

Chapter 15

Why Care? A Feminist Re-appropriation of Confucian *Xiao* 孝

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This chapter deals with the contemporary debate on the intersectionality of Confucianism with feminism in general and its compatibility with care ethics in particular.¹ My intent here is to propose a hybrid feminist care ethics that is grounded in Confucianism by, on the one hand, integrating specifically the concepts of *xiao* 孝 and *ren* 仁 into existing care ethics so as to strengthen and broaden its theoretical horizon and, on the other, revising Confucian gender requirements in light of feminist demands for gender equity. But before I get into the core of the argument, let me give a bit of background that helped shape this paper for me academically as well as personally. As we sometimes do, when we promise to deliver a paper, we procrastinate till the last minute, and as the deadline approached, I had a rather peculiar dilemma: Should I do everything humanly possible to complete the paper that I had promised to deliver or should I care for my mother-in-law, who is now quite ill and requires daily assistance? The issue of elder care is no doubt an existential question all must ponder, especially those of us with increasingly frail parents and demanding careers. But this is even more so for me not just personally, but academically. As you see, the subject that I intend to dissect is precisely the dilemma that I am facing: Why should I care?

Personal Autonomy vs. Filial Obligations

In fact, according to the Western social convention, none of the family members is morally obliged to care for my mother-in-law. A quick glance at contemporary Western scholarship where the issue of familial care is, by and large, absent shows

¹ This chapter employs the Ames and Rosemont 1998 translation of the *Analects*.

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that familial care simply is not considered a “moral” issue worthy of rigorous scholarly attention. And part of the neglect is due to the conflict between familial obligation and the liberal principle of voluntarism and self-determination. Since familial relationships are involuntary and adult children’s filial obligation cannot be voluntarily formulated, it follows that there is no familial obligation at all. As Christina Sommers observed back in 1989,

The contemporary philosopher is, on the whole, actively unsympathetic to the idea that we have *any* duties defined by relationships to which we have not voluntarily entered. . . . Because the special relationships that constitute the family as a social arrangement are, in this sense, not voluntarily assumed, many moralists feel bound in principle to dismiss them altogether (Sommers 1989: 730).

In other words, for the vast majority of ethicists in the West, one’s familial obligation, if there is any at all, belongs to the realm of the personal, the involuntary sentiment that is altogether outside the consideration of the rational and the ethical. One might be the beneficiary of the care performed by one’s family, but one has no filial duty to reciprocate. So, according to liberal social convention, I have no obligation, moral or otherwise, to care for my mother-in-law despite the affective ties that have intimately bounded us for the last 12 years. This liberal insistence on self-determination and voluntarism, according to Sommers, indeed “undermines the network of mutual obligations that characterizes the family and its members” (Sommers 1989: 730).

At best, one’s familial obligation can only be subsumed under the model of voluntary friendship first proposed by Jane English where the extent of one’s filial duty is determined solely by the strength and the duration of one’s friendship with one’s parents. And in the event of estrangement, the grown child, as English argues, has no obligation to care for his parents beyond his “general duty to help those in need” (English 1989: 687). In other words, one has no special duty to care for one’s parents whom one is no longer friendly with, and the general duty to care for those in need applies equally to one’s parents and strangers on the street. The familial tie that binds oneself to one’s parents, at face value, renders no moral obligations at all. As English writes simply, in response to her own essay title – “What do Grown Children Owe Their Parents?” – “I will contend that the answer is ‘nothing’” (English 1989: 683). Nicholas Dixon’s revival of English’s friendship model continues to assert the voluntary aspect of familial obligation, as if familial obligation and peer friendship rest on the same ground of personal choice. As Dixon writes, “Central to the friendship model is the extent of filial obligation is determined by the extent of our friendly relations with our parents. Exactly the same holds in the case of peer friendships, where deeper friendships generate more extensive duties of friendship” (Dixon 1995: 83). Simply put, one cares for one’s parents voluntarily the same way as one cares for one’s friends, but there exists no filial duty, as such, in its own right. In the case of my mother-in-law, my voluntary care for her can only be justified based on the duration and the strength of my friendship with her. And if it so happens that there is no friendly relationship existing between us, I am, based on this liberal, friendship model, free to walk away. And worse yet, if the choice is to care between my peer friend and my

mother-in-law whom I might or might not be quite fond of, based on this model, my obligation to help must gravitate towards my peer friend instead of my mother-in-law. After all, few of us are our in-laws' BFF.

