding that Confucians take the selection of one’s own residence to be a serious matter – not about the material wealth of the neighborhood, for “were an exemplary person to live in it, what crudeness could there be?” (9/14); the most important feature of a residence is the presence of human-hearted (*ren*) persons in the neighborhood (see 4/1).

Confucianism is often criticized for ignoring, if not opposing, individual rights and for the lack of any idea of democracy. However, some contemporary Confucian scholars have argued that not only are the criticisms unfair to classic Confucianism in the way that Confucius himself represented it, but also that, in exactly these areas, Confucianism has particularly valuable insights to offer. Henry Rosemont, for instance, argues that the modern Western notion of the autonomous right-bearing individual is fundamentally flawed. “99 % of the time I can fully respect your first generation civil and political rights [the rights of speech, of religion, of a fair trial, etc.] simply by ignoring you. You certainly have a right to speak, but no right to make me listen” (Rosemont 1998: 59). Without a communitarian notion of self, i.e. the self as a nexus of social relations, the practice of human rights could result in “excessive individualism, competitiveness, and vicious litigiousness” that “is not only endangering the well-being of others but also detrimental to our own wholeness” (Tu 1998: 305). The Confucian notion of the embodied, relational, duty-bearing person allows each member of a society to have a clear sense of mutual dependence on other people, and to develop a sense of caring for the interest of others. On this basis we can construct our notions of democracy and human rights as the right and duty of every member of the community to participate in public affairs and take the public welfare of all as one’s own. This Confucian notion of democracy is fully compatible with the spirit of democracy – a way of social and political life that promotes the interest of each member of the community as a vital part of the society of, by, and for the people. The key Confucian constituent in this theory is that there can be a good life over and above individual preferences, a life in which “the desired would not be equated with the desirable, and democratic political participation – being a citizen – would involve engaging in collective dialogue about the appropriate means for achieving agreed-upon ends” (Rosemont 1991: 93). It is worth noting that when Carsun Chang, the Chinese delegate to the U.N. and a distinguished Confucian scholar, added the clause that all men “should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood” (which is derived from the Confucian saying

that “all within the four seas are brothers,” 12/5 of the *Analects*), to the *Declaration of Human Rights*, he could not have expected to merely establish a procedure that would guarantee all the “brothers” the basic rights to speak, to be fed, etc. The spirit of brotherhood requires a sense of caring, love, and respect beyond just not legally violating the rights of a sibling. When a person acts toward his brother in a legal but otherwise unkindly manner, there is nothing a legal authority can do.

6 *Xue* 學 – Learning to Be Human

As a system of teachings that revolves around the theme of personal cultivation and manifestation of *ren* and *li*, naturally the topics of learning, thinking, and attaining knowledge are important to Confucianism.

One distinctive feature of the Confucian way of dealing with learning, thinking, and knowledge is that they all contain the *heart* part of *xin* 心, heart-mind. The heart is engaged in the process of reaching a deeper understanding, of critical evaluation, and of appropriating what is learned so that one is able to apply it creatively and artistically. Responding to a disciple’s question about shortening the period of mourning for his parents, Confucius asks “Would you feel at ease?” (17/21) This question forces the disciple to bring whatever feelings and ideas he has on the matter in front of his moral subjectivity and examine whether or not he can accept them at ease. When another disciple asked Confucius about the exemplary person, the Master said, “The exemplary person is free from worry and apprehension.... If there is nothing to be ashamed of upon self-reflection, what can the person be worried about and afraid of?” (12/4) It is no coincidence that the Chinese language contains lexicons that can be illustrative of the bodily characteristic of the Confucian way of thinking and knowing, such as “*ti yan* 體驗,” bodily experience, “*ti hui* 體會,” bodily understanding, “*ti cha* 體察,” bodily examination, “*ti zhi* 體知,” bodily knowing, and “*ti ren* 體認,” bodily recognition. We do not passively receive impressions, nor do we merely reason intellectually. We experience with the body engaged, understand with our heart in empathy, examine with the sensitivity of the body, and know with the body disposed to act upon what is known.

Since the process of learning and reflection involves dispositioning the body and transformation of the entire person, it requires practice to perfect. Biologically, human beings are similar in nature. It is by *xi* 習 (practice) that they diverge (17/2). The outcome is not nearly as much an accumulated stock of propositional knowledge as a set of abilities, which Song and Ming dynasty Confucians call “*gongfu* 功夫” (*kung fu*), obtained through receiving training from masters and through one’s own diligent practice. The *Analects* shows that when asked about *ren* by the disciples, Confucius never tried to describe *ren* per se. He talked about what a *ren* person would be like, how they would act, and he gave instructions according to each disciple’s particular condition, letting them know on what level and in which respect they should start or continue their practice. The teaching

method is indeed more typical of *gongfu* masters than of philosophy teachers in the ordinary sense of the term.

The Confucian *gongfu* culminates at *zhongyong* (see 6/29). “*Zhong* 中” means “centrality,” “not to be one-sided.” “*Yong* 庸” means “ordinary” or “commonality,” “practicality,” and “constancy.” When “*zhong*” and “*yong*” are used together as one term, it can be translated as “centering the commonality.” There is a considerable overlap between the Confucian doctrine of *zhongyong* and the Aristotelian Golden Mean. Both mean the virtue (not necessarily moral virtue), or excellence, of avoiding two extreme vices – deficiency and excess (see 11/16, 11/22, and 20/1), and not a state of being mediocre. By associating “*zhong*” with “*yong*,” Confucius advises people to constantly practice *zhong* in the ordinary or everyday life that makes our heart-mind always at ease. Since everyday life situations are dynamic and hence there is no rigid rule to follow, the person has to embody the *gongfu* to respond to differing situations in a consistent way, and be creative as a co-creator of the universe. After all, the unity between heaven and human is not a combination of two entities or a human’s ascendance to another world; it is rather one’s becoming truly human in serving parents, taking care of children, respecting teachers, helping friends, and finding enjoyment in these activities (see 7/19).

The kind of knowledge obtained through the Confucian sense of learning is closer to what is now commonly referred to as “knowing how [to do something],” as opposed to “knowing what [is the case].” The former is dispositional, and the latter is propositional. The teachings of Confucius are like road signs, or directives, that guide people’s life and their actions, leading them to their own new discovery and their own unique life. An obvious omission in the Confucian learning program is natural sciences. Confucius felt close to nature, but he never displayed any interest in the dispassionate, objective analysis of nature, as scientists do. His remarks about nature are without exception the objectification of his moral and aesthetic sentiments and virtues. As Xu Fuguan points out, the names of plants and animals in the 300 *Odes* are sentiments and virtues of the poets, not botany or zoology. Western science interprets human as part of nature; Confucius interprets nature in terms of human.

But certain caution is needed in taking the Confucian learning as “knowing how.” First of all, while it is true that Confucius never really delved into natural sciences, the holistic and correlative way of thinking that was prevalent in Chinese philosophy, including Confucius’ teachings, has led to remarkable achievements and insights about how the universe (including our own bodies) functions. It is best exemplified in traditional Chinese medicine. Confucius’ own observation about the connection between human-heartedness and longevity (6/23) and his followers’ contribution to Chinese medicine and the Chinese theories of health are indications that Confucianism may have more profound understanding of how the natural world functions than modern medical science does, though the latter is indisputably much more advanced in detailed local areas (that is, if we put aside the fact that the two systems may be incommensurable scientific “paradigms”). The most remarkable feature of the Confucian outlook on the natural world is that it helps us to understand the inseparableness between the body and the mind, between moral cultivation

and the overall wellness of a person, and between the state of an individual and her interpersonal relationships, and that the universe is a continuum, which must be viewed holistically (see Ni 1996, 1999).

Second, it is important to stress that the Confucian learning is not merely a matter of acquiring motor skills, as “knowing how” is commonly understood. It is more a transformation of the person. I may know how to overcome procrastination, but not disposed to do it or have the ability to do it. On the other hand I may be able to do it, but not know specifically how. The aim of the Confucian learning is to achieve the full capacity, including the strong inclination, to achieve excellence.

An interesting observation here is that, in this philosophy that aims primarily at prescribing a good way of life and offering instructions for people to grow mature and live well, the notion of time may also be different. “The Master was standing on the riverbank, and observed, ‘Isn’t life’s passing just like this, never ceasing day or night!’” (9/17) On the surface, this appears to be just a lament on how fast time goes. But the Master always draws moral lessons from observations of nature. The other passages succeeding this quote indicate that he is more likely reminding people that one should be like the river, making constant efforts to improve oneself. Time for a learner is not a passage that always passes evenly. “As in piling up earth to erect a mountain, if, only one basketful short of completion, I stop, I have stopped. As in filling a ditch to level the ground, if, having dumped in only one basketful, I continue, I am progressing” (9/19). “If there was anyone who was never tired of practicing what he was taught, it was surely Yan Hui” (9/20), for he is a person that “I only saw his progress; I never saw him stop” (9/21). “There are indeed seedlings that do not flower, and there are flowers that do not fruit” (9/22). Though no one can be perfect, one should aim at constantly perfecting oneself.

Confucius himself is a model learner. He says, “In strolling in the company of just two other persons, I am bound to find a teacher. Identifying their strengths, I follow them, and identifying their weaknesses, I reform myself accordingly” (7/22). One must not hesitate in correcting oneself when in error (1/8). When he was told that he misjudged someone, the Master said, “I am fortunate. If I make a mistake, others are sure to inform me” (7/31). “When you erred and yet not to correct yourself, that is to err indeed” (15/30). Often the problem is that, when something goes wrong, people tend to blame others or bad fortune rather than to search for the answer in themselves. Yet the exemplary person is like an archer who first searches for the fault within when he fails to hit the mark (*Zhongyong* 2001: Chap. 14; see also the *Analects*: 14/35).

While everyone should strive to become a *junzi* 君子 (exemplary person), the highest perfection of learning is to become a *shengren* 聖人, or sage. A Confucian sage is not one who has eliminated all natural human desires. The ideal is actually to regulate and transform natural desires to the human level. There is no question that for Confucius, as for all the great thinkers of his time, humans need to regulate their desires. But Confucius never advocated the elimination of human desires. He himself is one who likes fine food, not merely whatever can fill the stomach (see 10/8). With regard to sex, he only cautions young people not to overindulge in it (16/7). The *Songs* (*Odes*) that he repeatedly quotes and advises his disciples to study are full of love themes. He is also fond of having fame (15/20), though he also says that one should not be frustrated if one is not recognized by others (1/1). He is

very frank in saying that “Wealth and honor are what people want, but if they are the consequence of deviating from the way, I would have no part in them” (4/5). “If wealth were an acceptable goal, even though I would have to serve as a groom holding a whip in the marketplace, I would gladly do it. But if it is not an acceptable goal, I will follow my own devices” (7/12). The point is “to desire but not to be greedy” (20/2), and to obtain what one desires without deviating from the proper way.

Perhaps no passage in the *Analects* states Confucius’ own orientation toward personal enjoyment more clearly than section 11/26. The passage records a detailed conversation between Confucius and four of his close disciples, Zilu, Zeng Xi, Ran You, and Zihua. The Master said, with an obvious intention to create a relaxed atmosphere and to encourage the students to speak their minds, “Just because I am a bit older than you do not hesitate on my account. You keep saying, ‘No one recognizes my worth!’ but if someone did recognize your worth, how would you be of use to them?” The four students all expressed their wishes. Zilu said that his wish was to govern a state that was in trouble and to bring it back to a sure direction. Ran You’s wish was to rule a small territory and to bring prosperity to the people in 3 years. Zihua stated his modest wish that he wanted to serve diligently as a minor officer and do his job well. Only Zeng Xi (also known as Zeng Dian), after plucking a final note on his zither to bring the music to an end and setting the instrument aside, said that he would choose something different from the rest. Here is how Zeng Xi expressed his wish:

At the end of spring, with the spring clothes having already been finished, I would like, in the company of five or six young men and six or seven children, to cleanse ourselves in the Yi River, to revel in the cool breezes at the Altar for Rain, and then return home singing.

Typically people would expect the Master to endorse the first three disciples’ wishes, for they all expressed moral and political ambitions. However, after hearing all, the Master heaved a deep sigh, and said that he would be with Zeng Xi, whose wish was nothing but enjoyment of a beautiful environment and pleasant company. The detailed description of Zeng Xi’s relaxed way of expressing his wish is indeed part of the message: rather than anxiously waiting for his turn, he kept playing his music to the end even after the Master asked him “What about you, Dian?” Instead of being a nervous moralist who always worries about staying within the moral boundary, a real sage is one whose heart-mind is at ease, who is able to enjoy life artistically by spontaneous participation in the revival of everything, and celebrate the transformation of heaven and earth.¹⁰

¹⁰ Here I am basically following Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi’s reading of the passage. There are some other interpretations. For instance, Cheng Shude takes the Master to be lamenting that given his age and the fact that there was no sage king to employ him, he had no chance to implement his visions in his life. His agreement with Dian was simply saying that he had no choice but to be like Dian (see Cheng 1990: 812). Still another interpretation, held by Zhang Lüxiang, holds that the four disciples’ aspirations show an ascending order. Zilu’s was to bring peace to the land, which is necessary for implementing Ran You’s wish – to let people have sufficient material supplies. Ran You’s, in turn, is a necessary condition for implementing Zihua’s wish, i.e. using ritual propriety to teach people and to transform the society. Finally, only when all the three wishes mentioned above become reality can people truly enjoy the kind of pleasure that Zeng Dian was talking about. The Master’s “with Dian” is then actually consenting to this highest ideal (see Cheng 1990: 816).

This brings us to the question of the Confucian approach to art and aesthetics. If we say that today's conventional notion of art associates artworks with studios and galleries, the Confucian art is the artistic way of life itself. While the conventional artist dissolves the opposition between the mind and the "hands," the Confucian sage achieves unity with heaven, and is able to participate in heaven's creation. Aesthetic enjoyment is actually the culmination of the Confucian learning. Reading the passage 7/6 as a process of cultivation, we see that Confucius puts "sojourn in the arts" as the highest ideal, above other stages of practice, such as "Set your will on the way. Have a firm grasp on virtue. Rely on humanity." Similarly, passage 8/8 describes "finding fulfillment or consummation in music/enjoyment" as a result of getting inspiration from the *Odes* and taking a stand from observing ritual proprieties. For Confucius, "knowing that it cannot be done and yet doing it" (a remark someone made about Confucius, 14/38) is at its best when one "takes pleasure" in doing it (6/20). When the Duke of She asked Zilu about Confucius, and Zilu did not answer, Confucius said: "Why didn't you say that I am a person who forgets his food when engaged in vigorous pursuit of something, is so happy as to forget his worries, and is not aware that old age is coming on?" (7/19). The word "forget" is a strong indication of the pure non-utilitarian aesthetic ideal. These passages reflect that the ideal of Confucian learning is not in morality in the Kantian sense – not moral for the sake of being moral. It is the opposite: Morality is valuable because of its utilitarian function of leading to the aesthetic ideal (which is itself non-utilitarian)¹¹ or that what is moral is itself beautiful and enjoyable. Once the ideal is achieved, there is no need to worry about morality. One simply follows the will of the heart-mind without overstepping the line and enjoys the freedom this entails, just like "When the Dao prevails in the world, the common people do not debate affairs of state" (16/2).

The Confucian sage embodies *zhi*, knowledge or wisdom, and is therefore not perplexed; she embodies *ren*, human-heartedness, and is therefore not worrisome; she is courageous, and is therefore not timid (9/29). But that is not all. The person is profoundly joyful. She enjoys water, for wisdom is like water, dynamic and creative; she enjoys mountains, for human-heartedness is like the mountains, enduring and full of dignity (6/23). The Confucian artistic creation is displayed in one's entire life, and not merely in those "big moments" like jumping into a burning building to save a child, or taking up a dangerous mission to protect one's own country. After all, it is more difficult to be aesthetic consistently in daily activities, providing all sorts of social services, and building strong social relationships (this is where the "Zeng Dian spirit" differs from the Daoist and Buddhist ideals). Such a person may not be considered a prominent artist in the conventional sense of the term, yet for Confucius, she will necessarily be truly prominent (see 12/20), because she cannot become such an artist without turning her own relatedness with others into what is

¹¹ Though this does not mean that arts cannot have utilitarian functions. For instance the Master says that the *Songs* "can arouse your sensibilities, strengthen your powers of observation, enhance your ability to get on with others, and give expression to complaints" (17/9). It only means that an aesthetic ideal does not need any utilitarian function for its justification.

harmonious and pleasant. Indeed, as Roger Ames and David Hall point out, the social order brought forth by the Confucian sage will be an aesthetic one. In contrast with logical or rational order, which enforces some external or transcendental rule or principle from without, the aesthetic order emerges as embodied rules and principles through self-cultivation and mutual coordination. In a logical/rational order, there is no creativity, but only consistency and continuity, whereas in an aesthetic order, individuals and communities are able to creatively interpret and re-interpret the rules and principles. In a logical/rational order, everyone is equal, because everyone is conceived abstractly as an agent, and hence they are substitutable with any other agent, whereas in an aesthetic order, individuals are concrete particulars, un-substitutable, and the inequality is a matter of deference to excellence (see Hall and Ames 1987: 131–8).

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Chapter 4

The Philosophy of Confucius' Disciples

Yuet Keung Lo

1 Introduction

As the Zhou feudal order began to crumble in his times, one of Confucius' (551–479 B.C.E.) ambitions was to train a new social class of people of learning and with moral aspirations and commitment and he called these people noble scholars (*shi* 士). When they were properly and sufficiently trained in the various arts and classical learning, the noble scholars often tried to seek political office to restore the society that was in ritual disorder, and in this sense they were also called gentleman (*junzi* 君子). To Confucius, learning was not confined to books and must be translated into actual practices in everyday life and the political arena. Indeed, his own academy itself constituted a living environment where his teachings were transmitted to his disciples, who were expected to internalize and manifest them in their day-to-day interactions with one another in a fellowship that formed and shaped the earliest Confucian community. In the study of early Confucian thought, the physical environment where the real-life relationships and exchanges that took place and the teachings of the master were first practiced and eventually modified and transformed has been largely ignored. Thus it is worthwhile to examine how the earliest Confucian community was formed and how the master's teachings were practiced and tested before we discuss the philosophy of Confucius' disciples.

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2 Gate to Education

We know that Confucius was one of the first teachers who offered education to the common folk on a regular basis. Disciples clustered around Confucius but we do not know exactly how they actually spent their time together. In Chinese we have the term *kongmen* 孔門, which literally means “the gate of Kong,” Kong being the family name of Confucius. *Kongmen* refers to the community or fellowship which comprises Confucius and his numerous disciples. Yet, this term is not original to the Confucian community it describes; rather, it was probably coined around the late fifth century¹ and gained wide currency since the Tang dynasty (618–906). Even though *kongmen* evokes a strong sense of physical community, in actuality, it pinpoints the cultural, moral, and social identity of Confucius and his followers, as the family name of Confucius unmistakably indicates. This is indeed the way the term was used especially in the early days when it was coined.² Thus *kongmen* does not seem to tell us how the earliest Confucian community was constructed and how it functioned. At least, the family of Confucius does not get us very far in this regard.

But what about Confucius’ “gate”? The Han exegete Bao Xian’s 包咸 (6 B.C.E.–65 C.E.) offered us an extremely valuable clue.³ As we are all taught, the first chapter of the *Analects* talks about friendship and self-cultivation, among other things. The line in question reads, “When friends come from afar, isn’t it joyful?” Virtually all translators of the *Analects* render the term *peng* as “friends” (see, for instance, Slingerland 2003: 1). In glossing “*peng*” in the line, however, Bao says, “*Peng* refers to people who share the same gate.” This seems to be shocking, as far as our customary understanding is concerned. Indeed, for people in the Han period there was nothing unusual about Bao’s gloss. For them, *tongmen* 同門 can only mean “people who share the same gate,” namely, people who studied under the same master.⁴ It does not mean “friends,” as we have learned. In plain English, *tongmen*

¹ The term *kongmen* first appeared in Xiao Zixian 1972: *juan* 39, 2:686. Xiao lived in South China, but around the same time when he was composing his historical work, another historian in North China Wei Shou 魏收 (506–572) was completing his own, in which he also used the term *kongmen*. See Wei Shou 1974 *juan* 84, 5:1850. It is possible that the term was coined to mark the uniqueness of the Confucian tradition vis-à-vis Buddhism and Daoism, which had been gaining considerable currency since the third century. At the same time, the term *rumen* 儒門 (literally, “Confucian gate”) was also in wide circulation even though its first use dates back to the first century during the Eastern Han dynasty. See Liu Pansui 1958: *juan* 13, 1:281, and *juan* 30, 2:590.

² Since the Song (960–1276) period, the term was often used in contradistinction to Daoism and Buddhism, and thus carried a ring of ideology with it.

³ Bao Xian was invited by Emperor Guangwu of Eastern Han to tutor the heir-apparent on the *Analects*, and while in this capacity Bao wrote a *zhangju* 章句 commentary on the work. The commentary was sanctioned by the government and accepted as one of the official commentaries on the *Analects*. It was later incorporated into He Yan’s 何晏 (190–249) *Lunyu jijie* 論語集解 (Collected Commentaries on the *Analects*) in the early third century.

⁴ For a detailed study of the interpretations of the term *peng* from the Han to the Qing periods, see Lo 2008.

means “fellow students” or “classmates.”⁵ This peculiar meaning of *tongmen* continues in use to this day.

What interests us here is the gate in question. Whose gate is it? Given that *tongmen* refers to fellow students who study under the same teacher, it would seem that the gate must refer to the teacher's gate. This can be supported by two considerations. First, since the Confucian community is denoted by the term *kongmen*, the gate evidently belongs to Confucius the teacher. The term is marked, as it were, with the family name of Confucius. Second, the term *menren* 門人 (people of the same gate) appears five times in the *Analects*,⁶ and it clearly refers to Confucius' disciples in four occurrences. If his disciples could be referred to as “people of the same gate,” it seems that the gate must belong to Confucius. It does not seem to make sense that while the disciples studied with Confucius, their identity would be symbolized by a gate of someone other than their master.

Seen in this light, Huang Kan's 皇侃 (485–545) elaboration of Bao Xian's interpretation is particularly informative in his *Lunyu jijieyishu* 論語集解義疏 (Subcommentaries on the *Analects*). He says,

[People who] share the same teacher are called *peng* whereas [people who] hold fast to the same ambition are called friends. *Peng* is synonymous with “comrade;” *peng* are people who form a comradeship at the gate of a [common] teacher.⁷

Huang makes it explicitly clear that the gate belonged to the teacher (*shimen* 師門).⁸ However, the Qing scholar Mao Qiling 毛奇齡 (1623–1716) disagrees and argues that *peng* was originally the appellation for “gate” and this “gate” actually referred to that which guarded the dormitories of the *students* rather than the gate that belonged to the teacher. According to Mao, Confucius' disciples lived together in the same quarters, and the “gate” in question, then, referred to the gate of their dormitories. Mao substantiates his interpretation with a variety of early classical sources, but a commonsensical reflection would seem sufficient to support his view. Given that many, if not most, of Confucius' disciples came from places other than his native state of Lu 魯, they had to find a place to stay while studying under his tutelage. Even for disciples coming from Lu, their homes might be too far away from where Confucius was for them to commute, and they needed temporary lodging as

⁵For most China scholars, the most common term for “classmates” actually is “*tongxue*” (同學, literally, people who study together), yet it was not coined until around the first century. See Ban Gu 班固 2002: *juan* 78, 10:3271.

⁶The term *menren* appears five times in three different chapters in the *Analects*. See *Analects* 4.15, 7.29, 11.11 (twice) and 11.15. Sometimes, the term *mendizi* 門弟子 was also used to refer to the disciples (*Analects* 8.3, 9.2). Interestingly, both *menren* and *mendizi* were used to refer to the second-generation disciples of Confucius as well (*Analects* 19.3, 8.3). References to the *Analects* are based on D.C. Lau and Chen Fong Ching 1995.

⁷Huang Kan 1991: 1.4. Huang Kan's gloss of *peng* as *dang* actually was based on at least two Han sources: Xu Shen's 許慎 (fl. second century) *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (Preface dated 121) and Ban Gu's 班固 (32–92) *Baihu tong* 白虎通. For the citation on *Shuowen*, see Duan Yucai 1974: 150. For *Baihu tong*, see Chen Li 陳立 1994: *juan* 8, 1:376.

⁸The term *shimen* began to appear for the first time in the first century during the early years of the Eastern Han – exactly the same time when Bao Xian wrote his commentary on the *Analects*.

well. It is, then, plausible that the disciples cohabitated in a place provided by Confucius. Since the dormitories were probably provided by Confucius, it also seems to make sense to call their front doors the teacher's gates. In fact, Confucius himself did make such a reference (*Analects* 11.15, 11.2). He called his academy, metonymically and metaphorically, "Qiu's gate" (*Qiu zhi men* 丘之門), Qiu being Confucius' personal name. Hence, the seemingly different interpretations of Huang Kan and Mao Qiling are indeed compatible, if not actually identical.

The sheer number of the disciples makes it unlikely that they all lived with Confucius in his own house. Once, a disciple named Chen Kang 陳亢 asked Confucius' son Boyu 伯魚 if he had received any special teaching from the master given their unique relation. In reply, Boyu mentioned what he had learned from his father while running into him in the courtyard on two separate occasions (*Analects* 16.13).⁹ The courtyard in question cannot be just any courtyard, for it was one mutually understood by Chen Kang and Boyu. Given the explicit reference to private access to Confucius, the courtyard then must be inside Confucius' residence, and this means that the disciples probably did not live there with their master as Boyu appeared to be the only person who had such a privilege.

In the *Analects*, there are passages that seem to hint at the dormitory setting. For instance, we all know that Yan Hui 顏回 (521–481 B.C.E.) was the most beloved student of Confucius and the master considered him to be the only student who was truly fond of learning (*Analects* 6.3, 11.7). Yet, Yan Hui almost always kept his mouth shut in the master's presence; he seldom responded to the master's instruction and appeared, even in the observant eyes of Confucius, to be stupid. However, Confucius eventually came to the conclusion that Yan Hui was in fact not stupid at all. This is because the master had observed Yan Hui in private (*si* 私) when the deceptively stupid student was either by himself or with his classmates, and he realized that Yan Hui's behavior actually could elaborate or even illuminate what had been taught to him (*Analects* 2.9).¹⁰ Where did Confucius observe his students? The key word *si* rules out the "classroom." One viable possibility is the place where the students lived.¹¹

From Confucius' visit to Yan Hui's living quarters, it is plausible that the student dormitories were not far away from the master's residence. In fact, an episode concerning Ran Qiu 冉求 (522-? B.C.E.) evidently supports our conjecture. One day when Ran Qiu returned from court, he ran into Confucius, and the master asked why he came back so late (*Analects* 13.14). How would Ran Qiu run into Confucius when he returned home? The most reasonable explanation seems to be that his

⁹The *Analects* records that Confucius queried his son on the *Odes* on one occasion. See *Analects* 17.10.

¹⁰Confucius expected his students to tell him about the other three corners of a table when they were shown one. See *Analects* 7.8. Yan Hui evidently had more than lived up to such expectation.

¹¹In the case of Yan Hui, being a native of Lu, it is also possible that he lived in his own place, which would not be far away from the home of Confucius, since the *Analects* mentions, in particular, the miserable condition of Yan Hui's dwelling. As Yan Hui's misery was unique, the *Analects* could not be referring to the communal setting of the Confucian dormitory.

dwelling was in the vicinity of the master's place. Still, there is another anecdote that may further substantiate our claim. One day when Confucius was out at court, a fire broke out in the stables on his residence. When the master returned, he asked if anybody was injured without a care about the horses (*Analects* 10.17). We do not know whom the master asked about possible human casualties, but it is plausible that the disciples were at the scene helping to put out the fire. If so, their dormitories could not be far away from the master's residence.

It should be noted that while the students lived in their own quarters, instruction might take place in Confucius' residence. Once, Ru Bei 孺悲 sent a messenger to seek audience with Confucius, but the master declined on the pretext of illness. As the messenger was on his way out, the master picked up his zither and sang, and he made sure it was heard (*Analects* 17.20).¹² The incident suggests that some of the students were around Confucius in his home at that time, presumably for the sake of receiving instruction. That is why this incident was recorded. Book 10 of the *Analects* records the conduct of Confucius in private, including his preference and insistence on various quotidian details of everyday life such as eating and sleeping. These records all indicate that the students studied with the master in his residence, even if occasionally. In fact, at least some of the disciples had to practice their learning in the master's house (*Analects* 14.44, 6.5).

Based on the *Analects*, then, we can conclude that the disciples' dormitories were not far away from Confucius' own residence and that Confucius and his disciples probably lived in close proximity to each other. As luck would have it, we still have a valuable fragment from an encyclopaedic work of the third century by the title of *Huanglan* 皇覽 (For the Eyes of the Emperor), compiled under the order of Emperor Wen of Wei 魏文帝 (reigned 220–225). This fragment can confirm the finding of our investigation. In it we are told that “the houses of the disciples with wells and water pots still remain” (Quoted in Kong 1983: 446.86). And according to Kong Chuan 孔傳 (fl. mid-twelfth century), the 47th-generation descendant of Confucius, the dormitories of the disciples were actually only a mere five *li* 里 (less than two miles) east of Confucius' residence, sandwiched by River Si 泗水 to the north behind and River Zhu 洙水 to the south in the front. Kong further specified that there was actually a lecture hall near the dormitories where Confucius would instruct his disciples, yet it had become dilapidated even though its site survived into the twelfth century (Quoted in Kong 1983: 446.86). The attachment of the lecture hall to the dormitories and its geographical proximity to Confucius' residence must have contributed significantly to the palpable sense of camaraderie and solidarity that characterized the earliest Confucian community. It is well known that Confucius tailor-made his pedagogy to suit the various learning habits and personalities of his students (*Analects* 11.22). Although this tailor-made approach does not presuppose

¹² On another occasion, a friend of Confucius named Qu Boyu 蘧伯玉 also sent a messenger to deliver his greetings to the master, and the conversation between the host and the guest was recorded in *Analects* 14.25. It seems evident that some of the disciples were, again, around when the conversation took place. In fact, in *Analects* 14.44, a young disciple of Confucius did serve as an attendant to receive guests in the master's household.

a dormitory setting, it does require the teacher to get to know his students personally and understand their personalities, character flaws, and learning habits as well as individual strengths and weaknesses. Without such thorough understanding of his students, it is impossible for the teacher to educate them in accordance with the unique character and talents of each student. To get to know a student thoroughly, close contact and regular communication would definitely help.¹³ The physical proximity between the students' dormitories and their master's residence was crucial as it provided them ample opportunities to interact constantly with each other, and in a real sense, we can consider them to be living together in the same community. Finally, it is noteworthy that the Confucian community inaugurated by Confucius was apparently carried on through various lines of disciples even after the master died, for the term *menren* and *mendizi* 門弟子 continued in use to refer to the second generation disciples of Confucius as well (*Analects* 8.3, 19.12).

3 The Disciples and the Earliest Confucian Community

Confucius began his teaching career when he was in his early 30s, and over the course of his life, it is well known that he taught more than 3,000 students and some 70 of them were particularly outstanding in their well-rounded excellences. While Confucius was not the only or earliest teacher who made education accessible to the commoners, his disciples turned out to be the most influential presence in the social, political, and intellectual landscapes during the Warring States Period (404–221 B.C.E.). In Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (145?–87? B.C.E.) magnum opus, *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian), a special niche was created for them in a collective biography entitled “Zhongni dizi liezhuan” 仲尼弟子列傳 (Arrayed biographies of Zhongni's [Confucius'] disciples). It was not a mere matter of paying tribute to Confucius¹⁴; rather, it was, to a large extent, a factual account of the widespread and lasting influence of the master's disciples in their own time and thereafter. The Grand Historian was just being truthful.

While the identity of the vast majority of the three thousand disciples had long fallen into oblivion, the names of 77 were recorded in Sima Qian's collective biography, and they were, according to the Grand Historian, recognized by Confucius himself as “noble scholars of extraordinary abilities” who “thoroughly embodied the training they had received.”¹⁵ According to the biography of Confucius 孔子世家 (“Kongzi shijia”) in the *Shiji*, the training in question was on the *Odes*, the *Documents*, the rites, and music (See Takigawa 1977: *juan* 67). Another earlier

¹³ Confucius appears to comment, at least occasionally, on the individual strengths and weaknesses of his disciples. See, for instance, *Analects* 11.18. More detailed discussion follows below.

¹⁴ Sima Qian also placed the biography of Confucius among those of the Hereditary Houses, which were reserved for feudal vassals and no other pre-Qin thinker or teacher was treated with the same honor.

¹⁵ Whether Sima Qian's figure was accurate, it seems that the total number of students who had studied with Confucius was significantly large.

source, *Kongzi jiayu* 孔子家語 (Family Sayings of Confucius) mentions the names of 76 disciples, which do not completely overlap with those in the *Shiji*, although the order in which the common names appear is basically identical.¹⁶ And the *Kongzi jiayu* says the 76 disciples had “ascended to the master’s hall and entered into his private chamber” (升堂入室). The two lists from the *Shiji* and *Kongzi jiayu* together yield 96 names.¹⁷ While the expression “ascending to the master’s hall and entering into his private chamber” is taken metaphorically today, it probably was meant in the literal sense originally and indeed depicted the Confucian community graphically as Confucius himself used it to measure the progress and achievements of his disciples (*Analects* 11.15).

Apparently, Confucius did not demand any tuition; so long as a prospective student presented himself with a bundle of dried meat (*Analects* 7.7), he would welcome him. According to Xunzi 荀子, (340–245 B.C.E.) Confucius’ disciple Zigong 子貢 (520–? B.C.E.) even said that the master would not turn anyone away who came to seek education; he compared his teacher to a skilled physician, who had many patients at his door (Wang Xianqian 1997: 2.536). The sheer number of his disciples seems to attest to what Zigong said. They came from virtually all over China. From what we can still identify today, 43 came from the state of Lu, Confucius’ homeland; six from the state of Wei, three from Qin, two each from Chen and Qi; and one each from Song, Chu and Cai (Zhang 2007: 24). As the master himself said, “In teaching there is no difference in kind” (*Analects* 15.39). What he meant here was that education was open to all in his community. A student’s personal background was not relevant. Once, a young boy from a village notorious for its recalcitrant residents came to request admission from the master to the Confucian community, and when he was accepted, some of the disciples were nonplussed. Confucius then explained, “When a person purifies his self (*jieji* 潔己) before he announces his presence, I would approve his purity of mind even though I cannot guarantee what will become of him” (*Analects* 7.29). From this example we can see that Confucius basically adopted an open-door admission policy; the bundle of dried meat was only meant to be a ritualistic token of the prospective student’s sincerity. The fact that the young boy purified himself before visiting Confucius suggests that the master’s insistence on sincerity was well known.¹⁸ Indeed Confucius’ students would pay for their education a sum commensurate with their financial assets, and this was also considered a ritual gesture to their teacher as well. With this income, Confucius no longer needed to rely on an official career to make a living (Qian 1991: 16).

There does not seem to be any hard-and-fast restriction on the age of the student. We know that young boys (*Analects* 7.29, 11.26, 14.44) as well as adults only a few

¹⁶ See the “Qishier dizi jie” 七十二弟子解 chapter. Even though the chapter and its title explicitly say 72 disciples, 76 names are actually mentioned in the text.

¹⁷ More disciples could still be identified and so far at least 102 names are confirmed. See Zhang Rujiao 2007: 21–72. It should be noted that only 27 or so of these disciples were mentioned in the *Analects*.

¹⁸ Confucius also purified himself before he sought audience with the Duke of Lu. See *Analects* 14.21.

years the master's junior were admitted to the Confucian community.¹⁹ The disciples came from a variety of social backgrounds; some of them were noblemen²⁰ while the majority were simply underprivileged folks. Yan Hui, for example, lived in wretched conditions that nobody "was able to bear" (*Analects* 6.11). Similarly, Ran Yong 冉雍 (style Zhonggong 仲弓, 522-? B.C.E.) came from so humble a family that some suspected that he might not be offered an official post on that account (*Analects* 6.6), even though Confucius expressly recommended that he was "capable of being a lord" (*Analects* 6.1). Of the disciples of humble origin, some, like Yan Zhuoju 顏涿聚, were even former robbers²¹ while Gongye Chang 公冶長 had been a prisoner even though, in Confucius' opinion, he was actually not guilty of any crime (*Analects* 5.1).

The Confucian community comprised an intricate mosaic of human relationships. Some disciples were father and son to each other; some were son and nephew to the master himself. And many others were probably friends who decided to come to study with Confucius together. Between Confucius and his disciples, we also witness a variety of relationships of different degrees of intimacy. For instance, Confucius publicly professed that he treated Yan Hui as if he were his son, and his love and care for his beloved disciple were mutual for it was no secret that Yan Hui also respected the Master like he would his father (*Analects* 11.11). In reality, most, if not all, of the disciples treated Confucius as their father. It is quite certain that Confucius was well aware of their love and respect. Little wonder that he would rather die in their hands than in the hands of retainers (*Analects* 9.12). The master preferred to die under the care of his "family." When Confucius passed away, the disciples unanimously agreed to observe the 3-year mourning ritual at the master's gravesite, and Zigong, in particular, even continued to stay on for three more years (Takigawa 1977: *juan* 47, 746). Since the 3-year mourning period was reserved only for parents, the disciples' observance of the ritual in effect represented the most unequivocal statement of their profound respect for their mentor. The fictive relationship can actually become real. Confucius appreciated the personal qualities of some of his disciples so much that he, for example, gave his own daughter to Gongye Chang (*Analects* 5.1) in marriage and the daughter of his brother to another disciple Nan Rong 南容 (*Analects* 5.3, 11.6). All in all, the Confucian community in effect functioned much like a close-knit family. The only missing members seem to be girls and women.²²

¹⁹Yan Hui's father Yan Lu 顏路 was only 6 years younger than Confucius and Zilu was 9 years his master's junior. See Takigawa, *Shiki kaichū kōshō*, *juan* 67, p. 863 and p. 856.

²⁰Nangong Jingshu 南宮敬叔 (*Analects* 14.5) and Sima Niu 司馬牛 (*Analects* 12.3) were noblemen.

²¹See Chen Qiyu 1984: *juan* 4, 1:205. Yan Zhuoju came from Liangfu 梁父 in the state of Lu and eventually became an official in the state of Qi 齊. He was also known as Yan Zhuozou 顏涿鄒 and was mentioned in Sima Qian's biography of Confucius' disciples. See *Shiji*, *juan* 17, p. 743.

²²It is probable that there were young maids working in the household of Confucius. See *Analects* 17.25 and Lao 2007: 1310163.

The majority of the disciples naturally came and left; the length of their stay with Confucius varied according to their aspirations, ambitions, and of course, the availability of an official post. There does not seem to be a set length of time for the Confucian program of learning. Some students wanted to learn as much as necessary within a relatively short period of time. One young student, for example, was asked to be the master's messenger; it was an opportunity for him to learn the proper rituals of sending and receiving guests. When someone asked if the teenager had made progress in his learning, Confucius replied that he was actually only trying to wrap up his learning as soon as possible (*Analects* 14.44). Perhaps for the same reason, the master also warned a more accomplished disciple Zixia 子夏 (507-? B.C.E.), even after the latter had an official career as Governor of Jufu 莒父. Confucius told Zixia not to hurry things for petty gains if he wanted to succeed in larger enterprises (*Analects* 13.17). On the other hand, Confucius would also send his disciples out to start an official career if he deemed them capable and ready (*Analects* 5.6). Even though the disciples could decide on the pace and length of their study, it appears that a serious disciple would spend at least 3 years under the tutelage of Confucius before he looked for or accepted a job (*Analects* 8.12). Ultimately, Zixia summed it up most appropriately: "When one has the leisure from studying, one should pursue an official career" (*Analects* 19.13). Every student could have his own timetable.

Why did people come to study with Confucius? If we look at Confucius' curriculum, we may get a telling clue. Among many other things taught in the Confucian community, the so-called Six Arts were well known. They were rituals, music, archery, charioteering, writing, and mathematics. These were practical skills required for employment in the service of feudal vassals. In other words, people came to Confucius to learn the skills for a respectable and, hopefully, profitable career under the patronage of feudal vassals, who in many cases were then trying to recruit fresh talents to help them scramble for political clout and power. The prospective students came to find a way to improve their material life; that is why some of them would even ask about the art of agronomy and horticulture (*Analects* 13.4). Students such as Zizhang 子張 (503-? B.C.E.), who had higher aspirations, would seek instructions on how to pursue an official career (*Analects* 2.18). All in all, the prospective student certainly did not come to find out what his self was and how to cultivate it.²³ Once, Confucius recommended Qidiao Kai 漆雕開 (540-? B.C.E.) for an official post, and when the disciple declined because he did not yet feel confident, the master was visibly pleased (*Analects* 5.6). Confucius was pleased because Qidiao Kai's modesty reflected his seriousness in pursuing the Way, which was evidently somewhat uncommon in the Confucian community. Hence, we can almost

²³ Perhaps Yan Hui and Min Ziqian 閔子騫 (536-? B.C.E.) were exceptions but their unusual aspirations simply proved the rule. We learn that Min Ziqian was even compelled to flee when an official post was repeatedly offered to him (*Analects* 6.9). Yan Hui and Min Ziqian were both exemplary students in terms of moral cultivation, and the latter was particularly noted for his filial devotion. Yet, evidently, Min Ziqian was also cut for a political career. See *Analects* 11.3, and 11.5.

hear Confucius' inaudible sigh when he bemoaned that "It is not easy to find a man who, after studying for 3 years, does not think about a salary" (*Analects* 8.12).

What distinguishes Confucius from other teachers in or before his time is that he discouraged learning strictly for material gains. When Zizhang came from the far away state of Chen 陳, to express his wish to study with the master in hopes of an official career, Confucius admonished the young man, who was 48 years his junior, that he should study for the sake of learning and for his own good. If he could avoid making mistakes in his words and deeds, the master emphasized, an official career would only be a matter of course (*Analects* 2.18). To another student Zixia, who was 44 years younger than himself, the master also exhorted him to be a "gentlemanly scholar" (*junzi ru* 君子儒), not a "petty" one (*xiaoren ru* 小人儒) [*Analects* 6.13]. After all, the master said, "The gentleman seeks the Way; he does not seek to be fed. Plough the fields and you may still go hungry. Apply yourself to learning and you may yet make a career. Therefore, a gentleman worries that he may not find the Way, he does not worry that he may remain poor" (*Analects* 15.32). On numerous other occasions, Confucius reminded his students repeatedly that the true noble scholar (*shi* 士) should aspire for the Way rather than merely worrying over his material provisions. Hence, he said, "A noble scholar sets his heart on the Way, and if he feels ashamed of shabby clothes and coarse food, he is not worth any consideration" (*Analects* 4.9).

In the *Analects*, numerous chapters deal with the subject of wealth and poverty and they should be read in light of the master's emphasis on the pursuit of the Way even if at the expense of acquiring wealth. Confucius himself confesses, "Even though I may have coarse grain for food, water for drink and my bent arm for a pillow, I'll find joy therein. Wealth and honor inappropriately acquired are nothing but fleeting clouds to me" (*Analects* 7.16). Being his true self and being joyful are what Confucius seeks for himself; this is one of the crucial implications of what he calls "learning for one's own self" (*weiji* 为己) [*Analects* 14.24]. For this reason, he praises Yan Hui for being able to enjoy himself with simple food and drink even in a miserable dwelling (*Analects* 6.11). By the same token, he is proud of Zilu 子路 (542–480 B.C.E.) for his being able to stand in his tattered gown without feeling ashamed alongside people who wear fine furs (*Analects* 9.27).

Material provisions pertain to personal, petty considerations while the pursuit of the Way demands lifelong dedication to moral and cultural obligations (*Analects* 8.7). As Confucius said, "You can make the gentleman understand an issue in light of what is right, whereas you can make the petty man understand an issue in light of the gains involved" (*Analects* 4.11). Material provisions can be acquired by offering one's skills and expertise to a feudal lord while the self-appointed mission of carrying on with the Way makes one a morally fulfilled person and authenticates one's human existence. That is why Confucius reminded his students, "People in the past learned for their own selves (*weiji* 为己) whereas people today study for others (*weiren* 為人)" [*Analects* 14.24].

Nevertheless, material provisions and the pursuit of the Way are not necessarily incompatible goals. A sensible man as he was, Confucius acknowledged that "wealth and rank are what people desire" (*Analects* 4.5) and he himself claimed

that if he could acquire riches by driving a chariot, he would do it (*Analects* 7.12). On the other hand, one of Confucius' goals in education was to train political talents, and this was particularly emphasized in the early phase of his teaching career. This is what he meant by "learning for the sake of others," namely, to serve in the political arena with one's acquired learning and skills. That was the reality of his time and he acutely realized it. Therefore, Confucius did intend his disciples to pursue an official career, and perhaps to become wealthy. While Yan Hui was well known for his moral accomplishments, it is erroneous to assume that he was averse to a career in political governance,²⁴ and he was indeed a disciple from the early phase of Confucius' teaching career when the master was primarily intent on training political talents. As mentioned earlier, he would urge his disciples to pursue an official career when they were ready. Contrary to common assumptions, Confucius never meant to emphasize learning only for learning's sake. For him, one of the main goals of the study of the *Odes*, for instance, was to provide training in politics and diplomacy (*Analects* 13.5, 17.9). Indeed, Confucius' professed purpose of education was so well known that "scouts" from other states would come to find out if any of his disciples was suitable and ready for employment (*Analects* 5.8, 6.8, 11.24, 11.7).²⁵

4 The Confucian Program of Learning

In spite of the evolving spiritual progress of Confucius and the myriad differing motives of his disciples, the distinctive calling to study for one's own self was no doubt the trademark of the Confucian community. The calling was understandably challenging and it might be a clarion call to the disciples to recognize and confront their inner selves that were deep in the core of their persons. For instance, when Zaiwo 宰我 suggested that the typical 3-year mourning period for one's deceased parents be reduced to 1 year, Confucius asked him if he would be able to feel at ease eating white rice and wearing fine silk after only 1 year of mourning. The master was not trying to persuade the seemingly unfeeling disciple on rational grounds; rather, he was compelling him to wake up to his genuine feelings for his parents and become morally alive. And when Zaiwo answered in the affirmative, the master could only say in distress that Zaiwo was not humane (*buren* 不仁) [*Analects* 17.21].

This episode concerning Confucius and Zaiwo captures the spirit of the master's teaching most graphically. First of all, Confucius respects Zaiwo as an independent person who can will and feel on his own. This is the baseline for the master's

²⁴ See *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳, *juan* 9. For an English translation, see Hightower 1952: 303–304. Yan Hui was known to be of a quiet type and he hardly spoke in the *Analects*, and the only question he had ever asked Confucius was about governance. See *Analects* 15.11.

²⁵ After Confucius died, feudal vassals continued to come to seek advice from his disciples before they made an offer to a potential candidate for an official post. See *Analects* 19.19 (in this case it was a second-generation disciple).

teaching. Therefore, as much as he wants to see a change of heart in his disciple, Confucius does not appeal to the “universal” tradition of mourning practice; neither does he abuse his own authority as a teacher. Confucius once asked Yan Hui rhetorically, “In the practice of humaneness does a person follow [the feelings and will of] his own or [those of] others?” (*Analects* 12.1) We can thus appreciate that when the master criticizes Zaiwo for being inhumane he is saddened that his disciple has failed to establish himself on his own. The self of Zaiwo is not sensitive enough to erect itself; it appears to stoop to material comfort and selfish enjoyment.

Confucius firmly believes that an individual should and must discover for himself his inner core of being where the sprout of humaneness lies dormant. The dormant humaneness would spring to life upon its host interacting with his fellow beings, the most important of whom are his parents and family members. Only then will the personal self be gradually nurtured into moral fruition through a lifelong process of becoming in the art of interpersonal negotiation. The nurturing of the personal self entails determination to sustain its growth and development vis-à-vis an expanding circle of human relationships.

Second, while we all recognize that Confucius was particular about rituals, we may overlook the fact that he was indeed unrelentingly critical of the rituals of his time. On most occasions in the *Analects* where he discussed rituals, he was actually showing his dissatisfaction over or even disgust at the ritual abuses of the day.²⁶ For him, the spirit of rituals did not lie in their exterior forms which might very well have become fossilized and outmoded (*Analects* 17.11). Confucius was keenly interested in revitalizing and refashioning many of the obsolete rituals prevailing in his time (*Analects* 9.3). However, for him, the 3-year mourning ritual was not ready to change. He did not look at the 3-year mourning as a rigid custom; rather, he considered it a most appropriate ritual gesture to express our genuine feelings for our deceased parents. In other words, the ritual gesture simultaneously embodied and revealed our inarticulate feelings. But more importantly, for Confucius, the ritual form was not only integral to our love and respect that were amorphous, but it indeed consummated and embodied them and authenticated us as bona fide human beings.

The 3-year mourning ritual, then, was still a very much vibrant legacy of the traditional culture which Confucius inherited and admired. The observance of the ritual would make us not only morally but authentically indebted to a time-honoured cultural tradition whose revival and continual transformation was Confucius’ lifelong dream. When we are thus incumbent, we can be called an authentic *shi*, or a noble scholar. Zeng Can 曾參 (honorifically, Zengzi 曾子, 505–435 B.C.E.) describes it best when he says, “To be a noble scholar, one cannot afford not to be strong and resolute, for one’s burden is heavy and one’s road is long. When a person takes up humaneness as his burden 仁以爲己任 (lit., the burden for his self), is that not heavy? When the road ends only with his death, is that not long?” (*Analects* 8.7) On the one hand, the intimate relationship between one’s personal self (*ji* 己) and humaneness is highlighted here. The analogy of a lifelong journey demanded of the humane self, on the other hand, suggests that the individual must carry on a cultural

²⁶For instance, see *Analects* 3.1, 3.2, 3.10.

tradition much larger than his personal self. Given such an unyielding demand on the aspiring noble scholar, we can appreciate why some disciples felt intimidated and were too feeble-hearted to take up the noble challenge. Ran Qiu, for instance, told Confucius that even though he was fond of pursuing the Way as the master taught, he did not have the moral stamina to sustain his efforts (*Analects* 6.12). Perhaps for this very reason, Confucius often exhorted his disciples to apply themselves to follow the dictates of their humane self, even if only for one single day (*Analects* 4.6).

5 Harmony and Tension

As has been analyzed, the Confucian community consisted of an intricate mesh of human relationships. Existentially speaking, then, the cultivation of the humane self was inevitably implicated in the crisscrossing of human interactions on a regular, if not daily, basis. In fact, Confucius himself offered an emphatic assurance that “a virtuous person will not stand alone; he is bound to have neighbors” (*Analects* 4.25). Thus a virtuous person should expect to cultivate himself in a neighborhood of like-minded people. It was only with this communal understanding that Confucius would praise the living in a neighborhood of humane residents as “beautiful” (*Analects* 4.1).

For a community to function properly there must be some guiding principles to which its members will adhere in negotiating their daily transactions with one another. Even though Confucius expressly pronounced that he found it difficult to educate people who could spend a whole day together showing off their shallow wits without ever saying anything appropriate (*Analects* 15.17), as far as we know, he did not formally stipulate any rules to regulate the Confucian community. Yet, it should have been clear to all his disciples that the master exhorted them to become true gentlemen.²⁷ After all, the disciples understood that the purpose of the collective life in the Confucian community was to cultivate humaneness with each other's assistance (*Analects* 12.24).²⁸ In this connection, we can imagine that what Confucius had said on numerous occasions about the self-definition of the noble scholar must have guided all members in the Confucian community in their everyday lives. Confucius, for instance, said, “The gentleman should be proud without being contentious, sociable without being partisan” (*Analects* 15.22). Apparently, the only occasion on which the gentleman would engage in competition is archery (*Analects* 3.7). Clearly, the master asked his disciples to respect themselves as honorable denizens in his community; this self-respect must have

²⁷ Confucius admitted that he had never had the privilege to see a sage and that he would be glad as long as he could see a true gentleman. See *Analects* 7.26.

²⁸ It seems common for the disciples to help each other out when they had difficulty in learning. See, for instance, *Analects* 12.22, where Fan Chi 樊遲 (505/515-?), who being puzzled about Confucius' answer on the meaning of humaneness, asked his classmate Zixia specifically on the very issue. See also *Analects* 7.5.

come from their determination to become gentlemen. And with a strong will of which even an army cannot deprive (*Analects* 9.26), every aspiring gentleman should have a sense of lofty pride. But as a member of the Confucian community, everyone should also learn to be sociable and act according to what is right and appropriate. Since partisanship and competition for personal advantages tend to undermine the solidarity and camaraderie of the community, they are discouraged. In fact, Confucius made it crystal clear that “The gentleman seeks harmony, but not conformity” (*Analects* 13.23). No doubt, the master would like to see harmony among his disciples who lived together in a close-knit family that was the Confucian community. Indeed, he evidently enjoyed the company of his disciples in such a harmonious environment (*Analects* 11.13). Yet, at the same time, Confucius also respected the differences of his disciples, and he no doubt would try his best to foster mutual respect among them.

The camaraderie of the disciples clearly reveals itself in the various interactions among themselves. One of the most visible expressions of such amity is mutual sharing among the disciples. For instance, when Zihua 子華 was sent on a mission to the state of Qi 齊, Ran Qiu requested an allowance of grain for Zihua’s mother from Confucius (*Analects* 6.4). Similarly, when Yan Hui died prematurely, we can understand why his father Yan Lu 顏路 would ask Confucius to spare his own carriage in order to provide for an outer coffin for his son (*Analects* 11.8). Yet, many other disciples also pleaded to give their brilliant classmate a lavish burial. And in spite of the emphatic objection of the master, they proceeded with their plan (*Analects* 11.11). Their love and respect for their fellow student is unmistakable. Once, Confucius had a conversation with Yan Hui and Zilu in which they each shared their personal aspirations. For Zilu, he wished that he could share his carriages, horses, clothes, and furs with his classmates and friends without being upset when they damaged his property (*Analects* 5.26). This seems to be a less than lofty aspiration, but in light of the noble spirit of mutual assistance in the Confucian community, Zilu’s aspiration to unconditional sharing was indeed noble enough.²⁹

The shared destiny of the Confucian community perhaps was most readily seen when the master and disciples encountered dangers on the road. The best evidence for the solidarity in the Confucian community is revealed in the fact that several times when Confucius and company were trapped on their journey and their lives were threatened, everybody stayed together in one common destiny with unwavering faith in the moral values their master had taught them. Even though their master was marooned like a “dog without a home” (*sangjia zhi gou* 喪家之狗), none of the disciples deserted him or the Way they pursued with him. In fact, they fought hard to defend their master and their Heaven-ordained destiny.³⁰ In the case of Yan Hui, when Confucius and his disciples were stranded in Kuang 匡, Yan Hui and Confucius

²⁹Zilu once recommended his classmate Zigao 子羔 to be the Governor of Bi 費. Even though Confucius did not think Zigao was ready for the appointment and thus found Zilu’s recommendation ill-advised, nevertheless, this does not detract from Zilu’s kind-heartedness and caring for his classmate. See *Analects* 11.25.

³⁰*Shiji, juan* 47, pp. 734–736, pp. 739–740.

became separated during the chaos. When the two were eventually reunited, the master said, "I thought you were dead." In reply, Yan Hui said, "While the master is still alive, how would I dare to die?" (*Analects* 11.23) It is interesting to note that Yan Hui's father was still alive and well when this narrow escape from death took place; yet, the reason Yan Hui did not dare to die was because he believed Confucius had survived the life-threatening episode. This suggests that the spiritual bond between Yan Hui and Confucius was even greater than the blood relation between the devoted disciple and his father Yan Lu.

The camaraderie of the disciples can certainly be considered as an expression of harmony in the Confucian community. It should be noted that in the Confucian doctrine while harmony recognizes moral egalitarianism, it thrives on social distinctions. Thus, even though Yuoruo 有若, who was 30 years younger than Confucius, concluded that the application of the rites prized harmony (*Analects* 1.12), we should not overlook the fact that the spirit of rituals actually lies in making and affirming social distinctions. Confucius certainly recognized social distinctions and in fact took them seriously. Allegedly, he advocated the doctrine of the rectification of names (*zhengming* 正名) [*Analects* 13.3], and he taught that we should respect our elders and superiors. Yet, it is not clear whether seniority did carry any actual weight and was respected in the Confucian community. In fact, there appears to be signs that indicate that seniority was not always given due respect.

While we expect that most of the disciples would learn the art of music (one of the Six Arts), not all of them were equally skilled in it. Zilu was one of the students who came to study under Confucius in the master's early teaching career. Perhaps not insignificantly, Zilu was only 9 years the master's junior. As far as we know today, he was the second oldest student in the Confucian community. The *Analects* certainly portrays him as an intimate companion to Confucius, and therefore we would expect that he commanded respect among his classmates. Apparently he did until 1 day when Confucius seemed to complain about Zilu's musical skills, and on that account some of the disciples ceased to respect this senior student. As a result, Confucius attempted to resolve this insidious discord by saying that "Zilu had actually ascended to the hall even though he had yet to enter the chamber" (*Analects* 11.15). In other words, Confucius personally endorsed Zilu's accomplishments as his student. At the very least, this seems to be an unusual act of intervention by the master. Why would Confucius feel compelled to speak in favor of Zilu? We do not know how effective the master's endorsement of Zilu's accomplishments turned out to be, but apparently, a disciple's status in the Confucian community had something to do with the appraisal he received from the master. In fact, the master's approval seems to matter a lot more than a disciple's own accomplishments. More importantly, the respect a disciple commanded among his fellow students might not be commensurate with his seniority in the community, and this suggests that while Confucius insisted on the junior showing respect to his senior, this doctrine was not necessarily practiced even in the very community where it was taught.

In the *Analects*, we sometimes find the disciples soliciting their master to comment on their own abilities (*Analects* 5.4), and they sometimes seem to ask their master bluntly to compare their talents to those of their classmates. These queries

seem innocuous enough, but if we examine them in the context of an emergent Confucian community whose denizens supposedly took it upon themselves to live in strict accordance with what they had personally learned from their master and realized their shared commitment to a noble ideal of gentlemanly living, then these innocent inquiries might reveal traces of tension and rivalry among members of the community.

As mentioned earlier, Confucius acknowledged that Yan Hui was very much like a son to him. The master also made it known that Yan Hui was the only student who was fond of learning as much as he was, even after his premature death. We can imagine that the master would publicly show his special affection and care for his beloved student as well. No doubt Yan Hui was a gifted and hardworking student, but the slighting of Zilu by his classmates suggests that talent and industry might not be sufficient to command respect in the Confucian community. And in Yan Hui's case, he lived in unusual poverty³¹ and even the master admitted that he appeared to be dumb in his presence (*Analects* 2.9). He simply did not seem to stand out in any particular way. All things considered, Yan Hui's esteemed status must have owed a great deal to the master's generous accolades to him.

With this in mind, we can understand why other disciples sometimes ventured to ask Confucius to compare themselves with Yan Hui. And we must emphasize that the comparisons seem to focus on Yan Hui, Zigong, and Zilu, all of them being senior and advanced students in the Confucian community. To be sure, it is not clear whether all of these recorded comparisons were sought by the concerned students, yet given their senior status and plausibly high profiles in the Confucian community, it is possible that some of the concerned students might have a following even though that might very well go against their own wishes. It is probable that the "secret" followers of these esteemed students would try to settle the rank order of their heroes among themselves by seeking the master's assessment on the matter. For instance, Confucius was reported to have said, "Yan Hui came close to perfection, I suppose, and yet he often suffered poverty.³² Zigong did not accept his lot and went into trading; his speculation is often right" (*Analects* 11.19). Granted that we do not know why Confucius would make such a comparison, it seems clear that it was made for the curiosity of someone who was interested in ranking two of the most gifted students in the Confucian community.

It is also noteworthy that while we appreciate Confucius' candor, his answer was purposefully unequivocal as if he wanted to settle the matter once and for all. This apparent intention is even more obvious when the master initiated the comparison between Yan Hui and Zigong on another occasion. We do not know why Confucius would bring up such an issue; perhaps Zigong himself

³¹Zigong was good at business speculation, and apparently he was wealthy in the Confucian community. He himself seemed to be quite aware of his wealthy status (*Analects* 1.15). He also seemed to be recognized as one of the esteemed seniors among the disciples. His opinion was often consulted when doubts and concerns arose (*Analects* 1.10, 19.25).

³²The fact Confucius referred to Yan Hui's poverty suggests that his beloved disciple might fail to inspire respect owing to his financial straits.

had said something to trigger the comparison in the first place. In any case, here is what happened.

Confucius asked Zigong, "Which is better, you or Yan Hui?"

"How do I dare to compare with Hui? Hui can deduce ten things from one thing he learns but I can only deduce two from one thing I learn," replied Zigong.

The master said, "Indeed, you are not his equal; and neither am I" (*Analects* 5.9).

If Confucius indeed wanted to put a stop to the kind of potentially insidious comparison he was asked to make, his affirmative answer to Zigong could not have been more effective. If the master himself was not Yan Hui's equal, then who could be?

If it is unfair to second-guess Zigong's intention in the comparison between him and Yan Hui, Zilu could hardly extricate himself from his jealousy of Yan Hui. Zilu evidently would have liked to win the favor of Confucius. Once, Confucius regretfully wished that he could take a raft and put out to sea since he was disappointed that the Way did not prevail in his time. And he added that perhaps Zilu was the only person to accompany him on the trip. Upon hearing this, the senior student was overjoyed (*Analects* 5.7). It is irrelevant that Confucius never did take the trip, but Zilu's reaction to Confucius' suggestion clearly indicates that he cared very much about what kind of place he might occupy in the heart of the master.

Thus it is understandable that when Confucius gave unconditional and exclusive approval to another disciple, Zilu might squirm in jealousy. Once, Confucius had a conversation with Yan Hui and Zilu, and the master said, "To come out when needed and to hide when dismissed – only you and I can do this." Zilu was evidently displeased and he ventured to challenge the master. Since he was known for his courage and martial skills, Zilu confronted the master by asking, "If you had command of the Three Armies, whom would you take as your lieutenant?" (*Analects* 7.11) Obviously, Zilu was trying to compel Confucius to ascertain his own niche in the master's heart. We cannot but sense a subtle rivalry between Yan Hui and Zilu.

Perhaps Zilu's jealousy was not unique to him. When Yan Hui died, Confucius was greatly saddened and he wailed wildly. The disciples in the funeral procession then reminded him, "Master, is such grief not excessive?" (*Analects* 11.10) We should recall that Confucius normally advocated the doctrine of the Mean, so it is easy to understand why his disciples found him a little dramatic in showing his grief in public.³³ Perhaps more importantly, Confucius apparently did not show the same grief when his own son Boyu died.³⁴ Yet, in the final analysis, it is

³³When Yan Hui died, Confucius was so saddened that he exclaimed, "Alas! Heaven has made me bereft! Heaven has made me bereft!" The master indeed was weeping and was not aware of his unusual outpour of sorrow, and when his disciples reminded him that he was showing undue sorrow, he simply replied, "Am I?" See *Analects* 11.9, 11.10.

³⁴When another disciple Sima Niu was sick, Confucius visited him and, holding his disciple's hand, he said, "We are going to lose him. It must be destiny. Alas! Such a man is afflicted with such a disease! Such a man is afflicted with such a disease!" Like Yan Hui, Sima Niu was also known for his moral virtues but Confucius' reaction to his serious illness, albeit heart-broken, was within reasonable limits, at least in the eyes of his disciples. See *Analects* 6.10.

more likely that the disciples felt that Confucius might be too visibly partial to his beloved disciple.³⁵

It should be pointed out that even after the death of Confucius, the rivalry between some disciples apparently continued to persist. It did not involve Yan Hui as he had already predeceased the master. The most notable rivalry, and perhaps the only one that existed, was between Zizhang, Zixia and Ziyou 子游 (506-? B.C.E.), the latter two being the exemplary students of literature in the Confucian community (*Analects* 11.3). According to the *Analects*, the rivalry between these second-generation masters in literature, in fact, might very well have been purely academic (*Analects* 19.3, 19.12, 19.15) and did not involve any personal competition or rivalry for status or for reputation. Their differences concerned approaches to self-cultivation but their common objective that had been passed down from Confucius had not changed. They all strove for the consummation of humaneness (*Analects* 19.15, 19.16). In the end, they remained faithful to the fundamental doctrine of their master: “The humane person wishes to help others achieve what he wishes to achieve for himself; he wishes to help others to obtain what he wishes to obtain for himself” (*Analects* 6.30).

However real the jealousy and rivalry were among some disciples in the Confucian community, evidently they did not turn out to be destructive or divisive. The disciples actually lived in communal peace. Even if some disciples did feel jealous of Yan Hui, Yan Hui was indeed a positive influence that pervaded in the Confucian community. The master himself admitted that since he had admitted Yan Hui to the Confucian community, his disciples became much more cohesive. Confucius said that in teaching he never hid anything from his disciples (*Analects* 7.24) and even his own son did not have any privilege in this regard (*Analects* 16.13). In other words, he treated everyone in the Confucian community with equal respect and fairness; he did not play favoritism. This spirit of fair-mindedness inspired all members of the Confucian community and overrode petty jealousy and rivalry before and after the death of Confucius. We learn that many disciples chose to settle around the gravesite of the deceased master and thus the Confucian community continued to exist both physically and spiritually and thrive in the absence of the master (Takigawa 1977: *juan* 47, 746–747). Yet, none of the senior disciples came forward to assume the leadership of their community. When someone suggested that Zigong was actually more worthy and competent than the master himself, the senior disciple readily and emphatically dismissed the insinuation that he could and should now assume the moral leadership of the Confucian community (*Analects* 19.25). Zigong’s refutation not only was meant to defend the unrivalled greatness of the master, but it also declared that all disciples of Confucius were truly equal and respected one another. There might be occasional innocuous rivalry but it was perhaps only meant to win the favor or get the attention of the master whom they dearly adored. In the final analysis, it can be argued that the disciples by and large followed their master’s teaching; they acknowledged both that they were all different in their abilities and talents and that they might have a different yet unique niche in their master’s heart. They could live together in

³⁵ It should be pointed out that Confucius also preferred grief to formality in funerals. See *Analects* 3.4.

harmony while respecting one another's differences (*Analects* 13.23). Thus, they did not need a moral leader. In spite of Confucius' death, the earliest Confucian community did not disintegrate because of factional strife, as every member sincerely upheld what the master had taught.

6 Confucian "Family"

The Confucian community virtually constituted a family in terms of its living environment, fictive kinship, emotional bonding, and philosophical outlook. Confucius was revered as not only as a surrogate father of the family but also the "father" of the "school" (*jia* 家, literally, family) of thought called Confucianism (*rujia* 儒家). When the Han Grand Historian Sima Tan 司馬談 (?-110 B.C.E.) classified the six major philosophical doctrines of the pre-Qin period, he considered each of them to be forming a "family" of its own. The idea of "family" was not merely a convenient metaphor but actually signified the historical reality that a philosophical doctrine actually resulted from the collective wisdom of numerous thinkers over generations who shared a common core of fundamental concerns as well as approaches and solutions to them.³⁶ No doubt the metaphor is most apt and realistic for Confucianism as the doctrine developed over time along then recognizable lineages even after the demise of Confucius. To express his extraordinary veneration for Confucius, Sima Qian violated his own organizational principles of his magnum opus *Shiji* and accorded the master a special biography in the category of hereditary houses which was reserved only for feudal lords and nobles of hereditary enfeoffments, who of course established their biological families through actual kinship. The analogy hinges upon the fictive kinship relations between the master and his disciples, which not only signified their emotional bonding but their intellectual affiliation as well. Graphically, the portraits of Confucius and his 72 disciples were often painted together in the Imperial Academy and tombs, and the portraits of the disciples rarely appeared by themselves.

As Confucius' teaching career spanned over four decades or so, students came to follow him at different times. In the master's own words, they can be classified into the early (*xianjin* 先進) disciples and later (*houjin* 後進) disciples (*Analects* 7.7), who began to study with Confucius when he returned to his home state at the age of 68 after a 14-year-long peripatetic search for a feudal lord who would implement his political vision. Thus roughly speaking, there were two generations of disciples from the earliest Confucian community. Owing partly to the personal

³⁶As mentioned above, Confucius referred to his academy as "Qiu's gate" and he measured the achievements of his disciples by pinpointing their relative positions in his household (Zigong, for instance, had ascended to the hall but yet to enter into the chamber), in this sense his disciples were considered members of his physical family and were indeed addressed as "sons and younger brothers" (*dizi* 弟子). In light of this, Confucius' teaching was a family doctrine and a work entitled *Kongzi jiyu* (Family Sayings of Confucius) that consists of dialogues between Confucius and his disciples very much similar to the *Analects* is still extant today. For a discussion of the *Kongzi jiyu*, see R. P. Kramers, "K'ung tzu chia yü" in Michael Loewe 1993: 258-262.

transformation of Confucius himself as a philosopher and partly to the change of the ethos in late Chunqiu times, the learning of the early and later disciples differed in character. The early disciples such as Zilu, Ran Qiu, and Zigong aspired to employ themselves in politics while Ziyou, Zixia and Zengzi were keen on studying culture, which includes rites and music (Qian 2002: 94–95). Of course, there are exceptions, and some disciples such as Yan Hui and Zigong actually straddled both generations. In any case, the later disciples actually classified the specialties of both generations into four main categories: virtue, oratory, government, and culture (*Analects* 11.3). On the other hand, Confucius in his teaching referred to literature and real-life situations and instructed on how to do one's best and act in good faith (*Analects* 7.25). Evidently, the disciples' classification and the master's pedagogy coincide.

The disciples were not trained as philosophers; they received training in the *Odes*, the *Documents*, the rites, and music; these were all practical arts for political service and governance. Much worse, with the exception of Zengzi, virtually none of them left us with any writing of their own. The bibliographical section of the *Han shu* (Han History) lists only three works by Confucius' disciples and four by his second-generation disciples.³⁷ Except for a redaction of the work of Zengzi in ten scrolls, none survives today. To make things even more complicated, the disciples' works all belonged to a philosophic family and thus similarities might overshadow individual differences. Toward the end of the second century B.C.E., Han Fei 韓非 reported that Confucianism had developed into eight branches, each of which was identified with the family name (*shi* 氏) of its purported founder. Granted that Han Fei's characterization is ambiguous and puzzling, it nonetheless implies that Confucianism was perceived as comprising an extended family over generations. Only three of these branches – Yan shi 顏氏 (Yan Hui),³⁸ Zizhang shi 子張氏 (Zizhang), and Qidiao shi 漆雕氏 (Qidiao Kai) – can be attributed to the immediate disciples of Confucius. Unfortunately, Han Fei mentioned nothing about their doctrines. What is certain is that only the later disciples and their own followers began to distinguish themselves with their doctrines. The Confucian texts from the pre-Qin period archived in the Han imperial library confirm this phenomenon. As we all know, Confucius had little to say about human nature but according to Wang Chong 王充 (27–?97), the issue of human nature became a preoccupation among his later disciples and their own followers. Wang said,

³⁷ *Zengzi* 曾子 in 18 chapters (*pian* 篇); *Qidiaozi* 漆雕子 in 13 chapters; *Mizi* 宓子 in 16 chapters; (*Jingzi* 景子 in 13 chapters; Ban Gu's note says "it contains Mizi's sayings and Jingzi appears to be his disciple." 6.1724); *Shizi* 世子 in 21 chapters (Ban Gu's note says "Shizi's name was Shuo 碩, and he was a second-generation disciple and came from the state of Chen; *Li Ke* 李克 in seven chapters (Zixia's disciples, minister to Marquis Wen of Wei 魏文侯); and *Gongsunnizi* 公孫尼子 in 28 chapters (second-generation disciple).

³⁸ If Yan shi indeed refers to Yan Hui, it must be a later attribution by his disciples to acknowledge the origin of their new doctrine because Yan Hui died before Confucius did, so he probably would not have started his own lineage of teaching while the master was still alive. Given that Yan Hui tried to emulate the master in every possible way, it is not likely that he would start his own line of teaching in the first place.

Shi Shuo 世碩 (a second-generation disciple of Confucius)³⁹ believed that human nature contains both good and evil. Focus on the good in human nature and nurture it to its full development, good will grow. [Focus on] the evil and nurture it to its full development, evil will grow. Thus human nature contains yin and yang as well as good and evil; what matters is nurture. Thereupon Shizi composed the *Book on Nurturing* in one chapter. Mi Zijian 宓子賤 (521/502-? B.C.E.), Qidiao Kai and Gongsun Nizi 公孫尼子⁴⁰ also debated about feelings and human nature and [their views] corresponded to that of Shizi in that they all held that human nature contains both good and evil.

Confucius reportedly only said, “By nature humans are similar to one another and by practice they become far apart” (*Analects* 17.2). And from everything else he said, he seemed to entertain a much broader view of human nature and did not exclusively confine it to the dualistic moral categories of good and evil.⁴¹ In this sense, the later disciples did divert from their master in their understanding of human nature. Insofar as the anonymous authors of the recently unearthed bamboo texts related to the Confucian doctrine from around the fourth century B.C.E. can be considered to be later-generation disciples of Confucius, they also provide evidence to this proliferation and diversification of the Confucian doctrine on human nature. For instance, in the Guodian bamboo text now entitled *Xing zi ming chu* 性自命出 (Human nature comes from destiny) it explicitly says, “It is human nature that there is good and not good” (善不善,性也).⁴² Still later, even though Mencius and Xunzi held seemingly diametrically opposite views on human nature, they inherited the same dualistic framework of good and evil from Confucius' later disciples.

7 Yan Hui

Given the various difficulties as mentioned, I will focus on the philosophy of the immediate disciples of Confucius only, and in particular, Yan Hui, Zengzi, and some other later disciples. This is because Yan Hui, an early disciple, was unanimously respected as the most accomplished in the Confucian community and enjoys the same prestige even until today. Beginning with the Han dynasty he was worshipped along with Confucius himself and in 1,330 Emperor Wenzong 文宗 of the Yuan dynasty bestowed upon him the title of Lord of Realized Sagehood (*fusheng gong* 復聖公). The Fusheng Temple (復聖) in his honor still stands in Qufu,

³⁹Ban Gu in his own annotation to the work of *Shizi* says, “[Shizi], named Shuo, he was a native of Chen and a disciple of [one of] the 70 disciples of Confucius.”

⁴⁰According to Shen Yue 沈約 (441–513), the “Yueji” 樂記 chapter of the *Liji* 禮記 actually came from the hands of Gongsun Nizi. The “Yueji” chapter does contain explicit references to human nature.

⁴¹Lao Yueqiang, “Shan e guan yiwai de Kongzi xing lun—yige sixiangshi de kaocha” in Zheng 2009: 73–124.

⁴²Li 2007: 102. The same quotation also appears in a similar yet different bamboo text called “Xing qing” 性情 (Human nature and emotions), published by the Shanghai Museum. See Li Ling 2007: 155.

Shangdong today. Zengzi was probably the most respected among Confucius' later disciples and we are fortunate to have a partial redaction of his sayings. Some of the later disciples are also discussed because they had new philosophical insights that perhaps might have set them apart from the majority of their cohort.

Information about Yan Hui in the *Analects* is scanty but it should be emphasized that not only did he figure quite prominently in many other pre-Qin and early Han accounts, but they are also consistent with his basic character in the *Analects*. In a sense, we can say that Yan Hui enjoyed an afterlife that was richer in detail than his physical one. Inasmuch as the two lives are consistent, coherent, and unified, they can be viewed as one, philosophically if not strictly historically. Based on the *Analects*, Yan Hui pursued both learning for one's sake and learning for others' sake but he was more inclined to embrace the former. Contrary to common perception, he appears to be fully capable of political leadership (*Analects* 15.11; Hightower 1952: 49–51). Personal temperament and perhaps the un conducive political circumstances contributed to his decision.⁴³ He was determined to attain self-sufficiency and spiritual autonomy, and his self-cultivation was particularly focused on the heart-mind. He was able to unify himself with his environment with his personal self in a blissful oblivion; he was also able to manage his own feelings and maintain them in harmony. He evidently was able to emanate a unique charm that could draw people together and help them cohere. This was the remarkable achievement of Yan Hui's learning for his own sake.

Confucius once compared his disciples in terms of their spiritual and moral accomplishments and he said, “[Yan] Hui does not violate humaneness in his heart-mind for 3 months without lapse while the others attain it only now and then” (*Analects* 6.7).⁴⁴ This perhaps is the highest virtue Yan Hui attained in his short life and should be recognized as the bodily expression of his philosophy. For Confucius, humaneness was without doubt the highest virtue, which he seldom volunteered to discuss (*Analects* 9.1). This is a rare occasion and he pinpointed the locus of the virtue in one's heart-mind.⁴⁵ It cannot be overemphasized that Confucius said that he himself “followed the wishes of his heart-mind without transgression” (*Analects* 2.4) when describing the apex of his lifelong self-cultivation. It can be assumed that the master's achievement was not limited to any length of time. This sustained effortless expression of the wishes of the heart-mind always in accordance with

⁴³Confucius enthusiastically commended Yan Hui as the only disciple who, like himself, would come out when employed and would hide when denied to serve (*Analects* 7.11). The wisdom to decide when to come out and when to hide no doubt was implied. Hence, it was a matter of choice that Yan Hui lived in poverty. Confucius also said on a separate occasion, “Poverty and humble station are what people hate, but if one gets them the right way, one will not leave them. If the gentleman abandons humaneness, how could he be considered one of such name? The gentleman never abandons humaneness for the moment it takes to finish a meal...” (*Analects* 4.5). Yan Hui no doubt fits the description of such a gentleman.

⁴⁴Ran Yong (style Zhonggong), along with Yan Hui, was also regarded one of the most accomplished in moral cultivation (*Analects* 11.3), but Confucius did not think he had achieved humaneness (*Analects* 5.5; cf. *Analects* 5.8).

⁴⁵Later, Mencius would make the same identification. See *Mencius* 6A11.

what is appropriate in a given circumstance is a succinct description of what humaneness is as an embodied experience. It is a unity of the inner and the outer as well as self and other. Yan Hui was not the most talkative disciple and in fact he quietly observed Confucius' teaching without so much as uttering a word so that he even appeared stupid to the master, but it is important to note that Confucius realized that Yan Hui's practices could actually illuminate his own teachings (*Analects* 2.9). Yan Hui's embodiment of humaneness should thus be considered as his personal understanding and practice of the master's doctrine on that virtue. According to a dialogue between Confucius and Yan Hui reported in the *Xunzi*, when Yan Hui was asked to describe the wise person and the humane person, he replied, "The wise person knows himself and the humane person loves himself" (知者自知,仁者自愛) [Wang 1997: 2:533]. Insofar as the report is reliable, and it is certainly consistent with what the *Analects* tells us, Yan Hui's cultivation of humaneness centres on the self and specifically, on self-understanding and the management of one's own feelings.⁴⁶

Confucius said, "People of the past learned for themselves (*weiji* 为己); people today learned for the service of others (*weiren* 為人)" (*Analects* 14.24). It is often misunderstood that learning for the sake of others is morally undesirable as one is perceived to be learning just to impress others rather than for one's own good.⁴⁷ In fact, what Confucius meant by *weiren* is that one learns in order to be employable in the government so that one can serve one's lord as well as the people under his care. One of the main goals of the master's popular education was to train people in the practical skills of governance, and he would urge his disciples to take up a post in the government when he deemed them ready (*Analects* 5.5). Indeed, many if not most of his disciples came to receive training from the master precisely for a political career. Thus the master could not but sigh that "it is not easy to find a man who does not think of earning a salary after 3 years of learning" (*Analects* 8.12). The purpose of a political career no doubt is to serve others – it is the ultimate goal of learning for others' sake. Yet if a person's goal of serving others is to earn a salary, he does not live up to the master's expectation of a noble scholar (*shi* 士), who sets his heart on the Way and would not feel ashamed of having poor food and poor clothes (*Analects* 4.9; cf. *Analects* 15.32). As mentioned above, Confucius' disciples classified themselves into four main categories of virtue, oratory, government, and culture. Of these, only virtue, which is not a skill in an ordinary sense, is the goal of learning for one's own sake; the rest are all technical expertise that could

⁴⁶In contrast, Zilu's replies to the same questions are: The wise person causes other people to know him and the humane person causes other people to love him. Similarly, Zigong's replies are: The wise person knows other people and the humane person loves other people. Both disciples focus on others rather than one's own self.

⁴⁷In the early commentary on *Analects* 14.24 that is extant today, the Han-dynasty exegete Kong Anguo 孔安國 said, "For the sake of one's own sake means one embodies the Way and practices what one learns while for the sake of others means one can only talk about what one learns." Huang 1991: 2.511. Clearly, the distinction between the two types of learning is amoral. The moralistic reading begins with Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107). See Zhu 2001: 155.

be used to serve others.⁴⁸ Confucius reminded his disciples that “the gentleman is not a utensil” (*junzi buqi* 君子不器) [*Analects* 2.12]. One would be a mere utensil if one learns with the only goal to serve others.

Needless to say, the two kinds of learning are not incompatible with each other. That Yan Hui was versed in the practical skills of governance and well-rounded in the abilities of political leadership, and that he excelled in the cultivation of virtue suggests that he was a true gentleman, not a utensil. On one occasion, he revealed to Confucius his dual ambition that he should like never to boast of his own goodness (*fashan* 伐善) and show off his meritorious achievements (*shilao* 施勞) [*Analects* 5.26]. Evidently, Yan Hui aimed at both learning for his own sake and learning for the sake of others. Little wonder that Confucius proudly acknowledged that *only* he and Yan Hui had the ability to practice what they had learned when employed and to hide themselves when dismissed (*Analects* 7.11). Confucius in effect announced that Yan Hui was the only disciple who could actually master both learning for one’s own sake and learning for the sake of others.

While learning to serve others is a perfectly legitimate endeavor, learning for one’s own sake clearly takes precedence and assumes fundamental importance in self-cultivation. Confucius praised Yan Hui for not taking his anger out on others (*bu qiannu* 不貳過) and not committing the same mistake twice (*bu erguo* 不二過) [*Analects* 6.3]. Both achievements are grounded solidly in the cultivation of the self; they are the outcomes of learning for one’s own sake. Evidently, the ability to manage one’s anger is a sign of cultivation of the heart-mind. Yan Hui was not just able to contain his anger within himself; rather, he could deal with it on its own without unburdening it on others. He could master his anger without being enslaved and driven by it as this would mean he had lost control of his self. He could express his anger as he wished yet without violating the proper confines of personal anger. He is the master of his anger, not the other way around. In the words of the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (Doctrine of the Mean), Yan Hui’s anger probably can attain due measure and degree (*zhongjie* 中節) when aroused and his heart-mind would be in a state of harmony (*he* 和). Confucius once lamented that the virtue of *zhongyong* (mean) was rare among the common people in his time (*Analects* 6.29), but we may wonder if Yan Hui was not one of the rare exceptions.

Yan Hui’s other outstanding accomplishment is to not repeat the same mistake. This may seem insignificant to us but it was not the case with Confucius or Yan Hui himself. Notably, Confucius in the *Analects* often talked about the issue of making mistakes.⁴⁹ He was keen in differentiating mistakes in light of people’s various temperaments and levels of cultivation (*Analects* 4.7). He emphasized learning from one’s mistakes and regretted that he had never seen anyone who could see his own mistakes and interrogate himself in his heart (*Analects* 5.27). Confucius was visibly impressed when Qu Boyu’s 蘧伯玉 messenger told him that his lord wanted to minimize his errors but had not been successful (*Analects* 14.25). Thus it is clear

⁴⁸It should be noted that Confucius did not classify his teaching into learning for one’s sake and learning for others’ sake. Nor did he separate the four areas of learning into formal disciplinary categories. It is rather the learner’s ambition that could make such a distinction.

⁴⁹*Analects* 1.8, 4.7, 5.27, 6.3, 7.17, 7.31, 14.25, 15.30, and 19.8.

that Confucius was deeply concerned about doing things right. Even after he had attained the mind that was free of doubts at the age of 40 (*Analects* 2.4), he wished that he could live on to the age of 50 in a few more years so that he could study the *Book of Changes* and free himself from major mistakes (*daguo* 大過) [*Analects* 7.17].⁵⁰ We should keep in mind that his self-proclaimed spiritual accomplishment at the age of 70 is all about doing things right in a spontaneous seamless harmony of inner self and outer dictates.

In order to understand precisely the merit of Yan Hui's ability to avoid repeating the same mistake, it is important to know what kind of mistakes Confucius' might have in mind in summing up his beloved disciple's moral accomplishments. When Yan Hui asked Confucius about humaneness, he was told to cultivate it by returning to the observance of the rites through overcoming the self (*keji fuli weiren* 克己復禮爲仁) [*Analects* 12.1]. And Confucius reminded him that the cultivation of humaneness comes from one's self (*weiren you ji* 爲仁由己). When Yan Hui ventured to ask about the method of cultivation, the master told him not to see, listen, speak, or act when it is not in accordance with the rites. In the *Analects*, seven disciples had asked their master about humaneness on different occasions; all except Yan Hui focused on its political dimension.⁵¹ Naturally Confucius gave them different answers and it was only to Yan Hui that he referred to specific practices of self-cultivation.⁵²

In the entire *Analects*, Yan Hui had asked Confucius only two questions: one on humaneness and one on governance (*Analects* 15.11). No doubt they were of utmost concern to him. The four negative imperatives Confucius specified are noteworthy as they were intended to help Yan Hui navigate the minefield of ritual transgressions. In this light, it seems probable that Confucius was referring to ritual violation when he praised his disciple for being able not to repeat the same mistake. That he was so persistent all his life in trying to restore the ritual institutions of the Zhou dynasty should then seem an inevitable destiny to him. Interestingly, the master himself committed a factual error in trying to avoid making one regarding the rites. He discreetly acknowledged it when his disciple Wuma Qi 巫馬期 (521 B.C.E.-?) brought it to his attention but apparently did not regret it (*Analects* 7.31). He did not cover it up like a petty person would (*Analects* 19.8). Wuma Qi was 31 years Confucius' junior, and if we assume that he became the master's student at the age of 20, then Confucius was already 51 years old when he made that factual error.

⁵⁰Whether Confucius actually studied the *Book of Changes* may be still controversial to some, but this does not alter the fact that even as Confucius was approaching to age 50 when he would "know heaven's mandate" 知天命 (*Analects* 2.4), he was still very much concerned with avoiding mistakes.

⁵¹*Analects* 5.19, 6.26, 6.30, 12.1, 12.2, 12.3, 12.22, 15.10, and 17.6. While it is not clear if Yan Hui also asked specifically about the political implications of humaneness, Confucius did refer to it explicitly in his reply. The difference between Yan Hui and these other disciples is that he was the only one who went on to seek advice on how to cultivate humaneness personally after being given an answer on the political significance of the virtue.

⁵²To another accomplished disciple Zigong, who was just interested in seeking Confucius' confirmation of his understanding of humaneness, the master told him only a general principle of cultivating humaneness after pointing out his mistake. See *Analects* 6.30.

It was the time when he hoped he could avoid making “major mistakes.” As the rites were considered an indispensable means of political governance and social interaction among humans as well as between the human world and the natural and spiritual realms,⁵³ perhaps for Confucius, “major mistakes” were in fact about ritual transgressions. That is why the four imperatives he stipulated for Yan Hui all concern the rites and they were articulated as prohibitions. Little wonder then that Yan Hui said, “The master broadened me with matters of culture and tie them together for me with the rites” (*Analects* 9.11).⁵⁴

It seems that Yan Hui’s self-cultivation revolved around the practices of the rites and he would regulate his conduct with them. A later disciple Youruo once said, “In the application of the rites, harmony is prized...It does not always work if one aims at harmony for the sake of harmony without regulating it with the rites” (*Analects* 1.12).⁵⁵ Clearly, this sort of strenuous pursuit of harmony is far from Confucius’ spontaneous realization of his heart-mind’s wishes without overstepping the boundaries. In this light, Yan Hui’s cultivated abilities of managing his anger in a harmonious way and not repeating the same mistake are perhaps two sides of the same coin, and for this reason they were mentioned in tandem by the master. These accomplishments – inner harmony and overcoming the self – stem from the cultivation of the heart-mind and no doubt constitute learning for one’s own sake. Once, Confucius asked his disciples about their aspirations, and Yan Hui replied, “I wish I would never boast of my good qualities or call attention to my good deeds” (*Analects* 5.26). In contrast, Zilu wished he would never be bothered if his friends damaged the material goods he had loaned them. Clearly Yan Hui was keen on the cultivation of his own self. Confucius described what would be highly regarded as Yan Hui’s paradigmatic attainment of self-cultivation as follows:

How remarkable Hui is! A bowl of rice to eat, a gourd of water to drink, dwelling in a humble alley – no one can bear such hardship, yet Hui does not allow this to affect his joy. How remarkable Hui is! (*Analects* 6.11)

In spite of the unusual misery he lived in, Yan Hui was oblivious to it. His heart-mind was autonomous and his inner joy was impervious to external contingencies. In Zengzi’s characterization, “he has yet appears to lack; he is full yet appears to be empty” (有若無，實若虛) [*Analects* 8.5]. Indeed Yan Hui aimed at self-sufficiency in his heart-mind. Insofar as joy was concerned, he was able to follow his heart-mind’s wishes much like Confucius at age 70. It is perhaps in this connection that the master commended his ability of sustaining humaneness in his heart-mind for 3 months without lapse. Interestingly, Confucius was known to have forgotten the taste of meat also for 3 months when he was totally immersed in the Shao 韶 music of sage-king Shun 舜 (*Analects* 7.14), which he lauded as “perfectly beautiful and perfectly good” (*Analects* 3.25). Both master and

⁵³Youruo said, “The beauty of the way of the ancient kings lies in the rites. All matters, great and small, were observed in accordance with them” (*Analects* 1.12).

⁵⁴Confucius himself proclaimed this pedagogy in *Analects* 6.27 (repeated in 12.15).

⁵⁵This is a theorization of the rites and it is no coincidence that it came from a later disciple who excelled in literary culture. It is quite possible that Yan Hui would agree to it.

disciple had the capacity to be lost in the oblivion of joy.⁵⁶ It was a unique experience to which no other disciple apparently was spiritually adequate enough to have access.

8 The Later Disciples

In Mencius's time it was well known that Confucius' later disciples Zixia, Ziyou, and Zizhang all acquired the features of the sage whereas his early disciples Ran Niu 冉牛, Min Ziqian, and Yan Hui embodied his totality in epitome, and Mencius himself consented to this view (*Mencius* 2A2). As far as we can tell today, this Warring-States opinion is basically sound, and in light of our analysis above, the case of Yan Hui at least can be confirmed. With regard to the various features the later disciples acquired from their master, the trio mentioned by Mencius were all employed under different political administrations. Zixia stood out in his expertise in music and in the study of the *Documents*⁵⁷ and Ziyou specialized in the study of rites with particular regard to governance. Little is known about Zizhang except his expertise in governance. In the *Analects*, virtually every question he asked Confucius pertains to governance. In fact, that seems to be his sole concern in studying with Confucius; he was the only disciple who asked the master about how to secure a position in the government (*Analects* 2.18).⁵⁸ The trio, it would seem, could be considered "utensils" in Confucian terms.⁵⁹

Besides the trio, Zengzi was probably one of most respected of Confucius' later disciples. He was known for his daily self-introspection on three counts: doing his best (*zhong* 忠) when he is asked for counsel; being trustworthy in dealing with his classmates and friends; and personal practice before giving instructions to others (*Analects* 1.4). Even though it is not clear how Zengzi conceived of the practice in a broader philosophical context, he highlighted the importance of being watchful when one is alone (*shendu* 慎獨),⁶⁰ a doctrine which would receive greater attention

⁵⁶According to the *Zhuangzi*, when Confucius asked him to serve in the government, Yan Hui replied that "the Way that I am learning from the master is sufficient to give me joy." See "Rang wang" 讓王 Chapter, in Guo 1985: 4:978.

⁵⁷Zixia was known for his cultivation of courage. According to Mencius, his method was similar to Beigong You 北宮黝 in that they never showed submission on their face or let anyone outstare them. See *Mencius* 2A2. Zixia himself describes his kind of courage in the *Hanshi waizhuan*. See Hightower 1952: 213. It was also known that Zixia had a battle in his heart between what to pursue: the joy of wealth and high station and the joy of the Way taught by Confucius. See Sima Qian, "Li shu" in Li and Wang 1991: 499.

⁵⁸But Zizhang was not interested in politics merely for personal gains; he actually warned against pursuing profit at the expense of what is right (*Analects* 19.1). Ultimately, it appears that he was concerned about larger issues of cultural and political order. (*Analects* 2.23).

⁵⁹Zixia was actually warned by Confucius not to be a petty scholar (*xiaoren ru* 小人儒) and to aspire to be a noble one (*junzi ru* 君子儒) [*Analects* 6.13].

⁶⁰In the *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學), in a discussion of *chengyi* 誠意 (sincerity of intention) where the idea of being watchful when one is alone, Zengzi was quoted to say, "With ten eyes looking at you and ten hands pointing at [you], isn't fearsome?"

at a later time in the Warring States period.⁶¹ Zengzi also identified *zhong* 忠 (doing one's best, loyalty) and *shu* 恕 (empathy) as the one thread that ties the philosophy of Confucius together (*Analects* 4.15). Like Zixia, he was also known for a method of cultivating courage. According to Mencius, it is similar to that of Meng Shishe 孟施舍 in that he would treat defeat as victory. Even though he cannot be certain of victory, he can rid himself of fear (*Mencius* 2A2). Zengzi's writings indeed focus almost exclusively on personal ethics – filial devotion and the moral integrity of the gentleman. Unlike many of the later disciples, Zengzi did not gain much, if any, experience in actual governance, so he had little to say about politics or the relation between ruler and minister. In fact, except for the parent–child relation, he rarely addressed other human relations.⁶² Moreover, most of his discussions are geared toward concrete behavior and lack a theoretical bent and he did not offer a view on human nature.

Perhaps Zengzi was best known for being a filial son not only in the Warring States period but throughout Chinese history. As tradition has it, the *Xiaojing* 孝經 (Classic on Filial Devotion) we have today is actually the record of a lecture on the virtue given to him by Confucius.⁶³ In the *Analects*, Confucius himself did not volunteer to speak about filial devotion; he only counselled his various later disciples on specific filial conduct.⁶⁴ His early disciples apparently did not ask him about the virtue either. There seems to be a growing interest among the later disciples in the nature of filial devotion. Curiously, Zengzi had virtually nothing to say about filial devotion in the *Analects* even though he indeed developed an elaborate doctrine on the virtue. In the *Analects* 8.3 we are told that when Zengzi was seriously ill and approached the end of his life, he summoned his disciples and told them, “Take a look at my hands. Take a look at my feet. The *Odes* say, ‘In fear and trembling/as if standing at the edge of a deep abyss/As if treading on thin ice.’ Only now am I certain that I am spared, my young friends.” Evidently, Zengzi's filial devotion consists in taking good care of his person and physical body so that its integrity would not be compromised either morally or physically. It was his personal practice for a lifetime rather than a mere philosophical doctrine. Perhaps from his personal experience, Zengzi differentiates three types of filial devotion: the highest venerates the parents (*zunqin* 尊親); the second highest does not subject them to humiliation (*buru* 不辱), and the lowest can only feed them (*neng yang* 能養).⁶⁵

⁶¹Most notably in the bamboo text called “Wuxing” 五行. Studies on this important text are too numerous to name, but see Csikszentmihalyi 2004) and Ikeda 2005.

⁶²In *Analects* 12.24, Zengzi said, “The gentleman makes friends by being cultivated in literature and cultivates humaneness with the support of his friends.” He addressed the nature and significance of friendship.

⁶³For a discussion of the text, see William G. Boltz, “Hsiao ching,” in Loewe 1993: 141–153. For a new translation of the *Xiaojing*, see Rosemont and Ames 2009.

⁶⁴*Analects* 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, and 2.8.

⁶⁵Wang 1983: 82. Confucius, in answering the later disciple Ziyou on filial devotion, said that if one does not feed one's parents with reverence, one is treating them much like one would feed dogs and horses (*Analects* 2.7).

While Confucius' advice to his disciple on filial devotion primarily focuses on the son's genuine love for his parents and its proper expressions, Zengzi tends to magnify the virtue and expands it to cover every small behavior in the son's daily living and indeed his entire life. Filial devotion is elevated to the foundation of all virtues. For Zengzi, the virtue of filial devotion is the main cord that binds all under heaven (天下之大經).⁶⁶ It fills up the space between heaven and earth and covers the four seas. It can be practiced day and night and extend to posterity. It is a universal standard wherever it is applied (Wang 1983: 84).

Not only does filial devotion become the guiding power and moral inspiration in monitoring the minutiae of the son's everyday life, but it is virtually the teleology of his entire being. Thus if a son injures his leg by accident at home, he could be considered unfilial. As Zengzi puts it meticulously, "The gentleman does not forget about his parents when he lifts his foot, nor does he forget them when he utters a word" (君子一舉足不敢忘父母, 一出言不敢忘父母) [Wang 1983: 85].⁶⁷ This is because one's body is a gift from one's parents; therefore, in conducting it, how can one not be reverential? (Wang 1983: 82–83) "At birth, the parents give the son a body in whole, and if the son can return it intact [at death], he can be called filial. A body without injury is considered intact" (父母全而生之, 子全而歸之, 可謂孝矣。不虧其體, 可謂全矣) [Wang 1983: 85].⁶⁸ Compared to Confucius who treats the son as the moral agent and pinpoints directly his affective feelings and thoughtfulness in interacting with his parents, Zengzi begins to shift the focus of filial love to its recipients such that they become the determinant power in guiding the son's conduct. Confucius' idea of filial devotion is son-centred (*Analec*s 1.11); it is an intricate art of reinforcing a special emotive bonding between parent and son. In contrast, Zengzi's idea of filial devotion is parent-centred and it borders on being a moral discipline to avoid making mistakes in any possible way.⁶⁹ It is perhaps no coincidence that the three counts on which Zengzi examined daily all concern doing things right for others and that he took *zhong* and *shu* to be the single thread

⁶⁶ Chapter 7 of the *Classic of Filial Devotion* says, 'Filial devotion is the cord [that binds] heaven, the proper standard for earth, and the conduct that people observe' (孝, 天之經也, 地之義也, 民之行也).