Even in Simon Keller's recently formulated "special goods theory" that attempts to go beyond the voluntary "friendship" model in order to provide a distinct theoretical ground for filial obligation, filial obligation continues to be placed below the value of personal autonomy. According to Keller, even though we have a special obligation to care for our parents due to the unique position that we occupy to provide for and to receive special goods from our parents, if the demand of filial obligation conflicts with personal autonomy, then it ceases to be relevant, since personal autonomy is an immutable value in Western culture. Keller reflects on the two restrictions on his "special goods theory" of filial obligation: "First, the child's duties to provide special goods to the parent should not be such as seriously to impede the child's ability to live a good life" and the ability to make autonomous choices about the shape of one's own life "is regarded in contemporary Western culture as being, a central component of the good life and a central entitlement of the individual" (Keller 2006: 269). And second, not all children have a special obligation to care for their parents, if the parents are proven to be undeserving, or there is a personality conflict, or one has a limited ability to provide special goods to the parents (Keller 2006: 269). In short, personal autonomy is the supreme good, against which all other goods, including one's filial duty, must be ranked accordingly. Caring for one's family simply has no *prima facie* value in developing one's moral sense of self in liberal, Western discourses on ethics. Obviously, in the liberal universe, my personal autonomy and self-determination are the central focus of my ethical reasoning, and caring for my mother-in-law should then be treated as an act of charity. In a nutshell, according to the liberal principle of personal autonomy and voluntarism, one gives only when one is willing and when one is able. Familial relationships exert no moral pull over the self whose moral reasoning rests solely on its rational detachment and a de-subjectivized viewpoint.

It is against this philosophical background that the rise of care ethics in the early 1980s, in part, can be seen as a response to the Western canonical dichotomy of the public, "masculine" sense of disinterested justice vs. the private, "feminine" sense of affective care. Carol Gilligan's seminal work, *In A Different Voice*, provides an alternative care centered perspective that is said to be more common among women in contrast to the principle, rule based perspective among men in the discourse of ethics (Gilligan 1993). Sarah Ruddick in her pioneering piece, "Maternal Thinking," explicitly builds the care perspective on the practice of mothering in the mother-child relationship, where the needs of the dependent and the vulnerable forms the basis of one's moral thinking (Ruddick 1980). It is a common stance among care ethicists that women's experiences and practices of care in private, unchosen relationships inform us a great deal about the nature of morality; to some, care must come even before justice in the practice of ethics (Held 2006). Yet, morality, seen through the traditional, "masculine" lenses, only deals with the disinterested public affairs that are determined by a disembodied self-conscious will, and hence the private, affective ties in unchosen familial relationships fall outside the consideration

of what is moral. As far as morality is concerned, one's family and strangers on the street have the equal weight in one's moral deliberation; one's affective familial ties, in and of themselves, simply have no moral pull over one's own person. In other words, my rational, noumenal self where moral deliberation takes place, as Immanuel Kant insists, is completely unencumbered by my affective phenomenal self. My contingent relationship with my mother-in-law, hence, does not oblige me in any special way to care for her in times of need and my indifference to her needs in turn does not diminish my moral sense of the autonomous self.

Of course, my mother-in-law has a right to seek medical care, but no one is compelled, on the liberal, Kantian ground where personal autonomy reigns supreme, to care for her beyond the care provided by the medical institution or hired personal assistance at home. When my mother-in-law's condition reached a critical point, the discussions in the family, to my astonishment, continued to center around two things: First, that my mother-in-law needs to be more independent; and second, that it is up to her and her husband to hire an additional help. In fact, due to her love of independence, my mother-in-law once drove herself to a local store under heavy medications that included *Oxycodone* and *Dilaudid*, strong narcotic drugs that have the same side effects as morphine and heroin. So considering all this, what should one do? Do I leave her to die in a slow and self-destructive way since no one expects anything of me, or should I step in and make a case for Confucian *xiao* in life as well as on paper?

Obviously, my choice is clear: I choose to care. And I can honestly say that my eventual commitment to caring for my mother-in-law is, by and large, propelled by my understanding of Confucian *xiao*, a moral vision that sees human interdependency as a strength in, and not a distraction from, human flourishing. It is my take that, echoing the words of Confucius, *xiao* is the root from which humanity grows (Ames and Rosemont 1998: 1.2). Or as Confucius says, told through the beginning chapter of the *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing* 孝經), *xiao* is the root of excellence and whence comes the birth of moral education (*Xiaojing* 1).² In other words, one's moral sense grows from one's genuine feelings and care for one's intimately relationships in the family. Morality for Confucius as well as for care ethicists, unlike the liberal model, simply cannot bypass one's affective ties in the familial realm. Caring for the needs of the dependent and the vulnerable in the personal realm is the beginning of one's moral thinking for care ethics. In the same way, Confucian *xiao* is the root, the beginning, of one's cultivation into the moral mutuality of *ren*. Caring for my mother-in-law, therefore, is constitutive of the substance of my sense of the self; it forms part of my life's journey to self-realization, not only in the realm of morality, but also in the realm of feminism as well.

² Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the *Xiaojing* are from the Rosemont and Ames 2009 translation.

Intersectionality of Confucianism with Feminism

Some would contend that if feminism is what one seeks, conventional wisdom dictates that Confucianism is fundamentally incompatible with feminism. Some feminists bluntly neglect Confucianism's relevance to feminist theorizing, while others overtly reject it, characterizing it as antithetical to the feminist movement and agenda. Most noticeably, early French feminist, Julia Kristeva in her book *About Chinese Women* boldly entitles a chapter as "Confucius – An Eater of Women" (Kristeva 1977). In the mid-1990s when there was a resurgence of interests among Confucian scholars to join Confucianism with contemporary ethical theories, including care ethics, Confucianism was still by and large characterized as a patriarchal ideology that should be discarded as irrelevant to the modern, and supposedly superior, Western way of life. For instance, Margery Wolf, in her assessment of Tu Wei-ming's 杜維明 popular re-interpretation of Neo-Confucianism, writes:

The Confucian principles defining the propriety of hierarchical authority structures and the orderliness of the patriarchal family system seem anachronistic in this age of multinational corporations in Fujien, and young people from Shanghai acquiring Stanford MBAs. But to my surprise, books about Confucianism still sell well, and a superb Harvard scholar named Tu Wei-ming writes cogent 'reinterpretations' of Neo-Confucian thinking that are very close to being 'guides' for modern living (Wolf 1994: 253).

The disparaging undertone in Wolf's perception of Confucianism is clear. For her, Confucianism – a useless ideology of Old China – is nearly synonymous with patriarchy and misogyny. This perception of Confucianism continues in recent feminist works. Virginia Held, a leading care ethicist, briefly but boldly declares that Confucianism is incompatible with feminism due to its patriarchal nature (Held 2006: 22). And the list goes on and on. Feminists or not, many scholars view the intersection of Confucianism with feminism as impossible.

Indeed, feminist ethics by and large are unilaterally dominated by western theories. There is very little interaction, if any at all, between the West and the rest of the world. The obvious absence of non-Western philosophy in mainstream feminist scholarships attests clearly to the *de facto* practice of identifying feminism exclusively with Western philosophy. So one might say that the contemporary flow of feminist ideas has been uni-directional in the theoretical space, the West presumed to be the sole supplier of feminist ethics and the rest of the world a passive recipient. Susan Moller Okin's much talked about piece, "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?" is a case in point (Okin 1999). Although Okin's piece was published in 1999, the tension between multiculturalism and feminism continues to plague the liberal feminist community today; Anne Phillips' latest publication, *Multiculturalism Without Culture*, continues to wrestle with the problems set out by Okin's essay. As Phillips writes in the opening paragraph of her introduction, her first preoccupation is to address the feeling that feminism was "prone to paralysis by cultural difference," a feeling that "became especially acute after Susan Moller Okin published her essays on the tension between feminism and multiculturalism. . ." (Phillips 2007: 1). In Okin's case, the liberal West is held to