⁶⁷ Other unfilial mundane behaviors include climbing the mountains, treading on dangerous areas, laughing casually, getting angry wilfully. See Wang 1983: 79.

⁶⁸ Zengzi said this was what he had heard from Confucius. In the opening chapter of the *Xiaojing*, Confucius was reported to have said to Zengzi, "Our physical body and limbs as well as our hair and skin are given by our parents; we dare not subject them to any injury."

⁶⁹ Once, Zengzi cut off the roots of the gourds by accident while he was weeding in the field, and his father Zeng Xi, himself also a disciple of Confucius, was infuriated. In a fit of anger he struck Zengzi with a huge staff and the son fell down and lost consciousness. After a while, Zengzi came to and he asked his father if he hurt himself since he struck him so hard. He then went back to his room and began to play the zither so that his father could hear him play and thought he was fine. When Confucius heard about this, he was angry and refused to see Zengzi. See Yang 2005: 188–189. It should also be pointed out that after Zeng Xi died when Zengzi was 31 years of age, he could not help but weep every time he read the book on mourning rites. See *Shizi* 尸子 (a work of the Warring States period), quoted in Ouyang 1982: 623. Zengzi also could not bring himself to eat jujubes as it was his father's favorite food. See *Mencius* 7B36.

that unifies Confucius' teachings as the two virtues – doing one's best and being sympathetic – are crucial to filial devotion that aims at serving the persons of the parents rather than fulfilling one's humanity as a son. Of course, Zengzi's moral practice, filial service, and self-fulfilment are fully integrated.

There is another critical development in Zengzi's doctrine on filial devotion. When Confucius was once asked why he did not take part in government, he replied that "if a man is filial to his parents and friendly to his siblings, he is making a contribution to the government" (*Analects* 2.21). The connection between filial virtue and government is indirect at best and Confucius was not philosophizing on filial devotion or fraternal love. However, the later disciple Youruo actually theorized on the virtue and he considered filial devotion and fraternal obedience to be the roots of humaneness (*ren zhi ben* 仁之本). For him, if a person is filial to his parents and obedient to his siblings, he would never offend his superiors, much less to stage a revolt. Therefore, the gentleman should cultivate the roots because once the roots are established, the Way will develop (*Analects* 1.2). Familial virtues now are directly linked to political worthiness; furthermore, the former will develop into the latter. While Zengzi did not articulate it as succinctly, he no doubt endorsed the same view, and in his characteristically detailed fashion, he pronounced:

When one is not dignified at home, one is not filial; when one does not serve one's lord to the best of one's abilities, one is not filial; when one is not reverential in conducting one's official duties, one is not filial; when one is not trustworthy to one's friends, one is not filial; when one is not courageous in the battlefield, one is not filial. (Wang 1983: 83)

It is clear that filial devotion can be translated into political loyalty, professional dedication, personal trustworthiness, and even military courage. Needless to say, the beneficiaries of filial devotion are no longer confined to the parents. In this sense, Zengzi's idea of filial devotion is more beneficiary-oriented than son-centred. In Zengzi's discourse on filial devotion, he particularly highlights its intimate relation to political loyalty.⁷⁰ He says, "If one knows how to serve one's parents, one can serve one's lord. If one knows how to serve one's elder brothers, one can serve one's teachers and superiors. The way one treats one's son is just the same as the way [a lord] treats his subjects" (Wang 1983: 79) because "a filial son is good at serving his lord and a fraternally obedient brother is good at serving his elders" (Wang 1983: 82). This peculiar symbiosis of filial devotion and political loyalty soon would find its way into the *Classic of Filial Devotion* toward the end of the third century B.C.E.⁷¹ even as Zengzi became a legendary filial exemplar of all ages.

⁷⁰ It should be noted that Zengzi sometimes uses the term *zhong* 忠 in the sense of reverence (*jing* 敬) and considers it to be the root of filial devotion (*xiao zhi ben* 孝之本). See Wang 1983: 79.

⁷¹ In Chap. 14 of the *Classic of Filial Devotion*, it says, "The gentleman in being filial to his parents can thus transfer his loyalty to his lord and in being obedient to his elder sibling can thus transfer his deference to his superiors." A similar statement can also be found in Chap. 2.

9 Mi Zijian 宓子賤 and Confucian Political Philosophy

While law and punishments have their place in governance, Confucius thought people should be guided by virtue and shaped uniformly by the rites so that not only will they develop a sense of shame, but they will strive to reform themselves (*Analects* 2.3). The crux of his doctrine lies in the fact that people have the innate ability to seek the good on their own when they are properly educated and inspired. Confucius was interested in transforming people from within. Thus he would prefer to make lawsuits unnecessary rather than merely adjudicate them (*Analects* 12.13). This perhaps should be in line with the spirit of ruling by *wuwei* 無爲 (noninterference) that Confucius admired in the sage-king Shun 舜 (*Analects* 15.5).

Fundamentally keen on self-cultivation for his own sake as he was, Yan Hui was also interested and apparently competent in political governance. He asked Confucius about how to govern a state (rather than a specialist position that Zilu or Zigong held as a “utensil”), and the master told him, “Use the calendar of the Xia, ride in the carriage of the Yin, and wear the ceremonial cap of the Zhou. As for music, employ the *Shao* (of Shun) and *Wu* (of King Wu of Zhou). Abandon the tunes of Zheng and keep the clever talkers at bay. The tunes of Zheng are wanton and clever talkers are dangerous” (*Analects* 15.11). The master offered models of political institutions; he did not counsel on practical matters and his only realistic advice was to avoid clever talkers. There is no record of Yan Hui’s view on governance in the *Analects*, but if we can rely on an account in the early Han dynasty source *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳 (Outer Commentary on the Han Version of the *Odes*),⁷² which contains numerous episodes in which Confucius discussed various issues with his disciples, we shall gain valuable insight into his political philosophy. In a conversation between Confucius and his disciples on their political aspirations, after Zilu and Zigong spoke of the desire to employ their talents in the military and diplomacy respectively, Yan Hui said,

I wish I might be minister in a small state. The ruler would govern by the True Way, and his subjects would be reformed by his transforming virtue. Prince and subjects would be of one mind, and those inside and those outside [the court] would respond to one another. Of the various states and the feudal lords, none but would fall in line with what is appropriate and be subject to [my] influence. The able-bodied would rush to come forward, and the old would come leaning on their staves. My teachings would pass to the four barbarians. Everyone would give up his weapons and assemble inside the four gates [of my capital]. In the world everywhere enduring peace would prevail. Flying or crawling, each [creature] would rejoice in his own nature. I would advance the worthy and employ the able, each to be in charge of the office suited to himself. Then the prince above would be tranquil and his subjects below would be in harmony. I would let [my robes] fall, fold my hands, and practice

⁷²For a discussion of the text, see James R. Hightower, “Han shi wai chuan” in Loewe ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, 1993: 125–128.

noninterference (垂拱無爲). What was done would coincide with the True Way, naturally and easily adhering to the rites. Those who spoke of humaneness and righteousness I would reward, and those who spoke of war and strife I would put to death.⁷³

The scenario Yan Hui presented may not be Daoist in substance, but the natural, harmonious dynamics between the prince and his subjects, among the subjects themselves, as well as between humans and other creatures is characteristically Daoistic. It is perhaps no coincidence that Yan Hui was only interested in governing a small state. In *Laozi* 80, we are given the Daoist utopia, which is also “a small country with a sparse population” where weapons would be of no use. What is most important, however, is the way Yan Hui’s utopia is governed and achieved and it is explicitly called *wuwei*.⁷⁴ How exactly *wuwei* worked remains unclear in this portrayal but Yan Hui emphasized that the need for military action or diplomacy would be obviated in a utopia governed by it. And this in itself is indeed a form of preemptive *wuwei*. As Confucius exclaimed in approval, “In a government with Hui, how would you, You [Zilu] and Ci [Zigong], have a chance to show your abilities?” And he called Yan Hui a “sage” (*sheng* 聖).

It is not always easy to see how a philosopher is at work in real life. Yan Hui never did serve in any government and Confucius left us no record of his actual governance. Fortunately, Confucius’ later disciple Mi Zijian provides us with some clues as to the actual work of a Confucian governor. Mi Zijian enjoyed a legendary reputation in his political career as the local governor of Shanfu 單父 in the state of Lu 魯. We are told that he played the zither all the time and never came down from the hall where he was supposed to work, yet Shanfu was in perfect order. On the other hand, Wuma Qi 巫馬期, another disciple of Confucius who was probably his predecessor, also governed Shanfu well but in a different way. He went out to his duties while the stars were still out and did not return until they again came out at night. He gave himself no rest, taking care of everything in person. When Wuma Qi asked Mi Zijian for the reason, he said he himself governed by “relying on people” (*ren ren* 任人) whereas his predecessor governed by “relying on strength” (*ren li* 任力). For this reason, people called Mi Zijian a gentleman.⁷⁵ They said, “While he rested his four limbs, preserved his sight and hearing, kept his mind and spirit quiet, the various officers would be in order. All he did was to make use of their natural capacities” (逸四肢, 全耳目, 平心氣而百官理。任其數而已矣).⁷⁶ This is perfectly in line with the Daoist idea of ruling by *wuwei*. For instance, *Laozi* 63 says, “Practice noninterference, engage in nonengagement” (為無為, 事無事). And *Laozi* 48

⁷³ *Hanshi waizhuan*, in Li and Wang 1991: 23. The translation is modified from Hightower 1952: 249.

⁷⁴ Confucius himself also applauded the sage-king’s rulership, which he also characterized as ruling by non-interference (*wuwei*). See *Analects* 15.5.

⁷⁵ In fact, Confucius himself praised Mi Zijian as a gentleman as well (*Analects* 5.3).

⁷⁶ *Hanshi wai zhuan*, in Li and Wang 1991: 688. It is possible that Mi Zijian was intending a double meaning with the pun word *guan*, which can mean both “organ” and “officer” here. When he rested his four limbs, preserved his sight and hearing, kept his mind and spirit quiet, his various organs would be in order accordingly. Due to its charismatic and moral influence, his subordinates and officers would also be functioning as they should.

says, "Obtain all under heaven always by nonengagement. With engagement, it is not sufficient to obtain all under heaven" (取天下常以無事, 及其有事, 不足以取天下). Clearly, Mi Zijian was practicing noninterference and nonengagement in governing Shanfu.

In actual practice, Mi Zijian's *wuwei* can be illustrated in a situation where his noninterference would seem counterintuitive but epitomized the true spirit of the Daoist value. Once during the time of wheat harvest, the state of Qi planned to attack the state of Lu and on its way it passed through Shanfu. The local elders then asked their governor if the citizens were allowed to make their harvests before the Qi army arrived, since this could give them more food instead of it going to their enemies. They made their requests repeatedly but Mi Zijian refused to listen. Soon, all the wheat was taken by the Qi troops. Jisun (Mi Zijian's superior) was infuriated when he heard the news, and he sent someone to reprimand Mi Zijian. But he explained, "We lost our wheat this year but we can grow it again next year. Yet if I allowed those who did not work in the field to take the harvest, then people would love to have raiding robbers here. Moreover, 1 year of wheat harvest would not make Lu more powerful; neither would Lu become less powerful with its loss. But if we allow the people to think that they can take things from others as they wish, the damage will definitely remain for several years to come."⁷⁷

In this episode Mi Zijian literally did not do anything to make sure that the citizens of Shanfu would not get used to the idea of taking other people's property willfully. He wanted them to respect others as well as themselves but he did it without interfering in the unfolding of events. This is *wuwei* par excellence. Not only did his superior agree with him, but the people of Shanfu were transformed during his tenure such that they could not bring themselves to deceive their governor.⁷⁸ Mi Zijian's actual governance substantiates his master's claim that when guided by virtue and shaped by the rites, people will have a sense of shame. The Grand Historian Sima Qian actually made a special mention of the transformative influence of Mi Zijian's *wuwei* rulership in the *Shiji*.⁷⁹ Most significantly, it was also noted in the Daoist text *Huai'nanzi* 淮南子.⁸⁰ And if we compare Mi Zijian's practice with the Daoist rulership described in the text, the credit he earned was well deserved. The *Huai'nanzi* says,

The Perfect Man rules by hiding his intelligence and eradicating his embellishments. He follows the Way and abandons his cleverness, abides by what is proper with the people, shuns his temptations, discards his desires, and dismisses his deliberations. To minimize that which to observe, one can be clear about things. To curtail that which to obtain, one can be successful (He 1998: 60–61).

⁷⁷ See "Shenwei" Chapter, in Yan and Zhong 2000: 75. As mentioned earlier, Mi Zijian entertained the view that human nature contains both good and evil. One may wonder if his analysis of the inclination of the Lu people to reap other people's harvest when an imminent battle made it convenient and possible does not actually reflect his view of human nature.

⁷⁸ See *Lüshi chungqu*, "Jubei" Chapter, in Li and Wang 1991: 687.

⁷⁹ See "Guji liezhuan" in Li and Wang 1991: 690.

⁸⁰ See "Daoyin xun" Chapter, in Li and Wang 1991: 689.

As the Daoist Perfect Man “rules by hiding his intelligence and eradicating his embellishments,” Mi Zijian “rested his four limbs, preserved his sight and hearing.” The Perfect Man “follows the Way and abandons his cleverness” while Mi Zijian “kept his mind and spirit quiet.” They both keep things simple and let them run their course as they see fit. They abide by this fundamental spirit of noninterference. The *Huai’nanzi* says, “He who embodies the Way is relaxed and cannot be exhausted” (體道者逸而不窮) [He 1998: 32]. Mi Zijian aptly fits the description.

To be sure, Mi Zijian was not a Daoist exemplar. The *Huai’nanzi* also depicts the Daoist sage as follows:

Sageliness lies not in governing people but in attaining the Way; joy lies not in wealth and high station but in harmony in virtue; if one knows the self is great and all under heaven is small, one is close to the Way. (He 1998: 65–66)

We have no evidence that Mi Zijian was interested in attaining the Way or cultivating harmony in virtue even though he appeared to prize himself over the city he governed. Nevertheless, the case of Mi Zijian perhaps suggests that Confucian political philosophy began to accommodate Daoistic elements in the middle of the fifth century B.C.E. as Confucius was coming to the end of his life. In fact, the spiritual accomplishment of the master at age 70 undoubtedly took on a bit of Daoistic character. He could follow the wishes of his heart-mind without overstepping the boundaries.

Furthermore, the character of Yan Hui, as analyzed above, seems to match the Daoist sage described in the *Huai’nanzi* as well. While it is difficult to take the accounts of Yan Hui in the *Zhuangzi* literally, the fact that he is usually treated as a Daoist adept in the text suggests that the followers of the Yan “school” in Han Fei’s account of late Warring States Confucianism may indeed espouse a doctrine that at least was then perceived to be consistent with Zhuangzi’s philosophy. Yan Hui might not be a mere flat caricature at the mercy of Zhuangzi’s Daoist manipulation. At least some of the anecdotes about Confucius’ disciples also appear in Confucian texts from early Han times. Like Yan Hui, Yuan Xian 原憲 (515-?), for example, refused to serve in government in spite of his extreme poverty, apparently because he felt ashamed to do so when the Way had fallen into disuse.⁸¹ His story was recorded in the *Zhuangzi* where he reputedly said he could never bring himself to “learn for other people’s sake and to teach for one’s own sake.”⁸² The same story was repeated in two early Han texts.⁸³ It should not be a mere coincidence that only Confucius’ disciples such as Yan Hui and Yuan Xian were cast in a favorable light in the *Zhuangzi*.

As mentioned above, both Mi Zijian and Qidiao Kai developed a theory of human nature and shared the view that human nature contains both good and evil.

⁸¹ When Yuan Xian asked about shame, Confucius told him, “When the Way prevails in the state, serve. When the Way falls into disuse in the state, it is shameful to serve.” See *Analecets* 14.1.

⁸² “Rang wang” Chapter in Li and Wang 1991: 700.

⁸³ *Hanshi waizhuan* and Liu Xiang’s 劉向 *Xin xu* 新序, in Li and Wang 1991: 701 and 704, respectively.

Even though Qidiao Kai was probably related to one of the eight “schools” of Confucianism identified by Han Fei, little is known about him except that he did not seem to enjoy serving in government (*Analects* 5.6) and that he might have been meted some form of corporal punishment even though he did not actually commit any wrongdoing.⁸⁴ It is no coincidence that Zhuangzi was averse to serving in government as was Qidiao Kai. Interestingly, it is well known that quite a few handicapped figures were featured in the *Zhuangzi* and they invariably represented accomplished men of authentic Daoist virtues.

The Warring States period was an unusually turbulent time; new ideas were conceived and new experiments were introduced in virtually every aspect of life. Innovation and adaptation carried the day. The fact that the teachings transmitted by Confucius eventually branched off into eight different Confucian doctrines says it all. Bamboo texts on Confucian teachings recently unearthed amply show that the master's unified doctrine indeed proliferated itself into a kaleidoscopic variety. We know that the *Zhongyong* and the *Xici Commentary* of the *Yijing*, both products of the late Warring States period, are hybrids of Confucian and Daoist metaphysics and ethics. Between Confucius and these two composite texts, there must be a trajectory of adaptation and accommodation. New archaeological finds may help us chart it in more definite outlines. Meanwhile, a meticulous study of Warring States and early Han texts may still prove to be most rewarding to the open-minded reader who is interested in tracing the history of evolving doctrines that would later be formally labeled as Confucianism and Daoism.

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⁸⁴ *Kongcongzi* 孔叢子, “Jie Mo” 詰墨 Chapter, in Li and Wang 1991: 769. According to Han Fei, the followers of Qidiao “never show submission on their face or let anyone outstare them. When their behavior is not straight, even if they face a captive, they would avoid him. When their behavior is straight, even if they face a feudal lord, they would reprimand him.” See Chen 1974: 2:1085. For study of Qidiao “school,” see Meng Wentong, “Qidiao zhi ru kao” in Meng 2006: 152–156.

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Chapter 5

Zisi and the Thought of Zisi and Mencius School

Chen-Feng Tsai

1 The Zisi of Intellectual History

Zisi 子思 was a grandson of Confucius (552–479 BCE). According to QIAN Mu 錢穆 (Qian 1935: 161), he was born in the thirty-seventh year of the reign of the Zhou Dynasty's King Jing and lived to the ripe old age of 82 *sui* 歲 (483–402 BCE). Despite Zisi's exalted ancestry, gaps in the historical record have made it extremely difficult for scholars to obtain an understanding of his thought with any certainty. The following two sections will briefly review some of the issues surrounding Zisi's works and the school of thought to which he belonged as a preface to further discussion of him in the context of Chinese intellectual history.

1.1 Zisi's Works

A number of works have been attributed to Zisi throughout the centuries. Ostensibly, the least problematic works should have been eponymous works: the bibliographical treatise of the *Han shu* (漢書) mentions a work entitled *Zisi* in 23 *juan*, while the corresponding section of the *Sui shu* (隋書) lists a similarly titled work, the *Zisizi* (子思子), in seven *juan*. Unfortunately, though, both works were lost sometime during the period of the Northern and Southern dynasties. Still, it is possible that portions of these works could have survived in other forms, for the musicology section of the *Sui shu* also quotes the Southern Dynasty scholar Shen Yue 沈約 (441–513) as saying that portions of the *Zisizi* are still to be seen in the *Book of Rites* (禮記), namely the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhong yong* 中庸), *Biao ji* 表記, *Fang ji* 坊記,

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and *Zi yi* 緇衣 chapters. The biography of Confucius in the *Shiji* (史記) also names Zisi as the author of the *Doctrine of the Mean*.

Based on the *Shiji* and the *Sui shu*, we can see that the *Doctrine of the Mean* has traditionally been attributed to Zisi. And while that traditional ascription was not challenged for centuries, some questions raised during that time as to the original organization of the 41 sections in the transmitted version recorded in the *Book of Rites* are relevant to our discussion. The *Shiji* does not give any information about any subdivisions of this work, but the bibliographical treatise of the *Han shu* lists a *Commentary on the Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhong yong shuo* 中庸說) in two chapters. This led the Song dynasty scholar Wang Bo 王柏 (1197–1274) to speculate that the transmitted version should be divided into two chapters, one containing the first 20 sections, the other of the final 11 sections. Despite his doubts about the arrangement of this work, Wang never went so far as to doubt that any of the 31 sections were not written by Zisi. That was left to the Qing dynasty scholar Cui Shu 崔述 (1740–1816). Cui based his argument that Zisi was not the author of the *Doctrine of the Mean* on textual evidence. For instance, he argued that the language of the *Doctrine of the Mean* was elaborate and obscure, especially when compared to the simplicity and clarity characteristic of the *Analectis* and the *Mencius*. The difference in style of expression was taken as evidence for a later date of composition for the *Doctrine of the Mean*. More important, perhaps, was Cui's observation that a phrase in the 20th section of the work, "when those in an inferior position do not have the confidence of their superiors" was virtually identical to a passage in the *Mencius*. Cui pointed out that when quoting Confucius or Zisi in other contexts, the *Mencius* always began with the formulation "Confucius said" or "Zisi said." The lack of such an attribution, Cui argued, meant that the passage in question was to be understood as being spoken by Mencius (372–289 BCE) himself. In other words, the *Doctrine of the Mean* should be understood as quoting the *Mencius*, rather than the other way around, and therefore could not have been the work of Zisi.

Some modern scholars have tried to combine the insights of Wang and Cui by suggesting multiple authorship of the *Doctrine of the Mean*. Specifically, it has been suggested that either the entire first half or the second through to the nineteenth sections thereof were penned by Zisi, with the remaining sections being added later by students of either Mencius or Zisi.¹ Other evidence has been put forth to support the view that the *Doctrine of the Mean* is made up of materials written by Zisi and other unknown author or authors during the transition from the Qin dynasty to the Han dynasty. For example, it has been suggested that the marking of quotations of

¹Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 argues that the second section through the first part of the nineteenth section were written by Zisi, while the opening section and everything after the phrase "when those in inferior positions do not obtain the confidence of their superiors" (*dao qian ding ze bu qiong* 道前定則不窮) was written by Mencius. See Feng (1961: 447–8). Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 takes a slightly different position, arguing that Zisi wrote the first section and that the second half was written by either Zisi or students of his writing prior to Mencius. See Xu (1969: 105–6). TAKEUCHI Yoshio held that the second through nineteenth sections were penned by Zisi, with the first section and everything after the nineteenth section being written by students of Zisi. See Takeuchi (1931: 121–23).

Confucius with the phrases “Confucius said” (子曰) and “Zhongni said” (仲尼曰) indicates different relations on the part of the author with Confucius. Likewise, the use of elements from two independent genres, namely the discursive essay and collected sayings, can perhaps be taken as indicative of different authors writing at different points in time.²

In addition to the *Doctrine of the Mean*, Zisi is also attributed with putting forth a theory of *wuxing* 五行 (five actions) in the “Contra Twelve Philosopher” chapter of the *Xunzi* 荀子. However, what exactly this theory entailed baffled scholars until the recent discovery of two versions of a text known as the *Wuxing*: the first, a silk manuscript, was discovered at the Mawangdui site in Changsha, Hunan Province in 1973, while the second, a bamboo manuscript, was discovered at the tomb of a Chu king at Guodian in Jingmen, Hubei Province in 1993. The silk manuscript is divided into two sections, the *Wuxing* text, which is for the most part identical to the bamboo manuscript, and a commentary on that text.³ The fact that the Guodian grave was sealed up sometime before 300 BCE means that Zisi would have been alive when this text was composed. That happy coincidence, combined with the connection between Zisi and something called the “*wuxing*” in the *Xunzi* has led most scholars to agree that the two manuscripts represent a single text that was originally written by Zisi or his students. On the strength of these finds, then, we can also see that the term *wuxing* in the *Xunzi* does not refer to the five cosmological elements – metal, wood, water, fire, and earth – that flow from *yin* and *yang*. Instead, it refers to a set of five kinds of actions: benevolence, righteousness, ritual propriety, wisdom, and sagacity (Pang 2000).

Two other bamboo manuscripts with connections to Zisi were also uncovered in the Guodian find, the *Lumugong wen zisi* 魯穆公問子思 (*Duke Mu of Lu Asks Zisi*) and the *Zi yi* mentioned previously. The first of the two is generally seen as being written by Zisi or his students. The basis for this attribution, besides the fact that the text presents itself as a dialogue with Zisi, is the appearance of the notion that one should “follow the Way and not the ruler.” This formulation is consistent with the description of Zisi’s ideas given in the *Mencius*. As for the *Zi yi*, the evidence in favor of authorship by Zisi includes Shen Yue’s attribution mentioned earlier and its appearance together with other works attributable to Zisi at Guodian. However, in his *Jingdian shiwen* 經典釋文, Lu Mingde 陸德明 (circa 550–630) quotes a scholar as saying that the *Zi yi* was authored by Gongsun Nizi 公孫尼子. For this reason, a

²Takeuchi thought that the first half of the *Doctrine of the Mean* contained portions of the *Zisizi* and was written during the early portion of the Warring States period, while the second half was composed towards the end of the Qin dynasty. The basis for the later dating of the second half came from the reference in Sect. 26 “it carries the Hua and Yue mountains without feeling their weight” (Takeuchi argued that a person from Lu would not have considered those two mountains to be large) and another reference in Sect. 28 to “Today under the Heavens the same wheels are used for carriages, the same characters are used for writing, and the same rules are used for conduct”.

³The silk manuscript of the *Wuxing* can be divided into two parts, the first part containing a discussion of the five virtues, and the second part containing a running commentary on the first part. Pang Pu refers to the first part as the “classic” (*jing* 經) and the second part as the “commentary” (*shuo* 說). See Pang (2000: 100).

conservative conclusion would be to see this work as a collection of sayings by Confucius that was passed on by both Zisi and Gongsun Nizi (Li 2002: 70–71).

From the above, we can see that our most reliable sources of information on the thought of Zisi are the *Wuxing* and the *Doctrine of the Mean* (from the second to the nineteenth sections). The bamboo manuscript of the *Lumugong wen zisi* can also be seen as a secondary reference.

1.2 Zisi's Scholarly Affiliation

The question of Zisi's scholarly genealogy has given rise to considerable speculation throughout the centuries. Given the year of his birth, it would have been impossible for Zisi to have studied under Confucius. There is also no evidence suggesting that he was a student of either Zengzi 曾子 (505–436 BCE) or Ziyou 子游 (506–443 BCE). During the Tang dynasty, though, some scholars, including Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) suggested that Zisi was indebted to Zengzi (*Han Changli ji* 韓昌黎集 20:14b–15a). This claim was accepted by prominent Neo-Confucians in the Northern Song dynasty and expanded on by Zhuzi (Zhu Xi 朱熹 1130–1200), who included Zengzi in his genealogy of the transmission of the Way.⁴ Some modern scholars have also suggested that Zisi's thought can be traced to Ziyou (Meng 2008: 22–23, and Jiang 2000), but the argument for this connection has come under sharp criticism (Ye 2000).

The question of Zisi's intellectual descendants, or more particularly Zhuzi's claim that the Way was transmitted from Zisi to Mencius, has also produced much discussion. But whereas the proposed connection between Zengzi and Zisi might have been mere speculation on the part of scholars in the Tang and Song dynasties,⁵ there is actual evidence that some of Zisi's ideas were transmitted by Mencius. For instance, the *Shiji* 史記 states that, "Meng Ke was from Zou and studied under a student of Zisi," while the "Contra Twelve Philosophers" chapter of the *Xunzi* claims that "Zisi sang the tune (of the *Wuxing*) and Mencius provided the harmony." However, evidence to the contrary can certainly be found as well. The *Han feizi* (韓非子) states that among the "eight schools of *ru*" there were the "*ru* of Zisi" (子思之儒) and the "*ru* of Meng" (孟氏之儒), although it is possible that this was not a reference to Mencius but rather to someone else with the same surname.

Given the contradictory evidence, it is not surprising that the relation between Zisi and Mencius has continued to be a source of controversy.⁶ Two reasons are

⁴According to Zhuzi, the Way was passed from Confucius to Zengzi to Zisi and finally to Mencius. See Zhu Xi's *Zhongyung jijie xu*.

⁵Based on the results of recent research, it would appear that the Tang dynasty view that Zisi's thought can be traced to Zengzi should be understood not as saying that Zisi was a student of Zengzi, but rather that their thought was similar in a number of respects.

⁶Scholars who have viewed Zisi and Mencius as belonging to the same school include Zhang Taiyan 章太炎, Guo Muoruo 郭沫若, and Hou Wailu 侯外廬. Ren Jiyu 任繼愈 argues that there was no such school of thought during the pre-Qin period (Ren 1983: 290–9).

usually put forth for doubting Zhuzi's genealogy and whether the two men belonged to the same school. To begin with, Zisi was already dead when Mencius was born, and there is no indication in the *Mencius* that Mencius either studied under Zisi's students or considered himself to have been championing Zisi's ideas. Furthermore, the chapter of the *Xunzi* mentioned above is generally seen as being written by followers of Xunzi interested in promoting the thought of their teacher at the expense of Mencius.⁷ Thus, its claims should be seen as being polemical in nature and not necessarily reflecting historical reality.

The discovery of the silk and bamboo copies of the *Wuxing* has resulted in a reconsideration of the relationship between Zisi and Mencius. The appearance of the term “*wuxing*” in the *Xunzi* (as being characteristic of their thought) and in the newly discovered texts has led to the conclusion that what has been found is a lost text from the school of thought led by Zisi and Mencius. Some more adventurous scholars have even gone so far as to suggest that the *jing* 經 (classics) portion of the silk manuscript was written by Zisi, with the commentary being authored by Mencius (See, for example, Chen 2008a: 1–11). This, however, seems to be based on an uncritical acceptance and mechanical application of the claim in the *Xunzi* that “Zisi sang the tune and Mencius provided the harmony,” a claim we have suggested cannot be taken at face value. A more nuanced understanding of the question is possible if we understand this phrase as indicating a similarity or continuity between the thought of these two men, rather than an actual teacher-student relation. This would allow us to tentatively agree that the “classic” portion of the *Wuxing* was written by Zisi or his students and that the commentary was written either by Mencius or his students.

2 Philosophical Issues for the *ru* Tradition Posed by the *Wuxing* Manuscript

While we cannot say with certainty that texts such as the *Doctrine of the Mean*, the *Wuxing*, and the *Lumugong wen zisi* were written by Zisi, we can be confident that they are at least closely associated with his school of thought. By the same token, even though these texts may not lend themselves to a discussion of Zisi's thought per se, they do provide us with a window through which we can see what sort of issues Zisi was interested in discussing. This is the same reading strategy that allows us, for instance, to take a statement by Zigong 子貢 in Book 5 of the *Analects* that, “The Master's discourse on nature and the Way of Heaven cannot be heard,” as indicating that the topics of nature and the Way of Heaven were of much interest to students of Confucius even though he himself did not spend much time discussing them.

⁷The Southern Song dynasty scholar Wang Yinglin 王應麟 argued that this criticism was falsely attributed to Xunzi by students of his like Han Fei and Li Si interested in defaming the sages and worthies. More recently, Chen Jing argues that the criticism was added by Liu Xiang and Liu Xin (Chen 2008: 159–80).

Can Zisi be seen as providing a new twist to questions of the sort that Zigong was interested in? While we would hesitate to claim that the statement, “What Heaven confers is called nature” in the opening passage of the *Doctrine of the Mean* represents Zisi’s view of these topics, we can say on the strength of the *Wuxing* that these topics held a place of importance in Zisi’s school of thought. We can go further and add that given the way in which the Way of Heaven and the Way of Man are theorized in the *Wuxing*, at the very least the distinction is being made between autonomous and heteronomous morality, the moral and the natural good, the sage and sagacity, and between tacit and explicit knowledge. These distinctions will be explored in detail below.

2.1 *Internal Formation of the Five Actions*

The *Wuxing* discovered at the Guodian grave opens with the following:⁸

1. When benevolence forms internally, it is called “virtuous action”; when not formed internally, it is called “action.” When righteousness forms internally, it is called “virtuous action”; when not formed internally, it is called “action.” When ritual propriety forms internally, it is called “virtuous action”; when not formed internally, it is called “action.” When wisdom forms internally, it is called “virtuous action”; when not formed internally, it is called “action.” When sagacity forms internally, it is called “virtuous action”; when not formed internally, it is called “virtuous action.”

The five kinds of actions in the *Wuxing* – benevolence, righteousness, ritual propriety, wisdom, and sagacity – can be understood as corresponding to the five virtues that are articulated when these actions take form. However, a distinction is made with respect to the first four virtues between instances in which they are formulated internally and instances in which they are not. In the former case, the result is “virtuous action,” while in the latter case, there is simply “action.” These two terms refer to two types of moral conduct that are predicated on different principles. “Virtuous action” is action based on an internal, independent will and is seen as moral conduct stemming from an autonomous principle. By contrast, “action” is an external realization based on other considerations (such as social codes, custom, or considerations of self-interest) and is seen as moral conduct stemming from a heteronomous principle. This distinction does not apply for the fifth action or virtue, sagacity. Regardless of whether it is realized internally, the *Wuxing* claims that sagacity is always to be considered “virtuous action.” The gist of this last point would seem to be that all conduct that is a realization of sagacity is based on an autonomous principle.

⁸Translations of the Guodian *Wuxing* manuscript are based on the text arranged and edited by Li Ling (2002).

2.2 *Virtue and Good*

The second section of the *Wuxing* states:

2. When the five “virtuous actions” are harmonized, it is called “virtue”; when four actions are harmonized, it is called “good.” Good is the Way of Man; virtue is the Way of Heaven.

Here, the harmonization of the five “virtuous actions” is itself called “virtue” and associated with the Way of Heaven. By contrast, the harmonization of the four types of action is identified as “good” and associated with the Way of Man. The term “harmonized” here should be understood as referring to something that transcends the categories of the analytic and the synthetic. Thus, the “virtue” resulting from the harmonization of the five actions indicates an active state of moral good. By contrast, the “good” stemming from the harmonization of the four actions refers to a completed state of natural good reached by bringing together benevolence, righteousness, ritual propriety, and wisdom.⁹ Here “natural good” refers to a relativistic conception of good and bad where a value is assigned to something depending on whether it is suited as a means or an instrument for achieving a desired end. As causal relations prevail here, this state is understood as belonging to the Way of Man. “Moral good,” on the other hand, is based on the principle of reason devoid of all *a posteriori* elements. Being as it is completely outside the realm of causal relations or considerations of personal benefit, this state is understood as belonging to the Way of Heaven.

The terms “virtue” and “good” are discussed further in sections 3 and 10 through 11 of the *Wuxing*:

3. If the five actions all form internally and are acted out in a timely manner, the (one who does so) is called a “Gentleman.” A candidate official who aspires to the Way of the Gentleman is called an “aspiring candidate official.” Without being enacted, good could never be approached. Without being willed, virtue could never be brought to completion. Without being reflected upon, wisdom could never be obtained.

10–11 When a Gentleman performs good acts, there is a beginning and an end; when a Gentleman performs virtuous acts, there is a beginning but no ending. “A metal bell sounding and a jade stone vibrating it” is a person of virtue. “A metal bell sounding” is good; a “jade tone” is sagely. Good is the Way of Man; virtue is the Way of Heaven. Only with a person of virtue may there be “a metal bell sounding and a jade stone vibrating it.”

Section 3 implies that moral good has nothing to do with the relation that obtains between a means or instrument chosen and the desired end. Instead, it is completely dependent on the independent volition of the will. We can see from the statement “without being willed, virtue could never be brought to completion” that virtue is

⁹The concepts of the natural good and the moral good have been adopted from Kant. For a relevant discussion, see Lin (1994).

always to be found in the active state of the will. Based on sections 10 and 11, the performance of a good act is predicated on the causal connection between a means and an end, that is, between a beginning and an ending. By contrast, the performance of virtuous acts stems from an autonomous moral nature without any concern for instrumental means. Thus there is a beginning (the moral nature) but no ending. Two metaphors, those of the “metal bell sounding” and a “jade stone vibrating,” are also used to explain, respectively, the performance of good acts and virtuous acts. These metaphors can be used in this way because the phrase “a metal bell sounding” carries the meaning of a beginning, while “a jade stone vibrating” implies an ending.¹⁰ Taken together, the phrase “a metal bell sounding and a jade stone vibrating” thus describes a virtuous sagacity that is able to combine the natural good of the Way of Man with the moral good of the Way of Heaven. Put another way, this virtuous sagacity is able to partake in the function of the natural good without violating the moral good of the latter.

2.3 *The Sage and Sagacity*

In the above discussion of good and virtue, virtue is shown to be a kind of good that stems from an independent will. The question, then, is how that virtue comes about. This question is treated in sections 15, 17 and 26:

- 15: Not having heard the Way of the Gentleman is called “not sharp-eared.” Not having seen a worthy is called “not clear-sighted.” Hearing the Way of the Gentleman and not knowing that it is the Way of the Gentleman is called “un-sagely.” Seeing a worthy and not knowing he has virtue is called “un-wise.”
- 17: Hearing the Way of the Gentleman is being “sharp-eared.” Hearing and knowing it is sagacity. The sage knows the Way of Heaven. To know and act on it is righteous. To act on it in a timely way is virtue. Seeing a worthy is being “clear-sighted.” Seeing and knowing it is wisdom. Knowing and being content therewith is benevolence. Being content and respectful is ritual propriety. Sagacity gives birth to wisdom, ritual and music,¹¹ and is the harmonization of the five kinds of action.

¹⁰For an explanation of these metaphors in terms of a beginning and ending, see Jiao Xun 焦循, *Mengzi zhengyi* 孟子正義 10.397.

¹¹Chen Lai 陳來 reads this sentence as “Sagacity and wisdom gives birth to ritual and music.” This reading is apparently motivated by a desire to emphasize that sagacity and wisdom are critical for the harmonization of the five actions and that benevolence is critical for the harmonization of the four kinds of action. Our reading differs from Chen’s, but seems to be equally acceptable. Rites and music can include benevolence, righteousness and ritual propriety, in which case the entire sentence can be read as meaning that the four actions are born from sagacity. Sects. 5 and 6 of the *Wuxing* discuss three kinds of thought: that of benevolence, that of wisdom, and that of sagacity. Chen takes this to mean that the five actions are grouped into two sets: one of sagacity and wisdom and the other of the remaining three. However, the introduction of these three kinds of thought does not seem to necessitate grouping the actions into two sets. It is our view that sagacity is the highest of the five kinds of action and that for this reason it is a virtuous action regardless of whether it has been formed internally. Wisdom and benevolence form a second tier of concepts, with wisdom being related to intellectual capacities and benevolence standing in for benevolence, righteousness and ritual propriety and being related to moral capabilities. See Chen (2008b).

26 Seeing to know it is called approaching it. Drawing on metaphors to know it is called approaching it. Drawing on comparisons to know it is called approaching it. Knowing by intuition, that is Heaven. “*Shangdi* 上帝 is with you; be not of two minds.” That is what is meant.

We have seen above how the harmonization of the five “virtuous actions” is related to the realization of virtue. But how is that harmonization achieved? The answer to this question cannot be found by making appeal to the idea of the sage, for by definition the conduct of the sage is an expression of virtue. It would appear, instead, that this harmonization is closely linked with the idea of sagacity.

To better understand what sagacity refers to, we need first to recognize the distinction between the sage and sagacity. A close reading of the *Wuxing* text shows that the two terms are used differently. For example, in section 17, the term “sage” seems to refer to a particular type of person (e.g., a ruler such as King Wen) and not to the average person. Sagacity, on the other hand, refers to having aural knowledge of the Way of the Gentleman. The difference between a sage and an average person, then, stems from the former’s ability to know Heaven. But even though the average person does not, by definition, have this knowledge, there is no reason to assume that the innate value of sagacity is also denied to him. To put it another way, the *Wuxing* presents each of the five types of virtue as corresponding to a different reflective and cognitive capability. Wisdom corresponds to distinguishing the worthies, while benevolence, righteousness, and ritual propriety correspond, respectively, to whether the mind can be content with, implement, and respect the Way of the Gentleman. Sagacity, for its part, is paired with having knowledge of the Way of the Gentleman. Thus in some fashion knowledge of the Way of the Gentlemen clears the way for the harmonization of the five virtues.

Up until now we have taken it for granted that the Way of the Gentleman is “out there” to be heard and recognized. But how is it that this information is available to be heard in the first place? To answer that question, appeal will ultimately have to be made to the sage and his knowledge of the Way of Heaven, for the sage not only has this knowledge, but acts on it and does so in a timely manner. In other words, it seems that the Way of the Gentleman can be known by others precisely because the sage embodies and articulates it through his conduct. It is significant to note that this articulation is achieved through actions instead of through language, a point that brings us to an implicit distinction between two types of knowledge in the *Wuxing*.

2.4 *Tacit and Explicit Knowledge*

The *Wuxing* argues that people, by means of sagacity, can “hear” and thus know the Way of the Gentleman as articulated by the sage. However, in section 26 we can see that the type of knowledge associated with sagacity, what has up until now been referred to as knowledge based on hearing, is fundamentally different from other types of knowledge discussed in the *Wuxing*. In this section, we are presented with four different ways of knowing. The first three, knowledge based on “seeing,”

“metaphors” and “examples,” are associated with the category of “man” and can be taken to refer to knowledge and deductions associated with the sensual facilities. The fourth, that associated with sagacity and the category of “Heaven” is knowledge based on intuition (*ji* 幾). This type of knowledge should be understood as tacit knowledge, that is to say, knowledge of an innate value or metaphysical truth obtained without the aid of conscious thought. It is exactly this distinction between two types of thought, or “two minds,” that allows the author of the *Wuxing* to use the phrase “*Shangdi* is with you; be not of two minds” to sum up section 26. The term *shangdi* makes the connection with the “Heaven” that is known intuitively, while the admonition “be not of two minds” points to the superiority of tacit knowledge. It is also significant that the notion of knowing intuitively is associated, as is “hearing and knowing,” with sagacity. The connection between these two kinds of knowing allows us to visualize the following theoretical procession: First there is a sage with knowledge of the Way of Heaven, who then articulates this knowledge as the Way of the Gentleman. This then allows others to gain knowledge (intuitive knowledge, also referred to as “hearing and knowing”) of the Way of the Gentleman. This in turn ultimately results in the manifestation of wisdom as well as rites and music (i.e., benevolence, righteousness, and ritual propriety, respectively).

In light of the above analysis, we can better understand another part of section 2:

A Gentleman without the anxiety of the inner mind will be without the wisdom of the inner mind. Without the wisdom of the inner heart, he will be without the joy of the inner mind. Without the joy of the inner mind, he will be discontented. Discontented, he will be unhappy. Unhappy, he will be without virtue.

The term “anxiety of the inner mind” refers to a fearful dread on the part of the Gentleman that the Way of the Gentleman will not be put into action. It is only because of this dread that the mind, based on moral sentiments and intellectual consideration, arranges for various actions to be undertaken. Thus all subsequent thought and action is an opportunity for the mind to take the initiative of putting into action the Way of the Gentleman that has been “heard.” This in turn will produce feelings of joy, contentment, and happiness and will ultimately result in virtue.¹²

In the *Wuxing*, Heaven is explained by the phrase “*Shangdi* is with you”. This could be interpreted as suggesting a tendency towards theonomous ethics or divine command theory whereby the morality of an act is determined by reference to a divine will. We would suggest, however, that that is not the case. Instead, ethical thought in the *Wuxing* is closer to a rational or autonomous ethical position. To begin with, it should be noted that there is no obvious notion of supreme deity in the text. It is true that there is a passage that states: “‘*Shangdi* is with you; be not of two minds.’ That is what is meant.” It is also true that the term *shangdi* can be taken to mean a supreme deity. However, the fact that the phrase, “that is what is meant” is added suggests that *shangdi* should be understood as an analogy instead of factually. Furthermore, while there is a Heaven/man dichotomy in the *Wuxing*, there is no

¹²This part of Sect. 2 can further be seen in light of the discussion of the caution of the Gentleman when in solitude in Sects. 8 and 9.

sense of Heaven as a transcendental deity. Instead, the emphasis seems to be on showing that the category of Heaven is incompatible with man's instrumental thought. The *Wuxing* does stress that the Way of Heaven is superior to the Way of Man, just as the virtuous action is superior to mere action and virtue is superior to good. However, this is done simply to indicate that the highest ethical principle has a transcendental nature unrelated to the calculated achievement of self-interested goals. But this transcendental nature does not entail a religious fear of a deity. Instead what is called for is an understanding of transcendental moral principles and choices in conduct based thereon. This is what is meant in section 3 when it is stated:

Without being enacted, goodness could never be approached. Without being willed, virtue could never be brought to completion. Without being reflected upon, wisdom could never be obtained. Reflection that is not clear cannot examine (its object); reflection that is not thorough cannot give form (to its object). Being unable to give form (to its object) one will be discontent. Being discontent, one will be unhappy. Being unhappy, one will be without virtue.

In other words, the overall position of the *Wuxing* is that anyone aspiring to the Way of the Gentleman can use his innate sagacity to obtain tacit knowledge of moral principles and demands. Once those moral demands are grasped, that person can go on to perform good actions externally and cultivate virtue internally.

3 From Zisi to Mencius

Given that the bamboo manuscript of the *Wuxing* was composed earlier than the *Mencius*, a comparison of the two texts can also help us understand developments in Confucian thought during this time. Likewise, by contrasting the above discussion of some of the theoretical aspects of the *Wuxing* with the *Analects* and the *Mencius*, we can get a better idea of the place this text has in Chinese intellectual history.

3.1 Inner Virtue and Moral Autonomy

The *Wuxing* makes a distinction between autonomous morality and heteronomous morality by contrasting the formation of the five actions internally with the failure to do so. This is a distinction that is largely lacking in the *Analects*. While it is true that the *Analects* stresses that authentic rituals and music are predicated on benevolence, Confucius is only seen exhorting his students to approach or to complete benevolence. He does not delve into the theoretical nuances of the difference between ordinary "ritual and music" and music and ritual that stem from benevolence, nor does he delineate a hierarchical ranking or explicate an order of importance in terms of practice. As a result, students such as Ziyou and Zixia 子夏 formed divergent views on these issues, a disagreement that is aired out in Book 19 of the *Analects*. There, Ziyou criticizes the emphasis students of Zixia place on

“sprinkling and sweeping,” “answering and replying,” “advancing and retiring,” as “not knowing the essential.” Zixia, for his part, insists that there should be a sequence in one’s studies, a “beginning and an end.” This kind of dispute indicates that Confucius did not leave behind a definitive answer to questions of this type.

The distinction in the *Wuxing* between “virtuous action” and mere “action” is at the very least a much more detailed explanation of the difference between autonomous morality and heteronomous morality than Confucius ever gave. In that sense, the *Wuxing* can be seen as making a clear theoretical distinction between ordinary ritual and music (*sans* internal formation) and ritual and music stemming from benevolence (with internal formation). Mencius seems to be making a similar point when he criticizes Gaozi 告子 for having never understood righteousness because he treated it as something external to himself. Mencius, of course, argues that both benevolence and righteousness are internal. Likewise, Mencius’ idea of “acting from benevolence and righteousness rather than enacting benevolence and righteousness” seems to be inspired by the same line of thought that led the *Wuxing* to contrast “virtuous action” with ordinary action. In both cases, the argument hinges on the internal origin of a kind of conduct.

The *Mencius* builds further on the distinction between “internal” and “external” to espouse an autonomous morality. For instance, Mencius states:

The mind of compassion pertains to benevolence, the mind of shame to righteousness, the mind of respect to ritual propriety, and the mind of right and wrong to wisdom. Benevolence, righteousness, ritual propriety and wisdom do not coat me in a luster from the outside. They are inside me to begin with, only I didn’t think of it. 6A6

Here, the assertion about benevolence, righteousness, ritual propriety and wisdom being internal is a restatement of Mencius’ idea that the *liangzhi* 良知, or the mind, is the final arbiter of moral principles in his system. In other words, the fact that both virtues and moral principles are internal leads naturally to the notion of an autonomous morality. This move is further strengthened by the distinction Mencius makes between more noble “honors bestowed by Heaven” (*tianjue* 天爵) and ordinary “honors bestowed by man” (*renjue* 人爵). The ascription of “nobility” to the former serves to underscore the moral nature of men and suggests that they are not to be used instrumentally, both key features of an autonomous morality.

3.2 *An Emphasis on Inner Reflection*

As we have seen, the *Wuxing* distinguishes between explicit knowledge (knowing through seeing, analogies, and comparison) and tacit knowledge (knowing intuitively). But in terms of tacit knowledge, there is an emphasis on knowledge of external objects, whether the intuiting of the Way of Heaven, hearing the Way of the Gentleman, or the seeing of worthies.

The *Mencius* also discusses tacit knowledge in a number of places:

What one can do without having to learn is one’s inborn ability; what one knows without having to reflect is one’s inborn knowledge. There is no one who does not know to love their parents when they are young children and respect their elder brothers when they grow up. 7A15

Here it should be noted that the fact that one can know without reflection shows that the verb “know” must be taken as referring to tacit knowledge. The knowledge (*zhi* 知) part of the *liangzhi* 良知 is completely independent from explicit knowledge, which is precisely what makes it *liang* 良 (noble). If we compare the *Mencius* with the *Wuxing*, however, we find that the kind of tacit knowledge emphasized in the *Mencius* is qualitatively different from that discussed in the *Wuxing*. For where the *Wuxing* emphasizes tacit knowledge of external objects, in the *Mencius* it comes from an awareness of one’s own inner *liangzhi*.

The *liangzhi*, besides being discussed in terms of its appearance as compassion, shame, respect, and a sense of right and wrong, can also be seen as stemming from a sense of filial piety. This can be seen when Mencius, answering questions about the sage Shun, does not begin his discussion of the sage with a consideration of the Way of Heaven or the definition of a Gentleman or a worthy (see *Mencius*, 5A). Instead of starting from such external objects, Mencius takes filial piety as his starting point.¹³

The prominence of ideas like being filial to one’s parents and being sincere to oneself (*chengshen* 誠身) in the *Mencius* suggests that tacit knowledge is treated primarily as inner moral knowledge, and not the type of external knowledge of Heaven or the Way of the Gentleman seen in the *Wuxing*. As a result, the moral principles (or moral thought) discussed in the *Mencius* do not require the apprehension of a metaphysical principle or the Way of the Gentleman. Instead, it revolves around inner reflection and the finding of an inherent, inner moral mind-nature (*xinxing* 心性) that starts with consideration of the subtle outward manifestations of that mind-nature.

The tacit knowledge described by Mencius is also related to his concept of thought (*si* 思). Thus we see statements like:

The desire to be exalted is common to the minds of all men. Everyone has something to be exalted inside them, they just haven’t thought of it. 6A17

Benevolence, righteousness, ritual propriety and wisdom do not coat me in a luster from the outside. They are inside me to begin with, only I didn’t think of it. 6A6

The function of the mind is to think: think and it will be obtained: don’t think and it will not be obtained. This has been conferred upon me by Heaven. If one establishes what is of greater importance to begin with, things of less importance will be unable to dislodge it. 6A15

From this we can see that for the most part Mencius’ discussion of tacit knowledge emphasizes thought that is directed towards what is common to the minds of all men. This “thought” is not just any thought but rather should be understood as the reflection on and inspection of the mind. And insofar as reflection and inspection play a significant role in Confucian practice, “thought” in Mencius’ hands comes to have important implications for the theory and practice of cultivation. By contrast, statements in the *Wuxing* such as “Lacking benevolence, thought cannot be precise,” “lacking wisdom, thought cannot be thorough” and “lacking sagacity, thought cannot be swift,” show correct thought and knowledge to be dependent on the virtues of

¹³This strategy is reminiscent of Youzi’s 有子 claim in Chap. 1 of the *Analects* that “filial piety and brotherly respect are the essence of benevolence.”

benevolence, wisdom, and sagacity. Here, clearly, the object and content of thought is of secondary importance. From this we can see that Mencius is not concerned simply with thought in a formal sense, as is the case in the *Wuxing*, but also with its object and content.

3.3 *A De-emphasizing of Sagacity*

In the *Mencius*, we can see statements that approximate claims in the *Wuxing* about sages knowing the Way of Heaven, having aural knowledge of the Way of the Gentleman, and visual knowledge of the worthies. For example:

From Yao and Shun to Tang, it was over five hundred years. Men like Yu and Gao Yao saw and knew them, while those like Tang heard and knew of them. From Tang to King Wen, it was over five hundred years. Men like Yi Yin and Lai Zhu saw and knew of them, while those like King Wen heard and knew of them. From King Wen to Confucius it was over five hundred years. Men such as Tai Gongwang and Sanyi Sheng saw and knew of them, while those like Confucius heard and knew of them. From Confucius to the present it has been over a hundred years. As such we are not far removed in time from the time of the sage, just as we are quite close to the home of the sage, and yet no one has anything of them, no one has anything of them. 7B84

According to this, included among the sages of old were those with aural knowledge and those with visual knowledge. But in doing so, Mencius effectively does away with the hierarchy put forth in the *Wuxing* whereby aural knowledge is associated with the sage, who is superior to the worthy with his visual knowledge. Mencius' disregard for the previously established ordering could be taken as an indication that he felt no need to differentiate between the sage and the worthy. To put it another way, and perhaps more precisely, Mencius believed that sagacity could be subsumed under the category of wisdom.

This subsuming of sagacity to wisdom should be viewed in conjunction with the following passage:

Mencius said, "The way the mouth is disposed to tastes, the eyes to colors, the ear to sounds, the nose to smells, and the four limbs to ease is human nature. It is also conferred (by Heaven), and so the Gentleman does not call it 'nature.' The way benevolence pertains to the relation between a father and a son, righteousness to the relations between a ruler and the subject, ritual propriety to the relation between a host and a guest, wisdom to the worthy and the sage to the Way of Heaven, that is conferred (by Heaven). But it is also human nature, and so the Gentleman does not say it is conferred (by Heaven)." 7B70

In this passage we see Mencius distinguishing between a biological nature consisting of the ears, eyes, mouth, nose, and four limbs and a moral nature consisting of benevolence, righteousness, ritual propriety, wisdom and the relation of the sage to the Way of Heaven. It is important to note that in contrast to the *Wuxing*, sagacity and aural knowledge of the Way of the Gentleman are missing in the *Mencius*. This could be taken as an indication that Mencius believes that the autonomous moral principle is achieved directly from tacit knowledge produced by one's own *liangzhi* rather than indirectly from aural knowledge of the Way of the Gentleman.

The listing of the sage and the Way of Heaven together with the virtues of benevolence, righteousness, ritual propriety, and wisdom would seem to indicate that the five are of equal standing. However, we arrive at a different understanding of their relative status once we consider the idea of the “four germs” (*siduan* 四端, see 2A6). From a theoretical standpoint, the statement that “the mind of compassion is the germ of benevolence; the mind of shame is the germ of righteousness; the mind of courtesy is the germ of ritual propriety; the mind of right and wrong is the germ of wisdom” should be seen as being equivalent to the “hint” (*ji* 幾) of the Way of Heaven that makes intuition of it possible. In his commentary on the *Mencius*, Zhuzi glosses the term translated here as “germ” (*duan* 端) as “tip of a thread” (*xu* 緒), adding “it is as if there is something inside and its tip is showing.” In other words, he understands the “germs” to have a meaning similar to the external “subtle signs” (*jiwei zhizao* 幾微之兆) of the *Book of Changes*.

This similarity is significant because it suggests a parallel between the “four germs” and the sage and his knowledge of the Way of Heaven. As we have seen, the *Wuxing* argues that the sage has virtue and access to the Way of the Gentleman because he is able to gain (intuitive) knowledge of the Way of Heaven from subtle “hints.” It is possible that Mencius lists the sage together with the four virtues because he views them as representing two different paths for gaining access to the Way of the Gentleman. One path, the one outlined in the *Wuxing*, was the one taken by the sages Yao and Shun: they knew the Way of Heaven directly. Mencius’ innovation is to suggest that there is an alternative path, and one that is available to ordinary people, that involves “thought” and “examination” directed at one’s own *liangxin* 良心. So while acknowledging that the sage knows Heaven, the *Mencius* also argues that it is possible to have knowledge of internal moral principles by way of one’s *liangxin*. This opens up the possibility that ordinary people can obtain the same results as Yao and Shun simply by developing their “four germs.”

Why does Mencius open up this alternative path? The answer to that question lies in his reluctance to claim that he was a sage even as he hoped to establish his own moral system. When asked if he himself is a sage, Mencius invokes Confucius, and, in addition to his strong denial, adds the comment: “A sage is something Confucius did not claim title to” (2A2). So, while Confucius is referred to as a sage several times in the *Mencius*, here we see Mencius implying that he could no more recklessly claim sagehood for himself than Confucius could. But given the context of the *Wuxing* and the exclusive status of the sage, it is difficult to see how Mencius could hope to legitimately develop his own moral system without claiming to be a sage and having knowledge of the Way of Heaven. In that light, Mencius may have felt the need to show that even though he was not the type of sage that knew Heaven, he still had access to an alternate method by which he could walk the path of the sage.

According to Mencius, there is a universal morality that originates in a moral mind common to everyone. Thus, he states:

All palates have the same preference in taste; all ears in sound; all eyes in beauty. Should the mind prove to be the only exception in possessing nothing in common? What is it, then, that the mind has in common? Principles and correctness. The sage is simply the first to find what is common to my mind. It is for this reason that principles and correctness please my mind in the same way that meat pleases my palate. 6A7

This “mind” is the moral mind, which in other places is referred to by Mencius as the “original mind” (*benxin* 本心) or *liangzhi*, while “principles and correctness” refer to the content of moral principles. Mencius here argues that the similarity (universality) of moral principles stems from the commonality of the original mind. For this reason he can say that the sage is, in this respect, no different from the average person. If there is any difference, it is only in terms of whether or not they have found what is common to everyone’s mind. In this way, Mencius allows for the possibility that the average person can grasp moral principles by finding them in his own mind.

3.4 A New way of Knowing Heaven

Even though he does not emphasize the sages’ knowledge of the Way of Heaven, Mencius does not overlook this issue. In fact, there are two passages in the *Mencius* that discuss knowledge of Heaven:

To give full realization to one’s mind, one must know one’s nature. To know one’s nature, one must know Heaven. 7A1

If a person in an inferior position does not have the confidence of his superiors, he cannot govern the people. There is a way to win the confidence of your superiors: if your friends do not trust you, you will not win the confidence of his superiors. There is a way to win the trust of friends: if you don’t please your parents when serving them, you will not win the trust of friends. There is a way to please your parents: if reflecting on yourself you find yourself to be insincere, you will not please your parents. There is a way to be sincere to yourself: if you do not understand goodness, you will not be sincere to yourself. For this reason, sincerity is the Way of Heaven. Pondering sincerity is the Way of Man. 4A12

According to the first passage, fully realizing one’s mind allows knowledge of one’s nature, which in turns allows knowledge of Heaven. This is how Mencius can claim that “everybody can be a Yao or a Shun.” Mind, nature, and Heaven are seen by him as forming a kind of continuum that allows for upward progression based on one’s level of personal cultivation. Given a universal moral mind, everyone has the same potential for achieving knowledge of Heaven on par with the great sages. This lets Mencius deemphasize the virtue of sagacity and its aural knowledge of the Way of the Gentleman and develop his moral system directly from the idea of realizing one’s mind. It also takes him way beyond anything seen in the *Analects* and the *Wuxing* in terms of the universality of the moral subject.

Zhuzi believed that realizing the mind was the ultimate result of “exhausting principles” (*qiongli* 窮理), glossing it as “meaning that ‘knowledge is complete.’” Elsewhere he explained the terms as “meaning without exception that all of the principles of object are known.”¹⁴ However, Zhuzi’s interpretation is most likely inconsistent with Mencius’ original meaning. Mencius argues that even though the completion of cultivation results in the people being governed, the actual realization

¹⁴This passage appears in the *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類, *juan* 60.

of moral principles comes from a series of increasingly inner-oriented steps, from winning the trust of superiors, winning the trust of friends, pleasing the parents, and finally being sincere to oneself (*Mencius* 4A12). This on-going process of reflection begins with being sincere to oneself. But the term “being sincere to oneself,” insofar as it implies “being faithful to the mind” or “being faithful to the four ‘germs’ of the mind,” basically means the same as “realizing the mind.” This is also what Mencius meant by pondering sincerity (*sicheng* 思誠): he wanted his students to seek out emanations of a mind that cannot be deceived. Thus, when Mencius says, “Sincerity is the Way of Heaven. Pondering sincerity is the Way of Man,” the term “Way of Heaven” should be understood as something that man is incapable of fully comprehending but which is nevertheless imposed on him externally as with laws and regulations. By contrast, the “Way of Man” is to reflect on and realize those same inscrutable laws and regulations.

From the above, we see that Mencius takes the Way of Heaven to be the source of the Way of Man. This is quite different from the approach taken in the *Wuxing*, where the two are seen as involving separate moral principles and the Way of Heaven is not only given a higher status but is held up as a goal towards which man should strive.¹⁵

4 Conclusion: Another Look at the Zisi/Mencius School of Thought

Before the discovery of the bamboo *Wuxing* manuscript, any discussion of Zisi’s thought inevitably began with the *Doctrine of the Mean*, the main feature of which is the conception of the Way of Heaven. The opening section boldly makes the claim that, “What Heaven confers is called nature; according with nature is called the Way; the cultivation of the Way is called teaching.” Section 20 states, “Sincerity is the Way of Heaven. The attainment of sincerity is the Way of Man,” and Section 21 goes on to say, “Clarity resulting from sincerity is called nature. Sincerity resulting from clarity is called teaching.” Here we see intentional, and thus meaningful, associations being made between Heaven and man on the one hand, and nature, Way, and teaching on the other.

Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 suggested that the *Doctrine of the Mean* took the idea of an objective and transcendent Decree of Heaven (*tianming* 天命) as a starting point for its system of thought. As such, he argued that given our understanding of the

¹⁵ Pang Pu 龐樸 understands “Virtue is the Way of Heaven” to mean that virtue is conferred by Heaven. Chen Lai offers a different explanation, arguing that this sentence should be understood as meaning: “The nature of the Way of Heaven is that it has a beginning and no end; the formation of the five actions internally and their harmonization is an articulation of the harmony of the Way of Heaven; sages know the Way of Heaven and for this reason their actions harmonize with it.” Therefore, the sentence “Virtue is the Way of Heaven” here indicates a harmonization of virtue with the Way of Heaven and not that virtue is received from Heaven.” We are in agreement with Chen’s interpretation. See Pang (2000: 159) and Chen (2008b: 17).

development of intellectual thought, the *Doctrine of the Mean* should be of a later date than the *Mencius* with its notion that a person who fully realizes his mind knows his nature and a person who knows his nature knows Heaven (See Mou 1969: 46–47). This kind of argument from philosophical analysis can certainly serve to bolster arguments, such as Cui Shu's, based on textual studies that the *Doctrine of the Mean* was composed later than the *Mencius*.¹⁶ At the same time, it also suggests that some parts of the *Doctrine of the Mean*, and specifically its ideas about the Way of Heaven, cannot be used to compare Zisi and Mencius.

Happily, there is no question about the dating of the *Wuxing*. Even if we cannot say with certainty whether it was penned by Zisi, we do know that it predated the *Mencius*. It is also consistent with the comment in the *Xunzi* about Zisi and Mencius' relation to this theory. At the very least, then, we can say that the *Wuxing* is from the period of time between the death of Zisi and the birth of Mencius. From the above discussion, we can see that the distinction between autonomous and heteronomous morality and explicit and tacit knowledge is featured more prominently in the *Wuxing* than in the *Analecets*. These distinctions were also picked up and expanded by Mencius. However, the virtue of sagacity seen in the *Wuxing* was effectively dropped by Mencius. In the *Wuxing*, the distinction between sagacity and wisdom parallels the distinction between hearing the Way of the Gentleman and seeing worthies. But despite being seen as kinds of tacit knowledge, aural and visual knowledge have to be obtained indirectly from contact with the outside world. Mencius moves his emphasis away from the external world and places it firmly in the inner world. For this reason he emphasizes that benevolence, righteousness, ritual propriety and wisdom are rooted in the moral mind and argues that knowledge of moral principles can be gained from the four “germs” of their minds.

This idea can be understood on the one hand as indicating the expression of the moral mind as the four different moral facets. On the other hand, it can also be understood as the expression of the moral mind in human relationships. With respect to the latter, the personal aspect (benevolence in the relation between father and son) and the social aspect (righteousness in the relation between ruler and official) are felt much more directly than the other two dimensions of ritual propriety in the relation between host and guest and wisdom in relation to the worthies. By virtue of this felt priority, “benevolence and righteousness” can be used to stand in for the full expression “benevolence, righteousness, ritual propriety and wisdom.” This can be seen, for example, when Confucius is quoted in the “Man in the World” chapter of the *Zhuangzi* (莊子·人間世) as saying:

In the world, these are the two great decrees: one is fate, and the other is duty. That a son should love his parents is fate – you cannot erase this from his mind. That a subject should serve a ruler is duty – there is no place he can go and be without a ruler, no place he can escape to between Heaven and earth.

¹⁶Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 (Feng 1982: 184) divides the *Doctrine of the Mean* into three sections and argues that the first and final sections were later additions. Jiang Boqian (Jiang 1984: 337–338) sees a connection between the *Doctrine of the Mean* and the *Xunzi*, while Qian Mu (Qian 1935: 459) claims that the text of the *Zi yi* is very similar to the *Xunzi*.

This passage would also be appropriate in describing how Mencius used the term “benevolence and righteousness” as a synonym for the moral mind or to express the sum of all moral principles. One further step simplifies “benevolence and righteousness” to the single term “benevolence,” a universal term with its base in the sentiments of filial piety and brotherly love and the mind sensitive to the suffering of others. From this kind of argumentation we can see that the mature thought of Mencius draws directly from Confucius’ idea of benevolence. It was for this reason that Zisi is not referred to as a teacher in the *Mencius* and why Mencius is portrayed as stressing that “I was never a student of Confucius, but I have learned of him from others” (4B50).

Zigong 子貢 says: “The Master’s discourse on nature and the Way of Heaven cannot be heard.” While we can’t tell what Zisi’s view of nature was from the *Wuxing*, there is a discussion of the difference between the Way of Heaven and the Way of Man in the text. However, on this point, Mencius is not completely in agreement with the *Wuxing*. That is primarily because in the *Wuxing* the sage and only the sage is able to know the Way of Heaven and have his virtue harmonize with Heaven. The common people, and even the worthies, are left out of the equation. For Mencius, on the other hand, realizing the mind is followed by knowing nature and knowing Heaven. Likewise, he saw benevolence and righteousness, virtues that are internal to the mind and common to all, as the essence of realizing the mind, thereby providing an avenue by which ordinary people could have access to transcendent moral principles. By claiming that nature and Heaven could be known in this manner, Mencius took a step further in making (human) nature a metaphysical concept. As such, Mencius can be seen as attempting to resolve the important, and unanswered, question left behind by Confucius regarding the relation between nature and the Way of Heaven.

Returning to the question of a school of thought associated with Zisi and Mencius, we can see from the above discussion that while Mencius was certainly influenced by Zisi, the extent of this influence was not greater than that of Confucius and his students (such as Zengzi). Therefore, Mencius would most likely not have considered himself to have belonged to such a school of thought. We would therefore suggest that those who spoke of such a school of thought, such as Xunzi and his students did not have a correct understanding of Mencius’ thought.

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Chapter 6

The *Daxue* (*Great Learning*) and the *Zhongyong* (*Doctrine of the Mean*)

Andrew H. Plaks

1 Introduction

In the historical development of classical Confucian philosophy, the two brief treatises known as *Daxue* 大學 (*Great Learning*) and *Zhongyong* 中庸 (*Doctrine of the Mean*) are among the most important milestones marking the transition of Confucian thought, from the kernels of ancient wisdom encapsulated in the early canonic writings: *The Shujing* 書經 (*Classic of Documents*), *The Yijing* 易經 (*Classic of Changes*) and *The Shijing* 詩經 (*Classic of Poetry*) together with the diffuse ethical teachings set forth in the name of Confucius in the *Lunyu* 論語 (*The Analects*), toward the gradual emergence of Confucianism as a spiritually profound and intellectually complex philosophical system. In this light, their position as foundational documents in the history of classical Chinese thought parallels that of the Platonic Dialogues in transforming the diffuse concepts of the pre-Socratics into a unified mode of philosophical inquiry. Alongside the related integral arguments presented in the pre-Qin writings attributed to Mencius and Xunzi, now supplemented by a handful of independent treatises outside of the received tradition that have been rediscovered among the archaeological treasures unearthed in China in recent years (including such texts as those known under the titles: *Taiyi sheng shui* 太一生水 (*The Great One Gave Birth to Water*), *Xing zi ming chu* 性自命出 (*Nature comes from Mandate*), *Hengxian* 恆先 (*The Constant Precedes*), and *Wuxingpian* 五行篇 (*Five Actions*), these works set the terms of discourse and the modes of argumentation that gradually crystallized through the centuries from Han through Tang to form the primary discourse of the Confucian strain of early Chinese thought. Ultimately, these works came to provide the core ideas and issues of the great revival of Confucian thought, in response to the profound spiritual challenge of Buddhist philosophy, that took shape during the Northern and Southern

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Song periods (a movement conventionally known in contemporary Sinological writings as “Neo-Confucianism”), and continued to dominate intellectual life in China through the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, down to the end of imperial period and beyond.

Despite the common impression of these works – in the eyes of those whose familiarity with them is based upon casual or compulsory study – as straightforward, unambiguous presentations of ethical and cosmological platitudes, it can be shown upon thoughtful reading and analysis that they both constitute carefully-wrought expositions of some of the most essential tenets of Confucian thought. Whether read as separate texts or taken together as a mutually complementary pair of writings, they provide a crucial elucidation of the central issues of mature Confucianism, regarding the process of self-cultivation, the ideal of perfect self-realization (or, “sagehood”), the anthropocentric conception of the cosmic order, the attainment of “integral wholeness” (*cheng* 誠) and the outward extension from inner selfhood to the fulfillment of the intrinsic potential of all human beings and even all “things” in the objective world.

2 *Daxue* (*The Great Learning*)

2.1 *Textual History*

The *Daxue* stands among the seminal texts of the Confucian canon under two separate bibliographical headings: first, as an important chapter in the canonic compendium of the Han ritual corpus, the *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記), and then, alongside the *Analects*, *Mengzi*, and the *Doctrine of the Mean*, as one of the so-called “Four Books” (*Sishu* 四書) elevated to scriptural status by Zhu Xi and other leading figures among his predecessors and followers in the reconstitution of Confucian thought in Song times. From that point on, these works took on immense cultural significance far beyond their physical size, forming the core curriculum of traditional Confucian education, the central focus of intellectual discourse and the textual basis of the imperial examination system.

The dating of the original composition of this brief text, prior to its inclusion in the *Liji*, remains uncertain. Its traditional attribution to Zengzi 曾子 (505–436 BCE?, personal name: Zeng Can 曾參, alt. reading: Zeng Shen), one of the leading disciples of Confucius whose name is mentioned prominently in the *Analects* and to whom a number of miscellaneous early writings are assigned, would place it as early as the fifth century BCE. But a variety of alternative theories of authorship, stylistic indicators, and, above all, inter-textual links to a number of other important writings of the Warring States period (475–221 BCE), make it far more likely that it was composed in its present form as late as the Western Han period (206 BCE – 24 CE), at a point much closer in time to its eventual selection for inclusion in the *Liji* compendium. The dating of the work is further confused by certain

inter-textual echoes linking the *Daxue* to the parallel literature of early Confucianism. Chief among these are a number of strikingly similar passages in the *Mengzi* and the writings of Xunzi roughly predating or postdating the probable formation of the original layers of the text. The connections to the text of the *Mengzi*, in particular, led earlier generations of Confucian thinkers to view the *Daxue* as a crucial link in the orthodox chain of the “filiality of the Way” (*daotong* 道統), from the Master of the *Analecets* down through the Song masters, and then on to latter-day exponents of Confucian doctrine. These same textual echoes, however, have been taken by a greater number of pre-modern and modern scholars as evidence that the text could only have been composed by a later follower of Mengzi 孟子 (372–289 BCE) during the later Warring States, sometimes pushing it as far forward as the Qin or early Han periods. Other intellectual historians deny or deemphasize the relation between the *Daxue* and Mengzi’s strain of early Confucian thought, reading it instead as a development of the arguments of Xunzi 荀子 (312–230 BCE) at the very end of the Warring States period, or even as a reflection of the syncretic writings of early Han thinkers such as Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 BCE).

The earliest extant text of the *Daxue*, that transmitted in the *Liji*, is but the first in a chain of alternate recensions. These include one version engraved on a stone tablet unearthed during the Ming period (1368–1644), alleged to have been inscribed during the Northern Wei 魏 dynasty (386–532) but later dismissed as a forgery, and a whole series of variant texts, as many as 20 or more in number, representing the revisions of later commentators purporting to restore the “original” form of the canon. While these competing recensions amount in nearly all cases to little more than a reshuffling of the constituent passages or larger sections of the text, the resulting changes in the structure of the argument are heatedly defended by their respective editors and commentators as vital to the correct understanding of the meaning of the work. This textual controversy is particularly significant in the case of Zhu Xi’s (1130–1200) reconstruction of the order of the text in accordance with the teachings of Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107), his intellectual forebear and predecessor in the orthodox lineage, that which was to become the officially sanctioned version of the *Daxue* that gained new scriptural status as one of the Four Books. Still, doubts continued to be raised regarding the definitive form of the work, particular among later polemical opponents of Zhu Xi, notably Wang Shouren 王守仁 (1472–1529, alt. name Wang Yangming 王陽明) in the mid-Ming period, many of whom championed competing versions provocatively claimed to represent the true “ancient text” (*guben* 古本) of the classic.

2.2 *Explication of Title*

The traditional title of this treatise – taken simply from the first two words of the text – is almost always given in Western translations as one or another variant of the expression “great learning.” This conventional rendering is misleading, both on

general philological grounds and because it fails to describe the specific contents of the book. Even a cursory reading of the text makes it immediately apparent that the educational process envisioned in the second term of the title: *xue* 學 refers here to a paradigm of moral fulfillment in every phase of human capacity, a conception far broader than what is expressed in the narrow sense of the English “learning.” Rather, the word *xue* in Confucian discourse covers the full spectrum of personal accomplishment from the active to the contemplative spheres. It begins at the more advanced levels of actual instruction, but then extends to the widest realization of human potential. The idea of the perfection of individual character at the heart of these spheres of Confucian attainment precisely matches the scope and meaning of the central ideal of “self-cultivation.”

Regarding the first term in the title, the difficulty with the standard translations lies not in its literal meaning (“large” or “great”), but in the particular conception of greatness to which it refers. In one very influential gloss on this word, Zhu Xi explains the whole phrase as an abbreviation for *daren zhi xue* 大人之學 (the learning of the great person). He then goes on to define the “great one” in ways that clarify the higher order of learning he envisions: either the higher status conferred by age, specifically the age (15 years) at which a young student moves up to a more advanced level in his intellectual and moral training, or, more compellingly, the greatness of the highest degree of cultivation, that of the Confucian “sage” (*shengren* 聖人). At first glance, Zhu Xi’s reading seems to clash with that of Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200) and Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648), the leading earlier commentators on the text of the *Daxue* preserved in the canonic *Liji*. Their gloss of the two words of the title as *boxue* 博學 (broad cultivation) seems to emphasize simple breadth of learning – until they go on to qualify their understanding of this capaciousness of mind as applying specifically to the capacity to govern, a sense not far removed from Zhu Xi’s explication of the “great one” as the sage-ruler. Once Zhu’s dominant interpretation was in place, subsequent commentators, even those at pains to revise or even overturn some of the basic assumptions of Song orthodoxy, continued to incorporate this essential reading into their interpretations. To give only the most conspicuous example, Wang Yangming, the famous exponent of the so-called “philosophy of mind” (*xinxue* 心學) in the sixteenth century, explained the “greatness” of the title as an allusion to the man who embraces the “ultimate unity of all things” (*wanwu yiti* 萬物一體).

2.3 *Structure of the Text*

Regardless of which version of the text one uses, its structure can in all cases be divided very neatly into a brief opening section, setting forth the core arguments of the treatise in concise outline form, followed by a series of ten explanatory, or “expansion” chapters, taking up and explicating one by one the key terms introduced in the initial section. In orthodox Confucian learning, these two textual divisions

came to be designated as the “canonic core” (*jing* 經) of the work, traditionally taken as the direct teachings of Zengzi himself, and the attached “commentarial traditions” (*zhuan* 傳) loosely ascribed to various subsequent generations of Confucian thinkers. The opening chapter itself is further analyzed into two primary components: an initial tripartite statement known as the “three general principles” (*san gangling* 三綱領), and the central passage known as the “eight specific points” (*ba tiaomu* 八條目) setting forth, in the rhetorical form of a chain syllogism, a series of consecutive stages, or complementary phases, that define the different spheres of inner conception and outward action through which the perfect cultivation of the Confucian sage is to be realized. This core section of the opening chapter is both preceded and followed by important transitional passages, in which primary stress is placed upon the importance of the proper sequential and conceptual ordering of these essential phases of self-cultivation.

The “expansion chapters” that make up the remainder of the book explicate, one by one, each of the main ideas set forth in the opening chapter. The bulk of these sections is composed of sets of illustrative “proof texts” drawn primarily from the received “canonic corpus”, especially the “*Classic of Documents*” (*Shujing* 書經) and the “*Classic of Poetry*” (*Shijing* 詩經), followed by statements of an expository or interpretive nature developing the meaning of the specific aspect of Confucian fulfillment under discussion in that chapter. Of these ten chapters, Chaps. 1, 2, and 3 (following the numbering in Zhu Xi’s recension) take up the loaded terms of the “three general principles”: “causing the light of one’s inner moral force to shine forth” (*ming mingde* 明明德), “bringing the people to a state of renewal” (*xin min* 新民), and “coming to rest in the highest good” (*zhi yu zhishan* 止於至善). At the other end of the treatise, Chaps. 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 explicate the first five of the “eight specific points”, in reverse order from their rhetorical sequence in the opening chapter: those expounding “achieving integral wholeness in one’s inner consciousness” (*cheng qi yi* 誠其意), “setting straight one’s emotional and cognitive faculties” (*zheng qi xin* 正其心), “perfecting one’s individual character” (*xiu qi shen* 修其身), “putting one’s family into proper balance” (*qi qi jia* 齊其家), and “establishing orderly rule in one’s kingdom” (*zhi qi guo* 治其國). This leaves Chaps. 4 and 5 to deal with what appear as the last two phases in the standard order of the initial eight-point chain: “expanding to the utmost one’s range of comprehension” (*zhi zhi* 致知), and “extending to all things the correct conceptual grid” (*gewu* 格物). Both of these sections present formidable problems of interpretation, since Chap. 4, vaguely designated as “the roots and the branches” (*benmo* 本末), touches only tangentially upon the expansion of one’s range of comprehension, while Chap. 5 is, in all the different extant versions, reduced to nothing more than a cryptic heading regarding “understanding the fundamental core,” with no actual explication of the subject. This glaring gap is filled for us in the canonic text established in the Four Books, where Zhu Xi adds a long explanatory note to take the place of the ostensibly “lost” fifth chapter. This supplementary note takes the form of a disquisition on the meaning of the final term in the eight-point sequence, *gewu*, in an unabashedly Neo-Confucian vein.

2.4 *Integral Argument*

The central theme of the *Daxue* concerns the substance and the ordering of the Confucian process of self-cultivation. This is immediately clear in the prevailing reading of the title of the treatise by some of the major traditional commentators as: “the learning of the great one,” or “learning to be great.” The essential ideas set forth in the “three principles” and the “eight points,” however, immediately raise a number of difficult questions of interpretation regarding the nature of this process. These questions begin with the initial problem of defining one’s inner moral force (*de*) and what it means to cause it to “shine forth” (*ming mingde*), how one is to go about “renewing the people” (*xinmin*, frequently read according to an alternate recension as *qinmin* 親民, “loving the people”), and why the point of ultimate attainment is here described with the term “supreme good” (*zhi shan* 至善), a glowing ideal that may sound quite familiar to Western ears, but is rarely invoked in early Chinese writings. In the passage that follows, the affirmation of the absolute importance of the temporal ordering of the process of Confucian cultivation is cast into further doubt as to its essential logical thrust: are these stages to be conceived as sequential steps or as simultaneous spheres of self-perfection? As the text moves from the broader to the narrower spheres of human endeavor, we learn that each stage of outer realization must be preceded by prior conditions of more personal, and ultimately, internal cultivation. But upon arriving at the deepest layers of consciousness, the order of progression seems to shift direction, and the core of inner attainment is redefined in terms of an outward-directed engagement with the entire phenomenal world, as expressed in the elusive term *gewu* (“extending to all things the correct conceptual grid”). The answer to some of these questions is adumbrated in a common thread of meaning running through many of the passages in the “expansion chapters.” Here the recurrent theme is one of finding within one’s own inner self, in both the “heart” or “mind” (*xin* 心) that interacts with the outside world and the “inner consciousness” (*yi* 意), closer to the core of one’s being, a reflection of the abiding patterns of meaning intrinsic in the entire cosmic order. Once one has succeeded in apprehending these inherent principles, one can then extrapolate from them to build a solid ground for moral judgment and for effective engagement with others at every level of human interaction.

The difficulty of defining the terms of discourse used in the *Daxue*, and the profound implications of its essential message regarding the inner core of selfhood, made it a central focus of philosophical debate in the Confucian school, at least from Tang times on. Even after it was reauthorized as one of the Four Books in the Song period, and thus became one of the obligatory texts of formal education for all Confucian scholars for the next 1,000 years, its essential meaning remained a matter of great controversy, particularly between followers of the orthodox “learning of principle” (*lixue* 理學), and thinkers of the so-called “school of the mind” (*xinxue* 心學) associated with many leading thinkers of the late-Imperial period, from Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (1139–1192) to Wang Yangming.

2.5 Interpretation

When one re-examines the overall flow of ideas in this treatise from the perspective of the primary assertions in each of its component chapters, a fairly well focused core argument begins to come into view. The first three expansion chapters, corresponding to the opening tripartite sequence of the first chapter, tell us in the most succinct manner that moral cultivation must be self-generated (*ziming* 自明), it must be extended to others (*tui yi ji ren* 推以極人), and it must be fulfilled by reaching a point of dynamic equilibrium in the fulfillment of cardinal human roles. Chapters 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 add to this the teaching that true cultivation is predicated upon paying heed to one's innate moral predisposition, avoiding the destabilizing pull of emotional impulses and affective inclinations and seeking the ground of moral interaction within oneself – measuring one's responses to others by one's own internal yardstick, yet never cutting oneself apart from the universal fabric of the human community. What this all adds up to is a compelling statement of the solid ground of cultivated selfhood upon which Confucian commitment to the various spheres of external human engagement must rest. This is a view of human capacity frequently paraphrased in the well-known Chinese ideal: “sagely qualities in one's inner self and kingly virtues toward the outside world” (*neisheng waiwang* 內聖外王), or, in words that will find their most eloquent expression in the *Zhongyong*: “bringing oneself to completion, and thereby bringing to completion one's fellow man and all existing things” (*chengji ... chengwu* 誠己...誠物).

This understanding of the overall trajectory of cultivation traced through the five final phases of the paradigm helps us to explicate the two crucial ideas that are left conspicuously unexplained in the initial sequence of the “expansion chapters”. The first of these is the uncertain expression *gewu* 格物. This most difficult and controversial of Confucian terms is composed of two separate semantic elements: a verb and a noun of vague and uncertain meaning. The first character: *ge* is glossed in the standard commentaries on various occurrences in the *Classic of Poetry* and the *Classic of Documents* as an archaic verb meaning “to come” or “to arrive” (one such citation appears in Chap. 16 of the *Zhongyong*). On this basis, the compound phrase may be understood as referring to some idea of “arriving at” or “reaching out” to all things (*wu* 物) in the world. In this context it is clearly the reach of the mind, rather than any material grasp, that is intended. Drawing upon an alternate use of the same word to indicate a grid-like window frame, the expression can be understood to mean something like reaching out to all things in the world through a mental process of extrapolation by analogy, i.e. what Sinologists refer to as “correlative thinking”. Thus the term suggests understanding the place and meaning of all things in the world in accordance with their positions in the universal grid of interrelated categories and individual correspondences.

The phrase *gewu* 格物 used to define the innermost core of selfhood in the eight-point chain (that would have been elucidated, one assumes, in the missing fifth chapter), can finally be construed in terms of the Confucian (and more particularly,

Mencian) faith that, at the point of maximum introversion, what the true seeker of cultivation finds within himself is his own inalienable integration into the universal patterns that govern all men and things. Zhu Xi describes this moment of self-discovery in terms strikingly reminiscent of Buddhist notions of sudden enlightenment. The process of individual attainment then becomes a matter of extrapolating outward from this inner core, extending the grid of conception to define and realize one's place in the objective world of Confucian fulfillment.

This redefinition of the locus of selfhood may also help us to reinterpret the puzzling citation of the passage from the *Analects* (12:13) that makes up most of Chap. 4. The insertion of Confucius' words regarding his personal experience as a magistrate is presented in the heading as an illustration of the idea of "comprehending the root" (*zhiben* 知本) of the whole system. Given the general lack of respect accorded in early Chinese writings to the entire sphere of legal disputation – in sharp contrast to the more honored position of principled advocates and wise judges in, say, Platonic or Mishnaic contexts – it is initially quite difficult to see why the author of these lines chose this as an elucidation of the "fundamental core." The solution to this riddle may lie in recognizing that this proof-text is cited not for what Confucius reportedly said about his own experience as a judge, but rather as a canonic attestation of one particular formulation: the words "one should put oneself in the place of others." By recasting the original source expressed in the first person: "I am like other men" (*wo you ren ye* 我猶人也), the application of this citation to the argument of the *Daxue* raises it to the force of a general proposition on the proper ordering of Self and Other.

3 *Zhongyong (The Doctrine of the Mean)*

3.1 *Textual History*

The *Zhongyong* has consistently been paired with the *Daxue* through its entire history as a canonical text: from its inclusion as a chapter in the *Book of Rites (Liji)* in the Western Han period to its incorporation into the Four Books (*Sishu*) in the restructuring of the canon in the time of Zhu Xi and others in the Song period. It, too, is of uncertain provenance. Its traditional attribution to Confucius' grandson, the second generation disciple Zisi (also known by his personal name Kong Ji 孔伋), is generally discounted by modern scholars, but in this case a body of other writings in the *Liji* compendium ascribed to this same figure, plus certain items in early bibliographical sources, lend a greater degree of credibility to the claim. On the strength of this attribution, Zisi is also revered as a transitional key figure in the orthodox chain of transmission (*daotong* 道統), linking the first-generation disciples of the Master to the first full exposition of Confucian thought in the writings of Mengzi 150 years later. Even more than the *Daxue*, however, the *Zhongyong* is tied by a dense network of inter-textual borrowings and allusions to a variety of philosophical writings dating from both before and after its first attested recension in the early

Han. Of particular interest to scholars is the presence in the text of strong echoes, and in some cases even direct paraphrases, of important passages in the *Mengzi*, on the one hand, and *Xunzi*, on the other – in a manner reminiscent of certain intertextual allusions in the *Daxue*. These have provided the spark for ongoing controversies regarding which of these two strains of early Confucianism best reflects the intellectual orientation of the original author. Despite the uncertainties regarding its date and authorship, on the other hand, the text of the *Zhongyong* has remained remarkably stable over the course of its development, with no major variants to speak of in its canonic recension.

3.2 *Explication of Title*

Along with the many other points on which the *Zhongyong* exhibits a shared textual history with the *Daxue*, it, too, has been subject to misleading renderings of the name of the work in Western translations. In this case, the title is not simply drawn from the opening words of the text, as in the *Daxue*, but represents an expression appearing prominently at a later point. It is this phrase, whose literal translation gives us the conventional “Doctrine of the Mean,” by which the book is almost universally known in Western writings about China. The problem with this formulation is not its implied analogy to the concept of the “mean” in Aristotelian thinking. The notion of dynamic equilibrium developed in this text is, in fact, sufficiently close to that of Aristotle, both in its basic sense and in its more complex application, to warrant what might otherwise be considered a questionable transfer of a Greek term to the Chinese context. Even popular etymologies based upon the early graphic form of the character *zhong* 中 (a vertical line passing through the center of a circle) – suggesting the image of a kind of well-balanced spinning top – do not automatically invalidate the use of the “mean” as an equivalent expression. The principal problem with the standard *Doctrine of the Mean* is that it simply ignores the second term of the equation. The word *yong* 庸 is typically glossed in the traditional commentaries either by its near homophone meaning “to use,” or by another character (*chang* 常) meaning “common,” readings that can be easily combined to yield the sense of “common practice.” Among those Western translators who have paid proper attention to this philological point, most have still misrepresented the relationship between the two words in the title, either treating them as coordinate terms: “A and B” (for example, Tu Wei-ming’s *Centrality and Commonality*), or taking the second as a modifier of the first (as in many early Latin and French versions).

All of these readings of the title tend to lose sight of two central facts about this book. First, while it opens with significant reference to the concept of the “mean,” this is clearly not the primary theme of the work as a whole, and the word drops almost entirely out of the text after the first quarter of its length. Instead, the *Zhongyong* is deeply concerned with the philosophical implications of transposing the unattainable ideal of perfect balance – that attributed to the cosmic order, to the *praxis* of finite human existence, putting it into practice in modes of behavior that trace from the lowest to the highest the entire range of human capacity.

3.3 *Structure*

An initial perusal of the internal structural arrangement of the *Zhongyong* shows it to be strikingly similar to that found in the *Daxue*. It also begins with an opening section (here numbered Chap. 1) that sets forth a programmatic overview of the basic message of the text (similarly termed the “canonic core,” or *jing*), followed by a series of “expansion chapters,” also traditionally referred to as the “commentarial traditions” (*zhuan*), that develop in detail the ideas outlined at the outset. In this case, however, the expansion chapters are not keyed, as in the *Daxue*, to specific terms or lines in the opening section. Rather, they take up the central threads of the argument and probe their meaning through a patchwork of proof texts, interpretive comments and philosophical argumentation. These 32 chapters fall neatly into three distinct sections. The first (Chaps. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11) consists of a series of actual or fabricated quotations from the Master expressing the supreme difficulty of realizing the ideal of the mean in common practice. The following section (Chap. 12 through most of Chap. 20) explores the conceptual ground of successful Confucian cultivation, notably in cardinal human relations, especially filial piety and other ritual obligations, and expanding outward to the broader human context in the exercise of benevolent rulership. The final section (from the end of Chaps. 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, and 33) introduces a new definition of the ideal of perfect cultivation, the concept of “self completion,” or “integral wholeness” (*cheng*), and, with this as its central focus, proceeds to explore the substance and the significance of the highest degree of self-cultivation, that of Confucian “sagehood,” with its metaphysical implications for Man as a central pillar uniting Heaven and Earth.

The sharp division between these three sections in their terms of discourse and their intellectual focus: beginning with the notions of perfect equilibrium in the cosmic sphere and finite harmony in the human realm (*zhonghe* 中和), and culminating in the ideal of “integral wholeness” (*cheng*) extending to metaphysical dimensions, has led many scholars, from as early as the Song period down to modern times, to speculate about the possibility that the *Zhongyong* may in fact be a composite text rather than a single unitary work, perhaps even reflecting formal disputation between competing philosophical schools, or at least divergent views regarding some of the central issues of Confucian thought. A close reading and analysis of the text, however, reveals a coherent central thread of conception running through the different phases of the argument. In order to follow this argument, one must immediately note that the term constituting the traditional title of the treatise: *zhongyong* cannot be understood here in the simple sense of “moderation,” or “mediocrity,” as it is used in a well-known passage in the *Analects* (and from there passed into common use). Nor can the text be read as a mere restatement of the “doctrine of the mean,” because, after introducing the conception of cosmic equilibrium in the opening chapter, the remainder of the text then turns its entire attention to other issues.

One is therefore forced to reinterpret the words *zhongyong* here, in line with the major commentaries, as referring to the limited application of the cosmic model of perfect equilibrium in the concrete context of Confucian moral practice. The exploration of this conception in the text takes us, after an initial exposition of the major themes and concepts, from a series of statements on the virtual impossibility (or all but perfect sages) of fully attaining this ideal, through a discussion of varying forms and degrees of putting it into practice, and finally to a lofty contemplation of the human and cosmic implications of its highest conceivable realization.

3.4 *Central Argument*

The central thread of the argument of the *Zhongyong* can be grasped more clearly when one appreciates the rhetorical method of the text, whereby certain statements are used mainly to lay the conceptual groundwork, or to lead through a chain of assertions to its primary propositions. This is seen immediately in the potentially misleading opening line of the work, where two terminologically overloaded clauses on the “nature of things” (*xing* 性) ordained by Heaven and on the fundamental relation between this “nature” and “the Way” are used to set the ontological grounding for the following clause, in which the primary focus of the text is turned to the “cultivation of the Way” in the concrete human realm. The same method of rhetorical analysis must be applied in the best-known passage in the opening section, where the notion of a hypothetical state of perfect equilibrium (*zhong*), posited as temporally or logically prior to the emergence of concrete existence – as perceived through the emotional markers of human experience (*xinuaile zhi weifa* 喜怒哀樂之未發), is introduced to provide the logical underpinning for the main point at issue in this text: that is, the process of seeking a degree of harmonious balance (*he* 和) in the real world. As in the context of music (to which the Chinese term *he* 和, like its Greek counterpart is linked), “harmony” signifies not a celestial state of perfect balance, but rather a compensatory process of re-balancing the disharmonies of human experience, subject to the limiting conditions imposed by the parameters of concrete existence (*yifa* 已發). When the text is read in this way, the crucial passage in Chap. 12: “The Way is not far from humanity” takes on its full meaning, to assert that sagely fulfillment is rooted in the essential ground of biological and social reality. The same sense emerges in the key passage in Chap. 20 marking the transition to the final section of the text, where the “Way of Man” (*ren zhi dao* 人之道), in contradistinction to the unmediated wholeness of the “Way of Heaven” (*tian zhi dao* 天之道), is distinguished by the need for unceasing, concerted effort in order to strive toward a less cosmic level of moral self-completeness. Finally, this human ideal of wholeness is linked, by way of the common ground of being shared by the individual with all other people and all existing things in the finite world, to a notion of the perfect cultivation of the sage that, at its highest conceivable level, enables such a person to participate, alongside Heaven and Earth, in the creative processes of the entire cosmic scheme.

The profound metaphysical implications attached to the process of human cultivation in the *Zhongyong*, especially in the opening chapter and in the final expansion chapters, help to explain why it became a primary focus of Confucian philosophical debate. Not only were the expressions *weifa* 未發 (prior to concrete manifestation) and *yifa* 已發 (in the world of concrete manifestation) later extracted from the text and used as shorthand indicators for the metaphysical and existential realms, respectively, but the deeper meanings of such terms as “nature” (*xing* 性) “equilibrium and harmony” (*zhong he* 中和) and “self-completeness” (*cheng* 自成) as developed here came to provide the core concepts for a large portion of the intellectual discourse of the Neo-Confucian period.

In the space of just a few dozen pages, the *Zhongyong* deals with a very wide range of philosophical issues. It opens by positing a tripartite relation between human cultivation (*jiao* 教), the Way (*dao* 道), and the intrinsic nature of things (*xing* 性), then considers the cosmic condition of the perfectly balanced mean with respect to the human ideal of ceaseless rebalancing (*shizhong* 時中). From this point, it surveys the entire range of possibilities for translating the abstract ideal of the mean into concrete practice; it asserts the grounding of all the spheres of human relations in the roots of individual experience and the anchoring of all external accomplishment in the perfection of individual character; and it explores the significance of the paradigmatic Confucian acts associated with ritual propriety and benevolent rulership. Finally, it contemplates the achievement of integral wholeness on both the cosmic and the individual levels, affirming the necessity of extending individual self-realization to the realization of all other beings; and it envisions the metaphysical implications of the highest imaginable attainment of these ideal states of being. In the eyes of a number of traditional and modern readers, this breadth of enquiry into so many separate topics has supported the suspicion that the treatise as we have it may be a composite compilation rather than a single integral text.

In view of the sequence of arguments in the respective chapters and the overall structural movements that make up this sweeping scope of discussion, however, the separate topics can be seen to fall into a coherent unified argument. The key to integrating the disparate elements of the text lies in grasping and consistently applying the logical method implied at the very outset in Chap. 1, and then reinforced in each of the subsequent contexts of discussion. This is the insistence on the essential distinction between the cosmic and the sub-lunar planes of being, according to which primary significance is focused on the concerted acts of human striving required for the ordering and perfecting of the finite human realm. In this light, each of the textual divisions outlined above takes its place in the gradually rising scaffold of this compact but elegant intellectual edifice. After positing the logical limits of human self-perfection in the definitions of moral instruction (with its mirror image: cultivation) and in the ideal of harmony in the opening section, the text goes on to explore the full range of attainment to which the active and contemplative human faculties are directed. The first of the major structural divisions traces this range of possible attainment from the low end of the scale, observing the prevailing condition of zero-degree accomplishment of the mean in practice, this set off even more starkly by glimpses of sagely cultivation reserved for

the most perfect of human exemplars alone (the Sage-Emperor Shun 舜, and the paradigmatic disciple of Confucius Yan Hui 顏回). We then turn in the second movement to a more detailed examination of finite degrees of Confucian cultivation in varying circumstances. After first consolidating the conceptual foundation for such activities by asserting the proposition that the roots from which all such accomplishment springs must lie close to, indeed are intrinsic within, the fundamental parameters of individual existence, the text then goes on to reaffirm this through the classic Confucian paradigms of moral action in ritual observance and benevolent rulership. This culminates, at the start of the final textual movement, in the redefinition of the highest state to which man can aspire in terms of the central concept of “integral wholeness” (*cheng* 誠). Here, again, the recurrent logic of the treatise is invoked to reassert the fundamental distinction between a hypothetical perfect state of cosmic wholeness, and that degree of proximate wholeness approachable only through concerted human striving. This conception is further deepened in subsequent sections by the crucial corollary that this pursuit requires both external acts of cultivation and an internal state of conscious understanding, and by the even bolder assertion that this so-called “wholeness” remains necessarily *incomplete* until it is extended beyond the self to effect the full “realization” of other men and things. In the final chapters, the author lifts his eyes to the highest conceivable plane of individual fulfillment, envisioning consequences of human perfection that bring us to the upper limit of the trajectory of attainment traced in the text. Even as we contemplate these glowing images at the height of the Confucian spiritual vision, we are reminded in the final chapter that none of this perfection can be separated from the fundamental ground of moral consciousness actualized only in the sphere of human interaction.

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Chapter 7

Philosophical Thought of Mencius

Wing-cheuk Chan

1 Introduction

Traditionally, Mencius (Mengzi 孟子 371–289 B.C.) has been identified as the second major founder of Confucianism. His family was originally noble, though his parents were quite poor. It has been a famous legend that for the sake of a better education environment for him, his mother moved 3 times. Like Confucius (Kongzi 孔子), during his earlier life Mencius travelled from one state to another to convince the lords to accept his political ideas. After several failed attempts, Mencius retreated to his home state of Lu 魯 and started to teach students. With the help of his disciples, he was able to complete a major work entitled the *Mencius*. This book, consisting of seven chapters, has been identified as the second cornerstone for the founding of Confucianism after the *Analects*. In Mencius' time, both Mohism (Mojia 墨家) and Yangism (Yangzhu *xuepai* 楊朱學派) were very popular and hence posed a threat to Confucianism. Mencius accordingly was determined to overcome these two opponents. Given his important contribution to the development of Confucianism, Mencius has been named “the second sage” (*yasheng* 亞聖).

In fact, Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi in Chinese philosophy have been compared to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle in Western philosophy. Just as Whitehead says that the whole of Western philosophy is a footnote to Plato's thought, one might say that the whole of Confucianism is a footnote to Mencius' thought.¹ More specifically, Mencius' major contributions are shown in developing a philosophical

¹For more recent investigations on Mencius' philosophy, please see: Shun Kwong-loi 1997; Huang Chun-chieh 2001; Alan K. L. Chan 2002; Liu Xiusheng and P.J. Ivanhoe 2002; Liu Xiusheng 2003. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Chang Chan-yuan and Miss Chen Yi's assistance. Regarding the quotations from Mencius' original text, I have followed either the English translation in Chan Wing-tsit 1963 or in Lau 1970. Occasionally, I may make an amendment of their translations.

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anthropology, an ethics, and a political philosophy from a Confucian standpoint. Mencius' philosophical anthropology starts with the thesis that human nature is originally good. He thereby criticized Gaozi's 告子 thesis of the neutrality of human nature. Mencius not only tried to justify his thesis argumentatively, but also experientially. His ethics and political philosophy are founded upon his philosophical anthropology. Mind (*xin* 心) is arguably the central concept in Mencius' thought.

First, this chapter aims to show that pure feeling constitutes the essence of mind in Mencius. This enables us to develop a non-naturalistic picture of Mencius. On the methodological level, as we will see, analogical thinking plays a key role in Mencius' philosophy. From a historical standpoint, the rise of Mencius' thought signifies that Chinese philosophy no longer only consists of dogmatic assertions. In addition, in terms of a settlement of the debate between Shun Kwong-loi 信廣來 and Liu Xiusheng 劉秀生 in modern scholarship on Mencius, we will try to overcome the paradigm of radical rationalism which is founded by Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 in the East and the paradigm of moral psychology which is introduced by David Nivision in the West. As a result, one has to shift to the new paradigm of a phenomenology of pure feeling. Finally, starting with Mencius' "politics of the sentiment," we will explore its possible contribution to overcome the controversy between modernity and post-modernity. This indicates that Mencius' philosophy is not past, but is significantly relevant to our age. From a standpoint of intellectual history, all this will help us to discover that it was neither Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), nor Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (1139–1193) and Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529), but rather Liu Zongzhou 劉宗周 (1578–1645) who was the faithful follower of Mencius.

2 Mencius' View of Human Nature in Light of His Debate with Gaozi

Logic in traditional Chinese philosophy is essentially different from Aristotelian syllogism. In contrast to the deductive logic of the West, Chinese logic is mainly analogical. Accordingly, most of the arguments developed by Chinese philosophers are primarily analogical. From a historical standpoint, only with the rise of the later Mohists did Chinese logic receive a first systematic articulation. But this does not preclude the possibility that even philosophers of other schools mainly argued by means of the Mohist logic. Thus it is helpful for us to start by highlighting the Mohist logic as a theory of analogical reasoning, in order to appreciate the arguments raised by Gaozi and Mencius.²

In the Mohist logic, there are four basic types of analogical reasoning: (1) exemplification (*pi* 辟) (2) parallel (*mou* 侔); (3) imitation (*yuan* 援); (4) extension (*tui* 推). First, exemplification (*pi*) is attributive analogical reasoning. According to the

²Such a connection was noted by D. C. Lau (Cf.: Lau 1970: 235–263). But no one has thus far systematically analyzed these arguments from the standpoint of the Mohist logic in a complete manner.

Mohists, “exemplification is to put forth another thing in order to illuminate this thing” (Graham 1978: 522; I mainly follow Lau 1970: 261). This is a type of reasoning in terms of comparing properties. Its validity is mainly determined by the existence of the similarity of attributes.

Second, parallel (*mou*) is relational analogical reasoning. According to the Mohists, “parallel is to set [two] propositions [expressing relations] side by side and show that they will both do” (Graham 1978: 522; I mainly follow Lau 1970: 261). This is a type of reasoning in terms of comparing relations. The existence of the proportionality between the relations is the major criterion for the validity.

Third, imitation (*yuan*) is copying analogical reasoning. According to the Mohists, “imitation is to say: ‘You can do this, why am I alone not allowed to do that?’” (Graham 1978: 522). This is a type of reasoning in terms of mimics. When the similarity between the proponent’s and the opponent’s position is found, the argument is valid. Pragmatically, imitation aims at defending one’s own position.

Finally, extension (*tui*) is destructive analogical reasoning. According to the Mohists, “Extension is to assimilate what has not been accepted to what has been accepted, so as to refute the opponent’s thesis” (Graham 1978: 522). This is a type of reasoning which targets the opponent’s thesis in terms of assimilation. If there is a self-inconsistency in the opponent’s position, then the argument is valid. Extension can be divided into two forms: (1) direct refutation; (2) indirect refutation. Pragmatically, the goal of extension is destructive with regard to the opponent’s position by uncovering its self-inconsistency. Such an outline of the Mohist theory of analogical reasoning enables us to develop a typological analysis of the arguments in the Gaozi-Mencius debate.

First of all, in justifying his claim that human nature is neutral, Gaozi said:

- G I: (i) Human nature is like the willow tree, and righteousness is like a cup or a bowl;
 (ii) To turn human nature into humanity and righteousness is like turning the willow tree into cups and bowls. (*Mencius* 6A1; Graham 1978: 522–523; here I mainly follow Lau 1970: 262)

GI (i) is an exemplification (*pi*). For Gaozi, both human nature and the willow tree are natural givenness, while righteousness and a cup are artificial products. The point of this argument is to show that righteousness is nothing natural. GI (ii) is a parallel (*mou*). According to Gaozi, turning the willow tree into cups and bowls is against its nature; likewise, to turn human nature into humanity and righteousness is against its nature. The point of this argument is to show that humanity and righteousness do not originally belong to human nature.

As a rebuttal, Mencius pointed out,

- M I: Sir, can you follow the nature of the willow tree and make the cups and bowls, or must you violate the nature of the willow tree before you can make the cups and bowls? If you are going to violate the nature of the willow tree in order to make cups and bowls, then must you also violate human nature in order to make it into humanity and righteousness? Your words, alas! would lead all people in the world to consider humanity and righteousness as calamity. (*Mencius* 6A1)

Implicit in this passage is an extension (*tui*). Mencius’ point is that if Gaozi’s argument is valid, then it would give rise to the following undesirable consequence:

All people in the world – including Gaozi himself – would consider humanity and righteousness as calamity. For Gaozi's position implies that to be moral is against human nature. In terms of Mencius' counter-argument, one can see that the controversy is intensified on whether to be moral is devastating to the original human nature.

To this, Gaozi responded with a new argument which is a parallel (*mou*):

G II: Man's nature is like whirling water.

If a breach in the pool made to the east it will flow to the east.

Man's nature is indifferent to good and evil, just as water is indifferent to east and west.

(*Mencius* 6A2)

In maintaining that there is still a similarity between turning water flow to east or west and turning human nature to good or evil, Gaozi no longer appealed to the notion of intrinsic nature, but rather argued that the direction of turning is determined in an accidental manner. He aimed to show that just as water's flowing to east or west is determined by external factors, human nature's turning to good or evil is determined by external factors. For him, to be good or evil has no intrinsic ground in human nature. In this way, he tried to escape the challenge brought up by Mencius that to be moral is to be against human nature.

Likewise, Mencius employed a parallel (*mou*) to respond:

M II: Man's nature is naturally good just as water naturally flows downwards. Man can be made to do evil as water is forced to flow uphill. (*Mencius* 6A2)

For Mencius, it is in accordance with the nature of water that it flows downward, but it is against its nature and due to the external force that it flows upward; likewise, it is in accordance with his nature that man is good, but it is against his nature and due to external influence that man is made evil. In his eyes, it is nothing accidental for human beings to be moral, for it is grounded in human nature. That is to say, there is something a priori in human nature that ensures the capacity of becoming moral.

In denying such an a priori concept of human nature, Gaozi started with his own definition of "nature": "What is inborn is called nature" (*Mencius* 6A3). For him, "nature" is an empirical, or, more precisely, a biological, concept. Accordingly, it is only a contingent truth that human nature is good.

For the sake of defending the necessity of the thesis that human nature is good, Mencius rejoined, "When you say what is inborn is called nature, is that like saying white is white?" Given Gaozi's positive answer, Mencius said:

M III: If you agree with saying that "the whiteness of a white feather is the same as the whiteness of snow," and that "the whiteness of snow is the same as the whiteness of white jade," then you have to accept that "the nature of a dog is the same as the nature of an ox, and the nature of an ox is the same as the nature of a man." (*Mencius* 6A3)

This is, in reality, an extension (*tui*). In Mencius' eyes, if Gaozi does not accept the thesis that "the nature of an ox is the same as the nature of a man," then he has to abolish the thesis that to say what is inborn is called nature is like saying white is white. The latter is necessarily true, whereas the former is not.

In defending his definition of “nature,” Gaozi said: “By nature we desire food and sex. Humanity is internal and not external, whereas righteousness is external and not internal” (*Mencius* 6A4). As a further support for this thesis, Gaozi introduced the following parallel (*mou*):

G III: When I see an old man and respect him for his age, it is not that the oldness is within me, just as, when something is white and I call it white, I am merely observing its external appearance. I therefore say righteousness is external. (*Mencius* 6A4)

Gaozi’s point is that by observing the external appearance of a white thing, we call it white; likewise, when we see the external appearance of an old man, we respect him for his age. At first glimpse, this might raise a challenge to the understanding of Gaozi’s view of human nature as neutral, for he now clearly claims that humanity is internal. However, what Gaozi actually means by saying that humanity is internal is rather that human nature is inclined to be good. This indicates that Gaozi merely understands humanity to be *de facto* internal. In other words, for Gaozi, “humanity” is still only an “ontic,” rather than an “ontological” concept. Accordingly, Gaozi’s internalization of humanity is in reality similar to attributing desiring food and sex to human nature. That is, humanity is “internal” only in the sense of being “instinctual.” So this will not change the fact of Gaozi’s identification of human nature as neither good nor evil.

In rejecting such a “naturalization” of humanity, Mencius employed the same analogy but in a different way:

M IV: There is no difference between our considering a white horse to be white and a white man to be white. But is there no difference between acknowledging the age of an old horse and the age of an old man? And what is it that we call righteousness, the fact that a man is old or the fact that we honor his old age? (*Mencius* 6A4)

From a logical standpoint, Mencius’ above argument is an extension (*tui*). Although Mencius accepted that there is no discrepancy between the white of the white horse and that of the white man, he doubted whether Gaozi would agree that there is no difference between the oldness of the old horse and that of the old man; for Gaozi had to accept that the oldness of the old man has an ethical implication, whereas the white of the white horse does not. More importantly, this shows that righteousness is shown in the respect for the old man, rather than in being the old man. As a result, the similarity between calling a white thing a white thing in seeing its whiteness and respecting an old man in seeing his oldness is destroyed.

However, Gaozi insisted that the respect for the old man exactly indicates that righteousness is external. He hence introduced another extension (*tui*) which can be reformulated as follows:

G IV: (1) You agree that since my love of my own younger brother but not the younger brother of a man from the state of *Qin* is determined by my pleasant feeling, it is called “internal.”

(2) Now in the case of my respect for the old man from the state of *Chu* as well as my own elders, what determines my pleasant feeling is age itself. Therefore, it is called “external.”

(3) To be determined by my subjective feeling is different from being determined by the other’s oldness. While the former is “internal,” the latter is “external.”

(4) In maintaining the internality of humanity, how can you oppose the externality of righteousness?

In order to escape such a charge, Mencius continued his effort in denying the externality of righteousness. He rejoined with another extension (*tui*):

M V: We love the roast meat of *Qin* as much as we love our own. This is even so with respect to material things. Then are we going to say that our love of the roast meat is also external? (*Mencius* 6A4)

Mencius' point is that if Gaozi identifies our love of the roast meat as external, then it would give rise to a self-inconsistency in G IV.

Although Gaozi himself did not respond to Mencius' counter-attack, his disciple Meng Jizi 孟季子 raised a question to Mencius' disciple Gongduzi 公都子, "What does it mean to say that righteousness is internal?"

Gongduzi said, "We practice reverence, and therefore it is called internal."

[MENG Jizi asked:] "Suppose a fellow villager is 1 year older than your older brother. Whom are you going to serve with reverence?"

[Gongduzi replied:] "I shall serve my brother with reverence."

[MENG Jizi asked:] "In offering wine at a feast, to whom will you offer it first?"

[Gongduzi answered:] "I shall offer wine to the villager first."

MENG Jizi concluded: "Now you show reverence to one but honor the age of the other. What determines your actions certainly lies without and not within." (*Mencius* 6A5)

Meng Jizi's argument can be reformulated as follows:

G V: You accept that when a fellow villager is one year older than your older brother, you will offer wine to the villager first.

However, you show reverence to your older brother in your heart while honoring the age of the villager.

Therefore, there is a self-inconsistency in your position.

This is also an argument in the form of an extension (*tui*). Meng Jizi's point is that in such a ceremony actually only the external appearance is the key factor. This implies that righteousness is external.

Since Gongduzi himself was not in a position to respond, he turned to Mencius for help. Mencius told him,

If you ask him whether he will serve with reverence his uncle or his younger brother, he will say he will serve with reverence his uncle. Then you ask him, in case his younger brother is acting at a sacrifice as the representative of the deceased, then to whom is he going to serve with reverence? He will say he will serve the younger brother with reverence. Then you ask him "Where is your reverence for your uncle?" He will then say, "[I show reverence to my younger brother] because he represents the ancestral spirit in an official capacity." You can likewise say, "[I show reverence to the villager] because of his position." Ordinarily, the reverence is due to the elder brother but on special occasions it is due to the villager. (*Mencius* 6A5)

In reality, Mencius introduces the following argument:

M VI: Ordinarily, the reverence is due to the elder brother, but on special occasions it is due to the villager.

Just as ordinarily the reverence is due to your uncle, but when your younger brother represents the ancestral spirit in an official capacity it is due to him.

This is an argument of parallel (*mou*). For Mencius, these two cases are similar in changing the order of reverence due to the special occasions. So what matters is the difference between the standard and the secondary, rather than that between the internal and the external.

When Meng Jizi learnt this, he said:

G VI: We show reverence to the uncle when reverence is due to him, and we show reverence to the younger brother when reverence is due to him. Certainly what determines it lies without and does not come from within. (*Mencius* 6A5)

This is also an argument of parallel (*mou*). As a follower of Gaozi, Meng Jizi wanted to stress that it is the role of the person that determines the order of reverence, and that this is the evidence that righteousness is external.

Following Mencius' instruction, Gongduzi rejoined:

M VII: In the winter we drink things hot. In the summer, we drink things cold. Does it mean that what determines eating and drinking also lies outside? (6A5)

To this argument Mou Zongsan remarks:

Gongduzi's argument does not work. It is messy and muddle-minded. On the surface, it looks like what Mencius said before: "We love the roast meat of *Qin* as much as we love our own. Then are we going to say that our love of the roast meat is also external?" In reality, they are different. While Mencius's argument is valid, Gongduzi's argument is not. To hold that "In the winter we drink things hot, and in the summer, we drink things cold" can only lend support to Gaozi's position. Namely, righteousness should be external. This indicates that Gongduzi is illogical. In saying that "We love the roast meat of *Qin* as much as we love our own," Mencius aims to stress love is internal. (Mou Zongsan 2004: 9)

However, Mou Zongsan's critique can only be justified from a behaviourist standpoint. That is to say, only when the behaviour is entirely reducible to the conditioned reflex, then Mou Zongsan's criticism is valid. Gongduzi's original point is rather that just as what determines the love of roast meat (as is shown in Mencius' argument) comes from within, what determines the love of drinking comes from within. Like Mencius, he is able to emphasize the spontaneity of the subjectivity. Structurally, his argument is a parallel (*mou*). Our difference from Mou Zongsan's position reinforces that the validity of an analogical argument is context-dependent or intention-dependent.

One can now sum up the difference between Mencius and Goazi as follows: on the one hand, for Mencius, apart from human nature no humanity and righteousness would be possible; on the other hand, for Goazi, humanity is internal to human nature, whereas righteousness is external to it. More importantly, while Mencius' concept of human nature is ontological, Goazi's concept of human nature is ontic. In other words, what Mencius means by "nature" is Being in the sense of the "way to be." In contrast, what Gaozi has in mind is basically a naturalistic, or more precisely a biological concept of nature.

But a set of questions remains: Is it possible to conclude that Mencius wins the argumentation? If this is the case, then in what sense does Mencius win the debate? Does Gaozi commit any logical fallacy?

In order to answer these questions, let us start with an exposition of the Mohist theory of logical fallacy. As the Mohists write,

Things may have similarities, but it does not follow that therefore they are completely similar. When propositions are parallel, there is a limit beyond which this cannot be pushed. For each thesis, there is a ground. Despite the similarity of [the two] theses, their grounds can well be different. For any choice of a position, there is always a criterion. Despite the similarity in the [two] chosen positions, their criteria may be different. Therefore, as far as the arguments in the form of exemplification, parallel, imitation, and extension are concerned, they may go too far, become different in validity, turn to be dangerous, and lose the foundation. So it is necessary to be careful in employing them, and to avoid seeing them as a rule. Given the possibility of ambiguity in speech, distinction in kind, and difference in grounding, one has to go beyond seeing things from any partial perspective. (Graham 1978: 522–523; here I mainly follow Lau 1970: 262)

This passage also includes an analysis of the causes of the rise of fallacies in the four types of analogical reasoning. First, in the case of exemplification (*pi*), the validity of an inference is grounded in the similarity between the properties of two things. However, “Things may have similarities, but it does not follow that therefore they are completely similar.” That is, the similarity might be just local. If one falsely generalizes a local affinity to be a global one, then it might give rise to a fallacy. This is the fallacy of “going too far.” Secondly, in the case of parallel (*mou*), the validity is grounded in the similarity between two relations. Nonetheless, “When propositions are parallel, there is a limit beyond which this cannot be pushed.” If one oversteps the limit, then one commits to a fallacy. This is the fallacy of “difference in validity.” Thirdly, in the case of imitation (*yuan*), the validity of the reasoning is grounded in the similarity between two theses. However, “For each thesis, there is a ground. Despite the similarity of [the two] theses, their grounds can well be different.” If one fails to recognize such a possibility, then one might commit a fallacy of “turning to be dangerous.” Finally, in the case of extension (*tui*), the validity of an inference is grounded in the inconsistency shown in the opponent’s two similar positions. Nevertheless, “For the choice of a position, there is a criterion. Despite the similarity in the [two] chosen positions, their criteria may be different.” Overlooking such a difference can give rise to the fallacy of “losing the foundation.”

Armed with such a Mohist theory of fallacy, we can start to examine the arguments involved in the debate between Gaozi and Mencius. First of all, the validity of GI is grounded in the similarity between making man moral and making the willow tree into cups. However, in MI Mencius not only tries to show that making man moral and making the willow tree into cups are different, but also aims to argue that GI can lead to disastrous consequences for being moral. For we have to do violence to the nature of the willow tree in order to make it into cups, whereas to be moral does not imply doing any violence to human nature. Furthermore, the claim that we have to do violence to our nature in order to be moral would undermine the authority and positive status of morality. Therefore, GI commits the fallacy of “going too far and that of difference in validity.” To this extent, one can conclude that MI succeeds in overriding GI.

The validity of GII as a parallel is grounded in the similarity between the indifference water shows in turning east or west and the equal possibility of human nature in becoming good or evil. MII rather aims to show that as far as the similarity between human nature and water is concerned, human nature's being good should be compared to water's flowing downward. From a logical point of view, GII and MII are different parallels. Unless Gaozi claims that GII starts with the premise that water and human nature are completely alike, one cannot charge him for committing the fallacy of "becoming different in validity."

As an extension MIII takes issue with Gaozi's identification of human nature as what is inborn. Given Gaozi's refusal to see the nature of an ox as the nature of a man, he would give up the claim that "Nature is what is inborn" would be a necessary truth like "White is white."

Nonetheless, in insisting on the externality of righteousness, Gaozi tries to compare an old man to the color white. The validity of GIII as an exemplification is grounded in the similarity between their appearances. In his counter-attack, Mencius points out that if Gaozi agrees that there is a distinction between an old man and an old horse, then he should give up the attempt to prove the externality of righteousness in terms of a comparison between the quality of being old and the quality of being white, for righteousness is only shown in the respect for the elder. MIV as an extension aims to uncover that if GIII holds, then we should also show respect for an old horse. But given that Gaozi does not accept such an undesirable consequence, he would withdraw GIII; otherwise, he would commit the fallacy of "going too far."

Since Gaozi maintains that the respect for an old man exactly shows the externality of righteousness, he contrasts the distinction shown in loving my brother and loving another's brother to the identity shown in the respect for an old man from my country and the respect for an old man from another country. GIV as an extension uncovers that it is based on my subjective preference that humanity is said to be "internal," while it is based on the appearance of the old man that righteousness is said to be "external." But even if Mencius denies this contrast, he would not commit the fallacy of "losing the foundation." For Mencius maintains that it is not due to the "outer" appearance of an old man, but rather the "internal" feeling that we show respect to him.

MV as an extension aims to show that there is a self-inconsistency in GIV. For Mencius, it is rather Gaozi who commits the fallacy of "losing the foundation." As Gaozi said before, to say that humanity is "internal" is due to the fact that "I am the one to determine that pleasant feeling" (*Mencius* 6A4). But although our love of the roast meat is also determined by our pleasant feeling, he identifies it as "external."

As a counter-attack, GV in form of an extension aims to demonstrate that it is rather MV which commits the fallacy of "losing the foundation." For, while showing respect to your brother whole-heartedly, you are forced to honor the elder villager. This implies that without admitting the externality of righteousness, Gongduzi would be inconsistent with himself. If Gongduzi agrees that age is the most decisive factor, then he will lose his position.

At first glance, MVI seems to confirm that the external factor is most decisive. For this indicates that to honor the younger brother is like honoring the elder villager. As is shown in GVI, similar to the case of honoring the younger brother, the criterion for honoring the elder villager is also external.

In order to block such a possibility, MVII aims to show that it is self-consistent to see the determining factor for whether to drink soup in winter or to drink water in summer as internal. One might wonder to what extent such a parallel can become valid. Clearly, if the disciples of Gaozi also assume that the subjective feeling of comfort, rather than the variation of external conditions, plays the key role in deciding whether to drink soup or water, then MVII is able to attain its goal.

As a whole, Gaozi finally gives up defending his position. In the first place, this is because, without the concept of moral competence, he cannot make sense of his own thesis of the internality of humanity. On the other round, given his thesis of the internality of humanity, he cannot reduce morality to the level of performance only. From a logical standpoint, in either case, it would give rise to the fallacy of self-inconsistency. In the second place, as Chong Kim-chong 莊錦章 points out, “Mengzi [Mencius] is questioning Gaozi’s application of ‘internal’ and ‘external’ to both *ren* 仁 and *yi* 義 and showing that it has absurd consequences” (Chong 2002: 104). To this extent, one can conclude that Mencius wins the debate. But Chong Kim-chong sees the origin of this debate in the conflict between a moral psychology and a psychology of desire. In contrast, for us, it is rather due to the more fundamental fact that Mencius and Gaozi have different views in philosophical anthropology. More precisely, in developing their respective views of human nature, Mencius’ starting point is “pure feeling,” whereas Gaozi’s is one of “sensibility.” As will be seen, Mencius’ position transcends a moral psychological approach, whereas Gaozi’s doctrine is imprisoned in moral psychology.

3 Mencius’ View of the Four Beginnings as Pure Feelings

Besides the argumentative approach, Mencius tried to justify his thesis phenomenologically. For him, the feelings of commiseration, of shame and dislike, of respect and reverence, of right and wrong, are found in all men. These feelings can be, respectively, cultivated into the virtues of humanity, righteousness, propriety (*li* 禮), and wisdom. Together these feelings define what a man is as a man. That is, they are intrinsic to human nature (*Mencius* 2A6). As phenomenological evidence, Mencius pointed out that when a man suddenly sees a child about to fall into a well, he has a feeling of alarm and distress, and then tries to rescue the child. His motivation is not to favor the child’s parents, nor to gain the praise of his neighbors and friends, nor to avoid the criticism from the other if he did not rescue the child (*Mencius* 2A6). All this shows that human nature is originally good and the moral mind is essentially affective. In terms of pure affectivity, for Mencius, human nature is nothing abstract.

The feelings of commiseration, of shame and dislike, of respect and reverence, of right and wrong are, however, the four beginnings. It is only when they are fully developed that one can become virtuous. This explains why, although all men have the same starting point, only a few might eventually become sages. Since Mencius maintained the original goodness of human nature, it is also necessary for him to account for the origin of evil. In his explanation, Mencius introduced the analogy of barley seeds. As he said in 6A7,

Sow the seeds and cover them with soil. The place is the same and the time of sowing is also the same. The plants shoot up and by the summer solstice they all ripen. If there is any unevenness, it is because the soil varies in richness and there is no uniformity in the fall of rain and dew and the amount of human effort devoted to tending it.

This shows that it is mainly due to the lack of effort in fully putting our moral capacity into the reality that evil arises. The feelings of commiseration, of shame and dislike, of respect and reverence, of right and wrong, are only the seeds. It is only when they are fully developed that virtues, instead of evils, can be attained. That is to say, evil arises when man fails to fully concretize his moral competence. Therefore a good beginning does not sufficiently guarantee a happy ending. Another necessary condition is self-cultivation.

Concerning the know-how in fully developing the four beginnings, Mencius likewise employed an analogy in explanation. He pointed out, "Even if you had the keen eyes of Lilou and the skill of Gong Shuzi, you could not draw squares or circles without a carpenter's square or a pair of compasses" (*Mencius* 6A1). In the case of moral cultivation, the former sages such as Yao and Shun can show us how to use the carpenter's square and compass. Modeling on these sages' behaviour, it is possible for us to rectify our behaviour. To this extent analogical thinking also plays a key role in moral cultivation.

At this juncture, one might ask, how can the sages achieve their goal. Mencius' answer runs as follows:

The sages, having taxed their eyes to their utmost capacity, went on to the compass and the square, the level and plumb-line, which can be used endlessly for the production of squares and circles, planes and straight lines; having taxed their ears to their utmost capacity, they went on to the six pipes which can be used endlessly for setting the pitch of the five notes (*Mencius* 4A1).

In the realm of morality, what functions as the square, the compass, and the five notes is *li* (principles). As Mencius further wrote, "What is common to all hearts? Principles and rightness. The sage is simply the man first to this common element in my heart" (*Mencius* 4A7).

Despite the thesis that morality is primarily based on feelings, Mencius is a rationalist in stressing the universality of the moral principles. For him, moral principles are first of all universalized feelings. More precisely, the feeling of commiseration corresponds to the principle (*li* 理) of humanity, the feeling of shame and dislike corresponds to the principle of righteousness, the feeling of deference and compliance corresponds to the principle of propriety, the feeling of right and wrong corresponds to the principle of wisdom. Without these feelings, moral principles would become empty. In this way, there is no contrast between feeling and reason.

But what is the ontological status of the four beginnings as feelings? In dealing with “feeling” in Mencius’ sense, many scholars tend to identify these feelings as instinctual. That is, they are understood as psychological emotions. For example, in arguing that “Mencius held a picture of the role of emotion in moral motivation that militates against a general separation of reason from emotion,” David Wong only approaches Mencius’ feeling from the standpoint of moral psychology (Wong 1991: 31). Likewise, although traditional Confucians such as Zhu Xi insist on the difference between the “four beginnings” as feelings, i.e., pleasure, anger, sorrow and joy, on the one hand, and the “seven emotions,” i.e., happiness, bitterness, worry, delight, love, hatred and desire, on the other hand, they try to account for the difference in terms of the distinction between the principle (*li* 理) and the material force (*qi* 氣). As Zhu Xi said, “The four beginnings are issued from the principle (*li*理), whereas the seven emotions are issued from the material force (*qi* 氣)” (Zhu Xi 1986: vol. 4, 1297) This nonetheless does not help change the fact that for Zhu Xi, the four beginnings, like the seven emotions, are still sensible. So the uniqueness of the moral feeling in Mencius’ sense is only shown in its being aroused by reason alone. All this indicates that Mencius’ feeling is identified either as rational (Mou Zongsan) or as sensible (Zhu Xi and David Wong). As a consequence, the autonomy of “feeling” in Mencius’ sense has been eliminated; for “feeling” in Mencius’ sense is pure, rather than sensible. In particular, to say that pure feeling is issued from reason overlooks the fact that the four beginnings can play the role of the *Bestimmungsgrund* (determining ground), additional to that of the *Bewegungsgrund* (motivating ground) of morality. As Mencius pointed out, “Children carried in the arms all know to love their parents. As they grow, they all know to respect their elder brothers” (*Mencius* 7A15). That is to say, all of them are not results from learning, but rather arise spontaneously. However, such “innate” ability and knowledge should not be understood in a biological or naturalistic sense. If this is the case, then one would ask Mencius for statistical grounds. This would also signify that for Mencius, moral truth is probable, rather than necessary.

The thesis that Mencius’ four beginnings are pure feelings is also confirmed by his assertion that “Therefore moral principles please my mind as beef and mutton and pork please our mouths” (*Mencius* 6A7). It is because moral principles are non-sensible, and the pleasure aroused by them must be likewise non-sensible. Furthermore, as Chong Kim-chong observes, “it would be wrong to construe Mengzi [Mencius] as suggesting that the heart-mind is a sensory organ in the way the palate is” (Chong 2002: 114) But one cannot hence agree with Chong Kim-chong’s claim that here Mencius “is making a *naturalistic* assumption that just as there is something that pleases my palate, there is also something that pleases my heart-mind” (Chong 2002: 114). As Chong Kim-chong himself acknowledges, “It is clear, that it is *li* and *yi* that pleases the heart-mind, not the sensation of taste” (Chong 2002: 114). But apart from the concept of pure feeling, one can hardly make sense of such an account.

Mencius also spoke of the “strong, moving force” (*haoran ji qi* 浩然之氣). Such a force is immaterial. Furthermore, “As force, it is accompanied by righteousness and the Way” (*Mencius* 2A2). While pure feeling goes hand-in-hand with the immaterial force, sensible emotion belongs to the dimension of the material force.

More importantly, the reason why Mencius' moral feeling must not be identified as "instinctual," "sensible," "biological," or "psychological," is shown in his concept of human nature. As seen before, Mencius strongly opposes Gaozi's understanding of human nature. For, in his eyes, Gaozi's concept of human nature is biological or naturalistic. Given Mencius' identification of human nature with the four beginnings, the reduction of feeling to sensible emotion would blur the essential distinction between Mencius' and Gaozi's doctrines of human nature. Indeed, for Gaozi, desiring food and sex is "instinctual." Therefore, to identify the four beginnings as "instinctual" would collapse Mencius' concept of human nature into that of Gaozi.

Insofar as Mencius clarifies human nature in terms of the four feelings, it would be more accurate to say that he grants a primacy to feeling over the distinction between reason and sensibility. Ontologically, the four feelings constitute the Being of human beings. But to characterize the four feelings as "instinctual" implies that they are merely "ontic" features of human beings. That is, these feelings merely belong to the human being as a being only, and hence have nothing to do with the ontological structure of the human being. Accordingly, this kind of understanding of the four beginnings can hardly make sense of Mencius' thesis:

a man without the feeling of commiseration is not a man; a man without the feeling of shame and dislike is not a man; a man without the feeling of deference and compliance is not a man; and a man without the feeling of right and wrong is not a man. (*Mencius* 2A6)

All this indicates that the four feelings constitute the ontological structure of man. This implies that for Mencius, man is first of all a feeling subject. That is, moral feeling is constitutive of *xin* (mind). Although we are sympathetic with Irene Bloom's claim that Mencius' "conception directly entails the idea of a *universal* human nature," we disagree with her identification of "four beginnings" as "moral dispositions" (Bloom 1994: 24; 44). In reality, these are pure, rather than psychological, feelings. *Pace* Heidegger, one might characterize the Being of pure feeling in Mencius' sense as follows:

Ontologically pure feeling is a primordial kind of Being for man, in which man is disclosed to himself *priori* to all cognition and volition, and *beyond* their range of disclosure. And we are never free of pure feelings. (see Heidegger 1962a: 175)

In short, Mencius' four feelings should be understood as man's *Seinskönnen* (capacity of *to be*). There is accordingly an essential distinction between pure feeling and sensible emotion. First, pure feeling is ontological, while sensible emotion is ontic. Second, pure feeling arises spontaneously, whereas sensible emotion is aroused by the external factor. Third, there is always an identity between pure feeling and ethical principle; in contrast, there is usually a discrepancy or even a conflict between sensible emotion and ethical principle. It should be noted that Craig Ihara's claim, "Mencius does not himself use a word that can translate directly as 'emotion'" (Ihara 1991: 48), is not justified if the term "emotion" refers to pure feeling. On the other hand, one might agree with David Wong's thesis that, "It seems straightforward to classify innate sensitivity to others as an emotion, or at least the primitive beginnings of an emotion such as compassion," only when the term "emotion" is changed into "pure feeling" (Wong 1991: 31–44).

Separating “pure feeling” from “psychological emotion” is also crucial for a correct understanding of the example of the child falling into the well. Ihara claims, “Certainly there are no cognitive emotions in the example of the child in the well. That is exclusively an illustration of instinctive sympathetic responses” (Ihara 1991: 50). If the feeling of commiseration is merely an instinctive sympathetic response, then its rise is exclusively elicited by certain features of a situation. This implies that the feeling of commiseration would not arise out of spontaneity of the mind. Such a consequence cannot be accepted by Mencius. For example, as he said, “Shun understood the way of things and had a keen *insight* into human relationship. He followed the path of morality. He did not just put morality into practice” (*Mencius* 4B19; *my italic*). This shows that the four beginnings as pure feelings are nothing instinctual, but rather self-conscious. That is also the reason why Mencius is able to claim, “if one finds oneself in the right, one goes forward even against men in the thousands” (*Mencius* 2A2). Obviously, for him, morality is never a “blind” action.

On the other hand, following Ronald de Sousa, David Wong argues that there is no principle of practical reason but only emotion which is capable of framing “what features of a situation appear as salient features” (Wong 1991: 33). In reality, it is pure feeling, rather than sensible emotion, that can address the “frame problem.” For the rise of sensible emotion is conditioned by the affecting factor external to the subjectivity. Nevertheless for Mencius, the feeling of commiseration, for example, is constitutive of human nature. It is due to its existence prior to seeing the child falling into the well that the feeling of commiseration can exercise the function of framing the salient features of the situation.

All this shows that the four beginnings as human feelings should be understood from a transcendental, rather than a moral psychological, perspective. However, Liu Xiusheng argues that Mencius is a moral realist. For him, this is the only way for Mencius to account for the objectivity of moral judgment. According to moral realism, as Liu Xiusheng understood, “a moral judgment ascribes, truly or falsely, a moral quality to a person, action, or object” (Liu 2003: 162). In justifying this moral realist picture of Mencius, Liu Xiusheng turns to Mencius’ frequent comparison of “the mind/heart’s enjoyment of moral qualities to the eye’s enjoyment of certain colours, the ear’s enjoyment of certain sounds, the mouth’s enjoyment of certain flavours” for help (Liu 2003: 162). Seen from the textual perspective, the evidence enumerated by Liu Xiusheng might be too thin in supporting his claim. As a matter of fact, Mencius never spoke of any “moral quality,” not to mention that he never granted any “objective reality” to such “moral qualities,” which can be compared to the “secondary qualities” in the empiricist sense. More importantly, there seems to be a vicious circle in Liu Xiusheng’s position. In explaining why respecting an old horse does not involve moral approval while respecting an old man does, he says that it is “because the former does not *evoke* characteristically human feelings, but the latter does” (Liu 2003: 164; *my italic*). This indicates that those characteristically human feelings are only the “passive receivers” of moral facts. But at the same time he writes:

For Mencius, feelings and so on contribute to cognition in the following two ways. (a) They have a capacity to establish what properties or features of a situation appear as salient. (b) Certain feelings indicate the presence of a moral quality. From (a) and (b) we can say, as some prefer, that certain feelings and sentiments are the equipment by which we *identify* moral facts. (Liu 2003: 163)

To this extent, those human feelings are more than just “passive receivers,” and have a kind of function in determining what can be counted to be “moral qualities” or “moral facts.” Therefore, it remains unclear in regard to the “ultimate” authority in judging what can be counted as “moral.” At this juncture, Liu Xiusheng might find himself faced with the following dilemma. If he grants the ready-made status to moral facts, then he has to fall back to the metaphysical moral realism. On the other hand, if he lets human feelings be the sole determining grounds of “being moral,” then he has to side with emotivism. Since Liu Xiusheng explicitly refuses to identify Mencius as either a metaphysical realist or an emotivist, he has to face an insurmountable difficulty.

All in all, it is rather due to Liu Xiusheng’s overlooking the distinction between pure feeling and sensible emotion that he identifies Mencius as a moral realist. In comparing Mencius to Hume, Liu Xiusheng merely understands the four beginnings as sensible emotions. As he writes:

For Hume, “feeling” or “sentiment” generally means (a) a tendency to be moved by various situations (as such it is also called a “sensibility” or “propensity”) and (b) in general an affective mental state and in particular an attitude that issues from the tendency described in (a). Hume’s use of “feeling” or “sentiment” is very similar to Mencius’ use of “*xin*” (心)... as in “*ce yin zhi xin*” (惻隱之心)... which is often translated as “feeling” or “sense.” (Liu 2003: 98)

Given his opposition of an emotivist picture of Mencius, Liu Xiusheng sees a realist interpretation of Mencius as the only way out. As he explains,

If *Yi* [yi] 義 and the performance of *Yi* [yi] 義 (to respect an elder) do not essentially involve any objective fact but depend entirely upon the projection of the agent’s natural feelings or desire or attitudes, then a “judgment” of *Yi* [yi] 義 will be entirely arbitrary and radically relativistic. (Liu 2003: 162)

Nonetheless, if one, from the very beginning, rejects such a “naturalization” or “psychologization” of the four feelings, then there is no need to (falsely) turn Mencius into a moral realist, in order to account for the possibility of the “objectivity” of moral judgment. In other words, the cause for Liu Xiusheng’s error lies in his blindness to the fact that for Mencius, the “rationality” (or “objectivity”) of moral judgment is grounded in what is common in the heart. As is seen before, Mencius explicitly identified principles and righteousness (*yi* 義) as what is common in the heart. That is, it is in terms of what is common in the heart, rather than any objective moral qualities, that Mencius attempts to account for the possibility of the “objectivity” of moral judgment. That is the reason why Mencius had to point out, “A gentleman differs from other men in that he retains his heart” (*Mencius* 4B28). Thus in account of the objectivity of moral judgment, there is an alternative to identifying Mencius as a moral realist. When Liu Xiusheng goes back to *Mencius* 6A4 and 6A7 to find evidence for his claim, he might also suffer from failing to differentiate Mencius’ position from Gaozi’s naturalism. In *Mencius* 6A4 Mencius tries to show that the quality “being elder” is not the major factor in determining morality; and what counts is only the “respect.” Such a respect is nothing but an “internal” pure feeling. From a textual standpoint, Liu Xiusheng has, besides, to face the challenge that his moral realist interpretation can hardly make sense of Mencius’ doubt: “And what is it that we call righteousness, the fact that a man is old or the fact that we

honor his old age?" Obviously, for Mencius, "being old" is not any moral quality which can determine the "objectivity" of the moral judgment that "I ought to respect the elder." Finally, it is only with the interpretation of Mencius as a "sensibility theorist" that Liu Xiusheng can ignore any conflict between his realist and internalist view of Mencius. For him, Mencius has merely developed a sensibility theory of feeling. Accordingly, Mencius, as an internalist, only conceives of feeling as "subjective." To be sure, with such a kind of feeling, Mencius can hardly explain the objectivity of moral judgment. But in saying that, "We have all kinds of feelings, which establish the salience of different kinds of fact," Liu Xiusheng should have recognized the "transcendental" function of Mencius' moral feeling (Liu 2003: 164). Indeed, only pure feelings, rather than psychological emotions (or sensibility), are able to exercise such a function.

All this confirms that moral feelings in Mencius' sense are primarily "pure." To this extent, Mencius is closer to Kant than Hume – contrary to the major thesis raised by Liu Xiusheng. It is no wonder that scholars such as Mou Zongsan and Li Minghui have compared Mencius to Kant (see Li 1990). In fact, as Heidegger remarks, when Kant said that "respect for the law is not the incentive to morality; it is morality itself," he hinted at the possibility of "pure" moral feeling (Heidegger 1962b: 163). For Kant, in contrast to the pathological feeling, respect as moral feeling is "produced solely by reason" (Kant 1956: 79). But since Kant himself maintained that "all feeling is sensuous," it had to wait for Heidegger to reveal the reality of "respect as a pure feeling" (Heidegger 1962b: 164). More importantly, even what Kant originally meant by "pure moral feelings" refer to those aroused by moral laws, it does not change the fact that they are still sensuous. As a result, unlike Mencius, Kant also failed to recognize the "identity" of the pure feeling and the moral law. Kant insisted that "no kind of feeling, [even] under the name of a practical or moral feeling, may be assumed as prior to the moral law and as its basis" (Kant 1956: 77). In identifying the moral law as the subjective cause of the feeling of respect, Kant did not allow moral feeling to serve "as a basis of the objective moral law itself" (Kant 1956: 79). To this extent, Michel Henry's following observation might more faithfully reflect Kant's limitation: "The determination of the specific affective reality of respect, namely, of respect itself, nevertheless presupposes a pure concept of affectivity which is totally lacking in Kant" (Henry 1973: 524). In contrast, Mencius is able to take care of the "identity" of the moral principle and the pure feeling. For him, the moral principle is nothing but the "universalized" pure feeling. In terms of Mencius' concept of pure moral feeling, one can also appreciate Henry's thesis: "far from being opposed to morality, affectivity is its condition" (Henry 1973: 529). Thus to reduce the four beginnings to psychological emotions would conceal their "transcendental" status. For Henry, what is wrong with Kant is the "absence of a transcendental philosophy of affectivity" (Henry 1973: 530). Furthermore, according to Kant, the submission to moral laws brings comfort. He however insisted that, "This comfort is not happiness, not even the smallest part of happiness" (Kant 1956: 91). Due to his lack of an explicit identification of moral feeling as pure, he could not produce any positive characterization of such a kind of comfort. He could at best say that,

“This inner satisfaction is therefore merely negative with reference to everything which might make life pleasant” (Kant 1956: 91). On the other hand, when Mencius declared that, “There is no greater joy than to examine oneself and be sincere” (*Mencius* 7A4), what he had in mind is joy as pure feeling, rather than as sensible emotion. At this juncture, Mencius’ position is superior to that of Kant. More importantly, according to Mou Zongsan, Kant’s failure to recognize that morality can please our mind indicates his insufficiency in articulating the concept of moral motive (see Mou 2005: 11). Mou Zongsan also points out that the introduction of an “original feeling” which is non-sensible and immaterial is necessary for fixing this problem. But regrettably he seems to ignore that in Mencius the four beginnings are originally pure feelings.

Mencius’ doctrine of pure feelings also shows that to simply explicate his concept of “human nature” in terms of the Aristotelian “essence” is not adequate. For Mencius’ approach is primarily “ontological,” rather than “logical.” So we agree with Roger Ames that Mencius is not an essentialist. But for us *xing* is primarily an ontological, rather than a cultural, concept (see Ames 1991). That is the reason why Mencius explicitly declared, “He who exerts his mind to the utmost knows his nature. He who knows his nature knows Heaven” (*Mencius* 7A1). In this context, while “nature” means “Being of man,” “Heaven” means “Being itself.” With such a thesis, as Mou Zongsan points out, Mencius paves the way for the rise of Confucian “moral metaphysics” (*moralische Metaphysik*) (see Mou 1968: vol. 1). That is, moral praxis not only reveals the Being of man, but also Being itself. Therefore, apart from pure feeling, Mencius would not be able to pinpoint the essential difference between man and other beings, not to mention the possibility of demonstrating the ontological implications of moral praxis.

Undeniably, on average most of us are not perfect in moral praxis. But this does not mean that we should no longer try to improve ourselves in moral praxis. Neither does it imply that human nature is not originally good. In illustrating this point Mencius introduces the famous analogy of the trees of the Niu Mountain: The trees of this mountain were once beautiful. However, due to the hewing down by humans and being pastured by the animals, the mountain became bold. When people see its boldness, they tend to think that it never had any timber. But as this is not the nature of a mountain, it is impossible for man to be originally lacking of humanity and righteousness. People seeing that a man behaves like an animal will tend to think that he never has the original endowment for goodness. Nevertheless, this is contrary to the human feeling (*Mencius* 6A8).

All this shows that for Mencius, possibility is higher than actuality. Such a standpoint lends support to our thesis that the four beginnings as feelings cannot be understood in a “naturalistic” way. For naturalism grants a priority to actuality over possibility. But to say that Mencius grants a primacy to the four beginnings as pure feelings by no means implies that he thereby undermines the importance of sensible feelings. As he said in *Mencius* 7A20, “A gentleman delights in three things.” They are: (1) “His parents are alive and his brothers are well”; (2) “Above, he is not ashamed to face Heaven; below, he is not ashamed to face man”; (3) “He has the good fortune of having the most talented pupils in the Empire.” In these

cases, the rise of delight results from the existence of a certain state of affairs in the world. Moreover, the difference between pure feeling and sensible emotion does not exclude the possibility of their co-existence. As Mencius pointed out in *Mencius* 3A2, sensible emotions might be the immediate expressions of pure feelings. For example, during the mourning the future Duke Wen of Teng wept so bitterly that his people were greatly delighted. It is because the prince was able to mourn out of his heart. At this juncture, one might agree with Xiao Yang's 蕭陽 thesis that for Mencius, "our virtuous actions are always a natural expression of what lies deep within our hearts" (Xiao Yang 2006: 270). The only thing we have to add is that the latter primarily refers to pure feeling, rather than psychological emotion.

On the whole, our "ontological" interpretation of human nature and "transcendental" understanding of pure feeling in Mencius' sense might shed new light on settling a significant controversy in modern scholarship. Concerning a correct understanding of Mencius' thesis of the "internality" of humanity (*ren* 仁) and righteousness (*yi* 義), Shun Kwong-loi considers three interpretations:

1. The motivation interpretation "takes the internality of *yi* 義 to be the claim that an act is *yi* 義 only if it is performed not just because it is proper, but because the agent is fully inclined to so act." (Shun 1997: 98)
2. The nature interpretation "regards the internality of *yi* 義 as the claim that *yi* 義 is a part of *hsing* [xing] 性, in the sense that human beings already share *yi* 義 as one of the four desirable attributes or are already disposed to *yi* 義 behaviour." (Shun 1997: 98)
3. The knowledge/recognition interpretation "regards it [the internal thesis] as the claim that one's knowledge of *yi* 義 derives from certain features of the heart/mind [*xin*] 心." (Shun 1997: 99)

While admitting that these three interpretations "are related and Mencius may have subscribed to all three," Shun Kwong-loi rejects the first two in favour of the third (Shun 1997: 99). In challenging such a position, Liu Xiusheng argues that the rejection of the first two interpretations is groundless, and "the third interpretation *alone* is, at best incomplete in explicating Mencius' internalist thesis" (Liu 2003: 158). Accordingly, it is necessary to incorporate all these three interpretations in order to develop a defensible understanding of Mencius' position. As an alternative, he integrates these three interpretations into his "Mencian internalism" which claims:

1. Mencius is an internalist in terms of the relationship between moral judgment and motivation.
2. Mencius, however, is not an irrealist internalist and in particular not an emotivist; he is a moral realist.
3. Mencius is not a metaphysical moral realist who claims evidence-independent moral reality. He claims that moral reality is conceptually tied to certain human sensibilities. That is, Mencius is a realist of the sensibility theory kind. (Liu 2003: 158)

As a settlement of this debate, first of all, our understanding of the four beginnings as pure feelings can justify the claim that “internal” means “necessarily involves motivation.” For the point of Mencius’ analogy is that as the desire to eat the roast meat necessarily motivates me, in showing respect to an elder, the motivating factor lies in me. In Kantian terms, this means that feeling functions as the *Bewegungsgrund* of morality. As Kant said, “Respect for the moral law is therefore the sole and undoubted moral incentive” (Kant 1956: 81). However, for us, in distinction from Hume, Kant, Shun Kwong-loi, and Liu Xiusheng, “feeling” here refers to “pure feeling.” Since *yi* 義 is non-sensible, it can only be related to “pure feeling.” Secondly, our “ontological” understanding of Mencius’ *xing* 性 as Being enables us to make sense of the nature interpretation. For obviously the Being of the human being is different from that of the horse. More precisely, there is an ontological difference between human beings and horses. So in terms of such an ontological difference, one can understand why treating an old man as old is different from treating an old horse as old. Finally, our clarification of the “transcendental” status of pure feeling helps us to understand that for Mencius, like for Kant, moral actions are “done wholly out of respect for duty and not from aroused feelings.” (Kant 1956: 88) This also explains the possibility of the point rightly emphasized by Liu Xiusheng that “It is not the old person who is *Yi* [yi] 義 (as an adjective in Chinese); rather it is the person who respects the old person who is *Yi* [yi] 義” (Liu 2003: 158). Mencius would definitely welcome Kant’s following thesis as expounded by Heidegger: “respect constitutes the essence of the person as the moral self” (Heidegger 1962b: 163). On the other hand, there is no need for us to commit to the so-called “Mencius internalism.” Nevertheless, we agree with Liu Xiusheng’s observation: “Though not an emotivist, Mencius does believe that characteristically human feelings play a role in the moral enterprise” (Liu 2003: 15). So, when these feelings are understood as pure, it is possible for us to account for both the subjectivity and objectivity of ethical values. In sum, the major error common to Liu Xiusheng and Shun Kwong-loi is the missing of the possibility of Mencius’ four beginnings as “pure feelings.”

Finally, Mencius’ thesis that everybody can become Yao or Shun demonstrates the egalitarian spirit of Confucian ethics. At this point, even Xunzi has to follow Mencius. Despite his route on the way to becoming a sage being different from that of Mencius, Xunzi also stresses that everyone can become a sage (Chan 1963: 54, 133). But unlike Mencius, Xunzi fails to provide a necessary guarantee for his claim. For Xunzi’s ground remains empirical and naturalistic. The concept of pure feeling is clearly absent in Xunzi.

From a critical standpoint, one might wonder why Mencius has to stress that moral activity aims to reveal *xing* 性 and Heaven. Indeed, the rise of Confucianism signifies a humanistic turn in the development of Chinese philosophy. Like Socrates, Confucius shifts the focus from nature to society. The major concern of Confucius is human affairs. As Zigong 子貢 remarked on the master, “one cannot get to hear his views on *xing* 性 (Being) and the *Dao* of Heaven” (Lau 1970: 41; *with modification*). At this juncture, one might recall what Leo Strauss said about Socrates’ turn in Western philosophy: “Contrary to appearance, Socrates’ turn to the study of

human things was based, not upon disregard of the divine or natural things, but upon a new approach to the understanding of all things” (Strauss 1953: 122). If Strauss’ remark can be equally applied to Confucius, then one might understand why Mencius’ thesis is not deviant. Indeed, it is nothing accidental for Mencius to quote “Great Declaration” in saying that “Heaven sees as my people see; Heaven hears as my people hear” (*Mencius* 5A5). In Mencius’ eyes, the *Dao* of Heaven is reflected in the hearts of the people. In ancient China, there was a lack of the concept of natural rights. In order to set a rational control on the ruler, Mencius could at best assert: “It was Heaven that gave the empire to him” (*Mencius* 5A5). As the *Dao* of Heaven is reflected in the hearts of the people, it is important for a ruler to be accepted by the people. Therefore, a ruler must keep in mind the principle that “To preserve one’s mind and to nourish one’s nature is the way to serve Heaven” (*Mencius* 7A1). Unlike the purely metaphysical concern of Song-Ming Neo-Confucians, Mencius might be more interested in the political implications of the concept of the *Dao* of Heaven. Granted the primacy of pure feeling, Mencius’ thesis of revealing Heaven by moral praxis can also give rise to a concept of cosmic feeling. It is in terms of such a cosmic feeling that Mencius is able to claim that “All the ten thousand things are there in me” (*Mencius* 7A4). The former Kings can function as the models, for they were able to reveal Heaven with such a cosmic feeling. This means that they well understood the hearts of the people.

4 Mencius’ Political Philosophy and Its Implications

Mencius’ political philosophy basically results from an extension of his doctrine of moral feelings. As he told the rulers, “If you let people follow their feelings (original nature), they will be able to do good” (*Mencius* 6A6). When Xunzi later attacked Mencius, one of his arguments was based on the concept of natural feelings. Xunzi’s point is that “to follow man’s nature and his feelings will inevitably result in strife and rapacity, combine with rebellion and disorder, and end in violence” (Chan 1963: 128). Mencius would blame Xunzi for overlooking the possibility of pure feelings. What Xunzi understands by “feeling” only refers to natural feeling implicit in Gaozi’s conception of human nature as what is inborn. That is to say, Xunzi is still imprisoned in the naturalist concept of feeling (this reinforces our thesis that it is misleading to characterize Mencius’ doctrine of feeling as a moral psychology). As a result, Xunzi fails to recognize the possibility that when people keep to their ontological nature, i.e., pure feeling, they would love excellent virtues and thereby establish a harmonious society. Like Gaozi, Xunzi reduces feelings to desires. However, when Mencius speaks of feelings, they are “feelings proper to the originally good nature of man” (Chan 1963: 54). It is due to Xunzi’s overlooking of the difference between pure and sensible feelings that he identifies feelings as the source of evil desires. Nevertheless, in order to account for the possibility of the first sage, it is necessary to start with the pure feelings intrinsic to the originally good human nature.

For Mencius, it is the original goodness of human nature that makes possible a “politics of sentiment.” That is the reason why he said,

When a government that cannot bear to see the suffering of the people is conducted from a mind that cannot bear to see the suffering of others, the government of the empire will be as easy as making something go round in the palm. (*Mencius* 2A6)

In a concrete case, Mencius reassured King Xuan that given his feeling for the ox, the king can definitely feel for his people. In accounting for this story, Ihara maintains that King Xuan’s “sympathetic response was itself *psychologically* based upon the ox’s resemblance to an innocent man being taken away for execution” (Ihara 1991: 51; *my italic*). However, if Ihara’s account is justified, then Mencius’ effort would be in vain. For this would rather confirm Gaozi’s thesis of the externality of righteousness. When Mencius concludes that the starting point of benevolent governance is the governance that cannot tolerate the suffering of the people, the sympathetic response is rather issued from the four beginnings as pure feelings. This also implies that the concept of “the hearts of the people” occupies a central position in politics. As is shown in the past, “Jie 桀 and Zhou 紂 lost their empires because they lost the people and they lost the people because they lost the hearts of the people” (*Mencius* 4A9). Therefore, to win the hearts of the people is the fundamental principle of governing. But how can one win the hearts of the people? Mencius’ answer runs as follows: “It is to collect for them what they like and do not do to them what they do not like” (*Mencius* 4A9). Clearly, this is an extension of Confucius’ golden rule to the political realm. For Mencius, this fundamental principle works because “The people turn to the humanity [of the ruler] as water flows down and as beasts run to the wilderness” (*Mencius* 4A9). Such an analogical representation reminds us that the original goodness of human nature is the ultimate foundation for Mencius’ political philosophy. This also shows that apart from pure feelings, Mencius’ benevolent government would become impossible.

Nowadays, Mencius’ thesis of the priority of humanity and righteousness over profit in governing seems to be naive and impractical. But it would be mistaken to charge Mencius with ignoring the importance of profit. In his eyes, there is nothing wrong for a ruler to love wealth and sex, if he can let his people enjoy the same (*Mencius* 1B5). What is not acceptable is to override humanity and righteousness through profit-seeking.

In promoting Confucius’ idea of a harmonious society, Mencius not only argued for its existence in the time of Yao, Shun, and Yu, but also tried to reassure its possibility in the original goodness of human nature. For him, “Yao and Shun practiced humanity and righteousness because of their nature” (*Mencius* 7A30). Thus when the ruler is able to imitate what Yao and Shun did before, the idea of government by humanity and righteousness could return to reality. Yao, Shun, and Yu are therefore set by Mencius as the role models in governing the state. Indeed, he reassured, “No one ever erred through following the example of the Former Kings” (*Mencius* 4A1). Nevertheless this does not imply that Mencius urges us to go back to the past. For what a ruler should learn from Yao and Shun is rather their humanity to all people. Methodologically, analogical thinking is also fundamental for Mencius’ political

philosophy. But this does not imply that Mencius is a political conservativist. His point is rather that one should learn from the history. As he noted, “The Three Dynasties won the Empire through benevolence and lost it through cruelty” (*Mencius* 4A3).

From a structural perspective, a harmonious society is an identity of difference: the aspect of identity is represented by humanity, whereas that of difference is represented by righteousness. Mencius rejected the Mohist doctrine of universal love for its ignorance of the distinctions in love implied an elimination of the aspect of difference. He also challenged the Yangists’ egoism. For this would undermine the aspect of identity and hence make the state impossible. In reality, both the Mohist universal love and the Yangist selfish love do not go beyond Gaozi’s concept of human nature as what is inborn. This also indicates that like Gaozi, they lack the concept of pure feeling.

The fundamental principle of Mencius’ political philosophy can be summed up as follows: “[In a state] the people are the most important; the spirits of the land and grain (guardians of territory) are the next; the ruler is of slight importance” (*Mencius* 7B14). Following this principle Mencius even grants legitimacy to the people’s overthrow of the tyrant. This constitutes the most innovative and provocative step in Chinese political philosophy. However, one might not thereby agree with some modern scholars such as Chan Wing-tsit in claiming that “it also made him the greatest advocate of political democracy in Chinese history” (Chan 1963: 50). Undeniably, for Mencius, without the support of the people no rulership can last long. “Therefore,” as he said, “to gain [the hearts of] the peasantry is the way to become an emperor” (*Mencius* 7B14). Mencius might be able to introduce the principle: “for the people.” But he never proclaimed the idea: “of the people”; he rather granted the ownership of the state to the ruler. Following the *Book of Odes*, he believed: “There is no territory under Heaven which is not the king’s; there is no man the borders of the land who is not his subject” (*Mencius* 5A4). It would be also too modern to claim that he conceived of revolution as a “right.” More importantly, he missed the idea: “by the people.” The goal of revolution in Mencius’ sense is to replace a tyrant with a humane ruler, rather than with an elected government from the people. Therefore, as Hsiao Kung-chuan 蕭公權 observed, “Mencius’ theory of the importance of the people differed from modern democracy” (Hsiao Kung-chuan 1971: vol. 1, 161).

On the other hand, it is interesting to explore Mencius’ legacy in overcoming the problem of modernity. Generally, thinkers such as Strauss claim that modernity gives rise to nihilism. For these opponents of modernity, the crisis is basically shown in the elimination of morality. In the debate on modernity, there seems to be a tension between good and basic rights. In granting a priority to rights over good, liberalism has tried to relegate morality to the private realm. As a result, there is a tendency to exclude morality from the political dimension. For the anti-modernists, this signifies the disappearance of the distinction between good and evil. To be sure, Mencius’ political philosophy remains pre-modern. But given his primary concern with the feelings of the people, he would welcome modern democracy. Certainly, he has to give up the idea of a sage-king. However, this does not necessarily imply any

retreat of morality from the political dimension. Instead of seeing good and rights in competition, Mencius would grant an equal status to them. Moral good in the Confucian sense is universalistic. That is to say, it is not specific to Chinese culture. The thesis that human nature is originally good is not limited to the Chinese.

From Mencius' standpoint, what is wrong with modernity is the forgetfulness of the subject of pure feelings. For modernity only sees the essence of subjectivity in rationality. As is shown in John Rawls' theory of justice, the subject in the "original position" is merely capable of making rational choice (see Rawls 1971). On the other hand, in granting a primacy to communicative rationality, Habermas founds an ethics only upon the normative presuppositions of a rational discourse. For the discourse ethics, subjects are primarily rational speakers. But Habermas seems to ignore that the argumentative approach is only one form of justification. Indeed, moral feeling can play the role analogical to perception in the non-discursive form of justification (see Chan Wing-cheuk 1987).

To the extent that modernity grants a primacy to the distinction of reason and sensibility, the subject is understood as the rational subject. For the post-modernists, the subject is understood as the subject of desire. As Deleuze and Guattari pointed out, "Desire ... is, rather, the *subject* that is missing in desire" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 26). This indicates that the post-modernists are not yet entirely free from the premise of modernity. What is overlooked by both modernity and post-modernity is the possibility of pure feeling and its priority to the division between reason and sensibility. They accordingly fail to recognize the subject of pure feelings. At this juncture, Mencius' concept of human nature as pure feelings might provide an alternative in overcoming the problem of modernity.

According to Strauss, the symbol of modernity is "the Beast Man as opposed to the God Man: it understands man in the light of the sub-human rather than of the superman" (Strauss 1958: 296–297). Even in a pre-modern period, Mencius is able to anticipate such a possibility. He said, "This is the way the common people: once they have a full belly and warm clothes on their back they degenerate to the level of beasts if they are allowed to lead idle lives, without education" (*Mencius* 3A4). What Mencius meant by education is, in the first place, moral cultivation. The aim of such education is to reactivate our moral feelings. Now we can understand why Mencius said, "Slight is the difference between man and the brutes. The common man loses this distinguishing feature, while the gentleman retains it" (*Mencius* 4B19). But Mencius would also agree with Strauss in stressing that, "Human nature is one thing, virtue or the perfection of human nature is another" (Strauss 1953: 145). The problem of how to fully develop human nature so as to assist the overcoming of the problem of modernity gives rise to a pressing task for contemporary Confucians.

In his interpretation of Mencius, Mou Zongsan opposes Zhu Xi's identification of the four beginnings as feelings. For Mou Zongsan, the four beginnings are rational (see Mou 2004: 6). As a result, he refuses to identify them as feelings. Like Zhu Xi, he tends to understand feeling only as psychological. Particularly, he fails to appreciate that in stating: "When one does not please one's parents, one cannot be a man" (*Mencius* 4A28), what Mencius has in mind is primary an ethical feeling. For

Mencius, such an ethical feeling has a political implication. That is the reason why he said, “Once the Blind Man was pleased, the Empire was transformed” (*Mencius* 4A28). More importantly, if one ignores the significance of pure feelings, then the potentiality of Mencius’ thought in overcoming the crisis of modernity would be overlooked.

As a conclusion one can say that Mencius was highly skilful in argumentation, though he confessed: “I am not fond of disputation. I have no alternative” (*Mencius* 3B9). Despite Xunzi’s challenge, his thesis of the original good of human nature has become the orthodox in the later development of Confucianism. In the field of Confucian ethics, he emphasizes the role played by the conscience. To this extent, he shifts from Confucius’ stress on the primacy of the community to that of immanence. But this does not imply that Mencius commits the fallacy of solipsism. Neither does it imply that he hence reduces man to an apolitical being. On the contrary, with his doctrine of human nature as pure feeling, he is not only able to do justice to the “transcendental” status of affectivity, but also able to develop a politics of sentiment. To this extent, he promotes the development of Confucian political philosophy. One might not necessarily agree with Mou Zongsan’s thesis that Mencius’ doctrine of nobility of Heaven gives rise to a Confucian perfect teaching (see Mou 1985: xii). But Mencius’ slogan that everyone can become a sage shows his affinity with the *ekāyāna* Buddhism. His doctrine of moral praxis particularly plays a key role for the rise of the Southern School of Chan Buddhism. Both emphasize the importance of the idea of self-power. Although his ideal of government by humanity and righteousness remains utopian, his emphasis on the importance of sentiment of the people is a legacy for the promotion of democracy in China as well as for a possible overcoming of the global crisis of modernity. Historically, Mencius was identified as the pioneer of the School of *Xin* 心 (Mind) founded by Lu Xiangshan and Wang Yangming in Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism. However, this school seems to ignore the key role played by pure feelings. In contrast, Liu Zongzhou was able to link feeling to Being (*xing* 性). At this juncture, unlike Zhu Xi, he understood feeling as pure, rather than sensible (see Tang Chun-i 1975: 305–331). Given the central position of pure feelings in Mencius’ thought, Liu Zongzhou might be the most faithful disciple of Mencius. As far as the modern research on Mencius is concerned, there are two major paradigms. In the Chinese circle, there is a paradigm founded by Mou Zongsan. According to this paradigm, the four beginnings are understood as rational. That is, Mencius’ pure feeling is reduced to reason. In Western scholarship, David Nivison initiates a paradigm of moral psychology (see Nivison 1996). In this paradigm the four beginnings are interpreted as sensible emotions. Nonetheless, a proper understanding of the Mencian objection to Gaozi’s conception of *xing* as what is inborn and Xunzi’s naturalism shows the limitation of the paradigm of moral psychology. On the other hand, even Mou Zongsan finally recognizes that commiseration is a sort of feeling. This brings forth a challenge to the paradigm of strict rationalism. Our above exposition should have shown that these two paradigms suffer from undermining the autonomy of pure feeling. Positively, it points to a paradigm shift towards the phenomenology of pure feeling. This new paradigm might have already been anticipated by Liu Zongzhou.

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Chapter 8

Xunzi as a Systematic Philosopher: Toward Organic Unity of Nature, Mind, and Reason

Chung-ying Cheng

1 Introduction

To understand Xunzi 荀子 (298–238 BCE) requires us to read through and think through all his essays (32 chapters in his collected works) in totality and to recognize the major theses he has developed through a train of thinking which relates one thesis to another. It is to be recognized that Xunzi is a systematic philosopher who follows Confucius in trying to reach “a thread of penetrating unity of my way” (*wudao yiyi guan zhi* 吾道一以貫之). But he is also like Mencius in responding to issues of his times in order to reach a better solution of these issues in light of his political ideal for a well-ordered society. It is therefore only when we see his time and his life as contexts of understanding that his approach and his views can be better understood and their significance can be better appreciated. For example, why does he assert that human nature is bad in opposition to Mencius’ position that human nature is good? Why does he advocate following both later kings and ancient sages? Why does he offer a new and detailed reconstruction of language and names for developing political governance and social control? Of course I am not here to suggest a merely intellectual historical approach to Xunzi. On the contrary, I wish to bring out the theoretical and systematic side of Xunzi which is necessary for understanding fundamental issues of nature at large, human nature, mind, language, human society, and human government. These are the philosophical issues which came to the forefront in Xunzi’s time and demanded a rethinking and re-evaluation.

It must be pointed out that in recent Western (American) studies of Xunzi it is Antonia Cua who has paid most serious attention to Xunzi by both articulating and analyzing Xunzi in the modern language of ethical thinking and using Xunzi as the basis for understanding new dimensions of modern ethics. In this sense Cua can be said to provide a good example and a good key for studying Xunzi as a systematic philosopher.

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This is also the way we are going to treat Xunzi: we see Xunzi as a systematic philosopher. Given this initial basis for understanding Xunzi and for that matter for any philosopher in the classical period, we can now assert that Xunzi has developed his system of philosophy over a period of time starting with concern with the distinction and relation between heaven and man, learning and knowledge, moving to issues of political governance, reflecting his understanding of the Confucian project as reconstruction of *li* 禮 and *yi* 義. But this project requires three basic considerations of humanity for development. The first is an understanding of human nature and human mind. It is important to see how mind and nature are to be distinguished in Xunzi whereby human nature can be said to be bad whereas human mind can become perceptive, reflective, and develop critical powers of understanding and evaluation, providing moral norms of relevant and correct action. The second is an understanding of nature at large as cosmic resources to be explored and learned for the benefit of developing human facilities. Xunzi comes to a more positivist account of heaven based on our rational ability to know and to value. The third is an understanding of names in relation to reality. Xunzi develops a philosophy of language whereby we can see how we come to share common norms of values and action so that we can act in unison and achieve communal order of harmonious and productive forms of living.

The development of language is so essential that Xunzi believes that our proper understanding and use of language is the medium and foundation for achieving efficient political governance and social order. It is true that we need adequate knowledge of nature at large and proper understanding and cultivation of human nature and human mind for reconstructing social order and political authority which give rise to unity of the world and peace under heaven. But this cultivation is possible and is to be only ensured on the basis of the proper understanding and use of language as a tool and as a vehicle for establishing functionality of social order and legitimacy of political governance. This is a new attempt to reconstruct, but not to restore, the *li* 禮 (ritual and social ethics), which implies a new sense of *li* and a new political philosophy based on deeper recognition of the human mind and human nature. It is on this basis that Xunzi is capable of criticizing Mencius on one hand, and on the other, gives inspiration to his disciples (such as Han Fei 韓 and Li Si 李斯) who unfortunately went to the extreme of legalism which instrumentally conduced to the unification of China, but which also generally undermined people's trust in law.

With this understanding of Xunzi we may see how Xunzi could fit into the classical philosophy of Confucianism by seeing how it can be said to have fruitfully developed the social philosophy of Confucius, and to a great extent, to have replaced or replenished the Mencian model for establishing a political government of the *wangdao* 王道 (the king's way) with *wangzhi* 王制 (system of the king). Yet it must be also pointed out that he could integrate Mencius as part of his system without having to reject Mencius as he appears to do. In this sense his philosophy of logic, language and political governance could be still enriched and enhanced for a more comprehensive theory of nature, mind and politics. Given this new perspective, we are able to find a high level of interpretive relevance and practical applicability of Xunzi's philosophy in today's China and the contemporary globalized world.

2 Starting with Antonia Cua

Although Xunzi's philosophy has been variously described and examined in histories of Chinese philosophy and introductions to English translations of the texts of Xunzi, no full systematic study of Xunzi has been attempted in modern times. We must however credit Antonia Cua (1933–2007) with being the first contemporary scholar to undertake a study of Xunzi's moral philosophy from an analytical point of view. Although Cua's study cannot be said to cover all the aspects of Xunzi, he has made Xunzi an outstanding center of attraction for contemporary Chinese philosophy and in some important sense secured a central and unique place of Xunzi in the classical Confucian tradition. Cua begins his study of Xunzi with his work *Ethical Argumentation: A Study in Hsun Tzu's Moral Epistemology* in 1965. From then on Cua has derived many insights from his study of Xunzi in his work *Moral Vision and Tradition: Essays in Chinese Ethics* in 1998. In his 2005 book *Human Nature, Ritual and History* Cua eventually came to formulate a philosophy of human nature of Xunzi and dealt with many other topics in connection with Xunzi's ethical and religious philosophy. He comes to endorse a position similar to Tang Chun-yi in considering the religious aspect of Xunzi as an extension of the ethical philosophy of Xunzi and speaks of spiritual beings as our own creations (*wei* 偽) or as "supervenient qualities of our reflective ethical experience, the resultant attributes of the expression of our ethical emotions or thought in the context of religious observances" (Cua 2005: 189), relating to W. D. Ross's book *The Right and the Good*. Following the threads of his thinking on Xunzi, one may reasonably come to see how a fuller systematic study of the philosophy of Xunzi is necessary for the purpose of covering all aspects of Xunzi's position as rooted in some sort of unity of virtue and ritual.¹

With this understanding, it is fair to say that Cua has opened the study of Xunzi in the contemporary contexts of analytical philosophy. His communication with me in the early 1970s on Confucian ethics provides some basis for this new departure and adventure, clearly a result of attraction by Xunzi's own analytical and discursive approach. What Cua does is to further conceptually analyze the key notions of Xunzi and reach for a formulation of the main theses of Xunzi boosted with both logical and linguistic arguments. These are important methods Cua has brought to bear on the study of Xunzi which nevertheless conformed with my earlier proposal of making a rational reconstruction of the Chinese philosophy for modern and Western readers. Cua is quite successful in doing this and thus demonstrates the effectiveness of conceptual analysis as a method of study of Chinese philosophy texts. But one needs also point out that it is due to Cua's own concern with contemporary ethics that he was able to bring contemporary concepts of ethics to bear on the Chinese texts.

¹ It is regrettable that Cua was not given time to do this. On the other hand, one can appreciate how Cua was influenced by his study of Xunzi or by Xunzi in his formulation of his own ethical philosophy. His ideas of reasonable action and paradigmatic individuals are notable examples as indicated in his writings.

In a sense Cua has made a philosophical hermeneutical study of Xunzi as it is a “from-interpretation” in contrast with a “to-interpretation,” which requires comprehensive systematic understanding.² Not quite touching on the ontological and cosmological issues of heaven in Xunzi, Cua has come to see the human being as primarily an ethical animal which requires community as the basis for its fuller development. As we shall see in the following discussion, it is important to see how Xunzi could be differently understood in his conception of human development in a systematic framework of his distinction and relation between heaven and man and in contrast with Mencius. Yet we can see how the conceptual analysis by Cua could be complemented with a holistic understanding of man in Xunzi from a systematic philosophy point of view as advocated by me.

2.1 *Distinction and Relation Between Heaven and Human*

It was said that there were 322 essays by Xunzi in circulation at the time of 32 BCE when Liu Xiang came to edit and amend Xunzi. Finally, 32 essays were selected and authenticated as genuine representations of Xunzi, which is our current reader for Xunzi.³ On reading through Xunzi and in light of our understanding of his biographical background there is little doubt that Xunzi is a systematic philosopher, who has thought through almost all the philosophical major issues of his time and has written and argued for a well-conceived idea and end of human society and community, which consists in the development of society and community according to ritual and reason (to be called *liyi* 禮義), principle and law (to be called *lifa* 理法), in which not only no strife and conflict would arise to disturb the productive relationships of human persons but human potential as human beings will be fully realized as a consequence.⁴ In this sense Xunzi is both a social idealist and a social realist, and his social idealism of *lifa* society is based on his social realism of learning (*xue* 學), education (*jiao* 教) and institutional and policy control (*wangzhi* 王制) with a rational reflection and logical persuasion toward understanding the way (*zhidao* 知道) as both a method and an end.

Given this brief sketch of the framework and content of his philosophical thinking, we may raise the question, what are the core and most basic concerns of Xunzi's

²In my onto-hermeneutics as a methodology I distinguish between reading and interpretation with pre-understanding which forms the “from-interpretation” and reading and interpretation based on objective and rational and conceptual analysis and synthesis of the given texts which forms the “to-interpretation” (see Cheng 1996: 55ff).

³There are many versions of texts of Xunzi. In this article I used the traditional well-known Chinese texts as annotated by Qing scholar Wang Xianqian 王先謙, titled *Xunzi Jijie* 荀子集解. I also consulted Qing scholar Wang Zhong 汪中's well-known introduction to Xunzi titled *Xunqingzi Tong Lun* 荀卿子通論. For identification of passages in Xunzi, I used *Xunzi Yinde* 荀子引得 as compiled by Qi Sihe 齊思和, Shanghai: Guji Publishing 1986.

⁴I have devoted a long paper in integrating law and virtue in light of Xunzi's moral and political philosophy in order to show how *yili* and *lifa* could be unified as a system of Confucian political governance. See Cheng 2005: 291–333.

philosophy as a systematic philosophy in which every thesis of his philosophy could be well-related and integrated. To raise this question is to ask for an insight on the basic source idea and starting points of Xunzi's philosophy. This question is important because we could come to know many important concerns and themes of Xunzi's and yet be in need of an understanding of how to premise his philosophy. We need some central concern which throws light on other concerns and leads us to a better grasp of issues and problems of Xunzi in his philosophical thinking in various areas. For example, scholars have been concerned with Xunzi's theory of human nature as bad. Is this a starting point for his philosophy of nature and man? No, we need to look elsewhere to identify a theme that enables us to explain why Xunzi holds human nature to be bad and in what sense of badness.

I suggest that the core and key notion for understanding Xunzi correctly and systematically is his notion of the distinction and relation made between heaven (*tian* 天) and humanity (*ren* 人). This distinction and relation has been referred as “*tianren xiangfen* 天人相分” (the mutual distinction of heaven and human).⁵ Why and how this distinction and separation are possible remains a difficult question. Yet it is quite clear that it is due to this distinction and separation that humans have both freedom and responsibility to develop their intelligence and sense of control over their own destiny, which means their own self-development and self-realization. This distinction lies in the fact that, whereas heaven has its stable regularities which normally do not change in the course of time, humans have the intelligence and cognitive power to explore things of nature for their survival and development. Whereas heaven has a law-like existence, the human being is a teleological being that seeks its own end of well-being and prosperity in nature. But if humans do not pay attention to the regularities of nature and adapt to them, they would not be able to survive or prosper. On the other hand, if human beings develop their cognitive and rational power of knowledge and evaluation, they would then be in a superior position to fulfill their end and potentiality of being. In this sense there is an internal relation of dependence of human on nature or more strictly the relation of dependence of human knowledge on nature. This relationship is well-expressed in the first paragraph of Xunzi's *Tianlun* 天論 (Essay on Heaven):

The natural course of heaven has its regularities, it does not exist for Yao 堯 (the sage king), and it does not perish for Jie 桀 (the bad tyrant). If a ruler responds [to heaven] with good governance, heaven will produce good fortune; if a ruler responds [to heaven] with disorderly conduct, heaven will produce calamity. If a ruler strengthen his national resources and be thrift in use, heaven would not impoverish his state; if a ruler takes precaution in preparation and act according to season, heaven would not make his people ill; if a ruler follows the law of nature and does not divert, heaven would not cause any harm. (*Xunzi* 17-1) (translation mine)

⁵This term has been also understood as “separation of heaven and human,” which is, however, mistaken, for it is precisely in the link between heaven and human that human is able to develop itself. But this link lies in the observation that heaven is independent of human will and has its own regularities of movement and change. It is up to the individual person to make adjustment to changes in nature and of nature, whereas nature will release its potential power in ways beneficial to genuine, well – cultivated individuals.

In this essay Xunzi may have addressed his view on the distinction between heaven and human to rulers of states and hence his talk of Yao and Jie. But this distinction no doubt applies to the individual person. An individual person must adjust and adapt to nature for his survival and his prosperity. In fact, the whole human species must pay attention to natural laws of cause and effect in human action. If one does not work hard and yet spends without restraint, one cannot count on heaven to become rich. If one does not save in resources of life and act out of order with time, one cannot count on heaven to become secure. If one betrays the way of nature and arbitrarily pursue one's desires, one cannot count on heaven to succeed. In this sense humans are masters of their own lives and cannot depend on heaven to become prosperous without making their own efforts.

As one can see, it is due to the law of natural causation that one's efforts are rewarded with success, while one's laziness is rewarded with loss. One may even say that it is nature or heaven that makes the hard working person succeed and the lazy person lose out. After all, humans are not separated from heaven; even heaven has its own stable regularities, for as human beings we depend on heaven for making our efforts in developing ourselves a matter of gain and our lack of such development a matter of loss. This view of the power of heaven is fully compatible with Xunzi's idea of the distinction and relation between human and heaven. Heaven's stable regularities have potentialities to make a difference to the well-being of the human person and the human community. It can be seen that community formation and societal development, political organization and moral-institutional rule by *li* and *yi* are themselves matters of the human use of human intelligence and reason that are conducive to the fulfillment of the ends of humanity. It is in this sense that heaven or nature has provided a basis for human development and human self-fulfillment only if human beings are to recognize this and have the wisdom to take advantage of this recognition. Hence Xunzi says near the end of his *Tianlun* essay:

Rather than to make heaven glorified and think of it, would it be better to take heaven as resource and control it? Rather than to follow heaven by praising it, would it be better to take charge of the heaven's order and make use of it? Rather than to look up time and to wait for it, would it be better to respond to time and enable it to serve us? Rather than to let things accumulate by themselves, would it be better to use our capabilities to transform things? Rather than to ponder how to use things, would it be better to organize things and do not let it be wasted? Rather than contemplate on how things arise, would it be better to consider how things grow? Hence to forget the human ability and merely think of heaven, one will lose the reality of ten thousand things. (*Xunzi* 17–44) (translation mine)

Xunzi recognizes that heaven has its autonomy of harmonious functioning which is exhibited in the movements of the sun and the moon and the four seasons. Heaven for Xunzi is largely cosmic nature in the sense of having natural powers to produce life and to sustain the growth of things. It lets all things "have their own harmonies for living and have their own nourishment for becoming" (*ibid*). He even conceives of heaven as a power that no one knows regarding its form and everyone knows regarding what it has accomplished. His view on heaven reflects the apparent influence of Daoists like Laozi and Zhuangzi, for his view of heaven eventually makes heaven a

matter of the *dao*, which one cannot identify in concrete form but which one can experience in the concrete things *dao* produces and sustains. In this powerful announcement, Xunzi makes it clear that heaven has the resources to be utilized by humans and humans' ability to utilize heaven is a way to approach heaven and a way of development of heaven for the development of humans. In this sense one sees that there is also a kind of unity between heaven and humans, not in the direction of emotional attachment to an object of worship, nor in the direction of mere cosmological understanding or metaphysical contemplation, but in an effort to engage heaven for the actualization of heaven's power in order to fulfill the well-being of the human as an individual, as a community and as a state.

3 Developing Humanity from Knowledge of Heaven

In this sense Xunzi shows that heaven is not only the origin and source of human life but also the resource for development of human life, so that not only does human being depend on heaven for its well-being but also heaven depends on human being for making its power and potential felt and effective. If one substitutes the term "dao" for "tian," one can easily recognize an element of the Daoist philosophy, whereby *dao* makes itself available for things to be born and grow without self-assertion. But there is still a major difference between Xunzi and Laozi or Zhuangzi: Whereas Laozi and Zhuangzi want humans to imitate and follow the *dao* so that they do not exert themselves to accomplish their well-being, Xunzi makes it absolutely clear that a human being needs to undertake utmost development and action like *dao* in achieving his or her own well-being and accomplishing his or her own life potential. In this regard Xunzi is no doubt more Confucian than Daoist. We may bring out this point more explicitly in later discussions.

Humans need to develop themselves, because, according to Xunzi, the human is a part of nature and in fact the most dynamic and creative part of nature. That is why Xunzi says: "Water and fire have vital force and does not have life. Grass and wood have life and do not have knowledge, birds and beasts have knowledge and yet have no righteousness. It is human being who has vital force, life, knowledge and also righteousness. Hence man is the most valuable part of the world" (*Xunzi* 9.70, translation mine). Hence humans could by nature rise above all things as the best representatives of the potential of heaven. Yet human potential has to be developed as part of nature, and this should enable humans to be truly representative of heaven. It is obvious that Xunzi has developed the insight of Confucius: "It is not the way that glories humans; it is humans who are capable of glorifying the *dao*" (*Analec* 15.29). What Confucius considers to be *dao* is *dao* of heaven, for it is heaven that created this world and humans and there is a way in such creativity. Being conscious of their own creative potential, it is the humans' role to continue this cosmic creativity and to make creation of human culture and civilization possible. To do this can be said to be a way of developing and glorifying heaven that lies in the actual fulfillment of human potential at the same time.

In this sense Xunzi has followed the Confucian insight and hence takes the creation of human community and human culture as an absolute must for fulfilling the nature of both humans and heaven. We see how Xunzi has reached his version of the unity of heaven and human in a significantly different way from Mencius. In Mencius one sees a quest for understanding the identity of human in heaven and hence the identity of human in its intrinsic goodness which gives rise to natural morality. For Mencius morality is a matter of “return to oneself to reach integrity” (*fanshen er cheng* 反身而誠). Whereas we may think that Mencius, following Zisi, has argued for the identity of human with heaven at the source creativity of heaven, Xunzi argues for the development of human potential for fulfillment of heaven as the end of humans. In this sense his argument for the distinction and relation between humans and heaven is a form of identity of heaven and human with heaven as a means for the end of human development. If we can see Mencius’ view as an “enlightenment theory of human nature,” we can no doubt see Xunzi’s view as an “achievement theory of human nature.” We need not see absolute opposition between the two views. Both are initiated by Confucian concern with achieving humanity. Together they form a complementary pair for spelling out the full implication of the Confucian vision of humanity as arising from heaven to develop heaven.

However, I wish to make two more important observations regarding Xunzi’s view on heaven. First, Xunzi recognizes the natural functions of heaven and the natural functions of humans. What is being natural (*tian*天) is observed to be by the things themselves without human intervention. It is not to ascribe pre-conceived qualities to things or to heaven. It has nothing to do with essentialism, neither is it a matter of modern anti-realism.⁶ Thus the movement of seasons and change of climates are part of the natural functions of nature. Humans need not take charge of these functions. Xunzi says that “achieving by not acting, acquiring by not seeking, this is called the function of heaven (*tianzhi* 天職)” (*Xunzi* 17.5). He asserts that

⁶There is currently some phobia against essentialism in both Western Philosophy and Chinese philosophy, which can be well-understood as a result of doing comparison of Chinese philosophy with Western or Greek philosophy. Whereas Aristotle wishes to make a definition of things in essences to be conceptualized in his ultimate system of metaphysics, Chinese philosophers always appeal to observation and experiences of things as ultimate ground of understanding of reality. Hence there is no Greek metaphysical ascription of essences in a close system of thinking in Chinese philosophy. On the other hand, due to the observational approach of the *Yijing*, nothing in the cosmos remains unchanged or unchangeable, but their natural qualities as experienced and observed by humans could be understood in relation to humans and in relations among themselves. But this is not to say that these qualities are constructed by humans nor that they are artificial or simply conventional as products of human caprice. On the contrary, qualities of things are real qualities of real things as reality is an experienced fact, and their names are conventional in the sense that they reflect common understanding among humans who adopt common names for these things and their qualities. In this sense names of things represent both human experiences of things and social conventions for naming those experiences of things. For this read Xunzi’s essay on *Zhengming* (Essay 22, “Rectifying Names”). Hence one should make a distinction between metaphysical, essentialistic, and Aristotelian realism versus empirical, naturalistic, non-Aristotelian realism.

humans should not compete with the natural functions of heaven (*buyu tian zhengzhi* 不與天爭職). In this he makes a point of repudiating Zisi's view on participating in the works of heaven and earth in the *Zhongyong*. He points out that "heaven has its own time, earth its own riches, and human has its own ordering power" (*Xunzi* 17.5). To recognize these distinctions and do one's own job is called *nengcan* 能參 (able to coordinate with heaven and earth). If one goes beyond this, it is only a mere confusion. Here lies the distinction of functions in nature and their proper coordination through man.

Clearly, Xunzi regards Zisi and Mengzi's theory of unity of heaven and human as a matter of humans' competition with and usurpation of heaven and earth. Xunzi's theory is significant in light of today's environmental ethical concerns, for according to Xunzi, the human attitude to nature is to use heaven by coordinating with heaven, although there is also an ambiguity in Xunzi's own explanation. He does want humans to explore heaven's powers in order to use them to human advantage. How far can humans go in using heaven without being said to harass nature and cause harm to both heaven and human? Apparently, for Xunzi, there must be a natural limit of such exploration and use, and it is also up to humans to discover this limit.⁷

By the same token, human beings have their natural functions, which however need to be developed and transformed by way of knowledgeable adjustment to nature. In other words, a human being needs to know his end of life by knowing the heaven or the *dao* of heaven which is exhibited in the natural functions of heaven. To know this is to adjust oneself to them instead of trying to change them. In this sense, Xunzi wants to redefine the notion of "*zhitian* 知天," which Mencius regarded as a matter based on knowing one's own nature (*zhixing* 知性). In making this redefinition, Xunzi speaks of the natural functions of sense organs and the natural function of the mind as the ruler of the five senses: He says:

Ears, eyes, nose, mouth and body all have their abilities to contact outside things, and yet they cannot substitute for one another. These are called the natural organs of humans. It is heart which sits in the void of the chest and governs all the five senses and hence is called the natural ruler (*tianjun* 天君). (*Xunzi* 17.5; translation mine)

For Xunzi the natural functions of natural organs of humans should be maintained in order as well as developed for better use, and this is how a sage could be distinguished from ordinary people. The latter's natural organs are often darkened, confounded, abandoned and violated and therefore could not fulfill their natural functions to the full. This is a matter of what he latter called *bi* 蔽 (obscurations, see his essay 21, *Jiebi Pian* 解蔽篇 [On Removing Obscurations]). On the other hand, a sage is capable of removing obscurities and gives clarity to his "natural ruler" (*tianjun* 天君: heart/mind), regulates his senses (*tianguan* 天官), cultivates his natural capacities (*tianyang* 天養), complies with what is required for good

⁷ It is to be pointed out that neither Xunzi's achievemental view nor Mengzi's enlightenmental view constitutes a violation of nature in the modern sense of industrial overdevelopment, which creates pollution and imbalance in nature and endangers the survival of human species and other living beings.

governance (*tianzheng* 天政), and preserves his natural feelings (*tianqing* 天情), so that he can accomplish his natural ends (*tiangong* 天功).

In order to do this, a sage must begin with learning and reflect on his own power of thinking, cognition, and understanding so that he may become enlightened of what is required of him for developing his natural functions and how this is to be done. He needs to become self-conscious of his powers, his needs and his ends. He needs to know what type of being he belongs to (*zhilei* 知類) so that he can properly develop himself within the capacities of humans. He needs to be transformed by his own self-cultivation in natural and social contexts so that he may make use of heaven and help others develop by constructing and developing cultural forms and institutional norms and rituals which he calls *li* and *yi*. In this sense Xunzi speaks of the distinction between *junzi* 君子 and *xiaoren* 小人. The former is one who respects what he has and does not long for what is in heaven, whereas the latter gives up what he has and longs for what belongs to heaven. The *junzi*, by developing what he has could eventually become the sage (*shengren* 聖人) who is in a position to develop principles and norms for social and cultural establishment without obscurations in his mind. It is interesting to note that for Xunzi any excess of desires and partial views deviating from a norm for total human development are considered forms of obscurations (for this see his essay 21 *Jiebi Pian* 解蔽篇).

4 End of Humans and How to Learn

Given this clarification of Xunzi's understanding of the distinction and relation between humans and nature, all major propositions of Xunzi's philosophy would fall into order. This understanding in fact provides a framework for orientating humanity and evaluating human worth. It is a framework in which a human person could identify the end of his life and the direction of his efforts and thus find meaning in his life. It is a framework in which one can speak of human rationality and morality according to which humanity can be said to be developed and achieved. One can see that if one wishes to develop oneself, one needs to learn and acquire knowledge of nature so that one can use natural knowledge for avoiding mistakes and achieving understanding and hence making correct judgments for action. One also needs to be sure that one is capable of development of oneself and makes an effort to go beyond oneself in order to master principles, norms, and disciplines so that one may form responsible and reliable judgments of action. One needs also to be awakened to a vision of human community and society on which one's own self-realization depends. One must therefore come to know the status and position (*lei* 類) one's own person so that one can properly and persistently pursue the long-term good of life. A human person will have to learn to know ultimately the ideal end of humanity and strive for its realization.

For Xunzi, one has to learn from both former sage-kings and latter-day kings and teachers. For it is in the conduct of the sages that one sees the example of developing one's character and transforming one's desires so that one's character would not

become obscured or beclouded and thus not fall into narrow channels of selfish egoism and bigotry. It is Xunzi's observation that without efforts to learn and without being engaged in learning from history and experience one simply could not properly use one's organs and form a correct understanding of things outside. One would not be able to have clear judgments as to what is the best for human well-being and thus fail to achieve a better state of development, which makes human life worthwhile, meaningful, and even happy.

The concern with learning leads Xunzi to deal with basic issues of understanding. One issue is how to come to know the *dao* or *dao* of heaven. One reply is that one must remove obscurations one has encountered in one's life. Xunzi has listed ten forms of such obscurations, *bi* 蔽: likes, dislikes, stressing only the beginnings, stressing only endings, stressing distant things, stressing near-by things, seeing things in the broad, seeing things superficially, stressing the ancient or stressing the present (see *Xunzi* 21.6). As a matter of fact, since there are all different things and different perspectives, all these differences could becloud the whole comprehensive understanding. Hence in order to know the *dao* one needs to reflect whether one has been obsessed with one aspect of things or seen things from one point of view or from a presupposed state of feeling. It is natural that one could easily fall into this narrowness of mind and heart. Being an empiricist may not prevent one from taking views narrowly. The question is whether the human mind/heart could remain open and reflective on positions taken so that one may see other points of view and transform one's view in light of a larger vision of things and a wider horizon of understanding. Without going into details, we can see that Xunzi has suggested three basic approaches for opening one's mind/heart in order to transcend *bi* and reach a clear and comprehensive understanding.

One is to learn from historical examples. One can see how different failure and success stories of rulers and ministers have been useful in overcoming *bi* in the whole context of history. We can see those stories as simply a matter of trying struggle between *bi* and *ming* 明 (clarity, illumination) which is the opposite of *bi*.⁸ That is why to learn from history is so important for humans, for humans must learn from experience, and historical experience is a matter of experience. With learning from history and experience one probably can become enlightened regarding the nature of things and one's ability of judgment will develop so that one could come to know norms among differences of things. Xunzi calls a person who comes to know or form norms among differences of things a sage (聖人 *shengren*), for such a person has demonstrated a great achievement of mind and reason in seeing things clearly, in grasping the ends of things and in forming norms for correct action. With these a sage would be able to hold differences of things without being subject to their mutual beclouding.

⁸Xunzi uses the term "*ming* 明" (illumination) to describe the state of mind in freedom from *bi* (obscurations). It is a state of mind that suggests both being illuminated and illuminating. That mind illuminates implies that mind has the light of reason which could shine light rays on things and thus opens itself to clear understanding of experience and objects. It is not quite clear that the state of *xuyierjing* 虛一而靜 must be a state of illumination. But one may liken it to light in space which may not be detected but which when shining on an object will make the object known.

As to how these achievements could happen to a person, Xunzi simply appeals to the enlightening function of mind that would become the basis for knowing the norm of things. We may consider this the second point of learning the *dao*, which consists in self-cultivation of the human mind-heart. In fact Xunzi holds that the basic function of the mind-heart is to know the *dao* and it can know the *dao* because one could cultivate oneself into a state of void, oneness, and tranquility (*xuyi er jing* 虛一而靜). He has this to say:

A human being is born to have perception; with perception one has memory. Memory is a matter of storing and yet it has void, which consists in receiving new things without harming what it has received. Mind is born with knowledge, and to know is to know the difference. The so-called difference is a matter which mind can hold at the same time. Mind has oneness as it does not let one harm the other which is oneness. Mind is such that it dreams in sleep, moves of its own, and plans when motivated. Hence mind cannot be said not moving, yet it has its tranquility, which consists in not letting dreams to disturb its cognitive power. Before acquiring the *dao* and yet seeking the *dao*, one must have void, oneness, and tranquility.... Being void, one, and tranquil, this is called great pure illumination (*daqingming* 大清明). (*Xunzi* 21.36–39; translation mine)

It is with this state of *daqingming* that one can come to see things in their comprehensive totality without being trapped into any one partiality. One would be able to come “to see all things within four seas in one room” and “to control great principles (*dali* 大理) and put the whole universe in order” (Ibid). In other words, one would rise above all different things and acquire a total view of things together with a norm for ordering them and guiding their further development. It is a state where “all things are displayed and amidst them there is the norm (*zhong xuan heng yan* 中懸衡焉)” (*Xunzi* 21.29).⁹ Xunzi would consider Confucius as actually achieving this state of mind and hence becoming a sage. It is important to note that the so-called *heng* is what Xunzi has designated as the *dao*. In this sense *dao* has two basic functions of organizing and ordering which is more than what a Daoist would regard as the *dao*. Perhaps we could regard the *dao* as more epistemological and moral than ontological and cosmological, even though it may originate from a cosmological source as one sees in the natural functions of heaven. This *dao* therefore is more Confucian than Daoist again: it is the result of comprehensive understanding and penetrating insight into how things could be organized and developed toward a better state from a teleological point of view. In this sense Xunzi speaks of “mind knows the *dao*” (*xinzhidao* 心知道) and hence speaks of “prescribing according to the *dao*” (*kedao* 可道) because of this knowledge. This knowledge is both descriptive and prescriptive, both empirical and axiological understanding of the *dao* on the part of the human and his mind.