be far less patriarchal than all the rest, and women in other parts of the world would be better off if those so-called illiberal cultures were, in Okin's own words, to "become extinct" (Okin 1999: 22–23). In other words, Okin's world is neatly divided into liberal and illiberal, West and non-West, feminist and patriarchal. With the West representing the pinnacle of human achievement, what the non-Western world has left to offer is compliance and conformity to liberal values and principles. This sort of worldview mirrors its colonial predecessor seeing the world as merely composed of "Europe and the People without History," as theorized in Eric Wolf's anthropological study, where Europe dictates not just the future trajectory of the world, but also the way in which human past is understood (Wolf 1982/1997). History is then written in a language of segregation, where the culture of the inferior must be first assessed and then reconstituted in accordance with the image of the superior West. This sort of colonialist representation of the colonized continues to define the theoretical landscape of feminism, with feminist consciousness and women's liberation defined synonymously with the West, if not strictly with liberal values and principles.

But if a more inclusive form of feminism is to be viable, the colonial dichotomy between the progressive West and the oppressive non-Western world must be abandoned. Instead each culture must be granted a sense of dignity *a priori*, just each person, as formulated by Kant, is owed a sense of respect. The presumption of the dignity of culture is as basic as the presumption of the dignity of humanity; neither must prove itself to deserve *prima facie* respect. While some cultural practices can and should be changed, no culture or tradition deserves to "become extinct" or should be counted naturally inferior simply because of its morally questionable practices or misogynistic textual traditions. Just as is true of Kant, Confucius is no feminist. But the obvious textual misogyny and xenophobia in Kant's writings, most noticeably in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* and *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, have not stopped contemporary feminists from reappropriating Kant's theories, theories that originally excluded women, domestic servants, and other minorities (Schott 1997). In fact, Annette C. Baier, a Humean scholar, argues that to dismiss all misogynistic canonical texts indiscriminately could be a self-defeating move for feminists. As Baier reflecting on her re-appropriation of David Hume's epistemology writes,

To dismiss as hopelessly contaminated all the recorded thoughts of all the dead white males, to commit their works to the flames, could be a self-defeating move. At the very least we should, as Hume advocated, examine each work we are tempted to burn to see if it does contain anything that is more worth saving than patriarchal metaphysics (Baier 2000: 20).

The same sort of feminist reappropriation, seeking to extract what is useful for feminist liberatory movements in traditional thought, I propose, can be applied to Confucius as well. In other words, despite the obvious misogyny, textually and historically, Confucian ethics, just as Kantian deontology or Aristotelian virtue ethics, can also function as a great well of resources for all sort of progressive modern projects, including feminism. There is indeed no *a priori* reason that Confucianism should not intersect with feminism given that prominent Western

philosophical traditions, including Kant and others, are integrated into feminist theories that draw inspirations from them despite their original misogyny and exclusion of women. Surely feminism, which has been historically committed to reconceiving traditional cultural forms, cannot function based on the premise that non-Western traditions such as Confucianism are archaic in nature. Therefore, I take the intersectionality of Confucianism with feminism as a compelling desideratum in the effort to form an ever more inclusive feminist ethics.