There is also the third way of removing one’s *bi* and avoiding future *bi* and hence knowing the *dao* is to learn from former and latter kings and sages. Xunzi stresses

⁹This state of understanding conforms to what I have described as “*chaorong* 超融” (transcendental integration). But Xunzi seems also to require that one sees a norm for judging proper places of different things and for guiding or prescribing proper development of things. Perhaps I could describe such a state as “*chaorong er zhuzai* 超融而主宰” (transcendental integration with normative control).

this point in the last paragraph of his essay on *Jiebi*. He considers that there are sages who have comprehended all the basic natures of things while there are kings who have comprehended all the basic principles of governance. Here Xunzi speaks from the point of view of accomplished development, not from the viewpoint of seeking development or in the middle of development. From this point of view, the norms are already established and hence an ultimate norm of rightness (*longzheng* 隆正) resulting from these must be followed in determining what is right and what is wrong, what is bad and what is good.¹⁰ This could become a point of view of governance by law but it could also become a point of view of authority, which would inevitably lead to legalism and legalistic domination. With this said, it is obvious that the first two approaches are more relevant for understanding how human beings could develop and how an ideal society and government could be still maintained or sustained in an open process of open reflection and open learning.

5 Communication and Institutionalization

From these major premises of the distinction and relation between heaven and human one could also see how rectification of names and institutionalization of *li* and *yi* are important and consequent measures for maintaining and sustaining a developed human community, society, and government. In order to have a sustainable community, society, and government, communication must be maintained with correct use of names and language. This is because, if a human person wishes to fulfill his own potentiality and achieve central values of humanity for survival and prosperity, he needs to achieve solidarity and trust with other people through good communication and thus through proper use of language. Xunzi's strong interest in the issue of "rectifying names" (*zhengming* 正名) consists in recognizing the realist and empiricist foundations of the names and their logical consistency (see Cheng 1969). He wishes to see that names and language be preserved in this consistency and yet can be at any time used to serve the social function of

¹⁰ See how language develops as a help or as a block? See how language develops to an extent that we come to have common framework of reference and meaning and yet there is the possibility of confusion and confounding (*luan*). This is because there is no way to prevent people from seeing the reference of language as having its own validity – the issue of reification. This ends up in the problem of *yi ming luan shi* 以名亂實. There is also the issue of lack of abstraction as in the case of *yi shi luan ming* 以實亂名. There is the problem of *yi ming luan ming* 以名亂名: forgetting that each name has its own use context and purpose to serve, and one cannot mix them together and draw conclusions. If killing a robber is not killing a human, it is because killing a robber is to kill a human for his or her crime of robbery where to kill a human is to kill a human for no crime of his or her own but for some external reason of someone else and hence possibly a crime. Our language serves the function of identifying the purpose of using the language: to kill a human is to identify the killing as simply killing without justification, whereas to kill a robber is to kill a person for his robbery. Hence the two can be related as having the same reference: a robber is a human, so to kill a robber is to kill a human but it is to kill the human for his robbery and there is no need to worry about their separate purposes and identities.

communication and solidarity of human feelings and minds. This matter is therefore dealt with in his essay 22 on rectifying names. Again this shows how Xunzi has conscientiously followed Confucius' suggestion on this issue and therefore can be said to explicate and expound the Confucian doctrine of rectifying names in a more sophisticated and comprehensive manner (see *Xunzi* 8 and 24).

Based on the theory of rectifying names, Xunzi is able to go one step further in the development of human potentiality for the achievement and flourishing of humanity. This is to explore various ways in which an ideal society and an ideal state can be established. This is actually the main focus of Xunzi's efforts: he wishes to establish an ordered society by a sagely king who is a paragon of human development and hence the center of emulation for all people under his rule. For this reason Xunzi can be seen to have devoted more space and time in arguing for and formulating such an ideal rule. In the present collection of his works, there are 11 essays which can be said to be on this topic of ideal rule. Among the 11 essays, essay 9 on Wangzhi (王制 King's Institutions) stands out as the most comprehensive discussion for the topic of *weizheng* (為政 doing government or conducting government) in which all aspects of political governance together with organizational issues and administrative-managerial issues are examined, some with illustrations from historical cases. This essay deserves independent analysis and exposition particularly in light of contemporary theories of public administration, political governance, and governmental ethics (see Cheng 2006). It suffices to say that with this essay the political philosophy and social idealism of Xunzi has reached its acme and apex.

6 Is Human Nature Really Bad?

One main purpose for identifying the basic framework of Xunzi's philosophy in terms of the distinction and relation between heaven and human is to show that his theory of human nature needs to be re-evaluated and given a new interpretation. It has been traditionally understood that when Xunzi speaks of human nature as being bad, he has shown a pessimistic attitude toward the quality of human existence and therefore a low esteem for humanity in the world. If human nature is bad, how could we redeem it or trust it in the first place? Perhaps it is for this reason that Xunzi was excluded unfairly from the main stream of Confucianism since the later Tang Period. In contrast, Mencius was conceived to show great confidence in human nature because he regards it as good and as such as capable of achieving goodness in human society. But as matter of fact, we must note that even when Xunzi argues in opposition to Mencius that human nature is bad (*renxing* 人性惡), he is more focused on his observation of common desires exhibited in common people for the purpose of arguing why the behavior of the common people needs to be improved. There are three terms in need of logical clarification in his observation: namely, the human person (*ren* 人), the nature (*xing* 性) of human beings and the bad (*e* 惡). Let us first proceed with the notion of the human person. As an observation, we do see most common people exhibiting the three selfish traits of behavior which Xunzi

identified in his essay on Human Nature Being Bad: love of profit, emotions of jealousy and hatred, and desire for sensual pleasures. Hence Xunzi's statement is a generalization on most people who we may regard as *xiaoren* 小人 (petite person)¹¹ in contrast with *junzi* who have overcome their natural desires of such. If such desires can be seen as deeply rooted in human nature, they must not be changed or removed from human nature. The only way to deal with them is to let them go or to control them by means of other human powers.

It is obvious from Xunzi that we can adopt the latter method of improving the human condition, namely by introducing reason or knowledge as a means of restraining selfish desires. It is obvious that we do have reason and reflective knowledge that can help us overcome our desires. But then, does this ability of reason and reflection belong to our nature as well? Is human nature only confined to average observation? Or maybe human nature does have a depth that is to be revealed in proper moments under the right circumstances? We shall say more about this point on "nature" a little later. Finally, what is "bad" about human desires and nature? What do we mean by human nature being bad? What is bad, perhaps, is that the first sort of desire, if not checked, will lead one into a situation of conflict and clash. Similarly for the second sort of desire, if not checked, in following it through, one will encounter loss of virtues and morality in an individual and thus cause instability in society. The third sort of emotion, love for sensual pleasures, if unchecked, could create both conflict and strife. In all these three cases, to follow one's desires and emotions (called *qingxing* 情性 by Xunzi) will not lead and conduce to larger social gain and welfare but instead will result in social disasters and possible political suppression. Hence to say that human nature is bad is equivalent to saying that it can bring bad results or consequences, and that that is undesirable from a political-social-moral point of view. In light of this fact, moral words like "good" and "bad" in their use have been intended to prescribe what to do and what not to do in order to avoid undesirable results and to achieve desirable ends.

What is good is to be accepted and to be done, what is bad is not to be accepted and not to be done. From this point of view, it is possible to see that for Xunzi to say that human nature is bad is to say that certain desires need to be checked in order to avoid undesirable consequences. Or to put it in a different way, to say that a desire when unchecked or restrained is bad is to anticipate some consequences such as disorder and suppression, which are not acceptable and not to be done. Hence we can indeed speak of consequential sense of good and bad as indicated by Tony Cua in his paper on Xunzi's philosophy of human nature (see Cua 2005: 8–9). As these consequences have not yet happened in a given situation, we may speak even more precisely of the good and the bad in an anticipatory sense. It is not those feelings and desires that are intrinsically bad (in fact they can be instrumentally good for some purpose under certain conceivable social and economic conditions),¹² it is the

¹¹ The term "*xiaoren*" need not be taken as a morally condemning term. It is originally used to refer to common people who are subjects to be ruled by the *junzi*, the rulers.

¹² Such as competition in an economic market. As Adam Smith sees it, it is the private interests and selfish desires which motivate competition and innovation in an open market which, when

anticipated results of pursuing them that are considered bad. Hence they are to be regarded as bad as a matter of anticipation of their results. Once we see this anticipatory aspect of the use of the good and bad, we can also come to see another anticipatory aspect of the use of these two terms, namely to say that human nature is bad is to say that it needs to be improved, guided, and refined. If we focus on this latter sense of anticipation for the social-political-moral statement that human nature is bad, there is not much condemnation or pessimism as one may view them in a consequentialist light.

Given these basic analyses of the three terms “*ren* 人/*xing* 性/*le* 惡,” we can see Xunzi’s statement or observation “*renxing e* 人性惡” as a forewarning for potential harm for not developing one’s nature and as a reminder of the necessity of development of human nature in light of consequential good and benefit. With this understanding, what would be wrong with Xunzi’s statement or his observation? For those who wish to defend Mencius’ view that human nature is good, must we say that Mencius is obligated to deny this statement and its practical implication? It is quite conceivable that Mencius would not deny that human nature could be developed and improved, even though he may regard human nature as originally good (good at origin) or intrinsically good. He may consent to Xunzi’s statement as an observation and agree with Xunzi in the need for improvement of human nature in a broadened notion of human nature which includes desires as commonly seen.

One may see Xunzi’s retort of Mencius’ thesis that human nature is good as an ambiguous reading of the word “*xing* 性.” For Mencius human nature or *xing* is rooted in heaven and earth and will naturally present itself when there are no contravening factors such as desires for certain concrete things. It is true that people in general could desire profit and sensual pleasures and evince hatred and jealousy in concrete circumstances, but it is also true that people in general could desire love and praise for noble acts, spiritual peace and virtue and even show sympathetic benevolence and tolerance under other concrete circumstances. People could naturally hate acts of hatred and dislike jealous outbursts. The passionate-impulsive nature of the human person can be very complex and toward various objects they may react with various emotions and desires, some of which we may regard as anticipatorily bad, and some of which we may regard as anticipatorily good. Hence Mencius and Xunzi need not controvert each other on this matter of evincing of different desires and emotions regarding their passionate-impulsive natures of the human being. In terms of the dispute between Xunzi and Mencius, Mencius could accept what Xunzi says without giving up his observation and theoretical understanding that human nature is good at the origin of its existence. So our next question is whether Xunzi could accept the Mencian view if we may clarify Mencius’ position in light of the distinction and relation between heaven and human in Xunzi.

My response is that we can indeed reformulate Mencius in a way that would suit Xunzi’s understanding of human nature in an enlarged sense. What Mencius

combined with some minimum regulating government, could generate profits for the public through an “invisible hand,” which represents a rational institutionalization of the economy.

has argued is that given optimum circumstances all virtuous emotions could be identified in the four beginnings of the virtues (*siduan* 四端). Take the example of the feeling of sympathy for an innocent about to fall into the well. Do we experience an impulse to run to help? As an empirical statement, the saying that people generally experience such an impulse may carry no weight for proving the beginning of the virtue of benevolence, because the virtue may have to contain both the rational element of justification and the feeling element one experiences and not just the feeling element alone. But one may argue that the feeling element serves as an occasion for discovery of something deeper in human nature so that one may come to rationally adopt the feeling and urge for action as a moral rule and a moral command. With this one can see how Xunzi may regard feelings and desires which are directed to selfishness as also an occasion for rational reflection and thus as a basis for rational development of virtues such as *li* and *yi*. As a matter of fact, Xunzi has argued and brought to light the fact that the human mind has the capacity of knowing the way of heaven which is to see balance, harmony, restraint, and wholeness of relations as the normative basis for judgment of moral evaluation and appraisal and hence as the basis for actualizing or developing of a deeper level of human nature.

In this sense there is no reason why Xunzi may not come to see Mencius as providing a level of humanity which would naturally accommodate his theory of human knowledge of the *dao* as he indicated in the *Jiebi* 解蔽 essay. There is no reason why his theory of selfish desires and emotions may not be reconciled with Mencius' theory of pure emotions and will which is also reflected and embodied in his theory of reflective reason and normative *dao*. Of course there is still a basic difference between the status of reason and *dao* in Xunzi and the status of emotion and will in Mencius. But this difference only points to the fact that each has come across an aspect of the human mind-heart, which consists in requiring conscious understanding as well as emotional response as factors of determinative power for action. The human mind-heart is an inseparable unit of reason/emotion and will which enables the human person to know and to act on knowledge and to know via action. It is the way that human nature is structured and composed if we can speak of a reflective understanding of human nature as we wish not only to explain our actions by our desires and emotions and knowledge but we wish to also plan our life along this line of knowledge-emotion and action interaction in a process of defining and growing ourselves as human beings.

What is significant in Xunzi is that he sees that human nature is a dynamic process which needs and requires development as it is seen in both historical and theoretical contexts. Humans' relation to nature and heaven is such that we need to move beyond our selfish desires and emotions so that we may transform ourselves into a higher and larger being by awakening our rationality and sensibility to the *dao* that is embodied in the regularities of heaven. Xunzi's essay on heaven has pinpointed this potential aspect of human nature and it is on this basis that the whole philosophy of social *li* and *yi* is to be developed. It is a realistic theory because it is based on observation of the reality of heaven and its way. In point of fact, as we see above in the quotations from *Jiebi Pian* and *Tianlun Pian*, Xunzi has presupposed or

identified a level of human nature which contains potential good for human development. We may see this potential good as the capacity for checking selfish desires and as the capacity to form divisions of labor and to organize communities and groups for collective productivity and mutual enhancement. They are implicit in the human nature that Xunzi has generally described as *yi* 義 as he says that “Human beings have vital force, life and perception and righteousness” in the *Wangzhi* essay. In a sense he has recognized this implicit and deep level of human nature. But unlike Mencius, he may think that one can only get them by way of learning and exposure to historical lessons from the past and the teachings of sage kings. But that one can learn from these resources does not rule out that one can feel the relevance of those levels in one’s direct encounter with life. They have to be realized in one’s life and experienced in order to be the basis for one’s action. As history and moral lessons can be effective, they have a basis in the human feelings that can be said to be a part of the enlarged human nature.

What I have said above makes it clear that for Xunzi human nature is not bad in all possible senses. In his use of the bad, bad may come with the good. His idea that because of the lack of good one may desire bad is an instructive one. But the fact that one may aspire for the good on the basis of feeling bad could be said to prove that human nature is indeed good after all for in this good bad is a simply a sign of privation.

We must further observe that there is indeed a sense of bad which is morally bad not as an anticipatory consequence for the social community, namely the bad in the sense of consciously and intentionally seeking selfish ends at the expense of others with knowledge used for achieving this intention. Xunzi has touched on this sense of intentional badness in his historical examples but he has not discussed it in distinction from the non-intentional badness which is anticipatorily attributed to the natural desires and feelings of most people in their life courses.

As one final question concerning this clarified theory of human nature in Xunzi, we may ask whether ordinary people can become sages. The answer is that if a sage can become a sage, an ordinary person can also become a sage, for there is no ontological basic difference between a sage and an ordinary person in their basic and extended natures. Xunzi has developed his theory of the human mind that would allow sagely wisdom to develop so that one can speak of everyone knowing the *dao*. There is no reason why anyone may not learn the *dao* as an ultimate norm and *dao* as an ultimate end of life. Xunzi has also provided three major ways of knowing the *dao* as I have exposed in the above. Hence there is no reason that any person is not capable of becoming a sage. As both a social realist and a social idealist, Xunzi sees his philosophy of human nature as part of his theory of human development in his fundamental framework of the distinction and relation between man and heaven and his consequent views on the human faculty of using language and developing human minds. Hence in the last resort there is a convergence of Xunzi and Mencius in the comprehensive system of reflections of Confucius.

7 Conclusion

Given the above new understanding of Xunzi, which combines conceptual analysis with a holistic systemic integration, one can have a full and balanced view of Xunzi both with regard to his theoretical content and with regard to his position in the classical Confucian philosophy. There are many unique features of Xunzi which reflect Xunzi's experience and reflection on the problem of human self and human person, human nature, human morality, human society, and government. One great contribution lies in his discursive analytic and systematic approach to various topics of humanity, which are essential for understanding individual, society, and government. He takes his observation of life and society seriously and sees history as providing examples and case studies in a theoretical framework. He has thus provided Confucianism with a new perspective which is required for integrating history, theory, and experience. He is also careful in working out a full philosophy of social motivation and political administration based on a moral reflection on the potential and purposefulness of humanity, which has been only programmatically discussed by Mencius and other philosophers. In this sense he has integrated both the tradition of *Daxue* and *Zhongyong* and founded his philosophy on both experience and reflection.

Apart from methodology and political philosophy, Xunzi has come to present an implicitly full theory of human nature based on experience and reflection and in reference to the relation and distinction between heaven and human. It is he who has critically examined the Zisi and Mencian theory of humanity and its role and disclosed a dimension of reality which needs to be dealt with by ethics and education. In this manner he has provided a justification of human history and culture as resources of morality that is required for the full development of humans, which in turn is essential for human survival and prosperity. In a sense he is able to pull all threads of thinking of Confucius together and re-establish the Confucian vision both as a social-political ideal and as an individually committed realizable project. In this sense he has comprehensively covered both the externalist and internalist issues in Confucianism and gives it a form of completion and organic interrelation. Although he was often understood as a mere naturalist philosopher, he is in fact not. His ideas of *dao* and heaven, and human mind knowing the *dao*, provide a basis for reconnecting human and heaven in a richer context than his Confucian predecessors and perhaps even the Daoists.

Although Xunzi appears to advocate a philosophy of human nature which many people dislike, it is precisely by focusing on a realistic aspect of human existence that the concept of human nature becomes more dynamic, open and even creative. It is fair to conclude that given our holistic and systematic understanding of Xunzi, there cannot be a complete and integrated understanding of the classical Confucianism without this understanding of Xunzi.¹³

¹³ Xunzi's notion of human nature being bad becomes a source of the notion of "*qizhixing* 氣質之性" (nature of temperament) in the Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism. It is largely conceived by Zhang Zai, the Cheng Brothers and Zhu Xi that human nature has both the nature of temperament and the nature of righteousness and reason (*yilixing* 義理之性), which of course requires adequate integration for both understanding the whole person and the self-cultivation project of a Confucian *junzi*.

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Part II
Philosophical Issues

Chapter 9

Early Confucian Perspectives on Emotions

Curie Virág

1 Introduction

The emotions were a central and constant feature of early ethical debates from antiquity onwards. Early Chinese thinkers diverged greatly in their attitudes toward the emotions, and in how they imagined their place in moral life. While for Confucius (Kongzi 孔子, 551–479 BCE) the morally cultivated person was one whose virtue was completed by joy and pleasure, likes and dislikes, and the fulfillment of his own desires, the *Daodejing* 道德經 called for the eradication of these very emotions and desires as a prerequisite to the achievement of oneness with the Way. While Mencius (Mengzi 孟子, 372–289 BCE) reasoned that certain innate feelings constituted the natural beginnings, or “sprouts” (*duan* 端) of virtue and moral action, Mozi 墨子 (c. 480–390 BCE) regarded spontaneous feelings as inherently partial and thus the cause of injustice, corruption and extravagance on the part of rulers. Underlying such radically diverging perspectives on the role of emotions in moral and political were, more fundamentally, competing visions of what it meant to be human and how to fully realize our moral potential: do we achieve our proper human state through stillness, oneness, and solitude, or through movement, change, and engagement in the world of people and things? Can we rely on our “natural” and spontaneous feelings to lead us to right action or must we constrain and order these feelings through our intelligence and the use of institutions and cultural forms?

In recent years, scholars of early China have paid increasing attention to the early discourse of emotions, recognizing the need to take this discourse into account if we are to have a fuller picture not only of the thought and moral outlook of the period, but also of the forces that drove political, social, and cultural change. This trend reflects a seismic shift affecting all academic disciplines, from the humanities to the social sciences to the neurosciences, in which emotions – and thinking about

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emotions – have become central topics of investigation in their own right. This development goes hand in hand with a growing awareness that emotions cannot be fully excised from those “rational” and intelligent human processes that were one assumed to be distinct from them (see esp. Solomon 2004; de Sousa 1987; Nussbaum 2001). Such hospitable circumstances for the investigation of emotions have reinvigorated the study of early thought in China. As a number of scholars have pointed out, emotions were central in the ethical and political discourse of pre- and early imperial China, reflecting the fact that “emotion, intuition, and moral judgment were thought to work in tandem, rather than in opposition to one another” (Nylan 2001a: 99).¹

Studies of emotions in much of the existing scholarly literature have tended to focus on *qing* 情 – the Chinese term most commonly associated with the western concept of “emotions.” In their discussions of this concept, commentators have invariably made note of its underlying duality of meaning: (1) “situation,” “circumstance,” or “essential reality,” on the one hand and (2) “passion,” “emotion,” or “feeling” on the other. While scholars of early Chinese thought have approached this duality historically and have been concerned with identifying the temporal moment in which the second sense of *qing* as passion or emotion might have first come into being, studies of the post-Han period have tended to focus on the simultaneity and correspondence of these two basic meanings of *qing*, and thus on the implied connection between inner and outer realities.² This connection might emphasize how the external world is mirrored in the inner realm as feelings, or how the inner world is fully revealed in the outer through expression – primarily in the form of poetry and music.³

In this chapter, I will go beyond *qing* to consider a broader range of ideas and concepts that are at least as important for understanding how early thinkers thought about emotions. These include accounts of the fully realized individual, such as the *junzi* 君子 (the worthy), the sage, or the person of *ren* 仁 (benevolence); concepts referring to the constituent parts of the human person, such as *xing* 性 (inborn nature) and *xin* 心 (heart-mind); terms referring to particular feelings such as *xi* 喜

¹The question of whether early Chinese thinkers themselves saw thinking and feeling (or reason and emotion) as distinct has been an issue of deep controversy. See, e.g., the debate over the cognitive content of Mencius’ view of emotions in Wong 1991 and Ihara 1991. Recently, Liu Qingping has challenged the traditional enterprise of analyzing the history of Chinese philosophy in terms of the presence or non-presence of “rational principles” by proposing that Chinese thought is rooted in “emotional principles” (see Liu 2011).

²For positions on this debate over early meanings of *qing*, see, among others, Graham 1990: 59; Hansen 1995: 194–203; Allan 1997: 85; and Puett 2004: 37–43. Christoph Harbsmeier has written about the wide semantic range of the term *qing*, differentiating among seven basic groups of meanings. See Harbsmeier 2004. Eifring 2004 offers the most focused and historically comprehensive survey of *qing* and its evolving conceptions from antiquity through imperial times.

³For an extensive discussion of how this correspondence plays out in traditional Chinese thinking about literature, see Owen 1985. Among later thinkers who opposed this merging of self and world (as conceived in terms of the pairing, *qing* 情 and *jing* 景) and stressed the importance of recognizing the subjective and objective as distinct realms, was Wang Fuzhi, who believed that their confounding resulted in a failure to see things in their true aspect. On this subject see Wong Siu-kit 1978.

(joy), *nu* 怒 (anger), *ai* 哀 (sorrow), and *le* 樂 (delight/pleasure); and a myriad other emotive terms such as *yu* 欲 (desire) and *zhi* 志 (direction, intention, will, etc). By considering the history of thinking about emotions more holistically, this study seeks to understand the diverse ways in which the self, in this critical historical juncture, was configured ethically and ontologically.

I will focus here on key texts of the early Confucian tradition, namely, the *Analects* of Confucius, the *Mencius*, the *Xunzi* 荀子, and the recently discovered Guodian text, the *Xing Zi Ming Chu* 性自命出. My goal is not only to show what these early texts might represent within the larger evolution of thinking about emotions, but also to reveal how their various approaches to the emotions point to the special problems and priorities driving the development of moral thought in this period. Historicizing the history of thinking about the emotions in this way shows us that what was at stake in the debates over the nature and moral status of the emotions was not simply moral theory pertaining to the life of the individual. Accounts of emotions had implications for thinking about community and state, culture and power. It is no wonder, then, that early Chinese thinkers, whose ideas were by and large put forth to gain the ear of rulers and offer a blueprint for political reform (Lloyd 1996: 20–46), rarely failed to discourse on the emotions. Or that by the end of the Warring States period, when the rising imperial powers began to create forms of knowledge integrating theories of the self with theories of the body politic and of the cosmos, the emotions – far from being suppressed or defined out of the picture – would play a pivotal role in uniting these previously disparate realms. Theories of the human self were the battleground upon which values and ideas about culture and statecraft were waged, and competing visions of the emotions offered different interpretations of how our goals as a society, both individually and collectively, should be realized.

2 The Pleasure of Learning and the Joy of Self-Realization in the *Analects* of Confucius

The *Analects* of Confucius (*Lunyu* 論語) reveals what, from a modern perspective, might appear as a striking mingling of affective and moral discourses.⁴ In its opening passage it relates the joys and pleasures arising from learning and friendship:

The Master said, “Is it not a pleasure (*yue* 說), having learned something, to try it out at due intervals? Is it not a delight (*le* 樂) to have friends come from afar? Is it not worthy (*jun* 君子) not to take offence when others fail to appreciate your abilities?” (*Analects* 1.1; *ICS Lunyu* 1.1/1/3–4.)⁵

⁴Like many early texts, there is a messy textual history behind the *Analects* and we cannot, properly speaking assume that the received text represents the collected sayings of a historical figure Kong Qiu of Lu. I will refer to the Master’s voice in the text as “Confucius” out of a convenience justified by its general unity of perspective.

⁵The translations given in this chapter are modified from Lau 1982. The given source passages from the *Lunyu* follow the format in Lau, Wah and Ching (1995a), which is given as *ICS Lunyu*. I have also actively consulted Edward Slingerland’s 2003 translation.

Here, Confucius juxtaposes pleasure (*yue* 說, 悅), delight (*le* 樂), and being a noble person (*junzi* 君子), as though they were parallel virtues, suggesting that finding pleasure and joy in the important things of life are moral ends at the level of being a worthy person. Other passages in the text go further than this to assert joy and pleasure as signs of moral attainment. In the case of learning, Confucius notes that the ultimate level of achievement is one in which a person has found delight (*le* 樂) in what one has learned: “The Master said, ‘To be fond of something is better than merely to know it, and to delight in it is better than merely to be fond of it’” (*Analects* 6.20). And in his reflections on his own life trajectory, Confucius signposts the various stages of achievement as they lead from his youthful embarkation upon a life of learning to his realization of its ultimate end:

The Master said, “At fifteen I set my heart on learning; at thirty I took my stand; at forty I came to be free from doubts; at fifty I understood the Decree of Heaven; at sixty my ear was attuned; at seventy I followed my heart’s desires (*cong xin suo yu* 從心所欲) without overstepping the line.” (*Analects* 2.4; *ICS Lunyu* 2.4/3/1–2.)

For one who aspires to realize himself, the moment of self-fulfillment comes when what one spontaneously desires to do fully coincides with what one ought to do.

In addition to emphasizing the feelings of joy and pleasure, and the fulfillment of one’s desires in learning and self-cultivation, the *Analects* also stresses emotional engagement. The moral ideal is not one of detachment and impartiality, as Mozi would advocate (see below), but the very capacity to have preferences grounded in one’s genuine convictions. A morally cultivated person – one who fully embodies the virtue of *ren* 仁 (humaneness or benevolence) – is someone who possesses clear likes (*hao* 好) and dislikes (*e* 惡):

The Master said, “It is only the benevolent person who is capable of liking and disliking others.” (*Analects* 4.3; *ICS Lunyu* 4.3/7/9.)

Zigong said, “Does even the gentleman (*junzi*) have dislikes?”

The Master said, “Yes. The gentleman has his dislikes. He dislikes those who proclaim the evil in others. He dislikes those who, being in inferior positions, slander their superiors. He dislikes those who, while possessing courage, lack the spirit of the rites. He dislikes those whose resoluteness is not tempered by understanding (*Analects* 17.24; *ICS Lunyu* 17.24/50/19–24.)

For a worthy, there is no contradiction between the spontaneous, emotional responses of liking and disliking, on the one hand, and making proper moral judgments, on the other. Indeed, having strong feelings and preferences about something *is* to fully realize one’s relationship with it.⁶ Confucius thus compares the lover of benevolence with the lover of beautiful women: “The Master said, ‘I have yet to meet the man who is as fond of virtue as he is of beauty in women.’” (*Analects* 9.18; *ICS Lunyu* 9.18/21/20. Cf. *Analects* 15.13). In other passages, Confucius notes that

⁶Shun Kwong-loi has thus argued for a broadened conception of *ren* as a “cluster of emotional dispositions and attitudes” that are embodied in *li*. In this context, Shun notes, *li* should likewise be considered more broadly as various norms that govern human conduct,” rather than as “ritual propriety,” which is the conventional translation. Shun 2002: 67.

one's actions must be accompanied by emotional involvement if they are to be meaningful. Thus, for example, just as the feelings of pleasure and joy must accompany true learning and understanding, proper feeling must also be present in one's moral conduct for it to be genuine. In the case of filial piety (*xiao* 孝):

The Master said, "What is difficult to manage is the expression on one's face. As for the young taking on the burden when there is work to be done or letting the old enjoy the wine and the food when these are available, that hardly deserves to be called filial." (*Analects* 2.8; *ICS Lunnyu* 2.8/3/14–15. see also *Analects* 2.7 and 8.2)

This passage notes how, although we may be able to perform filial actions, we might not be able to achieve the more difficult task of genuinely feeling the devotion and respect owed to one's parents. It is easy to go through the motions of being filial to one's parents. Far more difficult is to perform these acts sincerely – with authentic feeling. Unaccompanied by such feeling, our actions – however well-intentioned – become merely external performance, devoid of moral significance (Cf. *Analects* 3.12).

For Confucius, then, to be truly benevolent means not only doing what is right and appropriate in any given situation, but also being fully engaged emotionally. Thus, in a fully realized individual, inner and outer are part of a unified whole. This has tremendous implications for Confucius' understanding of ritual (*li* 禮), which he regarded as the beginning and end of moral self-cultivation. If Confucius stressed the need to constantly abide by ritual, exhorting others not to "look," "speak," or "move" without doing so in accordance with ritual propriety (*Analects* 12.1), this need for constant vigilance was as much about awareness of one's emotional commitment as it was about outer performance.⁷ Right emotions, then, were essential to the Confucian conception of virtue, which was none other than the art of living properly and well.

What are the ethical and historical implications of Confucius' stress on emotional presence as a necessary feature of the perfected individual? Historically, the Confucian discourse of emotions emerged as part of the search for a new and universal basis of values in a time of moral flux. It signifies a broader ethical shift, embraced by certain members of the newly emergent scholar-literati class, that the true locus of authority was moral, and that this site of moral authority lay within the individual.⁸ Confucius proposed that neither secular authority, nor established social norms, nor even the ritual practices of the Zhou state as codified in the transmitted texts and passed down through convention, could provide reliable models by which we should order our lives individually and collectively. The true guides to living lay within the self. Being present in the very structure of our feeling and desiring, they

⁷Herbert Fingarette has likewise argued for an understanding of Confucian ritual in a way that emphasizes the aspect of commitment – focusing, however, on the way in which ritual enables individuals to *actualize* their virtue and create a sense of the sacred through the forging of community. In this way, ritual enables one's moral convictions to become outwardly visible, transmuting moral identity into socially-embedded conduct (Fingarette 1998: 1–17).

⁸See Yuri Pines' important study of the intellectual and historical background to the emergence of Confucian thought (Pines 2002).

were not simply transferred from the outside. To the extent that they could be subjectively experienced by all individuals, they could be said to be universal.⁹ This general theme of the self-reliance and autonomy of the cultivated individual can be seen in a number of the Master's pronouncements about *ren*:

The Master said, "Is *ren* really so far away? No sooner do I desire it than it is here." (*Analects* 7.30; *ICS Lunyu* 7.30/17/12.)

The Master said, "What the gentleman seeks, he seeks within himself; what the petty person seeks, he seeks in others." (*Analects* 15.21; *ICS Lunyu* 15.21/43/17.)

"When it comes to being *ren* defer to no one, not even your teacher." (*Analects* 15.36; *ICS Lunyu* 15.36/44/20.)

The importance of emotions in Confucius' account of the perfected individual is a symptom of his attempt to shift the locus of morality authority inwards.¹⁰ The ultimate ethical attainment depended upon our individual capacities, which meant that what we needed for living life well and meaningfully was inside us, not "out there" somewhere. It was we who broadened the Way, and not the other way around (*Analects* 15.29; cf. 7.10, 7.30, 15.21).

Confucius' claim that right action had to be accompanied by spontaneous emotions points to an inner basis of moral authority, suggesting that living properly in the world is as much a personal attitude and dispositional state as much as it is about following accepted norms. But on the theoretical questions of what it was that made human emotional responses normative, and how generally the human moral character was to be understood and refined through cultivation, Confucius offered no explanation. Indeed, he was famously reticent about the subject of human nature and the "Way of Heaven" (*Analects* 5:13). His humanistic and this-worldly orientation, with its emphasis on the total engagement of the person and on the very transparency of the self, stressed the way in which individuals actualized their moral potential in relation to other people and things, and in specific contexts. The self was thus a practical entity, coming into perspective as individuals made themselves visible through their conduct – above all, through engaging in proper ritual, which ideally emerged out of emotions that were aligned with one's virtues.¹¹

⁹The "we" here needs to be qualified, for Confucius does not necessarily assume a universal "we." It is, after all, only those who have embarked upon an arduous path of self-cultivation who are able to "fully realize their desires without crossing the line." Moreover, as Erica Brindley has shown, the very possibility of this self-cultivation is strictly delimited by class and gender (Brindley 2009).

¹⁰This increasing emphasis on realms of human life that are within human control can be seen in the evolving history of core concepts that would become central to Confucius' ethical vision: *tian* 天 (Heaven), *de* 德 (virtue), *ming* 命 (mandate) *ren* 仁 (humaneness, etc). See Pines 2002: 164–204.

¹¹Herbert Fingarette has noted the "absence of an elaborated doctrine of an 'inner psychic life'" in the *Analects*, arguing, however, that the vision of self found in this text is distinctive in Asian philosophical traditions in its assertion of the self and its aspirations as both positive and meaningful. Based on his examination of vocabulary connected to self and to willing (*ji* 己, *shen* 身, *yü* 欲, and *zhi* 志), Fingarette concludes, "Confucius is affirmative, rather than negative, about the role of personal will and of the self it expresses. Specifically, Confucius appeals to us to activate our will – something only we as individuals can do – as a prime means of realizing the ideal life" (Fingarette 1979: 134).

3 Mencius and the Emotive Grounds of Morality

Some of Confucius' most prominent followers in the fourth and third centuries BCE grappled with the issue of how the emotional disposition of human beings, as contained within the "inborn nature" (*xing* 性), was related to virtue and moral action. They took as their point of departure the basic human virtues as elaborated by Confucius, as well as his assumptions about bodily integrity, self-cultivation, and sagehood. But in an age of intellectual ferment and broadened horizons in philosophical investigations, moral inquiry called for greater awareness of the workings of the human mind and body, as well as of the larger forces and patterns that governed the world (Harper 1999: 813–852). These explorations of the outer world shaped, in turn, knowledge of the human self, helping to give rise to what Erica Brindley has characterized as "a new intellectual preoccupation with the body and psyche" (Brindley 2006b: 3. See also Sivin 1995 and Lewis 2006). It was thus during the fourth century that the concept of *xin* 心 – the heart-mind – emerged as a major subject of philosophical discussion.

During this time, *xin* was broadly conceived in the context of a more or less unified cosmological vision – one based on the processes and movements of *qi* 氣, or "configurative energy" (Porkert 1974: 167).¹² Conceived as the site not only of thought (*si* 思, *lü* 慮) and will (*zhi* 志), but also of feelings and desires, the recurring usage of the term *xin* belies a more general concern with the emotional and affective dimensions of life (Brindley 2006a: 247). Within this context, the emotions became a central concern among later followers of Confucius. Among the most prominent of these was Mencius, who emphasized the inherent, natural origins of morality in human beings.¹³ This was in stark contrast to Xunzi (further discussed below), who held that human nature possessed no innate moral direction, and therefore required the guidance of extrinsic and artificial devices (*wei* 偽) in order to be made good. Thus, while Mencius identified in human emotions the "sprouts" (*duan* 端) of virtue, Xunzi saw them as generally steering people towards immoral conduct and therefore needing to be channeled and controlled through ritual, music, and other institutions arising from a well-ordered state. For both thinkers, however, morality depended on understanding the universal emotional tendencies of human beings, and knowing how to channel them properly.

Like Confucius, Mencius conceived of the perfected individual as one for whom inner and outer were integrated. He went beyond Confucius, however, in his insistence that, through people's eyes and words, it was possible to know their inner

¹² See Behuniak 2005: 1–22 for a thorough account of the conceptual history of *qi* and its connection to moral thought in Mencius' thought and in Warring States philosophy in general. On the central role of *qi* in Mencius' conception of the heart and of self-cultivation, see Chan 2002b.

¹³ For a comprehensive discussion of the moral and conceptual background of the issues discussed here, see Shun 1997.

character.¹⁴ Moreover, he took further the idea of “knowing” the self: subjecting the inner realm to deeper scrutiny, he traced the origins of virtue to certain basic emotional inclinations. The central moral claim for which Mencius is known – that human nature (*xing* 性) is originally good (*shan* 善) – assumes that all human beings share the same emotional constitution, which furnishes the “sprouts” of virtue within ourselves. The famous example of the child about to fall into the well in Mencius 2A6 exemplifies the workings of one of four emotional dispositions that represent the origin of moral awareness – the feeling of compassion (*ce yin zhi xin* 惻隱之心). “No one,” Mencius claims, “is devoid of a heart sensitive to the sufferings of others,” and his proof of this is that every single human being would feel a twinge of compassion when faced with the scenario of a child about to fall into a well. Not everyone will necessarily act upon this feeling, but everyone would feel it, and this fact is sufficient, according to Mencius, to make his case. This feeling of compassion is accompanied by three other innate human feelings – shame (*xiu wu zhi xin* 羞惡之心), respect (*gong jing zhi xin* 恭敬之心), and approval and disapproval (*shi fei zhi xin* 是非之心)¹⁵ – all of which represent the “sprouts” of moral action:

The feeling of compassion is the sprout of humaneness; the feeling of shame, of rightness; the feeling of respect, of ritual propriety; the feeling of approval and disapproval, of wisdom. Man has these four sprouts just as he has four limbs. For a man possessing these four sprouts to deny his own potentialities is for him to cripple himself. (*Mencius* 2A6; *ICS Mengzi* 3.6/18/8–10)

Our moral sentiments, as signified by the proper functioning of our emotional disposition, were as much a part of our humanness as our sense faculties – our ears, eyes, mouths and noses – and our four limbs. As such, to deny their existence was tantamount to “crippling” ourselves.

For Mencius, then, the potentiality for moral consciousness and action was as characteristic to the essential and underlying disposition of human beings (*qing* 情) as our sense faculties were intrinsic to our underlying physical constitution (*Mencius* 6A6).¹⁶ The affective, moral and physical realms, however, were not simply parallel, analogous aspects of the human experience; they were in fact

¹⁴ *Mencius* 4A15; *ICS Mengzi* 7.15/38/14–15. “Mencius said, ‘There is in man nothing more ingenious than the pupils of his eyes. They cannot conceal his wickedness. When he is upright within his breast, a man’s pupils are clear and bright; when he is not, they are clouded and murky. How can a man conceal his true character if you listen to his words and observe the pupils of his eyes?’” Translations from the *Mencius* are adapted from Lau 1970. Original passage citations follow the format of Lau, Wah and Ching (1995b), which is given as ICS Mengzi. I have also consulted Van Norden’s 2008 translation and commentary.

¹⁵ I follow James Behuniak (who in turn follows Dobson, Legge, and Chan) in reading *xin* 心 as “feeling” rather than “mind” or “heart-mind” here since it is clear that that Mencius is referring to specific feelings and not a particular physical faculty or organ. There are, however, passages in which Mencius has in mind a particular faculty and not simply the operations of this faculty, as in *Mencius* 6A15, discussed below. For a discussion of the problem of translating *xin*, see Behuniak 2005: 26.

¹⁶ Both Lau 1970: 163 and Shun: 214–215 follow this line of reading *qing* and translate the term as “what is genuine.”

inseparable and fully integrated with one another. Conceived in this way, morality was none other than nurturing our underlying tendencies, both physical and mental: for just as our emotions were the starting point for our moral awareness, so was the functioning of our bodies part involved in our embodiment of the moral order:

Mencius said, “The way the mouth is disposed towards tastes, the eye towards colours, the ear towards sounds, the nose towards smells, and the four limbs towards ease is human nature, yet therein also lies the Decree (*ming* 命). That is why the gentleman does not describe it as nature.” For a defense of the idea that Mencius is offering a biological argument for morality, see Bloom (1997). (*Mencius* 7B24; *ICS Mengzi* 14.24/75/22–24.)

For Mencius, the workings of our sense faculties were inseparable from the norms that should govern our lives. That is, morality is not about a higher set of guidelines that should be imposed over and above our senses and feelings but was integrated with them. The two realms were thus part of a unified whole pervaded by the shared substance of *qi* – that “vital force” or “configurative energy” that explained the workings of the physical body, as well as the inner life of the self. As Alan K. Chan has pointed out, Mencius was but one of many thinkers of his time who understood the human person as “constituted by *qi*” and who conceived the process of moral self-cultivation as “a process of taming, forcing, or channeling the powerful energy that informs the heart” (Chan 2002: 52).

The fact that there existed some inner force that could tame and channel the *qi* suggests that human beings possessed a capacity within themselves that was not determined by extrinsic physical circumstances. This capacity lay within the heart, and Mencius was careful to point out a crucial difference in the cognitive functioning of the heart and the sense faculties:

The organs of hearing and sight are unable to think (*si* 思) and can be misled by external things (*wu* 物). When one thing acts on another, all it does is to attract it (*yin zhi er yi* 引之而已). The organ of the heart can think. But it will find the answer only if it does think; otherwise, it will not find the answer. This is what Heaven has given me. (*Mencius* 6A15; *ICS Mengzi* 11.15/60/27–11.15/61/1.)

Thus, while the senses were vulnerable to the push and pull of external things (*wu* 物), the heart possessed the capacity to think or reflect (*si* 思), which allowed it to resist the onslaught of things and pursue something other than what one might be immediately attracted to at a given moment. This seems to suggest that *si* – the process of thinking or reflecting that the *xin* is uniquely capable of – is fundamentally distinct from feeling, which is physically responsive to one’s circumstances. Does that imply, then, that Mencius recognizes a distinction between feeling and thinking? Most scholars who have addressed this issue directly have argued against such a reading, either by insisting that Mencius regarded feelings as legitimate and proper sources of motivation for moral action (Van Norden, Behuniak) or that what Mencius imputes to feelings in fact involve significant levels of cognition and reasoned judgment (Wong 2000; Nivison 1980).

In 6A6, Mencius seems to reiterate his argument in 2A6 about the emotive basis for humaneness, rightness, ritual propriety and wisdom, but instead of referring to

the various feelings of compassion, shame, and so on, as the “sprouts” of these virtues, he simply equates them:

The feeling of compassion is benevolence. The feeling of shame is rightness. The feeling of respect is propriety. The feeling of approval and disapproval is wisdom. Benevolence, rightness, propriety, and wisdom are not welded onto us from the outside. We inherently have them. It is simply that we do not reflect upon them. (*ICS Mengzi* 11.6/58/22–24.)

The four basic virtues, then, are not “welded” onto us from without, but are inherent to our constitution. The reason they are not always actualized is because people fail to *si* them – to direct, concentrate and focus them.¹⁷ Recognizing the way in which *si* integrates the realms of feeling, judgment and cognition, 6A15 does not seem necessarily to warrant a thought/feeling dichotomy. That is, morality for Mencius does not depend on a categorical distinction between our biologically rooted desires and emotional inclinations, on the one hand, and our capacity for reasoned thought and behavior, on the other – with the latter guiding the heart to the proper objects of its interest: normative principle/pattern (*li* 理) and propriety (*yi* 義). Instead, our heart seek out, and experience satisfaction in, the pursuit and realization of virtue, just as our sense faculties desire and experience satisfaction in things they crave, such as delicious food and beautiful objects (*Mencius* 6A7). What is necessary for the nurturing of our hearts is therefore not the eradication of desire but the cultivation of desire for the right things.¹⁸ The heart and the senses thus remain in a state of dynamic tension with one another, with the possibility of mutual influence. In the case of a *junzi*, who had fully mastered both realms, the operations of his “floodlike *qi*” (*hao ran zhi qi* 浩然之氣) lead him spontaneously to do the right thing, and to be entirely one with his actions. Mencius’ moral vision, premised on the ideal of a unity between feelings and right judgment, points to the claim that human beings ultimately contain their own moral compass, and therefore do not need to have virtue instilled from them from without. The true directives for how to live in this life reside within the self:

Mencius said, “A *junzi* steeps himself in the Way because he wishes to find it in himself. When he finds it in himself, he will be at ease in it; when he is at ease in it, he can draw deeply upon it; when he can draw deeply upon it, he finds its source wherever he turns. This is why a *junzi* wishes to find the Way in himself.” (*Mencius* 4B14)

In emphasizing the inner grounds of morality, Mencius openly disputed thinkers like Mozi 墨子 (473 BCE – ca. 391 BCE) and his own contemporary Gaozi 告子 (ca. 420–350 BCE), who were not so confident in the innate human disposition to find the proper course.¹⁹ Mozi and his followers had regarded the feelings as the source of social injustice and wastefulness. Recognizing a deep contradiction between our natural inclinations and desires, which led to material self-indulgence

¹⁷Van Norden points out this key distinction between 2A6 and 6A6, and proposes taking *si* as “reflection” in the following sense: “‘Reflection’” is focusing one’s attention upon and thinking about one’s feelings and the situations that elicit them. It is an activity that involves feelings, thoughts, and perception. (Van Norden 2008: 149).

¹⁸In 7B35 Mencius also emphasizes the importance of reducing desires, which also suggests that what is problematic is not desire per se, but misdirected and immoderate desire.

¹⁹On Mencius’ disputes with the views of other philosophical schools including the Yangists, Mohists, and Legalists, see Graham 1990, Bloom 1994, and Chen 2002.

and partiality in our relationships with others, Mozi advocated that we strive for impartial concern (*jian ai* 兼愛) for the wellbeing of all people so as to enable our sense of propriety or correctness to hold sway (*Mozi* (2003) Ch. 16). Gaozi, for his part, argued that moral propriety was simply about external directives that were internalized within the self (*Mencius* 6A1-4). In the midst of these debates about the true sources of morality, Mencius supported his assertions by claiming that all human beings possessed in common emotional sensibilities that – if properly nurtured – would lead us to virtue. Morality, in short, was the proper actualization of feelings that we all possessed by virtue of being human.

4 Emotions and the Beginning of Culture in the *Xing Zi Ming Chu*

Emotions figure prominently in the *Xing Zi Ming Chu* (性自命出), a text that forms part of the now well-known cache of philosophical writings discovered in the Guodian tombs. Some of these writings are believed to date as far back as the fourth century BCE.²⁰ Containing lengthy discussions on such topics as human nature (*xing* 性), the heart-mind²¹ (*xin* 心) and feelings (*qing* 情), the *Xing Zi Ming Chu* offers a particular ethical theory of the self and then sets about to explain how this self – given its attributes – is to achieve proper realization in the world of things. The text has received particular scrutiny among scholars working in the field of Warring States thought – particularly those exploring the early history of *qing*.²² It is clear, however, that while it shares the Mencian premise that feelings and desires are defining elements of being human, and are therefore of vital relevance to thinking about moral and political order, it arrives at vastly different conclusions about what our emotions entail for the proper shaping of human life.

The *Xing Zi Ming Chu* opens with a pronouncement about the nature of human beings, which is the starting point for the ethical theory that follows:

Generally speaking, although human beings possess an inborn nature (*xing* 性), their heart-minds (*xin* 心) lack a fixed orientation (*dian zhi* 奠志). It depends on things (*wu* 物) and

²⁰ Indeed, a major re-evaluation of early Chinese thought has been underway since the Guodian findings, and scholars like Tang Yijie have suggested that one major impact that the discovery of these texts has had on our understanding of Warring States philosophy is that it makes clear the central role of emotions in early thought. These findings have likewise prompted scholars to speculate that there existed a “Si-Meng” school (Si Meng Xue Pai) of thought that included Mencius, the author of the Guodian texts, and authors of critically significant chapters of the *Li Ji*, including the *Yue Ji* and the *Zhong Yong*. See Li Xueqin 1999: 75–79, Liao Mingchun 1999: 36–74, and Behuniak 2005: xviii–xx. On the Guodian materials and their intellectual content and contexts, see esp. Allan 2000, Ding 2000, *GCBM* 1999, *SGCBM* 1999, and *PISGCBM*.

²¹ the term *xin* assumes a more cognitive dimension in this text and its meanings cannot be effectively rendered as “heart,” as in the case of Mencius.

²² Other Guodian texts containing discussions of human nature (*xing* 性) and feelings (*qing* 情) are the *Cheng zhi wen zhi* 成之聞之 and the *Yucong* 語叢 nos. 1, 2, and 3. See Puett 2004 and Tang 2003.

only then does it act; it depends on pleasure and only then does it move; it depends on practice and only then does it *become* fixed. (*Guodian chumu zhujian* 179)²³

There is a twofold claim being made here about human nature and the heart-mind, which potentially creates a tension within the individual. On the one hand, all human beings are said to possess a common nature (*xing*) that “arises from the Decree (*ming* 命)” sent down by Heaven itself. On the other hand, they also possess a heart-mind (*xin*) that has no fixed orientation and thus assumes shape and direction according to “things” (*wu*), our emotional responses to them, and the habits we form from our circumstances. In contrast to the *Mencius*, the text asserts that our heart-minds lack an inherent direction and are therefore vulnerable to external conditions, and to the unstable responses of our emotions.

After establishing the heart-mind’s dependence upon “things” to achieve a sense of direction, the text directly proceeds to the various emotions – joy and anger, sorrow and sadness – that arise within the nature:

The *qi* of joy and anger, sorrow and sadness (*xi nu ai bei zhi qi* 喜怒哀悲之氣) are the realm of the inborn nature. As for their becoming manifest outside, it is due to things grabbing hold of them (*wu qu zhi ye* 物取之也). The nature emerges from the Decree, and the Decree descends from Heaven. (*Guodian chumu zhujian* 179)

Although these emotions are said to be part of the inborn nature, it is only when they encounter things in the world that they become manifest. That is, emotions represent the locus of encounter between our inner nature and the world outside. The text then introduces the term *qing*: “The Dao begins in feeling/*qing* (*Dao shi yu qing* 道始於情). And feelings/*qing* are born from the nature (*Qing sheng yu xing* 情生於性)” (*Guodian chumu zhujian* 179). If in the *Mencius*, *qing* refers to the “essential nature” or “what is genuine,” here it refers to something closer to the realm of feelings and desires. *Qing* represents the aspect of human feelings that arise from contact with the things and events of the external world. But at the same time, as that which is “born from the nature,” *qing* is inborn and therefore universal to all human beings. As such, it is the starting place of the Dao, and thus the very foundation of the proper life itself.

The realm of *qing* – properly conceived here as emotions or, as Michael Puett has put it more precisely, “dispositional responsiveness” – opens up a problem that needs to be resolved. If all human beings, though sharing a common emotional disposition, are subject to the determinations of things in the external world, how does it become possible to achieve a unified sense of self with a “fixed purpose”? How is a virtuous and moral existence possible? If early Daoist thinkers resolved this dilemma by advocating that we free ourselves from our dependence upon the external world, and from the allures of the senses, the author of the *Xing Zi Ming Chu* insisted that the inborn nature could not be properly realized unless one engaged with the realm of things. And thus, if our emotional disposition was something inborn and gave us the capacity to live as we ought – if, indeed, *qing* was the starting

²³I follow the published version of this text in Jingmen Shi bowuguan 1998. I have been greatly aided in my translation of this and subsequent passages by Michael Puett’s readings in Puett 2004.

place of the Dao – the proper course lay in successfully channeling one's emotions in a manner that conformed with propriety (*yi* 義): “At the beginning one is close to *qing*, and at the end one is close to propriety” (*Guodian chumu zhujian* 179).

Asserting *qing* as the starting place of the Dao, this text focuses on inborn, universally shared tendencies as the ground for proper action; but it also identifies propriety as the end point – as something that can only be achieved through education (*jiao* 教). Education refers to external forces that shape human nature. The text, accordingly, engages in an extended discussion of how human nature requires the presence of things (*wu* 物) and circumstances (*shi* 勢) for its proper flourishing and realization:

Generally speaking, regarding the nature, some things move it, some things entice it, some things interact with it, some things discipline it, some things bring it forth, some things nurture it, some things make it grow. Generally speaking, what moves the nature are things; what delights the mind is pleasure; what joins with the nature are intentions; what disciplines the nature is propriety; what brings the nature forth is circumstance; what nurtures the nature is practice; what makes the nature grow is the Dao. (*Guodian chumu zhujian* 179)

This is a theory of human nature and the heart-mind that explains how to lead the innate emotional disposition, in the face of its encounter with things and circumstances, to its proper realization in accordance with propriety. The various forces that come to shape the person – circumstances, propriety, repeated study, the Way – are not described abstractly and generally, but concretely: they are particular experiences that are bound up with tangible things (*wu*) that can be seen and experienced:

Generally speaking, what is seen (*jian zhe* 見者) are called things; what brings delight to the self is called pleasure; the circumstances of things are called circumstance; having intentional activity is called purpose. Propriety is the accumulation of a myriad goodnesses. Habitual cultivation (*xi* 習) means having that by which to habitually cultivate one's nature. Dao is the Dao of the myriad things. (*Guodian chumu zhujian* 179)

In the midst of a world filled with things good and bad that literally take hold of us, what brings order and direction is the fact that there is a normative human way for people to follow:

As for the four techniques of the way, only the human way is able to serve as the guide (*ke dao* 可道). As for the remaining three, one guides them (*dao zhi* 道之) and that is all. (*Guodian chumu zhujian* 179)

This human way is the way consisting of Poetry, Documents, Rites and Music, and these – having emerged out of human feeling – furnish the proper guidelines for living. The text explains the emergence of these achievements of civilization historically: they represent the primordial sages' expression and documentation of actual human actions and events, and they arose from their *qing*. The work of the sages was to compile, order and embody them, and also to use them to pattern their own *qing*:

As for Poetry, Documents, Rites and Music, when they first appeared they arose from human beings. Poetry came about when there were events, and people enacted them. Documents came about when there were events and people spoke of them. Rites and music came about when there were events and people raised them up. The sages, having compared their variety, arranged and assembled them; having perceived their priorities, they added admonishments; having given substance to their propriety, they put them in order; having

patterned their *qing*, they manifested and internalized them. Afterwards, they again used them for instruction (*jiao* 教). Instruction is that by which to give birth to virtue within the self. The Rites arose from *qing*. (*Guodian chumu zhujian* 179)

The final sentence in this passage adds that the Rites arose from *qing*, thus emphasizing the way in which self-cultivation was a matter of according with one's emotions, rather than opposing them, even while it involved the need for external forces to shape the moral nature.²⁴

This positing of a normative cultural tradition that was arranged and embodied by the sages introduces into the moral discourse a model of the self as political subject in the literal sense: a being that is to be analyzed and shaped by those empowered to rule. The “psychological” perspective that is characteristic of this and other texts from this period thus corresponds to an interest in defining the human moral nature as an entity that is in constant interaction with “things” and that requires outer sources of completion. Although the text's recognition of the emotions as a starting point for human morality gives it an important point of commonality with earlier Confucian texts, its portrayal of the self as passive, directionless, and requiring external sources of direction represents an important departure: cultural institutions have become, for some, the carriers of moral order and value.²⁵

5 Conscious Activity and the Fulfillment of Natural Feelings in Xunzi

In many ways, the perspectives introduced in the *Xing Zi Ming Chu* prefigures the ethical stance of Xunzi 荀子 (ca. 312–230 B.C.). Xunzi, too, elaborated at length not only on the importance of the emotions and their proper expression, but also on the necessity of cultural institutions such as rites and music to shape human nature. But whereas in the *Xing Zi Ming Chu*, emotions (*qing*) are cited to show how the proper guide to living (Dao) and cultural institutions actually originate from the human emotional disposition, in the *Xunzi*, the theory of emotions describes a more complex relation between natural human feelings and morality. On the one hand, Xunzi asserts that the emotions are innate and universal, and as such, possess normative content. In the “Tian lun 天論” chapter, he explains how the form and spirit, body and mind, the sense faculties and emotions, all came to be produced by Nature (*tian* 天):

When Nature's work has been established, and its achievements have been perfected, the physical form becomes complete and the spirit is born. Love and hate, happiness and anger, sadness and joy are all contained within, and these are called the natural feelings (*tian qing* 天情). The eyes, ears, nose, mouth and physical form are all able to make contact [with

²⁴ Johanna Liu theorizes about the larger philosophical meaning of *qing* in her assertion that, in the *Xing Zi Ming Chu*, *qing* is “understood as the beginning of openness to the other in terms of ‘all things’ and ‘yi [propriety]’ as the ending, the final fulfillment towards which human feeling tends.” Liu 2008: 71.

²⁵ As Michael Puett has argued, the ethical significance of *qing* in this text lies in its invocation as an explanation and justification of cultural institutions. Puett 2004: 43–50.

things], but are not able to act on behalf of one another. These are called the natural faculties (*tian guan* 天官). (*Xunzi* 17.3; *ICS Xunzi* 17/80/9–10).²⁶

Later in this section Xunzi explains that the human possession of these emotions and faculties imply a kind of moral imperative to abide by and preserve these natural endowments:

To obscure one's natural ruler (*tian jun* 天君), confuse one's natural faculties, reject one's natural nourishment, rebel against the natural order of things and to turn away from the natural feelings so as to destroy one's natural virtues – this is indeed a great calamity. The sage purifies his natural ruler, rectifies his natural faculties, completes his natural nourishment, accords with the natural order of things, and nurtures his natural feelings so as to complete one's natural virtues. If one is able to do this, then he knows what to do and what not to do. And Heaven and Earth will preside and the myriad things will serve (*Xunzi* 17.3; *ICS Xunzi* 17/80/11–14.)

Our possession of emotions and sense faculties, therefore opens the path to a directive that we must follow in order to live life well: we must nurture (*yang* 養) these aspects of ourselves if we are to fully realize our human potential. In this way, we not only fulfill our individual human lives but also the larger destiny of Heaven and Earth. Thus it is that the sage, having successfully cultivated and refined his own nature, brings it about that “Heaven and Earth will preside and the myriad things will serve.”

This nurturing of what is “natural,” however, requires going beyond what is nature-given. If the forces of nature, or Heaven and Earth are able to bring the myriad things into being, it is incapable of ordering them: “Heaven is able to bring things into being, but it is not able to differentiate them. Earth is able to sustain people, but it is not able to govern them.” (*Xunzi* 19.6; *ICS Xunzi* 19/95/3.) One's natural state, therefore, does not provide us with a moral compass by which to live: as Xunzi famously declared, “Human nature is bad.” (*Xing'e* 性惡). Human nature, for Xunzi, refers to the most basic, instinctive, nature that all human beings possess and that accounts for people's affective responses to their condition: they desire food when hungry, warmth when cold, rest when tired, and so on. It also refers to the distinctive features of the five senses – sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch (*Xunzi* 4/64). Part and parcel of this natural human tendency towards the satisfaction of personal desire is the realm of “human feelings” (*renqing* 人情), which in their raw state lead one to pursue what is immediately gratifying to the self, rather than what is proper:

Yao asked Shun: “What are human feelings like?”

Shun replied: “Human feelings are truly unlovely things (*bu mei* 不美). What need is there to ask about them? When a man's life is complete with wife and child, his filial devotion towards his parents diminishes. When he attains what he desires, his sincerity towards his friends diminishes. When he has fulfilled his ambition for high office, his loyalty towards his lord diminishes. People's feelings! People's feelings! How unlovely they are! Only in the case of the worthy is this not so.” (*Xunzi* 23.6a/*ICS Xunzi* 23/116/25–23/117/1).²⁷

²⁶In English the only complete translation of Xunzi's writings is Knoblock 1988–1994. Notable partial translations include Watson 1963 and Hutton 2001. I have actively consulted and borrowed from Knoblock's translation in his renderings of certain passages. The passage numbering follows Knoblock and original source citations follow the format in Lau, Wah and Ching (1996), which will be given as *ICS Xunzi*.

²⁷Following Knoblock in translating *bu mei* 不美.

Since our *qing* tends towards the satisfaction of our immediate desires, allowing them to operate unimpeded would lead to strife, mutual destruction and disorder.

How, then, are we to go beyond the impulses and desires of our inborn human nature so as to realize ourselves properly? For this we must look beyond the inherent qualities of human nature to external standards of virtue such as ritual and propriety. These things, Xunzi claims, do not come about because of any inherent disposition of the inborn nature, but are the result of artifice, or conscious activity (*wei* 偽). Morality, in fact, depends upon both nature and artifice: If the inborn nature (*xing* 性) is the “beginning, the root, the raw material and the basic substance” of the self, “conscious activity” is its “pattern, the ordering principle, the extension and the flourishing.” (*Xunzi* 19.6/*ICS Xunzi* 19/95/1.) But it is not simply that natural emotional dispositions need to be molded and shaped by artificial, external devices. The latter, in fact, “nurture” human desires and provide the means to satisfy them (*Xunzi* 19/417). Unlike the *Xing Zi Ming Chu*, which had explained ritual and the Way as arising out of the natural and spontaneous realm of *qing*, Xunzi makes no claims as to the natural origins of ritual and morality. These instruments of culture, moreover, served to order society into a clear hierarchy based on differences in status and age, as well as intellectual, moral, and physical capability (*Xunzi* 4/69). In this way, the ancients managed to preserve the harmony of society.

Xunzi’s apparent ambivalence towards the emotions is philosophically significant.²⁸ It enables Xunzi to put forth a more nuanced vision of the self than what has been put forth by previous thinkers – a vision that would also have profound consequences for the later development of thought and political ideology. At the most general level, what Xunzi lays out is a conception of self in which previously recognized polarities are brought together under a single vision. At its foundation is a kind of two-self theory: while Xunzi claims to speak of a single, universal human nature, rather than of different natures belonging to different types of people, he nevertheless seems to have two different types of people in mind. On the one hand, there is the ruler, who “fully realizes/enables the full realization of human *qing* (essential nature)” (Hutton 2000: 228), and whose earliest representatives – the ancient sage kings – were morally refined enough to come up with rituals and cultural models that could be used to assist others. On the other hand there is the common person, whose originally “bad” nature needs to be shaped and molded through artifice in order to be made good. Moral self-cultivation is signified by a passage or movement in which one’s nature of an ordinary person is transformed into that of a sage.

Xunzi proposes, then, a model of self that is capable of change. The trajectory of change is represented by the mediation of a set of inter-related polarities:

1. Nature versus artifice
2. Inner versus outer
3. Passiveness versus activeness
4. Emptiness versus fullness

²⁸A major concern in Puett’s scholarship on *qing* (as well as on the issue of creation, *zuo* 作) is the issue of ambivalence, which points to a deeper agenda to justify the creation and use of culture. See Puett 2004. On this see Puett 2001.

One aspect of this change is a movement from the inborn nature to a nature that has been refined through artificial conscious activity:

Without an inborn nature, there would be nothing for conscious activity to contribute to; if there were no conscious activity, the nature would not be able to better itself. When the nature and conscious activity are joined, then one lives up to the name of ‘Sage’ and the virtue of uniting all under Heaven is realized. (*Xunzi* 19.6; *ICS Xunzi* 19/95/1–2.)

The sage is the figure in whom the natural and acquired nature are brought together. Thus, the progression is not a movement from nature to artifice, but rather, from a raw state of nature (in which emotions and desires are spontaneously realized) to a refined state of nature, in which emotions and desires have been channeled in the proper direction.²⁹ The model is one of a balance of oppositions, and this balance characterizes not only human goals, but also the very workings of the cosmos, explaining the vorigin and proper ordering of all things:

Thus it is said that when Heaven and Earth join together, the myriad things are produced; when *yin* and *yang* converge, the changes and transformations are set into motion; and when the inborn nature and conscious activity are joined together, all under Heaven is put into order. Heaven is able to produce things, but it is not able to differentiate them; Earth is able to sustain people, but it is not able to order them; Those who count themselves among the creatures and living people under Heaven depend on sages to assign them to their proper station. (*Xunzi* 19.6; *ICS Xunzi* 19/95/2–4.)³⁰

A similar logic penetrates the dialectic between inner and outer realms of the self. According to *Xunzi*, human nature is fundamentally characterized by desire – a longing for things that makes the inborn nature liable to depart from the path of goodness:

People’s natural inclinations (*qing* 情) are such that for food they desire meat of grass- and grain-fed animals; for clothing they desire patterned and embroidered fabrics; and for traveling they desire horse and carriage. In addition to this they desire the wealth of extra funds and stored-up provisions so that even through extended periods of meager earnings they will not experience shortages. (*Xunzi* 4.11/*ICS Xunzi* 4/16/5–6.)

Human beings are invariably caught up in a mechanism of interdependence with the world of things and circumstances. This is what makes us, to a certain extent, passive and vulnerable to things. But this also makes us capable of positive change through our encounter with things. The solution, then, is not to reject this world of things, but to bring about a situation in which we are caught up in a positive relationship with it.

The *junzi* does not differ from others by birth; he is just good at borrowing (*jia* 假) from things. (*Xunzi* 1.3/*ICS Xunzi* 1/1/14–15.)

The *junzi* arranges (*she* 設) things; the petty man is arranged by things. (*Xunzi* 2.5; *ICS Xunzi* 2/6/12–13.)³¹

Although the goal is to cultivate ourselves in such a way that we remain open to things, we must do so without becoming completely transformed by them. And

²⁹ On *Xunzi*’s account of self-cultivation as a process of shaping and habituation new dispositions and desires, see Kline 2006.

³⁰ Borrowing Knoblock’s phrasing for *fen* 分.

³¹ Compare with similar statements in *Guanzi* 49, “Neiye,” 16.3a and *Zhuangzi* 20, 7.9a.

ultimately, just as sagehood is the ultimate end of self-cultivation, so it is that being active – rather than passive – remains the model of proper behavior. Making use of a political analogy, Xunzi explains that the senses are like the many government bureaus, each with its distinct function (*guan* 官), and within this system, “the heart-mind (*xin* 心) is the lord that controls the body just as the lord of men controls and governs (*jun* 君) society.” (*Xunzi* 17.3a/*ICS Xunzi* 17/80/10.)

Here, the heart-mind, as the ruler of the body, the interface between inner and outer, and the access point of the Way, represents the juncture of apparent oppositions. Its substance is characterized by both emptiness and fullness, which gives it autonomy and yet opens it to the possibility of activity and learning:

What do people use to know the Way? I say that it is the heart-mind. How does the heart-mind know? I say, through emptiness, oneness, and stillness. The heart-mind has never stopped storing, but nevertheless it has what is called emptiness. The heart-mind has never stopped being two, but nevertheless it has what is called oneness. The heart-mind has never stopped moving, but nevertheless it has what is called stillness. (*Xunzi* 21.5d/*ICS Xunzi* 21/103/25–26.)

Xunzi’s theory of mind thus affirms positive learning – learning that takes place through a consistent and ongoing process of accumulation (*ji* 積) that focuses on the knowledge and experience of external things achieved through one’s sense faculties. But because the mind is empty and unified, it is capable of a lifetime’s worth of learning without ever losing the upper hand in its relationship with things. And ultimately, one’s fate as an individual – whether one becomes a robber or an artisan or a farmer or a sage – depends on “the accumulated effect of circumstances.” Indeed, Xunzi claimed that “As for Yao and Yu, it was not that they were fully realized by birth; rather, they rose up by transforming themselves, completed themselves through self-cultivation and conscious activity, and only having exerted themselves did they become perfected” (*Xunzi* 4.10/*ICS Xunzi* 4/15/13–14.).

What Xunzi offers is a model of how moral change becomes possible through an intelligible process of practical self-cultivation. Xunzi’s view of emotions is an essential feature of his ethical vision of self, for the very moral ambivalence of the emotions allows him both to lay claims as to how people actually are, and to provide a more dynamic picture of how they are capable of change. But the moral significance of the emotions goes beyond this for Xunzi. At another level, positive emotions in the forms of pleasure and joy are also essential to his conception of the fully realized life. And it is in this aspect that Xunzi’s thought bears a strong resemblance to the ideas contained in the *Analects* of Confucius. If the emotional nature of ordinary people leads them away from the proper path of living, that of the sages is in perfect harmony with the Way, which is why “the sage follows his desires and is one with his feelings, but what regulates them is moral principle (*li* 理).” This is also why, in contrast to the person of humane principles, whose thought is “reverent” the thought of the sage is “joyous” (*le* 樂) (*Xunzi* 21/493-4). Cultivating one’s emotional nature in accordance with moral principles does not mean that one’s desires will be moderated or suppressed. Quite the contrary: it makes the very satisfaction of these desires possible. Thus, as for the *junzi*, who through learning has come to perfect himself:

“His eyes come to love it more than the five colors, his ears come to love it more than the five sounds, his mouth comes to love it more than the five flavors and his heart-mind benefits from everything in the world” (*Xunzi* 1.14/*ICS Xunzi* 1/4/18–19).³²

6 Conclusions

As I have endeavored to trace here, a central thread uniting the early tradition of Confucian thought was a shared recognition of human emotions and desires as a defining aspect of the human character, and an attempt to conceptualize morality as developing out of these emotions. How thinkers saw the link between emotions and morality varied in fundamental ways: if for Confucius and Mencius, a certain emphasis on genuineness of feeling and on the unity of inner and outer meant that the affective life offered a direct channel to moral understanding and engagement with the world, for Xunzi and the author of the *Xing Zi Ming Chu* the emotions implied, or necessitated, the creation of cultural forms that helped to guide the self along the proper path to sagehood. And by their very character, the emotions pointed to the existence of multiple oppositions within us all – between nature and artifice, inner and outer, passiveness and activeness, emptiness and fullness – which we traversed through our endeavor to cultivate and realize our human moral potential.

Based on our reading of all of these thinkers, we see that the early Confucian tradition – far from suppressing or rejecting the emotions – affirmed their importance as the very foundation and starting point of the proper life itself. We see, moreover, that this tradition was also united by a shared vision of the self as an entity that is in constant contact with the real things of the world, and that takes its direction from its encounters with these things. On both these points, early Confucian thinkers were in fundamental disagreement with the assumptions of its major critics, including the Mohists and, more significantly, the Daoists. A recurring theme in the *Daodejing* 道德經 is that emotions – particularly the desires (*yu* 欲) arising from the physical senses – undermine the ultimate human goal of achieving a state of total perceptual awareness of, and unity with, the Way. Thus the text repeatedly warns against the dangers of the senses:

The five colors make man’s eyes blind;
The five notes make his ears deaf;
The five tastes injure his palate. (*Daodejing* Ch. 12, Lau 1963: 68)

³²This passage has been significantly altered from Knoblock, who reads it as “His eye comes to love the five colors” etc., which is implausible given that Xunzi regards sensual pleasure as part of the inborn nature. It is much more likely that Xunzi is referring here to the new-found appreciation for learning in those who have fulfilled their human potential through self-cultivation. Michael Nylan elaborates at length upon Xunzi’s emphasis on pleasure as an end-product of self-cultivation. She notes how this concern was part of a larger discourse in Warring States/early Han thought in which the most prominent thinkers focused on the achievement of pleasure as “one of the best possible tools of persuasion to induce members of the ruling class to right action” as they conceived of it (Nylan 2001b: 73).

It also calls for the need to lesson one's desires: for "no crime is greater than having excessive sensual desire (*ke yu* 可欲)." (*Daodejing* Chap. 46, Lau 1963: 128)

More ambiguously, the "Inner Cultivation" (*Nei ye* 內業) chapter of the *Guanzi* describes sageliness as a state in which the natural completeness of the mind is allowed actualize its "inner reality" (*qing* 情). Here, the presence of emotions and desires is understood as disrupting our ideal state of quiescence (*jing* 靜), setting our lives in disorder (*luan* 亂) and undermining our ability to find contentedness (*huan* 歡) in life. In this case, however, the text does not simply denounce the emotions and the disturbances caused by them, but offers a way to join the realm of emotions with the higher faculty of perception by opening the possibility of managing the emotions constructively:

If joy and anger (*xi nu* 喜怒) are excessive,
Deal with them in a planned manner.
Moderate the five desires and get rid of the two violent emotions.
Be neither joyous nor angry, then equanimity and good judgment will fill your breast.
(*Guanzi* Ch. 36; Rickett 1998:12)

The goal is not simply to transcend the body and to eliminate all traces of emotions and desires, but to achieve a unity of body and mind so that one achieves a state of contentedness and happiness (*fu* 福) arising from a sense of ease and oneness within one's self. Accordingly, the sage is not simply one who possesses no desires, but is capable of cultivating himself in such a way that self-destructive emotions and desires can be eliminated.

What emerges from these competing accounts of the place of emotions and desires in moral life is an ongoing debate over what it means to be human. This controversy was deeply enmeshed in a host of other contemporary disputes over such enduring questions as the sources of morality and the proper norms by which to live; the nature of our relationship to things and to others; the meaning of kingship and statecraft; and the origins and function of culture. That early thinkers turned to the realm of emotions and desires in their search for answers reveals a deep fissure between two possible visions of self: one in which the individual possessed agency, control, and the power of self-determination versus one in which the self was subject to external influence and vulnerable to the motions of the external world. The implications of these alternatives for power are only too clear, and it was thus hardly a coincidence that during this time, when the knowledge of the body, moral psyche and the cosmos were being mapped onto a unified world picture, the reality of empire was just looming over the horizon.

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Chapter 10

Art and Aesthetics of Music in Classical Confucianism

Johanna Liu

1 Introduction

When we look into the classical Confucianism for its interest in art and aesthetics, what immediately comes to our attention is its emphasis on music and poetry, as shown in the fact that both the lost *Yuejing* 樂經 (*Classics of Music*) and the *Shijing* 詩經 (*Classics of Poetry*) were regarded as belonging to the six fundamental Confucian Classics, *liujing* 六經. It is also confirmed in the recently unearthed *Kongzi Shilun* 孔子詩論 (*Confucius on Poetry*) and the *Xing zi ming chu* 性自命出 (*Nature comes from Mandate*). This chapter will focus on the philosophical issues of music (*yue*) as discussed in the recently unearthed *Xing zi ming chu*, in reference to the *Yueji* 樂記 (“Record of Music”) chapter in the *Liji* 禮記 (*Book of Rites*).¹

Yue 樂, as one of the six arts (*liu yi* 六藝) pertaining to the classical training of Confucian scholars, has a rather ambiguous feature as to its theoretical status, especially when compared with *shi* (poetry). The difficulty consists not only in the historical fact that the *Classics of Music* was lost after the burning of books in Qin Dynasty, but also due to the complicated relationship between *yue* and *li* 禮 (ritual). Besides, on the linguistic and semantic level, the Chinese character *yue* 樂, which represents music, is endowed with the double pronunciations *yuelle* and the double meanings music/pleasure. The recently unearthed *Xing zi ming chu*, among other bamboo slips unearthed at Guodian 郭店, with a major treatise on *yue*, provides us with a new clue to re-think the aesthetic meaning of *yue* in classical Confucianism. This is the main purpose of this chapter. By the strategy of intertextuality, which is applicable to the reading and interpretation of text, the first part of this chapter will contrast the texts on *yue* in the *Xing zi ming chu* with other ancient texts in the *Liji* 禮記, the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (*Zuo’s Commentary on Spring and Autumn Annals*), the

¹The *Liji* has been translated by James Legge, titled as *Li Chi: Book of Rites* (Legge 1967b).

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Xunzi 荀子, the *Shiji* 史記 (*Record of the Grand Historian*), etc., to identify the problems to be re-defined and re-understood, such as the ideas of music pursued by Confucian scholars, the crisis produced by Zheng 鄭 and Wei 衛 music as new sounds and melodies criticized by the Confucians, the place of music in the self-cultivation of *junzi* 君子, etc. The second part of this chapter will focus on the aesthetic meaning of music by referring to the Confucian theory of *qing* 情 (sentiment, affection, situation), also based on the *Xing zi ming chu*, which has dealt with the in-depth relation between *yue* and *qing*.

2 Intertextuality and the Interpretation of *Xing zi ming chu*

The text entitled *Xing zi ming chu*, written on bamboo slips discovered at Guodian in 1993, has been considered by contemporary scholars to be one of the most important unearthed documents pertaining to the theory of music in pre-Qin Confucianism. Researchers could find, in its transcribed version established by the Jingmen 荊門 Museum and published by Wenwu 文物 Publisher in 1998, that one third of the text, distributed among 67 pieces of bamboo slips, is devoted to the discussion of music. It would be probably too rash to claim that a new theoretical understanding of classical Confucian music could be built upon this newly unearthed text, because of the fragmentary character of the text itself and the uncertainty of its authorship. Nevertheless, it undoubtedly provides us with at least a new view and a critical reflection on the insufficiency of the received theories, which have been based on other conventional texts that consider Confucian music mostly from its cultural ideological function in keeping peace and harmony in the society, rather than as an art with which people can enjoy more or less purely aesthetic value.

A comparative study of the similarity between the text of *Xing zi ming chu* and other known texts in the *Liji* and *Yueji*, the *Zhongyong* 中庸, the *Xunzi*, etc., has led many scholars to infer that the *Xing zi ming chu* could be attributed to the so called Si-Meng *Xuepai* 思孟學派 (Zisi 子思 and Mencius' 孟子 School). One of the contributions of this line of research consists in having traced some texts in the *Liji*, especially that of the *Yueji* chapter, back to the period of Warring States. It concerns also some problems involved in the debates between scholars of *jinwen* 今文 (New Text) and *guwen* 古文 (Old Text) about the authorship of the *Yueji*.²

The main focus of this chapter is not to get involved in the debate about the authenticity and authorship of these unearthed texts. Instead, the problem with

²In the compilation of the Five Classics of Confucianism, the theory of music was arranged in the *Liji* (*Book of Rites*). According to the explanation of *guwen* scholars, it was due to the disappearance of the *Yuejing* (*Classics of Music*) after Qin's fire. Nevertheless, according to *jinwen* scholars' understanding, a book on the theory of music never existed before. What have really existed were the documents on the rules of music sound. Since there is not enough documentary evidence to certify the original source of the texts in the *Yueji*, some scholars claimed that the *Yueji* was created by Han scholars and falsely attributed to Pre-Qin Confucians. Others claimed that the writer of *Yueji* was named Gongsun Ni 公孫尼, a Confucian scholar in the Spring and Autumn period. For detail see Cook 1995: 3–10.

which we are concerned is how to achieve an in-depth understanding of the aesthetic/artistic meaning of music (*yue*) in classical Confucianism, through the application of the reading strategy of intertextuality or intertextual analysis to the *Xing zi ming chu*. The term “intertextuality”³ was coined by Julia Kristeva in 1967 and later developed by Roland Barthes. According to Julia Kristeva, every text is “constructed as a mosaic of quotations,” and “absorption and transformation of another.” (Kristeva 1986: 37) Kristeva claims that reading is an on-going dialogue between the writing subject, the addressee (or ideal reader), and other exterior texts, and she suggests that the text be viewed by both horizontal and vertical axes, since “the word’s status is thus defined horizontally (the word in the text belongs to both writing subject and addressee) as well as vertically (the word in the text is oriented towards an anterior or synchronic literary corpus)” (Kristeva 1986: 36–37). Roland Barthes develops this idea of textual intersection and considers every text as the outcome of interconnection of cultural artifacts. He says,

One of the paths of this deconstruction-reconstruction is to permute texts, scraps of texts that have existed or exist around and finally within the text being considered: any text is an intertext; other texts are present in it, at varying levels, in more or less recognizable forms: the texts of the previous and surrounding culture. (Barthes 1981: 74)

That is to say, a text is never a solitary or isolated work done by an isolated writer, but a network of writings by quoting one text from another, or by alluding one text to another, through and by which a continual deferment of an idea or a meaning in a particular culture would be able to continue.

In view of the literary texts in Chinese classics, this type of intertextuality could be found almost everywhere since the time of Confucius, who claims that: “I transmit but do not innovate” (*Analects* 7.1, my translation). In this chapter, the study of *Xing zi ming chu* could be seen as a good example for decoding Chinese textual meaning by intertextual analysis, which takes the *Xing zi ming chu* as an interconnected body of cultural texts from both synchronic (horizontal) and diachronic (vertical) views. According to the results of scientific examination of all excavated relics in the Guodian Chu tomb, it is supposed that those bamboo slips and their writings were transcribed presumably no later than 300 BC, that is, in the middle-late period of Warring States. The owner of these scripts was supposed to be a Confucian scholar of Chu 楚,⁴ arguably a teacher of the crown prince Heng 橫, skilled at reading both Confucian Classics and Daoist texts, as evidenced by the co-existence of fragments related to both Zisi and Laozi 老子. Some parts of the unearthed texts, including the *Xing zi ming chu*, are apparently related to other Confucian Classics. Some scholars assume that the author was a follower of Zisi and Mencius. The text, supposed to have been used by the owner as teaching materials, could be viewed horizontally, as having a dialectic relation between addresser (compilers/teachers), addressee

³The word intertextuality was used by Julia Kristeva to explain the transposition in textual system. Cf. Kristeva, Julia. 1969. “Le mot, le dialogue et le roman.” *Recherches pour une sémanalyse*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil. P. 146. English translation as “Word, Dialogue and Novel.” *The Kristeva Reader*, edited by Toril Moi. Oxford: Blackwell. 1986.

⁴The owner of the tomb was presumably related to Chen Liang 陳良, a Confucian scholar, recorded in the *Mencius*.

(readers/students), and vertically, as interacting with previous texts and various forms of its contemporary cultures.

By contrasting the text on music in the *Xing zi ming chu* with other texts quoted from other Confucian Classics, or when alluded to in other texts, or otherwise in connection with the cultural form of the day, two main questions remain to be asked and examined: (1) What is the artistic meaning of music in classical Confucianism? (2) How is the aesthetic foundation of Confucian music related to the concept of *qing* 情 (sentiment)? Some other issues relevant to the Chinese aesthetic of music will also be discussed, such as the ideal of music that Confucian scholars were pursuing; the symbolic meaning of ritual music; the crisis of Zheng 鄭 and Wei 衛 music as new sounds and melodies criticized by early Confucians, and the place of music in the four ways of self-cultivating of a *junzi* 君子.

3 The Artistic Meaning of Music in Classical Confucianism

Generally speaking, the *Xing zi ming chu*, as one of the Confucian teaching materials, is an article in which we find major discussion of the means of self-cultivation to become a *junzi* by way of music, given that music is supposed to contain spiritual power that may have influence on the formation and transformation of human nature. In it, there is a particular paragraph that elucidates the educational role of music as one of the three arts by which the Sages teach the way of realization of the Dao in humans that allows them to get along harmoniously with all things. It reads,

The Dao is a way of getting along with all beings. The major concern of Dao consists in the art of mind. Among the four arts/ways to the Dao, only the Art/Way of being human is the way through which Dao could manifest itself. The other three arts/ways (e.g. the art of poetry, the art of history, and the art of ritual music [*liyue*]) are human ways of expressing the Dao. Poetry, history and ritual music, all these three are originally produced by human beings. Poetry is versed by capable persons, history is narrated by capable persons, ritual music is performed by capable persons. (*Guodian [Guodian Chu mu zhu jian] 1998: 179*)

Under my textual analysis, there are three points implied in this paragraph that deserve our attention:

1. Dao means the human Dao by which one is supposed to get along well with all beings, including those from Heaven, from Earth, and among people.
2. The ways of Dao contain two levels: human Dao and three arts (*san shu* 三術), including poetry (*shi* 詩), history (*shu* 書) and ritual music (*liyue* 禮樂).⁵
3. The three arts (*san shu*) are originally produced by those who are capable of carrying out the human Dao.

⁵According to the annotation by Li Ling, here “*dao si shu* 道四術” should be understood as consisting in four arts, say, art of mind, art of poetry, art of history and art of ritual music; whereas “*san shu*” (three arts) means, respectively, *shi* (poetry), *shu* (history), and *liyue* (ritual music). For the coherence of meanings, the two characters “*liyue* 禮樂” should be read together as one way/art, instead of being read separately as two different arts: art of *li* and art of *yue* (Li Ling 2002: 70).

Our further question now is how to understand the formational meaning of *liyue* in the context of Confucian culture. How should we understand the meaning of *liyue*: *li* of *yue*, or *yue* of *li*? What kind of music does the *liyue* refer to? Why do Confucian scholars emphasize the self-cultivating function of *liyue*? What have they learned from *liyue*? Furthermore, what is the artistic meaning of *liyue* from the viewpoint of Confucian aesthetics?

4 Religious Function of Ritual Music in Zhou Dynasty

It was an old tradition in Confucian culture to consider music as having a transforming power on the individual heart/mind and on social customs. Since Zhou Dynasty, music had been considered as one important topic in the educational curriculum including four disciplines for cultivating the sons of the royal family and eminent people selected from the State to be trained as prominent future leaders. In the *Liji* it was said in the chapter “On Royal Regulation” (*Wangzhi* 王制) that,

The (board for) the direction of Music gave all honour to its four subjects of instruction, and arranged the lessons in them, following closely the poems, histories, ceremonies, and music of the former kings, in order to complete its scholars.... The eldest son of the king and his other sons, the eldest son of all the feudal princes, the sons, by their wives proper, of high ministers, Great offices, and officers of the highest grade, and the eminent and select scholars from (all) the states, all repaired (to their instruction), entering the schools according to their years. (Legge 1967a: 232–233)

Also in Chap. VII, “King Wen as Son and Heir” (*Wenwang shizi* 文王世子), it was said that, “In the education of the crown princes adopted by the founders of the three dynasties, the subjects were the rules of propriety and music” (Legge 1967a: 349).

According to the chapter “Spring Ministry” (*Chunguan* 春官) in the book of *Zhouli* 周禮 (the *Rituals of Zhou*), it was the director of music (*dasiyue* 大司樂) who took charge of the school of grand studies (*chengjun* 成均), and taught the heir-sons and the young generations the six ways of music performance with ethical values,⁶ that is, centrality, harmony, respect, moderation, piety, and friendship, and taught them the six artistic forms of musical language, that is, figurativeness (*xing* 興), discourse (*dao* 道), ironic (*feng* 諷), narrative (*song* 頌), speech (*yang* 言), and wording (*yu* 語). After they became capable of performing music with ethical values and expressing music in various forms of musical language, the heir-sons and eminent young scholars were taught the six pieces of ritual dance inherited from previous dynasties: *Cloud Gate* (*Yunmen* 雲門) and *Grand Scroll* (*Dajuan* 大卷), *Grand Concord* (*Daxian* 大咸), *Grand Shao* (*Dashao* 大韶), *Grand Majesty* (*Daxia* 大夏),

⁶According to the commentary of Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 BC), quoted by Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200) in his annotations on *Liji*, the meaning of *dezhe* 德者 could be understood as the person capable to perform. Here I follow Zheng Xuan’s commentary that understands the *yuede* 樂德 as a way of music performance.

Grand Exaltation (*Dahuo* 大濩), and *Grand Warrior* (*Dawu* 大武) (see *Zhouli*).⁷ The objective of teaching the heir-sons to play short flute and string music and to perform the various kinds of ritual dance consisted in cultivating their capacity to conduct ceremonies with ritual music, rather than to become professional musicians such as vocalists, instrumentalists, or composers, all these roles often being played by the so-called *gu meng* 瞽矇 (the blind).

As to the value of music, what has been stressed in the *Zhouli* and *Liji* was its religious function in the rituals of sacrificial offering, such as the sacrifice to Heaven and Earth offered by Son of Heaven, that to the spirits of the land and grains by princes of the states, and the five sacrifices of the house offered by great officers.⁸ All ceremonies of offerings were accompanied by performances of different kinds of ritual music, songs, and dances.⁹ The six pieces of ritual dance are accompanied by the ritual music of the six dynasties in ancient China. As with other ancient civilizations in the world, the complete repertoires of their music performance were lost, but in China some textual descriptions of the titles, the performances, and the religious and social-political functions of its ancient ritual music still remained and could be read in some texts in the *Zuozhuan*, the *Analects*, the *Liji*, the *Zhouli*, the *Guoyu* 國語, the *Lü shi chun qiu* 呂氏春秋, etc., which could still serve as textual evidence revealing to us a certain idea about the function of music in pre-Qin China.

Apparently, in referring to the above texts, the *Xing zi ming chu*'s mention of watching the ritual dances of *Lai* 賚 and *Wu* 武, *Shao* 韶 and *Xia* 夏, could be understood as dealing with and manifesting the religious value of ritual music from an aesthetics point of view. As it reads,

In watching the dance of Lai and that of Wu, there arises a feeling of being well arranged in order. In watching the dance of Shao and that of Xia, there arises a sense of beauty of simplicity. (*Guodian*: 180)¹⁰

Now we can be sure that, in classical Confucian education, learning ritual music, for the heir-sons, is different from learning music for self-entertainment and for passing leisure time. For them, the purpose of learning music is to cultivate their spiritual sensibility, with heavy aesthetic and ethical implications, to the revealing of Heaven, Earth, and ancestors, through their training in the art of sounds. This means the religious function of ritual music has its aesthetic foundation in the human mind, as expressed by the word “*qing*” in the *Xing zi ming chu*. Before we

⁷Cf. “Spring Ministry with the Overseer of Ritual Affairs” (*Chunguan Zongbo* 春官宗保) in the *Zhouli* (1815).

⁸Cf. “Royal Regulation” in the *Book of Rites*, “The son of Heaven sacrificed to Heaven and Earth; the princes of the states, to the (spirits of the) land and grain; Great officers offered the five sacrifices (of the house)” (Legge 1967a: 225).

⁹Cf. “Spring Ministry” (*Chunguan*) in the *Zhouli* (1815).

¹⁰I translate this passage in reference to Confucius' words about Shao and Wu in the *Analects* translated by James Legge: “the Master said of the *Shao* that it was perfectly beautiful and also perfectly good. He said of the *Wu* that it was perfectly beautiful but not perfectly good.” (*Analects* 3.25; Legge 1960: 164).

discuss in more detail the relation between music and *qing*, we have to review briefly the shift of musical value in Confucian thought from religious function to more humanistic concerns.

5 The Confucian Idea of Music as a Way of Self-Cultivation to be an Integral Person

Along with the collapse of Zhou aristocracy and the rise of various schools of thought in the periods of late Spring and Autumn and early Warring States, the right to receive education was no longer the privilege of royal family members. In this process, the value of music in the cultivation of the human heart/mind degenerated. For example, the *Laozi* emphasized the quietness and silence of Nature, and claimed that too many sounds (five tones) would make people deaf. In the *Mozi* 墨子 we find a chapter that criticizes music and there we read the claim that indulgence in the pleasure of music was a cause of corruption. Among various intellectual schools, classical Confucianism was the only school that kept the traditional idea of education and put the emphasis on the important cultural meaning of music. Confucius himself was a man of music; he used to sing, play musical instruments such as *qing* 磬, *qin* 琴 and *se* 瑟, and he even knew how to compose a piece of musical work.¹¹ He had put to right order the repertoires of music for the Odes, and corrected their tones after his trip from Wei 衛 back to Lu 魯.¹² He had discussed issues related to the performance of music with the Grand Music Master of Lu saying, “How to play music may be known. At the commencement of the piece, all the parts should sound together. As it proceeds, they should be in harmony while severally distinct and flowing without break, and thus on to the conclusion” (*Analects* 3.23).

Confucius taught his disciples music as one of the six arts, and considered music an essential element in the completion of cultivation of a *junzi* or a condition *sine qua non* of a complete (integral) person.¹³

¹¹ In the *Qin Cao* 琴操 (a collection of ancient tunes of *qin*), Cai Yong 蔡邕 (132–192 CE) noted that Confucius composed the *Yilan Cao* 猗蘭操 (Tune of Elegant Orchid) to convey his poetic mood, on the returning road from Wei to his native state Lu, when he passed a hidden vale and observed a fragrant orchid flourishing alone (see Cai Yong 2002: 147). In the *Analects*, Confucius played the *qing* 磬 (a sounding stone) while traveling in Wei. It is read, “The Master was playing, 1 day, on a musical stone in Wei when a man, carrying a straw basket, passed door of the house where Confucius was, and said, “His heart is full who so beats the musical stone” (*Analects* 14. 40).

¹² Confucius said, “I returned from Wei to Lu, and then the music was reformed, and the pieces in the royal songs and praise songs all found their proper places” (*Analects* 9.15).

¹³ Confucius said, “It is by the odes that the mind is aroused. It is by the rules of propriety that the character is established. It is from music that the finish is received” (*Analects* 8.8). In answering Zilu’s question about a complete person, Confucius said, “suppose a man with the knowledge of Zang Wu-Zhong, the freedom from covetousness of Gong Chuo, the bravery of Bian Zhuang Zi, and the varied talents of Ran Qiu; add to these the accomplishments of the rules of propriety and music; such a one might be reckoned a complete man” (*Analects* 14.12).

Music, considered as essential to the formation of a complete (integral) person, did not consist merely in musical performance such as playing an instrument, but in the realization, through music, of the human Dao, i.e., the virtue of humanity (*ren*), without which music, as an art of sound, would become meaningless. Confucius said: “If a man be without the virtues proper to humanity, what has he to do with music?” (*Analects* 3.3) Only with the human Dao of *ren*, would music become properly a human art of playing with sound, and thereby the following question, proposed by Confucius himself, would have the possibility of finding an answer: “Ritual, ritual, does it mean no more than gems and silk? Music, music, does it mean no more than bells and drums?” (*Analects* 17.11)

Basically, this question touched upon a crucial problem in Chinese aesthetics of music, and would prompt a series of questions on the essence and existence of music as an art. How could the sounds of bells and drums be musical and be considered as belonging to the art of music? If the answer is that their sounds are produced merely by the performance of a musician, then, what kind of music player could be considered a musician-artist? If the answer is that those who know how to play bells and drums and perform in a way that is proper to music, then the question will turn back to the original question: What is music? Who is a musician?

In contemporary Western philosophy, Martin Heidegger has taken “the Coming of Being/Truth in things” as the starting point for answering questions on the origin of a work of art (Heidegger 1971: 17–76). In comparison, classical Confucians would take a different approach than the ontological one taken by Martin Heidegger in answering these questions. They took an ethico-aesthetic approach to consider the artistic value of “music” and “musician.” For example, the passage on the origin of music in the “Record of Music,”¹⁴ emphasized the moral relation between music and the human mind, rather than the technique of composing the sounds in music. Thus only *junzi* can understand the profound meaning of music as art. It read,

All modulations of sound take their rise from the mind of man; and music is the intercommunication of them in their relations and differences. Hence, even if beasts know sound, but they know not its modulations; and masses of the common people know the modulations, but they do not know music. It is only the superior man who can (really) know music. (Legge 1967b: 95)

In Confucian thought, music should always go along with the practice of *li* (ritual, propriety). Anyone who is good at musical sounds, but not familiar with *li*, won't deserve the name of a good musician, that is, a musician as a complete (integral) person. This is illustrated by a story that was told about Kui 夔, who was reputed at the practice of musical sounds, but there was a rumor that he had only one leg

¹⁴Before the discovery of the unearthed bamboo slips, “The Record of Music,” compiled in Western-Han as a document of Confucian lineage, has been considered as the unique clue to the understanding of Confucian thought on music. For example, Xu Fuguan, in his *Zhongguo yishu jingshen* (*On Spirit of Chinese Art*), contributed a chapter to investigate the spirit of Confucian thought on art through music, where he claimed that the theory of music in the “Record of Music” transmitted the legacy of Confucian thought on music that highly valued the relation between morality (Xu Fuguan 1966: 12).

(*yizu* 一足). Duke Ai of Lu 魯哀公 doubted it and went to ask Confucius. Confucius explained that Kui was not a person with one leg, but a man who was capable only of playing sounds, which was insufficient, or one-legged (*zu* 足) in metaphor, for a good musician. That is to say Kui is merely sufficient (*zu* 足) as a musician, not a “good” musician.¹⁵

In a dialogue on the virtue of *li*, during Confucius’ leisure time at home, Zi Gong 子貢 asked a similar question about whether Kui was a good musician. Confucius explained, “To be versed in the ceremonial usages, and not versed in music, we call being poorly furnished. To be versed in music, and not versed in the ceremonial usages, we call being one-sided. Now Khuei [Kui] was noted for his acquaintance with music, and not for his acquaintance with ceremonies, and therefore his name has been transmitted with the account of him (which your question implies)” (Legge 1967b: 275–276).

It is clear then, for Confucius, Kui was a man who knew enough musical sounds and performed music well, but his one-sided knowledge was not enough for him to become a good musician in the sense of having a real knowledge of music as completing his human personality.

6 *Qing* as the Aesthetic Foundation of Confucian Music

The purpose of learning music was not merely to know musical sounds, but, more than that, to cultivate the capacity of realizing human Dao in its completeness. The humanistic meaning of music is therefore based on the Confucian theory of self-cultivation, which now gradually takes on a more significant role than its religious function.

In the *Xing zi ming chu*, the cultivation of music as an art should go along with the cultivation of *li* 禮 (rule of propriety), *shi* 詩 (poetry), and *shu* 書 (History), considered as the *san shu* 三術 (three arts), constituting thereby an integral way of orientating toward the human Dao. By learning *shi*, *shu*, *liyue* 禮樂, the ability of *junzi* would gradually develop under the teaching of the Sages, which consisted in the formation of a complete (integral) human ability of unifying all things by analogy, learning lessons from observing the sequence of things, measuring human activities by examining the righteousness of will, and ordering human feelings in receiving them in and in expressing them out (*Guodian*: 178).¹⁶ The ability was obtained from the training of *shi*, *shu*, *liyue* functions as a whole, without neglecting one or the other, no matter by way of *san shu* (three arts) or *liu yi* (six arts). It makes

¹⁵This story can be found in the *Han Feizi jijie* 韓非子集解 (*The Collected Annotations of Han Feizi*) *juan*12: 33 “Waichu Shuo Zuo Xia 外儲說左下” (Wang Xiangshen 1896: 465).

¹⁶With different translation on the text of this passage, Michael Puett makes a comment with pedagogical meaning of the learning the *san shu*: “The sages took the worthy traditions from the past, organized them, patterned (*li*) their *qing*, and thereby made them available to educate the latter-born” (Puett 2004: 50).

sense that in the *Xing zi ming chu*, the emphasis on music's value in self-cultivation in no way neglected its relation with poetry (ability of using language), with ritual propriety, and with history.

According to the *Xing zi ming chu*, the realization of human Dao should start from cultivating the ability of feeling (*qing* 情). The *Xing zi ming chu* said: "The Dao begins with *qing* (*dao shi yu qing* 道始於情)" (*Guodian*: 179). As Tang Yijie 湯一介 has well pointed out, "It makes sense to say 'dao begins with *qing*' rather than 'dao arises from *qing*,' because *dao* exists from the start on account of human *qing* rather than emerging out of *qing*" (Tang 2003: 271). Tang Yijie explains in his notes that, "This is not to say that it cannot emerge at all, for it can also emerge out of rationality or study" (Tang 2003: 279).

Most of scholars' discussions on *qing* in the Confucian classics focus on the status of *qing*, referring generally to the various psychological forms of emotion, such as the seven *qings* (joy, anger, sadness, fear, love, disliking, liking) in the *Liji*,¹⁷ or the six *qings* (likes and dislikes, delights and angers, grieves and joys) in the *Xunzi*,¹⁸ in the context of their ethical discussions about the relation between the human mind (*xin* 心) and human nature. The explanation of the moral function of *xi* 喜 (pleasure), *nu* 怒 (anger), *ai* 哀 (sorrow), *le* 樂 (joy) in the *Zhongyong*,¹⁹ and the annotations on the concept of *zhonghe* 中和 (equilibrium and harmony) in Zhu Xi's 朱熹 *Zhongyong Zhangju* 中庸章句 (*Commentaries on Chapters and Sentences in the Zhongyong*) have well provided us with the ethical model of interpreting the meaning of human affectivity (*qing*), but unfortunately all of them have left the aesthetic dimension of feeling untouched. However, this aesthetic dimension is always there in the creativity of poetry and music, and also, we should say, it exists vividly in the daily life of all people.

The interpretation of *qing* in the *Xing zi ming chu*, following the *Zhongyong*, has also laid the foundation of feeling (*qing*) on human nature (*xing* 性),²⁰ but its emphasis was put on the aesthetic function of *qing* in its expression through *yue/le* (music/pleasure) and *li* (ritual/propriety). In the *Xing zi ming chu*, the term "*qing*" is understood as the beginning of openness to the other in terms of "all things," and "*yi*" as the ending, the final fulfillment, toward which human feeling tends; and "those who understand feeling can express it properly, and those who understand *yi* can realize it in oneself properly" (*Guodian*: 179).

In short, according to the Confucian tradition, the learning of music and ritual propriety is to cultivate the capacity of a complete person as to his/her aesthetic

¹⁷"What are the feelings of men? They are joy, anger, sadness, fear, love, disliking, liking. These seven feelings belong to men without their learning them" (Legge 1967a: 379).

¹⁸It is read in the "Rectifying Names" (*Zhengming* 正名) chapter in the *Xunzi*: "The likes and dislikes, delights and angers, grieves and joys of the nature are called emotions" (Watson 1963: 139).

¹⁹"While there are no stirrings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, or joy, the mind may be said to be in the state of Equilibrium. When those feelings have been stirred, and they act in their due degree, there ensues what may be called the state of Harmony" (Legge 1960: 384).

²⁰"*Qing* arises from *xing* (*qing sheng yu xing* 情生於性)" (*Guodian*: 179).

feeling, which is rooted in human affectivity (*qing*), to be integrated with his/her moral feeling and religious sentiment, which are expressed through *yi* 義 and *li* 禮.

7 The Aesthetic Dimension of *yue/le* in the *Xin zi ming chu*

Apart from its ethical function in Confucian culture, music, together with the ritual propriety with which it operates, has an aesthetic dimension as well. This consists in the pleasure (*le*) obtained by a sympathetic feeling that is able to share the world of other people by apprehending various affections communicated through sounds produced by other people.

7.1 Sounds and Music, Music/Pleasure and Ritual Propriety

The “Record of Music” said that “music produces pleasure;— what the nature of man cannot be without” (Legge 1967b: 127). Enjoying the art of music by singing songs, playing musical instruments, or simply listening to a beautiful melody, is the common aesthetic experience of music among people. A famous story about Confucius studying the Chinese lute from Shi Xiangzi 師襄子 tells us that for Confucius, the aesthetic pleasure of music as art does not consist only in the rhythm and melody, or only in playing with the mathematically intelligible structure of sounds, but, more so, in the existential meaningfulness conveyed through the sounds of the music, understood in a humanistic way.²¹ This does not mean that the Confucian theory of music has neglected the embodiment of music in sounds. On the contrary, it claims that only those who know sounds are able to talk about music and understand it. The “Record of Music” said, “Hence with him who does not know the sounds we cannot speak about the airs, and with him who does not know the airs we cannot speak about the music” (Legge 1967b: 95).

²¹ Cf. Sima Qian 1967: Book 47: “Confucius studied [the tunes of] *qin* from Shi Xiangzi. For 10 days [Confucius] did not advance. Shi Xiangzi said, you may go on studying more. Confucius said, I have learned the *qu* 曲 (melody) [of this tune] but I haven’t get the *shu* 數 (mathematic structure). Later [Shi Xiang Zi] said, you have learned the structure you may go on. But Confucius said, I haven’t learned the *zhi* 志 (ideal/poetic meaning). Later [Shi Xiangzi] said, you have learned the ideal/poetic meaning, you may go on. But Confucius said, I have not yet got the demeanour of the author. Later, getting a feeling of a person characterized by majesty with profound thoughts, a gentle, venerable person but with lofty ideal, [Confucius] said, I learned the demeanour of the author, it was someone of very dark appearance, large in size and looking far off at the sea, like the king of four countries. If it isn’t Wen Wang, who else could it be? Shi Xiangzi stood up, bowed and said, the tune you were talking is exactly the *Wen Wang Cao* 文王操.” This narrative can be read also in *Hanshi waizhuan*, *juan* 5 and in *Kongzi Jiayu* 孔子家語 (*The school sayings of Confucius*) Chap. 35 *Bianyue* 辯樂解 (Explanation about Music). The *Jiayu* has been proved as authentic rather than pseudographic after the unearthed documents excavated in China since 1970s. For example, see Li Xueqin (1987).

Through the aesthetic feeling produced by musical experience, a human being is given access to various kinds of pleasure in sounds as well as in music, and enjoys the experience of values revealed through them. The *Xing zi ming chu* has vividly described the variety of pleasures in the aesthetic experience of listening, such as listening to the sound of laughter that makes one feel lively and happy; in hearing the ballad, which makes one feel contented and excited; in listening to the melody of *qin* and *se*, when a profound feeling of praise is inspired; in watching the dance of Lai and the dance of Wu, when there arises a feeling of being well arranged in order; in watching the dance of Shao and the dance of Xia, when there arises a sense of beauty of simplicity.²²

The pleasure obtained from sounds can stay no longer than the echo of laughter in the air; whereas the pleasure obtained from a musical melody will last as long as it resounds in one's own mind/heart. The experience of Confucius in hearing the music of Shao in Qi State makes him ignore the taste of meat for 3 months (*Analects* 7:14). This is a typical aesthetic experience of musical art.

Concerning the relation between the aesthetic pleasure of music and the self-cultivation of a *junzi*, the *Xing zi ming chu* pointed out that learning spiritual pleasure through music would be the faster way to reform one's heart.²³ The longer the mind keeps the spiritual pleasure of music, the more serious it would be in returning to its own original good nature and its original *qing*, and the more smoothly it would be in expressing outward and in receiving inward. This is the way of realizing one's virtue (see *Guodian*: 180).

One of the meanings of connecting *li* with *yue* consists in the fact that the practice of ritual propriety should be realized with spiritual pleasure in heart/mind, given that the true meaning of *li* is based on the feeling of respect. In daily life, sincere smiling is enough to display the pleasure of heart/mind in the friendly exchange of agreeable words. As to the diplomatic meeting among states or nations, a concert in the state or national banquet represents the magnificence of the diplomatic rituals. We need not mention again the pious feeling in the performance of ritual music during the sacred offerings in a temple. Therefore, it makes sense for the *Xing zi ming chu* to claim that "smiling is the superficial side of ritual propriety, whereas music/spiritual joy is the deep side of ritual propriety" (*guodian*: 180).

Confucius once described the presentation of music in diplomatic courtesy and explained the symbolic function of music performed in the diplomatic ceremony during the visit of a ruler. This happened in Confucius' leisure time at home, after

²²"When you hear singing and chanting, you will feel jovial. This is excitement. When you listen to the sounds of the lute and zither, you will feel stirred. This is distress. When you watch the Lai and Wu dances, you will feel confrontational. This is being incited. When you watch the Shao and Xia dances you will feel focused. This is frugality" (*Guodian*: 180; translation in Brindley 2006b: 25, 28–29).

²³"In general the difficult thing about learning is 'seeking one's heart-mind.' If one follows from what one has done, one is close to obtaining it, but it is not comparable to the speed with which music achieves the same end" (*Guodian*: 180; translation in Brindley 2006a: 248).

he had talked to his disciples Zizhang 子張, Zigong 子貢 and Yan You (言游 or Ziyou 子游), on the value of *li*.

When one ruler is visiting another ruler, they bow to each other, each courteously declining to take the precedence, and then enter the gate. As soon as they have done so, the instruments of music, suspended from their frames, strike up. They then bow and give place to each other again, and ascend to the hall, and when they have gone up, the music stops. In the court below, the dances Hsiang and Wu are performed to the music of the flute, and that of Hsia proceeds in due order with (the brandishing of feathers and) fifes. (After this), the stands with their offerings are set out, the various ceremonies and musical performances go on in regular order, and the array of officers provided discharge their functions. In this way the superior man perceives the loving regard (which directs the entertainment). They move forward in perfect circles; they return and form again the square. The bells of the equipages are tuned to the Khai-khi [采齊]; when the guest goes out they sing the Yung [雍]; when the things are being taken away, they sing the Khan-yu; and thus the superior man (sees that) there is not a single thing for which there is not its proper ceremonial usage. (Legge 1967b: 274–275)

In reading Confucius' detailed description of the diplomatic courtesy and music performance in the court today, we still can feel the magnificence of *li* and *yue* in ancient China. The focus of Confucius was the symbolic function of music in showing cultivated good feeling, virtue and historical knowledge, as the text goes on to say,

The striking up of the instruments of metal, when they enter the gate, serves to indicate their good feeling; the singing of the Khing Miao [清廟], when they have gone up to the hall, shows the virtue (they should cultivate); the performance of the Hsiang to the flute in the court below, reminds them of events (of history). Thus the superior men of antiquity did not need to set forth their views to one another in words; it was enough for them to show them in their music and ceremonies. (Legge 1967b: 274)

7.2 *Music, Qing, and the Sentiment of Grief*

It is by the aesthetic feeling, i.e. the sense of beauty, and the moral feeling, i.e. the sentiment of respect, that superior men of antiquity could set forth their views and communicate with each other without the necessity of using verbal language. That is why the *Xing zi ming chu* says, “Being in trust without saying a word are those who have the sense of beauty” (*Guodian*: 181).

The temporary pleasure brought about by the musical sounds is not enough to carry on the formation of an individual's virtues and a group of people's ethos. There is no need to say it is not good enough for the good governance of a country. Confucius' criticism of the songs of Zheng and Wei was in the context of his reply to Yan Yuan's question on the government of a State. For the purpose of serving as Music of a State, Confucius recommended the dance of Shao and he alerted rulers to keep away from the sounds of Zheng, due to the latter's excessive indulgence in the pleasures of sounds, which was unqualified to serve in the ritual ceremony in a temple or in the court (*Analects* 15.11). It seems that Confucius didn't deny the

cognitive value of the sounds of Zheng that revealed a local people's ethos. What made Confucius discontented was the mixture of the court music of *ya* with the popular music of Zheng (*Analects* 17.18).

Although the purely melodic aspect of music is not enough to be qualified for being performed in the sacred ritual, as music of *ya* is thus qualified, it is still quite practical for the training of musical skill of an instrumentalist or vocalist. That is why the *Xing zi ming chu* says, "The ancient music is good for mind/heart, and the new sounds are good for the fingers, both are for the cultivation of the people" (*Guodian*: 180).

Along with its affirmation of the aesthetic value of music, *Xing zi ming chu* did not ignore the aesthetic quality of the feeling of grief. In this sense it is quite different from Zi Zhang who took grief and joy as belonging to two separate categories of crying and music: "to grief, there belong crying and tears; to joy, songs and dancing" (*Zuozhuan*: 708). By contrast, the *Xing zi ming chu* considered pleasure and grief as a pair of feelings that produce each other: "The extreme development of music/pleasure accompanies itself certainly with grief. Crying, with grief, too. All of them touch human feelings" (*Guodian*: 180).

The aesthetic pleasure produces a sense of openness to other people's joy, whereas the feeling of grief produces a sympathetic feeling for other people's sorrow. The sound of crying expresses the feeling of grief as well as that of pleasure. It is only in the highest form of music that brings the highest pleasure that one would be able to convey a comprehensive feeling of sympathy capable of discerning various states of mind from sounds produced by other people. The human mind tends to play with various kinds of sounds, in which crying is but one kind of decipherable sound among others. Moreover, the great music conveys the sentiment of sadness, similar to the sound of crying. And the great pleasure in music will not be separated from the sentiment of sadness. That is to say, the sentiment of grief, as the deepest feeling (*qing*) of the human heart/mind, plays an important role with a primary value in the aesthetics of Chinese music since the pre-Qin period.²⁴

However, the extreme happiness in the heart/mind of a *junzi* caused by a melody with the sentiment of grief has nothing to do with the psychological emotions, which are changing all the time with the transient process of myriad things. It refers rather to the *qing*, the ability of human *dao*, inherent to the heart/mind of a *junzi*. The following passage in the *Wuxing Pian* 五行篇 (*The Five Actions*) reveals the deep concern of the grief embodied in *junzi*'s mind. "While I do not see *junzi*, my grief heart cannot but agitated. Now that I have seen *junzi*, my heart cannot be but happy" (*Guodian*: 149). This passage is followed by the verses quoted from the *Shijing*, "While I do not see *junzi*, my grieved heart is agitated. Now that I have seen this *junzi*, my heart cannot be happy [like others]" (Legge 1960: IV. 23–24). This song is an *air* of the *Zhaonan* 昭南 chapter in the *Shijing*, singing on the ascent of the southern hill for the gathering of ferns, when one is surrounded by the sounds of grass-insects and the leaping of grass-hoppers. The song should be happy, evoking

²⁴The discussion on the primary value of sadness in the aesthetics of Chinese music, see Egan 1997: 5–66.

delightful images of the excursion and a sense of love and satisfaction. However, paradoxically, the song also transmits a mood of grief to the audience. According to the commentary of Confucian tradition, for example in the *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳 (*Outer Commentary to the Classics of Poetry by Han Ying*),²⁵ the grief conveyed in this poem is an allegory of the sorrowful feeling of a *junzi* who is worried about the lack of discontentment in his daily life full of pleasurable satisfaction. In the *Hanshi waizhuan*, Confucius says that a *junzi* has three kinds of grief: the lack of knowing, the lack of learning caused by self-contented knowledge, and the lack of action after learning.²⁶ His saying “not seeing a *junzi*” does not only mean the missing of someone who is away and absent, but the missing of someone who lacks the sentiment of grief, which is necessary for being a *junzi*. In short, the didactic function of music has its ground in its cultivation of the *qing* of the human heart/mind, which operates with the dialectic interaction between *yue/le* (happiness) and *bei* (grief).

8 The Ethico-aesthetic Theory of Chinese Music and the “Record of Music”

The problems of authorship and time of composition have been issues of long debate among scholars. Nevertheless, most contemporary scholars have now agreed that the *Yueji* (Record of Music) chapter in the *Liji* was compiled in Western Han by Liu De 劉德, Mao Chang 毛萇 and other Han Confucian scholars, therefore much later than the period of classical Confucianism and should not be our main concern in this chapter.²⁷ However, since it has been claimed by scholars to be an important Confucian work on music, we will say a few words about it here at the end of this essay. In continuity with the *Xing zi ming chu*, the *Yueji* emphasized the educational, political, and moral function of music as based on the relation between *qing* and *yue*. The statements such as “the *yue/le* 樂 (music/pleasure) is something unchangeable of *qing* 情” (Legge 1967b: 114; translation modified);²⁸ “to go to the very root of [the things] and know the changes [which they undergo] is the *qing* (sentiment/

²⁵The *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳, attributed to Han Ying 韓嬰 (active. 200–130 BC), was one of the four schools (Mao 毛, Lu 魯, Qi 齊, Han 韓) of *Odes* learning in Han dynasty. The *Hanshi waizhuan* was the longest surviving document of the *Odes* interpretation outside the tradition of the *Maoshi* 毛詩.

²⁶Cf. *Hanshi waizhuan*, *juan* 1: 18. This paragraph has been literally translated by James Robert Hightower: “Confucius said, ‘The superior man has three worries: That he does not know—can he not but worry? That he knows but does not study [what he knows]—can he not but worry? That he studies but does not practice what he has studied—can he not but worry? The Ode says: When I have not yet seen the superior man./My sorrowful heart is very sad’” (Hightower 1952: 26).

²⁷Concerning the studies on the problem of the authorship and the time of composition of the *Yueji*, see Scott Cook (1995: 3–10).

²⁸James Legge translated this passage with a different interpretation: “In music we have the expression of feelings which do not admit of any change” (James Legge 1967b: 114).

essence) of pleasure in music (*le/yue*)” (Legge 1967b: 114; translation modified); all indicate the essential role of *qing* for understanding the meaning of music. Today, it is arguable to state that the *Yueji*, as a representative work of Han Confucian scholars, has integrated various pre-Qin schools’ thoughts on music, including Daoism, Legalism, Mohism, Yin-yang School and Miscellaneous School, into Confucian thoughts to establish its own theory of music (Cai Zhongde 2003: 252). This syncretistic discourse on the origin of music, on the relation between rites and music, on the cultural function of music, has been an undeniable contribution to the ethico-aesthetic theory of Chinese music in the Confucian tradition.

On the one hand, the *Yueji* follows Confucius’ thought in taking music as an ideal way to self-cultivation, to improving quality of state governance, and rectifying the folklore customs; indeed an ideal way of pursuing a happy life that embodies the aesthetic value of music/ritual music in basing it on moral righteousness. On the other hand, it follows Xunzi’s thought on music in epitomizing his theory and in quoting a lengthy text directly from the *Yuelun* 樂論 (Treatise on Music) chapter from the *Xunzi*, to explain how musical sounds penetrate into the human mind with deep moral affections and political consequences. From Mohism, it adopts the criticism of the decadent music of Zheng and Wei in order to propose a theory on the mutual communication between musical sounds and quality of governance. For example, it says, “The airs of Zheng and Wei were those of an age of disorder, showing that those states were near such an abandoned condition. The airs near the river Pu, at the mulberry forest, were those of a state going to ruin. The government (of Wei) was in a state of dissipation, and the people were unsettled, calumniating their superiors, and pursuing their private aims beyond the possibility of restraint” (Legge 1967b: 94). Since the airs of Zheng and Wei allude to a kind of decadent life, therefore they are not suitable to serve as State Music. That’s why when Yan Yuan asked how the government of a country should be administered, Confucius advised, “Let the music be the Shao with its pantomimes. Banish the songs of Zheng, and keep far from specious talkers. The songs of Zheng are licentious; specious talkers are dangerous” (*Analects* 17.11).

Thus the Confucian concept of music does not confine itself to the perception of fluency of melody, but sees in it the pursuit of the ideal state of harmony, including the cosmological harmony between Heaven and Earth, moral harmony between heaven and the human heart/mind, and political harmony between individuals and society. In this sense, the role of *qing* playing on the level of emotions should be transformed and harmonized through music in order to purify the desiring heart. Thus the *Yueji* says, “Hence the superior man returns to the (good) affections (proper to his nature) in order to bring his will into harmony with them, and compares the different qualities (of actions) in order to perfect his conduct” (Legge 1967b: 112). Thus the emphasis is put on the aspect of social harmony rather than on the aspect of art. The *Yueji* says, “Therefore, when the music has full course, the different relations are clearly defined by it; the perceptions of the ears and eyes become sharp and distinct; the action of the blood and physical energies is harmonious and calm; (bad) influences are removed, and manners changed; and all under heaven there is entire repose” (Legge 1967b: 112).

9 Conclusion

It is a common sense to say that, in general, Chinese culture as defined by classical Confucianism and reputed as a *liyue* culture, has always put its emphasis on the educational function of music in forming individual moral characters and people's ethos. Most of the discussions on music in ancient Confucian documents have been focused on the educational and ethical effect of music, especially in emphasizing the grandiose music of *ya*. In this historical and ideological context, the newly unearthed *Xing zi ming chu* shows us a very interesting example, in which we find a continuity of the same Confucian stereotypical idea that considers music as one of the three arts (*san shu*), as an important way of realizing human Dao. This represents the mainstream ideas of Confucius' legacy. On the other hand, *Xing zi ming chu* also provides us with something new, that is, the aesthetic value of *qing*, the artistic value of musical sounds, and the dialectical relation between the feeling of pleasure and that of grief in music. It considers the aesthetic quality of musical sounds, as different from other kinds of sounds, both physical and human, and relates them to the irreducible moral and affective dimensions of human existence, all in promoting them with ethical and religious values. In this sense, even if the *Xing zi ming chu* may not be taken as great as other Confucian classical texts, nevertheless, it can inspire us with a remarkable aesthetic of music, and convey to us the richness of Confucian music culture in the pre-Qin Era.

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Chapter 11

Wisdom and Hermeneutics of Poetry in Classical Confucianism

Vincent Shen

1 Introduction

Poetry occupied a crucial position in the classical Confucian educational program. Not only did the *Shijing* 詩經 (*Classic of Poetry*) constitute one of the fundamental teaching materials in the Six Classics, but poetry also played an important role in the political, diplomatic, and cultural arenas in ancient China. In the cultural and educational context of ancient China, *shi* 詩 (poetry) was closely connected with *yue* 樂 (music) and *li* 禮 (propriety, rites), as confirmed by what Confucius said, “One gets inspired with poetry, established with propriety, and filled with a sense of completeness by music” (*Analects* 8.8, my translation and same below). Also, the learning of poetry was necessary for elegant language and public speech, as Confucius was said to have taught Bo Yu 伯魚, his son, “One will not know what to say if one does not learn poetry” (*Analects* 16.13).

As to the practical application of poetry in the political and diplomatic arenas, Confucius said, “If someone is able to recite the 300 odes, yet cannot achieve anything when entrusted with political power, or cannot respond to other’s specific intent when sent to a diplomatic mission, no matter how many poems he has learnt, of what use is it?” (*Analects* 13.5). Here Confucius’ words confirmed the historical fact that till Confucius’ time, poems or odes were still quite often recited to express one’s intent on political and diplomatic occasions.

Such a crucial position occupied by poetry in ancient Chinese culture and classical Confucianism must have its philosophical implications. Therefore we may ask what is the philosophical meaning and wisdom implied in Confucian teaching of poetry, which is the most succinct and essential form of language? What are the Confucian

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hermeneutic methods related to the interpretation of meaning in poetry? In short, what is the philosophy of Confucius' teaching of poetry?

In several places in the *Analects* where Confucius referred explicitly to the *Shijing* we can find some important messages about Confucius' understanding of poetry and his interpretation of poems.¹ However, problems such as how Confucius taught poetry to his students, and what is his philosophy of teaching poetry etc., were not very clearly discussed in the *Analects*. Fortunately, the recently unearthed bamboo slips of *Kongzi Shilun* 孔子詩論 (*Confucius on Poetry*)² add much to our knowledge of Confucius' contribution to the teaching of poetry in ancient China. These newly unearthed texts, which might have been transcribed by Confucius' later disciples, or even disciples of his disciples, help us clarify and solve some historically debated problems. In this chapter, I will focus only on the philosophy and wisdom that seem very essential in Confucius' teaching of poetry and in his comments on poems. We can find Confucius' poetic wisdom in his comments on different kinds of poetry and individual poems, in the way he organized his teaching on the *Shijing*, especially in his vision of affectivity as the primordial mode of human existence and the function of poetry in both self-cultivation and public life. We will also touch upon the hermeneutic issues of how to interpret the meaning of poetry.

2 Historical Context of Confucius' Teaching on Poetry

Before Confucius came onto the historical scene, there had been in ancient China collections of Odes by *shi* 師 (Master), musical masters and professional collectors in each city-state, which then went through the process of royal selection by *tai shi* 太師 (Great Master), Zhou's musical officers, for the purpose of royal files and public education. The group of bamboo slips now entitled *Kongzi Shilun* could be read as a syllabus recording Confucius' teaching on the *Shijing* (*Classic of Poetry*). It constitutes in fact the first treatise we know till now on the *Shijing* for the purpose of education in early Confucianism.

These recently unearthed fragments confirm the historical facts not only that Confucius taught and gave comments on the *Shijing*, but also that his teaching on the *Shijing* was in fact quite different from Han scholars', especially that of Mao's

¹ See for example, *the Analects*, 2.2, 7.18, 8.8, 9.15, 13.5, 16.13, 17.9, 17.10, ...etc., in which Confucius talked about either the *Classic of Poetry* in general or various individual odes in it.

² These bamboo slips, unearthed from the Warring States Chu tombs in the area of Jinmen City, Hubei Province, China, where the *Jinmen Bamboo Slips* were also discovered in 1993, were found a bit later in Hong Kong antiquity market in the spring of 1994. They were then bought back, conserved and edited by the Shanghai Museum, China. The first volume of a series of books entitled *Shanghai Museum's Chu Bamboo Books of the Warring States* was published in November, 2001. There we find three pieces of works, now named respectively the *Kongzi Shilun* 孔子詩論 (*Confucius on Poetry*), the *Ziyi* 緇衣 (*Colorful Clothes*), and the *Xingqin Lun* 性情論 (*On Human Nature and Human Affectivity*). The texts now entitled *Kongzi Shilun* consists of 29 bamboo slips, which have been transcribed by philological scholars into 29 fragments. This is the first time we have so many fragments of Confucius' teaching on the *Shijing* among so many recent archaeological findings.

commentaries on the *Shijing*, which had constituted the traditional version of the *Shijing*.³ First, in regard to the order, the traditional (Mao's) version of *Shijing* follows the order of *Guofeng* 國風, *Xiaoya* 小雅, *Daya* 大雅, and *Songs* 頌, whereas in these newly unearthed fragments, Confucius' comments follow the order of *Songs* 頌, *Daxia* 大夏 (*Daya* 大雅), *Xiaoxia* 小夏 (*Xiaoya* 小雅), and *Bangfeng* 邦風 (instead of *Guofen* 國風).⁴ Also, we find in these fragments some different titles for the same odes in the traditional version as well as some new titles that were not there in the past.⁵ This confirms the fact that poems selected in the *Shijing* were largely stable, while Confucius used an earlier version with different order of arrangement and some different titles from Mao's version in Han Dynasty.

The real difference between Confucius' teaching of poetry and that of Mao's commentary consists in their interpretations. According to Mao's commentaries, most poems in the *Daya*, *Xiaoya*, and *Guofeng* were produced either for praising or satiric criticism of King Xuan 宣王 and King Li 厲王. For example, more than half of the *Guofeng* poems were presumed by Mao's commentaries to be composed for political purposes. In other words, most of the Odes contained in the *Daya*, the *Xiaoya*, and the *Guofeng* were presumed to be either glorifying praise or satirical criticism of kings, royal families, or political leaders of the time in the form of poems, while those expressing common people's feelings and more universal human affectivity were neglected. However, when we come to the newly unearthed fragments of the *Kongzi Shilun*, we find that there more attention was paid to human feeling. In these fragments, except in the case of *Jie Nan San* 節南山 and *Yu Wu Zheng* 雨無正, we do not find any interpretation of verses as satirical criticism of bad kings. In this sense, the *Shijing* were not necessarily envisaged as poetic expression of political criticism or flattering praise, though they might sometimes have such a function. Their function of expressing human feeling and affectivity in poetic language was put in priority. It was then that a poem could have in addition other functions such as political and pragmatic ones.

3 Confucius' Method of Teaching Poetry

The way in which Confucius commented on the *Shijing*, as shown in the newly unearthed bamboo slips, seems to be very systematic and pedagogical, which constituted a very intelligent way of teaching poetry on his part. We find some bamboo

³Mao's commentaries to the *Shijing* were traditionally attributed to Mao Heng and Mao Chang, who were active in early Western Han Dynasty (206BC-9BC) without exact dates of birth and death. Their commentaries contained the earliest version of the *Shijing*.

⁴Since the words *xia* 夏 and *ya* 雅 were very similar both phonetically and morphologically in ancient China, we may presume there was no big difference between the titles *Daxia* 大夏 and *Daya* 大雅, *Xiaoxia* 小夏 and *Xiaoya* 小雅. As to *Bangfeng* 邦風, it should be the original title, and was later changed to *Guofen* 國風.

⁵As to different titles, for example, there were *Shiyue* 十月 instead of *Shiyue zhijiao* 十月之交, *Tang zhisui* 湯之水 instead of *Yang zhisui* 揚之水, *Bei baizhou* 北白舟 instead of *Bozhou* 柏舟 ... etc. As to new titles, for example, *Keshi* 可斯, *Zhongshi* 中氏, *Lü'er* 律而, *Heshui* 河水... etc.

slips in which Confucius characterized poetry in general and the relation of poetry with other cultural activities such as music and literature. Then, we find some bamboo slip texts in which he proceeded to discuss the general characteristics of those major types of poem such as *Guofeng*, *Xiaoxia*, *Daxia*, and *Songs*. These comments might be considered as a preface or introduction to poetry in general and its major types. Then, we find some bamboo slips in which Confucius commented on each individual poem in giving their wholesome meaning as well as featuring some of their most remarkable key verses. We can suppose then that the texts of *Kongzi Shilun* were arranged and structured in the following order: general introduction to poetry, classification of poems and their main characteristics, summary of and comments on individual poems and the key verse(s) in each poem according to their classification. This gives us an impression of a very systematically organized syllabus of Confucius' teaching on the *Shijing*. Let me explain each aspect of the syllabus in the following order.

First, concerning the nature of poetry in general, Confucius said in Fragment 1, "Poetry could not be without earnest thoughts; music could not be without feeling; literature cannot be without good wording" (Confucius 2001: 123).⁶ These words related poetry to music and literature, based upon the fact that in ancient China, odes were sung and performed with music and elegant wording. In the *Zuo's Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals*, for example, the narrative of Jizha's 季扎 reviewing Zhou's music during his diplomatic visit to the State of Lu 魯, which took place in the 29th year of Duke Xiang's Reign 襄公二十二年 (544BC), gave us typical textual evidence that odes were performed at that time with music (Legge 1994c: 545–551). In Fragment 2 of the bamboo slip texts, Confucius said, "The music itself is easy and slow. Its song is accompanied harmoniously by *xun* 埙 and *ci* 篪. Its thought is deep and far-reaching. The odes in the *Daxia* are full of praises for his virtues" (Confucius 2001: 127). This comment also gave us the textual evidence that confirmed the fact that poetry was at that time performed with music. If poetry was related essentially to music, then its essential function of expressing earnest human thoughts was deeply related to human affectivity or human feeling. This brings us to Confucius' vision of affectivity as an essential mode of human existence, quite different from the traditional emphasis on his ethical and political pragmatism. We will come back to this part of Confucian wisdom after we discuss his views on different types of poems and individual pieces of poem.

Second, Confucius' comments on different types of odes: after the characterization of poetry in general and its relation with music and literature, Confucius proceeded to give comments on different types of odes such as *Songs*, *Daxia*, *Xiaoxia*, and *Bangfeng*. This order, very well articulated in the *Kongzi Shilun*, was in fact in reverse to the order presented in Mao's version.

The *Songs*, first commented on by Confucius, were generally performed in ancient China together with music in temples and royal courts, mostly for the purpose of praising the present king or the founding kings' benevolent and brilliant virtues. In the fragments where Confucius mentioned the *Songs*, he seemed to

⁶All the English translations of the *Kongzi Shilun* in this chapter are mine.

emphasize those kings who had achieved great merit for the country, especially King Wen. For example, in Fragment 2 of the bamboo slips, we read, "...is it, thereby King Wen received the mandate. This *Song* sings his merit of conquering, which is often spoken of by his offspring. The music itself is easy and slow. Its song is accompanied harmoniously by *xun* 埙 and *ci* 篪. Its thought is deep and far-reaching. The odes in the *Daxia* are full of praises for his virtues, often spoken of..." (Confucius 2001: 127). Also, in Fragment 5, we read, "What to do with those who have great merits? To praise them in the sacrificial *Songs*. The verses of the *Qingmiao* 清廟 praise how supreme the merit of King [Wen] has been" (Ibid: 131).

As shown in Fragment 2, Confucius' comments on the *Songs* were followed by those on the *Daxia*. The newly unearthed texts seem to confirm the traditional opinion that *Daya* poems were composed mostly for the praise of the virtues of Zhou's founding Kings, especially King Wen, for example in Fragment 2 mentioned above. Also, Fragment 7 belongs to the *Daxia*. It reads,

What does it mean by saying that "[God said to King Wen:] 'I think cherishingly of your bright virtue.'" It is to say about King Wen's sincerity. 'The mandate is from Heaven. Giving the throne to King Wen.' It is a mandate by sincerity. Trustfully it is. That's why Confucius says, 'It is a Heavenly Mandate. Is it by his own multiple talents that King Wen gets it? It is his mandate.' (Ibid: 134)

These comments on the *Daxia* were followed by those on *Xiaoxia*, which was constituted of poems composed by the elites or officials of each country/city state. There, the fragment on which Confucius gave his comment seemed to emphasize the expression of common people and the king's subjects' suffering, their worries and complaints in difficult times. Confucius said in Fragment 3, "[The odes of *Xiaoxia*] express people's worries and complaints in difficult times, lamenting that their rulers are declining and being deprived of virtue" (Ibid: 128–129). These words of Confucius give us a general characterization of the *Xiaoxia*.

After this, in Fragments 8 and 9, we are able to read Confucius' comments on individual poems contained in the *Xiaoxia*:

The *Shiyue* 十月 is good at describing slanderous situations. The *Yu Wu Zheng* 雨無正 and the *Jie Nan San* 節南山 are all expressing the decline of their Lord, and kings and dukes feel ashamed. There are a lot of doubts in the *Xiaomin* 小旻, saying that one's willing is not pleased. The *Xiaowan* 小宛 gives no hateful words, though there seems to be no calm conscience either. The *Xiaobian* 小弁 and the *Qiaoyan* 巧言 all talk about the harm done by those who slander. (Ibid: 135–136)

Most precious is that he blames his own self. The *Tianbao* 天保 says that he owns his happiness forever. Even when the food offered is tiny, he still keeps on his virtue like in the old days. The *Qifu* 祈父 also blames with reason. The *Huangming* 黃鳴 shows that the author was then stuck in difficulty and desired to return to the old days. Most people would be shamed against its anger. The *Jinjin Ze Er* 菁菁者莪 talks about the enrichment made by talented people. (Ibid: 137).

In comparison with the *Xiaoxia*, which was constituted of poems composed by the elites or officials of each country/city state, the *Bangfeng* 邦風 was constituted rather of popular songs of each individual state. In the newly unearthed bamboo slips of *Kongzi Shilun*, most of Confucius' comments on the *Shijing* were on the *Bangfeng*, or popular songs of different states. The later term "*Guofeng*" was named

Bangfeng in Confucius' time, of which the word "bang" was later changed to "guo" in Mao's version, probably in order to avoid breaking taboo against LIU Bang, name of the first emperor of Han Dynasty. The term "feng 風" could mean transformation by way of education, custom, the ethos of the people, and the popular songs, including love songs, of the 13 states existing in the time of Spring and Autumn not including the *Zhounan* 周南 and the *Zhaonan* 昭南. This could be seen especially in the narrative of Jizha's review of Zhou Music by which Jizha understood well the ethos of the people and the virtues of political leaders of each country well documented and performed in the court of Lu state. The theory goes that *Bangfeng* recorded and expressed first of all the ethos of people in each state, whether or not it had the educational function of transforming its people or the political function of criticizing or satirizing its political leaders, such as Mao and other Han scholars emphasized. In Fragments 3 and 4 of the *Kongzi Shilun*, Confucius says,

The Odes of *Bangfeng* contain a lot of things. They look generally into the customs of people by abundantly collecting materials from different countries. Its wording is elegant and its voice kind. (Ibid: 128–129)

Odes are like open doors, given to the lower people for expressing themselves. What could it be their intentions? It is to express in the *Bangfeng*. When people are exhausted and tired, especially when the upper elites and the lower people are not in harmony, what could it be their intentions? (Ibid: 130)

As we can see clearly from the fragments quoted above and in other comments of Confucius on individual poems, although they are not quoted here, Confucius' method of interpreting poems went much like this: he first summarized his characterization of each poem together with other poems in the same group he was commenting on before he went on to the details of each poem. He used the method of "key verse" by picking the most interesting verse(s) in each poem to exemplify his judgment on the poem or on the group of poems in question. In his choice of key verses and his appropriation of the meaning of each poem, there was manifested a kind of poetic *phronesis*,⁷ or poetic wisdom as an art of expressing one's value judgment.

4 Human Affectivity and the Cultivation of Feeling

The *Shijing*, like the *Song of Songs* in the *Old Testaments*, expresses and thereby interprets through poetic language human affectivity as the original mode of human existence. Confucius was very clear about this point when, combining poetry, music, and literature, he said in Fragment 1 that "Poetry could not be without willing; music could not be without feeling; literature could not be without wording."

⁷We adopt the term *phronesis* from Aristotle, for whom it is practical wisdom in ethical sense. We use this term to express a meaning not limited to practical wisdom in ethics as for Aristotle. We extend its meaning also to poetics.

This line of thought should have been followed by Zisi, the grandson of Confucius, and become a legacy in the so-called Zisi-Mencius School. That is why in the text entitled *Xing zi ming chu* (*Human Nature Comes from Mandate*), a Confucian text, also in the *Guodian Bamboo Slips*, now attributed to the so-called “Zisi-Mencius School,” we read,

Human nature comes out from mandate,
Mandate descends from Heaven,
Dao begins with human feeling,
Human feeling is born from human nature,
Those who begin with human feeling,
Will end up with righteousness. (Jinmen Museum 1994: 179. my translation)

We should notice that human feeling or affectivity is here very much emphasized, even to the point of relating it to the Dao and human nature, in saying that “Dao begins with human feeling,” and that “Human feeling is born from human nature.” In particular, it puts emphasis on the role of feeling in human self-cultivation and ethical behaviour. “Those who begin from human feeling will end up with righteousness.” Therefore, somehow it bases the unfolding of human nature and the fulfilment of human existence on human affectivity.

Mao’s commentary in the *Great Preface* to the *Shijing*, though overemphasizing the political function of poetry in praising or satirizing powerful kings, still followed Confucius’ idea of human feeling/affectivity and saw it as essential to poetry. In that line of thought, Mao’s *Great Preface* said, “Poetry is the product of earnest thought. Thought cherished in the mind becomes earnest. Exhibited in words, it becomes poetry. The feelings move inwardly, and are embedded in words. When words are insufficient for them, recourse is had to sighs and exclamations. When sighs and exclamations are insufficient, recourse is had to prolonged utterances of song. When those prolonged utterances of song are insufficient for them, unconsciously the hands begin to move and the feet to dance” (Legge 1994b: 34).

James Legge, when commenting on the *Shijing*, followed also this line of thought, though tracing it back only to Mao’s *Great Preface* because of his ignorance of Confucius’ own teaching on poetry. He said, “By poetry, according to the *Great Preface* and the views generally of Chinese scholars, is denoted the expression, in rhymed words, of thought impregnated with feeling; which so far as it goes, is a good account of the species of composition” (Legge 1994b: 1).

A careful reading of the *Shijing* shows that the affective relation between man and woman, subjects and kings, human beings and Heaven, sometimes with love, sometimes with joy, sometimes with anxiety, sometimes with bitterness, sometimes even with hateful blame, depending on the situation they were affected and the way they were treated, were expressed through poetic language: for example, affective relation between man and woman, as in the *Guanju* 關雎 (*Cry of Ospreys*)⁸; or

⁸For example, in the *Guanju* 關雎 we read, “Kwan-kwan go the ospreys, on the islet in the river. The modest, retiring, virtuous young lady; after whom a young gentleman loves to look for mate” (Legge 1994b: 1; with my modification).

affective relation with parents and ancestors, as in the *Xiaowan* 小宛⁹; or affective relation between subjects and his superiors and king, as in the *Qifu* 祈父 that showed a deep sense of complaint to the minister of war.¹⁰ The relation between subjects and king was much better in the founding period of Zhou dynasty, as exemplified by those poems concerning King Wen.¹¹ Because of his virtues, King Wen was assured of his Mandate of Heaven as justification of the legitimacy of his political leadership. The Mandate of Heaven bestowed upon those who had virtues, such as King Wen. This presupposed an affective relation between humankind and Heaven, or God on High, in whom there was a strong belief in the period from Shang Dynasty to the early Zhou Dynasty.

Confucius' comment on the function of poetry seems to have well grasped this web of existence constituted of affective relations as we can find in the *Kongzi Shilun*. It evokes in us an image of a great thinker, not that of a stringent political and ethical philosopher, but first of all a human person in whom we can recognize the authenticity of existence, the primacy of affectivity over discourse, and the primacy of existence over thinking.

Confucius emphasized the cultivation of human affectivity, to the point of thinking innocently upon those poems expressing passionate emotions and sexual insinuations. In fact, there expressed many such kinds of emotion, such as joy, anger, sadness, blaming, hate, and lust. Some poems might appear to be sexually indecent, such as the poems of the *Zhengfeng* 鄭風 and the *Weifeng* 衛風, yet Confucius would wrap them up in the basic spirit of the *Shijing* in saying that, "All 300 odes can be covered by one of their sentences, and that is, "Have no depraved thoughts" (*Analects* 2.2; Chan 1969: 22).

In the bamboo slips of *Kongzi Shilun*, Confucius seemed to be very open to human feelings, especially to the feeling of love such as that expressed in the *Cry of Ospreys*. He made this clear in his summary characterization of the *Cry of Osprey* as "joyful" in Fragment 10, saying that, "The *Guanju* sings of joyfulness." Then he proceeded to say, "The *Quechao* 鵲巢 sings of marriage. The *Gantang* 甘棠 sings of praise. The *Lu Yi* 綠衣 sings of thinking. The *Yanyan* 燕燕 sings of love. Why does it mention propriety? All for the purpose of tracing back to its origin. The *Guanju* understands *li* 禮 by way of beauty" (Confucius 2001: 139). Again, in Fragment 11, Confucius said, "...it's about love. The *Guanju* sings of joyfulness

⁹We read, in the *Xiaowan* 小宛, "Small is the cooing dove, but it flies aloft up to Heaven. My heart is wounded with sorrow, and I think of our forefathers. When the dawn is breaking. And I cannot sleep, the thoughts in my breast are of my own parents" (Legge 1994b: 333–334).

¹⁰We read, in the *Qifu* 祈父, "Minister of War, We are the claws and teeth of the king. Why have you rolled us into this sorrow? So that we have no abiding place? Minister of War, We are the taloned soldiers of the king. Why have you rolled us into this sorrow? So that there is no end [of our toils]? Minister of War, we have indeed acted without discrimination. Why have you rolled us into this sorrow? So that our mothers have to do all the labor of cooking?" (Legge 1994b: 298–299).

¹¹For example, we read, in the *Wei Tian Zhi Ming* 維天之命 (The Mandate of Heaven): "How solemn and unceasing! Oh, how illustrious was the purity of King Wen's virtue! With blessings he overwhelms us. We all receive the blessings. They are a great favour from our King Wen. May his remote descendents hold fast to them" (Legge 1994b: 570–571; with my modifications).

and is enriched by the author's thinking. The *Qiumu* 楛木 sings of timeliness because of the author's happiness. The wisdom in the *Hanguang* 漢廣 is an unattainable wisdom. The marriage in the *Quechao* 鵲巢 is paired with..." (Confucius 2001: 141). Now it is obvious that Confucius, in encouraging the expression of human feeling and the joyfulness of love, would put them back into the ethical relationship and the cultivation of feeling by *li* 禮, understood as the ritual behavior leading to harmonious relation with a sense of beauty. We can see this in Fragment 12 where Confucius said, "The happiness [of Man and woman] should be traced back and integrated in *li*; that's why it could be joyful. The *Qiumu* sings of happiness realized by *junzi*" (Confucius 2001: 142).

Thus, we can assume that Confucius condones the expression of human feelings through poetic language, and he sees this as a basic function of poetry. This is also corroborated by the *Analects*, where Confucius says, "My young friends, why do you not study the *Odes*? The *Odes* can arouse your feelings, broaden your observations, enlarge your fellowship, and express your grievances. They help you in your immediate service to your parents and in your remote service to your rulers. They widen your acquaintance with the names of birds, animals and plants" (*Analects* 17.9; Chan 1969: 47, with my modification). Confucius seems to take centrality as the principle of cultivating one's affectivity, as in the case of love songs, such as the *Cry of Osprey*. Confucius says, "The *Cry of Osprey* is pleasing without being excessive, is mournful without being injurious" (*Analects* 3.20; Ames and Rosemont 1998: 86). Here the so-called "pleasing without being excessive," "mournful without being injurious" refer implicitly to a principle of centrality or middleness – that one should always take the middle way. The principle of centrality/middle way allows human feelings to express themselves without becoming excessive, all to the end of achieving harmony with a sense of beauty. In short, poetry expresses human affectivity in its authentic mode, while ethics cultivates human affectivity by referring it to the measure of *li* and to the principle of centrality/middle way.

5 Function of Judgment in Meaning Appropriation: Confucian Hermeneutics of Poetry

Confucius shows his wisdom in appropriating the meaning of a poem and in his judgment on it. Confucius' reading of poems may be seen as a verbal and decisional concretization of pragmatic wisdom. That is what is meant by "appropriation of meaning by cutting or selecting text" (*duanzhan quyì* 斷章取義) or, in short, "featuring key verses," which in fact is a kind of poetic wisdom implying his judgment in the process of textual selection and interpretation. In the bamboo slip texts of *Kongzi Shilun*, we find Confucius commenting on poems by highlighting a certain key verse in order to represent the whole poem. For example, Fragment 6 reads,

[The *Qingmiao* 清廟 says.] "Great is the number of the officers, assiduous followers of the virtue of King Wen." I pay my homage to this. The *Liewen* 烈文 says, "What is most powerful is being the Man." "What is most distinguished is being virtuous."

“Ah, the former kings are not forgotten.” I am delighted by all these. [The *Haotian You Chengming* 昊天有成命 says,] “The Heaven made its determinate mandate, which our two sovereigns received.” They are indeed highly honored and powerful. The Songs... (Confucius 2001: 133)

Here in this text Confucius puts together a group of key verses of different poems in the *Songs* to emphasize the idea that the moral admirability and the ethical power of the person of King Wen consist in his virtue, seen as the honorable assurance of the Mandate of Heaven bestowed on him. The theme of “Mandate of Heaven” in the case of King Wen seems to be very much cherished by Confucius. We read, for example, in Fragments 7 and 22, that,

What does it mean by saying that “[God said to King Wen:] ‘I think cherishingly of your bright virtue’”? It is to say about King Wen’s sincerity. “The mandate is from Heaven, giving the throne to King Wen.” It is a mandate by sincerity. Trustfully it is. That’s why Confucius says, “It is a Heavenly Mandate. Is it by his own multiple talents that King Wen gets it? It is his mandate.” (Confucius 2001: 134)

When the *Wanqiu* 宛丘 said, “Full of kindly affection, yet without anything to look up to.” I say it is good. When the *Yijie* 猗嗟 said “All four arrows again and again return to the same place. One is able to withstand rebellion.” I like it. When the *Sijiu* 鶉鳩 said that “His deportment is uniformly coherent, his heart being tight to what is right.” I do believe it. When the *Wen Wang* 文王 said that, “King Wen is on high. Oh, bright is he in Heaven.” I say it is excellent. (Confucius 2001: 151)

The hermeneutic method of “featuring key verses” presupposes a certain common familiarity with the odes and a common measure of understanding them, so that it suffices to mention the title and the key verse of a poem to make the audience understand the message in one’s discourse. In other words, it is enough to pick one verse of a poem, or sometimes even only the title of that poem, to convey the affective and intellectual thoughts of the user of the poem. In ancient China, this collective familiarity with a more or less common collection of poems was a result of the fact that there were collectors of poems on the level of each city-state, and then, on a higher level, there were royal selectors of poems in the Zhou court. There were also schools where one could learn the poems, which, on the level of Zhou court, were named *Piyong* 辟廱, and, on the level of each city-state, *Pangong* 泮宮. In these schools, elites could learn the collections of poems on both central and local levels that served as their common reference. Also, they had the opportunity to learn poems from different states so as to understand the ethos of other states and the virtues of their political leaders.

The hermeneutic process was not rigid; in fact it was quite flexible. Sometimes the users or interpreters’ appropriation of meaning of some words in a particular poem might be different from its original meaning. This was especially the case with Confucius when he quoted a poem to express his assessment of a person or an event. We should say that Confucius, when quoting from the *Shujing* 書經 (*Classic of Documents*), attached himself more often to the original wording and meaning in it. However, when quoting from the *Shijing*, Confucius would depart quite often from the original meaning of a poem. This was probably because of the fact that what he quoted from the *Classic of Documents*, which is historical in nature, and

history was supposed to be as faithful as possible to what had actually happened; whereas the *Classic of Poetry* is about human intentions and affectivity, which could suffer from changes in space and time and were susceptible to undergo freer subjective interpretations. This special characteristic of poetry allowed Confucius the flexibility to appropriate meanings by selecting verses, which showed a creative interpretation of his own. For example, in the *Analects*, we read,

Zizhang asked about the exaltation of virtue and the resolution of perplexities. The Master said, “Make it your guiding principle to do your best to others and to be trustworthy in what you say, and move yourself to where rightness is, then you will be exalting virtue. When you love a man you want him to live and when you hate him you want him to die. If, wanting him to live, you also want him to die, is this not being perplexed? [The Odes says] “If you did not do so for the sake of riches, You must have done so for the sake of *difference*” (*Analects* 12.10; Lau 1983: 113; emphasis added)¹²

Here Confucius quoted from verse 3 of the *Woxing Zhi Ye* 我行之野 in the *Xiaoya* 小雅. The original verse sang about someone who changed his mind after a marriage was made, though not necessarily because the new wife was richer, at least because she was different from the previous wife. Confucius used here the term *yi* 異 (difference) to explain the origin or cause of doubt in respect to virtue, that is, if one changed one’s mind because of facing something or someone different, one would be in quandary. Confucius re-contextualized the verse by changing the case of marriage to that of virtue. We have to keep in mind that here the relation of marriage served as a metaphor for virtue, in the sense that, just as one should not change one’s mind in marriage because of the new wife’s being richer or being different, in the case of virtue, one should not change one’s respect for virtue because of facing different situations.

In fact, Confucius’ famous saying, that “All 300 odes can be covered by one of their sentences, and that is, ‘Have no depraved thoughts,’” was itself an exemplary case in which he had appropriated the meaning of poetry by creative selection and interpretation. Originally the verse “Have no depraved thoughts” came from the poem entitled *Jiong* 駟 (*Stallions*) in the *Lu Songs* 魯頌, which was sung when someone was pasturing horses, where it was sung “Ah, how they are without depravity!”¹³ In the original Chinese texts, the term “*si* 思” was merely an auxiliary ending term similar to “*si* 兮,” and the whole verse would say only something like, “Ah, don’t go astray,” or “Ah, how they are without depravity,” as James Legge translated it. However, Confucius used the term “*si*” to denote “thought” and read the whole verse as “thought without depravity.” Thus, it was a creative reading on the part of Confucius.

¹² My correction of D.C. Lau’s translation of “novelty” into “difference,” this being more faithful to the term *yi* 異 in the Chinese text.

¹³ The *Jiong* 駟 (*Stallions*) reads, “Fat and large are the stallions, on the plains of the far-distant borders. Of those stallions, fat and large, some are cream-coloured; some, red and white; some, with white hairy legs; some, with fish eyes; All, stout carriage horses, Ah, how they are without depravity; He thinks of his horses, and thus serviceable are they” (Legge 1994b: 613).

Now, according to classical Confucianism, what were the hermeneutic criteria by which users of poem could achieve mutual understanding? Here we should point out one principle that says the meaning of a poem should be “like” (*lei* 類), which means both “similarity” and “befittingness.” On the one hand, the true intention of the user of poems should be similar to the literal, figural, or imaginable meaning of words, verses, or odes used in the situation. On the other hand, the poems used should be befitting to the occasion and be used by other users for a similar purpose. Similarity of one’s intention to one’s wording means sincerity. Similarity of purpose to other users of poems means friendship or alliance for common purpose. Especially on diplomatic occasions, the use of a poem contrary to the principle of “*lei*” might create conflict or even lead to war among states. For example, according to the Confucian Classics *Zuzhuan* 左傳 (*Zuo’s Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals*), in the 16th year of Duke Xiang’s Reign 襄公十六年 (557BC), during the banquet of Marquis of Jin 晉 with other princes at Wen 濫, the Marquis of Jin said that “The poems sung in the banquet must be similar and befitting the occasion, now the poem sung by GAO Hou 高厚 from Qi 齊 State is not so.” Thereafter a war was waged against Qi. (Legge 1994c: 472). That the misuse of a poem could have a serious consequence, even to the point of provoking a real war, was the most remarkable negative consequence of misused poetry that ever happened in the history of international affairs.

We should say that cutting verse to appropriate meaning and the criteria of similarity and befittingness concerned mostly the users of poems, yet till the time of Confucius the hermeneutic criterion of those who read or listened to poems was left untouched. It was much later, in the time of Warring State that Mencius proposed to “trace the expressed intention by understanding” (*yiyi nizhi* 以意逆志). We read in the upper chapter of *Wanzhang* 萬章 of the *Mencius* that, “Therefore he who interprets *the Odes*, should not be stuck by words in detriment of a sentence, and he should not be stuck by sentence in detriment of earnest thoughts. If one can trace back to the earnest thought by understanding, he then is said to have caught its meaning” (*Mencius* 5A4; my translation).

Using one’s understanding of a poem to trace back to its original and earnest intent could mean, on the level of poetic hermeneutics, something very similar to what Wilhelm Dilthey says about the function of understanding in historiography. For Wilhelm Dilthey’s historical hermeneutics, human life is teleological in the sense that it tends to the creation of meaning by expressing its creativity in words, deeds, and works, which, in their turn, could be understood by enacting this process of creative expression in a sympathetic understanding. While the process of creativity goes from the dynamic teleology of life to meaningful expression in words, deeds, and works, the process of understanding goes inversely from the expressed words and deeds, to trace back to the dynamic and creative process of life, via the intelligible structure of words, deeds, and works in question. When added to Confucius’ “hermeneutics from the user’s point of view,” Mencius’ “hermeneutics from the reader’s point of view” could be seen as having completed the circle between the user and the reader in the classical Confucian hermeneutics of poetry.

6 The Use of Poetry in Public Affairs

Wisdom, conceived as prudence demonstrated in judgment, can be shown not only in the appropriation of meanings of poems, but also in the public use of poems. When using poems on public occasions, especially on a diplomatic occasion, which, as we have mentioned, was a common practice in ancient China, one should be wise to quote the right poem and the right verse for the right occasion. In some sense, Confucius' teaching of poetry was necessitated by his ambition to train disciples capable of taking positions in public life, of becoming officers or diplomats, for which purpose they should be well versed in the *Odes*. As we have quoted from the *Analects*, Confucius said, "If someone is able to recite the 300 odes, yet cannot achieve anything when entrusted with political power, or cannot respond to other's specific intent when sent to a diplomatic mission, no matter how many poems he has learnt, of what use is it?" (*Analects* 13.5).

Here the necessity to have a common reference so as to facilitate common understanding and avoid alienation or conflict situations seems to exclude the possibility that Confucius might have edited an original collection of poems for his own use in his teaching of poetry. As I see it, although Confucius had a better and more systematic method of teaching poetry, it would seem to the disadvantage of his disciples if he had a different collection of poems than the one commonly used. In the *Zuo's Commentary of the Spring and Autumn Annals*, where poems were reported to have been performed 73 times, only in two performances were the quoted poems unrecognized because of the ignorance of the person in question. This shows that there was a very high consensus as to what poems to learn and there was no need for Confucius to break this consensus by producing a different collection of poems for his own teaching and for the good career of his students. On the other hand, according to the *Analects*, Confucius had reorganized the order and the musical tuning of those collected poems. We read in the *Analects* that,

The Master said, "It was after my return from Wei to Lu that music was put right, with the *ya* 雅 and the *song* 頌 being assigned their proper places." (Lau 1983: 81)

Confucius' teaching of the poem was for the purpose of his disciples' self-cultivation as well as their future career in public service. Confucius said in the *Analects*, "Unless you study the *Odes*, you will be ill-equipped to speak" (Lau 1983: 167). That is also why he was concerned that his disciples could recite all the poems, and yet, when sent to foreign states, they were unable to quote them properly in responding to specific poems sung by their hosts. All these were about the public use, especially the diplomatic use, of the *Odes*. As proved historically by *Zuo's Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals*, the diplomatic use of the *Odes* was a very common practice in ancient China during the period of Spring and Autumn, especially during the period from 637BC to 505BC. In this period of time, the intellectuals, officials, and diplomats learnt poems by heart as part of their intellectual and professional formation. They used, quoted, and performed poems to express their intents, as a rhetoric device and as a token of culture. "Perform odes

to express one's intent" (*fushi yanzhi* 賦詩言志) became a diplomatic practice by which one used or quoted poems to express one's own wish, one's worry, and one's solicitation, and one's interlocutor or entertainer would also respond by quoting relevant verses.

For example, according to the record of the *Zuozhuan*, in the 23rd year of Duke Xi's Reign 僖公二十三年 (637BC), Jin 晉 prince Chong Er 重耳 in his exile visited Qin State. Chong Er sang the *Hesui* 河水 (River Water),¹⁴ the Earl Mu of Qin responded with the *Liuyue* 六月, singing of King Xuan of Zhou's order to Yin Jifu 尹吉甫 to conquer the Yanyun 儼狁, and one could read there a verse like "The King had ordered the expedition, to help the son of Heaven." Chong Er, advised by ZHAO Shuai 趙衰, bowed to express his gratitude to Earl Mu of Qin, in acknowledgement of his encouraging him to retake the control of his own country and become a great assisting Earl to Zhou King. This was a story of properly responding to poems on a diplomatic occasion.

On the other hand, it would be a shameful matter if a diplomat sent to another state did not understand the words and intents of the poem sung to him. For example, the *Zuozhuan* told the story that, in the 12th year of Duke Zhao's Reign (530BC), the State of Song sent Huading 華定 on a diplomatic mission to the State of Lu, where Duke Zhao of Lu entertained him with a banquet and the *Luxiao* 蓼蕭 was played for him, which sang of the delight of seeing the diplomat. The four verses sang respectively of the happiness of seeing the noble man with delightful words in banquet, with appreciation of favor and brightness, with joyfulness in being virtuous, and with the shared happiness in their getting together. Unfortunately, Huading did not understand these verses and made no response to them. For that reason Duke Zhao got angry and said, "He is sure to be driven into exile. He cherished not that 'We feast and talk'; he declared not his sense of that 'They favors me, they brighten me'; He understood not that 'Excellent virtues'; He accepts not that 'Common happiness'; how should he continue to be **in that position** in Song?" (Legge 1994c: 639, my correction in bold). This is one of the two examples of poems that were sung yet ignorantly not understood in the 73 performances of poems mentioned in the *Zuo's Commentary*.

7 Wisdom in the Poems

To be wise or not is also an important criterion by which Confucius judges poems. As can be seen in the newly unearthed bamboo slips of the *Kongzi Shilun*, Confucius characterizes a poem as wise or not in the Fragments 10, 11, 13, 27, 28,

¹⁴The *Hesui* is lost now and we find only its title here in this text. However, it is possible that "Hesui" might be another title of the *Miansui* 沔水, in which it is sung, "In large volume, those flowing waters go to the court of the sea. Rapid is that flying facon, now soaring, now resting. Alas! Among my brethren, my countrymen, my friends, no one is willing to think of the prevailing disorder. But who has not parents to suffer from it?" (Legge 1994b: 295).

29. So it seems that Confucius uses the term “wise” or “wisdom” quite frequently in his characterization of poems. If wisdom concerns a prudent way of delivering judgment, then caution should be paid as to cases in which judgment could be distorted in both ethical and political matters. This is generally called a case of slander, a kind of malicious statement, or an utterance of defamatory statements injurious to the wellbeing of a person. If wisdom concerns judgment that reveals truth, then slander is a dissimulation of truth that causes injury to one’s wellbeing or fame. Slander is generally used, in private as well as in public situations, as a tactic to gain worldly advantage by irresponsibly uttering statements that dissimulate truth and thereby cause injury to one’s opponents in a competitive or conflict situation. In the newly unearthed bamboo slips of *Kongzi Shilun*, Confucius has very wisely picked certain poems complaining about slanders and appealing for justice. For example, Fragment 8 reads,

The *Shiyue* 十月 is good at describing slanderous situations. The *Yu Wuzheng* 雨無正 and the *Jie Nansan* 節南山 are all expressing the decline of their Lord, and kings and dukes feel ashamed. There are a lot of doubts in the *Saomin* 少旻, saying that one’s willing is not pleased. The *Xiaowan* 小宛 gives no hateful words, though there seems to be no calm conscience either. The *Xiaobian* 小弁 and the *Qiaoyan* 巧言 all talk about the harm done by those who slander. (Confucius 2001: 135–136)

It is evident then that those poems related to slanders imply always certain painful complaint. Negatively speaking, in some cases, what Confucius means by wisdom seems to be related to slanderous situations. For example, in fragment 28, Confucius says, “...The *Qiangyouqi* 牆有薺 is with great caution and secrecy and yet knowing nothing about what to say. The *Qingying* 青蠅 is wise” (Confucius 2001: 158). In the *Book of Odes*, the poem *Qingying* expresses an anxious complaint against slanders that aim at separating someone from his king, using the buzzing of blue flies as a metaphor of slanderous speeches. We read the following verses of the *Qingying*,

They buzz about, the blue flies,
Lighting on the fences.
O happy and courteous sovereign,
Do not believe slanderous speeches
They buzz about, the blue flies,
Lighting on the jujube trees.
The slanderous observe no limits,
And throw the whole kingdom into confusion. (Legge 1994b: 394–395)

As shown by the *Zuo’s Commentary of the Spring and Autumn Annals*, this poem was also used by the chieftains of barbarian tribes to complain about slanders during a diplomatic ritual of alliance. Since quoting and performing poems on social, political, or diplomatic occasions constituted a common practice among the nobles, it belonged to a part of the know-how of noble class, especially related to the *li* or rituals. Under the power of this ancient Chinese poetic culture, even the chieftains of barbarian tribes were familiar with it when they were establishing diplomatic relations with the Han people. For example, according to the *Zuo’s Commentary of the Spring and Autumn Annals*, in the 14th year of Duke Xiang’s

Reign 襄公十四年 (558BC), it was mentioned that FAN Xuanzi 范宣子 blamed the barbarian chief JU Zhi 駒支 for his disloyalty to Jin, and refused him participation in the morning court meeting. Ju Zhi refuted this accusation by saying that Jin was too unfair toward the barbarian tribes, and then he recited the *Qingying* 青蠅 before he retreated from the court.

Wisdom is in contrasting position to slander; yet both are related to the proper or improper use of language. Confucius knows how wording as a vehicle to reveal truth is difficult. The learning of poems will equip a person well in what to say properly, whereas without learning poems, one would be ill-equipped with skill in speaking. This seems to be very much emphasized by Confucius in the newly unearthed *Kongzi Shilun*. For example, in Fragment 25, Confucius says that, “The *Dangdang* 蕩蕩 talks about the common people. The *Youtu* 有兔 expresses being in wrong time. The last chapter of the *Datian* 大田 knows what to say and behaves courteously.” In Fragment 29, he says that, “In the *Juan Er* 卷耳 we find no wise man. The *Seqin* 涉秦 talks about quietude. The *Zhu'er* 著而 talks about the coming bridegroom. The *Jiaozhen* 角枕 talks about woman. The *Hesui* 河水 talks about wisdom.” Because of the fact that the *Hesui* is lost, we do not have the textual basis to judge what Confucius has in mind when he says that the *Hesui* is wise. Yet we can always say that wisdom on this level always concerns truth as revealed or distorted by language.

8 Openness to the Unknown: Unending Quest of Wisdom

In conclusion, we may say that the classical Confucian classics, such as the *Shijing*, the *Analects*, the *Zhuozhuan*, and the *Mencius*, together with the newly unearthed bamboo slips *Kongzi Shilun*, show us the importance of poetry in ancient Chinese society in general and in Confucian teaching in particular. Especially the *Kongzi Shilun* conveys to us Confucius’ wisdom in his systematic teaching of poetry, and in his seeing affectivity as the original mode of human existence. For Confucius, the human feelings, when expressed, should be cultivated by *li* leading to a virtuous life of harmony imbued with a sense of beauty. Confucius’ poetic wisdom of appropriating the meaning of poetry is itself a creative interpretation and reasonable judgment of the poem’s positive relevance to self-cultivation and the public realm.

Still, it seems that wisdom is not totally exhausted in the cultivated expression of human affectivity and judgment, which always keeps to words that reveal truth and prudently avoids words that distort truth. Wisdom seems to be more than all these. It seems that, beyond the revealed and the expressed, wisdom is still open to the unfathomable, the hidden, and the unknown. In Fragment 10, Confucius first characterizes a poem as wise in saying that the *Hanguan* 漢廣 sings of wisdom (Confucius 2001: 139). Following this, in Fragment 11, he continues to say that “the

wisdom in the *Hanguan* is unattainable” (Confucius 2001: 141). Then, in Fragment 13, he says that “The *Hanguan* sings for wisdom which is uneasy to attain. Wisdom, though unattainable, is it not eternal?” (Confucius 2001: 142).

When we come to the traditional version of *Hanguan* in the *Shijing*, it sings in fact of some unapproachable beautiful lady (ladies) in making comparison to the uncrossable river Han. It reads,

In the South rise the trees without branches,
Affording no shelter.
By the Han River are girls rambling about,
But it is vain to solicit them.
The breath of the Han,
Can not be dived across;
The length of the Jiang,
Can not be navigated with a raft.
Many are the bundles of firewood;
I would cut down the thorns [to form more]
Those girls that are going to their future home,—
I would feed their horses.
The breath of the Han,
Can not be dived across;
The length of the Jiang,
Can not be navigated with a raft. (Legge 1994b: 15–16)

In Mao’s commentary, the praise of ladies in this poem is said to be used as a metaphor to praise King Wen, under whose reign the dissolute manners of people, especially women, in the region south of Zhou, had undergone great transformation. However, contrary to Mao’s commentary, the song could be read also simply as a love song, without any ideologizing ethical and political insinuation, which at most serves as a metaphor for wisdom. Thus, Confucius could interpret it as singing of the unattainability of wisdom. This is another case of Confucius appropriating meaning by creative interpretation, using Han River’s uncrossability to express metaphorically a sense of the unattainability of the lady, and, furthermore, using the unattainability of the lady to tell of the unattainability of wisdom. The eternal wisdom is therefore comparable to a lady so beautiful, so attractive, yet unattainable. On this point it is quite similar to what the *Book of Wisdom* says, “Wisdom I loved and searched for from my youth; I resolved to have her as my bride. I felt in love with her beauty” (*The New Jerusalem Bible* 1998: 792).

The more the eternal wisdom is attractive, the more it is unattainable. Wisdom therefore possesses certain unfathomability. Confucian poetic wisdom is very humanistic in the sense that he puts emphasis on human affectivity and its appropriate expression through self-cultivation and public ritual, and yet he still opens himself to the hidden and the unfathomable dimension of existence. This implies an implicit understanding that human feeling and human desire are always longing for the infinite, while the ultimate truth is always unfathomable. Therefore, wisdom is still to be sought in the process of unending quest.

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Chapter 12

Early Confucian Moral Psychology

Kwong-loi Shun

1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss an aspect of early Confucian ethical thought that arguably is one of its more distinctive characteristics, namely, its emphasis on self-transformation. By self-transformation, I refer to the transformation of oneself that comes about as a result of one's own reflective efforts at self-improvement; the process that involves such efforts I will refer to as "self-cultivation." This aspect of Confucian thought is related to its distinctive nature as a kind of ethical thought. Suppose we use the term "ethics" broadly in the sense that an ethical concern has to do with a concern with how to live, or how one should live, where the scope of "one" is supposed to include most of those whom we nowadays would refer to as "human beings." This way of describing the scope of "one" is intended to accommodate the fact that the term *ren* 人 (human beings), which is the term closest to "human beings" in early Chinese, is not understood in biological terms in early China and, on some scholarly views, might have a more restricted scope than that of the contemporary term "human beings."

While early Confucian thinkers did exhibit an ethical concern in this sense, the way they engage in ethical thinking and teaching is very different from the way this is done in a contemporary academic setting. Their primary concern is not with developing or transmitting a systematic general account of the ethical life, but is more immediately practical. Their attention is directly focused on the daily ethical experiences of themselves and of their associates, the concrete ethical challenges they confront, and the way for themselves and their associates to properly navigate

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the ethical complexities of the world. As we can see from the record of his sayings, Confucius' attention was directed primarily to providing concrete ethical guidance to specific individuals, including rulers and officials as well as his students and other close associates. Confucian thought did subsequently evolve in a more general direction, leading to more general and systematic discussions of such topics as human nature (*xing* 性). Still, even when expounding on the human condition in general terms, most major Confucian thinkers continue to direct attention to concrete situations involving specific individuals they encounter in their daily life, in a way often reflected in their more general discourse.

Given the orientation of their ethical thinking, their attention is often focused on what we would now describe as the psychology of the individual person. In reflecting on concrete situations involving specific individuals with whom they are in interaction or in discourse, they see clearly that ethical problems generally have their source in the depths of the human psychology, and it is here that the fundamental ethical task resides. And while childhood upbringing is important, the task also involves a continuous self-reflective reshaping of oneself in adult life. "Self-cultivation" refers to this process, and "self-transformation" to the goal of this process.

In elaborating on this aspect of early Confucian thought, I will take as my primary sources Chinese texts up to the early Han that are usually classified as Confucian texts, including the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*) of Confucius, the *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*), the *Xunzi* 荀子, the *Daxue* 大學 (*Great Learning*), and the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (*Centrality and Commonality*). The term usually translated as "Confucianism" or "Confucian thought" is *rujia* 儒家, or the school of *ru* 儒, and this term was introduced in early Han as part of a retrospective classification of the pre-Han intellectual scene. Although *ru* 儒 (Confucianism) was an identifiable social group of professional ritualists and educators at that time, the school of *ru* 儒 (Confucianism) was not a well defined movement before the Han. Still, the texts just referred to do share some commonalities that warrant our grouping them together, and when referring to early Confucian thought, I will be referring primarily to ideas in these texts. For convenience, when this will not lead to confusion, I might sometimes refer to these ideas simply as Confucian ideas, without specifying that they come from the early period.

So far, I have freely used the notion of self in discussing early Confucian thought. This notion requires explanation, and this will be the task of Sect. 1. In Sects. 2, 3, and 4, I discuss three aspects of the early Confucian ethical ideal related to, respectively, *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence), *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites), and *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness), with a focus on how the self figures within this ethical ideal. I will show that there is a sense in which each of these three aspects of the Confucian ideal involves one's moving away from a certain kind of self-centeredness, and these three sections together describe the kind of self-transformation advocated by the early Confucians. In Sect. 5, I discuss the nature of the self-cultivation process involved in such a transformation, and in Sect. 6, I discuss ways in which one's ethical attention may be properly or improperly directed in such a process.

2 The Self

To explain the notion of self we will be ascribing to the early Confucians, let us begin with some of the terms that early Chinese thinkers use to talk about various features of a person (Shun 2004: 183–199). They use the term *ti* 體 (body), often translated as “body,” to talk about the person’s body, and there are also ways of referring to parts of the body, such as the four limbs (to which *ti* 體 also refers) and the senses. These parts of the body not only have certain capacities, such as the eyes’ capacity of sight, but they also exhibit certain characteristic tendencies, such as the way the eyes are drawn toward beautiful colors. These tendencies are referred to as *yu* 欲 (desires), a term often translated as “desires.” This term is used not just of parts of the body, but also of the person as a whole to describe how the person is drawn toward things like life and honor. That human beings have such tendencies as part of their basic constitution is regarded as a fact about them that is pervasive and difficult to alter, a fact that is referred to as the *qing* 情 (facts) of human beings. Later, *qing* 情 (emotions) comes to refer to what we would describe as emotions, including such thing as joy, sorrow and anger, these also being regarded as part of the basic constitution of a person.

There is another aspect of the Chinese view of the person for which it is difficult to find a western counterpart. The body of a person is supposed to be filled with *qi* 氣 (the life forces), a kind of energy or force that flows freely in and gives life to the person. *Qi* 氣 (the life forces) is responsible for the operation of the senses, and it can be affected by what happens to the senses. It is linked to the emotions, and what we would describe as a person’s physical and psychological well-being is regarded as dependent on a proper balance of *qi* 氣 (the life forces). For example, both illness and such emotional responses as fear are explained in terms of the condition of *qi* 氣 (the life forces).

Among the different aspects of the person, early Confucians attach special significance to *xin* 心 (heart, mind), the organ of the heart which is viewed as the site of what we would describe as cognitive and affective activities. *Xin* 心 (heart, mind), a term often translated as “heart” or “mind”, can have desires (*yu* 欲) and emotions (*qing* 情), and can also deliberate and focus attention on things. It has the ability to set directions that guide one’s life and shape one’s person as a whole, and these directions of the heart/mind are referred to as *zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind). *Zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind) can refer to specific intentions or general goals, and it is something that can be set up, nourished, and attained. It can also be altered by oneself or swayed under others’ influence, and lost through insufficient persistence or distraction by other things. *Zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind) has to do with the heart/mind’s focusing itself on and constantly bearing in mind certain courses of action or goals in life, in such a way that it will guide one’s action or one’s life unless it is changed by oneself or under others’ influence, or unless one is led to deviate from it by other distractions.

Zhi 志 (directions of the heart/mind) differs from *yu* 欲 (desires) in that, while *zh* 志 (directions of the heart/mind) pertains specifically to the heart/mind, *yu* 欲

(desires) can pertain to the heart/mind or to parts of the body such as the senses. Also, while *zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind) involves focusing the heart/mind in a way that guides one's actions or one's life in general, *yu* 欲 (desires) involves tendencies that one may choose to resist rather than act on. There is another term, *yi* 意 (thoughts and inclinations), often translated as "thought," which refers to tendencies that differ from both *zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind) and *yu* 欲 (desires). The term can refer to one's thoughts or opinions, or to one's inclinations, which involve one's wanting to see certain things happen, or one's thinking of bringing about certain things. Unlike *yu* 欲 (desires), which can involve tendencies (such as sensory desires) that just happen to obtain without one's having a reflective awareness of them, *yi* 意 (thoughts and inclinations) is more reflective in that its object is something one is aware of as part of one's thoughts, which pertain to the heart/mind. On the other hand, *yi* 意 (thoughts and inclinations) is in a less directed state than *zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind) in that, while *yi* 意 (thoughts and inclinations) can be just a thought in favor of something without one's actually having decided to act in that direction, *zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind) involves one's actually forming the intention or aim to so act.

With this account of the early Chinese view of the person as background, we can now turn to the notion of self that might be ascribed to the early Confucians. In using the notion, I have in mind three phenomena that can be found in early Confucian texts. First, as we just saw, we find a range of terms used in early Chinese texts to talk about the constitution of an individual person, including what we nowadays would describe as physical as well as psychological aspects of a person. Thus, in early China, there is a conception of the individual person as an identifiable entity distinct from other persons. The way some thinkers view what is distinctive of a human person might make reference to the way the individual person relates to other people. For example, both Mozi and Xunzi explicitly state that they view a person (*ren* 人) in social terms, namely, in terms of their capacity to draw and abide by social distinctions (Mozi 1948: 16/12/4–5; Xunzi 1965: 3.3b–4a, cf. 5.7b–8a). Nevertheless, while holding such views, these thinkers still speak in a way that allows them to talk about the relation between the individual person and other people, showing that they still have a conception of the individual person as distinct from, though intimately related to, other people.

Second, in classical Chinese, there are first personal pronouns, such as *wo* 我 (oneself) and *wu* 吾 (oneself), that can be used to refer to oneself. In addition to these first personal pronouns, the classical Chinese language also has two characters with the meaning of "oneself"; *zi* 自 and *ji* 己. The two characters differ in that the former emphasizes one's relation to oneself, while the latter emphasizes oneself as contrasted with others (*ren* 人). These linguistic observations show that the early Chinese not only have a conception of an individual person as distinct from other people, but they also regard each individual person as having a conception of oneself as an identifiable entity distinct from other people, as well as a conception of the way one relates to oneself.

Third, in early Confucian texts, the characters just mentioned are often used to talk about one's examining oneself and making improvements to oneself on the

basis of such self-examination. This shows that early Confucian thinkers also work with a conception of one's being related to oneself in a self-reflective manner, with the capacity to reflect on, examine, and bring about changes in oneself. They ascribe this capacity to the heart/mind, which plays a guiding role in one's life. And, as we will discuss in greater detail later, the heart/mind also has the capacity to hold on to the directions it sets without being swayed by external forces, as well as the capacity to constantly step back from and reflect on its own activities and to reshape them in accordance with its conception of what is proper.

In speaking of the Confucian conception of the self, I have in mind these three aspects of the way the early Confucians view the individual person – that they have a conception of an individual person as distinct from (though also intimately related to) other people, that they see each such person as also having a conception of oneself as distinct from other people and of the way one relates to oneself, and that they regard each such person as having, through the capacity of the heart/mind, the capacity to constantly reflect on and bring about changes to oneself, including changes to the activities of the heart/mind itself. Throughout the chapter, I will be using the notion of self in this minimal sense, without being committed to more substantive accounts of what constitutes the self, such as whether it is constituted by a stream of consciousness.

Having discussed the Confucian conception of the self, I turn now to the content of the Confucian ethical ideal. Throughout the history of Confucian thought, *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence), *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites), and *yi* 義 (duty, righteousness) continue to be three prominent concepts used in characterizing this ideal. I will consider these three aspects of the Confucian ideal in the next three sections, focusing on how the self figures in each. I will show that, in each case, there is a sense in which what is advocated involves one's moving away from a certain kind of self-centeredness. Together, these three aspects of the Confucian ideal point to a kind of self-transformation that involves properly situating the self in relation to others and in relation to certain ethical standards.

3 Concern for Others

Ren 仁 (humanity, benevolence) as part of the Confucian ethical ideal has to do with one's concern for the well-being of others. The way such concern is spelt out takes different forms in the history of Confucian thought, and *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence) is also related to what some might call 'metaphysical' views, especially in later Confucian thought. In addition, there are different scholarly views on the earlier connotations of the term; for example, some believe the term carried in earlier times the connotation of fully embodying the distinctive characteristics of a human person, which accounts for the occasional translation of *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence) as "humanity." In my discussion, I will focus on that aspect of *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence) having to do with one's concern for the well-being of others, and set aside these other dimensions of *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence). This aspect of

ren 仁 (humanity, benevolence) has been discussed in the English language literature using various contemporary terms such as “love,” “compassion,” “empathy,” “sympathy,” or “benevolence.” These terms, however, often carry certain specific connotations, especially in contemporary philosophical analysis of the phenomena they refer to, that might not be present in the Confucian understanding of *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence). To avoid inadvertently ascribing these connotations to *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence), I will avoid the use of these terms, and instead speak of concern for the well-being of others, or simply concern for others, when referring to the relation between self and others that Confucian thinkers advocate in their discourses on *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence).

To be more specific, in speaking of concern for others, I am referring to the ways in which one’s attention maybe focused directly on the well-being of others without mediation by other considerations, and in a positive manner in that one seeks to promote the good of others and to alleviate their negative conditions. This way of characterizing concern for others is intended to exclude other ways in which one maybe related to the well-being of others, such as when one’s attention is directed to the well-being of others as a way to accomplish other goals, or when one’s attention is focused on others in a way that is conducive to their well-being though their well-being is not the object of one’s attention. An example of the latter is the posture of *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully), which I will discuss in the next section. Characterized in this manner, the notion of concern for others is specific enough to capture the aspect of *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence) under consideration, while also broad enough to accommodate the different ways in which this aspect of *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence) is spelt out in the history of Confucian thought. This characterization is also non-committal on questions such as whether such concern involves one’s imaginatively placing oneself in the other’s position, unlike contemporary terms such as “empathy.” All Confucian thinkers regard such concern for others as part of the ethical ideal, and some, such as Mencius and later Confucian thinkers under his influence, believe it to be already to some extent part of the basic human constitution.

One’s concern for others takes at least three distinct forms in the early Confucian discourse on *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence). First, I may have a concern for the well-being of a specific individual by virtue of some special situation she is in, or some situation in which she and I are involved in some special way. A number of such examples are presented in the *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*). One passage observes how one would react with *ce yin* 惻隱 (commiseration) upon suddenly seeing a baby on the verge of falling into a well, and another observes how King Xuan of Qi (Qi Xuan Wang 齊宣王) reacted with *bu ren* 不忍 (unable to bear the suffering of others) upon seeing an ox being led to be killed as part of a sacrificial rite (*Mengzi* 1984: 1A:7, 2A:6). The reactions are presented as immediate responses of the heart/mind to some imminent negative condition of a living thing, responses that are felt with some degree of intensity and that move one to act in certain ways to alleviate or pre-empt the negative condition. These responses are not mediated by any kind of calculative attitude, though some kind of imaginative exercise might be involved – King Xuan’s response to the plight of the ox is described in terms of his viewing

the ox as if it were an innocent person being led to the place of execution. Beyond these general observations about the responses, the textual evidence is not sufficient to enable us to draw further conclusions about whether these responses also carry more specific connotations that are highlighted in contemporary philosophical discussions of such phenomena as compassion, empathy, or sympathy.

There is another kind of response to a specific individual that involves a situation in which I am in a position to possibly treat the individual in a certain manner. The response is conveyed by the notion *shu* 恕 (reciprocity), a notion found in most of the early Confucian texts and explained in the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*) in terms of my not imposing on another what I would not wish to be imposed on myself (*Lunyu* 1980: 15.24, cf. 12.2). *Shu* 恕 (reciprocity) has to do with potentially negative conditions of an individual in that the contemplated treatment from which I should refrain is either unwelcome to the individual or not in her interest. Though *shu* 恕 (reciprocity) is presented in the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*) as a more reflective kind of exercise, it is likely that ideally, for the Confucians, one should cultivate oneself to the point when one would so respond without engaging in such explicit reflection (Zhu 1986: 116, 358, 672; Zhu 1983–1986a: 3.4b–5a, 1983–1986b: 11.30a).

The second kind of concern for others involves a concern for the well-being of another individual on an ongoing basis, by virtue of some special relation I stand to that individual. This phenomenon is related to the Confucian advocacy of a gradation in one's concern for others depending on how one is related to them. This kind of concern differs from the first in a number of ways, as can be seen from the example of one's relation to one's parents. Although one would still respond to specific situations involving potentially negative conditions of one's parent, one's attention can be directed to her in a way that is not dependent on awareness of any such situations. Instead, one's concern for her is ongoing – for example, one continues to think of her while traveling afar, hopes that her aging does not impair her health, and is constantly on guard against doing anything that would bring her disgrace. Furthermore, unlike the first kind of concern, one's attention need not be restricted to negative or potentially negative conditions of hers. Instead, one actively seeks to promote her well-being such as by looking after her health, and to bring her joy in various ways. Indeed, the relation to one's parent is even more complex as it also involves another kind of attitude which is conveyed by the term *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) and which we will consider in the next section.

The third kind of concern has to do with individuals who might not be related to one in any special way. It is directed not to a specific individual, but to living things, or human beings, or a sub-class of human beings, in general. Such attitude is portrayed from time to time in early texts in connection with those who have people under their care, and is sometimes put in terms of one's forming one body (*ti* 體) with those under one's care. For example, the ideal ruler is described as someone who regards the common people as part of his body or who forms one body with the common people (e.g., *Liji* 1965: 17.16a; *Guanzi* 1965: 10.18a). The best illustration of this kind of attitude is probably the story of Yu's (Da Yu 大禹) efforts to channel the flood that had caused immense suffering to the people; he was so devoted to alleviating the plight of the people that he three times passed the door of his own

household without entering (*Mengzi* 1984: 4B29). The way a caring ruler or official feels for the people is also sometimes portrayed using the relation between parents and children as analogy – the ruler or official is like the parents (*fu mu* 父母) of the common people, whom they look after as if caring for a new born infant (*chi zi* 赤子) (e.g., *Mengzi* 1984: 3A5). This kind of concern differs from the first in that one’s concern is directed not to any specific individual but to people generally, and it can be directed not just to alleviating their suffering but also to positively promoting their well-being.

While the three kinds of concern just described differ in important ways, they share the common underlying idea that, ideally, one’s attention should be directed to, and one should be sensitive to, the well-being of others in certain appropriate ways. Falling short of this ideal involves one’s being overly focused on one’s own interests and well-being, and as a result being insufficiently attentive and sensitive to the interests and well-being of others. Put differently, self and others should ideally be connected in certain appropriate ways, and it is a kind of self-centeredness that separates one from others. Part of the self-transformation that the early Confucians advocate involves one’s moving away from this kind of self-centeredness, properly situating the self in relation to others. This aspect of the early Confucian ideal is later taken up by Sung-Ming Confucians and developed into the idea of ‘one body.’ Each individual person ideally forms one body with all living things in that one is sensitive and responsive to the conditions of all living things, and it is through self-centeredness (*si* 私) that one separates oneself from others (Shun 2005: 1–9).

4 Lowering Oneself and Elevating Others

Let us turn next to a cluster of attitudes related to *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites), a term often translated as “rites.” *Li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites) originally referred to rites of sacrifices, but later came to be used of rules of conduct governing ceremonial behavior in various recurring social contexts. Subsequently, its scope broadened even further to include rules governing behavior appropriate to one’s social position, though it continued to be used frequently in connection with ceremonial behavior. From a contemporary western perspective, in which there is not one single term whose scope even approximates that of *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites), it might seem puzzling how this variety of rules can be subsumed under a single term. What gives unity to the rules of *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites) is the spirit behind *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites), which is presented in early texts as *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully), a term often translated as “respect”. *Li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites) is also related to other attitudes, such as *rang* 讓 (letting others have what is good or honorable), and Mencius describes *gong jing* 恭敬 (treat respectfully and with specific postures in being respectful) and *ci rang* 辭讓 (politely declining and letting others have what is good or honorable) as the basis for *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites) (*Mengzi* 1984: 2A:6, 6A:6). While these attitudes are directed toward others, they are unlike the

kind of concern for others considered in the previous section, which involves one's attending directly to the well-being of others.

Jing 敬 (treat respectfully), though often directed toward deities or persons, can also be directed toward things and affairs, such as *de* 德 (virtue) or one's official responsibilities. In early texts, it is often paired with *shen* 慎 (a cautious and attentive attitude), and with *jie* 戒 (an attitude of being on guard). It likely involves devotion, focus of mental attention, caution, and being on guard against things going wrong. It is occasionally used in early texts such as the *Yijing* 易經 (*The Classics of Changes*) to refer to a posture that is not directed to any specific object, and this usage is highlighted by later Confucians to refer to a posture of seriousness that is part of the self-cultivation process. But more often, it is used in early texts to refer to an attitude directed toward deities, persons, or affairs to which one should be devoted, such as one's official responsibilities (for further elaboration on *jing* 敬, see Shun 1997: 52–54).

To see how *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) differs from the kind of concern for others considered in the previous section, let us consider one's relation to one's parents. Imagine, for example, that one is serving a meal to an elderly parent who cannot take care of herself (cf. *Lunyu* 1980: 2.7; *Mengzi* 1984: 4A19, 7A37). In being concerned for her well-being, one would ensure that she is well-nourished and that the kind of food served is pleasing to her. But one could have done something similar for an animal one is keeping as a pet. *Jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) toward the parent involves an attitude that goes beyond just attending directly to her well-being. It involves a certain posture toward the parent that is displayed in the way one serves the food – one's demeanor in passing the food, one's attentiveness to her reactions, the words one uses when speaking to her, one's not being distracted by non-urgent business when serving her, etc. The attentiveness and seriousness one displays, though pleasing to her, are not themselves focused directly on her material needs or on what she finds pleasing. Instead, they are focused directly on her as a person whom one should treat seriously and with attention. If we are to find a western equivalent, the posture involved is probably close to that of treating someone respectfully – while the person one treats in this manner will be pleased by such treatment, one's attention in treating the person respectfully is not directed to seeking ways to please her.

When directed to persons, *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) may have to do with certain specific qualities that pertain to its objects. For example, it may be directed to superiors in government or to elders; in these cases, it is by virtue of certain qualities that these individuals have – their superior position in government or their age – that one treats them with *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully). And because *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) is often translated as “respect,” comparison with contemporary western discussions of respect for persons might lead one to draw the inference that, when Confucian thinkers advocate *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) toward people in general, *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) is also a response to a certain intrinsic quality shared by all human beings. Such a quality maybe labeled variously as “human worth” or “human dignity,” and treating human beings with *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) maybe regarded as a matter of according them ‘due regard’ in the sense that *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully)

is a response called for by such an intrinsic quality that all human beings share (for an excellent discussion that takes this direction, see Chan 2006: 229–252. Though my interpretation of *jing* is different, my thoughts on the subject has been stimulated by Chan’s discussion).

It is unclear that there is textual evidence in support of such an understanding of *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully t). While Confucian thinkers do advocate *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully), as well as other kinds of attitudes, toward special classes of people, or people in general, whether they regard these attitudes as responses called for by certain intrinsic qualities of their objects will depend on how they explain their advocacy. For example, while early Confucians advocate love toward one’s parents, it does not follow that they regard such love as a response to certain intrinsic qualities pertaining to one’s parents. Instead, they might explain it in terms of the past relationship between parents and children, such as how parents have cared for their children when the latter were young (e.g. Lunyu 1980: 17.21). Similarly, in urging that we treat people generally with *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully), it does not follow from such advocacy by itself that Confucian thinkers regard *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) as a response to certain intrinsic qualities that all people share.

As far as I can tell, there is no evidence that early Confucians subscribe to the contemporary idea of intrinsic human worth or view *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) in a way close to the contemporary understanding of respect for persons. As mentioned earlier, if we are to find some western equivalent to *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully), the attitude involved in *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) is probably closer to ‘treat respectfully’ than to ‘respect,’ and the idea that we should treat people respectfully does not carry the kind of connotations that are often associated with the idea of respect for persons. That the way *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) is used in early texts is unlike the way “respect” is used nowadays can be seen from other considerations. For example, while we might come to respect someone on learning about some special accomplishment of the person, I am not aware of any instance in which *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) is similarly used in early texts. Also, in early texts, attitudes related to *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) are at times presented in such a way that it involves one’s viewing people as if one were dealing with them in certain contexts that did not actually obtain. For example, in the Lunyu 論語 (*Analects*), officials are urged to deal with people one encounters in one’s travels as if one were receiving important guests, and to employ the common people as if one were conducting an important sacrifice (Lunyu 1980: 12.2). A contemporary example of a similar nature would be for senior scholars to be urged to speak with junior colleagues at professional conferences as if they were accomplished scholars. In these examples, what one is invited to do is to engage in an imaginary exercise that makes it easier for one to adopt a posture of a certain kind when dealing with others, rather than to respond to a certain intrinsic quality that exist in those whom one deals with. The translation “treat respectfully” better conveys this connotation of *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully), and helps us avoid the misleading connotations potentially generated by the translation “respect.”

Turning to some of the other attitudes associated with *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites), *gong* 恭 (specific postures in being respectful) is often paired

with *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) though the two differ in their emphases. Whereas *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) is an attitude of caution, seriousness, and mental attention that can be directed toward people and affairs, *gong* 恭 (specific postures in being respectful) is a more specific attitude having to do with attention to one's appearance, posture, manners, and manner when dealing with others. Both *gong* 恭 (specific postures in being respectful) and *jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) have to do with the way one's attention is directed, and *gong* 恭 (specific postures in being respectful) is not a mere matter of outward appearance. Still, in *gong* 恭 (specific postures in being respectful), one's attention is directed primarily to externals of the kind just described. As for *ci rang* 辭讓 (politely declining and letting others have what is good or honorable), *ci* 辭 involves politely declining, and *rang* 讓 letting others have, something good or of honor to oneself. An example of *ci rang* 辭讓 (politely declining and letting others have what is good or honorable) is to politely declare one's incompetence to address a question put to one by an elder before responding to the question, rather than immediately proffering an answer (*Liji* 1965: 1.3b). By so doing, one conveys that one sees the opportunity to respond to the question as an honor, something that one does not necessarily deserve (For further elaboration on *gong* 恭 and *ci rang* 辭讓, see Shun 1997: 54–55).

Although *gong jing* 恭敬 (treat respectfully and with specific postures in being respectful) and *ci rang* 辭讓 (politely declining and letting others have what is good or honorable) differ in the manner described, they probably refer to different aspects of a more general attitude that Confucians believe underlies *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites). *Jing* 敬 (treat respectfully) involves taking the other person seriously, focusing one's attention on and treating the other person with caution. *Gong* 恭 (specific postures in being respectful) involves attending to one's outward presentation of oneself in dealing with the other person, including one's appearance, posture, manners, and demeanor. Together, *gong jing* 恭敬 (treat respectfully and with specific postures in being respectful) demonstrates a serious regard for the other person, in a way that would have been appropriate to someone of higher status than oneself, such as deities, superiors, or elders. *Ci rang* 辭讓 (politely declining and letting others have what is good or honorable), on the other hand, involves a posture that focuses on declaring one's being in some sense 'lower' than the other, such as being less deserving of an honor that has been offered. This does not mean that one literally has a low opinion of oneself or lacks awareness of good qualities that one might have. Rather, it is a matter of not having oneself at the forefront of one's thinking when interacting with others – one does not display oneself nor seek attention or admiration. Together, *gong jing* 恭敬 (treat respectfully and with specific postures in being respectful) and *ci rang* 辭讓 (politely declining and letting others have what is good or honorable) are two sides of a more general attitude that underlies *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites), an attitude that is described in the *Liji* 禮記 (The Book of Rites) as "lowering oneself and elevating others" (*zi bei er zun* 自卑而尊人) (*Liji* 1965: 1.3a).

The nature of this attitude can be brought out further by comparing *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence) with *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites). *Ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence) has to do with a view of human beings as beings that have material

needs, are vulnerable to pleasure and pain, etc. By contrast, *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites) has to do with a view of human beings as beings that have a sense of dignity and sensitivity to the way they are treated. This aspect of human beings requires a degree of self-awareness that is not shared by other animals. For example, while non-human animals may accept food given in whatever manner when hungry, a person would have reluctance accepting food given in an abusive manner even when starving (e.g., Mengzi 1984: 6A:10). *Li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites), as a set of rules governing behavior in recurring social contexts, is a codification of our acknowledgement of this aspect of humans, and helps build and reinforce our conception of human beings as distinct from other animals in the manner just described. And for people standing in special social relations, such as rulers and subordinates, or parents and children, *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites) further codifies the acknowledgement of the special status of people in certain social positions. Human beings naturally tend to put more weight than appropriate on their own interests and well-being, and *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence) helps to steer us away from such a tendency so that we also attend in appropriate ways to the interests and well-being of others. Likewise, human beings naturally tend to over-emphasize their own importance, and *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites) helps to steer us away from such a tendency so that we also pay appropriate attention to others in our interactions with them. The idea of 'lowering oneself and elevating others' (*zi bei er zun ren* 自卑而尊人) used in the *Liji* 禮記 (The Book of Rites) to characterize the attitude behind *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites) is not a matter of our believing ourselves to be literally in a lower position. Rather, it is a matter of our shifting our attention away from ourselves toward others, in a way that is akin to one's attitude when interacting with people in a higher position. Such redirection of attention is particularly important for those actually in a higher social position, as it is particularly tempting for them to treat those in a lower social position in a disrespectful manner. The remark in the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*) about dealing with people one encounters as if one were receiving important guests, and employing the common people as if one were conducting an important sacrifice, is directed to those in office vulnerable to this tempting tendency (*Lunyu* 1980: 12.2).

Thus, as part of the Confucian ethical ideal, *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites) steers one away from another form of self-centeredness, different from that discussed in the previous section in connection with *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence). The latter involves a move away from an undue emphasis on one's own interests and well-being that might result in insufficient attention and sensitivity to the interests and well-being of others. The former, on the other hand, involves a move away from attaching an undue importance to oneself that might result in one's not treating other people with sufficient seriousness and attentiveness. In both cases, the emphasis is on how the self should be properly situated in relation to others. In the next section, we will consider the kind of attitude associated with *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness). While this attitude also involves a move away from a kind of self-centeredness, the emphasis in this case is on the submission of the self to certain ethical standards.

5 The Self and Ethical Standards

In early texts, *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness) is often related to *ru* 辱 (disgrace), or disgrace – to be subject to disgrace is to be lacking in *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness). Likely, the earlier meaning of *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness) has to do with a sense of honor and an absence of disgrace; it is a matter of self-regard, not allowing oneself to be subject to disgraceful treatment. One possible attitude toward disgrace (*ru* 辱) is *wu* 惡 (dislike, aversion), and early thinkers regarded the desire for honor (*rong* 榮) and aversion to disgrace (*ru* 辱) as part of the fundamental constitution of human beings. But *wu* 惡 (dislike) can be directed at anything that one dislikes, such as death, unpleasant sights and sounds, or insecurity. Although all these things relate to oneself – it is one’s own death or insecurity, and it is the unpleasant sights or sounds that one experiences, that one dislikes – *ru* 辱 (disgrace) is related to oneself in a more intimate manner. The *ru* 辱 (disgrace) one suffers is not just something that one dislikes; it reflects adversely on oneself and results in a lowering of one’s standing. One’s attitude toward *ru* 辱 (disgrace) can therefore take on a special form, which is referred to as *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful), a term often translated as “shame” or “regard as shameful.” Unlike *wu* 惡 (dislike), *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful) focuses on *ru* 辱 (disgrace) as something that is beneath oneself or lowers one’s standing. Thus, *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful) involves a more reflective concern with the self, having to do with thoughts about the effect on oneself of certain occurrences. Though often translated as “shame” or “regard as shameful,” *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful) differs from contemporary western notions of shame in important respects. *Chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful) can be directed toward something contemplated as well as toward what has already come about. It is not associated with the thought of being seen or the urge to hide oneself. Instead, it is associated with the thought of being tainted and the urge to cleanse oneself of what is tainting; the idea of cleansing oneself is conveyed by the expression *xue chi* 雪恥 (cleanse the tainted). *Chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful) is linked to a resolution to either remedy the disgraceful situation if it has already obtained, or to distance oneself from or pre-empt a potentially disgraceful situation if it has not yet come about (for further elaboration on *chi* 恥, see Shun 1997: 58–61).

Now, in early China, what is regarded as disgraceful is often treatment that is insulting by public standards, such as being beaten in public, being stared in the eyes, or being treated in violation of certain accepted protocols of conduct that include *li* 禮 (propriety, observance of the rites). “Insulting” is used here as a translation of the character *wu* 侮 (insult), a character that refers to the kind of treatment just described, treatment that is inappropriate by certain generally accepted public standards. It differs from *ru* 辱 (disgrace) in that while *wu* 侮 (insult) is a matter of how certain forms of treatment measure against generally accepted public standards, *ru* 辱 (disgrace) focuses on the viewpoint of someone who is subject to such treatment, involving a perception of the treatment as somehow diminishing oneself. *Ru* 辱 (disgrace) is closely identified with *wu* 侮 (insult) in early China – that is, what one regards as diminishing oneself is usually treatment that is insulting by

generally accepted public standards. As a result, insulting treatment is viewed with *chi* 恥 (regard as shameful), which is often associated with anger at a situation and the urge to fight back to avenge the situation (the discussion that follows draws on Shun (forthcoming). See also Shun 1997: 61–63).

Fighting of this kind was so pervasive in early China that it led one early thinker to propose that, if one stops seeing what is insulting as a disgrace, such fighting would stop (see the presentation of Songzi's position in Xunzi 1965: 12.11a–11b). Xunzi took note of this view, but disagreed on the ground that whether people fight depends on what they dislike, and as long as they dislike insulting treatment, the fighting will not stop regardless of whether one regards such treatment as a disgrace. Contrary to Xunzi, though, this thinker has probably made a valid point – in not regarding the insulting treatment as disgraceful, one no longer sees it as a personal affront even if one still dislikes it, and it is seeing something as a personal affront that leads to the kind of fierce fighting that has become problematic. In any instance, Xunzi's own position shares something in common with that of the other early thinker in that he also advocates a fundamental change in what one regards as truly disgraceful. According to him, what we regard as disgraceful should not be tied to the way others view or treat us, but should be a matter of our own ethical conduct, which also includes the way we respond to others' treatment of ourselves (Xunzi 1965: 12.12b).

This view is shared by practically all Confucian thinkers. Several passages in the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*) also make the point that what one regards as shameful, that is, the proper object of *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful), should be a matter of one's own qualities and actions rather than the way one is viewed or treated by others. In the *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*), we find a contrast between the ranks of Heaven (*tian* 天) and the ranks of human beings, and between what is truly worthy of esteem and esteem that is conferred by humans; the contrast is between the ethical attributes and official ranks in government (Mengzi 1984: 6A:16, cf. 6A:17). In addition, Mencius also advocates a higher form of courage over a lower form of courage. The latter has to do with fighting in response to insulting treatment; the former, by contrast, has to do with the resolve to correct situations that one regards as ethically problematic (Mengzi 1984: 1B:3, 2A:2). Thus, while Mencius continues to relate *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness) to *chi* 恥 (regard as shameful), he also holds the view that the kind of situations to which *chi* 恥 (regard as shameful) should be directed are situations that are disgraceful by ethical standards. It follows from the early Confucian way of viewing the proper object of *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful) that *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful) is no longer linked to the thought of avenging oneself, as its object is no longer the way one is treated by others. Instead, *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful) has more to do with the resolve to distance oneself from certain situations that can be ethically tainting on oneself, and to correct such situations should they arise.

What is innovative about the early Confucian position is a different way of viewing the proper object of *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful), while still retaining the linkage between *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness) and *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful). It continues to regard a person of *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness) as

a person with a sense of self-regard, someone with the resolve to distance oneself from disgraceful situations that are tainting on oneself. But it views what is truly disgraceful in ethical terms: what is tainting on one is for one to be ethically inferior or to conduct oneself unethically. One implication of this view is a move away from a certain kind of focus on oneself. Even when I have been treated inappropriately by others, my focus is not on the situation viewed as a personal affront to myself. Instead, I view it as an ethical situation, and my focus is on how I could respond in an ethically appropriate manner to the situation. Thus, though there is still a sense of proper self-regard, this sense of self-regard is focused on my not responding in an ethically problematic manner to the situation, rather than on my not being treated in a certain manner. Having decoupled *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful) from the perspective of seeing something as a personal affront, and having linked it to one's own ethical conduct, *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful) can now be a response to a situation in which others are treated inappropriately. An example is that of King Wu (Wu Wang 武王), who upon seeing a tyrant heaping miseries on the people, viewed with *chi* 恥 (shame, regard as shameful) the prospect of his not doing something to correct the situation (Mengzi 1984: 1B:3). The kind of self-regard highlighted in this Confucian view is different not just from the view that focuses on one's not being treated in an insulting manner, but also from the views of self-respect presented in certain contemporary philosophical discussions. On certain philosophical accounts, self-respect has to do either with a certain assessment of oneself, related to the worth of oneself or excellences that one possesses, or with protecting one's rights to or claims on not being treated in certain ways (Darwall 1977: 47–49). By contrast, the kind of self-regard highlighted in the Confucian view focuses on the idea of not falling below certain ethical standards in one's own behavior, involving the viewpoint that it is tainting on oneself to fall below such standards.

In this way, though the Confucian understanding of *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness) is still related to self-regard, the focus is now on properly subordinating the self to certain ethical standards. These standards are regarded as something that the heart/mind can grasp in a process that is akin to perception. On a number of occasions, Mencius compares the heart/mind to the senses. Just as the senses are drawn toward and take pleasure in certain sensory objects, the heart/mind is drawn toward and takes pleasure in *liyi* 理義 (morality) (Mengzi 1984: 6A:7). The relation between the heart/mind and *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness) is described in terms of *si* 思 (focusing or directing the attention of the heart/mind); when the heart/mind *si* 思 (focusing or directing the attention of the heart/mind), it will attain *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness) (Mengzi 1984: 6A:15). *Si* 思 in early Chinese texts has the connotation of focusing or directing the attention of the heart/mind, just as one focuses or directs the attention of the ears or eyes when one listens or looks (Shun 1997: 149–153). This perceptual metaphor for describing the operation of the heart/mind is also found in the *Xunzi* 荀子. While Xunzi uses *zhi* 知 (know, understand), a term often translated as “know” or “understand,” to describe the relation of the heart/mind to *dao* 道 (Way) or *li* 理 (pattern), *zhi* 知 (know, understand) is itself presented in terms of a perceptual metaphor. The *zhi* 知 (know, understand) of the heart/mind can be *ming* 明 (bright), or bright

(e.g., *Xunzi* 1965: 1.1a), where *ming* 明 (bright) is illustrated by the brightness of fire or of the sun and moon (e.g., *Xunzi* 1965: 11.13a).

Thus, for both Mencius and Xunzi, the kind of ethical standards to which one should subordinate oneself are something that the heart/mind can ‘perceive’ and to which we should respond. Furthermore, for both, there should be a firm commitment to these standards of such a kind that it can override personal interests of the most pressing kind, including one’s own life. That the individual can exhibit such firmness of commitment is because *zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind) is independent of external control in that the heart/mind has the capacity to hold on to the directions it sets without being swayed by external forces. For example, while both the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*) and the *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*) emphasize the guiding role of *zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind), comparing it to the commander of an army, the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*) notes one point of dissimilarity – while an army can be deprived of its commander, even a common person cannot be deprived of the directions (*zhi* 志) set by the heart/mind (*Lunyu* 1980: 9.26; *Mengzi* 1984: 2A2). Such directions can, of course, be influenced by outside factors, but the point is that the heart/mind has the capacity to resist such influences and, for the Confucian thinkers, one should ideally cultivate oneself to attain such a steadfastness of purpose after having set the heart/mind in the proper directions. This independence of the heart/mind from external control is also emphasized by Xunzi, who compares the heart/mind to the position of the ruler and the senses to the offices of government; like the ruler, the heart/mind issues order but does not take order from anything (*Xunzi* 1965: 11.10a–10b, 15.5b–6a). To ensure that *zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind) is not swayed by external influences, we need also to cultivate *qi* 氣 (the life forces), which support *zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind). The *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*) talks about nourishing the flood-like *qi* 氣 (the life forces), acknowledging that without adequate support from a cultivated *qi* 氣 (the life forces), *zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind) can collapse and the heart/mind can be moved (*Mengzi* 1984: 2A:2). *Xunzi* likewise emphasizes that self-cultivation involves giving order to *qi* 氣 (the life forces) and nourishing the heart/mind (*zhi qi yang xin* 治氣養心), again giving recognition to the complementary roles of *zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind) and *qi* 氣 (the life forces) in this steadfastness of purpose (e.g., *Xunzi* 1965: 1.9a).

So far, we have discussed in connection with the Confucian conception of *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness) the shift of attention away from the way we are treated by others to our conforming to certain ethical standards. For the early Confucians, this shift of attention to the ethical should also happen in other areas of life, including adverse circumstances of life of all kinds. This position is conveyed using the term *ming* 命 (destiny, fate, decree), a term sometimes paired with *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness) in early texts. *Ming* 命 (destiny, fate, decree), often translated as “destiny,” “fate,” or “decree,” is used in early Confucian texts to convey a certain attitude toward adverse external conditions of life, which include not just the way we are viewed and treated by others, but also things like sickness or death. These conditions do matter to the Confucians. For example, in the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*), we see Confucius lamenting the lack of appreciation by others (*Lunyu* 1980: 14.35), as well as expressing sorrow at the death of his favorite disciple Yan Hui 顏回

(*Lunyu* 1980: 11.9, 11.10). At the same time, from the Confucian perspective, even though these things do matter, they pale in significance compared to our own ethical qualities. When we do not fare well in relation to the former, at least the latter is something within our control and something we can fall back on and take consolation in. This contrast between what is of true significance and within our control, and what is of comparatively lesser significance and not entirely within our control, is highlighted in a passage in the *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*), which characterizes the latter in terms of *ming* 命 (destiny, fate, decree) (*Mengzi* 1984: 7A:3).

Despite its usual translation as “destiny” or “fate,” *ming* 命 (destiny, fate, decree) is not used by early Confucians to express beliefs about pre-determination of things or about historical forces at work that cannot be resisted. Instead, it is used to convey an attitude that might be described as one of willing acceptance (*Mengzi* 1984: 7A:2). This is not a general attitude directed toward external occurrences in general, but a posture one takes up in response to specific adverse conditions of life that one actually encounters. It might be an undesirable condition that is literally not within one’s control, such as the death of a beloved one. Or it might be a condition that one can still alter but only by improper means, such as avoiding one’s own death by succumbing to evil. One can still be emotionally affected by these adverse conditions of life and wish things could be otherwise – one would still grieve at the death of beloved ones, be disappointed by the lack of appreciation by others, and lament the corruption that prevails. However, one would not direct one’s emotional energy to blaming others or complaining about the outcome, nor become bitter and resentful (*Lunyu* 1980: 14.35). It does not mean that one is resigned to the situation in the sense that one becomes totally passive, a kind of fatalistic surrender to one’s environment. Nor is it a matter of submission to the environment, as when a slave ‘accepts’ being enslaved, or a matter of inertia, as when one lets things proceed without bothering. Instead, there is an element of activism in the Confucian attitude. One would still await and welcome the possibility of change, and even when such opportunities do not arise, one would redirect one’s energy in a positive direction, just as Confucius redirected his energy to teaching after having come to a realization of the futility of his political endeavors. And accompanying this acceptance of the adverse external conditions of life is a positive affirmation of the ethical values that one stands by and in which one takes consolation.

From the preceding discussion of *yi* 義 (dutifulness, righteousness) and *ming* 命 (destiny, fate, decree), we see that early Confucian thinkers advocate a submission of the self to certain ethical standards that the heart/mind can grasp. They advocate a total submission of the self to such standards, even at the expense of grave consequences for oneself. This firm ethical commitment involves a move away from attaching undue significance to the interests of oneself understood in ordinary terms. Such interests include not just the way one is treated or viewed by others, but also other adverse conditions of life of all kinds. It is one’s ethical qualities that are of fundamental importance, and anchoring the self in such ethical standards enables one to respond to all kinds of adverse circumstances of life without being emotionally perturbed (an idea conveyed in *Mengzi* 1984: 2A:2 in terms of the heart/mind’s being ‘unmoved’). Thus, this aspect of the Confucian ideal also involves a

move away from a kind of self-centeredness that focuses on one's interest understood in more ordinary terms, to a perspective that anchors the self in the ethical standards to which one should conform.

6 Self-Cultivation

We see from the above discussion that early Confucians advocate a fundamental transformation of the self that involves properly situating the self in relation to others and in relation to certain ethical standards. On the one hand, one submits oneself to certain ethical standards and focuses one's attention on living up to such standards rather than on how one is treated by others or on the external conditions of life. On the other hand, one attaches proper significance to the interests and well-being of others and interacts with them with proper attentiveness and seriousness. Such transformation involves a move away from certain tempting kinds of self-centeredness – an undue focus on one's own interests and well-being, on one's own importance, or on the external conditions of life to which one attaches importance. That the fundamental ethical task has to do with a move away from certain kinds of self-centeredness is hinted at in early Confucian texts, such as the observation in the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*) about how attaining the ethical ideal involves “overcoming the self” (*ke ji* 克己) (*Lunyu* 1980: 12.1). This idea is taken up and highlighted in later Confucian thought, which ascribes ethical failure primarily to certain forms of self-centeredness and regards the move away from self-centeredness (*si* 私) as the fundamental ethical task (for a discussion of Zhu Xi's 朱熹 elaboration on this idea, see Shun 2005: 1–9).

Attaining a proper positioning of the self in one's perspective takes effort, and while Confucian thinkers also emphasize proper childhood upbringing, what is distinctive of Confucian ethical thought is its emphasis on the self-reflective ethical efforts that one undertakes as an adult. I will use “self-cultivation” to refer to the self-reflective process that one undertakes to attain such transformation of the self. The idea of a process of this kind is conveyed in the notion *xiushen* 修身 (self-cultivation), a term that occurs three times in the *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*), is the title of a chapter in the *Xunzi* 荀子, and is used to refer to one of the eight items of adult learning in the *Daxue* 大學 (*Great Learning*).

Regarding the content of this process, it is spelt out in different ways and with different emphases in the history of Confucian thought. Since part of the transformation has to do with submitting the self to ethical standards that the heart/mind can grasp, learning is needed for us to properly grasp such standards. The Chinese term usually translated as “learning,” *xue* 學 (learning), has the connotation not just of learning in the contemporary sense, but also of drawing moral lessons from and embodying in one's daily life what one has learnt. For the Confucians, its object includes all aspects of the cultural heritage, including such items as poetry, history, rites (*li* 禮), music, and archery. The notion is particularly highlighted in the

Lunyu 論語 (*Analects*) and the *Xunzi* 荀子, the latter having a whole chapter devoted to the subject. The importance of learning is emphasized by *Confucius* in his own autobiographical statement that he set his heart on learning at the age of 15 (*Lunyu* 1980: 2.4). And, as presented in the *Xunzi* 荀子, what one has learnt from *li* 禮 (rites) and from other items of the cultural heritage will permeate the whole person, and their accumulated effects will totally reshape the person in an ethical direction (e.g., *Xunzi* 1965: 1.4b).

Learning by itself is not sufficient. Having ensured that the directions of one's heart/mind, or *zhi* 志 (directions of the heart/mind), is properly directed, one still need to cultivate one's *qi* 氣 (the life forces) to give it support to ensure that one maintains the kind of steadfastness of purpose described earlier. More importantly, there are all kinds of forces at work within oneself that can lead one astray, and so it is also important to work on one's own heart/mind to ensure its proper ethical orientation. One might work on the heart/mind to ensure that it performs its guiding and regulatory roles in relation to others forces at work within oneself, or to ensure that its own operations is properly oriented. I will consider these two kinds of exercises in turn.

The guiding role of the heart/mind in relation to the senses is highlighted in a variety of early texts. The *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*) presents the senses as potentially problematic if not regulated by the heart/mind (*Mengzi* 1984: 6A:15), and the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 likewise observes how sensory objects can distort the operation of the senses and how it is only under the heart/mind's regulation that the senses attain their proper place (*Huainanzi* 1965: 7.3a, 14.7b). The *Guanzi* 管子 observes how external things can distort the operation of the senses, which in turn can distort the operation of the heart/mind (*Guanzi* 1965: 13.6a, 16.3a). The text compares the position of the heart/mind to that of the ruler; when the heart/mind is in order, the senses will also be in order (*Guanzi* 1965: 13.1a, 16.3b). The governing role of the heart/mind over the senses is also emphasized in the *Xunzi* 荀子 (*Xunzi* 1965: 11.10a–10b). The *Xunzi* 荀子 in addition emphasizes the importance of the heart/mind's role in regulating desires (*yu* 欲); if unregulated, chaos will result from people's pursuing without constraint the fulfillment of their desires (e.g., *Xunzi* 1965: 13.1a). The "Yueji" chapter 樂記 of the *Liji* 禮記 (The Book of Rites) makes a similar point. It observes how, when human beings come into contact with external things, likes and dislikes arise. Humans are affected by things without limit, and if their likes and dislikes are not regulated, human beings would be moved to exhaust their human desires (*ren yu* 人欲) and things become problematic (*Liji* 1965: 11.8b–9a). Thus, for early Confucians, an important part of self-cultivation is to train the heart/mind to properly guide and regulate all kinds of human desires.

Ethical problems can also arise from within the heart/mind. As we have seen, early Confucians advocate self-transformation of a kind that moves us away from certain forms of self-centeredness that are themselves common and tempting human tendencies. The subtle workings of the heart/mind can reflect such tendencies and pose obstacles. As part of the self-cultivation process, one also needs to work on the subtle activities of the heart/mind to ensure that they are properly oriented.

One illustration of this idea is the idea in the *Daxue* 大學 (*Great Learning*) and *Zhongyong* 中庸 (*Centrality and Commonality*) that the heart/mind should cautiously watch over its own activities to ensure that all of its activities, however minute or subtle, are completely oriented in an ethical direction. This idea is presented in terms of one's cautiously watching over *du* 獨 (what one alone can access), where *du* 獨 (what one alone can access) likely refers to the minute and subtle workings of the heart/mind that are not yet manifested outwardly and to which one alone has access (Zhu 1983–1986d *Daxue* Chap. 6, 1983–1986c *Zhongyong* Chap. 1) (for a more elaborate discussion of the idea of watching over *du*, see Shun 2008: 262–266). In the *Daxue* 大學 (*Great Learning*), this idea is related to the idea of *cheng yi* 誠意 (to make one's thoughts fully oriented in an ethical direction), which is a process of making one's *yi* 意 (thoughts and inclinations) fully oriented in an ethical direction. *Yi* 意 (thoughts and inclinations), as we saw earlier, has to do with the more reflective inclinations of the heart/mind, unlike *yu* 欲 (desires) which can be pre-reflective. Thus, this aspect of self-cultivation is concerned with the activities of the heart/mind itself, not just with the pre-reflective desires that need to be guided and regulated by the heart/mind. This aspect of Confucian thought shows that the Confucians ascribe to the heart/mind a self-reflexiveness – for any of its own activities, however minute and subtle, it has the capacity to reflect on and reshape such activities to ensure their orientation in an ethical direction. And this self-reflexiveness is related to the independence of the heart/mind from external control – even though its activities can be influenced by external circumstances, the heart/mind has the capacity to constantly step back and reshape its own activities under the conception of what is proper that it forms on the basis of its own reflections (the discussion of this and the next paragraph draws on Shun 2004: 188–190).

We have so far focused on the heart/mind in our discussion of self-cultivation – how the heart/mind can grasp certain ethical standards through learning, how it can guide and regulate our feelings and desires, and how it can monitor and reshape its own operations. While the heart/mind does play a key role in self-cultivation, it is important to note, though, that the effect of self-cultivation does not stop with the heart/mind. For the early Confucians, the heart/mind and other aspects of the person are mutually interacting. In early Chinese texts, we see mention of how the life forces (*qi* 氣) that fill the body can be affected by what happens to the body, such as the tastes that the mouth takes in and the sounds that the ear hears; conversely, the life forces can generate speech in the mouth and sight in the eyes. Also, the directions (*zhi* 志) of the heart/mind can guide and shape the life forces (*qi* 氣) while depending on the life forces for their execution; conversely, the directions of the heart/mind can be swayed if the life forces are not adequately nourished. It follows from the intimate link between the heart/mind and the life forces, and between the life forces and the body, that the heart/mind is also intimately linked to the body. For the early Confucians, the condition of the heart/mind will inevitably be manifested in the body and in one's outward behavior and demeanor, and be perceivable by others. In emphasizing the need to be watchful over *du* 獨 (what one alone can access), both the *Daxue* 大學 (*Great Learning*) and the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (*Centrality*

and Commonality) also point out that, although the minute and subtle tendencies of the heart/mind are initially known to oneself alone and not yet perceived by others, they will eventually become manifest (Zhu 1983–1986c *Zhongyong* Chap. 1, 1983–1986d *Daxue* Chap. 6). The *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*) speaks of how the condition of the heart/mind is also manifested in the body, not just in action and speech, but also in the face, the look of the eyes, the four limbs, and in one's physical bearing in general; indeed, according to Mencius, it is only through self-cultivation that one can give complete fulfillment to the body (*Mengzi* 1984: 4A:15, 7A:21, 7A:38). Likewise, the *Daxue* 大學 (*Great Learning*) speaks of how virtue (*de* 德) adorns the body just as riches adorn a house, and how when the heart/mind is expanded the body is also at ease (Zhu 1983–1986d *Daxue* Chap. 6). Thus, for the early Confucians, the effect of self-cultivation does not stop with the heart/mind, but affects the person as a whole.

Indeed, for them, the effect of self-cultivation does not even stop with the individual person, but also extends to others. Early Confucian texts emphasize how self-cultivation has a transformative power on others, a power that the Confucians regard as the ideal basis for government. For example, for both Confucius and Mencius, the goal of government is to transform people's character, and the way to accomplish this is to first cultivate oneself and to let the transformative power of one's cultivated character take effect (*Lunyu* 1980: 2.1, 2.3, 12.19, 13.4, 13.13, 15.5; *Mengzi* 1984: 4A:20, 7A:19). This does not mean that governmental policies are not important, but proper policies are themselves a manifestation of the cultivated character of those in power, and properly carrying out policies transmitted from the past also requires a cultivated character (*Mengzi* 1984: 2A:6, 4A:1; cf. 7B:5). So, the ultimate basis for order in society lies with cultivating oneself, an idea that the *Daxue* 大學 (*Great Learning*) expresses by describing self-cultivation as the basis for regulating the family, giving order to the state, and ultimately bring peace to the whole Empire (Zhu 1983–1986d *Daxue* text; *Mengzi* 1984: 4A:5, 4A:12, 7B:32). A similar point is also presented in terms of *cheng* 誠 (complete ethical orientation of the heart/mind), which is used in early Confucian texts to refer to the complete ethical orientation of the heart/mind. The notion is highlighted in the *Daxue* 大學 (*Great Learning*), the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (*Centrality and Commonality*), and also occurs in parts of the *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*) and the *Xunzi* 荀子. *Cheng* 誠 (complete ethical orientation of the heart/mind) has the connotation of being real and complete, and it refers to a state in which one embodies the ethical attributes to the fullest extent. The most elaborate presentation of this state is in the second half of the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (*Centrality and Commonality*), in which *cheng* 誠 (complete ethical orientation of the heart/mind) is presented as the basis for social and political order. A *cheng* 誠 (complete ethical orientation of the heart/mind) person will have a transformative effect on others' character and, when in government, will also ensure that the 10,000 things take their proper places. Since the transformative effect on others is itself a natural outgrowth of one's own self-transformation, it follows that, for the early Confucians, there is no clear line between self-transformation and the transformation of others.

7 Attending to the Self

I have in the chapter highlighted self-transformation as a distinctive feature of Confucian thought, and have discussed in some detail the nature of the self-cultivation process. The transformation involved affects the whole person in fundamental ways. The proper situating of the self in relation to others involves a fundamental reshaping of one's outlook on life, including the way one assesses one's own interests and well-being, as well as one's sense of one's own importance. It involves overcoming natural tendencies to place oneself at the center of things, and requires constant vigilant attention to the subtle activities of the heart/mind. The firm commitment to the ethical is particularly demanding as it involves a steadfastness of purpose that could incur grave personal sacrifices, including giving up one's own life. These dimensions of Confucian thought provide a sense in which it can also be described as a kind of spiritual thought, if the spiritual is understood in a way that is divorced from pietistic and devotional practices. This Confucian concern with self-transformation, however, might itself raise a potential worry, namely, that it might itself exhibit a problematic form of self-centeredness that involves a misdirection of one's ethical attention. In this concluding section, I will discuss some possible forms that this worry can take. I will discuss two kinds of concern that the early Confucian thinkers themselves have raised and cautioned their audience against, and then move on to two other kinds of concern that might potentially be directed against the Confucian thinkers themselves.

As we have discussed in the previous section, self-transformation is viewed by Confucian thinkers as the basis for the social and political order. This idea is built into the early Chinese notion *de* 德 (virtue, power), a term often translated as "virtue" and sometimes as "power." In its earliest use, *de* 德 (virtue, power) probably carried primarily religious connotations, referring to an attitude of the king that enabled his communion with Heaven (*tian* 天). It eventually came to refer in addition to qualities such as generosity, humility, and receptiveness to instruction, as well as to certain powers associated with these qualities, including a compulsion to respond on the part of the recipients of generous or sacrificial acts and a non-coercive power on others of attraction and transformation. Early Confucian thinkers continued this tradition, and regarded the power associated with *de* 德 (virtue, power) as the ideal basis for government – it is *de* 德 (virtue, power), or *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness), that enables one to become a true king (*wang* 王). At the same time, they also noted the associated potential for a misdirection of attention that results from one's aiming at 德 (virtue, power), or *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness) primarily for its perceived political advantages. *Mencius* draws a number of distinctions in this connection: between those who truly act out of *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness) and those who enact *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness) for political advantages, between those who rely on *de* 德 (virtue, power) to practice *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence) and those who rely on force to make use of *ren* 仁 (humanity, benevolence), and between those who use goodness to nourish the people and those who make use of goodness to

gain people's allegiance (*Mengzi* 1984: 2A:3, 4B:16, 4B:19). The point is to warn rulers against misdirecting their attention to the political advantages of 德 (virtue, power), or *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness) – someone so motivated would not truly attain 德 (virtue, power), or *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness), and would therefore not attain the desired goals. A similar misdirection of attention can happen among officials, who cultivate themselves for the purpose of being appreciated by others thereby attaining employment or high rank in government. In this connection, Mencius again draws a distinction between the honors of Heaven (*tian* 天), which have to do with the ethical attributes, and the honors of humans, which have to do with high ranks in government, lamenting the fact that people during his times would aim at the former for the sake of the latter (*Mengzi* 1984: 6A:16). Confucius makes a similar point by saying that learning should be for the self and not for others; it should be directed at one's own character and ability as such and not at appreciation by others and the resulting employability (*Lunyu* 1980: 14.24, cf. 1.1, 1.16, 4.14, 14.30, 15.19).

A second kind of misdirection of attention that early Confucian thinkers criticize has to do with a focus on external perception that is guided by a concern with one's reputation rather than by political ambitions. This is the situation of the village worthy, who is concerned primarily with the reputation of being good, without a genuine concern for its substance (*Lunyu* 1980: 13.21, 17.13, 17.18, cf. 13.24; *Mengzi* 1984: 7B:37). This individual's way of life is entirely geared to social opinion, and since he adjusts his way of life to seek the approval of others, it is difficult to find fault with him. His way of life appears good, everyone approves of him, and he regards himself as living properly. And yet he has no genuine commitment to goodness, as can be seen from the fact that he would adjust his words and deeds to what he perceives as the expectations of others. Whatever qualities he has would change in response to the changing expectations of others, and so would lack the stability that morally good traits are often expected to have. Thus, he is not truly virtuous though he resembles someone who is and is mistakenly taken by people to be virtuous; in this sense, he 'steals' the name of 德 (virtuous) and so is a "thief of *de*" (*de zhi zei* 德之賊).

Both Confucius and Mencius condemn such an individual, and there is something about the village worthy that is deeply disturbing. He exhibits a high level of self-awareness. He is aware that he is being judged, and wishes himself to be seen to have certain qualities; so he is not just reflecting on his own inner states, but also reflecting on how others would perceive his inner states. In his motives, he is subtly deceptive in a way that those who aim at being good for the resulting political advantages need not be. As can be seen from some of Mencius' dialogues with the rulers of states, the latter can, at least, be somewhat explicit about their true motives. The former, however, would hide his true motive, which is to please others, as part of his pretence; he would do that as long as he is aware that his audience would not think well of his true motives. In this regard, he is like the type of moral hypocrite who has contrary values and qualities that others would not approve of and who, in seeking the approval of others, has to hide these values and qualities. But unlike this other type of moral hypocrite, the village worthy does not even have contrary values

and qualities, as his sole preoccupation is to be seen as good. As a result, unlike this other type of moral hypocrite, he is less likely to betray himself in inattentive moments, and thus more likely to succeed in his deception. Through such deception, he is blurring the distinction between genuine goodness and semblances of the kind that he exhibits, thereby undermining his audience's understanding of what genuine goodness is, and hence undermining the very conception of that to which he makes a false claim (see Kittay 1982; McKinnon 1991 for a discussion of the other type of moral hypocrite and for an elaboration on the last point about what is problematic about the pretence involved).

What we have considered are two kinds of misdirection of ethical attention that are in a sense too externally directed – one's ultimate goal is to attain certain political advantages in the first case or to acquire a certain reputation in the second. Ultimately, though, one's attention is also self-directed in a problematic way – it is after all one's own political advantages or one's own reputation that one aims at. The issue still comes down to problematic forms of self-centeredness, and the early Confucians are vividly aware of such dangers and speak vehemently against them. An interesting question, though, is whether the Confucians are themselves, in their own focus on self-cultivation, vulnerable to a similar criticism that they are themselves overly self-centered. In the remainder of this section, I will consider two forms such criticism can take, and the potential responses that can be given on behalf of the Confucians (the discussion that follows draws on Shun 2001: 229–244).

One form that such criticism can take is that, even on the Confucians' own position, the concern with cultivating 德 (virtue, power), or *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness) in oneself can still involve an excessive concern with others' opinion of oneself, even if one's attention is not directed explicitly to the opinion of others in the way that the attention of the village worthy is. The reason is that terms like 德 (virtue, power), or *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness) are terms that typically occur in third-person descriptions of the good person rather than in the content of the first personal deliberation of the truly good person – to use a contemporary parallel, the truly benevolent person would typically not be thinking of herself as benevolent or her actions as benevolent acts. Thus, it appears, the first-personal exercise of cultivating these qualities in oneself involves one's being concerned primarily with the way others would describe oneself. To aim at 德 (virtue, power), or *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness) is to aim at one's being describable by others in a certain way, and this kind of concern seems misdirected in a disturbing way, just like the village worthy's concern with pleasing others.

On behalf of the Confucians, one might note that even though they talk in general terms about 德 (virtue, power), or *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness), self-cultivation for them typically would not involve thinking in these terms. Instead, one's attention in self-cultivation is more often directed to something more specific than these general qualities, as can be seen from our discussion of the idea of being watchful over *du* 獨 (what one alone can access). Still, this response would not suffice as the Confucians do from time to time advocate in more general terms a concern with the overall quality of one's character, conveyed in terms of 德 (virtue, power),

or *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness). To supplement this initial response, we may add that while 德 (virtue, power), or *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness) is typically a third person description, someone engaged in self-cultivation may be using it as a description of others by oneself, rather than of oneself by others. That is, in being concerned with 德 (virtue, power), or *ren yi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness), one's concern need not be with being describable by others in these terms, but may instead be with one's becoming like the kind of person that one would oneself describe in this manner. In having this concern, one's attention is directed not to the description itself, but to one's having a certain quality which, as it happens, can be described in this way.

Another possible criticism of the Confucian emphasis on self-cultivation is that, even if one is not concerned with others' description of oneself, one's attention may still be too self-directed. One may be making one's own character ethically the most important thing, more important than other-regarding considerations. In fact, Mencius was himself occasionally accused of this kind of self-centeredness. The *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*) contains several examples of his refusing to see a ruler because he had not been summoned or treated in accordance with certain rules of propriety appropriate to his position. His critics made the point that, if only he had been willing to 'bend' himself a little and have audience with the ruler, he might have been able to accomplish desirable political changes and thereby help the people (*Mengzi* 1984: 3B:1, 5A:7, cf. 4A:17). His self-righteousness, it seems, had come at the expense of missing the opportunity to help others.

Put in general terms, the Confucian response would refer to both the content of the ethical ideal they advocate and the effect of one's attaining this ideal. The content involves proper attention and sensitivity to the well-being of others as well as due acknowledgement of their importance, and the effect of self-cultivation also extends to the transformation of others' character. Accordingly, there cannot be a divergence between one's own self-cultivation on the one hand, and the well-being or the transformation of others' on the other. Mencius' response to his critics draws on this idea. According to him, what he sought to accomplish in the political realm was to 'straighten' those in power, and 'straightening' others depends on one's being 'straight' oneself; there has never been a case of one's 'bending' oneself and yet succeeding in 'straightening' others (*Mengzi* 1984: 3B:1, 5A:7; cf. *Lunyu* 12.22, 13.13). So, to the extent that the well-being of the people depends on a reform of the political order, there cannot be a conflict between a concern for one's character and a concern for the well-being of others. And given that the transformative effect on others' character is a natural outgrowth of one's cultivating one's own character, there also cannot be a conflict between a concern for one's character and a concern for others' character.

This Confucian response draws on an optimistic belief about the transformative power of a cultivated character. While we do see repeated statements of this belief in early Confucian texts, we also get the sense that the early Confucians were not unaware that this belief could be overly optimistic and might not match the practical political realities of the times. Consider, for example, the fact that the attitude of acceptance that we discussed earlier in connection with the notion *ming* 命

(destiny, fate, decree) is sometimes also directed to a failure to bring about desired political changes. In Confucius' words, whether the Way prevails or falls into disuse is itself a matter of *ming* 命 (destiny, fate, decree) (*Lunyu* 1980: 14.36). Now, if one's own ethical qualities are within one's control as the Confucians think, and if one's own self-cultivation will lead naturally to the transformation of others, especially those in power, then the prevailing of the Way should have been something that one can bring about. Thus, statements like Confucius' are implicit acknowledgements that perhaps the belief about the transformative power of a cultivated character is itself overly optimistic. So, while there is a Confucian response to the kind of criticism directed against Mencius, perhaps that response is itself potentially undermined by this tension between the early Confucians' belief in the transformative power of a cultivated character and their own political failure and the resulting frustration with the political realities of their times.

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Chapter 13

Early Confucian Virtue Ethics: The Virtues of *Junzi*

Antonio S. Cua

1 Introduction

Confucius' *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語) provides an ample vocabulary for virtues or excellences of ethical character.¹ Throughout the text, we find frequent occurrence of certain terms such as *ren* 仁 (benevolence, humaneness), *li* 禮 (rules of proper conduct, ritual, rites), and *yi* 義 (rightness, righteousness, fittingness), indicating Confucius' ongoing concern with the cultivation of fundamental virtues. His remark that there is one thread (*yiguan* 一貫) that runs through his teachings may be cited as a partial support for ascribing a holistic perspective to his thought. However, we do not find a systematic scheme for conduct in the *Analects*. Also, throughout the history of Chinese thought and contemporary Chinese and Western writings on Confucianism, we find a great variance of interpretation of fundamental concepts such as *ren* (Chan 1955, 1975).

The unsystematic character of Confucius' ethical thought in part reflects his emphasis on the concrete and the particular. The *Analects* portrays a mental attitude that emphasizes the particular and the concrete as a way of explaining concepts. Owing to the influence of the *Analects*, it may even be said that characteristic of the Chinese way of thinking is the preference for "particular, concrete, and intuitive explanations." Hajime Nakamura claims that this preference "may be seen in their way of explaining ideas and teaching people by the use of particular examples.

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¹ Unless indicated otherwise, reference to the *Analects* in the text are based on D. C. Lau's translation in Lau (1979), with modification in some cases. Throughout this chapter, citations containing Wade-Giles romanization are replaced by *pinyin*.

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To most Chinese, therefore, ethics is not understood or taught as part of a universal law, but is grasped on the basis of particular experiences, and is then utilized to realize human truth.” (Nakamura 1964: 198). While one may raise questions about the adequacy of this attribution to Chinese ethics, the conception is well-supported by the *Analects*, as it is quite evident, for example, in the frequent occurrence of proper names intended as exemplars of Confucius’ ideal. Yao and Shun, regarded by Confucius as paragons of sagely rulership, were frequently commended as models of virtue (*Analects* 6.28, 14.45, 20.1.). Other purportedly historical personages were also cited as particular exemplars of conduct (*Analects* 14.12). More telling is Confucius’ extensive use of notion of *junzi*, instead of principles, for explaining ethical virtues and instruction on their practical significance in human conduct. Plausibly, Confucius’ notion of *junzi* encapsulates a concern for flexibility in coping with changing circumstances. An emphatic autobiographical remark indicates this attitude of flexibility: “I have no preconceptions about the permissible or impermissible (*wu ke wu buke* 無可無不可)” (*Analects* 18.8). This aspect of Confucian ethics is perhaps best approached by way of Confucius’ notion of *junzi* 君子 as a notion of an ideal individual, who functions as a paradigmatic standard for practical morality. In this light, Confucius’ ethical thought, unlike that of Mencius (Mengzi 孟子) or Xunzi 荀子, is best characterized as an ethics of *junzi* or paradigmatic individuals.

Although Confucius believed that only a sage (*shengren* 聖人), divinely inspired and intuitively wise, can envision and establish a harmonious social order, he did not regard the ideal of becoming a sage as practically attainable. He once remarked that he cannot hope to meet a sage, but can only hope to meet a *junzi* (*Analects* 7.26). In *Analects* 14.12, however, we do find a characterization of *chengren* 成人, which may be rendered as “perfect man.” When Zilu asked what constituted a *chengren*, Confucius cited a combination of excellences exemplified by certain historical persons, such as wisdom, courage, absence of greed, variety of talents, and in addition, an enhancement of these qualities by rites and music. But he added: “nowadays it is not necessary to have all these qualities in order to be a *chengren*. If a man can think of what is right (*yi*) when he sees personal advantage, and in the presence of personal danger, is ready to give up; and does not belie the professions of his life – such a man may also be considered a *chengren*.”² In this saying, *chengren* may be construed more clearly as *chengde zhi ren* 成德之人,³ a person of accomplished virtue, that is, an ethically accomplished person who has moral convictions, and a particular concern with *yi* or right conduct, in situations that seem to advance personal gain.⁴

² Ku Hung-ming’s 辜鴻銘 translation with minor modification. As we shall see later, the idea of *yi* (rightness, righteousness) as contrasted with profit or personal gain or advantage is a central tenet of Confucian ethics and plays a key role in the exercise of *quan* 權 (moral discretion).

³ This is Liu Baonan’s 劉寶楠 explanation cited by Mao Zishui 毛子水, see Mao (1977: 223).

⁴ Qian Mu 錢穆 points out that the text indicates two sets of standards, higher and lower, as exemplified by persons past and present. This is puzzling, since the so-called higher standard exemplified by men of the past did not include *ren*. Perhaps, as an occasional dialogue, Confucius thought that the answer is a sufficient response to Zilu, who was more impressed with external than internal merits, the focus of the second set. However, the “lower” set of standard, construed as prerequisites for the

Mencius 孟子 and Xunzi 荀子, as well as some major Song and Ming Confucians, aspire to a greater height. For CHENG Hao 程顥 and WANG Yangming 王陽明, for example, all humans are capable of becoming sages.⁵ More realistic is Confucius' insight into the practical possibility of attaining human excellence. To him it is possible for ordinary humans to become *junzi*, presuming that they have a whole-hearted commitment to the ideal of *dao* (*zhi yu dao* 志於道), to *ren*, *li*, and *yi*; and have exerted their best efforts in self-cultivation even in adversity or in the best of circumstances. Becoming a sage is an object of wish, not a reasonable, realistic objective of ethical pursuit.

In this chapter, I present a reconstruction of some principal aspects of Confucius' thought as an ethics of *junzi*.⁶ The focus is on the virtues of *junzi* in the *Analects*. Occasionally I employ insights of Mencius, Xunzi, and the *Liji* 禮記 for elaboration. Section 2 is a critical appreciation of the varying interpretations of *junzi*. Section 3 presents a map of the virtues of *junzi*. These excellences or personal merits of the *junzi* depict some salient characteristics of *junzi*, with emphasis on the embodiment of fundamental, interdependent, ethical virtues and selective, dependent virtues. Section 4 discusses two ways for dealing with conflict: (IV.1) reconciliation and harmonizing of differences (*tiaohe* 調和) with a preference for arbitration or mediation over adjudication or litigation, and (IV.2) the art *zhongyong* 中庸. Section 5 focuses on the flexibility of *junzi* in the exercise of *quan* 權 (moral discretion) in exigent circumstances.

2 Interpretations of *Junzi* in the *Lunyu*

The difficulty of settling on a definitive or adequate English translation of *junzi* in the *Analects* is reflected in some translations and notes since the nineteenth century. Here is a short list of translations of *junzi*: “superior man” (Legge, Chan, Bodde, Dubs), “gentleman” (Waley, Lau, Watson), and “noble man or person” (Giles, Fingarette, Schwartz, de Bary). In some recent, explicitly interpretive studies, we also find “paradigmatic individual” (Cua 1969b, 1971; both incorporated in Cua 1978, Chaps. 3 and 5), “model of emulation” (Munro 1969), or “exemplary person” (Hall and Ames 1987). In the case of *The Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong*), we also find “profound person” (Tu). Since there is no English equivalent, *junzi* is best

achievement of the higher, focuses more on the internal psychological attributes of the agents or, in Alasdair MacIntyre's words, the internal goods of the ethical practice. Note also that Xunzi gives a more elaborate description of *chengren* in terms of *quan cui* 全粹 (integrity and purity) in *Quanxue pian* 勸學篇 19. Reference to Xunzi text is based on Li Disheng's annotated edition.

⁵For more discussion, see Cua (1998b), Chaps. 7 and 9.

⁶This chapter is an update of previously published materials presented in two entries: *Junzi: The Moral Person* and “*Quan*: Moral Discretion” in Cua 2003b and other earlier writings. The aim is to present a coherent ethics of *junzi* focusing on the virtues of character and virtues of flexibility along with the supportive and constitutive virtues and the problem of conflict resolution.

left untranslated. This proposal does not deny the necessity of choice in translation at the service of readability and consistency. But whatever English term is chosen, the writer must offer some explanation and justification for this choice. Let us consider some examples.

2.1 James Legge

James Legge, the pioneering translator of the *Lunyu* in the late nineteenth century employed “superior man” for translating most occurrences of the ethical uses of *junzi*. In two exceptional cases (*Analects* 1.2 and 1.14), we find “man of complete virtue.” The first exception and also the first occurrence in the *Analects* (*Analects* 1.1) is this saying of Confucius: “Is he not a man of complete virtue [*junzi*], who feels no discomposure though men may take no note of him?” (Legge 1960: 1). Legge gives a terse comment on *junzi*:

Literarily, it is a “princely man” ... It is a technical term in Chinese moral writers, for which there is no exact correspondency in English, and which cannot be rendered always in the same way. (Legge 1960: 2)

The second case is *Analects* 1.14:

The Master said, “He who aims to be a man of complete virtue [*junzi*] in his food does not seek to gratify his appetite, nor in his dwelling place does he seek the appliances of ease; he is earnest in what he is doing, and careful in his speech; he frequents the company of men of principle that he may be rectified: -such a person may be said indeed to love to learn.” (Legge 1960: 7–8)

Legge gives no explanation for using “man of complete virtue” in these remarks. The translation also eradicates the distinction between *junzi* and sage, for “a man of complete virtue” conveys the idea of ethically perfected state or highest degree of ethical attainment of being a sage, rather than a *junzi* who, as we shall see later, is an imperfect being – a being who has reached a high or superior degree of ethical attainment as compared with ordinary people who have lesser or no distinguishing ethical achievement. A *junzi* in this sense is a *chengren* 成人, an ethically accomplished person. This sense of *junzi* provides an explanatory justification for Legge’s preference for “superior man” for the other occurrences of *junzi* in the *Analects*.

2.2 Lionel Giles

While agreeing with Legge that *junzi* literally means “princely man,” Giles thinks that “superior man” is a misleading translation. For *Analects* 1.2, Giles offers this translation: “The Master said: Is he not a princely man [*junzi*] – he who is never vexed that others know him not?” A long note follows Giles’ translation.

This is the much-discussed *chūn-tzu* [*junzi*], an expression of which the stereotyped English equivalent is “the superior man.” But in this there is, unhappily, a tinge of blended superciliousness and irony absolutely foreign to the native phrase, which in my opinion makes it unsuitable. “Princely man” is as nearly as possible in literal translation, and sometimes, as we shall see, it actually means “prince.” But in the majority of cases the connotation of rank or authority is certainly not explicit, and as a general rendering I have preferred “the higher type of man,” “the nobler sort of man,” or sometimes more simply as “the good man.” Perhaps the nearest approximation in any European language is to be found in the Greek *ho kalos kagathos*, because that implies high mental and moral qualities combined with all the outward bearing of a gentleman. Compare also with Aristotle’s *ho spoudaiou* who is however more abstract and ideal. (Giles 1907: 52n)

In defense of Legge we may say that Giles’ remark actually echoes Legge’s reminder that there is no exact English “correspondency” or equivalent for *junzi*. The difference in translation lies in the explanatory addendum, which provides the rationale for translation. Considered as a descriptive term for an ethical ideal today, “superior man” does not have the connotation of “a tinge of blended superciliousness and irony,” though we would prefer a gender-neutral term “individual” or “person.” A superior person is one who is above average in excellence, merit, or intelligence. As we pointed out earlier, *junzi* is “superior” to other people because of his greater ethical character and achievement. Giles’ preference for “the higher type of man,” or “the nobler sort of man” is no less misleading, for it may suggest that a *junzi*, as distinguished from ordinary persons, belongs to a special class of persons with “higher mental and moral qualities” – an idea Confucius would reject. For Confucius, humans are born pretty much alike; it is practice that sets them far apart (*Analec*s 17.2). For major Confucians, Mencius and Xunzi, since all ordinary people have the capacity to become *junzi* or sages, their achieved ethical status does not mark them as members of a special class of humanity. As Xunzi put it:

With respect to inborn nature and endowment, intelligence and ability, the *junzi* and small-minded persons are one and the same. In desiring honor and averting shame, the *junzi* and small-minded persons are the same. However, if we consider the way they pursue these matters, we would find them to be diametrically opposite. (Li 1979: 60)⁷

For purposes of distinguishing the degrees of ethical attainment and assignment of praise and blame, Xunzi would differentiate the ideally great Confucians (*da Ru* 大儒) from those who are merely refined or vulgar (Li 1979: 149). However, Giles’ allusion to the Greek ideal of *kalos kagathos* and Aristotle’s notion of *spoudaiou* as somewhat analogous to *junzi* offers valuable hints for comparative ethical study. When we focus on *junzi*’s concern for *li* (rites), particularly in the observance of *wen* 文 (cultural refinement), it is illuminating to compare *junzi* with *kalos kagathos*, especially if we construe *junzi* as a refined Confucian (*ya ru* 雅儒) in Xunzi’s sense – one who exalts *li* and *yi*. A similar remark may be made about the now popular translation of *junzi* as “gentleman.” More interesting and significant is

⁷For a comparative study of the notion of shame in Xunzi and Aristotle, see Cua (2003); also Cua (2005, Chap. 8).

Giles' interesting comparison of *junzi* with Aristotle's notion of *spoudaiou*, for it is plausible to consider *junzi* and *spoudaiou* as functionally analogous notions of paradigmatic individuals.

2.3 Waley, Lau, and de Bary

Let us turn to the familiar translation of *junzi* as "gentleman," suggested also by Giles. It is interesting to note the difference in rationales for the same translation, by Arthur Waley and D.C. Lau. Says Waley:

As regards the translation of the term *chün-tzu* [*junzi*], I see no alternative but to use "gentleman," though the effect is occasionally somewhat *absurd* in English. One needs a word, which primarily signifies *superiority of birth*, but also implies moral superiority. Neither Legge's "superior man," nor Soothill's various equivalents ("man of the higher type," "wise man") fulfill this condition. (Waley 1938: 37)

Contrast this view with Lau's, where "superiority of birth" is, rightly, de-emphasized:

In the *Lunyu*... *chün-tzu* [*junzi*] and *hsiao-ren* [*xiaoren*] are essentially moral terms. The *chün-tzu* is the man with a cultivated moral character, while the *hsiao-ren* is the opposite. It is worth noting that the two usages indicating the social and moral status are not exclusive, and, in individual cases, it is difficult to be sure whether, besides their moral connotations, these terms may not also carry their usual social connotations as well. (Lau 1979: 14)

For distinguishing these two usages of *junzi* in the *Analects*, de Bary proposes the distinction to use "gentleman" and "noble man" respectively. Says Wm Theodore de Bary:

[T]he great majority of reference to him [*junzi*] in the *Analects* can be understood simply as "gentleman," referring to a class of well-bred persons with gentle ways, impeccable manners, and a well-developed moral sense. It is only in the minority of cases – though I would say a significant minority – that the *chün-tzu* [*junzi*] is cast in a very lofty and self-sacrificing role demanded of the noble man as a leader of others. He is said to be content even in poverty and in humble circumstances that would be beneath the dignity and refined tastes of the gentleman (*Analects* 6.9, 15.32, 18.7). No less than the sacrifice of one's life may be called for (*Analects* 15.8). But above and beyond this the noble man is a model for everyone who might play a leadership role in society, a life of higher responsibilities (*Analects* 19.7). (de Bary 1991b: 28)

Since the main stress of Confucius is the *junzi*'s virtues of character, inclusive of *ren* 仁, *yi* 義, and *li* 禮 or observance of the *li* (rites, rules of proper conduct), one would expect his "nobility" to include the main characteristics of the "gentleman" without special reference to class membership. As we shall see shortly, a well-articulated notion of gentleman will also include some fundamental ethical concerns expressed in *ren*, *yi*, and *li* (*Analects* 2.1).

In a nutshell, for Confucius, as well as for Mencius and Xunzi, *junzi* expresses an ideal of a cultivated, ethical character. Although more explanation is needed to avoid misleading interpretations, the various translations of *junzi* may be viewed as

valuable attempts to bring forth the translator's own appraisal of the salient features of this ideal of ethical character in a way that will be intelligible to English readers. In this light, we may regard *junzi* as a sort of *emphatic* term that, in context, serves to accentuate certain ethically desirable and commendable virtues (*meide* 美德) or qualities of ideal person, in short, ethical excellences. In Hume's term, these excellences are "personal merits" that deserve emphasis especially in moral education. (Hume 1957: 97) In the case of Xunzi, we have insightful essays on learning and self-cultivation (*Xunzi*, Books 1–2). We find forceful statements of the practice of *li*, *yi*, and *ren*; the importance of learning the classics, guidance of exemplary, learned teachers, self-examination and reflection, and accumulation of good deeds. For becoming a *junzi*, Xunzi insists on the possession of integrity (*quan* 全) and purity (*cui* 粹) or incorruptibility. Allied with this emphatic function, the *junzi* also serves as an exemplar of how the fundamental Confucian ethical concerns – *ren*, *li*, and *yi* – have concrete significance, practically attainable in varying degrees by ordinary moral agents.

2.4 *Chan*

In general *junzi* is a notion of a morally excellent person, a paradigmatic individual who sets the tone and quality of life of ordinary moral agents. A *junzi* is a person who embodies *ren*, and *yi*, and *li*. Every person may strive to be a *junzi* in the sense of a guiding paradigmatic individual, rather than a *xiaoren* (small-minded person). There are of course degrees of personal ethical achievement, depending on the situation, character, ability, and opportunity of moral agents.

Legge's translation of *junzi* as "superior man" brings out the *junzi* as a person who has a distinguished, superior ethical character and aptitude. In this sense, a *junzi* may be said to be a *chengren* 成人 or ethically accomplished person (*Analects* 14.12). The translation of *junzi* as "true gentleman" focuses on *junzi*'s relation to the cultural setting of his actions, his ability to satisfy, so to speak, the stylistic requirements of a form of life. A *junzi*, in this sense, is an embodiment of a "cultural life style." Some of the qualities of *junzi* resemble those of the ideal of gentleman as articulated by Douglas McGee.

The gentleman as defined by tradition aspired to nothing less than becoming a concrete universal. Guided and sustained by his limitation, he took as his moral ideal the cultivation of *humanity*.... His conduct was judged by its *appropriateness*, a measure that took account of particular circumstances, but always in conformity to the human ideal. Conduct regulated by this *form* felt congruous and fitting, hence purposeful. In the widest sense of "manners," the *manners* of the gentleman were textures of his life, a texture isomorphic with the structure of his class. (McGee 1966: 222; emphasis added)

If we attend to the words we have stressed, we can appreciate the functional equivalents of the Confucian cardinal notions. For *ren* may be properly viewed as the ideal of the "cultivation of humanity," especially when this ideal is expressed as "an affectionate concern for the well-being of the fellow members of

the community.”⁸ Perhaps for this reason, Wing-tsit Chan often rendered *ren* as “humanity.” “Appropriateness of conduct” expresses the concern for *yi*. In the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong* 中庸 Sect. 20), we find a concise remark to the effect that *yi* is “appropriateness” (*yi zhe yi ye* 義者宜也).⁹ The focus on the “manners” of life recalls the main concern of *li* as a set of formal prescriptions for proper behavior, which include, among other things, good manners, courtesy and respectfulness. In sum, the ethical ideal of *junzi* expressed in the *Lunyu* may be regarded as setting forth the different requirements or qualities for a life of moral excellence. A *junzi*’s serious commitment to *dao* (*Analects* 4.9) involves a singleness of purpose and acting in accordance with the requirements of the basic, interdependent virtues of *ren*, *yi*, and *li*. More formally, *ren*, *li*, and *yi* are basic, cardinal and interdependent virtues.

3 Basic, Interdependent, and Dependent Virtues

3.1 General Remarks

Concern with the basic interdependent virtues of *ren*, *yi*, and *li* also involves particular dependent virtues such as filiality (*xiao* 孝), magnanimity (*kuan* 寬), trustworthiness (*xin* 信), and courage (*yong* 勇). These particular virtues are called dependent virtues in the sense that their ethical significance depends on connection with the basic, interdependent virtues. Dependent virtues are not subordinate or logical derivatives of the basic virtues.¹⁰ The ethical significance of the particular dependent virtues is determined by *ren* and *yi*, since these are criteria of moral virtues.¹¹ Of course, when *li* is invested with an ennobling function, it entails the

⁸For further elaboration of *ren* as a vision of human community, see Cua (1984); or Cua (2005, Chap. 11).

⁹Recently Kwon-loi Shun proposed the translation of *yi* as propriety. Legge, however, uses this term for translating *li*. Both these translations bring out the concern of both *yi* and *li* with proper conduct, with what is proper and fitting to the occasion, but they differ in orientation. *Yi* is situation-oriented, *li*, on the other hand, is rule-oriented. For further discussion, see Cua (1978: 69). More extensive discussion is given in Cua (1998b, Chap. 14).

¹⁰The distinction between basic and dependent virtues is not the distinction between basic and subordinate virtues mistakenly attributed to me by Schoper, citing my earlier paper “Hsün Tzu and the Unity of Virtues” (Cua 1987). See Schoper 2000. For elaboration of the relation between basic, interdependent virtues and dependent virtues, see Cua (1998b, Chap. 13).

¹¹In Cua (1978), I considered *ren* as an internal criterion of morality and *li* as the external criterion. Since the application of *li* as rules of propriety is determined by *yi*, *yi* can also be regarded as an internal criterion, as it is an exercise of judgment concerning the applicability of *li*. Moreover, “just as *jen* [*ren*] cannot be practiced without *li*, or the cultural setting, *ren* cannot be realized without *i* [*yi*], or the judgment of the relevance of *jen* and *li* in concrete situations of moral performance” (Cua 1978: 51–57, 67–69). In Cua (1998b), based on a modification of Chen Daqi’s work on the *Analects* (Chen 1977), I discussed the criteria for determining the central or fundamental concepts in the *Analects*.

presence of *ren* and *yi*.¹² Arguably, as CHEN Daqi maintains, what Confucius meant by *de* 德, in the sense of excellence or virtue (*meide* 美德), pertains to the product of the intersection of *ren* and *yi*. Thus both *ren* and *yi* may be said to be the constituent elements of *de*.¹³

For forestalling misunderstanding, let us note that dependent virtues are virtues, as they reflect personal merits, although their ethical significance is determined by their connection with one or more basic interdependent virtues. At issue is their ethical significance, not their value status as deserving of praise in appropriate non-ethical contexts. Also, their value status may be appreciated in the light of their function as specifications of the concrete significance of the cardinals, which are basically abstract general concepts. To borrow Xunzi's distinction, the cardinals *ren*, *yi*, and *li* are *gongming* 共名, or generic terms, and dependent virtues are *bieming* 別名 or specific terms, that is, terms that specify the concrete significance of the cardinals in particular contexts of discourse.

For elaborating interdependent and dependent virtues, we may employ Chen Daqi's distinction between complete virtues (*quande* 全德) and partial virtues (*piande* 偏德). Interdependent virtues, *ren*, *yi*, and *li* are cardinal or fundamental virtues. They may be said to be *quan* 全 or complete in the sense that their ethical value is intrinsic, i.e., it does not depend on anything else. In this sense, *quande* 全德 are complete or whole (*quan* 全). Moreover, these cardinals are relevant to all situations of human life as our actions always have effects on others especially in exigent circumstances. Normal, unproblematic situations in human intercourse do not need to invoke the cardinals. On the other hand, *piande* 偏德 or partial virtues are so-called because their ethical significance is limited, not only in their application to circumstances, but also insofar as their ethical value depends on connection to the cardinals. It is important to note, however, that *piande* have values. Here we may invoke Xunzi's distinction with *dao* as a whole and its various *pian* or partial aspects.

¹² See Cua (1989b); incorporated and expanded in Cua (1998b, Chap. 13).

¹³ Chen Daqi elaborates *ren* and *yi* as constituents of *de*: "The core of *ren* is *ai* 愛 (affectionate concern), thus *ai* as the main concern of *ren*. The fundamental nature of *yi* is appropriateness (*yi** 宜), thus appropriateness is the main concern of *yi*. Consider *xin* 信 (trustworthiness or being true to one's words). Because of affectionate concern for people, one will not allow people to be deceived. One's words must be suited to the action, and action must be suited to the words. This is the core of *ren*. For cogency (*zhongken* 中肯) and for the sake of obtaining good results, one should adhere to *xin* only if such adherence is appropriate and should not adhere to *xin* if such adherence is inappropriate. This is the fundamental nature of *yi*." Chen goes on to distinguish *ren* and *yi* from particular virtues by way of the distinction between complete virtues (*quande* 全德) from partial or incomplete virtues (偏德). The former are said to be "perfect virtues free from any defects whatsoever. If a virtue has the *ren* element but does not possess the *yi* element, it can only be called a partial virtue" (Chen 1977: 230). Chen's distinction is quite different from my distinction between basic interdependent and dependent virtues, for at issue is not completeness or possession of both *ren* and *yi*, but the ethical significance of particular virtues. In other words, in the absence of the connection to *ren* and *yi*, particular virtues may have non-ethical values and may well be commendable from the prudential point of view, provided of course, they are not exercised contrary to *ren* and *yi*. Nevertheless, Chen's distinction, as we shall see shortly, is useful for elaborating my distinction between interdependent and dependent virtues.

Xunzi's is critical of some thinkers, not because they espoused faulty or irrational doctrines, but because they comprehend only partial aspects of the *Dao*. Mozi, for example, rightly appreciates the importance of uniformity, but he fails to attend to the value of diversity; Songzi rightly appreciates the value of having few desires, but he fails to see the value of having many desires. Says Xunzi, "*Dao* embodies constancy, but encompasses all changes. A single corner is insufficient to exhaust its significance" (Li 1979: 381, 480).

3.2 Supportive and Constitutive Virtues

In the *Analects*, we do find some of Confucius' remarks that mention both cardinals and dependent virtues in the same contexts, for example, *ren*, *zhi* 智 (knowledge, wisdom), and *yong* 勇 (boldness or courage) in 14.28; *gong* 恭 (respectfulness), *zhong* (loyalty), *jing* 敬 (reverence), and *yi* 義 in 16.10; *li* 禮 and *zhong* 忠 in 3.19; *li* 禮, *yi* 義, and *xin* 信 (trustworthiness) in *Analects* 13.4 and 15.18. Once it was reported that the Master taught four subjects: *wen* 文 (culture, cultural refinement), *xing* 行 (conduct of life), *zhong* 忠, and *xin* 信 (*Analects* 7.25).

For heuristic purposes, we may regard dependent virtues as belonging to two different clusters. One cluster consists of those dependent virtues that are closely related to one basic, cardinal virtue rather than another. Another cluster consists of "overlapping" dependent virtues in the sense that they seem especially germane to the practice of one or more cardinal virtues (henceforth, cardinals). For convenience, let us introduce the distinction between supportive and constitutive virtues. Supportive virtues are those virtues that are genial or helpful, though not necessary, to the development of the cardinals such as *ren*, *yi*, and *li*. Constitutive virtues, on the other hand, are those that are constitutive of the quality of the cardinals actualized. Differently put, constitutive virtues are the contributory means to the pursuit of a certain end, that is, they are means that become constituents of the end achieved."¹⁴ In general, virtues can be admired and can also inspire ideal achievement when they are viewed as constitutive features of an achieved state of a person. However, detached from the governing guide of moral ideals, virtues are mere objects of praise that may not possess a transforming significance for moral agents.

Constitutive virtues are those that are integral parts of the state of *ren* achieved, and thus may be termed "integral virtues." However, it is important to allow that there are some dependent virtues that are both supportive and integral. In the *Analects*, items of both clusters are sometimes mentioned together. Below I discuss briefly *junzi*'s basic qualities of character as embodying a concern with the Confucian cardinals and some supportive and constitutive virtues as a preliminary to dealing with Confucius' idea of the flexibility or adaptability of *junzi*.

¹⁴Here I adopt Lau's felicitous terminology of "constitutive means" as contrasted with instrumental means (Lau 1970: 245). In Western ethical theory, the more familiar terminology is "contributory" as contrasted with instrumental means. For an insightful discussion, see Lewis (1946, Chap. 16).

Again the distinction between supportive and constitutive dependent virtues is not intended as a dichotomy. Depending on the character and temperament, what is a supportive trait in one person may be a constitutive virtue for another. *Kuan* 寬 (magnanimity, generosity of spirit, broadmindedness), for example, may be constitutive for a person of mild temperament, but merely supportive for another who has an inordinate self-confidence in the practice of *ren*. In the discussion below, although I sometimes propose a specific interpretation, the classificatory question is always an open question. Moreover, the distinction is offered in a tentative spirit. Perhaps, on closer analysis, the distinction may have only a practical, not theoretical value, i.e., helpful to individual agent's reflection on how best to constitute his or her character, on which dispositions are the most congenial for development in the light of temperament and circumstance.

3.3 Ren 仁

A sincere and serious commitment to *ren* is a weighty and momentous burden (*Analects* 8.7), for it requires constancy. "It is hard for a man to have constancy who claims to have when he is wanting, to be full when he is empty and to be comfortable when he is in straightened circumstances" (*Analects* 7:26).¹⁵ If a *junzi* disavows *ren* and gives up his commitment to *ren*, he does not deserve the title of being a *junzi*. The *junzi* "never deserts *ren*, not even for as long as it takes to eat a meal" (*Analects* 4:5). Whether he confronts an urgent or difficult situation, he abides by *ren*. A person genuinely committed to the practice of *ren* would even sacrifice his or her life for the sake of *ren*. Says Confucius, "A determined scholar or a *ren* person will not seek to live at the expense of doing harm to *ren*. He will even sacrifice his life to fulfill *ren*" (*Analects* 15.9).¹⁶

Ren, in the broad sense, is Confucius' *dao* 道, his vision of the good, an *ideal theme* of concern for humanity. The term "ideal theme" is an appropriation of the notion of theme familiar in various linguistic contexts. We talk of a theme as a topic of discourse or discussion, or of a theme as "an idea, point of view, or perception embodied or expanded upon in a work of art," or as "a melody forming the basis of variations or other development in a composition."¹⁷ Unlike ideal norms, ideal

¹⁵ More elaborate is Mencius's stress on constant heart (*hengxin* 恒心) as one crucial deficiency that accounts for moral failure, owing perhaps to (a) the enticement of personal gain without considering the relevance of *yi*, or (b) failure in preserving moral integrity. Says Mencius, "Only a *junzi* can have a constant heart (*hengxin*) in spite of a lack of constant means of support. The people, on the other hand, will not have constant hearts if they are without constant means. Lacking constant hearts, they will go astray and fall into excesses, stopping at nothing" (*Mengzi*, 1A7).

¹⁶ My translation. Note here the Confucian view that morality involves sacrifice of one's own interest even to the extent of accepting death.

¹⁷ *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (1969).

themes do not provide precepts, rules, directives or principles for action.¹⁸ They are ideal points of orientation that have an import for committed agents. Such terms as development, clarification, and expansion are thus quite at home in discussing ideal themes. Whereas in the case of ideal norms, terms such as application, compliance and extension are more appropriate.

Ren is like a theme in literary or musical composition, amenable to polymorphous, creative expressions, depending on the committed person's interpretation of the significance of the ideal for his or her life. Fundamentally, *ren* is the love of fellow humans (*Analects* 12.22), or affectionate concern for the well-being of humanity. Commitment to *ren* involves benevolence, that is, desire to do good to others as well as to "study the good of others" (See Hutcheson 1729: 158). Confucius said: "The *junzi* helps others to realize their (ethically) praiseworthy qualities (*mei* 美); he does not help them to realize their bad qualities (*e* 惡). The small man does the opposite" (*Analects* 12.16).¹⁹ Contributory to and constitutive of the realization of *ren*, is the development of particular dependent, constitutive virtues such as *zhong* 忠 and *shu* 恕. *Zhong* and *shu* are perhaps the most important constitutive or integral virtues of *ren*.²⁰

3.4 Ren-Dependent Virtue: Zhong 忠

Zhong 忠 is often translated as "loyalty, devotion," sometimes, "doing one's best."²¹

For constructive interpretation, all these renderings may be used for indicating a unified conception if we adopt, say, Josiah Royce's preliminary definition of "loyalty": "The willing and practical and thoroughgoing devotion of a person to a cause."²² "Thoroughgoing devotion to a cause" implies constancy (*heng* 恒) and doing one's best to realize the cause or object of one's devotion, that is, in doing one's utmost with one's whole heart and mind (*jin xin* 盡心) to realize the object of commitment (*jinzi* 盡己). (Zhu 1980: 23) Alternatively, to be *zhong* is to give the fullest expression to one's commitment, in short, to be true to oneself.²³

¹⁸ For the distinction between ideal norm and ideal theme, see Cua (1978, Chap. 8).

¹⁹ In this translation, I read *mei* as *mei de* 美德, ethically admirable qualities or virtues.

²⁰ The interpretation proposed below is a reconstruction that makes no claim to being faithful to the original text. It draws some materials from Cua (1984) and Cua (1995). Notably I discuss *zhong* and *shu* as distinct, supportive and constitutive virtues of *ren*. The interpretation does not deal with *zhong-shu* as a pair, thus leaving open the interpretative issues. For a brief critical survey of different interpretations of *zhong* and *shu* as a related pair, see Nivison (2003, 1996).

²¹ See Lau (1979: 15). Note that Confucius occasionally paired *zhong* and *xin* 信 (trustworthiness). *Xin* is also an important dependent virtue. For an informative, historical survey, see Shun (2003). For an excellent analytical study of *shu*, see Mou (2004).

²² Adopting this definition implies no commitment to Royce's conception of "loyalty to loyalty" as a supreme good. See Royce (1920: 16–17).

²³ For translation of *jinxin* as "doing the best one can, being true to one's nature;" occasionally "being true to oneself;" see Gardner (2003: 206, 157).

As a self-regarding virtue, *zhong* implies a commitment to a self-governing standard for conduct. The object of one's devotion may be another person. For example, when Fan Chi 樊遲 asked about *ren*, Confucius replied: "While at home maintain your respectful attitude (*gong* 恭); in handling affairs, be reverend (*jing* 敬); in dealing with others, be *zhong* 忠. These are the qualities that cannot be put aside, even if you go and live among the barbarians" (*Analects* 13.19). The object of *zhong* may be a person in a superior position. Thus, in one sense, to be *zhong* is to be loyal to someone superior in the social, political hierarchy, especially to a ruler (*Analects* 2.20, 3.10, 12.14,²⁴), for example, "The ruler should employ the services of his subjects in accordance with rites (*li* 禮). A subject should serve his ruler by *zhong*." (*Analects* 3.19).

Notably, *zhong* also occurs in a non-hierarchical sense (*Analects* 1.4, 7.23, 13.19, 16.10). The object of *zhong* may also be an equal. When Zigong 子貢 asked about friendship, Confucius replied: "Advise them in the spirit of *zhong* and tactfully guide them. If that is not possible, do not disgrace yourself" (*Analects* 12.23). On another occasion, Confucius said about himself: "In a hamlet of ten households, there are bound to be those who are my equal regarding *zhong* and *xin* 信 (trustworthiness, being true to one's words), but they are unlikely to be as eager to learn as I am" (*Analects* 5.28). It is important to note that the object of *zhong* is people in general; it is not confined to either one's superior or equal.²⁵

As a self-regarding virtue, *zhong* implies a commitment to a self-governing standard for conduct. As a *ren*-dependent virtue, *zhong* is not a blind devotion to persons or matters of concern. Even a ruler's conduct is also subject to criticism by subordinates (e.g., *Analects* 13.15, 13.23). Xunzi expatiates this theme: In the case of an ethically responsible minister, whenever the ruler has departed from the *dao* 道, it is quite proper for the minister to follow *dao* rather than the ruler. So also, while filial piety enjoins obedience, there are situations where disobedience is morally justified. When, for example, one's compliance with parental wishes will bring them disgrace rather than honor; when one will endanger the lives of the parents rather than bring them peace; and when the parents' wishes are such as to compel one to behave like a dumb creature rather than a man of moral cultivation. In all these cases, one must follow *yi* 義 or one's sense of what is right.²⁶ In short, in appropriate situations in the light of *yi* or right conduct the object of *zhong* may not be worthy of devotion. The critical committed agent preserves his sense of *yi* and

²⁴ Presumably, these passages are partly the basis for Nivison's view that *zhong* be construed as "loyalty" as expressing the standard governing the conduct of an inferior to a superior or to an equal.

²⁵ For this reason, Chen Daqi endorses Zhu Xi's interpretation of *zhong* as *jinzi* 盡己. This interpretation is plausible when we draw attention to its ethical basis in *ren*. See Chen (1977: 236–37).

²⁶ See Li (1979: 651). Also, cf. *Analects*, 4.18: The Master said, "In serving your father and mother you ought to dissuade them from doing wrong in the gentlest way. If you see advice being ignored, you should not become disobedient but remain reverend. You should not complain even if in doing so you wear yourself out."

independent judgment.²⁷ Moreover, while *zhong* is a *ren*-dependent virtue, a person may have *zhong* without *ren* (*Analects* 5.19), although it may sometimes be admired as a personal merit, as in the case of a person of blind devotion to an ethically unworthy person or institution.

3.5 Ren-Dependent Virtue: *Shu* 恕

Let us now turn to *shu* 恕, which expresses the idea of consideration of others. Viewed separately or together, *zhong* and *shu* involve reflection and judgment. *Zhong* expresses loyalty to and conscientious regard for the moral standard or the ideal of *ren*, i.e., an attitude of sincerity and seriousness in one's commitment to *ren*; *shu* more especially pertains to other-regarding conduct. A commitment to *ren* is a commitment to realizing *ren* in the personal relations between oneself and another. In other words, it is an adoption of an attitude of moral regard. *Shu* may be said to be “the golden rule” that governs the exemplification of the *ren* attitude. *Zigong* asked, “Is there a single word which can serve as a guide to conduct throughout one's life?” The master said, “It is perhaps the word ‘*shu*.’ Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire (*yu* 欲)” (*Analects* 15:24).

In other words, to be guided by *shu* is to use “oneself as a measure in gauging the desires of others” – an idea expressed in *Analects* 4.30 and 6.15.²⁸ Alternatively expressed: “What I do not desire (*yu* 欲), I ought not to do it to another” (*Analects* 12:2). In both formulations, what is crucial is the notion of *yu* 欲 or desire. It is misleading to say that *shu* concerns the nature of desire in the ordinary sense, for it has more to do with the manner of satisfaction than with the nature of occurrent desires. A plausible explication of *shu* thus requires a distinction between occurrent and reflective desires; thus what I desire now may, on reflection, be something I ought not to desire. This distinction seems implicit in a passage in the *Xunzi*:

²⁷An alternative interpretation of *zhong* is to focus on *li* 禮. Bo Mou maintains: “The primary meaning of ‘*zhong*’ in the *Analects*, especially when it is used together with ‘*shu*’ to unify Confucius's ideas as a whole, is a moral agent's sincere and devoted commitment to *one's responsibilities and duties* specified by the *li* (the ritual rules) or those culturally and historically established social institution; the implementation of such sincere and devoted commitment as a virtue can be towards any involved moral recipients, no matter to whom – regardless of the social status of the moral recipient involved” (Mou 2004). Admittedly many passages in the *Analects*, particularly those involving *yan* (speech) would support Mou's interpretation, as he ably discussed in his excellent paper. Still, it is a puzzle how this account can explain a couple of passages involving *zhong* and *xin* 信 without any reference to *li*, e.g., *Analects* 1.8 (repeated in 9.25) and 12.10, where on a couple of occasions Confucius recommended *zhong* and *xin* as the master concerns or main guides to conduct. Even if the *li* are relevant, one would expect the sense of *yi* 義 to be a determining consideration for the appropriate application of particular ritual rules. See Sect. 2.14.

²⁸This is Lau's gloss. Lau continues: “It interesting to note that when Tzu-kung [Zigong] remarked that if he did not wish others to impose on him neither did he wish to impose on others. Confucius' comment was that this was beyond his ability” (Lau 1979: 135n7).

“A single desire which one receives from nature (*tian*) is regulated and directed by the mind in many different ways, and thus it is difficult to identify and classify it with those which we receive from nature.”²⁹

In this sense, *shu* has to do primarily with reflective rather than occurrent desires. *Zhong* and *shu* may be said to be a method of reflection on occurrent desires, for assessing their appropriateness in the context of human relations. In this way, the exercise of *shu* presupposes a capacity of self-reflection and self-evaluation. To pay heed to *shu* is to deal earnestly with the question: Do I want my present desire to be satisfied as I want other’s analogous desires to be satisfied in a way that comports with *ren*? The wanting here is a reflective desire. Thus a deliberate consideration on the character of occurrent desires has consequences in terms of the moral character of one’s acts. *Shu* as moral regard has a practical import only when the agent has subjected his occurrent desires to reflective evaluation in the light of *ren*.

3.6 Golden Rule

We may regard *shu* as functionally equivalent to the Golden Rule, which is negatively expressed as “Do not do to others as you would not expect them to do to you,” or positively, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Singer 1977: 122). Our above interpretation of *shu* as pertaining to reflective desire is compatible with this general formulation of the Golden Rule. For at issue is the question of one’s willingness or desire to be treated in a certain way rather than the content of occurrent desires. The issue has to do with the standard governing the satisfaction of one’s occurrent desires. What I morally want to do is to subject my present desires to the assessment in terms of the standard I am committed to. For a Confucian, to be a man of *ren* is to engage in reflection that brings the ideal of *ren* to bear in actual conduct, and this obviously implies a desire or willingness to make other persons’ desires a relevant consideration in light of *ren*. To pay heed to *shu* is to have an

²⁹ More formally, we may restate the distinction as one between first-order and second-order desire. “Someone has a desire of the second-order either when he wants simply to have a certain desire or when he wants a certain desire to be his will” (Frankfurt 1971). The distinction is implicit in a passage in the *Xunzi*, which seems puzzling to Dubs and Watson, and corrupt to Knoblock. My reading is consistent with Xunzi’s thesis that the transformation (*hua* 化) of original human nature (*hua* 化) results in new characteristics, which cannot be identified and classed with those things we receive from *tian* or nature. As Xunzi put it, “The original nature of man is the beginning and material; acquired characteristics are the beautification and glorification of the original nature. Without acquired characteristics, the original nature could not become beautiful of itself. When original nature and acquired characteristics unite in character development, then only the name of Sage becomes inseparable from that of man” (Li 1979: 439, Dubs 1929: 234–35, Watson 1963: 102. My distinction seems implicit in Liang Qixiong’s 梁啟雄 distinction between *tianxing yu* 天性欲 (desires as endowed by nature or natural desires) and *lixing yu* 理性欲 (desires guided by reason or reflective desires). See Liang 1978: 323. Cf. Dubs 1929: 294; Watson 1963: 141; and Knoblock 1994 Vol.3: 21.22.5a.

other-regarding attitude. Coupled with *zhong* or one's own sincere commitment to *ren*, such an other-regarding attitude is an aspect of self-regard, i.e., a regard for one's own character and moral condition. Such a commitment entails "doing one's best" in appropriate circumstances. According to Confucius, "a man of *ren* desiring (*yu* 欲) to establish his own character, also establishes the character of others, and desiring to be prominent himself, also helps others to be prominent. To be able to judge others by what is near to ourselves may be called the method of realizing humanity" (*Analects* 6:30).³⁰ In this way, the moral agent's own conduct serves as a measure or standard for others. This is possible because his own character is achieved by way of embracing others as an integral component of his own moral development. *Shu* as extensive concern for others is thus a component of one's pre-occupation with moral attainment or moral condition on the whole. My extensive concern for others is a concern for their *moral being* or condition on the whole. In establishing or developing my own moral character in light of *ren*, I am also engaged in establishing or developing others' moral character, not in the sense of directly urging others to do so nor of asserting myself to be a moral paradigm; but in the sense that my own case serves as an embodiment of the possibility and actuating import of *ren*-realization. In this way I indirectly contribute to the development of others' moral character. When *zhong* and *shu* are construed as a practical rule of conduct, it is a *procedural* rather than a *substantive* guide to *ren*-realization.

Arguably, when *shu*, especially its negative formulation, is construed as a version of "Golden Rule," apart from being a useful means for "the elimination of self-partiality and inward dishonesty," as Kant would put it (See Abbott 1948: lii), it may also be viewed as a counsel of moderation and humility in making claims concerning one's knowledge of the good.³¹ Recall that the vision of *ren* or the good is an indeterminate ideal theme, and as such it is subject to diverse, concrete specifications within the lives of committed agents. At any given time, a reasonable agent would make such a specification based on a partial knowledge of the significance of the holistic vision. The ideal of impartiality implicit in the notion of *shu*, as opposed to partiality of the knowledge of the good, serves as a reminder of one's imperfection or incompleteness of ethical knowledge. By construing the negative formulation of *shu* ("What I do not desire, I ought not to impose on others" (*Analects* 12.12 and 15:23) as a counsel of modesty and humility, we can appreciate its importance

³⁰The translation cited is Chan's, except for translating *yu* 欲 as "desiring" in lieu of "wishing." This minor modification is made to conform to my earlier discussion of *yu* as "reflective desire." Elsewhere, Confucius points out that one establishes (*li* 立) oneself on the *li* (*Analects* 8.8, 16.13). In the text, I follow Chan in construing 6.28 as the positive version of *shu*.

³¹The following remarks on modesty and humility are inspired by Allinson's perceptive essay on the negative version of the Golden Rule or *shu* in the *Lunyu*. However, my claim here is stronger than Allinson's. In my view, if the Confucian *ren* is brought in as the background for interpreting the negative formulation of *shu*, it is not merely consonant with the Confucian attitudes of modesty and humility, but more fundamentally, constitutive of reasonable commitment to *ren* as an ideal of the good human life as a whole. See Allinson (1985). For a discussion of reasonable vindication of the adoption of *ren*, see Cua (1982: 94–100).

by attending to a characteristic of reasonable persons. Modesty pertains to the moderation of one's claims or demands upon others. One ordinary sense of 'reasonable' indicates that a reasonable person will refrain from making excessive or extravagant demands on others. As Kurt Baier remarks, "We say of demands or requests that they are excessive if, though we are entitled to make them, the party against whom we make them has good reasons for not complying, as when the landlord demands the immediate vacation of the premises in the face of well-supported pleas of hardship by the tenant" (Baier 1958: 316). More importantly, in the light of the vision of *dao* or ideal of the good human life, we would expect reasonable, committed persons to be modest in making their demands and requests, because no one possesses the knowledge of all possible, concrete, and appropriate specifications of the significance of the good for individual human life. As a result, one's specification of the good is always made from a limited perspective. In this sense, the negative formulation of the *shu* is a counsel of modesty, underscoring the importance of being aware of one's limited perspective. As we shall see in Sects. 3 and 4, the salient qualities of *junzi* are markedly those of the reasonable persons.

Hume justly observes that modesty, in the sense "opposed to *imprudence* and arrogance" is one personal quality that is agreeable to others, for it "expresses a diffidence of our own judgment and a due attention and regard for others" (Hume 1957: 7). We find a similar idea of modesty in one passage of the *Analects*: "The *junzi* considers *yi* 義 as the substance (*zhi* 質) of his conduct; he puts it into practice by observing the *li* 禮; he gives it expression by being modest (*xun* 遜). He completes it with trustworthiness (*xin* 信)" (*Analects* 15.18). Perhaps, the inner significance of modesty is best appreciated in terms of humility, in the sense that the reasonable persons know their place in relation to others' thoughts and affections, informed by an awareness and estimate of the limited character of their importance in relation to others. This attitude of humility is compatible with self-respect or even pride in one's achievement (Isenberg 1949: 7–8). Moreover, humility, in the light of commitment to the good, is an acknowledgement of "the lack of knowledge about what is good [for oneself and another] and its consequent attitude of not claiming to be or thinking oneself as good" (Allinson 1985: 306). Deprived of complete knowledge of the specification of the concrete significance of the good for all humans, a reasonable person will be humble. For any claim to knowledge about one's good and another's is at best a plausible presumption but always defeasible. The possibility of negation of such claims furnishes a basis for the adoption of humility. The ethical value of humility also provides a way of appreciating the Confucian stress on the observance of *li* or rules of propriety, as well as Cicero's on decorum.³²

On the basis of the foregoing, it should be clear that the negative version of the *shu* imposes a more stringent requirement than the positive version (analogous to that of negative moral rules or precepts). Imagining oneself in "the dual roles of agent and patient," while expressing self-respect and respect for others, does not

³² For the Confucian notion of *li*, see Cua 1989b; and Cua 2000. Cf. Fingarette 1972. For Cicero, see Higgenbotham 1967, Chaps. 27 and 28.

provide a reasoned justification for imposing one's conception of the good. This is perhaps the force of Confucius' saying: "To say you know when you know, and to say you do not when you do not, that is knowledge."⁶⁷ One's claim to knowledge about what is good for oneself and another must be proportional to accessible information and experience. While such knowledge may provide grounds for a claim of its significance for future conduct, reasonable persons would avow their sense of fallibility, in expressing modesty and humility. As we shall see in Sect. 4, sagacious or judicious judgments will also be informed by a sense of timeliness (*shi* 時), that is, an adaptation to the current situation in order to achieve equilibrium and an adjustment to varying, changing circumstances.

Our stress on the significance of the negative aspect of *shu* 恕 is consistent with practical expectation of mutual regard or consideration. For this reason, *shu* is often rendered as "reciprocity," conveying the idea of mutual expectation of the agent and the recipient. In the *Xunzi*, we find a remark attributed to Confucius: "The *junzi* has three different ways of practicing *shu*: When he is incapable of serving his ruler and yet expects lower officials to serve him, this is not *shu*. When he is incapable of requiring the affections of his parents and yet expects his sons to be filial, this is not *shu*. When he cannot respect (*jing* 敬) his elder brothers and yet expects his younger brothers to listen to him, this is not *shu*. If a scholar-official (*shi* 士) clearly understands these three ways of *shu*, then it is possible that he can rectify himself" (Li 1979: 661).

3.7 Other Ren-dependent Virtues

Let us consider briefly some other *ren*-dependent virtues. On one occasion, responding to an inquiry about *ren*, Confucius said that a man of *ren* practices five things: "*Gong* 恭 (respectfulness), *kuan* 寬 (magnanimity, generosity, open-mindedness), *xin* 信 (trustworthiness, being true to one's words), *min* 敏 (adroitness), and *hui* 惠 (beneficence)" (*Analects* 17.6). I suppose that *kuan* and *hui* are dependent, constitutive virtues of *ren* 仁, for *ren* is basically expressed in love, or affectionate concern (*ai* 愛). Similarly, warm-heartedness (*wen* 溫) is also *ren*-dependent, constitutive virtue (1.10). *Ren* as an affectionate concern for others would also be expressed in loving-kindness (*ci* 慈) (2.20), in some contexts, would be expressed in *kuan* 寬. *Hui* 惠 or beneficence is also an expression of *ren* concern. *Xin* seems to be another constitutive virtue of *ren*, as indicated in the pairing of *zhong* 忠 and *xin* 信 (*Analects* 1.8, 1.9, 9.21, 15.19). For instance, when Zizhang 子張 asked about conduct (*xing* 行), Confucius replied: "Make *zhong* and *xin* your master guides" (*Analects* 15.6). As *zhong* involves doing one's best on behalf of the object of loyalty, *min* 敏 (agility or adroitness) would be a virtue of resourcefulness in handling affairs on behalf of the object of loyalty. While *gong* 恭 is a dependent, supportive virtue of *li* 禮, it is also a supportive virtue of *ren* when the spirit of *ren* informs its expression according to *li*. As Confucius remarked: "If a man has no *ren*, what has he to do with *li*" (*Analects* 3.3). Moreover, as involving *rang* 讓, *gong* would be merely supportive as

in the case of the agent's refusal to yield (*rang* 讓) the practice of *ren* to his teacher (*Analects* 15.36). As we shall see later, *jing* 敬 (reverence) is a constitutive virtue of both *ren* and *li*, since it is an essential attitude required in filial conduct (*xiao* 孝) – a foundation for the practice of *ren* (*Analects* 1.2; 2.7).

3.8 *Overlapping Constitutive Virtues of Ren, Li, and Yi: Keji 克己 and Yong 勇*

At this point let us interpose by briefly attending to *keji* 克己 and *yong* 勇 as *overlapping*, constitutive virtues of *ren*, *li*, and *yi*. When YAN Yuan 顏淵 asked about *ren*, Confucius said: “To return to the observance of the *li* through self-control (*keji* 克己) constitutes *ren*” (*Analects* 12.1). Elsewhere, Confucius also remarked, “If a man has no concern for *ren* 仁, what has he to do with *li* 禮?” (*Analects* 3.3). These two sayings show the interdependence of *ren* and *li*. Self-control is constitutive of the practice of *ren* as it involves overcoming emotions and desires that may well hamper *ren*-performance, especially in difficult situations of the moral life. Particularly problematic, as Xunzi points out, are those self-serving desires that interfere with the practice of *ren*. The *li*, as delimiting the proper boundary for the pursuit of self-satisfaction, are the means for self-control. In the case of *yi*, self-control is indispensable in observing the constraints of flexibility – a topic we will take up in Sect. 2.15.

Yong 勇, as an aretaic or virtue term, is perhaps best rendered as “courage” – the quality of character that shows itself in facing danger undaunted despite fear or lack of confidence.³³ *Yong* is clearly a dependent virtue of *ren*, for “the *ren* person certainly possesses *yong*, but a *yong* person does not necessarily possess *ren*” (*Analects* 14.4). Likewise, *yong* is a dependent virtue of *li*; for its ethical significance depends on its connection with *li*. Thus, the *yong* person who does not have regard for *li* is likely to be unruly (*Analects* 8.2). It is an open question whether *yong* is a constitutive virtue of *li*. Arguably a person committed to the observance of *li*, in some context, may need *yong* to act in the absence of the detail rituals involved. Here the agent may need *yong* or a sense of venture, risking embarrassment or humiliation, or even shame. In the case of *yi*, *yong* is clearly a dependent, constitutive virtue. For example, when Zili asked: “Does the *junzi* cherish *yong*?” The Master said: “For the *junzi*, it is *yi* that is considered supreme. Possessed of *yong* but devoid of *yi*, a *junzi* will make trouble, but a small man will be a brigand” (*Analects* 17.23). That *Yong* is constitutive of *yi* seems evident in this passage: “To see *yi* (the right thing to do) and leave it undone shows a lack of *yong*” (*Analects* 2.24). At any rate, *yong* requires learning (*Analects* 17.8) and judgment, which inform the exercise of *yi*. We will deal with this topic in Sect. 2.15.

³³Other renderings of *yong* are possible in different contexts, e.g., “bravery, boldness, being daring, audacity, fearlessness.” One passage (*Analects* 14.28) clearly says that a *yong* person has no fear (*yongzhe buju* 勇者不懼). (See also *Analects* 9.29.) I leave the translation issue open, since my discussion deals only with the relation of *yong* to *ren*, *li*, and *yi*.

3.9 Confucius Reasoning

Before we turn to *li*-dependent virtues, let us note Confucius' reasoning in our passage above (*Analects* 17.6). His reasoning consists in a series of hypothetical propositions, conveniently numbered below.

1. If you are respectful (*gong* 恭), you will not be treated with disrespect.
2. If you are generous (*kuan* 寬), you will win the people.
3. If you are trustworthy (*xin* 信), people will entrust responsibility to you.
4. If you are agile (*min* 敏), you will accomplish much.
5. If you are beneficent (*hui* 惠), you will be in an adequate position to employ the services of others.

Note that the consequent in each hypothetical proposition is an appeal to the notion of reflective desirability.³⁴ In (1)–(5), a desirable state of affairs, the consequent, is said to follow if the antecedent occurs. The consequents are desirable states of affairs, which Confucius took to be plausible presumptions, that is, matters of common knowledge. These presumptions are of course defeasible. If this interpretation is correct, particular moral virtues cited, with others such as knowledge and courage (*Analects* 15.17), are recognized as having moral values insofar as they advance the realization of a life of *ren*. They are virtues in the sense that the absence of them would lead to undesirable consequences, which hamper the pursuit of realization of *ren*.

We may represent Confucius' appeal to reflective desirability in this form: "If you reflect seriously on the desirable consequences of adopting and acting in accord with virtues, you would discover where your true interest lies." Indeed, the notion of reflective desirability (or undesirability) is implicit in the idea of *shu*, and it is an important aspect of Confucian argumentation. Notably, our passage clearly implies that possessing the five virtues is beneficial to the individual, as they are wanted and as they serve the true interest of the individual. For our present purpose, it is sufficient to note that a *junzi* cultivates the particular virtues for the purpose of attaining to a life of *ren* and this task presupposes knowledge of reflective desirability of actions and human affairs.³⁵

³⁴Another example of appeal to reflective desirability is *Analects* 8.2, which will be discussed later. Perhaps, the most interesting form of logical reasoning is the use of sorites or chain argument in *Analects* 13.3. For a critical discussion of deductive reasoning in Confucian ethics, see Cua (1998b: 203–05).

³⁵As I wrote elsewhere: "A reasonable solution to a practical question is a concretely temporal solution and not necessarily a universalizable decision that claims cogency of application to all similar cases or to all persons in similar circumstances. The universalizable feature, if present in a ruling, is a consequence of acceptance of that ruling as a paradigm for future situations. What is fitting and appropriate to act in a particular situation remains open to ruling. On this Confucian view, the validity of a moral principle depends on assessment in an actual case. Every moral situation has, so to speak, integrity of its own quite apart from its possible subsumption under a pre-established standard. Its function in practical contexts depends on the agent's appeal to some notion of reasonableness as occasionally determined with a view to the reflective desirability of pursuing

3.10 *Dependent Virtues of Li* 禮

Li and *yi* are also fundamental ethical virtues. Because of the Confucian stress on tradition and civility, and the need for independent ethical judgment of committed individual moral agents, *li* and *yi* deserve special attention in Confucian ethics. Our discussion in the preceding section on *ren* and particular *ren*-dependent virtues pertains, so to speak, to the internal aspect of *ren*-morality. The accent is on the ideal and self-cultivation of desirable qualities or dispositions rather than the external or outward form of conduct. Unlike a small-minded person in times of moral failure, a *junzi* seeks the cause within himself rather than others (*Analecets* 15:21). For a person committed to the Confucian ideal *dao* or *ren*, he or she must examine himself for the cause of failure. As an eminent disciple, Zengzi 曾子 reminds his pupils: “Daily I engage in self-examination on three matters: In what I have undertaken on another’s behalf, have I failed to do my best (*zhong* 忠)? In my dealings with my friends, have I failed to be trustworthy in what I say (*xin* 信)? Have I failed to practice repeatedly what has been passed on to me?” (*Analecets* 1.4). Among other things, one contribution of Mencius to the development of Confucian ethics is his emphasis on the function of *xin* 心 (mind/heart) in connection with moral failure. Xunzi also gives additional insight on the manner in which an ethically informed human mind may be obscured (*bi* 蔽) by concern with immediate satisfaction of desires without regard to distant consequences.

More fundamentally, an action conforming to a ritual requirement of *li* has its ethical significance because such an action is performed in the light of a concern for *ren*. As Confucius put it, “If a man has no concern for *ren* 仁, what has he to do with *li* 禮?” (*Analecets* 3.3) Without a regard for *ren*, ritual observances would amount to mere formal gestures vacuous of moral substance. Notably, in addition to imposing restraint on human behavior, as Xunzi points out, the *li* also support the satisfaction of desires within the defined boundaries of proper conduct. And when a *junzi*’s compliance with *li* is informed by the spirit of *ren*, *li* has also an *ennobling* function, exemplifying the *junzi*’s respect for *li* as an ideal, *ren* embedded tradition.³⁶ This attitude toward *li* signifies also a respect for the reality of the situation, the background and possibility that furnish the context for successful moral performance. The Confucian emphasis on *li* is one justification for the Confucian homage to the concrete. Every action, on this view, has a *conventional* aspect for understanding its normative meaning and import. Whether or not we accept this stress on *li*, some sort of *convention* for identifying the normative import of action must be an essential

certain courses of action. In this sense the notions of reasonableness and reflective desirability are internally related within the concern for the ideal of *jen* [*ren*]. Thus some sort of consensual background of shared moral attitude is presupposed in discourse. The use of Confucian sorties in the classics, [e.g., *The Great Learning*] can also be understood in this light as discourses on reflective desirability rather than attempts at determining the logical consequences of moral beliefs.” (From Cua 1975).

³⁶For a discussion of the three functions of *li*, see Cua (1989b); More extensive discussion of *li* and its connection with *ren* and *yi* is given in Cua (1998b, Chap. 13).

element in any moral theory. Granted the importance of ethical convention or tradition, attention to the aesthetic and religious dimensions of *li* will also lead us to an appreciation of valuable facets of human life in different cultures and civilizations.

3.11 *Li-Dependent Virtue: Gong 恭 and Jing 敬*

Perhaps the most important dependent virtues of *Li* are *gong* 恭 and *jing* 敬. Both terms pertain to expression of respect for others. In vernacular Chinese, *gongjing* 恭敬 is a compound term (*jianming* 兼名) for “respect or respectfulness.” In the *Lunyu*, *gong* and *jing* occur as single terms (*danning* 單名),³⁷ and the difference is roughly indicated by different translations, such as “respect” for *gong* and “reverence” for *jing*. However, in some contexts, as we shall see later, *jing* may also be rendered as “respect.” In one passage we cited earlier in connection with *zhong* 忠 (Sect. 2.3), we have a suggestion that *gong* and *jing* are dependent, supportive constitutive virtues of *ren*.

For distinguishing *gong* from *jing*, we may say that the former pertains primarily to outward appearance, the latter to one’s inner attitude. As ZHU Xi put it: “*Gong*’s principal focus is appearance (*rong* 容), *jing* on human affairs. *Gong* is seen in outward expression (*wai* 外), *jing* focuses on what is within (*zhong* 中)” (Zhu 1980: 91). This explanation is supported by Confucius’ remark that among the nine things that occupy *junzi*’s thought (*jiusi* 九思) is “to think of appearing respectful (*gong* 恭) when it comes to demeanor (*mao si gong* 貌思恭)” and “to think of being reverend when attending to human affairs (*shi si jing* 事思敬)” (*Analects* 16.10). Differently put, *gong* pertains to one’s bearing or deportment. Courtesy or politeness, as it has to do with manners of behavior, is an example of *gong*. *Jing*, however, pertains to virtuous conduct, more specifically to one’s inner attitude. The idea is also present in the *Yijing*: “Being straight means correctness, and being square means *yi* 義 (righteousness). The *junzi* 君子 applies *jing* 敬 to straighten the internal life (*nei* 內) and *yi* to square the external life (*wai* 外). As *jing* and *yi* are established, one’s virtue will not be an isolated instance.”³⁸ Chan’s rendering *jing* as “seriousness” brings out the serious attitude; however, it is better to render it as “reverence” in the sense of “deep respect and feeling for something or someone,” which is a serious, attentive state of mind.³⁹ In so far as *li* involves *gong* and *jing*, compliance

³⁷ For the distinction between *danning* and *jianming* in *Xunzi*, see Li (1979: 515).

³⁸ *Zhou Yi* 周易, 坤文言.

³⁹ Graham points out that the word *jing* 敬, as used by the Cheng brothers (Cheng Hao 程顥 and Cheng Yi 程頤) “cannot be translated by ‘reverence’”; and Bruce’s “seriousness” is utterly inadequate, although accusation can be made against Bruce, it is difficult to find a better alternative. The two aspects of *ching* are interdependent; to collect oneself, be attentive to the person or thing implies that one respects him or takes it seriously; and to be respectful implies that one is collected and attentive. But there is no English word which covers both, and the only course seems to use “reverence” for one and a different word for the other.” See Graham (1958: 69).

with *li* has thus outer and inner aspects. Unlike *gong*, however, *jing* is a constitutive virtue of *li* 禮.

As we mentioned earlier, *jing* 敬 can be also rendered as “respect.” When FAN Chi asked about wisdom (*zhi* 智), the Master replied: “To know the duties (*yi* 義) due to the people, to respect (*jing* 敬) while keeping the gods and spirits (*guishen* 鬼神) at a distance may be called wisdom” (*Analects* 6.22). Note that *jing* as respect here conveys no sense of the depth of feeling of deferential esteem, as in the case *jing* for one’s parents. Our passage seems to indicate Confucius’ agnostic attitude toward gods and spirits, while acknowledging that *jing* or paying them proper respect is important, perhaps as a concession to common practices without seriously endorsing the common belief in their existence.⁴⁰ Presumably, then, Confucius was simply expressing a formal gesture of respect for a cultural tradition, but redirecting attention of humans toward a concern for *ren* or serving humanity and understanding humanity rather than gods and spirits. When Ji Lu 季路 asked about serving the spirits of the dead and gods, Confucius replied, “You are not able even to serve men. How can you serve the spirits?” When asked about death, Confucius said, “You do not understand even life. How can you understand death?” (*Analects* 11.12)

The important thing to note is that *jing* can be used to express respect in ways that differ from *gong* 恭, which focuses on the formal character of speech or behavior rather than feelings. I can pay respects or obeisance to the dead, to acquaintances, to superiors, men or women of authority without any feeling of esteem, or even liking. As Confucius remarked, “Only a man of *ren* is capable of liking and disliking people,” in the sense of liking their good and disliking their bad conduct. However, “if a person has the will (or firm determination) to become a man of *ren*, to that extent, he can be free from dislike on account of his misconduct” (*Analects* 4.4). Xunzi gives us an elaboration of the degrees of *jing* feeling. “The *ren* person must respect (*jing* 敬) others. However, there is *dao* for respecting others. If the other is a worthy, then you should try to be close to him, honor him and respect (*jing*) him as well. If the other is unworthy, be fearful of him but keep him at distance, while showing him respect. The expression of respect is the same, but one’s inner feeling is different” (Li 1979: 298). Xunzi’s remark seems to be an echo of Confucius’ attitude toward gods and spirits. If you don’t pay respects to them, you will probably incur the censure of the populace. Xunzi goes even further by employing the language of *shen* (gods), perhaps as an expression for the respect for current linguistic practice. He would probably agree with Hobbes that “Words are wise men’s counters; they do but reckon by them; but they are the monies of fools” (Hobbes 1952: 29 with spelling modernized).

⁴⁰As Mao Zishui’s 毛子水 remarks: “It appears that Confucius does not believe in the existence of gods and spirits. His ‘*jing*’ attitude toward gods and spirits is entirely because of concession to ‘the established teaching on the legend of spirits.’” (This is a free reading of Mao’s remark. See Mao 1977: 87.) It is interesting to note that Confucius’s remark, which we render as “respect the gods and spirits” has a modern usage that is completely devoid any implication of respect, instead it is used to express disrespect. Lin Yutang, for example, offers this translation of the saying “*jing guishen er yuan zhi* 敬鬼神而遠之” as “to act correctly to nasty people and keep them at a distance” (Lin 1972: 304A).

3.12 Li-dependent Virtue: Rang 讓

Another important *li*-dependent virtue is *rang* 讓, which can be rendered in two different ways: “to decline politely (*tuici* 推辭),” and *rang*, as in Mencius’ *cirang zhi xin* 辭讓之心--the seed of the virtue of *li*--has to do with “yielding” (*Mengzi*, 2A6). In both cases, *rang* may be considered as an example of concern with *gong* 恭. One should yield to others in some circumstances, say, in dealing with one’s parents or elders, as one can respectfully decline their request. In the either case, as we shall see in Sect. 2.14, the exercise of reasonable judgment in accordance with *yi* 義 is a crucial determinant.

3.13 Li-dependent Virtue: Wen 文

Perhaps the most prominent dependent and constitutive *li*-dependent virtue is *wen* 文 (culture, cultural refinement). *Wen* is reported to be one of the four subjects of Confucius’ teachings. “The Master instructs under four heads: culture (*wen*), moral conduct (*xing* 行), doing one’s best (*zhong* 忠), and being trustworthy in what one says (*xin* 信)” (*Analects* 7.25). For Confucius, the *junzi* is “widely versed in culture but brought back to essentials by the *li* can, I suppose, be relied upon not to turn against what he stood for” (*Analects* 6.27). Although the *li* is fundamentally a code of formal rules of proper conduct, apart from its connection with *ren*, it has an aesthetic aspect. Learning is for the sake of self-improvement, not for the sake of impressing other people (*Analects* 14.24). Xunzi would add, “The *junzi* uses learning to beautify his own person (*mei qi shen* 美其身). The small-minded man uses learning as a bribe to win attention from others.”⁴¹ Implicit in the idea of *wen* is the beautification of character in the light of cultural refinement. The idea of *wen*, in the light of the connection of *li* with *ren*, in effect, appertains to the ennobling of the virtuous character of persons. Alternatively, *wen* expresses the ennobling function of *li*. In this light, the *junzi* is a “beautiful” person, as his life and conduct exemplify the “beauty of virtue” in an eminent way, reminiscent of the popular concern with “the beauty of virtue and the deformity of vice” among the British Moralists of the eighteenth century.

As a dependent virtue of *li*, a regard for *wen*, as Xunzi would put it, is “to honor the roots” of human existence. (Li 1979: 424) However, exaggerated emphasis on *wen* without regard to *zhi* 質 has dubious ethical value. Confucius said, “When there is a preponderance of [native] substance (*zhi* 質) over acquired refinement (*wen* 文), the result will be churlishness. When there is a preponderance of acquired refinement over substance, the result will be pedantry. Only a well-balanced admixture of the two do we have a *junzi*” (*Analects* 6.18; see also *Analects* 12.19).

⁴¹The second sentence is Watson’s translation. See Watson (1963: 20).

3.14 *Yi as the Virtue of Flexibility*

The well-balanced admixture of native substance (*zhi* 質) and cultural refinement (*wen* 文) does not indicate the ideal, for fundamentally *yi* 義 is the substance (*zhi*) of the ethical life (*Analects* 15.18). *Yi* is the Confucian virtue of flexibility. According to Confucius, the *junzi*, in his dealings with the world, “is not invariably for or against anything. He is on the side of *yi* 義 (*Analects* 4.10). Recall also Confucius’ autobiographical remark cited in the Introduction: “I have no preconceptions about the permissible or impermissible (*wu ke wu buke* 無可無不可)” (18.8). This freedom from predilection, prejudgment, inflexibility, and egotism is said to be characteristic of Confucius. “There were four things the Master refused to have anything to do with: he refused to entertain conjectures or to insist on certainty; he refused to be inflexible or to be egotistical” (*Analects* 9.4). These qualities may also be ascribed to the *junzi*, qualities which are necessary to maintain his freedom of thought and action in advance of encounter with particular problematic situations, although Confucius, perhaps out of modesty, disclaimed being a *junzi*. Confucius said, “The *dao* of the *junzi* is threefold, none of which I was able to attain: being humane (*ren* 仁), he is free from worries (*you* 憂); wise (*zhi* 知), from delusions (*huo* 惑); courageous, he is free from fear.” Zigong said, “What the Master has just quoted is a description of himself” (*Analects* 14.28). On another occasion, Confucius said, “In the knowledge of letters and the arts, I may perhaps compare myself with other men. But as for the character of a *junzi* who carries out in his personal conduct what he professes – that is something to which I have not yet attained” (*Analects* 7.32, this is Ku’s translation. Ku 1984: 33).

If *yi* is “to square with” external life of the *junzi*, then its primary function is to deal with matters external to the individuals, seen as demands or requirements that need to be made compatible with the concern of their inner life. These external demands may appear in the form of duties (*yiwu* 義務) imposed by societal custom or tradition, along with institutional rules and regulations, more generally, demands for compliance with *li* as a set of formal prescriptions for proper behavior. This sense of *yi*, which is functionally equivalent to *li*, is often rendered as “duty.” One example is the use of *yi* in the passage cited in Sect. 2.11. The *Liji* mentioned ten duties of human relationships (*renyi* 人義), such as “The father’s loving-kindness (*fuci* 父慈) the son’s filial piety (*zixiao* 子孝), gentleness on the part of elder brother (*xiongliang* 兄良), and obedience (*shun* 順) of the younger brother” (Wang 1977 Vol.1: 300). The *Li* as a corpus of rules of proper conduct can be quite complex and burdensome even for committed persons. The vastness of the rules staggers our imagination. A chapter (*Liqi* 禮器) in the *Liji* 禮記 mentioned three hundred “great (*da* 大)” or important rules (*dali* 大禮) and three thousand “smaller” rules (*xiaoli* 小禮), but points out that “they all lead to the same thing.” “No one can enter an apartment but by the door.” The *junzi*, in his consideration of the rules, finds those which are carried directly to practice; those in which one has to bend and make some modification; those which are regular and the same for all classes.” (Legge 1966: 405)

Yi 義, in the sense of rightness, appropriateness or fittingness, would be the basis of modification of *li*. Moreover, the relevance of the *li* to the present, particularly

in exigent situations, is a matter of reasoned judgment based on his sense of appropriateness or *yi* and appreciation of the regulative, supportive, and ennobling functions of *li*.⁴² Wherefore, the *li* are subject to revision or even elimination. Notably, as Zhu Xi points out, we must reject rules that are unreasonably onerous and superfluous, and retain rules that are practicable and essential to the maintenance of the social order.

Because of the complexity and the competence necessary to apply the *li*, ordinary persons do not have the time, the knowledge, nor interest in the mastery of *li*. The application of the great or important *li*, such as funeral rites and sacrifices, required ritual experts, who ideally possess a sense of *yi*. Confucius seemed to be quite aware of the problem of complexity and the rationales underlying the application of *li* when he said, “The common people can be made to follow a path, but not to understand (*zhi* 知) it” (*Analects* 8.9).

Moreover, the appropriate and reasonable determination of the application of *li* in accordance with *yi* must attend to the time and circumstance of the individuals. It is explicitly stated in the *Liji*: “In [observing] the *li*, what is appropriate (*yi* 宜) [for the time and circumstances] should be followed” (Legge 1966 Vol. 1: 62–63; Wang 1977 Vol. 1: 3). Given a set of ritual rules, its application cannot be determined a priori. “Should words be understood only in one way? Each saying has its own appropriate application.” (Legge 1966 Vol. 2: 214; Wang 1977 Vol. 2: 609) Or to paraphrase Wittgenstein, ritual rules, like all rules, stand there like signposts for the guidance of our will and action. (Wittgenstein 1968, par. 85) There is always a possibility of doubt in actual cases, where one must interpret their concrete significance. In the application of *li* in particular, in its requirement of compliance with formal procedures, it is all the more important to pay heed to the circumstances of the individual. For example, the proper execution of formal procedures often requires the possession of material instruments that may go beyond the means of ordinary persons. The *Liji* is quite emphatic on the economical aspect of ritual observances: “goods and wealth are not to be expected from the poor in their discharge of the rules of propriety (*li* 禮).”⁴³ It goes without saying that an enlightened knowledge of other factors that affect different individuals in different circumstances or the same individual in different circumstances is essential to the exercise of *yi*, which entails a judgment of what is right and reasonable in applying the *li*.

In sum, concern for *yi* is generally a concern for right conduct, which is deemed fitting or appropriate to a particular situation.⁴⁴ However, one problematic area of

⁴²For the notion of *yi* 義 as appropriateness (*yi* 宜), see *Zhongyong* 中庸, Sect. 20 in Chan 1963:104. For this notion of *yi* and its general significance as ruling on the relevance of moral rules to particular circumstances, see Cua (1971: 44–46); elaborated in Cua (1978), Chaps. 5 and 6. Similar interpretation may be found in Cheng (1972), Lau (1979: 49–50), and Chen (1977, Chap. 3).

⁴³*Quli* 曲禮, Legge 1966 Vol. 1:78; Wang 1977 Vol. 1: 20. See also, *Tangong* 檀弓, Legge 1966 Vol. 1: 153–54; Wang 1977 Vol. 1: 106.

⁴⁴For the notion of *yi* 義 as appropriateness (*yi* 宜), see *Zhongyong*, Sect. 20 in Chan (1963: 104). For this notion of *yi* and its general significance as ruling on the relevance of moral rules to particular circumstances, see Cua (1978, Chaps. 5 and 6).

conduct, to use Xunzi's expression, is our fondness for profit or personal gain (*haoli* 好利). In Confucius' words, "The *junzi* understands what constitutes right conduct (*yi* 義); the small-minded man understands what is profitable" (*Analects* 4.16). Confucius said of himself that "wealth and rank attained through unrightful means (*buyi* 不義) have as much to do with me as passing clouds" (*Analects* 7.16). In situations when we are tempted to do what promotes personal gain, Confucius would advise that "when you see something that is conducive to attaining personal gain, you must think of right conduct (*jian de siyi* 見得思義)" (*Analects* 14.12; 16.10), that is, whether the contemplated, self-serving act is the right thing to do. This contrast between *yi* and self-serving benefit suggests the Confucian distinction between morality and egoism. Perhaps it is the assumption of this contrast that accounts for common translation of *yi* as having to do with morality. For example, in the passages we just cited, Lau rendered *yi* 義 as "what is moral" (*Analects* 7.16) and *buyi* 不義 as "immoral means" (*Analects* 14.12).

3.15 *Dependent Virtues of Yi* 義·*Kuan* 寬

Let us consider some of the dependent virtues of *yi* as a virtue of flexibility. The idea of *kuan* 寬 suggests catholicity and neutrality, which may be regarded as the main supportive and constitutive virtues of *yi*. For Confucius, the *junzi* is not an implement (*Analects* 2:12), which is fit for specific, and narrow purpose. "Instead, he should have broad vision, wide interests, and sufficient ability to do many things" (Chan 1963: 24). He is broad-minded and non-partisan (*Analects* 2:14; also 7:30), and aspires to higher and more valuable things in life (*Analects* 14:23). Alternatively, we may say that *yi* as a virtue of flexibility has *kuan* 寬 as a supportive and constitutive virtue. Earlier, we mentioned that *kuan*, as a dependent, constitutive virtue of *ren* 仁, is a virtue of magnanimity (Sect. 2.1). Understood as *kuanhong* 寬宏, *kuan* embraces also broadmindedness and generosity (Sect. 2.7), either in the form of liberality in giving or in the form of generous-mindedness, impartiality or fair-minded. Let us consider some of the dependent virtues of *yi* as a virtue of flexibility. The idea of *kuan* suggests catholicity and neutrality, which are the main supportive and constitutive virtues of *yi*. Earlier, we mentioned *kuan*, as a dependent, constitutive virtue of *ren* 仁. For elaborating the complex notion of *kuan* as a constitutive virtue of both *ren* 仁 and *yi* 義, we may appropriate Xunzi's conception of three desirable qualities of participants in argumentation. Xunzi says of the argumentative discourse of the scholars and *junzi*:

With a humane mind (*renxin* 仁心) he explains his ideas to others, with a learning mind (*xuexin* 學心) he listens to their words, and with an impartial mind (*gongxin* 公心) he makes his judgment. He is not moved by the censure or praise of the mob; he does not try to bewitch the ears and eyes of the observers; he does not cringe before the power and authority of eminent men... He honors what is fair and upright and despises meanness and wrangling. (Watson 1963: 148–149 emended)

3.16 *Kuan as a Composite Virtue*

A different way of indicating the virtue of *kuan*, in the light of Xunzi's remark and his distinction between generic (*gong* 共名) and specific terms (*bieming* 別名), is to say that *kuan*, a composite virtue, as a generic term, may be concretely specified in three virtues: humaneness (*renxin* 仁心), learning mind (*xuexin* 學心), and impartiality or fair-mindedness (*gongxin* 公心). In the context of the exercise of *yi* 義, *renxin* expresses a concern for others as one's conduct may affect others. More especially in discourse, *renxin* would counsel the agent to be vigilant (*shen* 慎) in using words that may hurt others' feelings, for the *ren* person has concern for others' feelings and well-being (*Analects* 12.22). Says Xunzi, "Hurtful words engender wounds deeper than those inflicted by spears or halberds" (Li 1979: 55). Xunzi would elaborate the close connection of *ren* and *yi* in the context of deploying arms.

Chen Xiao 陳騫 said to Xunzi, "When you talk about the use of arms, you always speak of *ren* 仁 and *yi* 義 as being the basis for deploying arms or soldiers. A humane person loves others (*renzhe airen* 仁者愛人), the righteous person acts in accordance with what is right and reasonable (*yizhe xunli* 義者循理). Why, then, do they have recourse to arms in the first place? Xunzi replied, "This is not something that you would understand. The humane person does indeed love others, and because he loves others, he hates to see men do them harm. The righteous person acts in accordance with what is right and reasonable, and thus he hates to see them do wrong. He takes up arms, in order to put an end to violence and to do away with harm, not in order to contend with others for spoils."⁴⁵

3.17 *Gongxin 公心 as a Specific Virtue of Kuan*

As *gongxin* 公心, impartiality or fair-mindedness, is a specific virtue of *kuan* 寬, characteristic of the *junzi*'s neutrality and catholicity, we shall attend to *xuexin* 學心, the learning mind (*xuexin*), which for Xunzi, in discourse, is the virtue of receptivity, the ability to listen to others without prepossession or prejudice. This virtue is important, as it is an amplification of what it means to be an impartial person that displays *kuan* as generous-mindedness. To be impartial in discussion, one must have an open mind, a mind that is receptive to contrary opinions, even those

⁴⁵Li (1979: 328); Watson's translation emended. Rendering *yizhe xunli* 義者循理 as "right and reasonable" is an interpolation of *li* 理 as "reason" in the sense of "what is right and reasonable," which brings out an important function of *yi* 義. Knoblock's proposal of "rational order" for *li* 理 is also acceptable, in the light of Xunzi's overall concern with order (*zhi* 治) as opposed to chaos or disorder (*luan* 亂) (Knoblock 1990 Vol. 2: 15.2). Violence and harm doing, especially on a large-scale, are liable to produce chaos or disorder. Dubs's translation of *li* 理 as "principles" in this passage is also acceptable (Dubs 1929: 168), if the notion of principles is construed in the sense of *principia*, the originating and fundamental basis of ethical conduct, which for the Confucians are *ren* and *yi*. Moreover, especially in the context of intercultural ethical conflict, the principled interpretation and formulation of *ren* and *yi* is quite appropriate, as it emphatically draws attention to the core of Confucian ethics. See Cua 1997.

that disagree with one's own, prior to assessment of their relevance or correctness. In the *Analects*, Confucius frequently stresses the importance of extensive study or learning (*boxue* 博學) and application (*Analects* 6.27, 1.1). Learning, however, as we stated in Sect. 2.13, is for the sake of self-improvement, not for the sake of impressing others (*Analects* 14.24). Quite in the spirit of Confucius' teaching, Zixia 子夏 said: "As workmen labor in their workshops to learn their trade, so a *junzi* gives himself to study in order to attain the Way" (*Analects* 19.7).

Learning is not merely the passive absorption of textual materials or learning from one's own or other people's experiences, but must involve a certain amount of thinking or reflection (*si* 思). As Confucius said, "Learning without thinking is labor lost. Thinking without learning is perilous" (*Analects* 2.15). Similarly discussion is important in teaching, as indicated in Confucius' self-reflective remark: "It is these things that cause me concerns: failure to cultivate virtue, failure to discuss (*jiang* 講) more deeply into what I have learned, inability, when I am told what is right (*yi* 義), to move to where it is, and inability to reform myself when I have defects" (*Analects* 7.3). Confucius did not seem to council deep thinking in situations that require effective decision, as indicated in this report: "Ji Wenzhi 季文子 always thought three times before taking action. When the Master was told of this, he commented, "Twice is quite enough" (*Analects* 5.20). Presumably, "thinking thrice" is poor advice for dealing with matters at hand, which call for relatively fast and effective decision. Also, when habitual, "thinking thrice" may result in the separation of learning or knowledge. As WANG Yang-ming 王陽明 complained against the scholars of his time on the separation of learning or knowledge and action, pursuing them separately, thereby disjoining knowledge from action. This tendency of separate pursuits is likely to result in a sort of "abulia," an incapacitation of the agent to will effectively or to make decisions leading to action.⁴⁶ Of course, on occasion when the agent can afford the time and energy, he must deliberate (*lü* 慮) about the distant future. Failure to do so may give rise to "worries much closer at hand" (*Analects* 15.12).⁴⁷

3.18 Supportive and Constitutive Virtue: Caution (Shen 慎)

In addition to the learning mind, Confucius also stressed the importance of caution or circumspection (*shen* 慎), dignity, seriousness, solemnity of manners (*zhuang* 莊), and firmness, resoluteness, and steadfastness (*gang* 剛).⁴⁸ *Shen* 慎 is a supportive and constitutive virtue of *yi* 義, for caution in speech and conduct (*Analects* 4.24) is essential to the exercise of impartiality. It is also a supportive and constitutive virtue

⁴⁶For further discussion of Wang's doctrine of the unity of knowledge and action, see Cua (1982).

⁴⁷The theme of learning, thinking, and deliberation is more extensively discussed in the *Xunzi*. For further discussion, see Cua (1985: 3–4, 65–69), passim; and Cua (1993).

⁴⁸For *shen*, see 4.24, 7.13, 8.2; for *zhuang*, see 2.20, 11.21, 15.33; and for *gang*, see 5.11, 13.27, 16.7, 17.8.

of *ren* 仁, since it is implicit in the ideal of *shu* 恕, which requires impartiality (Sect. 2.6). *Gang* 剛 or *gangyi* 剛毅 (*Analects* 13.27) is an important supportive and constitutive virtue of *yi* for resoluteness in commitment to *yi* and the decisiveness in judgment according to *yi* is an indispensable prerequisite for its exercise. So also, *gang*, like *shen*, is a supportive and constitutive virtue of *ren* 仁. Perhaps, the most important supportive and constitutive virtue of *ren*, *li*, and *yi* is *yong* 勇 (courage or valor). Great courage is required in the readiness of sacrificing one's life for the sake of *ren*. Confucius said, "The determined scholar and the man of *ren* will not seek to live at the expense of *ren*. They will even sacrifice their lives in order to realize *ren*" (*Analects* 15.10). Here we may say that *yong* is the *courage to be a ren* person. In the context that requires the exercise of *yi* 義, *yong* is the *courage to do* the right thing. As Confucius put it, "Faced with what is right, to leave it undone shows a lack of courage" (*Analects* 2.24). In sum, *yong* is an overlapping dependent, constitutive virtue of both *ren* and *yi*.

3.19 Summary

The foregoing Sects. (2.1–2.19) present a map of the virtues of *junzi*, consisting of cardinal, interdependent virtues such as *ren*, *li*, and *yi*, and their dependent supportive and/or constitutive virtues. The distinction between interdependent and dependent virtues is a heuristic device for sorting out the virtues. Alternatives such as that of Chen Daqi (Sect. 2) and Ye Jingkui 葉經桂 are available for comparison.⁴⁹ Note also that I made no claim as to completeness or to a sharp division of dependent virtues as belonging to one cardinal rather than another, for as we have pointed out, there are overlapping dependent virtues of *ren* and *yi* such as *yong* 勇 (Sects. 2.8 and 2.18) and *kuan* 寬 (Sects. 2.7 and 2.15). There is a complementary way of grouping the dependent virtues suggested by *Zhongyong* 中庸, Sect. 27: honoring moral character (*zun dexing* 尊德性) and following the path of inquiry and learning (*dao xuewen* 道問學), much reminiscent of Aristotle's distinction of virtues of character, and virtues of intellect in *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Dependent virtues of *ren* and *li* are essentially the virtues of character, and those of *yi*, virtues of the intellect. Notably the virtues of the intellect are complementary to the virtues of character, and they comprise a few virtues not particularly emphasized by Aristotle, but the idea of *phronimos* or man of practical wisdom seems to be implicit in the idea of the exercise of *yi*, which may be elaborated by Xunzi's

⁴⁹Ye proposed a fourfold classification of virtues: (1) self-regarding (*duiji* 對己), (2) other-regarding (*duiren* 對人), (3) attitudes toward things in general (*duiwu* 對物), and (4) attitudes toward affairs of human life (*duishi* 對事) (Ye 1977). It seems to me that Confucius drew no such sharp division between (1) and (2), and between (3) and (4). Chen's proposal is more illuminating and, as I have shown in Sect. 2.1, can be adopted for elaboration of my own proposal, but I leave this as an open issue.

conception of *zhilü* 知慮 or wise and well-informed deliberation. Xunzi would also concur with Aristotle that persons who possess practical wisdom are those who have “the capacity to do well about what is good and advantageous for oneself” (Aristotle 1962: 1140a), for a well-informed and wise choice must be the outcome of careful and well-considered weighing of consequences in the light of benefits and harms to the agent.

Also, for developing an adequate Confucian ethics of virtue, there is the crucial task of elaborating its theoretical or practical significance, and presently, of dealing with difficult problems attendant to our discussion of *yi* as a virtue of flexibility, e.g., such problems as the role or status of ethical rules and principles, and the possible contribution of Confucian ethics as an ethics of character or *junzi* to contemporary virtue ethics, as well as deontology and consequentialism. I have dealt with some of the problems in various essays in *Moral Vision and Tradition*, especially in a reconstructed formulation of a Confucian moral philosophy, comprising the idea of the Confucian tradition, basic conceptual framework, and principles for dealing with intercultural ethical conflict as preconditions of adjudication. In the next two sections, I shall expand somewhat the ways in which the *junzi* deal with human conflict, and return to the problems of *yi* as a virtue of flexibility.

4 Non-contentious Ways for Dealing with Human Conflict

4.1 Human Conflict

Because of the concern for *ren*, or well-being of humanity, Confucius was well aware that human beings, as we know them here and now, are prompt to conflict or altercation concerning what they view as legitimate claims, especially regarding inheritance or division of properties within the family. Xunzi would later draw our attention to the problematic character of the original nature of our basic motivational structure as consisting of feelings and desires. Confucius’ attitude toward human conflict seems implicit in his remark: “The *junzi* is dignified (*jin* 矜), but not contentious (*buzheng* 不爭); he associates with other people, but does not join parties (*budang* 不黨)” (*Analects* 15.22). “The *junzi* does not engage in contention, except perhaps in archery. But when he enters the contest, he courteously makes a vow before he advances to take his place among the contestants; he does the same when he steps down after participating in the event; when he loses, he drinks his cup of forfeit. Thus in this single case of contention, he still shows himself as a *junzi*” (*Analects* 3.8, Ku 1984: 10). As we shall see shortly, non-contentiousness is an indispensable precondition for employing the two methods for dealing with conflict of interests, for it contributes to the maintenance of impartiality and fairness (*gong* 公), essential to the exercise of *yi* 義 (Sect. 2.15), and later for Xunzi, a desirable quality of participants in ethical argumentation.

4.2 The art of he 和

The *Lunyu* intimates two ways of dealing with human conflict: *he* 和 and *zhong* 中 or *zhongyong* 中庸. Confucius said, “The *junzi* is concerned with *he* 和, but not *tong* 同” (13.23). *He* means “harmony.” Elsewhere, Youzi 有子 remarked that the most valuable function of *li* 禮 is to promote *he* (harmony) (*Analects* 1.12). This emphasis on the harmonizing function of *li* is instructive in that the prescriptions of *li* are primarily designed as schemes of mutual accommodation for securing orderly and harmonious conduct. We can read *he* 和 in our passage as *tiaohe* 調和, “to mediate or to reconcile.” Confucius’ saying may thus be rendered as “The *junzi* is conciliatory, but does not identify with others; the inferior man identifies with others, but is not conciliatory” (*Analects* 13.23).⁵⁰ In the sense of *tiaohe*, the *junzi* is concerned with reconciling and harmonizing differences in cases of conflicting interests or values among people. This suggests that the *junzi* would deal with human conflict by the method of mediation or arbitration rather than the method of adjudication or litigation.

Preference for arbitration is reflected in Confucius’ attitude toward litigation: “In hearing litigation, I am no different from any other men. But if you insist on a difference, it is, perhaps, that I try to get the parties not to resort to litigation in the first place” (*Analects* 12:13). In the *Xunzi*, we have presumably an account of Confucius’ handling of a case while serving as a justice minister (*sifa da chen* 司法大臣) in Lu 魯 state. The case is a litigation of a father against his son, presumably for lack of filial piety (*xiao* 孝). Confucius confined the son in prison and for three months did not decide the case. When the father requested permission to stop the proceeding, Confucius released the son from prison. When the head of Ji 季 family heard about the incident, he was piqued, saying, “The revered old man has deceived me. I was told that in ruling the country the ruler must advocate the way of filial piety. Now he should execute the unfilial son to set an example, instead he released him from prison.”

When [the disciple] Ranzi 冉子 related this to Confucius, he sighed deeply and exclaimed, “Alas! When superiors fail to execute subordinates on account of it – is that proper! Not having instructed the people and yet to decide criminal prosecutions against them is to kill innocent people... When all living things have their seasons, to make exactions without regard to the season constitutes oppression. Not to instruct the people, yet to require from them completion of allotted tasks constitutes cruelty. It is only when these three practices have been ended that punishments may be considered.” (Li 1979: 642; Knoblock 1990: 2: 28.3)

It is also alleged that Confucius was “good at persuading people not to litigate,” while serving in the same official capacity in the Lu state. “Mutual *rang* 讓 (yielding, making concessions and compromises) was practiced among the people” (Chen 2003). It is possible that Confucius appealed to their sense of shame (*chi* 恥) as an internal monitor. Recall Confucius’ saying: “If in government you depend upon laws and enforce the laws by meting out punishments, you may keep the people

⁵⁰This is Chan’s translation. Chan refers to 2.14 for comment: “The superior man (*junzi* 君子) is broadminded (*kuan* 寬) but not partisan; the inferior man is partisan but not broad-minded.” See Chan 1963: 41. For our earlier discussion of *kuan*, see Sect. 2.15 above.

from wrongdoing, but they will lose the sense of shame (*chi* 恥). If, on the other hand, in government you depend on virtues and maintain order by encouraging the rites (*li* 禮) the people will have a sense of shame for wrongdoing and, moreover, will emulate what is good” (*Analects* 2.3). Presumably the appeal to people’s *sense of shame* is well exemplified in the rule of Zhou Wen Wang 周文王.

He [Wen Wang] ruled so well that the peasants made compromises with one another regarding land boundaries, and the people respected and took care of the elderly. Nobles of feudal domains who had disputes with one another would go to Wen Wang for arbitration. In one case, when the disputing parties arrived at Zhou territory, they were so impressed by the harmony and mutual forbearance of its people that they felt ashamed of themselves, realizing that the Zhou people would consider a shame to quarrel over the kind of matter, which they were now quarrelling. They therefore decided immediately and entered into a compromise. (Chen 2003)

As I stated elsewhere, at issue in arbitration is an impartial resolution of disputes oriented toward the reconciliation of the contending parties in the light of the concern for harmonious human intercourse. The arbitrator, chosen by the parties in dispute, is concerned with repairing the rupture of human relationship (*lun* 倫) rather than with deciding the rights or wrongs of the parties. The task of an arbitrator is not only to interpret the meaning of a current practice, but also to shape the expectations of the contending parties along the line of mutual concern, to get them to appreciate one another as interacting members in a community. Albert Chen points out, “The Chinese terms for this [Confucian, official] practice is called *tingsong* 聽訟 (beseeching the parties to drop litigation) and *xisong* 息訟 (dissolving the litigation). The ultimate aim is the reconciliation of the disputants to each other and hence the restoration of the personal harmony and social solidarity that have been temporarily breached by the conflict” (Chen 2003). This practice is reminiscent of Xunzi’s *jianshu* (art of accommodation) (see Cua 1985: 11–12).

In sum, the difference between litigation and arbitration is a difference in orientation toward persons in conflict. The former directs to the problem or issue that beset the parties in dispute, and aims at resolution of conflict. Conflict of interest is seen to be a problem or issue to be resolved. The latter directs attention to the persons in conflict and aims at a reconciliation of the persons involved. The art of *he* 和 is thus an art of reconciliation, and not a method of conflict resolution between contending parties.

4.3 The Art of *Zhong* 中: Striking a Balance

Complementary to the art of *he* or reconciliation is the art of *zhong* 中 or *zhongyong* 中庸. The idea of *zhong* as the mean between extremes, reminiscent of Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean, is fairly indicated in this dialogue in the *Analects* (11.16):

Zigong 子貢 asked, “Who is superior, Shi 師 or Shang 商?” The Master said, “Shi overshoots the mark; Shang falls short.” “Does that mean that Shi is in fact better?” The Master said, “There is little to choose between overshooting the mark and falling short (*guo you buji* 過猶不及).”

More explicit on the mean is Confucius’ remark: “Supreme indeed is the Mean (*zhong* 中) as a virtue. It has been rare among the common people for quite a long

time” (*Analects* 6.29). The nominal use of *zhong* 中 means “the center,” thus it may be construed as the mean between excess and deficiency as implicit in our first passage (*Analects* 11.6). The verbal use of *zhong* suggests, “hitting the mark.” It is significant that the binomial *shizhong* 時中 couples *zhong* with *shi* 時, implying that hitting the mark is a matter of timing – a key concept in *Yijing* 易經 and a prominent theme in Song Confucianism (see Cheng 2003b). Notice that without self-cultivation, learning, and experience, hitting an appropriate target is likely to be a hit-and-miss affair. Whether one has hit the target in an occurrent situation at a particular time and place is, as Mencius points out, a matter of the exercise of *quan* 權. Thus, in the last analysis, *tiaohe* 調和 and *zhong* 中, as ways of dealing with human conflict, are guidelines, rather than decision procedures. Below we take up the concept *quan* as a defining characteristic of the virtue of flexibility of the *junzi*.

5 Exercise of *Quan* 權 in Accord with *Yi* 義

5.1 *Quan* and *Jing*

This key Confucian concept may be rendered as “weighing of circumstances,” “exigency,” or “moral discretion.” Understanding *quan* depends on its contrast with *jing* 經 (the normal or standard).⁵¹ This distinction reflects a similar Confucian concern with *chang* 常 (the constant) and *bian* 變 (the changing). Indeed, the latter is indispensable to elucidating the former. As ZHU Xi put it, “*Jing* pertains to the constant aspect of *dao*, and *quan* to the changing aspect of *dao*” (Zhu 1962: 6:1a).

Translation of *quan* by “expediency” would be misleading if it were to suggest the agent’s concern for self-serving purpose rather than a concern for what is appropriate or proper under the circumstances. As we have seen (Sect. 2.14), expediency, in the first sense, is contrary to the Confucian concern with *yi* 義 (rightness, righteousness). In the second sense, however, it is functionally equivalent to the other renderings, that is, weighing (the importance or unimportance) of circumstances and discretion. D. C. Lau’s “moral discretion” is perhaps the best rendering of *quan* in a perplexing passage in *Analects* 9:30.

Reflection on the nature of moral discretion may provide us with a systematic way of dealing with Zhu Xi’s preoccupation with the *jing-quan* distinction. In fact, as WEI Cheng-t’ung (WEI Zhengtong 韋正通) points out, ZHU Xi’s concern was in part motivated by his students’ repeated query on the notion of *quan* in *Analects* 9:30⁵²:

The Master said, “A man good enough as a partner in one’s studies need not be good enough as a partner in the pursuit of the Way [*dao*]; a man good enough as a partner in the pursuit of the Way need not be good enough as a partner in a common stand; a man good enough as a partner in a common stand need not be good enough as a partner in the exercise of moral discretion [*quan*]” (*Analects* 9.30).

⁵¹This section draws materials from my entry “*Quan* (Ch’üan): Weighing Circumstances” in Cua (2003), which is a highly abbreviated account based on Cua (1998a: 260–266).

⁵²Wei 1986, “Chu Hsi on the Standard and the Expedient,” in Chan (1986: 255).

The exercise of *quan* is quite properly an exercise of discretion in the sense of the power of the individual to act according to his or her judgment in dealing with uncertain, exigent situations, or “hard cases.” As contrasted with the “soft cases” or normal problems in human life, the hard cases are rule-indeterminate, thus the established standards of conduct (*jing*) offer no clear guidance. Even when such standards are deemed appropriate, there may be a problem of application, which calls for interpretive judgment and discretion. The problem cannot be resolved by some mechanical or deductive procedure.

5.2 Constraints for Discretion

Most moral and legal traditions thus allow for the exercise of discretion, though such an exercise is always subject to constraints. In the Confucian context, the constraints comprise the *li*, the operative ritual rules or formal prescriptions of proper conduct. Arguably, Confucius has a recurrent interest in discretion as an indispensable means for coping with the hard cases of moral life. For that reason, he stressed the virtue of flexibility of *junzi* (Sect. 2.14). Recall again his autobiographical remark: “I have no preconceptions about the permissible or impermissible”; and the student’s description of his character: “There were four things the Master refused to have anything to do with: he refused to entertain conjectures or insist on certainty, he refused to be inflexible or to be egotistical” (*Analects* 18:8, 9:4).

In two different ways, the focus on *yi* (rightness) especially brings out the moral aspect of *quan* or discretion. First, *yi* is contrasted with personal gain or self-serving interest. Secondly, *yi* focuses on doing the right thing as determined by a judgment of the relevance of moral rules to particular circumstances (Sect. 2.14). More importantly, the exercise of *yi* is required in dealing with changing, exigent situations of human life. Xunzi’s emphasis on the use of *yi* in varying one’s response to changing circumstances (*yi* *bianying* 以義變應) echoes the same concern.⁵³ We would expect an adequate account of the *jing-quan* distinction to give a pivotal role to *yi*, since the exercise of *quan* or discretion is fundamentally an exercise of *yi*.

The need for discretion in the interpretation of *li* or ethical rules can in part be accounted for by the open texture of natural languages. That is, there is always a possibility of vagueness in the empirical and practical application of words in relation to the natural and the human world (Waismann 1952). More fundamentally, the need for discretion arises out of two deficiencies of humanity: “our relative ignorance of facts” and “indeterminacy of aim” (Hart 1961, Chap. 7, Sect. 1). In formulating and/or modifying rules of conduct, we rely on our tradition and experience. We cannot always foresee the consequences of the enforcement of established rules nor anticipate without error our future situations, especially those that are exigent, demanding immediate attention and action. In these cases, discretion is necessary, given the human

⁵³Li (1979: 43, 306). The judgment involved may be challenged and thus subject to argumentation, see Cua (1985, Chap. 3).

predicament. Thus, Aristotle considers the subject matter of ethics as one that cannot be treated with exactitude, and that “the truth” can only be indicated “with a rough and general sketch.” In the case of legal justice, there is a need to supplement it by equity or reasonableness (*epieikeia*) as a corrective (Aristotle 1962: 1094b).

5.3 *Quan as a Holistic Idea*

As indicated by his preference for voluntary arbitration or mediation over adjudication in settling disputes within the community, and by his recurrent emphasis on the importance of being a *junzi* or paradigmatic individual (Sect. 3), Confucius would concur with Aristotle on the role of equity or reasonableness in human affairs. The exercise of *quan*, moral discretion, is also necessary in the light of Confucian *dao* as a holistic ideal. This ideal of the good human life as a whole is more of a theme than a norm (Sect. 2.3). However, this ideal is a topic of communal discourse, somewhat analogous to a theme in literary or musical composition. Discretion is essential especially in specifying practical objectives to be pursued in the hard cases of the moral life. It is this “indeterminacy of aims” in conjunction with human fallibility or “ignorance of facts” that renders such moral discretion (*quan*) unavoidable.

Hence, if the Confucian agent is to cope with exigent, changing circumstances in the course of pursuing the *dao*, he or she must be disposed to exercise *quan*. This is perhaps the force of Zhu Xi’s saying, “This substance of *dao* is vast and inexhaustible (*zhe daoti hao-hao wu qiongzong* 這道體浩浩無窮終)” (Zhu 1962: 8:1a). WANG Yang-ming more concisely put it: “*Dao* cannot be exhausted with finality (*dao wu chongqiong* 道無終窮)” (Chan 1963: 46), that is, the concrete significance of *dao* cannot be specified with any claim to finality. Any attempt to do so must be informed by a sense of timeliness (*shih* 時) to attain the Mean or equilibrium (*zhong* 中), aiming at doing the right thing (*yi* 義) in accord with the agent’s judgment of what a particular situation demands. Perhaps, this is the basis for Mencius’ remark that Confucius was “the sage whose actions were timely” (*Mencius*, 5B:1; 2A:2). The specification of the concrete significance of *dao* must be a reasoned or principled one. The exercise of *quan* or moral discretion is thus constrained by the exercise of practical reason.

As in the study of the classics, so in the proper exercise of *quan* or moral discretion, an open mind is required (Sects. 2.15–2.16). While the objective is to achieve timely equilibrium (*shizhong*), the Confucian tradition must not favor any one doctrine of interpretation, even if it happens to be a moderate position between extremes. As Mencius says:

Holding on to the middle [*zhong* 中] is closer to being right, but to do this without moral discretion [*zhizhong wu-quan* 執中無權] is no different from holding to one extreme. The reason for disliking those who hold to one extreme is that they cripple the Way [*dao* 道]. One thing is singled out to the neglect of a hundred other. (Lau 1970, 7A:26, emended)

Moreover, Xunzi would advise the Confucian agent to consider carefully all the salient features of the situation before pronouncing judgment on his current desires and aversions. In his words:

When one sees something desirable, he must carefully consider (*lü* 慮) whether or not it will lead to detestable consequences. When he sees something beneficial, he must carefully consider (*lü*) whether or not it will lead to harmful consequences. All these consequences must be weighed together (*jianquan* 兼權) in any mature plan before one determines which desire or aversion, choice or rejection, is to be preferred. (Ibid.)

In sum, *quan* (1) essentially pertains to assessment of the importance of moral considerations to a current matter of concern. Alternatively put, the exercise of *quan* consists in a judgment of the comparative importance of competing options answering to a current problematic situation. (2) The situation is such that it presents a hard case, that is to say, a case falling outside the normal scope of the operation of standards of conduct. (3) *Quan* is an exercise of moral discretion and as such must conform to the requirement of *yi* 義 (rightness). (4) The judgment must accord with *li* (principle, reason), that is, be a principled or reasoned judgment.

5.4 *Yi as a Virtue of Flexibility*

In the light of the foregoing discussion of *quan*, we can appreciate better *yi* as a virtue of flexibility of the *junzi*. A *junzi* may thus be said to be a *reasonable*, rather than a rational, person. Arguably, there is an important conception of reasonableness in Confucian ethics, especially as it is exemplified in Wang Yangming. Some of the characteristics of reasonable persons are already indicated in the dependent virtues of *yi*, such as *gongxin* 公心, impartiality or open-mindedness, extensive concern for others as *renxin* 仁心, and sense of appropriateness implicit in the virtue of *yi*. And, given its orientation toward ethical practice, as a reasonable person, a *junzi* would appreciate the actuating import of the cognitive content of learning and inquiry, in WANG Yangming's words, the unity of knowledge and action (*zhixing heyi* 知行合一).

Summing up, the notion of *junzi* is Confucius' ideal of a paradigmatic individual, which functions a guiding standard for practical conduct. In Confucius' view ordinary moral agents may not attain to sagehood (*sheng*). However, they can look to a *junzi* for guidance and may become *junzi* themselves. The notion of *junzi*, though an exemplar for practical conduct, is not an ideal of a perfect man, but an ideal of an ethically superior person who embodies the various virtues we have discussed. Plausibly, the notion of *junzi* in Confucius' thought serves as a mediating schema between his ideal of *dao* or *ren*. Historical characters such as Yao and Shun serve a similar function. In the classical Daoism of *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, fictional characters serve the same purpose in mediating the abstract ideal and the actual world.

More importantly, construed as an ideal of the paradigmatic individual, the *junzi* provides a standard of inspiration, rather than aspiration, that is, an embodiment of an ideal theme that functions more like a beacon of light than a norm of conduct (Sect. 2.1). For this reason, the ideal of *junzi* does not imply any

given set of principles or rules. His freedom of judgment lies in his exercise of discretion (*quan*) especially in exigent situations. However, *quan* must be exercised with caution, circumspection, informed by knowledge, experience, and reflection. The judgment so reached is defeasible and the moral agent, when challenged, must vindicate himself by engaging in ethical argumentation.⁵⁴ Arguably, Confucius' notion of *junzi* expresses the idea of paradigmatic individuals as exemplary embodiments of the spirit and vitality of the tradition. In addition to their role in moral education, they also serve as living exemplars of the transformative significance of the ideal of the tradition, thus invigorating the tradition.

Both Xunzi and Zhu Xi emphasize the role of inspired and insightful persons regarding classical learning. This emphasis somewhat echoes Confucius' notion of *junzi* or paradigmatic individuals, that is, persons who through their life and conduct embody *ren*, *li*, *yi* and other ethical excellences (Sect. 2). The *junzi* are the exemplars of the actuating significance of the Confucian tradition, serving as standards of inspiration for committed agents. These paradigmatic individuals are generally ascribed an authority by their contemporary adherents or posterity. The authority, however, is based on the acknowledgement of their superior knowledge and achievement, and especially their exercise of *yi* in interpretive judgments concerning the relevance of rules in exigent situations, or in Xunzi's words, on *dao* and *de* (virtue). They are the *chengren* 成人, the ethically accomplished individuals (see Introduction). However, while possessed of an authoritative ethical status, as standard bearers and interpreters of culture and tradition, the *junzi* are not arbiters of moral disputes, for their interpretations of the Confucian tradition represent individual efforts toward "the repossession or reconstitution of *dao*" (de Bary 1991a: 9), thus essentially contestable and subject to the reasoned assessment of their contemporaries and posterity.

6 Conclusion

For concluding this long study of the virtues of *junzi*, let me briefly remark on some problems that call for further exploration.⁵⁵ In our map for the virtues of *junzi*, in the distinction between basic, cardinal, and interdependent virtues and dependent,

⁵⁴ See my *Ethical Argumentation*.

⁵⁵ In my Keynote Address to the 11 Conference of the International Society for Chinese Philosophy held in Taiwan in 1999, I mentioned other problems: "What is the role of the developing tradition as the background of Confucian ethics? To what extent can the ideal of *dao* or *ren* be concretely specified in a conceptual framework comprising *ren*, *li*, and *yi*? How are these fundamental notions to be further shaped to accommodate the evolving normative problems in the ethical life today and tomorrow, problems that are quickly acquiring greater transcultural and global significance? In the context of inter-traditional and/or intercultural ethical conflict, what degree of success can one expect from the employment of my proposed ground rules or transcultural principles of adjudication, such principles as non-prescriptivity or cultural integrity, mutuality, procedural justice, rectification, and reconsideration? (see *Moral Vision and Tradition*, Essay 14.). Perhaps additional or other principles will do a better job in conflict resolution." See Cua (2000a).

supportive/constitutive virtues, it may be said that the unity of virtues is presupposed without argument. This is a difficult issue that deserves extensive discussion. In studying this issue in Xunzi's moral philosophy in two papers in the 1980s, I proposed what I called the completion thesis. Concisely stated, this thesis is that *ren*, *li*, and *yi* are interdependent concepts, for an adequate explication of one must involve the other concept. This thesis pertains to *ideal* unity of virtues, since *ren*, in the broad sense, is an ideal theme. Given the interdependence of these cardinals, the ideality of *ren* will also pervade through the ennobling function of *li* and the exercise of *yi* as exemplified in *renxin* 仁心 or humane mind. The actual conflict between dependent virtues such as *xiao* 孝 to parents and *zhong* 忠 to the state, historically for the people has been a difficult one. Confucius' preference for the former is indicated in a well-known, but highly perplexing and disturbing passage about a son's concealing his father's misconduct and a father concealing the misconduct of his son as constituting uprightness (*zhi* 直) – an attitude that markedly differs from that of Euthypro in Plato's dialogue of that name (*Analects* 13.18).

At issue is the case of stealing sheep. In the light of *yi* 義, a committed Confucian may differ from Confucius, as Xunzi would most likely council the agent to follow *yi*, rather than the father's wish from avoiding prosecution. Perhaps the agent at issue, were he to follow Confucius, could say that there are grounds for his decision to conceal his father's misconduct. First, it is a reasonable attempt to resolve a difficult and perplexing situation, a decision to do what is right as he sees it. He may even use the language of "ought," as suggested by FUNG Yulan, who construed *yi* as "oughtness" of the situation (Fung 1950: 42). However, the "oughtness" of the situation, though a characteristic of obligatory actions, has its central focus on the right act as appropriate to the particular situation that a moral agent encounters. Secondly, the decision rests on *ren* in the light of Confucius' saying: "The *ren* person is at home in practicing *ren* (*renzhe anren* 仁者安仁)" (*Analects* 4.2). More clearly, Mencius said, "The *ren* person is man's peaceful abode (*ren, ren zhi anzai ye* 仁, 仁之安宅也) and *yi* its proper path (*yi, renlu ye* 義, 人路也)." The question is, Can I live with the decision to inform on my father? Can I feel at home with the decision without self-reproach? Of course, when challenged, the agent must vindicate himself against imputation of wrongness. And thirdly, perhaps more fundamental, harmony (*he* 和) in the family is always a first consideration (Sect. 3.2). In short, to an agent in a hard and/or exigent circumstance, he may find no pre-existing guidelines. Wang Yangming comments on the case of Shun's 舜 decision to marry the emperor's two daughters without informing his parents:

As for Shun's marrying without first telling his parents, was there someone before him who did the same thing and served as an example for him, which he could find out by looking into certain records and asking certain people, after which he did as he did? Or did he search into his *liangzhi* 良知 [his sense of right and wrong] in an instant of thought and weigh all factors as to what was proper, after which he could not help doing what he did? (Chan 1963: 109–110)

For Shun, there are no previous cases of paradigmatic agents' decisions to guide his decision, nor is there any existing rule, say, a priority rule or principle that determines a right decision over conflicting claims of filiality and marital relations.

All he can do is to rely on his *liang-chih*, his sense of what is right and good, weigh a variety of factors (*quan* 權), and arrive at a judgment based on these factors. For the exercise of *quan* in hard cases of the moral life, there are no fixed rules; although the decision and judgment involved are subject to argumentation. The agent does his best to arrive at a reasonable decision, while fully aware that it may turn out to be a bad one.

In this connection, our thesis on the exercise of *quan* in accord with *yi* may appear problematic even for one sympathetic to Confucian rather than Kantian ethics. While appreciative of my stress on arbitration for dealing with human conflict, David Wong nevertheless thinks that I underemphasize adjudication “to be found in Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi.” He gives no citations in support of this claim. In an accompanying note to his text, he states:

It would seem that the very concepts of *yi* (righteousness) and *ren* (when it connotes the necessity of expressing respect and concern for others) would have to involve a judgment that certain kinds of actions are simply *wrong* – that an action done purely from profit and purely to humiliate another person is simply wrong, for instance. (Wong 2004: 48n33)

I very much appreciate Wong’s comment as it affords an occasion for further clarification. Consider the first example of an action done purely from profit. Such an action, by itself, is not wrong or objectionable, because the question of *yi* arises only when it appears, in the language of *Lunyu* 7.16, to be a case of *buyu* 不義. Recall again Confucius’ saying, “When you see something that is conducive to attaining personal gain, you must think of right conduct (*jian de siyi* 見得思義)” (*Analects* 14.12; 16.10). (See Sect. 2.14.) The question that could be raised is when there is a suspicion that the action made use of unrightful means (*buyi*) to obtain profit.

As regards the second case of an action done “purely to humiliate another person,” I quite agree with Wong that the action is wrong, except that I would prefer a different way of stating the point. The action quite clearly belongs to the ambit of the practice of *ren*, which calls for refrain from harm doing. Given the interdependence of *ren* and *yi*, certainly, a *junzi* would refrain from such an action, but for quite different reasons. Consider an act “done purely to humiliate another;” a *junzi* may agree or even say that it is “simply wrong.” Recall that *shu* 恕 is a dependent, constitutive virtue of *ren* (Sect. 2.3). Refrain from harm doing is constitutive of the conduct of a *ren* person who has an affectionate concern for his fellows (Sects. 2.16 and 2.17). However, “wrong,” in this example, functions more like a reminder of an act not to be done, not a discriminator, for it provides no information about the nature of the act. It must be admitted, however, that the use of “simply wrong” serves only as an emphasis of the kind of action that a *junzi* would not perform. To use the language of Mencius: the person who humiliates another for its own sake must be *buren* 不仁 (*Mencius* 4A1), a completely heartless or uncaring person. For that reason the action is ethically unacceptable.

In the light of the foregoing discussion, we can now see better that converting the ideality of the unity of virtues into the actuality of the practice of the virtues is not a theoretical task. In spirit, our thesis on the interdependence of the cardinals is akin

to that of J. L. Ackrill and Elizabeth Telfer in their defense of the Aristotelian unity of virtues as an *ideal unity of virtues*, rather than empirical thesis. (Telfer 1989) It is a task for Confucian normative ethicists to inquire into the respects in which our thesis needs to be recast in the light of actual experiences of the conflict of virtues. When such a task is successfully carried out, we may have to revise our thesis into a “limited thesis of the unity of virtues.” (Badhwar 1996)

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Chapter 14

Early Confucian Political Philosophy and Its Contemporary Relevance

Tongdong Bai

1 Early Confucianism as a “Modern” Political Philosophy

In this chapter, I will discuss the political aspect of early Confucian philosophy. The texts I will focus upon are the so-called “Four Books,” i.e., the *Analects*, the *Mencius*, the *Great Learning*, and the *Doctrine of the Mean*, which can be considered forming a coherent whole. In the first section, I will argue that the political aspect should be taken as the key concern of early Confucians, and from the problems they were facing, that it is more justified to call them “modern” than classical thinkers in the Western sense¹. In the second section I will show how they answer some of the key questions of their times, especially the search for a new form of social glue, and how their answers can still be relevant to contemporary political issues. In the third section, I will show how they tackle other key issues of their time, especially the selection of the ruling class. In the fourth section, I will show how the regime proposed in the third section combined with ideas discussed in the second section can be (to a large extent) reconciled with, critical of, and constructive to contemporary liberal democratic regimes.

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¹As I will argue in this section, to use “modern” to describe a group of philosophers is with regard to the nature of problems they dealing with, and not with regard to the time they live.

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To understand early Confucianism, in my view, we should first understand the world early Confucians lived in and thus the problems they were faced with. I will give a brief overview without sketching out interesting and important details.²

Early Confucians lived during what was called the “Spring and Autumn” and “Warring States” periods (since these two periods will be mentioned together often in this chapter, I will use “SAWS” for brevity, and note the fact that they lasted roughly from 770 to 222 B.C.E), which was about the same time as early classical Western thinkers (the Greek thinkers) lived. This might be one of the reasons why the former are also called “classical.” The philosopher Karl Jaspers placed both as well as the early Indian thinkers together in the “Axial Age” (Jaspers 1953). These labels are fine if we understand them, especially the term “classical” as “foundational.” That is, texts of both ancient Greek thinkers and early Confucian thinkers laid the foundations for later developments. But there is a different meaning of “classical,” and it is used in contrast with “modern.” In addition to the meaning of periodization, these two terms also suggest the nature of the political problems classical or modern thinkers are dealing with. In this sense, we will have to investigate the central issues early Confucians were facing with before we label them as “classical” or “modern.” For example, the dominant regime in ancient Greece was that of the city-state (*polis*), and political matters were centered upon the political life in this regime, but the dominant political regime in China before early Confucians was a form of feudalism, and this regime was collapsing during their times. The urgent issue for early Confucians was how to restore order in their world. Thus, to call them classical thinkers (*vis-à-vis* modern thinkers) can be misleading in the area of politics.

If we label Confucian thinkers during the SAWS with regard to the nature of their central political problems, I think it is less misleading to call them modern thinkers than classical thinkers. (Thus throughout the rest of this chapter, I will refer to these Confucians as “pre-Qin Confucians” or “early Confucians.”) The political changes China experienced during the SAWS are comparable to those in early Western modernization. Both were transitions from some form of feudalism to “modern” states. During the Western Zhou period (the middle of the eleventh century B.C. to 771 B.C.), which was before the SAWS, the political structure was like a pyramid. The Zhou King was at the very top, and he directly ruled over princes of various ranks, in addition to his own fiefdom. The princes then ruled over their ministers, their ministers over lesser lords, and so on down the level of common people. Although the Zhou state as a whole was relatively large, on each level, one ruler ruled over a limited number of people. The noble ranks were hereditary, and *li* 禮, which includes rites, rituals, and codes of conduct were what bonded the noblemen on each level together. The political structure in Europe during the Middle Ages bore many similarities to the Zhou regime. Of course, there was not someone or an office that held the long-standing status of the Zhou King. The Pope and his office were of as long-standing as the Zhou King, but the former may not have enjoyed the same kind of over-lordship as the latter. The Europeans had heritage from the ancient Greeks and Romans, which the Chinese didn’t.

²For references in English, see Bai 2011, 2012a, b.

During the SAWS in China and toward the end of the Middle Ages in Europe, the feudalistic structure was collapsing. On each level, the ruler was losing his or her control over the lesser noblemen. The Zhou King became but a local lord and eventually was eliminated. What emerged were a few strong states in which one ruler had to rule a large and populous state. With the overlord gone, these states were vying for domination. Hereditary nobility disappeared, and so did the old ruling class and ruling structure. A de facto equality emerged, and political and military offices became more and more plebianized. *Li* that served as the social glue in feudalistic times couldn't hold a large state of strangers together anymore, and a new social bond was desperately needed. Similar changes also happened in Europe during its transition from feudalism to modernity. There were two pressing "domestic" issues for these states in transition: what could serve as the new social glue and how could they reconstruct a ruling class from a more egalitarian and mobile (and "liberal" in the sense that one could now choose one's career, in contrast to the fixed role one was born into in feudalistic times) society. Pressing "international" questions included how to deal with the newly emerging international relations, and whether it was possible to achieve peace among states.³

These political questions, in my view, were the foci for pre-Qin Confucians (and other pre-Qin Chinese thinkers). Other dimensions, such as moral psychology and moral metaphysics, were secondary or in service to the political dimension. If my thesis – i.e. that pre-Qin Confucianism centered upon the aforementioned pressing questions which were also shared by European thinkers during the European transition to modernity – holds, then the alleged influence Chinese thoughts in general and Confucianism in particular had on European thinkers in their modernization efforts was neither accidental nor superficial.⁴

However, the political aspect has been ignored, even vilified, in recent history. For Confucianism has been linked by many with the alleged authoritarianism in traditional China. In the May 4th Movement in 1919, the attack on authoritarianism and the advocacy of democracy was partially expressed through the slogan of "down to the Confucian store" (*dadao kongjiadian* 打倒孔家店). Even the cultural conservatives, such as the New Confucians, fully embraced Western democracy, limiting the contemporary significance of Confucianism to the ethical and cultural spheres.

In the next two sections, I will focus on the political dimension of pre-Qin Confucianism. I will show how the apparently ethical and metaphysical teachings of early Confucianism can be interpreted as being centered upon the aforementioned political issues, thus showing that pre-Qin Confucianism is a political philosophy first and foremost. Since, according to my interpretation, early Confucianism was already addressing issues of modernity, we should consider it offering a political paradigm comparable to and competing with other modern political paradigms,

³ It is bold to claim that China's transitions during the SAWS were a form of modernity, comparable to the European transitions to its modernity. But there are people who have made this claim independent of my work, and have conducted their own comparative studies. See, for example, Fukuyama 2011; Hui 2005.

⁴ For the Chinese influence on European modernizations, see Hobson 2004.

liberal democracy included. If there are differences between the Confucian paradigm and Western modern paradigms, they should be considered competing ones and should be judged as such. One shouldn't dismiss the Confucian one as a political proposal for a bygone era. As long as we still live in modernity, and as long as we refuse to accept the belief that history comes to the end with the triumph of liberal democracy, as the political theorist Francis Fukuyama did (1992), we should evaluate the merits and problems of the Confucian political proposal against other modern political proposals so that we can envision a more ideal and yet humanly possible political regime. Although the elaboration of the political dimension of early Confucianism should already show its contemporary relevance, in the last section of this chapter, I will focus on how, following early Confucian ideas, we can develop a regime that is compatible to contemporary liberal democracy and human rights in many aspects, and is different from and superior to the latter in some other aspects.

2 Humanity and Compassion as the New Social Glue

2.1 *The Ideas of Humanity and Compassion*

As argued in the previous section, the world pre-Qin Confucians faced was a chaotic one due to the collapse of the old regime. To restore order, apparently, one can either restore the old regime or construct a new one. It can be argued that pre-Qin Confucians, especially in the case of Confucius (but far less so in the case of Mencius), wished to restore the old regime. Confucius claimed that “I transmit but do not innovate; and I like the antiquity with a trustful attitude” (*Analects* 7.1), and that “the Zhou [*li*]⁵ was based upon those of the two previous dynasties, and was resplendent in culture. I am for the Zhou [*li*]” (*Analects* 3.14). But the great historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 keenly observed in the *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Grand Historian*) that what Confucius did was to “carve the historical records *Spring and Autumn Annals* [into his own version]” (Vol. 48 of the *Shiji*; Sima 1981: 228).

Not to deny that Confucius and even some early Confucians can be interpreted as purely conservative, and that there is textual and historical evidence for this belief, I want to maintain that they can also be interpreted as reformers and even revolutionaries with a conservative façade, and there is also strong evidence to support this argument. Indeed, the latter reading is perhaps philosophically more interesting and more relevant not only to us, but even to Chinese political thinkers and practitioners since the SAWS, because to go back to the old regime was already a lost cause during the SAWS, and much more so in later times in Chinese history.

⁵ Confucius didn't specify which aspect of Zhou he talked about here, and it is only one possibility that he referred to the Zhou *li*.

In this chapter, then, I will adopt the reading of early Confucianism as trying to address the new issues of their times by reinterpreting the old. In fact, although apparently, Confucius wished to restore Zhou *li*, first, he acknowledged the need to adjust it to the changing social and political reality (*Analects* 9.3), and second, he offered a new basis for following it. This new basis is *ren* 仁. “*Ren*” can be translated as benevolence or kindness, but I will use the translation as “humanity” in this chapter; for it is pronounced exactly like the Chinese word for “human,” although the Chinese characters for these two words are different. There may be a deliberate play of this identity of pronunciations, and thus “humanity” or “humane” can catch this play the best.

When discussing with his pupil Zai Wo 宰我 whether the old ritual of 3-year mourning – according to which one is required to stay away from an office, and away from luxuries and entertainments for 3 years after a parent dies – should be observed, a crucial reason Confucius offered is that one wouldn’t and shouldn’t feel at ease in having luxuries during the 3 years after the death of a parent (*Analects* 17.21). If a person enjoys luxuries in this situation, Confucius said that he is “inhumane,” and he ruefully asked if this person “was not loved by his parents for 3 years?!”⁶ At another place, Confucius explicitly said, “What can a man do with *li* if he is not humane?” (*Analects* 3.3), implying that *li* (and the conservation of it) is not fundamental, but humanity is, which is the ultimate foundation of *li*.

Mencius developed the concept of humanity and introduced the idea of compassion. In a very famous example in the *Mencius*, he said:

The reason for me to say that all human beings have the heart that cannot bear [to see the sufferings of] others is this. If men suddenly see a child about to fall into a well, they all have a feeling of alarm and distress, not to gain friendship with the child’s parents, nor to seek the praise of their neighbors and friends, nor because they dislike the cry of the child. From this we see that a man without the feeling of compassion is not a man... (*Mencius* 2A6)

A few things should be noted here. First, the term for “compassion,” *ce yin zhi xin* 惻隱之心, was translated as “a feeling of alarm and distress” in its first occurrence in this passage, which is the original meaning of this term. Perhaps thanks to Mencius, this term is later used to refer to compassion. Second, Mencius did not say that all people will then act on their instinctive moral sentiment of compassion. Taking an action will depend upon the cultivation of moral sentiments. Third, he then claimed that those who don’t have the heart of compassion are not human, implying that his account is normative rather than descriptive. Of course, most people would probably react in the way Mencius described, and this shows that Mencius’ normative account is rather realistic.

Confucius’ concept of humanity and Mencius’ concept of compassion are often read as accounts of moral psychology or moral metaphysics. But they may be first and foremost accounts of political philosophy. They offered an answer to one of the fundamental problems of their times: the search for a new social bond. In feudalistic

⁶The English translations of Chinese classics in this chapter are all mine. For different translations of the *Analects* and the *Mencius*, see Lau 2000, 2003. For different translations of the *Great Learning* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*, see Chan 1969.

society, *li* can be sufficient to hold a small group of acquaintances together, but a fundamental change in China's early modernity is the emergence of a large society of strangers. Humanity and compassion are precisely moral sentiments for strangers. In *Mencius* 7A45, Mencius explicitly pointed out that humanity is feeling toward the people (i.e., strangers). In the aforementioned example, he focused on our immediate and instinctual reaction to the falling child, and in this immediacy, we are not able to recognize whose child it is. Thus, this instinctual reaction is also directed toward strangers.

Another textual evidence to support this political reading of compassion can be found if we look into the context where the discussion of a falling child began. That passage began with the following statements:

No human being is devoid of a heart that cannot bear [to see the suffering of others]. The Former Kings had it, which is why they had the governance that could not bear [to see the sufferings of its people]. Applying the heart that cannot bear and practicing the governance that cannot bear, the world can be run like being played on one's palm. (*Mencius* 2A6)

We can clearly see the focus on politics in this passage.

From the above passage, we can also see that although compassion among people is important, Mencius' focus is the compassion a ruler has for his people. One can argue that traditional China since the collapse of the feudalistic Zhou dynasty had still remained a society of acquaintances. Due to the agrarian nature of its economy, this may well be the case, although social mobility was still far greater than it was during the feudalistic era. But now a ruler or an official had to face strangers, unlike in the feudal structure, where a higher nobleman ruled over a limited number of lesser nobles, whom the higher nobleman knew personally. This personal connection between a ruler or a minister and his subjects was gone in China's early modernity, and the search for a new connection was, as I speculated, what early Confucians tried to address.

According to this understanding, we can see a difference between China's early modernity and the European one; for the latter came with the industrial revolution, while China stayed an agrarian society for a very long time after its early modernity. In traditional China, officials who moved out of their hometown and lived in big cities still had their economic roots in rural areas. But in industrial society, these roots could be thoroughly cut off. In general, industrial society leads to far stronger social mobility and thus creates a society of strangers to a far higher degree. In this sense, China's early modernity is modernity 1.0, while the European one is modernity 2.0. Nonetheless, these two versions of modernity share some fundamental problems.

This speculation can further be supported if we look into Western political philosophy and history. As the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche pointed out, compassion was not valued as a virtue by ancient Greeks and Romans. It became a virtue with the introduction of Christianity to Europe, and was prevalent as a virtue during Nietzsche's times (c.f., Nietzsche 1994, 2002). His diagnosis of this "symptom" was that this change of values was a result of slave revolt, perpetrated by the people of "black art," the Jews. But this account couldn't explain why compassion

could play such a central role in early Confucianism, because the Confucians didn't suffer the kind of hopeless oppression that the Jews in Nietzsche's account did, and thus they had no secret plan to change their status by re-inventing the value system. The real reason for compassion becoming a value and even an important value may have been the rise of a society of strangers. The ancient Greek *polis* and the early Roman Republic were small city-states, and virtues such as justice (which is a contractual form of codes of conduct) and sentiments such as friendship could serve as the effective social bond. In the Roman Empire, societies of strangers emerged, and so did compassion as a virtue. But the progress of the latter emergence was held up when Europe became feudalistic. When feudalism collapsed and modern states (that are large and populous, lacking the pyramid-like structure of feudalism) emerged, compassion became a dominant virtue, which upset Nietzsche, a former classicist and probably a lover of ancient Rome, who correctly saw the change of values, and mourned the lost world of the ancients, but might have failed to understand the nature of modernity and offered a wrong diagnosis of it. Thus, our understanding of the role of compassion is applicable to the history of political thought in Europe as well, which in turn supports and corroborates our understanding.

2.2 *The Cultivation of Humanity and Compassion*

Now that humanity and compassion are introduced as the new social bond and as the ultimate foundation of *li*, the next issue is how to cultivate them. The general principle is "to take as analogy what is near at hand" (*Analects* 6.30). What is commonly near at hand is one's own self and family. Self and family are often considered, especially in modern Western philosophy, as being in conflict with the other and the public. Early Confucians understood this conflict. But they also saw the complementary aspect between the two sides. To understand the self and to understand the other are inseparable from each other. In *Mencius* 1B5, a king confesses that he has weaknesses which are a fondness for money and for beautiful women, but Mencius said that these were not necessarily a problem for the king. Indeed, a ruler can be good precisely because he understands, from his own fondness, that his people must share it too, and then act upon this understanding to secure livelihood and family for his people. An interesting contrast is Immanuel Kant's account of moral worth. In one example, Kant said that if a man is overshadowed by his own grief which extinguishes all his sympathy for the fate of others, or if by nature he is cold and indifferent to the sufferings of others, the philanthropic action that he commits then has "its genuine moral worth" (Kant 1998: 12–13; 4:398–4:399)!

But to understand other's emotions and needs by understanding one's own doesn't mean that one would do something to help others. An extreme counter-example is that a sadist gets his or her pleasure precisely from understanding that his or her object of torture has certain emotional needs, and he or she deprives them of the object. What is needed for this understanding to become compassion is the

motivation to help others. Confucians saw that a unique place to cultivate compassion is within the family. For, on the one hand, family is what most people feel akin to and have a loving feeling for, almost as natural as one's self-love. On the other hand, the care for family members is also the first step to stepping out of one's mere self and self-love, and to go toward others. This is perhaps why filial love played such a central role in early Confucianism. In this sense, filial love is not merely an ethical value for personal conduct, but a crucial political value. This again supports the political philosophical reading of early Confucianism.

From a passage in the *Analects*, we can clearly see the political dimension of filial love and early Confucians' concern with it:

It is a rare thing for someone who is filial to his parents and respectful to his older brothers to defy superiors. And it is unheard of for those who do not defy superiors to be keen on initiating rebellion. Exemplary persons [*junzi*] concentrate their efforts on the root, for the root having taken hold, the Way will grow therefrom. Being filial to one's parents and being respectful to one's older brothers is the root of humanity! (*Analects* 1.2)

Thus, for Confucians, communal and political relations are analogous to, and should be modeled after, familial relations. To understand family is important for us to understand politics. If we can cultivate filial love and drive the compassion that grows out of this love outward, we will eventually become caring toward everyone and even everything in the world. As Mencius put it,

Treat the elderly of my own family [as they should be], and extend this treatment to the elderly of other families; treat the young of my own family [as they should be], and extend this to the young of other families... Thus extending one's humanity outward can protect everyone within the Four Seas [the alleged boundaries of the world], and not extending one's humanity cannot even protect one's wife and sons. (*Mencius* 1A7)

Thus, starting from the self and from family, one should cultivate one's care outward, and develop compassion for strangers. But it should be noted that for Confucians, it is also natural and justified for everyone, including a person of universal love (if there is ever such a person), to care about those closest to them more, in that they would try to save their drowning mother before saving anyone (or anything) else. This is the Confucian idea of graded love (*ai you chadeng* 愛有差等). Thus, the Confucian love is universal and hierarchical or unequal at the same time.

2.3 Confucian Ideas of State Identity, Just War, and Peace Through Unity Under Humanity

Pre-Qin Confucians introduced humanity and compassion as the new social glue for a large state, especially between rulers and subjects. Compassion, fully cultivated, can be extended to everyone and everything in the world, but it will still be hierarchical. On the issue of international relations, it means that a person will care about his or her compatriots more than foreigners, but at the same time, this person will

consider foreigners human and care for them accordingly. This means that one can enjoy being identified with one's home state, but this identification doesn't mean a total disregard for others.

This understanding offers a Confucian model of international relations that addressed the need of theories of these relations during the SAWS. The Zhou King stopped being a supranational authority, and states became independent entities of interests. This process was similar to what happened in the post-Westphalian Europe. However, the Confucian treatment of statehood and international relations is different from a certain form of nation-state model that emerged in Europe. This form of nation-state was based upon nationality which was in turn based upon (imagined?) blood relations or other exclusive relations that are closed to aliens. Associated with this kind of nation-state is often a sharp boundary between "us" and "aliens," which is a nation-state form of the friend-enemy distinction that existed in Greek *polis*. Its motto is "my country, right or wrong," and its principle for international relations is *Realpolitik*. The Confucian model offers an alternative that is morally superior to this kind of nation-state model. It is also more realistic than the kind of cosmopolitanism that is based upon universal and equal love.

In addition to compassion, early Confucians offered another bond for the state, and it is culture. It comes from the classics of the past and the spirit of humanity lying beneath them. Culture as it is understood by Confucians is open to "aliens." A passage from the *Mencius* beautifully illustrates this openness (*Mencius* 3A4). In the passage, Mencius argued that, because he managed to grasp the Chinese culture (in the form of the teachings of Confucius) better than the scholars from the Chinese states, Chen Liang, a native of the state of Chu (a state that the Chinese looked down upon as almost barbaric and not as a *bona fide* "Xia" (Chinese) state), should be considered a Chinese. In contrast, because some others, though from a Xia state, failed to follow the Chinese culture, they degraded themselves to the level of non-Chinese or barbarians.

This culture-based model of national identity also leads to a possibility of peaceful assimilation among different ethnicities, in contrast to the nation-state model that is based upon blood or other exclusive relations. An alien can become a member of a state the identity of which is based upon a "thin" kind of culture by adopting this culture, but an alien cannot become a member of a nation-state the identity of which is based upon blood or other exclusive relations. The only conversion for the latter is elimination. One can object to this claim by saying that the crusaders also wished to convert the aliens, but the fundamental conflicts between religions (one can't be both a Muslim and a Christian; indeed, one can't even be a Catholic Protestant!) mean that this conversion is very close to elimination (either by destroying the body of the alien or by destroying his or her spiritual belonging). Here we should note that culture, as understood by Confucians, is or can be rather "thin." It is so thin that one can be a Confucian Muslim, a Confucian Christian (for a contemporary example, think about the so-called Boston Confucians), or a Confucian Jew. A good historical example is that although Jews have been persecuted all over the world in the past, the only known case of peaceful assimilation happened in China, where the Jews who came to China for commerce willingly

adopted the Chinese way of life while maintaining their faith for quite a long time.⁷ The openness brought about by culture as national identity helped explain how, in spite of being defeated or even conquered by “barbaric” nomads on a few occasions in history, Chinese people and Chinese culture have lasted, making China a country that has the longest continuation of state identity. For the conquerors in the past either got assimilated into the Chinese culture and thus became Chinese themselves, or they were eventually driven out due to their failure to assimilate themselves into the Chinese culture.

We should see clearly by now the merits of the bond for a state that Confucians offered. It doesn’t demand people to do the impossible, such as caring for everyone equally, as some Christian theories, Kantian philosophy, or some forms of cosmopolitanism demand. It preserves the boundaries of a state and thus preserves competition among states. This competition, like the function of physical exercise for one’s health, is good for different states to develop, instead of falling into a non-competitive and stagnant uniformity, the kind of world of “last men” that Nietzsche worried about (1954). But this competition is culture-based, and is aimed at peaceful conversion and not bloody extinction, as some forms of nation-state are. Patriotism in the Confucian model doesn’t mean a total disregard for aliens’ interests. In short, the Confucian form of national identity is like a life full of friendly but serious sport, in comparison to a sedentary lifestyle and life-or-death strife.

But there are some problems with the Confucian model. On the one hand, the kind of culture that serves as the identity of the state may be still too thick. Part of the national identity of the U.S. is also culture, but it is more inclusive than the Confucian one. For example, a difficult issue for China now, both practically and theoretically, is how to absorb fully Tibetans and Uyghurs into a Chinese state, which wouldn’t pose a theoretical problem for the U.S.⁸ On the other hand, one can complain that the Confucian cultural identity is too thin. The kind of culture as Confucians understand it can be shared by two states, and it won’t be sufficient to draw state boundaries.

The thinness of Confucian cultural identity of a state, together with the concepts of humanity and compassion, offer an answer to another key question in China’s transition to its early modernity during the SAWS, that is, how to achieve “international” peace. One period of the SAWS is literally called “Warring States,” and every state in this period seemed to believe that the only way to eliminate wars was for one state to unify China. The way to unity was through wars and conquests. For Confucians, however, constant strife is bad because it is against humanity, and unity is desirable only if it stops the strife in a humane manner. Unity is a good secondary to humanity, and unity without humanity is not desirable. Thus, it is still

⁷ See, for example, Shapiro 1984, Pollak 1998, and Xu 2003. One on-line account can be found here: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaifeng_Jews (accessed on February 16, 2012).

⁸ Of course, the (shameful) elimination of most of Native Americans greatly helped solve the unity problem for the U.S.

desirable if we can live peacefully and prosperously together without a unified state. Similarly, to maintain two distinctive states is not Confucians' concern, either. In reality, however, the fact that all the warring states thought that they had shared culture did help them go down the road of unity, which would achieve international peace. But Confucians thought that this unification had to be achieved willingly.

A few textual supports are in order here. For example, in a conversation (*Analects* 16.1), two of Confucius' pupils wished to help their lord (Lord Ji 季氏) attack a nearby fief because its very existence threatened a fief of his lord. Confucius pointed out that the stability of the state or a fief depends on treating its own people well. When this is done, if people from a different state or fief are still un-submissive and even posing a potential threat, we should improve our civilization and moral character to attract them. Finally, Confucius pointedly observed that the threat to the fief of Lord Ji's did not really come from outside, but from within, i.e., from Lord Ji's lack of humanity and from his practice of *Realpolitik*. In fact, Lord Ji himself was among those who usurped all the power of the throne of the state of Lu through his strength. An interesting twist to this story is that, in the next chapter of the *Analects*, the magistrate of Lord Ji's fief that was said to be threatened by another lord's fief used the strong fortification to rebel against Lord Ji (*Analects* 17.5). The fact that this happened is really a small wonder if we consider the moral example Lord Ji set for his subjects, which is what Confucius alluded to when he claimed that the threat to Lord Ji really came from within. To sum up the principle of domestic and international peace and prosperity, Confucius said that good governance is for the people who are near (that is, under the government in question) to be happy and for those who are afar (that is, from other states or under other magistrates) to wish to come (*Analects* 13.16).

In the *Mencius*, there are many passages that discuss wars and unity. For Mencius, the strength of a state lies in the practice of humanity. For example, in a conversation with a king of one of the seven strong states (the state of Wei 魏) during the Warring States period, he stated,

A territory which is only a hundred *li* 里 by a hundred *li* [*li* is a length unit, which might have been around half a kilometer during Mencius' times] is sufficient for its ruler to become a true King [ruling over all states]. If Your Majesty will practice humane governance to the people—sparing in the use of punishments and fines, and making the taxes and levies light, so that the fields shall be ploughed deep and the weeds shall be removed in time, and that the strong-bodied, during their days of leisure, shall cultivate their filial piety, fraternal respectfulness, loyalty, and trustworthiness, serving thereby, at home, their fathers and elder brothers, and, outside home, their elders and superiors—then you can make these people who are armed with nothing but staves inflict defeat on the armies of Qin 秦 and Chu 楚 [two powerful states during the Warring States period] who are armed with the strong armor and sharp weapon. [For] the rulers of those States rob their people of their time [during the farming season], so that they cannot plough and weed their fields to support their parents. Their parents suffer from cold and hunger, and their brothers, wives, and children are separated and scattered. Those rulers push their people into pits and into water. If Your Majesty should go to punish them, who will be there to oppose you? Hence it is said, “The man of humanity has no match.” I beg of you not to have any doubts anymore. (*Mencius* 1A7)

A few clarifications need to be made here. First, the message here may appear to be overly idealistic, because Mencius seemed to be saying that a small but humane state can conquer the world. But we have to remember that he was talking to the king of a powerful state, and he might have been trying to be encouraging with the idealistic rhetoric. When he actually talked to the king of a small state who had a reputation of being a humane ruler, Mencius didn't repeat the claim; rather, he offered two options to the king: to run away and find a safe place, hoping that his state would become strong over generations and that a future king would lead his people back to the homeland, or to defend his state with his people at the risk of being eliminated (*Mencius* 1B13, 1B14, and 1B15). Second, he described the other states as being tyrannical, but he didn't seem to support this claim with any historical fact. I think that this description was not really meant to be an accurate picture of other states, but was meant to be a normative requirement. That is, Mencius implicitly warned the king that only if another state is an inhumane state can it be attacked.

Thus, when it is humane and strong, a state may need to engage in wars of liberation. Mencius offered clear criteria for these kinds of wars. That is, the people of the state to be liberated have to welcome the invader, and the welcome has to be clearly expressed and long-lasting. Talking about historical and legendary events, Mencius said that a justified war of liberation is one in which those who are attacked later in a military campaign would complain about this (being attacked later) (*Mencius* 3B5 and 7B4). The people thought that when being attacked by a humane state, their sufferings would finally come to an end (*Mencius* 1B11 and 3B5). When the attack happened, the people would welcome invaders by coming to the streets and offering them good food and drink (*Mencius* 1B10, 1B11, and 3B5). This welcoming also has to be long-lasting, and the invasion would turn out to be unjustified if the invaders failed to deliver good life to the people (*Mencius* 1B10).

From these criteria we can also see the caution early Confucians urged against wars of liberation. Even if people of another state are actually suffering, it may take time for them to realize it and to be ready for change. Otherwise, the consequence might be unnecessary loss of life and even push the suffering people to flock to the bad rulers. The reason that the suffering people have to be ready themselves is that, for example, the *Mencius* expresses a firm belief in every human's capacity to be enlightened, and the moral enlightenment has to be done by the person willingly. In a tale in the *Mencius*, a stupid and impatient farmer wishes to help the seedlings to grow by pulling them up, but, as we can imagine, he ends up killing them (*Mencius* 2A2). In short, Mencius saw both the potential of human beings and their limits.

In sum, early Confucians thought that they could solve the conflicts among states with their concepts of humanity and compassion, their understanding of state identity that is based upon culture, and their theories of "just wars." When inhumane states are eliminated, a desirable peace will be achieved. There could be a few humane states, although their boundaries are not taken so seriously by Confucians. It could also be the case that one humane state unifies all in the world. These two options make little difference to early Confucians.

2.4 *Private and Public in Early Confucianism*

In this section, we have seen how early Confucian ideas that are often taken primarily as ideas of moral psychology and moral metaphysics are first and foremost those of political philosophy. They were addressing some of the key issues in China's transition to early modernity. Since there are shared issues between China's early modernity and the modernity we are still facing today, many ideas and theories discussed so far have clear implications for the contemporary world. Most of these implications have already become obvious when we discussed those ideas themselves. In this subsection, I will elaborate on the contemporary relevance of one set of ideas discussed previously.

In our discussion of the cultivation of humanity and compassion, a key feature is the Confucian view that there is a continuous and complementary aspect between the private and the public, and it is utilized to overcome the conflict between the two. This offers a model for dealing with the private-public issue. In Plato's *Republic* and in the Chinese classic *Han Fei Zi*, much of the private is taken as conflicting with the public, and for the public good, the private is largely suppressed. This is often viewed as a characteristic of various forms of oppressive government. Liberal thinkers since John Stuart Mill (for example, in his *On Liberty*) object to this oppression, trying to protect the private from the public or governmental intrusion. But this thinking shares with the *Republic* and the *Han Fei Zi* 韓非子 the idea that there is a clear divide between the private and the public, and their relation is one of conflict. This is the basis for the contemporary belief in privacy and the separation between the public good and private virtues, or the virtues of moderns and the virtues of ancients. This separation may have been rooted in the memory of the unity between the church and the state and religious oppressions in the West. But as we already saw, Confucian cultural values could be thin enough to become the substratum of a society with diverse faiths. For example, the emphasis on family values is equated in the U.S. with conservatism and implies a public intrusion into private choices. But for Confucians, family is a crucial stepping stone for a private person to open himself or herself up to others, to the public. It is neither merely private nor merely public, and its dual role is precisely the reason that it is so crucial to the politically-minded Confucians. Very simply put, for example, it doesn't matter whether you are a Christian, a Muslim, a Jew, or an atheist, and as long as you acknowledge the importance of the stability of families to the stability of the state and the desirability of the latter, you will consider family arrangements important to the public. In short, the Confucian understanding of the relations between the private and the public poses a challenge to the dominant liberal ideology that pushes too many moral values into the private sphere.⁹

Interestingly, the above Confucian understanding can also support some liberal agenda, for example, gender equality in politics. One issue as regards women's participation in politics is that, barring any medical miracle, women still have to

⁹For a more detailed discussion, see Chap. 6 of Bai 2009b.

bear the burden of pregnancy, child-birth, and breast-feeding, if not more. This forces women to retreat within the family for a period of time even if they hold some public office. If we take the conflict model between the private and the public, this retreat will put women at a disadvantage even if they have, before the retreat, the same ability and experience as their male counterparts. However, for Confucians, family plays a dual role, and the private can be constructive to the public. After all, they support the ritual of 3-year mourning, according to which an official has to leave office if a parent of his dies. The hidden assumption of this support is that this 3-year absence wouldn't hurt the official's political capacity. Indeed, by retreating from public life and by recalling the loving memories of the deceased parent, this official may become an even better one when he returns to office. One can use a similar argument to support women in politics by saying that the time women spend in child-birth and child-raising may actually help them become better politicians than they otherwise would be.

3 Confucian Hybrid Regime

3.1 *Government for the People*

With the collapse of feudalism during the SAWS, the political structure had to be rebuilt.¹⁰ One issue concerns the legitimacy of the sovereign. In the feudalistic structure of Zhou, the King was called the son of Heaven (*tian zi* 天子), meaning the legitimacy of the king is from the divine (although the idea of Heaven during the Western Zhou (which was pre-SAWS) might have been already humanized). The king then appointed lesser lords, the lesser lords appointed even lesser lords, and so on and so forth. When the “son of Heaven” of Zhou was not respected and eventually eliminated, and when previously vessel states became de facto independent states, the question of the legitimacy of the sovereign emerged.

Early Confucians, especially Mencius, argued that the legitimacy of the sovereign lies in the service to its people, and this echoes early Confucians' central concept of humanity. In 3A4 of the *Mencius*, by describing what an ideal government in the (legendary) past did, Mencius clearly offered a normative account of government's duty: it is to improve natural, technological, and economic conditions for people to have their material needs met. But this by itself can make people beast-like at best. For them to be truly human, certain human relationships (*wu lun* 五倫) have to be established with the assistance of the government. Thus, the government should be responsible for satisfying both basic material and spiritual needs of its people.

¹⁰A far more detailed discussion of the topics in this and the next sections can be found in Chaps. 2, 3, and 4 of Bai 2009b. For some earlier and partial versions of these chapters, see Bai 2008, 2009a.

Therefore, similar to the contemporary democratic understanding of government, the Confucian ideal government is also for the people. But the latter is required to address people's basic spiritual or moral needs, which makes it different from the democratic government. It is a common belief of contemporary democratic peoples that the government will be oppressive if it is in charge of people's spiritual lives. But as we saw in the previous section, the Confucian understanding of morality can be a very thin one that can be endorsed by people with different faiths and spiritualities. Moreover, early Confucians like Mencius believed that all human beings have the equal potential to become moral (see, for example, 2A6, 4B19, 6A7, and 6B2), and to impose morality upon them is only counterproductive, as illustrated by the story of the stupid farmer, who thought he could help seedlings to grow by pulling them up (*Mencius* 2A2). Thus, the Confucian emphasis on the government's moral role doesn't necessarily mean oppression.

Although both contemporary democratic governments and the Confucian ideal government pay attention to satisfying people's material needs, early Confucians also recognize the importance of this satisfaction not only to people's material well-being but also to people's spiritual well-being. Mencius pointed out,

Only an exemplary person (*jun zi* 君子) can have a constant [or "stable"] heart in spite of a lack of constant means of support [or "stable possessions or properties"]. The people, on the other hand, will not have constant hearts if they are without constant means. Lacking constant hearts, they will go astray and fall into excesses, stopping at nothing. To punish them after they have fallen foul of the law is to set a trap for the people. (1A7; see also 3A3)

For Mencius, then, the common people need to have basic material needs met for them to be moral. Governmental failure to satisfy these needs would make the government responsible for crimes and moral failures of the common people. But at the same time, as mentioned, Mencius also believed in people's ability to become good in spite of a hostile environment, and those who fail morally are also responsible for their failures. By emphasizing both the significance of virtue and the significance of material well-being to one's virtues, early Confucians combined both the American liberals' and conservatives' arguments on governmental responsibility.

Therefore, the Confucian ideal government is a government for the people, and should be held accountable for satisfying people's basic material and moral needs. The general principle, as Mencius put it, is "Heaven sees with the eyes of its people; Heaven hears with the ears of its people" (*Mencius* 5A5).¹¹ If the ruler fails to satisfy people's needs and people are not happy, the ruler can be punished even with death. In one conversation with the king of a powerful state, Mencius asked, if a friend miserably fails to do what he promised and he shouldn't be considered a friend anymore, and if an official fails to do his duty and he should be dismissed, what

¹¹ This line was from the chapter "Taishi 泰誓" ("Great Declaration") of *Shangshu* 尚書 (*The Book of Documents*), and this chapter was allegedly a Zhou document. This was why I said earlier than the humanization of divine will might have happened in Zhou already. But whether this chapter was really a document from Zhou was controversial.

about a king in a similar situation? The king ducked the question, but the answer is plainly obvious (*Mencius* 1B6). In another conversation with the same king, Mencius argued that the reason for Confucians who are perceived by the king as loyalists to support the removal and even the killing of certain kings in the past is that these kings fail to fulfill their duties and are kings in name only. Confucians are against regicide only if the king in question is truly a king, and a king who brutalizes his people is a “mere fellow” or a tyrant, the killing of whom is completely justified (*Mencius* 1B8).

3.2 *But Not by the People*

Early Confucians’ view that the legitimacy of the sovereign lies in the satisfaction of the people makes them sound rather democratic. In fact, their “democratic” aspect doesn’t stop here. As mentioned in the first section, the collapse of feudalism led to the emergence of de facto equality, for hereditary nobility was gone. Early Confucians embraced this equality in both practice and theory.

Confucius was said to be the first private teacher in Chinese history, daringly bringing teachings that were reserved for the nobles at that time to all that were willing to learn (*Analects* 7.7 and 15.39). As mentioned, Mencius believed that every human being has the potential to become a sage (see, for example, *Mencius* 2A6, 4B19, 6A7, and 6B2). Xunzi, despite having a view of human nature that is apparently the polar opposite to Mencius’, seemed to believe the same (*Xunzi* Chap. 23; for a partial English translation, see Chan 1969: 133).

Paradoxically, however, early Confucians also seemed to believe in hierarchy. In many places in the *Analects*, Confucius warned not to teach common people higher things (*Analects* 6.21, 8.9, 15.8, 16.9, and 17.3). For example, he said, “the common people can be made to follow the way, but they cannot be made to understand it” (*Analects* 8.9), with the common people defined as those who “don’t study even after having been vexed by difficulties” (*Analects* 16.9). Mencius famously or notoriously maintained the distinction between the “great men” (*da ren* 大人) and the “small men” (*xiao ren* 小人), where the great men are those who use their minds and rule, and the small men are those who use their muscles and are ruled and support the former (*Mencius* 3A4).

How can we solve this apparent contradiction? As mentioned, early Confucians were reformers with a conservative façade because they tried to conserve the old by reinterpreting it. The hierarchical terminology in early Confucianism often has its root in feudalism. But from the passages quoted above, we can see that the Confucian hierarchy is not based upon birth, but upon one’s merits. Thus, although everyone has the same potential in the case of Mencius or should be educated for whatever reasons in the case of Confucius, both of them seemed to think that only a few can actually “make it.” We have to keep in mind that they think that the government is responsible for satisfying people’s basic material and moral needs. Thus, those who fail to make it have nobody but themselves and fortune to blame, in contrast to some

poor people in contemporary societies, whose failure to excel is partially caused by the failure of the government. For Confucians, then, we are equal in potentiality or at the beginning of our formation, and the government should do everything in its power to help people to move up the ladder. But the reality is that only a few can actually make it. We can't change it, and so we'd better take advantage of it for the public good. We acknowledge the superior political status of those who actually excel themselves in learning and virtues (compassion in particular), but in exchange, they have to justify their superior status by serving the masses. Borrowing the term of "difference principle" from John Rawls which dictates that economic inequality can be accepted if the least advantaged are benefited (Rawls 1971: 75–83), we can call the Confucian reasoning here the "political difference principle"; that is, political inequality (in terms of the power in political decisions) can be accepted if the least advantaged are benefited.

Therefore, although potentially we can all become great men, in actuality, only a few of us can have the level of political wisdom and virtue (compassion) to participate in the art of ruling. Leisure has to be provided to these competent and virtuous great men (*Mencius* 3A4), and all these conditions are necessary for making sound political decisions. Thus although, as argued in the previous sub-section, the legitimacy of the sovereign lies in satisfying people's basic interests (broadly construed), it is not the people who have the sole power to decide on political matters. It is one thing that "Heaven hears with the ears of its people," but what to do about it is another thing. The Confucian ideal government is for the people, and by the competent and virtuous people (with regard to political decisions).

For example, in the passage that leads to the conclusion of "Heaven hears with the ears of its people," Mencius was talking about how the legendary sage-ruler Yao passed his throne to the sage-ruler Shun. In spite of the apparent democratic message in the conclusion, Shun was not directly elected by the populace. Rather, he was appointed by Yao as his prime minister for 28 years. After watching his performance for so long, people chose to follow him instead of others after Yao died. In another passage, Mencius said that in the promotion, demotion, and capital punishment of an official, the opinions of the ruler's inner circle and his ministers don't count, and only those of the people do. But the ruler shouldn't simply follow people's opinions; rather, he needs to investigate the case and then make a decision (*Mencius* 1B7).

Let's now put all the considerations on government of early Confucians, especially Mencius, together. People with merits that are selected from a level playing field should be entrusted with ruling. But people's satisfaction should be clearly expressed and serve as the final measurement of the effectiveness of ruling. The Confucian ideal government that is by the competent and virtuous people will then require some channel for the popular will to be expressed and measured, and in this sense the masses still need to participate in politics to a certain degree. If "government by someone" means participation by someone, the Confucian ideal government should be understood as "for the people, and partly by the competent and virtuous people and partly by all the people." It is a hybrid regime that combines popular elements with meritocratic elements.

4 Confucianism and Liberal Democracy

4.1 *The Compatibility Between the Confucian Ideal Regime and Liberal Democracy*

In the previous two sections, I discussed how early Confucianism addressed problems of China's early modernity. These problems were also shared by Western modernity. Thus, the contemporary relevance of the Confucian ideas is obvious. But in most cases, I didn't discuss directly and explicitly how they interact with contemporary ideas, especially ideas of liberal democracy, which are dominant in the contemporary world. I will discuss these interactions in this section. Many of the Confucian ideas were already introduced in previous sections, but some of them were not, and these will now be discussed.

On the surface, Confucianism is fundamentally in conflict with ideas considered essential to liberal democracy. Liberal democracy is often perceived as being built upon individualism, the pursuit of self-interest, equality, rule of law, and market economy (capitalism), whereas Confucianism is said to advocate collectivism, altruism, hierarchy, rule by virtue, and the belittlement of commerce.

Some of the accusations made against Confucianism are, however, plainly false. Early Confucians never condemn commerce. In *Mencius* 3A4, Mencius emphatically claimed that "it is a matter of fact that things are unequal," and used this claim to challenge a radical form of egalitarianism in the economy. Confucius claimed that "it is a shame to be poor and humble when the Way prevails in the state," and he considered wealth and fortune to be bad only when the state is in bad shape, meaning that the wealth cannot be gathered in a virtuous manner (*Analects* 8.13). Thus, Confucians are only in conflict with a radical form of capitalism in which greed is celebrated, and the gathering of wealth is justified no matter how it is achieved.

Early Confucians did emphasize the role of virtue, but this doesn't mean that they allowed no room for the application of laws. For example, if we read carefully Confucius' own words on the relations between virtues and laws (*Great Learning* Chap. 4; *Analects* 2.3, 12.18, 12.19, 13.3, 13.6, and 20.2), the conclusion we should draw is as follows. First, the use of laws alone wouldn't be sufficient for a state to be good, for the people may be law-abiding, but they would always be ready to violate laws whenever they have a chance if they had no basic virtues. Such a state is in constant danger of degenerating into chaos. Second, for a state to be stable for the right reasons, the masses need to have some basic virtues, and more importantly, the leaders have to set examples for their people. Third, ideally, if all people were virtuous, laws wouldn't be necessary. But from the discussion of the previous section, we saw that early Confucians didn't have high expectations of the common people. In particular, they wouldn't expect the masses to be so virtuous as to regulate themselves. Thus, laws can and need to be used as "fallback mechanisms" that regulate the common people as the last resort. Still, laws themselves should be the embodiment of some basic moral concerns. Fourth, there are also matters, such as people's manners, that cannot or should not be regulated by laws, and they should

be guided by *li*, that is, social norms that have moral content. In this sense, *li* and basic moral codes (such as basic family values) also serve as a “fallback mechanism” to legal regulations.

It is true that the Confucian ideal regime contains strong meritocratic elements. But from the discussion in the previous section, we saw that this meritocracy is built upon equality. That is, early Confucians, especially Mencius and Xunzi, believed in the equality of all in terms of their potentials to become wise and virtuous. The door to climbing up the political ladder is open to everyone, and the government is held accountable for offering all necessary conditions it can to people to move up in the political hierarchy.

Early Confucians did emphasize the effort to cultivate one’s compassion toward others. But this doesn’t mean that everyone is able to do so. More importantly, this apparently other-oriented requirement is actually for one’s own good, and is not built upon the negation of the self. Confucius stated that the ideal person is for himself, and the non-ideal person is for others (*Analects* 14.24). Early Confucians differ from radical individualists because they understood the self as fundamentally social and intertwined with others. Again, Confucius claimed that the establishment of oneself is inseparable from the establishment of others (*Analects* 6.30). As mentioned earlier, Mencius stated that, lacking five basic human relations, a well-fed human look-alike shouldn’t be called a human being, and is close to beasts (*Mencius* 3A4). Thus, the Confucian understanding of the self is different from the understanding of an autonomous self that can exist independent of social conditions, but early Confucians nevertheless acknowledged the self as an entity.

Therefore, the conflict between Confucianism and ideas often associated with liberal democracy is not as sharp and fundamental as it appears to be. But one can argue that there is still conflict between the two, especially if we take a radical version of certain democratic ideas. The questions, then, are the following. First, how can we justify these ideas themselves? For example, if we take a radical version of the autonomous individual, believing that individuals do or should exist before or independent of society, how can we justify it? If we take it as a descriptive account, it is in conflict with the known empirical facts.¹² If we take it as a normative account (i.e., human beings should be autonomous individuals), a little exposure to the history of philosophy will tell us that the indisputable justification of it is even harder to establish.

Let us try another indirect defense of the importance of these ideas, that is, by taking advantage of the almost sacred, “end-of-history” status of liberal democracy. One can argue that in order to embrace liberal democracy, we have to embrace these ideas. That is, to embrace these ideas is a necessary condition for accepting liberal democracy. If so, there is an even bigger problem. Clearly, a significant minority or even a majority in any large state won’t embrace these ideas if no oppression is applied, which is dictated by the fact of pluralism. If accepting these ideas is a necessary condition to embrace democracy, the fact of pluralism will mean that a

¹² See, for example, the primatologist Frans de Waal’s criticism of this asocial version of individualism (de Waal 2006).

significant minority or a majority won't accept democracy. How, then, can we have a democracy that is both pluralistic and stable for the right reasons (i.e., not achieved through oppression and other non-liberal means)? This is precisely the question Rawls raised in his later philosophy (Rawls 1996: 36–38; see also xxvii and 78).

To solve this problem, let us take a look at Rawls' answer. Very simply put, it is to make liberal democracy a free-standing political concept, freed from metaphysical ground, including those “democratic ideas.” What is necessary for democracy to enjoy stability for the right reasons is for different “comprehensive doctrines” (such as a moral metaphysics) to endorse this free-standing concept from itself. This concept doesn't have to be a clearly defined concept, and only needs to be the “overlapping consensus” among all the doctrines that can endorse liberal democracy as a political concept. Put differently, what Rawls did was to “thin down” the concept of liberal democracy, and to allow it to be read differently (within a loosened boundary) by different comprehensive doctrines. Moreover, the concept of liberal democracy doesn't have to be the highest concept in these doctrines, and doesn't even have to be derivable from these doctrines. All that is needed is an endorsement.

Of course, Rawls still had his own idea of the loosened boundary. If we put this aside, but follow his general approach to this problem, we can argue that for Confucianism to be compatible with liberal democracy, it doesn't have to embrace the aforementioned “democratic ideas,” and only needs to endorse liberal democracy with its own reading.

For example, as already argued, Confucians can endorse the rule of law, taking it as a fallback mechanism and an effective way to regulate common people, although it cannot take it as the highest, sacred principle. Certain moral values are. But this doesn't mean that they can be used to interfere with laws arbitrarily. Rather, these values can play their supreme role through laws that are embodiments of these values, and regulate people's behavior where laws are silent. Moreover, these values are very thin, serving the common interests of all reasonable citizens and leaving the matter of faith and comprehensive belief system to each to choose.¹³

Another important issue is rights. If rights have to be built upon the view that we human beings are or should be autonomous individuals, and, as such, we have inalienable rights, Confucians can't accept them. But as in the case of the rule of law, Confucians can endorse certain rights as fallback mechanisms. Confucians can also endorse certain other rights by subjecting them to some higher good in Confucianism. For example, Confucians can endorse freedom of speech by arguing that this is essential to good policy-making because, as argued earlier, the people's will has to have a secure channel of expression, and Confucians can endorse the view that open discussions among the informed and concerned citizens are more likely to lead better political decisions.

Another possible way for Confucians to endorse rights is as follows. Confucians prefer the language of obligations, but this language can lead to practices similar to how the language of rights does. For example, using the language of rights, we can argue that a criminal has a right not to be tortured. For Confucians, if someone

¹³I use the term “reasonable” in this chapter as Rawls did in Rawls 1996, 1999.

commits a heinous crime, feels no remorse whatsoever, and has no possibility to ever repent (although Mencius might think that there is always a chance of rehabilitation), he or she is not even a real human being, and it is ridiculous to talk about his or her “human” rights. Even so, the torture of him or her shows that those who inflict torture lack compassion. The criminal should be punished, but no excessive punishment should be allowed. To enjoy carrying out excessive punishment is a sign of lack of humanity. Thus, Confucians would argue that even though the criminal has no human right not to be tortured, we, as human beings who are superior to this criminal, have an obligation not to torture him or her. Generally, the readings of certain practices may be different between Confucians and some rights theorists, but there can be sufficient overlapping consensus on the practical level, if not on a theoretical level as well.

One can argue that there is a profound distinction between rights and obligations: rights are enforceable or claimable, but obligations are not. But it is not clear why the latter are not. For example, one’s obligation not to torture a criminal can be claimed by the criminal and enforced by law. One can further argue that obligations claimed or enforced by law are oppressive. But again, this seems to be a myth. Why is the claim and enforcement of not torturing a criminal, or a father’s obligation to pay child support oppressive? Don’t we do it all the time in a liberal democracy, though under the language of rights?

Another objection to the Confucian “rights” is that they are fragmented. If we start with autonomous individuals and then find an a priori way to list their rights, it will be far more systematic. But the problem is how we can ever agree upon one a priori way to do it. The distinction between the a priori and the arbitrary can be arbitrary. With the same reasoning, we can answer another objection: Confucian “rights” are often subjected to some higher good, and can thus be sacrificed when in profound conflict with this higher good. For example, freedom of speech, in Confucianism, is justified on the grounds of good policy-making. If a speech is obviously useless to discovering good policies and is somehow problematic, it can be suppressed in the Confucian regime. But unless we take freedom of speech as supreme, it is an open question whether and where there should be a limit on freedom of speech. Even among contemporary liberal democracies in the West, there are various degrees of limit to this freedom (for example, the censorship of Nazi symbols in Germany and of pornography and racism in the U.S.). The potential restriction Confucians may impose on speech is then not problematic on its own, although, clearly, we can discuss where the proper limit should be, which, I think, is a far more interesting and promising question to discuss.

In sum, rights can be largely endorsed in Confucianism, although they may be read differently. Confucians may have different “rights,” for example, a child’s obligation to support his or her old parents, the government’s obligation to provide education to its citizens, etc., and may not endorse certain rights or may not endorse them to the same degree as they are in certain liberal democracies. That is, even with a Rawlsian thin requirement, there may still be some remaining real differences between commonly received rights and Confucian “rights.” But whose position is better is an open question.

Finally, on democratic participation and election, Confucians can accept democratic participation as a way for people's will to be expressed, and can use election as a way to select the wise and virtuous. The Confucian reading of election may even improve on the mores of political culture. For example, the dominant ideology in American democracy is that election is a way to get rid of the bad politicians, and this can lead to a "mud-slinging" culture which breeds cynicism in politics. Under the Confucian reading, a political candidate will argue that "I am better than my opponent" instead of "My opponent is worse than me," and this might push politics to higher goals, instead of a race to the bottom.¹⁴

But a fundamental difference remains. Although Confucians can accept popular participation as a way for the popular will to be expressed, and in this way the popular will can be a factor in the process of political decision-making, Confucians must give room to the wise and virtuous in order for them to have a voice in this process. As argued in the previous section, the Confucian ideal regime is a hybrid regime. In the following, I will show how this Confucian regime is actually better than the present liberal democratic regimes in dealing with some fundamental issues of modern states.

4.2 Fundamental Problems Within Liberal Democracies

As we saw, even with a "thin" reading of liberal democracy, there are still remaining differences between liberal democracy and the Confucian ideal regime. But if we are not close-minded and don't believe that history ends with liberal democracy, we shouldn't dismiss the Confucian regime because of the remaining differences, but should ask the question: which regime is actually better in facing the contemporary world?

In my view, there are four problems with today's liberal democracies in facing the contemporary world. First, the ideologies behind some people's readings of liberal democracy are problematic because they lead to problems in contemporary societies, such as a radical version of individualism that denies any sacrifice for the common good or for others, a blind faith in the market economy, the assumption of the equally evil nature of all human beings that serves as the foundation of check and balance, etc. Confucians would be against these ideologies, and thus offer a cure to them. Of course, one can imagine that these ideologies can be challenged and corrected by some liberal theories as well.

The second problem is that, combined with the ideology of radical individualism and the retreat of moral education, the institution of one person one vote has a built-in defect of not being able to pay sufficient attention to non-voters, such as past and future generations and aliens. For non-voters have no voice in this process, and voters are not guided to consider the interests of non-voters. This is perhaps why issues

¹⁴ See Chan 2012 for a more detailed discussion.

about budget deficit and environment (interests of future generations), foreign aid (interests of aliens), etc. are hard to address adequately in present democracies.

Third, even among voters, the vocal and powerful voters tend to suppress the opinions of the silent and the silenced. Especially when the rule of law is not well-established, this leads to problems such as the mistreatment of minorities within a state, and policy-making being hijacked by the so-called “issue-voters” who are opinionated about certain matters (such as abortion) and let these matters override all other concerns.

Fourth, even in terms of interests of the voters, the voters themselves are often not the best judges. There are many studies that support this.¹⁵ One can argue that contemporary democracies are not directly participatory, but representative. But if voters can't understand their interests well, how can they understand which representative represents their interests well?

The causes of the last three problems, in my view, are the following. First, it is argued that the institution of one person one vote itself encourages citizens' interests “to shrink and center on their private economic concerns to the detriment of the bonds of community” (Rawls 1999: 73).¹⁶

Second, the size of most contemporary states is much too large, making state affairs too complicated for common people to understand and making political manipulations easy to achieve and difficult to detect. Moreover, the large size of the state makes possible the large concentration of wealth. These wealthy individuals and organizations (for example, think of big global companies) then develop interests of their own that are not necessarily in line with the common good of a state, and they have a motive and the ability to manipulate politics in their favor.

Third, to make the matter worse, most people in contemporary societies have to work for their living. In *Mencius* 3A4, Mencius argued that a ruler needs to have leisure in order to rule. But this necessary condition for someone to participate in politics is lacking in today's societies. Again, contemporary democracies are representative, but the lack of leisure among citizens together with the complexity of state affairs make them disqualified even from selecting the right representatives.

Fourth, even if one had some remarkable capacity and went through all the troubles, his or her vote would be equivalent to someone else's who votes in an uninformed or casual way. Indeed, statistically, in a large society, one vote never counts. This means that to vote responsibly or just to vote is not a rational decision one should make (Hardin 2002).

Fifth, there are people who have no interest in politics or choose not to be concerned with politics. In a liberal and pluralistic society, their way of apolitical life should be tolerated. But their political voice should also be limited (either through their own choice or, if we don't think we can count on their good will, through some political arrangement). Otherwise, political decision-making will be jeopardized.

¹⁵ See, for example, Akerman and Fishkin 2004, 2005, and, more recently, Caplan 2008. For a more popular account, see Kristof 2008.

¹⁶ To be clear, this view is not Rawls's. It is what he describes as a “Hegelian view.”

4.3 *Why Is the Confucian Ideal Regime Better?*

Many liberal and democratic theorists also see some of the four problems with contemporary liberal democracies listed above, and try to offer their own solutions within the framework of liberal democracy (see, for example, Rawls 1996, 1999; Ackerman and Fishkin 2004, 2005). They also realize that, for participatory democracy to function well, voters need to meet certain criteria, such as getting informed and having some basic moral sense. The state should offer all necessary means for voters to meet these criteria, such as satisfying people's basic needs, offering education, and making it possible for voters to deliberate on political matters (such as having a day called "deliberation day," as Ackerman and Fishkin 2004, 2005 suggested). But as we saw in the previous subsection, the problems are rooted in the nature of modern states and human psychology. As long as modern states remain large and populous, most people in these states have to work for a living, and human willingness and capacity to understand politics is limited; these problems cannot be ultimately solved by the internal tinkering. These tinkering offered by democratic thinkers, already radical in today's politics, may improve the situation, but can't fundamentally and adequately address the aforementioned problems.

In contrast, the Confucian ideal regime may be better equipped to address these problems. As I have argued, Confucians can endorse the rule of law and most rights. They acknowledge governmental responsibilities to the citizens, such as satisfying their basic material and spiritual needs, and hold government accountable for that. The same is also advocated by liberal and democratic thinkers. But Confucians would also emphasize the basic moral and political education of all citizens, thicker than the civil education in contemporary democracies but still thin enough for citizens with a variety of reasonable comprehensive doctrines to endorse.

Confucian moral and political education is rooted in Confucian political philosophy discussed in the second and third sections of this chapter, and is able to address some of the issues discussed in the previous sections. It tells citizens that voting is not a mere expression of one's narrowly-defined material interests or one's article of faith, and it is not a peaceful process for fighting factions to achieve a temporary truce through a non-violent suppression of minority opinions. Rather, voting should be based upon one's interests broadly construed, which include short- and long-term material interests, interests of others, and moral needs, and voting is a process of discovering public good. In order to vote, one has to have these understandings (which is a moral requirement) and also has to be informed about political affairs. Check and balance as well as other political institutions are not only there to punish the bad, but also to select the good. Government is not a necessary evil, but should be an institution that secures for its citizens a basic standard of living and social relations. When the politicians do their job, they should be considered politically superior and be respected accordingly.

The Confucian "civil" education may already be considered too radical for democratic thinkers. But there is something even more radical from a democratic point of view. Although Confucians such as Mencius believe in equality of all human

beings in terms of their potential to become wise and virtuous, and that government is responsible for helping people to realize their potentials with any means necessary, they nevertheless believe that only a few human beings can actually “make it.” As we saw, Confucians’ concern with the masses’ lack of intellectual and moral capacities that are necessary to meaningful political participation is supported by the aforementioned conditions of contemporary states. Then, Confucians think that to correct this deficiency of the masses, the competent and virtuous should be given more power in the process of political decision-making. These people are trained and selected on the basis of whether they are compassionate toward others and are able to grasp political matters, and thus they are better equipped for dealing with problems that challenge contemporary liberal democracies.

This radical reform of liberal democracy is destined to encounter many objections, and it is beyond the scope of this short chapter to deal with them in any adequate manner. Let me just very briefly mention a few. One issue is how to institutionalize this Confucian hybrid regime. There are many ways of doing so.¹⁷ One of them is to turn the upper house of a bicameral legislature into a house of the competent and virtuous. Members of this house can be selected through exams (or making exams a requirement for them to be selected) that test their knowledge relevant to political decision-making and through evaluations of their performances in past assignments in order to see if they have the moral character relevant to being a good politician; they can also be selected from high-officials or from large NGOs who have done a good job in their offices. In the past the Chinese have experimented with many ways of selecting the wise and the virtuous, and thus traditional Chinese politics offers a rich resource for thinking about how to select members of this meritocratic branch. The other house can be popularly elected, and clearly, there are different ways to distribute power between these two houses. Clearly, to make all the relevant procedures fair, laws and institutional regulations are necessary.

The Confucian hybrid regime may remind people, especially those in the West, of the kind of aristocracy in the Middle Ages, or democracies at their earlier stages, in which many people were unfairly disenfranchised and thus held a deep resentment toward the elite. But as we saw, the Confucian meritocracy is built upon equality and upward mobility. The door to meritocracy is open to everyone both in the sense that everyone has the potential to climb up the political ladder and in the sense that the government is responsible for offering all means necessary for this mobility. Since there is no cut-off line after which one cannot participate in politics anymore, one’s seclusion from meritocratic institutions such as the upper house is never permanent. All the above may address the problems of disenfranchisement and resentment.

Another common objection to my arguments here is that contemporary democracies are actually already meritocratic. There are more wealthy and well-educated people in the legislature and other political institutions, proportion-wise, than in the populace. This may well be true. But first, these meritocrats may have the wrong

¹⁷ Chapter 3 of Bai 2009b contains many detailed discussions of this issue and other issues with Confucian hybrid regime. An earlier English version is Bai 2008. See also Bell 2006.

kind of merits from a Confucian point of view. The Confucians want people with compassion and competence to have a greater voice in government, and merits such as wealth and celebrity status by themselves don't count. Second, even if some politicians have the right kind of merits from a Confucian point of view, they are "closeted" meritocrats. Due to the pressure of popular elections, sometimes they have to hide their merits in order to appeal to the average voters, and their political decisions are often hijacked by the short-term and oftentimes misguided interests of these voters. That is, they fail to play the role of meritocrats, as expected by Confucians and necessary to right the wrongs of participatory democracy.

To propose the Confucian hybrid regime as a correction of contemporary liberal democracies is radical. There are many details that cannot be dealt with due to the limited space of this chapter. But even if there were more space, I am sure many readers would still find faults with this proposal. Here I can only beg for charity and open-mindedness. As I argued in this chapter, Confucian ideas may have had real influences on European modernity. In contrast, for whatever reasons, the Chinese didn't learn from the West soon enough to avoid the humiliations in recent history. If we learn from these historical lessons, if we understand early Confucians as attempting to wrestle with issues of modernity and offering competing paradigms, and if we don't consider the end of history has already come, we should open ourselves to the "old" and the "alien," in order to usher in a better future for ourselves.

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Chapter 15

Ultimate Reality and Self-Cultivation in Early Confucianism: A Conceptual/ Existential Approach

Zhonghu Yan

1 Introduction

“Self-cultivation” is the most commonly accepted English equivalent for the Chinese term *xiushen* 修身, which covers the exercises including physical as well as psychological and spiritual levels. In the Confucian context, this self-cultivation has an undeniably strong moral sense (Ames 1985).¹ However, this morality has also a metaphysical dimension that has frequently been overlooked by scholars. Therefore, in this chapter, I will attempt to illustrate this profound and often neglected dimension of classical Confucianism by a conceptual and existential analysis of its founder Confucius’ *Analects*. I will begin by discussing the Ultimate Reality as conceived in the *Analects* and proceed to discuss the three consummate virtues that Confucius expounded, namely, wisdom, benevolence, and courage. I will conclude the essay by highlighting the metaphysical basis of Confucian self-cultivation.

2 Ultimate Reality in Early Confucianism

The concept of *tian* 天 (Heaven) appears often in early Confucian literature. It does not just refer to the physical sky but also to the Ultimate Reality behind the visible world. When human beings suffer, they invariably call upon Heaven in some way or other. In contemporary colloquial Chinese, such an expression is

I wish to kindly acknowledge the permission from *Religion Compass* to reuse “Ultimate Reality in Confucianism” and from Cambria Press to reuse portions of *An Existential Reading of the Confucian Analects*.

¹Also, John Knoblock translated 修身 as “Self-cultivation” in Chap. 2 of the *Xunzi*.

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wo de tian a 我的天啊, which means “Oh, My Heaven.” In English, we have “Oh. My God!” or “Good Heavens!” Surprise and shock lead us to search for the cause of suffering. Confucius believed that suffering is part of the physical and social structure of human beings. The correct attitude should be to acknowledge the inevitability of this aspect of human existence, as he said to his disciple Zigong, “I do not complain against Heaven, nor do I blame Man” (*Analects* 14.35). What can we infer about the conception of Heaven in early Confucianism?

Firstly, *tian* is the force behind all natural processes. Thus we read in the *Analects*,

The Master said, “I am thinking of giving up speech.” Zigong said, “If you did not speak, what would there be for us, your disciples, to transmit?” The Master said, “What does Heaven ever say? Yet there are four seasons going round and there are the hundred things coming into being. What does Heaven ever say?” (*Analects* 17.19)

Heaven causes the seasons to alternate and plants to grow. And it sustains our lives. Because the Chinese did not make clear linguistic distinctions between the created world and the force of creation itself, the debate on the immanent and transcendent nature of Heaven has persisted (see Huang 2007). The debate is due largely to our dualistic thinking: Something immanent must not be transcendent and something transcendent must not be immanent.² The Chinese mind does not accept this strict dualism.

Second, *tian* is also a conscious being. Heaven creates the myriad things in the world, but it does not seem to leave them to their own devices. It seems to be always overseeing human conduct. It is able to perceive the heart of the people. When Confucius felt that nobody understood him or his vision, he lamented, “I start from below and get through to what is up above. If I am understood at all, it is, perhaps, by Heaven” (*Analects* 14.35). As a man with a great vision, Confucius strongly felt that only Heaven understood his heart. Confucius may even have communicated with Heaven through prayers. He held the transcendent source in the greatest respect. We hear Confucius say, “When you have offended against Heaven, there is nowhere you can turn to in your prayers” (*Analects* 3.13).

As a conscious being, Heaven seems to be watching over the moral conduct of human beings. Once when Confucius’ disciples wished to bring honor to him by acting or sending their own disciples to serve as his retainers, Confucius reprimanded them by saying: “In pretending that I had retainers when I had none, who would we be deceiving? Would we be deceiving Heaven?” (*Analects* 9.12)

Finally, Heaven is the assigner of a person’s earthly mission. Heaven also assigned a mission to a person of its choosing. In the Chinese tradition, prophets as seen in the Old Testament are not common,³ but once in a long while, the Chinese do see sages emerge, whose mission was believed to come from Heaven. In the *Analects*,

²The strict dichotomy does not even apply to the Christian conception. The Christian conception of God is immanent as well as transcendent. For its transcendence, Christianity inherited the Hebrew conception of God. For its immanence, Christ bridged the gap between the human and divine. See *Acts* 17: 27, 28. In this sense, the Chinese conception of Heaven is comparable to it.

³For a comparative study of Hebrew prophets and the Chinese sages, see Rawley 1956.

a few such sages are mentioned, such as Shun, Duke of Zhou and King Wen. It is significant that Confucius considered himself to be called by Heaven to carry out the mission to transmit the Zhou culture. This is apparent in the following passage.

When under siege in Kuang, the Master said, “With King Wen dead, is not this culture of ours invested here in me? If Heaven intends this culture of ours to be destroyed, those who come after me will not be able to have any part of it. If Heaven does not intend this culture of ours to be destroyed, then what can the men of Kuang do to me?” (*Analects* 9.5)

This sense of mission is also confirmed in *Analects* 3.24, where a border official said to Confucius’ disciples about their Master: “The world has long been without the Way. Heaven is about to use your Master as a wooden tongue for a bell.” Confucius’ disciple Zigong also expressed the idea that Heaven exercised its will on the Master, when he said, “Heaven set him on the path of sagehood” (*Analects* 9.6).

From being a force behind the movement of nature, to a conscious being and a being that assigns mission, Heaven is seen at the same time as far away and near, as immanent and transcendent. This dual nature of *tian* sheds a new light on the question of theodicy from a Confucian perspective. As Confucius did not believe in an all-knowing, all-powerful, absolutely transcendent being, *tian* cannot be held fully responsible for the evil that causes human suffering. As human beings have a participatory role in maintaining a good universe, they should not be exempt from the responsibility for causing suffering. What Confucius proposed in times of suffering is not to complain against Heaven nor blame one’s fellow men. Instead, one should take suffering as a learning opportunity.

In his *Chinese Thought from Confucius to Mao Tse-Tung*, G. H. Creel asked: “What did Confucius understand by the term ‘Heaven’?” His response is, “Not anthropomorphic being. Heaven was seldom so connected in his time, and there is explicit reason for rejecting this idea in connection with Confucius.” He continues, “If we examine the way in which Confucius refers to Heaven, it appears that this term stood, in his thinking, for a vaguely conceived moral force in the universe. He placed the utmost emphasis on striving by the individual, but he seems to have hoped that Heaven, as we say, ‘helps those who help themselves’” (Creel 1953: 36). Professor Creel’s interpretation of Heaven has a strong appeal to those who no longer hold a religious frame of mind. But I beg to differ from him with my analysis of the passages above. Considering Heaven as a conscious being is not only compatible with the general thrust of thought in the *Analects*, but also compatible with the belief in the Mandate of Heaven in the time of Confucius and earlier. In the popular religious belief, which may be traced back to a very early period, Heaven is also called *tiangong* 天公, the Lord of Heaven, which suggest a personal character of Heaven. Professor Creel might have been influenced by Max Weber in his rationalistic interpretation, as he quoted a passage from the latter with a strong overtone of rationalism:

In the sense of absence of all metaphysics and almost all residues of religious anchorage, Confucianism is rationalist to such a far-going extreme that it stands at the extreme boundary of what might call a “religious” ethics. At the same time, Confucianism is more rationalist and sober, in the sense of the absence and the rejection of all-non-utilitarian yardsticks, than any other ethical system, with the possible exception of J. Bentham. (Creel 1953: 38–39)

It is the dual character of Heaven that can help to explain the reality of Chinese experience. The fact that the emperor was called the son of Heaven and the fact that sacrifice was offered at the place of worship called the Temple of Heaven suggest further that Heaven after all is not an impersonal thing. As the Ultimate Reality, Heaven also provides the religious ground and ultimate purpose of self-cultivation as will be seen below.

3 *Zhi* 知/智 (Wisdom) and Its Relation to Ultimate Reality

One of the goals of self-cultivation in early Confucianism is the acquisition of wisdom. Much scholarly ink has been spilled on key notions of Confucius' teaching such as *ren* 仁, benevolence, and *li* 禮, rites. While the former is considered the goal to which the students are taught to aspire and the qualities that the future leaders of the nation should possess, the latter is considered the concrete practice toward this goal. These are surely the two key notions of the *Analects*, considering their number of occurrences: 104 instances of *ren* and 74 instances of *li*. Confucius also emphasized a separate human capacity, without which *ren* is incomplete. This human capacity is called *zhi* 知/智, a term that could perhaps be translated as "knowledge" or "wisdom."

3.1 *Notion of Zhi in the Analects*

There are 116 instances of the word *zhi* in the *Analects*. All but five are attributed to Confucius. In 89 cases, it is used as a verb and in 22 cases it is used as a noun or an adjective. When it is used as a verb, it takes either a single noun or a sentence as its object. When it takes the sentence as its object, it expresses a kind of factual statement:

The Master said, "I don't see (*zhi*) how a man can be acceptable who is untrustworthy in word. When a pin is missing in the yoke-bar of a large cart or in the collar bar of a small cart, how can the cart be expected to go?" (*Analects* 2.22)

The factual statement is also seen in *Analects* 5.8 and 14.1. Invariably, *zhi* means "to judge" when it expresses a factual statement. When it takes a single object the matter becomes much more complicated, for there is a wide range of objects that *zhi* takes. I will divide them into four categories.

A. Persons. *Zhi* involves first of all the capacity for appreciation and recognition of one's talent (*Analects* 1.16 and 13.2). This must have been a very big concern for Confucius' disciples whose implicit purpose in studying with the Master was to gain an official position. Time and again, Confucius asked them not to worry about the position as long as they have the right qualifications (*Analects* 4.14, 14.30 and 15.19). Instead, they should develop the capacity to know other people. We will

discuss what the knowledge of other people means when we come to the usage of *zhi* as a noun. For now, it is worth bearing in mind that recognizing a whole person in others is never considered an easy job. Even Confucius himself would at times lament that he is not recognized or understood by the people.

The Master said, “There is no one who understands (*zhi*) me.” Zigong said, “How is it that there is no one who understands (*zhi*) you?” The Master said, “I do not complain against Heaven, nor do I blame Man. In my studies, I start from below and get through to what is up above. If I am understood (*zhi*) at all, it is, perhaps, by Heaven !” (*Analects* 14.35)

It is from Heaven’s perspective that Confucius is understood. How much less can we human beings understand another person!

B. Li, the rites. Besides *zhi ren* 知人, understanding or recognizing a person, Confucius strongly recommended that one understand the rites, as seen in *Analects* 3.22 and 7.31. A careful reading of the *Analects* tells us that understanding the rites does not mean theoretical knowledge; instead, one judges a person’s practical performance as a basis upon which to judge whether he is *zhi li* 知禮 or not. Therefore, there is a practical dimension to *zhi*. Without correct performance of the rites, one cannot position oneself well or win recognition in society. This is seen in the following passage:

Confucius said, “A man has no way of becoming an exemplar person unless he understands (*zhi*) Destiny; he has no way of taking his stand unless he understands (*zhi*) the rites; he has no way of judging men unless he understands (*zhi*) words.” (*Analects* 20.3)⁴

Without understanding or performing the rites correctly, one cannot have a smooth interaction with the people around one and one’s career suffers.

C. Speech. For Confucius, to know when, how and what to speak to others is very important, for it is through speech that one communicates to others what kind of person one is (*Analects* 1.14, 4.22 and 16.6). Equally important is to know how to interpret what others have said and identify the motives behind the words. Confucius especially warned against cunning and insincere words (*Analects* 5.25; 15.27). These words damage the integrity of a person who speaks them. Finally, the Master made it clear that “he has no way of judging men unless he understand words” (*Analects* 20.3), for apart from behavior, comprehending language is the only means to gain access to the minds of other people.

Knowledge of words, then, involves a keen observation of the speaker as he reveals himself. Also, it involves the capacity to distinguish sincerity and insincerity in the spoken words and therefore gain knowledge of the speaker. This skill requires years of training.

Knowing one’s fellow human being as a whole person, practical knowledge of the rites and intuitive grasp of the metaphysical realm of existence and speech appropriately uttered or comprehended constitute the main components in deciding whether a person could be considered *zhi*, or a wise person. In the *Analects*, there is

⁴The idea that without knowing the rites there is no way one can take a stand in the world is repeated in *Analects* 8.8 and 16.13.

no distinction in character between the *zhi* as a verb meaning to know or understand and *zhi* as an adjective or noun meaning wise or wisdom. At least, we can say that a wise person is one who possesses salient features of wisdom.

D. Wisdom and Metaphysical Reality. Besides knowing a person and the rites, the *Analects* also mentions the metaphysical level of existence such as *ming* 命, destiny and death. The passage quoted above speaks of how “understanding destiny” is essential for being a *junzi* 君子. The idea of such a relationship is reinforced in the following passage.

The Master said, “At fifteen I set my heart on learning ... at fifty I understood (*zhi*) the Decree of Heaven.” (*Analects* 2.4)

Zhi ming 知命, understanding destiny, or *zhi tianming* 知天命, understanding the decree of Heaven, is repeated in *Analects* 16.8 and 12.3. *Ming* and *tianming* are basically interchangeable. What does it mean to “understand the Decree of Heaven?” These passages suggest to us that *zhi ming* or *zhi tianming* does not necessarily mean that one understands the law of the universe. Instead, it means that there are things in the universe that one should be wise enough to be resigned to, or that one knows what purpose Heaven has for one. This kind of *zhi* is by no means an intellectual one, and involves an action in light of this understanding. This is best exemplified in two cases: one is when Confucius’ disciple Bo-niu 伯牛 came down with a very bad disease (*Analects* 6.10); the other is when he was asked about Yan Yüan 顏淵 who died early (*Analects* 6.3). In both cases, the Master mentioned *ming*, destiny, and accepted it.

E. Who could be counted as *zhi zhe* 知者 (wise person)? The person who possesses wisdom is considered a wise man. The wise man displays certain characteristics presumably informed by his wisdom. A wise man knows what to do in a conflict (*Analects* 9.29, 14.28), knows how to address his speech to the right person (*Analects* 15.8), and takes delight in movement and change (*Analects* 6.23).

Therefore, in Confucius’ thinking, a wise man is a person who is able to cope with life’s difficult situations and retain a healthy state of mind. Confucius never equates technical skill with wisdom. Indeed, he does not use the term *zhi* for technical skill. Instead, he uses *neng* 能 (*Analects* 9.6). Confucius did not regard technical skills as worthy of pursuit for a *junzi*.

As one of many virtues mentioned in the *Analects*, *zhi* is a quality that can be cultivated in a person. *Ren*, a virtue that is more socially oriented, seems to be more highly regarded by Confucius himself. When discussing the wisdom of Confucius, one needs to distinguish between its narrow sense and its broad sense. In its narrow sense, wisdom is a specific quality. In answer to Fan Chi’s questions, Confucius used *zhi* in a narrow sense (*Analects* 6.22, 12.22). It is the mental capacity to know the people and things in the world and to act accordingly. In its broad sense, wisdom is the capacity to bring order to oneself, to the community and the whole world in such a way that a wise person lives a happy life. It is in the broad sense of the word that we find that wisdom has its metaphysical foundation. The kind of wisdom that Confucius pursued had its source in Ultimate Reality (*Analects* 9.29, 6.23). In a certain sense, the fear of Heaven is the beginning of wisdom.

4 *Ren* and Ultimate Reality

4.1 *Where Do the Roots of Ren, Benevolence, Grow?*

The etymology of *ren* 仁 suggests to us how relationships with other people are indispensable for forming the character of *ren*. This is a very important suggestion, for the significance of the individual or individuality has been deemphasized. This emphasis on interpersonal relationship is central in Confucius' teaching about *ren*. For instance, we have a passage relating the words of his disciple *Youzi* 有子:

The exemplary person devotes his effort to the roots, for once the roots are established, the Way will grow therefrom. Being good as a son and obedient as a young man is, perhaps, the root of man's character (*ren*). (*Analects* 1.2)

Family is where the virtue of *ren* is first cultivated. One needs first to be a good son to one's parents and be sensitive to their needs. As a younger brother in the family, one should also be sensitive to the respect due to the elder brother. Failure to perform one's duty in the family, on the other hand, is considered not *ren*. For instance, when his disciple *Zaiwo* 宰我 expressed his reluctance to observe 3 years' mourning for his parents, Confucius said:

How unfeeling Yu is. A child ceases to be nursed by his parents only when he is three years old. Three years' mourning is observed throughout the **world**. Was Yu not given three years' love by his parents? (*Analects* 17.21)

If one is able to be a good son or younger brother, by extension, one will do well when he steps outside the home and meets people in the community. Sensitivity towards others' feelings is an essential quality; indeed, one meaning of *ren* that has come down to us as an idiom is *mamu bu ren* 麻木不仁 (too unfeeling to be *ren*).⁵ This suggests that sensitivity is an essential quality for a *ren* person. Without this quality one is as unfeeling as dead wood.⁶

There is a scholarly debate, however, over whether *ren* is an inner psychological state or an external aspect of man (Hall and Ames 1987). While Tu Weiming and Chan Wing-tsit hold to the former point of view, Fingarette emphasizes the latter. If we take it that *ren* is the result as well as the process of cultivating sensitivity, the tension between the inner and outer interpretation breaks down. On the one hand, sensitivity is the basis for one's voluntary action that may involve attitude and will and is therefore an inner state. On the other hand, sensitivity is directed to an outside object or person and therefore is an external aspect of man. I suggest that sensitivity consists of a deeper core than what the disparate inner or outer meanings might convey. This deeper core is the source from which Confucian benevolence flows. Confucian benevolence is capable of responding to fellow human beings as well as the Being of all existences.

⁵ Cheng Hao 程灝 seems to be the first one to correlate physical insensitivity with moral insensitivity (see Cheng and Cheng 1984: 33).

⁶ It is interesting to note that Confucius once compared his lazy disciple to dead wood (*Analects* 5.10).

4.2 *How to Cultivate Ren*

The questions of how much this deep core of human sensitivity is inborn and how much it is cultivated are not explicitly addressed in the *Analects*. But from the number of occurrences of this term, namely 104, the topic of *ren* is obviously a great concern of Confucius and his disciples. Its importance and complexity are indicated by the fact that his disciple Fan Chi asked about it 3 times, but was given a different answer on each occasion. And four other disciples asked the same question, but were also given quite different answers. By analyzing Confucius' responses to the question of *ren*, we should understand what this concept involves. I begin by analyzing Fan Chi's three exchanges with the Master.

1. Fan Chi asked about benevolence. The Master said, "The benevolent man reaps the benefit only after overcoming difficulties. That can be called benevolence." (*Analects* 6.22)
2. Fan Chi asked about benevolence. The Master said, "Love your fellow men." (*Analects* 12.22)
3. Fan Chi asked about benevolence. The Master said, "While at home hold yourself in a respectful attitude; when serving in an official capacity be reverent; when dealing with others do your best (be loyal). These are qualities that cannot be put aside, even if you go and live among the barbarians." (*Analects* 13.19)

Fan Chi seems to have been relatively dull-witted, and Confucius' answers tried to accommodate Fan's intellectual capacity. In *Analects* 12.22, Fan Chi's incapacity to understand Confucius' answers is made explicit. Even after Confucius further explained what he meant, Fan Chi was not able to understand. But from these exchanges, we can still get an idea of some complexity in the meaning of *ren*.

These exchanges point out that *ren* is not something easily defined, but there are some signs or actions that lead one to become a man of *ren*. From Confucius' answers to Fan Chi's questions, we can see that cultivating *ren* starts from the family and gradually extends to one's circle of concerns. The "respectful attitude" at home means filial piety and brotherly respect; this is the root of *ren*. This respect is translated into reverence when it comes to the discharge of official responsibility. And when it comes to interpersonal relationships in general, *zhong* 忠, serious commitment, becomes a guiding principle, for this is the way to win respect or trust from other people. Confucius understood that these teachings are easy to remember but hard to practice. Therefore, he emphasized in *Analects* 6.22 that the practice of *ren* involves great difficulties. And in *Analects* 13.19, he emphasized that the practice of *ren* demands persistent effort. One should not abandon it even if one is in a barbarian state. Finally, the practice of *ren* requires that one love one's fellow men, *ai ren* 愛人.

The love of one's fellow men does not mean that one need only love people from the same social class. And love here does not mean an emotional attachment towards others. Instead it means a sensitive concern for the welfare of others. This love differs from Mohist *jian ai* 兼愛 (universal love), which involves love without any distinction. For later followers of Confucius, the Mohist conception of love is too idealistic and against one's natural feelings. One should certainly be concerned for other people, but one must consider that people are different in relation to oneself. Not considering the differences is a sign of insensitivity. Insensitivity may defeat the very purpose of your love. The Confucian love derives its ultimate source from a firm belief in the

prevalence of the Way. In this sense, it is similar to Christian love, which is inspired by a firm belief in the Kingdom of God.⁷

The meaning of *ren* is not exhausted by the above quoted exchanges. Other more quick-witted disciples also raised the question about *ren*. Confucius' answer to Zhong Gong 仲弓 (12:2) carries a similar spirit as in 13:19. *Ren* is first of all practiced at home. One should act in such a fashion that no one in the family has complaints. This attitude of respect should be maintained when one meets colleagues or people in the community. It should also be maintained when one acts in the capacity of an official. One should also find opportunities to improve oneself and befriend those who possess the quality of *ren*.

One sign of *ren* is appropriateness in speech, and Confucius often emphasized its importance. People tend to speak more than act. For Confucius, this should absolutely be avoided. In his answer to Sima Niu 司馬牛, reluctance to speak is considered a distinctive quality of *ren* (12:3).

For Confucius, willingness to practice *ren* depends on oneself alone, but through examples, *de* 德, virtue that accumulates through this practice can spread all over the world. This is probably what is meant by "If for a single day a man could return to observance of the rites through overcoming the self, then the whole world would consider benevolence to be his" (12:1).

4.3 *Intrinsic Rewards from the Practice of Ren*

The analysis of the *ren*-related passages above suggests to us that everyone has the inborn capacity to become a person of *ren*. However, because human beings are driven by desires to satisfy themselves immediately, the *ren*-quality lacks opportunities to shine forth. For Confucius, if men are able to restrain desire through the rites, they will become persons of *ren*.

Restraining one's desire does not necessarily mean asceticism. Following the rites is an aesthetic experience as well. One joins a cosmic dance, so to speak. The practice of *ren* surely needs discipline, for the whole being is involved, but the practice of *ren* has its intrinsic rewards. Indeed, only persons of *ren* can really enjoy a happy life. For example:

The Master said, "One who is not benevolent cannot remain long in straitened circumstances, nor can he remain long in easy circumstances. The benevolent person is attracted to benevolence because he feels at home in it. The wise person is attracted to benevolence because its wisdom benefits benevolence's realization." (*Analects* 4.2)

⁷Though the Confucian community based on blood and geographical ties is formed in a different way from a Christian community based on the same belief in Jesus Christ, the ultimate goal of both communities is to expand themselves indefinitely so that the Way or the Kingdom of God prevails. For a larger comparative study of Christianity and Confucianism, see Ching 1977. For a discussion of the Confucian community, see pp.96–102. For a focused study of Confucian love, *ren*, and Christian love, agape, see Xinzhong 1997.

And twice it is mentioned that a benevolent person never worries (*Analects* 9.29; 14.28). Not only in words but in deeds, Confucius show himself to be a person who rarely worries. Once when Huan Tui threatened to kill him, Confucius remained very calm. He said, “Heaven is author of the virtue that is in me. What can Huan Tui do to me?” (*Analects* 7.23)

In another instance, when under siege in Kuang, the Master said, “With King Wen dead, is not culture invested here in me? If Heaven intends culture to be destroyed, those who come after me will not be able to have any part of it. If Heaven does not intend this culture to be destroyed, then what can the men of Kuang do to me?” (*Analects* 9.5) Just as an ordinary person, a person of *ren* will encounter difficulties, but a person of *ren* can face those difficulties with courage. In the words of Confucius, “A person of *ren* is sure to possess courage.” (*Analects* 14.4)

Confucius’ teaching does not promise anything for the life to come as Jesus’ does. It is a teaching that maximizes one’s happiness, nonetheless. Human existence is such that many things are beyond our control. For an uncultivated person, these things become the objects of worry or concern. Illness and death are the two most salient examples of this. However, for Confucius, existential concerns go beyond illness and death. As we live in the human world, how we interact with other members of the family and by extension with society at large is also a top concern. Confucius believes that people can try to cultivate themselves to such a degree that they can remain unworried under all circumstances. This quality is *ren*. Because of his sensitivity to his role in human relationships, such a one can always perform well and remain calm. Because of his sensitivity to forces beyond his control, he can accept what comes to him, even illness and death. Indeed, Confucius explicitly says that unless one understands his destiny, he cannot become an exemplary person (*Analects* 20.3).

4.4 Seeming Paradox of Ren

Confucius often commented on the central concept of *ren*. From these comments, we learn how qualities of *ren* may be acquired and what the roots of *ren* and the rewards of acquiring *ren* are. There are also a few passages that evade immediate understanding and seem paradoxical. On the one hand, Confucius rarely attributed *ren* to his contemporaries. Even his best and favorite disciple was said to be able not to go against *ren* for only 3 months, to say nothing of others who could only attain *ren* once in a long while (*Analects* 6.7). Perhaps Zengzi captured this spirit well when he said,

An exemplary man must be strong and resolute, for his burden is heavy and the road is long. He takes benevolence as his burden. Is that not heavy? Only with death does the road come to an end. Is that not long? (*Analects* 8.7)

On the other hand, Confucius told Yan Hui that if for a single day a man could return to observance of the rites through overcoming the self, then the whole world would consider benevolence to be his (*Analects* 12.1). Furthermore, we have:

Is *ren* really far away? No sooner do I desire it than it is here in me. (*Analects* 7.30)

For Confucius, *ren* is both difficult and easy. It is easy because it is not something external to us. Every one of us has an inner sensitivity capable of responding to

the world. As long as we remove impurities from it by cultivating our heart and mind, we are on the way to becoming *ren* or a responsive person. In a large sense, Confucius emphasized self-reliance, but we must realize that this self-reliance is not absolute, for relationships with other fellow human beings is equally if not more important. Indeed, a person's self-perfection is significant only in his capacity of relating to others. Still, it is in this generally self-reliant nature that we see the strength and weakness of Confucius' teaching. Its strength lies in a positive confidence that people can transcend the limits of self. It is according to this positive attitude that the above quotation from the *Analects* 7.30 should be understood. The weakness of Confucius' teaching also lies in his over-confidence, for it blinds us to other aspects of human nature, which might have an evil tendency.

This positive view of human nature and the human capacity to reach the *ren* state is not shared by all of Confucius' disciples or later Confucians. In *Analects* 8.7, we already find that Zengzi thought of *ren* as a heavy burden and therefore hard to achieve. Later, Xunzi went even further and pointed out that human nature is evil, contrary to the view of Mencius. The paradox that we observed in the *Analects* about *ren* can be resolved, for such a paradox indicates an evolution of the view of *ren* and human nature in general in the overall context of the early Confucian tradition. One thing is true for all periods of this evolution: *li*, the rites, are essential for overcoming the self and thus generating *ren*. The egoistic self is most difficult to overcome, but if we can merge our stream of self into the great ocean of life through the rites, or better still each of us play our roles in the orchestra of life, our response to others will become spontaneous. This newly gained virtue of power will influence people at home and abroad and, by restoring the rites, will ultimately bring the whole world to *ren*.

4.5 *Ren and Human Affiliation*

Confucius believes that man is essentially a social being. When he is born, it is into a web of social relations. He is the son to his parents, a younger brother to his elder brother; when he grows up, he needs to assume responsibility according to these roles. When he enters society, he needs to assume more roles. He is a friend to all friends, and inferior to his senior colleagues. As a social being, he belongs to a certain community. Within that community, most of his needs, including the need for recognition, are met, and as a member of the community, he has to assume multiple roles as well. Newly assumed responsibilities pose great challenges to him, but the socialization process starts at home. Confucius believes that if one performs a proper role as a younger brother at home, he will know intuitively how to be a junior friend or colleague, for proper respect due to one's seniors is applicable in all circumstances. On the other hand, piety towards one's parents is also translatable into obedience towards all authority. This sociological analysis helps us better understand the role of *ren* in human relations. The etymology of *ren* reveals a person-to-person relationship that shapes lives. And this relationship has the home as its foundation. Cultivating *ren* at home leads to the life of virtue abroad. In other words, private virtue is inextricably intertwined with public virtue.

Therefore a person of *ren* is one who is able to shine forth his virtue both in private and public life. In other words, he is able to respond spontaneously on all occasions. Confucius realized that this capacity for natural response is inborn and shared by all people alike, but has been contaminated by egoistic desires. What a person needs to do is to recover this inborn capacity through cultivation (*Analects* 17.2). This inborn capacity, according to Confucius, is endowed by Heaven, the ultimate source for what a person could be at the highest level.

Confucius' teaching on the *ren* is therefore not pragmatic in its true sense. Rather, it is idealistic in a sense. It is predicated on the belief that there exists an Ultimate Reality of Heaven, which endows us with the power of virtue, and to which we should be held responsible. The meaning of our existence is to be found ultimately in this reality.

5 *Yong* 勇 (Courage)

Among the three consummate virtues,⁸ *yong* 勇 (courage), is the least discussed concept among Confucian scholars. The fact that this virtue is listed along with the other virtues such as *ren* and *zhi* indicates that it is a highly important concept in Confucius' thinking. For example,

1. The Master said, "The man of wisdom is never in two minds; the man of benevolence never worries; the man of courage is never afraid." (*Analects* 9.29)
2. The Master said, "The Way of the exemplary man consists of these three, none of which I have succeeded in following: the man of benevolence never worries; the man of wisdom is never in two minds; the man of courage is never afraid" (*Analects* 14.28).

These three virtues focus on three different aspects of the human heart/mind. *Zhi* is concerned with the human intellect; i.e. to make sound judgments. *Ren* is concerned with its affective or emotional aspect; i.e. the human capacity to remain calm and joyful under all circumstances. *Yong* emphasizes its volitional aspect; i.e. the will to combat fear and anxiety. And while *zhi* and *ren* can stand alone as positive virtues, *yong*, courage, usually requires a supporting virtue to go with it.

5.1 *Following the Rites*

The Master said, "Unless a man has the spirit of the rites, in being respectful he will wear himself out...in having courage he will become unruly..." (*Analects* 8.2)

Courage as a virtue is a mixed blessing. It will become a positive quality only when it is restrained by the rites.

⁸ *Ren*, benevolence, *zhi*, wisdom, and *yong*, courage, are considered three consummate virtues in the *Doctrine of the Mean*.

5.2 Righteousness

Zilu said, “Does the exemplary man consider courage a supreme quality?” The Master said, “For the exemplary man it is morality (*yi*) that is supreme. Possessed of courage but devoid of morality,⁹ an exemplary man will make trouble while a small man will be a brigand.” (*Analects* 17.23)

Yi 義, righteousness, involves proper action based on a sound judgment made on the basis of information given. Without attention to the appropriate situation, displayed courage may lead to chaos.

5.3 Learning

To love courage without loving learning is liable to lead to insubordination. (*Analects* 17.8)

The book or intellectual learning is considered conducive to a balanced mind when one pursues the virtue of courage.

The relationship between courage and benevolence is also observed in the *Analects*. In it, courage is considered subordinate to the higher virtue of benevolence:

The Master said, “...A benevolent man is sure to possess courage, but a courageous man does not necessarily possess benevolence.” (*Analects* 14.4)

As benevolence enables one to be free from worry in all circumstances (*Analects* 9.29; 14.28), it is presupposed that one is not afraid. This is not true the other way around. Though a courageous man is not afraid (9:29; 14:28), especially in a dangerous situation, nonetheless he will worry in other situations.

Our philological study could only take us thus far. We need to probe into the existential situation of Confucius to see how courage, though subordinate to benevolence, played an important part in Confucius’ overall thought system.

In Confucius’ lifetime, he was reportedly threatened with death several times (*Analects* 7.23; 9.5 and 15.2), and experienced the death of his close associates (*Analects* 11.9). In the face of death or non-being, Confucius showed the courage to affirm himself or the courage to be. According to Paul Tillich, the self-affirmation or courage to be in the face of death or fate is different from the self-affirmation in the face of sin and guilt in Christianity. While the former leads to the question of renunciation, the latter leads to the question of salvation (Tillich 2000: 17).

We do find in the *Analects* instances of renunciation (*Analects* 6.10, 12.5), but in the face of fate, Confucius encouraged cultivation of moral virtues such as wisdom and benevolence to offset the impact of the contingent circumstances. The following passage is a description of how he cultivated himself in different stages of his life and reached the final stage when he was able to act spontaneously in all circumstances.

⁹For justification for translating *yi* as morality, see Lau 1979: 26–7.

Though he may still not have been able to take his fate into his own hands, he was able morally to transcend his limitations.

The Master said, "At fifteen I set my heart on learning; at thirty I took my stand; at forty I came to be free from doubts; at fifty I understood the Decree of Heaven; at sixty my ear was attuned; at seventy I followed my hearts' desire without overstepping the line."(*Analects* 2.4)

Although it is true that Confucius does not teach about the sin, guilt and salvation that Christianity does, there is a salvation of another kind. Confucius believed that paradise should be built in this world, and his aspiration is to make the elder contented, friends trust in him and younger people cherish a good memory of him. (*Analects* 5.26) To make this world a paradisiacal place to live, human relationships, in all their complexity, should be smooth. Confucius recommended various methods to make this happen. Externally, one follows accepted norms with a certain degree of creativity. Internally, one cultivates the inherent virtues and lets them shine forth. For the world is fundamentally a human world. It is a real bliss to see ourselves capable of interacting with others in a smooth and spontaneous way.

Though Confucius is mostly concerned with this world, he believe that transcendence is the source of the courage to affirm oneself in the face of fate and death. Confucius repeatedly resorted to Heaven when he experienced the threat of death or when he saw the death of his close disciples, suggesting Heaven is his ultimate source of courage. A close reading of some other passages in the *Analects* shows that the related concept of *Dao*, the Way, is an equally important source of courage:

The Master said, "He has not lived in vain who dies the day he is told about the Way." (*Analects* 4.8)

This seemingly pragmatic conception of *Dao* often blinds us to its implicit mystical dimension. *Dao* permeates Heaven, Earth and the human world. It is through personal and interpersonal cultivation that *Dao* is grasped, which in turn enables one to move spontaneously in the world. In this, we believe Confucius' teaching did not differ much from early Daoist teaching. The only conspicuous difference is that Daoism derived its inspiration from the natural world and Confucianism from the human world. In the mystical union in *Dao*, one person can gain strength of courage and conquer the anxiety of fate and death. For Confucius, the ultimate source for the courage to be in the face of death is the Way of Heaven. Perhaps because of its mystic nature, Confucius rarely talks about it (*Analects* 5.13).

The unspeakable nature of the ultimate source of courage is also experienced in the Christian tradition. In his analysis of courage and transcendence, Paul Tillich asserts that mysticism and theism should both be transcended. He concludes, "The courage to be is rooted in the God who appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt"(Tillich 2000: 190).

He implies that the root of courage is beyond our common conception of God. For Confucius, the root of courage to be can be found in Heaven.

6 Conclusion

Confucius' *Analects* details three consummate virtues of wisdom, benevolence and courage. While wisdom emphasizes the intellectual aspect and benevolence the affective aspect of virtue, courage emphasizes the volitional aspects. All these three virtues find their sources in the Ultimate Reality, Heaven. True wisdom in a person is the capacity endowed by Heaven to understand other people and things around that person. True benevolence in a person is the quality to shine forth the virtue endowed by Heaven. True courage in a person is the calm acceptance of the destiny of Heaven. Our understanding of early Confucianism would be impoverished if we ignore its metaphysical dimension.

The correlation of Ultimate Reality with self-cultivation finds the best embodiment in *shengren* 聖人, the concept of the Confucian sage. In the Confucian tradition, the sage is the moral exemplar par excellence. In his conception of the universe, everything is related to everything else. All work together to constitute a perfect universe. There is no radical break from the source of creation as is assumed in Western religions. In such a universe, harmony among the constituent parts, such as person, society and nature, is considered normal. The most conspicuous human predicament is the demand for harmony versus the impulse of the self with the egoistic tendency to disrupt harmony. A sage is just such a man who is able to transcend the egoistic drive and to take the interest of the world as his personal interest. The harmony that a sage brings to the world becomes a model that a less spiritually advanced person can emulate. If the whole world acts according to the model, harmony becomes the order of the day. The sage in the Confucian tradition has both secular and sacred dimensions of existence. Secularly, he acts as leader in the world and effects a transformation of the world so much so that worldly harmony is achieved. Sacredly, the sage engages in self transformation, so much so that his ego is diminished and his self is merged with the cosmos. In the expression used by Zhuangzi 莊子, such a person is "inwardly sage and outwardly king" (see Burton Watson 1968). The ideal and reality thus come as one.

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Chapter 16

Confucian Harmony: A Philosophical Analysis

Chenyang Li

He 和 (harmony, harmonization) is the most cherished ideal in Chinese culture, and more specifically, in Confucianism. Focusing on the Confucian ideal of *he* developed during the classical period, this chapter explores its meaning and provides a philosophical analysis and exposition.

1 The Confucian Ethical, Political, and Metaphysical Ideal of *He*

“*He*和” is usually translated in English as “harmony,” though it may be more appropriately rendered as “harmonization” in many contexts. The word predates Confucianism. Its earliest form can be found in inscriptions on bones and tortoise shells of the Shang Dynasty (sixteenth to eleventh century BCE.) and later more frequently in inscriptions on bronze utensils of the Zhou Dynasty (1066?–256 BCE.) (see Guo 2000). In the earliest Confucian texts, we can find numerous occurrences of “*he*.” The meaning of *he* in these texts mostly has to do with sounds and how sounds interact with one another. It was probably used more frequently as a verb than a noun. The *Yijing: Zhong Fu* 易經·中孚 states, “a crane sings in the woods and its baby birds respond (*he*) to it” (TTC 1980: 71). The *Zuozhuan: Zhuanggong 22nd Year* 左傳·莊公二十二年 states, “male and female phoenixes fly together and their sounds mutually respond (*he*) vigorously” (TTC 1980: 1775). The *Shijing: Zhengfeng* 詩經·鄭風 contains the expression “responding (*he*) to

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brothers with songs” (TTC 1980: 342). In the *Analects*, we find “when Confucius sang with others and saw someone did well, he always made the person repeat the song before he responded (*he*)” (*Analects* 7.31; TTC 1980: 2484). Finally, in the *Zhouli: Diguan* 周禮·地官, there is the statement, “to use [the musical instrument] *chun* to respond (*he*) to drums” (TTC 1980: 721). In all these instances, “*he*” evidently is used to describe how various sounds, of animals, of people, and of instruments, respond to one another. This meaning of “responding” is preserved in the modern Chinese language when “*he*” is used as a verb (with the fourth tone), as in “*he shi* 和詩,” namely composing a poem in response to another poem by someone else. Xu Shen 許慎 (30–124) in his lexicon *Shuowenjiezi* 說文解字 defines “*he*” simply as “mutual responsiveness (of sounds)” (*Shuowenjiezi* 1992: 57). As a lexical definition, Xu’s is a report of these usages of “*he*” in earlier texts. It summarizes the root meaning of the word.

However, mere mutual responsiveness is not yet harmony. Harmony results only when sounds respond to one another in a mutually enhancing way. One of the earliest definitions of *he* as harmony, several 100 years before Xu Shen, can be found in the *Guoyu* 國語, a classical text written during the Spring and Autumn period (770–476 BCE) in close association with the Confucian tradition. In the chapter “*Zhouyu B* 周語上,” it is stated that “when sounds correspond and mutually *bao* one another it is called *he*” (Lai 2000: 166). “*Bao* 保” has a number of interrelated meanings such as “protect” (*bao hu* 保護), “nurture” (*yang yu* 養育), “rely on” (*yi kao* 依靠), “stabilize” (*an ding* 安定), and “assure” (*bao zheng* 保證) (*Sources of Terms* 1995: 117).

Understood in this way, *he* is not just that sounds mutually respond; it is that various sounds respond to one another in a mutually promoting, mutually complementing, and mutually stabilizing way. In this sense, some of the expressions cited above can be interpreted as harmonization. For example, the expression in the *Zuozhuan: Zhuangong* 22 can be interpreted as that “male and female phoenixes fly together and their sounds harmonize with vigor” (TTC 1980: 1775). The expression in the *Zhouli: Diguan* can be read as saying, “to use [the musical instrument] *chun* to harmonize the [sounds of] drums” (TTC 1980: 721). As such, expressions like “the *he* of the five sounds”¹ in the *Zuozhuan: Xigong* 24th Year 左傳·僖公二十四年 do not merely mean the mutual response of sounds, but also the harmonious interplay of these sounds (TTC 1980: 1818). “*He*” is used here as a noun, standing for a (dynamic) state of music rather than simply one sound responding to another. Therefore, we may conclude that the original meaning of *he* as harmony comes from the rhythmical interplay of various sounds, either in nature or by human beings, that is musical to the human ear, and that the prototype of *he* is found in music.² From the notion of *he* as the harmonious interplay of sounds, it is not difficult to see how it can be expanded, by analogous thinking, to mean harmony in other things and hence harmony in general.

¹Ancient Chinese used a five-tone scale in music.

²Another source of the early meaning of “*he*” is the word “*shu*,” which means the mixing of wine with water. See Li 2008.

Thus, we can say that, philosophically, harmony presupposes the existence of different things and implies a certain favorable relationship among them. Understood this way, harmony is not about conforming to a fixed order in the world. To the contrary, it is about creating orders.

One of the earliest ideas of *he* was proposed by a pre-Confucian scholar-minister, Shi Bo 史伯 (551–475 BCE). In the *Guoyu: Zhengyu* 國語·鄭語 Shi Bo elaborates on *he*:

Harmony (*he*) is indeed productive of things. But sameness does not advance growth.³ Smoothing one thing with another is called harmony. For this reason things come together and flourish. If one uses the same thing to complement the same thing, it is a dead end and will become wasted (Lai 2000: 746).

This is so because,

A single sound is nothing to hear, a single color⁴ does not make a pattern, a single taste does not satisfy the stomach, and a single item does not harmonize (Lai 2000: 747).⁵

According to Shi Bo, *he* was the philosophy of ancient sage-kings and it enabled their societies to prosper:

Therefore, the early kings mixed Earth with Metal, Wood, Water, and Fire, and produced varieties of things. They balanced one's taste with the five flavors, strengthened the four limbs in order to guard the body, harmonized (*he*) the six measures of sounds to improve the hearing, made the seven parts of the body upright to maintain the heart/mind, balanced the eight body parts to complete the whole person, established the nine social roles to set up pure virtues, and put together the ten offices to regulate the multitude. Therefore, there came into existence thousands of categories and tens of thousands of methods used in calculating millions of things and evaluating myriads of properties. They maintained constant incomes and managed countless items. Therefore the kings had land of nine provinces and had incomes to raise the multitude. They taught the people adequate lessons and harmonized (*he*) them as one family. Thus, it was harmony (*he*) at the highest level (Lai 2000: 746–747).

These sage-kings also set themselves as examples in promoting *he*:

The early kings married their wives from other families, sought wealth in all directions, and chose ministers who could remonstrate with the ruler. This way they reconciled a multitude of things. They were engaged in harmonization (*he-tong*) (Lai 2000: 747).

For Shi Bo, a harmonious world must be a diverse world. This is so because a healthy and prosperous world relies on its diverse things to go together. This is why the ancient sage-kings sought diversity. As in good cooking and in good music-making, a healthy family must consist of spouses from different tribes, a prosperous nation must seek wealth from various sources, and a good government must have

³I here translate “*ji* 繼” as “advance growth.” See the *Analecets* 6.3, “the superior person helps those in emergency but does not advance the cause of the rich” (*junzi zhouji bu jifu* 君子周急不繼富) (TTC 1980: 2478).

⁴Literally it reads “a single thing” or “a single item.” In his commentary of *Zhouli: Chunguan: Baozhangshi* 周禮·春官·保章氏, Zheng Xuan writes, “*wu* means color” (*wu se ye* 物,色也) (TTC 1980: 819).

⁵“聲一無聽,物一無文,味一無果,物一不講。” The *Shuowenjiezi* defines *jiang* (講) as “harmonizing (和解也)” (*Shuowenjiezi* 1992: 95).

ministers capable of holding different opinions. Harmony out of diversity produces a lively world; sameness without adequate difference can only lead to a dead end.

The *Zuozhuan: Zhaogong 20th Year* 左傳·昭公二十年 records a discussion of *he* by another scholar-minister, Yan Zi 晏子(?-500 BCE):

Harmony (*he*) is like making soup. One needs water, fire, vinegar, sauce, salt, and plum to cook fish and meat. One needs to cook them with firewood, mingle (*he*) them together in order to balance the taste. One needs to compensate for deficiencies and reduce excessiveness. The virtuous person (*junzi*) eats [such balanced food] in order to purify his heart/mind (TTC 1980: 2093).

The cook needs different things to make a balanced soup. She needs ingredients that taste and smell very different. Water and fire are usually seen as diametrically opposed to each other, yet neither is dispensable for cooking. One important aspect of good cooking is to be able to balance one excessive flavor with another. Yan Zi believes that enjoying such harmonized food can purify a virtuous person's heart/mind (*xin*). He continues:

Sounds are like flavors. Different elements complete one other: one breath, two styles, three types, four instruments, five sounds, six measures, seven notes, eight winds, and nine songs. Different sounds complement one another: the pure and the impure, the big and the small, the short and the long, the fast and the slow, the sorrowful and the joyful, the strong and the tender, the late and the quick, the high and the low, the in and the out, and the inclusive and the non-inclusive. Listening to this kind of music, the heart/mind of the virtuous person (*junzi* 君子) is purified (TTC 1980: 2093-4).

For Yan Zi, good music (e.g., a symphony) requires a variety of sounds in various modes. A good musician is like a good cook, capable of mingling together various sounds, some in sharp contrast, to make a coherent and harmonious piece. Like a good soup, enjoying such good music can also purify people's heart/mind.

Based on this understanding of *he*, Yan Zi argues that *he* must be distinguished from another notion, *tong* 同 (sameness). In Yan Zi's conversation with the duke of Qi, the duke evidently confuses *he* with *tong* when he praises how harmonious (*he*) it is between him and his minister Ju 據. Yan Zi points out that the relationship between the duke and his minister Ju is described more appropriately as *tong*, not *he*. Yan Zi uses the above examples of cooking and making music to show that *he* is not to be confused with *tong*. Yan Zi says that the moral of his examples of *he* also applies to the relationship between the ruler and ministers. He says:

When the duke says "yes," Ju also says "yes;" when the duke says "no," Ju also says "no." This is like mixing water with water. Who can eat such a soup? This is like using the same kind of instruments to produce music. Who can enjoy such music? This is why it is not all right to be *tong* (TTC 1980: 2094).

For Yan Zi, this kind of relationship between the duke and his minister Ju is sameness or conformity, not harmony. A harmonious relationship presupposes that they have different perspectives and different views on various issues. One may say that *tong* without adequate differences precludes harmony, and such a state is like a soup made of only one ingredient or a symphony composed of only one kind of instrument. A soup made of only one ingredient is tasteless, a symphony composed

of only one instrument is boring, and a government consisting of only one voice is stagnant and dangerous.

The thought of Shi Bo and Yan Zi was later appropriated in the Confucian classics *Zuo zhuan* and *Guoyu*.⁶ *He* later became a central ideal in Confucianism. In the *Analec*s 13.23 Confucius (551–479 BCE) adopts the ideal of *he*, making *he* a criterion for the good person (*junzi*). He says that “The *junzi* harmonizes but does not seek sameness, whereas the petty person seeks sameness but does not harmonize” (TTC 1980: 2508). For Confucius, a sensible person should be able to respect different opinions and be able to work with different people in a harmonious way. A major function of *li* 禮 (rites, rituals of propriety) is precisely to harmonize people of various kinds. The Confucian disciple Youruo 有若 is recorded in the *Analec*s 1.12 as saying that “of the functions of *li* harmonization is the [most] precious” (TTC 1980: 2458). There is little need to emphasize how Confucius valued the use of *li*.⁷ Confucius and Confucians see a direct connection between *li* and *he*. They take *li* to be a central aspect of government and believe that, through the good use of *li*, good government results in a harmonious society. According to the *Zhouli: Tianguan* 周禮·天官, another Confucian classic, one of the six primary functions of the state official Greater Minister is “[to minister] state rituals (*li*), in order to harmonize the nation” (TTC 1980: 645).⁸

Mencius (372–289 BCE), too, highly values *he*. He comments that among the three important things in human affairs, the harmony of people is the most important: “good timing is not as good as being advantageously situated, and being advantageously situated is not as good as having harmonious people” (*Mencius* 2B1; TTC 1980: 2693). In order to achieve a major goal in social affairs, one would need all three: good timing, being advantageously situated, and having harmonious people. The most precious thing, however, is to have people who work harmoniously with one another. Mencius praises Liu Xiahui 柳下惠 as “the sage who is able to harmonize” (*Mencius* 5B.1; TTC 1980: 2741). Liu is well known for his familiarity with *li* and for his conviction of harmonious co-existence.⁹

Xunzi 荀子 (313?–238 BCE) also emphasizes *he*. In the *Xunzi: Xiushen* 荀子·修身, he concurs with Confucius on the importance of *li* to harmony. Xunzi says that “[only] when following *li* is one harmonious and regulated” (TTM 1986: 289). He also echoes Confucius in saying that “To harmonize with others by goodness is being reasonably accommodating” and “to harmonize with others by wickedness is fawning” (*Xunzi: Xiushen*; TTM 1986: 289). For Xunzi, harmony is not without principle. This strikes a similar note to Confucius, whose ideal of harmony is

⁶ Unlike the *Zuo zhuan*, the *Guoyu* is not one of the Confucian 13 Classics. But it has been attributed to the same author as the *Zuo zhuan* and has a similar philosophical orientation.

⁷ For my discussion of *li*, readers can see Li 2007.

⁸ Beside *li* (禮), *he* is also closely related to other key Confucian concepts such as *li* 理, *ren* 仁, and *yi* 義. Space does not allow me to expand my study into these concepts in relation to *he* in the present chapter.

⁹ When the state of Qi attacked Liu Xiahui’s native state Lu in 634 B.C.E., Liu sent off people to persuade the ruler of Qi “not to harm one another” (Lai 2000: 295).

“harmony without mindlessly following others” (*Liji*: *Zhongyong* 10; TTC 1980: 1626).

He is not just about human relationship. The *Jiaotesheng* 郊特牲 chapter of the Confucian classic *Liji* 禮記 states, “when *yin* and *yang* harmonize, the myriad things get their due” (*Liji*; TTC 1980: 1446). Xunzi elaborates on the same idea in more detail: “with the great transformation of *yin* and *yang*, the generous supply of the wind and the rain, the myriad things each get harmonized so they can live, and get their nurture so they grow” (*Xunzi*: *Tianlun*; TTM 1986: 327). Here Xunzi concurs with the *Yijing*, the *Tuanzhuàn* 彖傳 chapter of which develops the notion of “grand harmony” (*taihe* 太和): “How great is the *Qian* 乾 (Heaven)! From it the myriad things originate under Heaven....With the changes of the *Qian* way, the myriad things all keep on their own path of life. Thus they preserve the grand harmony” (*Yijing*; TTC 1980: 14). “Grand Harmony” is the most important ideal in the *Yijing*. The world is full of different things, yet all these things harmonize as they go through incessant changes. Confucians have faith in this ultimate harmony of the world.

Perhaps the most concentrated articulation and elaboration of this Confucian ideal of harmony is found in the *Zhongyong* 中庸 chapter of the classical text *Liji*. The *Zhongyong* states, “Centrality is the great foundation under Heaven, and harmony is the great way under Heaven. In achieving centrality and harmony, Heaven and Earth maintain their appropriate positions and the myriad things flourish” (*Liji*; TTC 1980: 1625). In a separate essay I have argued that, in the *Zhongyong*, centrality is the way to achieve harmony (Li 2004). Without harmony, Heaven and Earth would be out of their proper places, and nothing in the world would be able to flourish. Therefore, harmony is the highest ideal in the *Zhongyong*. The *Zhongyong* lays out the foundation for Confucian metaphysics and promotes harmony as the highest ideal.

Harmony, as understood in Confucianism, can take place at various levels. It can take place within the individual. A person can harmonize various parts of his or her body, the mind-heart, and various pursuits in life into a well-functioning, organic whole (Li 2010). Harmony can take place between individuals at the level of the family, the community, the nation, and the world.¹⁰ This may include harmony between societies, harmony within a society with different ethnic groups (or political organizations), harmony within the same ethnic group with different kinships, and harmony within the same kinship. Harmony also can take place between human beings and the natural universe. Confucianism does not exclude intrapersonal harmony, which Daoism emphasizes, but Confucianism puts tremendous weight on interpersonal harmony, such as harmony between ruler and ministers, parents and children, husband and wife, between siblings and between friends. It also places tremendous weight on the harmony between human society and the natural world. Its ultimate goal is to achieve grand harmony throughout the cosmos.

¹⁰For an insightful discussion of intercultural harmony from a Confucian perspective and its implications for the contemporary world, see Shen 2003. For a detailed explication of Confucian harmony at these levels, see Li 2013.

For Confucians, harmony defines the kind of life a person should live, the kind of society people should construct, the kind of world humanity should maintain. The difference between harmony and disharmony is one between right and wrong, good and bad, and success and failure. The *Wuxing* 五行 text of the Guodian Chu Bamboo Slips, which is generally accepted as a Confucian text, states that “the harmony of the Five virtuous practices is called Virtue; the harmony of the Four practices is called Goodness. Goodness is the way of humanity. Virtue is the way of Heaven” (Liu 2003: 69). The Four virtuous practices are Humanity, Appropriateness, Propriety, and Wisdom; the Five virtuous practices also include an additional Sageliness. The harmonious practices of these virtues are the way of humanity and the way of Heaven. They are the right way.¹¹ Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 BCE), the influential Han Confucian, declared that “the greatest virtue is harmony” and advocated to “use central harmony in managing society” (Dong 1986; TTM 1986: 805). For Dong, the ability to harmonize in the world is indeed the most precious.

As far as the need for harmony is concerned, Confucians tend to see more consistency than distinctions between the “private” and the “public” (as is seen in Western liberalism), between the political and the non-political, and between human society and the natural world. When persons and things are engaged in a healthy, stable interplay and each gets its due, it is deemed as harmony; the opposite as disharmony. When a plant is harmonized with its surroundings it thrives; when a person is harmonized with his environment, he flourishes. The ideal of an individual is not only to harmonize within one’s own person, but also with other individuals. The ideal of a society is not only to harmonize within the society, but also with other societies. The ideal of humanity is not only to harmonize among its members but also with the rest of the cosmos as well.

2 A Philosophical Analysis and Exposition of *He*

Based on the study in Sect. 1, I would like to make the following observations concerning the Confucian notion of harmony. First, harmony is a metaphysical as well as an ethical notion; it describes both how the world at large operates and how human beings ought to act. Harmony is the Way, the Confucian way. Second, harmony is by its very nature relational. It presupposes the co-existence of multiple parties; “a single item does not harmonize.” As far as harmony is concerned, these parties possess relatively equal significance. Harmony is always contextual; a mentality of harmony is a contextual mentality. Epistemologically, it calls for a holistic approach. Persons of harmonious mentality see things, and make judgment of things, in relation, in context, not in isolation or separation. In this connection, harmony is not a one-directional “adjustment” in conformity to pre-existing cosmic orders as Max Weber has read it (Weber 1951: 152–53). The requirement of harmony places a constraint on each party in interaction, and, in the meantime, provides a

¹¹ For a detailed discussion of the Confucian harmony of virtues in the *Wuxing*, see Li 2011.

context for each party to have optimal space to flourish. In the Confucian view, the world is not there just for one item or one kind of thing. It is for the “myriad things.” Nothing in the world can claim absolute superiority to all others. Parties in a harmonious relationship are both the condition and the constraint to one another’s growth. A harmonious relationship implies mutual complement and mutual support between the parties (Cheng 1991: 187). There is mutual benefit, even though harmony cannot be reduced to mutual benefit. Third, Confucian harmony is by no means “perfect agreement” as is often (mis)understood. In harmony, co-existing parties must be in some way different from one another; while harmony does not preclude sameness of all kinds, sameness itself is not harmony. Harmony is different from stagnant concordance in that harmony is sustained by energy generated through the interaction of different elements in creative tension. Although a harmonious relationship in society may involve friendliness and love, friendliness or love is not a necessary condition for harmony. Even unfriendly parties can co-exist in harmony. This point, as I will show shortly, has implications for an appropriate understanding of the relation between harmony and strife.

In what follows, I will first articulate a Confucian view on the relation between harmony, sameness, and strife, then explore in the context of Confucian philosophy why harmony is so important to Confucians, and finally, through a brief comparison of Confucianism and Christianity, try to answer some questions about Confucian harmony by discussing issues regarding gaps or potential gaps between moral ideals and their implementation.

It is important that we do not simple-mindedly interpret the Confucian attitude toward sameness. Difference and sameness between things exist at various levels. Confucians do not advocate difference for the sake of difference, nor do they reject sameness altogether. Obviously, even though the sage-kings are said to have sought spouses from other tribes, the couples were all human beings (i.e., a kind of sameness). Even though one would need different instruments in order to make good music, they are still musical instruments (i.e., another kind of sameness). Indeed, some ancient Chinese texts advocate a certain kind of sameness. For instance, in the *Jingfa* 經法: *Sidu* 四度 of the Silk Texts of the Mawangdui Han Tombs, is the statement that “Joining the Heaven and Earth, responding to the people’s will, establishing both the civilian and military service, this is called the superior *tong* 同 (sameness)” (Chen 2007: 103). Of course, the “superior *tong* 上同” is not just any kind of sameness; it is sameness at the optimal level. Confucius also advises us “not to plan together with people of different roads (pursuits)” (*Analects* 15.39; TTC 1980: 2518). Conversely, we should plan together with those following the same (*tong*) roads. Mencius praises the sage-king Shun 舜 “good at *tong* with others” (*Mencius* 2A8; TTC 1980: 2691). Furthermore, the *Zuozhuan*: *Chenggong* 16th Year 左傳·成公十六年 states that: “when people live in abundance, they will be together harmoniously and listen [to the ruler’s commands]” (TTC 1980: 1917). The expression of “being together harmoniously” combines both “*he* 和” and “*tong* 同.” We can say that, at an appropriate level, sameness is an ingredient of harmony and, as such, must be maintained and valued. Therefore, the kind of sameness that ancient and Confucian scholars reject must not be understood as sameness per se,

but “over-presence of sameness,” like the one between the duke and his minister Ju in the Yan Zi story. An over-presence of sameness can occur in many ways. It can be caused by a lack of diversity when diversity is called for. For example, a cook only has one kind of ingredient for a soup. It can be caused by forced sameness when sameness is sought for the sake of sameness. For example, a powerful person forces the same opinion on everyone else, or a fawning person pretends the same view in conformity to his superior for ulterior purposes; both undercut conditions necessary for harmony.

For Confucians, over-presence of sameness, whether seeking spouses within the same tribe or making music with the same type of instrument, is not conducive to harmony. Even though members of a stamp collection club have to share common interest at some level (i.e., they are fond of collecting stamps), collecting the same stamp, e.g., the Year of the Monkey stamp issued by the U.S. Post Office in 2004, does not make a good stamp collection club; such a club will probably not last, because this kind of sameness “does not advance growth,” as Shi Bo said. In the political arena, even though laws must be made to treat everyone equally (a kind of sameness), making laws that overly demand uniformity is not conducive to good society. What kind of sameness is appropriate to harmony is always a contextual matter and cannot be determined in absolute terms. Because the harmony orientation takes conflict as its primary opponent, there is a tendency to overlook the other side of the danger, namely the over-presence of sameness. Ancient scholars emphasize the difference between harmony and sameness because people tend to confuse them, taking mere sameness as harmony. Strictly speaking, over-presence of sameness is a lack of harmony, and therefore it is a kind of disharmony.

While emphasizing the harmonious interplay of different things, Chinese philosophers appear to have not given much attention to strife, or they may have left the impression that strife is to be avoided for the sake of harmony. A certain type of strife, however, is inherent in harmony. This point is implied in the ancient scholars’ emphasis on the difference between harmony and sameness (*tong*).

Harmony presupposes differences and has to be achieved through differences. Difference entails, at least potentially, strife. We may say that there can be two kinds of strife between various things. The first kind I call tension and cooperative opposition. Different things in a relationship have tension between them in that they compete, at a minimum, for space and time. For instance, people at a busy train station heading in various directions may experience tension and opposition (potential conflict); they may step in one another’s way. Tension and opposition like this are obviously not harmony; they can jeopardize harmony. This happens, for instance, when the tension and opposition between busy people erupts into a stampede. Opposing parties, however, can also be harmonized without harming one another. For example, this happens when people at a busy train station take turn, make room for one another, and move forward in an orderly way, even though in different directions. The transition from mere tension and opposition to harmony takes coordination or cooperation of the involved parties, either consciously or unconsciously. Taking a panoramic view of such a busy station, one has to marvel how a harmonious scene is being produced by people heading in different, even opposite, directions.

This kind of difference as tension and opposition is a pre-condition for harmony; without it there is mere sameness rather than harmony.

The second type of strife is more severe. It is the kind in which one force aims at destroying or eliminating the other or others. For example, a murderer kills innocent people, and wolves eat sheep. Let us call this second type antagonistic opposition. This type of strife is either itself disharmony or a key element of disharmony. In this case, harmony is achieved through overcoming strife. An overcoming process may take one of two forms. First, it can be the elimination of strife. We remove a serial murderer and the community is restored to harmony. However, for Confucians, elimination is not the prototypical path to harmony. For the most part, harmony can be achieved through the second form by putting strife under control without elimination, namely by turning the second type of strife into the first type. Whereas a large population of sheep tends to increase the population of wolves, the population of wolves has to be lowered when they over-eat sheep to cause a shortage in food supply. Eventually, the wolves and the sheep have to strike a balance through some kind of natural “negotiation.”¹² When harmony is achieved, the sheep provide food for the wolves while the wolves weed out the unhealthy and keep the sheep population in check. Of course, sometimes violent disharmony is inevitable. On the individual level, the strife between a wolf and a sheep may end in elimination. Where the population of wolves and the population of sheep strike a balance, some sheep and/or wolves have already been lost in the process. In cases like this, Confucians would say that strife between the two individuals serves as an instrumental step toward harmony in the long run and at a large scale for the world. Dong Zhongshu writes, “the system of Heaven and Earth integrates harmony and disharmony, centrality and non-centrality; these are employed timely to be most effective” (Dong 1986; TTM 1986: 805). Since harmony is not only a state, but more importantly a process, disharmony is necessarily present during the process of harmonization.

In this sense, human beings can exist harmoniously with nature even though we have to consume natural resources. In order to survive, we have to consume, and therefore to eliminate lives in nature. But we can do it in a balanced way and achieve harmony with nature. Unlike the natural world, human beings have the capacity to play an active role to promote harmony in the world. This capacity enables human beings to avoid unnecessary damage and harm in achieving harmony. For instance, imposing too large a human population burden on nature may eventually destroy the human habitat, and consequently reduce the human population to a level bearable to Earth. But human beings have the power to restrain their behavior and to maintain a balance with nature before such a catastrophe takes place.

Confucian harmony is not pure submissiveness or absolute avoidance of conflict. In Sect. 10 of the *Liji: Zhongyong*, Confucius’s disciple Zilu 子路 asks about strength. Confucius identifies two types of strength. One type is the strength of the northerners, who will fight unto death for the right cause; the southerners have a different kind of strength: they are tolerant and flexible, and they do not avenge the

¹² Obviously human beings can affect the level of the balance between the two populations, so can other species.

unjust. Confucius approves both types of strength, including the strength of “central standing without leaning to one side” (*Liji*; TTC 1980: 1626). This passage suggests that Confucius endorses an integration of both kinds of strength into a harmonious interplay, rather than simply taking the mean between the two. The strength of the northerners may appear extreme (“to fight unto death”), but at times it is necessary in order to achieve and maintain harmony in the large picture of human affairs. Therefore, it should not be ruled out. This is why Confucius tells Zilu that “the *junzi* harmonizes without following the flow” (*Liji*; TTC 1980: 1626). To blindly follow the flow of other people is what Xunzi has called “fawning” as opposed to “reasonably accommodating” (*Xunzi: Xiushen*; TTM 1986: 289); it will lead to an over-presence of sameness rather than long-term harmony. A harmony deteriorating into over-presence of sameness loses internal energy; it cannot maintain itself as harmony and needs renewal.

On this understanding, Confucian harmony is not mere agreement without difference; it is not to preserve peace at any cost. Harmony is harmonization; real harmony is a dynamic process. It does not rule out strife, but uses strife in order to achieve greater harmony. Harmony comes from, and is maintained through, harmonization; it requires action. Having faith in God does not mean that Christians will not fight for their cause. Similarly, Confucians do not just sit there waiting for harmony to present itself. To the contrary, Confucians have a mission in life: to harmonize the world in the process of the formation of the triad with Heaven and Earth. What makes Confucianism a philosophy of harmony rather than a philosophy of strife is that it takes harmony as the ultimate goal and measures success or failure of an action by whether it contributes to greater harmony in the world.

Then, why is harmony so central to Confucianism? Admittedly, Confucianism is not the only tradition that values harmony. After all, who would not think harmony to be a good thing? My point is that, in comparison with other major world traditions, Confucianism gives harmony utmost importance not matched by most major world traditions and it holds firmly that harmony can be realized. Here I would like to show that the absence of a pre-determined fixed order in the Confucian cosmos and the Confucian belief in the goodness of human nature are among the main reasons why harmony is so central to Confucianism.

David Hall and Roger Ames have pointed out insightfully that Confucian harmony, or *he*, marks the difference between Western “Truth-seekers” on the one hand and Chinese “Way-seekers” on the other (Hall and Ames 1998: 180).¹³ For Hall and Ames, “Truth-seeking” is the prototypical mode of doing philosophy in the West, while “Way-seeking” is its counterpart in China. Seeking “Truth,” with a capital “T,” is to look for something absolute, eternal, and ultimately true, like Plato’s Forms. In contrast, the Chinese Way is not pre-set and needs to be generated through human activities. In Hall and Ames’ terminology, whereas Westerners typically follow a logical order in their interpretation of the world, the Chinese typically follow an

¹³ Obviously, not all Westerners are “Truth-seekers” and not all Chinese are “Way-seekers.” But to the extent that these two patterns have been the predominant tendencies respectively, I believe that Hall and Ames are right.

aesthetic order. Logical order is achieved by application to a given situation of an antecedent pattern of relatedness. Aesthetic order is achieved by the creation of novel patterns (Hall and Ames 1998: 16). Aesthetic order requires openness, disclosure, and flexibility. In the Chinese aesthetic order, various things have to be synthesized in order to generate a harmonious whole, like *yin* and *yang*, and the five processings (*wuxing* 五行).

In support of Hall and Ames' interpretation, I would point out that ancient Chinese cosmology holds the belief that the world has evolved from chaos, the belief that there is a process from no order to the generation of an order, as articulated in such texts as the *Huainanzi: tianwenxun* 淮南子·天文训 and later in Zhou Dunyi's 周敦颐 *An Explanation of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate (Taiji tushuo* 太极图说). Based on this belief, the Chinese order is fluid and open-ended; the order of *yin* and *yang*, and of the five processings at most provides a general direction rather than a detailed road map for human action.

This Confucian understanding of world order differs significantly from some other major world traditions (see Li 2008). In Christianity, for example, God created the world with a purpose for each and every part of it. The will of God is carved in nature as natural law. God has set up order in the world and boundaries between all parts of the creation. Accordingly, the right way in this world is to follow God's rules and to obey the order given by God. Unlike most major world traditions, Confucianism does not believe in an anthropomorphic God as creator. Consequently, in the Confucian world there is no order or natural law from God. Without a pre-set fixed order, the world has to generate an order of its own. Although sometimes the Confucian Heaven (*tian* 天) appears to play a role that resembles the Christian God in some way, it is not a transcendent power as the Christian God is.¹⁴ The Confucian Heaven is a member of the Triad Heaven-Earth-Humanity (*tian-di-ren* 天地人), and it does not have the power to impose a pre-determined order on the world from without. Rather, as merely one member of the Triad the Confucian Heaven needs to achieve order through coordination with the other two-thirds, namely Earth and Humanity.

For Confucians, therefore, order in the world has to be achieved through harmonization. Take again the example of the populations of sheep and wolves. On the Confucian thinking, there is no fixed order from God about their populations. Nature keeps a balance between the two. Ancient Confucians believe that the will of Heaven is revealed through the people. When the ruler loses the mandate of Heaven, it is time for the people to replace him. Perhaps the fact of the matter is that there is no such thing as the mandate of Heaven. Rather it may be that when the ruler is so oppressive and causes so much social disharmony that the people can no longer put up with him, it is time to replace him with another ruler, with one who can

¹⁴Some people may think otherwise. Here I follow Hall and Ames' interpretation (Hall and Ames 1998). Perhaps we should distinguish popular Chinese beliefs and Confucian theology here. An average person may believe that Heaven is a fixed entity and that Heaven has set a pre-determined order in the world. Confucian theology, as delineated in such texts as the *Liji:Zhongyong* and the *Yijing*, clearly offers a different view.

harmonize with the people. Confucians see a harmony (not necessarily friendliness) coming out of this continuous interplay of opposing forces. Through such interplay various parts of the world “negotiate” with one another in order to strike a balance, not from a pre-destined principle but through some kind of “compromise,” some kind of “give-and-take.” It is like rocks and water in the river: both can have their way yet both have to yield in some way. In such a world, any order that exists has to be an outcome of harmonization.

Elsewhere I have argued that in Chinese social practice, the Chinese understanding of truth plays an important role that differs from the West (Li 1999: Chap. 2). The Chinese typically do not see truth as correspondence with an objective fact in the world; rather they understand truth more as a way of being, namely being a good person, a good father or a good son. For them there is no objective truth carved in stone and, consequently, there is not an ultimate fixed order in the world for things to operate. The Confucian Dao is the process of generating an actual order in the world rather than a pre-given fixed order itself. Without pre-determined truth, humanity in coordination with Heaven and Earth has to set boundaries for themselves and for other things as they move forward in the world.

Between being too principled and being too flexible, Christian theology is more likely to risk the former than Confucian theology, and Confucian theology is more likely to risk the latter than Christian theology.¹⁵ Acting out of principles (e.g., the Ten Commandments) from God, the Christian stands firm, but she may misunderstand God (as during the Crusades); being principled leaves her little room for flexibility: God is always right and so are God’s commands. Acting on the ideal of harmony, Confucians have few specifics to go by before they themselves make the specifics, and being made by human beings, the specifics should never be taken as absolute. Thus Confucians tend to be less rigid, but risk being too flexible in the pursuit of harmony. It would be naïve, however, to think that a happy union of the Christian and the Confucian would solve all the problems: such a union carries the weakness of not being principled enough when needing to be principled and of not being flexible enough when in need of flexibility.

In addition to the absence of a pre-determined fixed order in the world, the Confucian belief in harmony has been re-enforced by a faith in the goodness of human nature. Early on in history, Mencius articulated and argued emphatically that human nature is good. His doctrine has had a long-lasting influence on the Confucian tradition. This notion sets the orientation for Confucians to look for ways to resolve conflicts in society without elimination. This orientation is fundamentally different from that of looking to identify and eliminate “evil-doers” in the world. In order to root out “evil-doers,” the primary approach would be to attack and destroy the enemy as effectively as possible; negotiation is merely a waste of time and of

¹⁵This is not to say that a Confucian may not be as stubborn as a Christian on one’s commitment to a particular moral ideal. But the typical Confucian has less faith in an objective Platonic moral order set in the universe than the typical Christian, and therefore the Confucian’s fundamental moral principles are less clearly cut. In this regard, the Confucian probably stands at the mid-point between the “water-like” Daoist and the “righteous” Christian.

opportunity. On the other hand, in order to work out differences between people who are basically good, the primary approach should be looking for ways to negotiate with them; even though confrontation cannot always be ruled out, it should be minimized. Based on the Confucian belief in the goodness of human nature, it is readily conceivable that the world at large is not fundamentally antagonistic to human existence, because the non-human world, which is incapable of consciously harming others, is either benign or neutral toward humanity. Therefore, harmonization, rather than elimination, should be the primary consideration in dealing with problems in the world.

In practice, the ideal of harmony translates into a kind of pragmatic attitude or mentality. It is this mentality that makes the whole world of difference between the philosophy of harmony and the philosophy of combativeness. The attitude of harmony has a strategic significance. It makes us more willing to engage in negotiation, more willing to compromise, and less willing to resort to confrontation and conquest. It enables us take into consideration the whole picture of an issue and give each party its due. Therefore, it is more conducive to peaceful solutions to problems in the world.

At this point, it is appropriate to discuss issues related to the Confucian ideal of harmony and its implementation. First, having faith in harmony does not imply that things always harmonize. As a cherished ideal, harmony provides the guideline as well as an account of certain cultural patterns in Confucian society. Having faith in harmony is to have faith in a world that gives everything its due and lets the myriad things flourish. However, things may not always harmonize. In Christianity, God's will is not always followed by human beings; natural law gets violated; and not all Christians love their neighbors as they should. Similarly, in the Confucian world, harmony is not always achieved and maintained; disruptions take place and disharmony ensues; not all Confucians cherish harmony as much as they should. A Confucian who has faith in the harmony of the world is somewhat like a Christian who has faith in God, even though God and harmony are by no means parallel: Sometimes things go terribly wrong; yet a Christian would keep her faith that things eventually will turn around because all is in the hands of God; similarly, a Confucian in trying times would believe that disharmony is temporary and harmony will prevail. It is harmony as the ultimate ideal that makes the Confucian world a meaningful world, and it is harmonization that gives the Confucians a sense of sacred mission in the world.

Second, embracing an ideal does not imply a consensus on its application. Under the same ideal, people may seek different ways to implement it. Christians may not agree with one another on how they should put God's words into practice, even though they share a common belief in God and a common belief that one should obey God's will. Similarly, although Confucians take harmony as their highest ideal and all strive for its achievement, they may not always agree with one another on how harmony is identified and how it is best achieved. It is possible that what is called "harmony" by one person may be disguised oppression to another. Indeed, there have been times when under the name of "harmony" oppression persisted, just as oppression under the name of God existed in the history of Christianity. Obviously

it is not the case that once we embrace the concept of harmony, all problems will disappear. My aim in this chapter is to elucidate the Confucian concept and ideal of harmony, not to provide a precise conception of harmony on a particular issue. Just as Christians need to figure out among themselves what God's words mean to them, Confucians have to translate the ideal of harmony into specific terms. Nevertheless, for Confucians it is still important to promote the ideal of harmony rather than disharmony, and to prioritize the goal of harmony, just as it is still important to promote justice rather than injustice, even though we may not agree on exactly what justice is in a specific case.

Finally, one may ask, how are you supposed to promote harmony when your enemy is attacking you? In a world of conflicts today, isn't the Confucian ideal of harmony a mere naiveté? The Confucian would respond as follows: When your enemy is attacking you, you need to protect yourself. If he slaps your right cheek, you should not give him your left cheek. Harmonization requires action and resolve to overcome disharmonious elements in the world. However, you must understand that in the long run, the best life is to be lived in harmony and peace. Therefore, you should avoid doing extreme things that create or perpetuate your enemy, and even when you engage in fighting with your enemy, you should try to turn conflict into harmony. In other words, one should maintain a harmony mentality rather than the combatant mentality. The Confucian classic *Zhouli: Dongguan* 周禮·冬官 states that "harmony results in peace" (*he ze an* 和則安) (TTC 1980: 914). Peace cannot be obtained and maintained without harmony. Temporary peace through oppression and suppression is not real peace, and it does not last. In order to achieve real peace and to maintain peace throughout the world, we would do well to learn from the Confucian ideal of harmony.

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