Hybridity of Confucian Care

The tension between feminism and multiculturalism, as noted earlier, is well brought to the surface by Susan Okin's much talked about piece, "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women" (Okin 1999). A decade later, Ann Phillips in her *Multiculturalism Without Culture* continues to struggle over finding a balance between the multiculturalism's demand for respect for minority cultures and the so-called liberal "exit" strategy for women from an illiberal culture proposed by Okin (Phillips 2007). In other words, non-western cultures, by and large, are still seen as an impediment to women's liberation. Coupling feminism's suspicion of non-Western culture with the West's prevalent sense of moral superiority, there is indeed very little, conscious integration of non-Western intellectual traditions into feminist theorizing, as if feminist consciousness is an exclusively Western prerogative. The interaction between Confucianism and feminism, as Terry Woo observes, has been a largely one-sided affair: Feminists criticize Confucianism for victimizing Chinese women (Woo 1999: 110). However, interestingly, constructive comparative feminist studies have been quite vibrant in the Asian and Comparative philosophical community: for instance, Chenyang Li's pioneering piece on Confucian *ren* and care ethics (Li 1994), Henry Rosemont Jr.'s comparative study of Confucian and feminist relational selves (Rosemont 1996), Tu Wei-Ming's audacious Confucian response to the feminist critique (Tu 2001), the special issue on "Femininity and Feminism: Chinese and Contemporary" in the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* (2009: 32.2). But despite the vitality of comparative feminist studies within the circle of sinologists and comparative philosophers, the assessment of Confucianism as anti-feminist continues to persist today among many western-focused feminists. As mentioned earlier, in a rare engagement between a contemporary western feminism and Confucianism, Virginia Held briefly but decisively rejects the compatibility between care ethics (as well as feminism) with Confucianism (Held 2006: 21–22). It is indeed quite curious to note that despite numerous similarities between care ethics and Confucian ethics pointed out by sinologists and comparative philosophers, care ethicists largely ignore or reject the viability of a collaborative project between these two ethical theories. Intercultural transaction remains one of imposition from the West to the rest of the world. But if we are willing to discard unilateralism in the feminist space, it must be possible to culturally appropriate care ethics by Confucianism and *vice versa*. What then would a hybrid Confucian care look like?

***Xiao* and Contextualized Personhood**

Confucian care will begin with a richly contextualized notion of personhood, not as a contrasting notion to the liberal autonomous self, as if one is either completely in possession of one's core self or hopelessly enmeshed in externally imposed social roles to the detriment of one's well-being. Instead, Confucian care serves as an alternative model to conceptualize the self as an open-ended process of moral cultivation through the embodiment of inclusive social roles and mutual obligations. In other words, the uniqueness of the individual is manifested not through her ability to shed all external attachments and relations down to the bare core self, but through her ability to respond productively to the existential demands of human relations that grow ever more inclusively. It is a world-view that accords moral values to an inclusive progression of human attachments and relationships. Hence a Confucian self, just as a care ethicist would suggest, cares naturally, starting with an attentive and productive response to the needs of loved ones. Confucian *xiao*, or familial reverence, captures the essence of a Confucian care at home: the young is raised by the old with affection and the old in turn leans on the young to move forward, as the etymology of *xiao* indicates (Knapp 1995: 196; Holzman 1998: 186; Rosemont and Ames 2009: 1). A Confucian self, just as advocated by care ethicists such as Virginia Held and Eva Kittay, recognizes that vulnerability and interdependency characterize human existence (Held 2006; Kittay 1999, 2002). Hence to productively meet the needs of others in the way we would want our own needs to be met constitutes the starting point of the moral self that owes its beginning to the care of others.

But to talk about Confucian *xiao*, let alone to revive it, in this day and age, may seem to many quite antiquated and old fashioned, to put it mildly. A quick survey of popular Western perceptions of Confucian *xiao* shows disdain and incomprehension. As Bertrand Russell puts it in his assessment of the problems of China in early twentieth century, "Filial piety, and the strength of the family generally, are perhaps the weakest point in Confucian ethics, the only point where the system departs seriously from common sense" (Russell 1922: 40). Russell considers the necessary reforms that China must undertake in order to face the impending challenges of modernization at the turn of the twentieth century, and concludes that Confucian ethics emphasizing family feeling and the authority of the old "make it a barrier to necessary reconstruction. . ." (Russell 1922: 40). It is clear then not only that Confucian *xiao* has no moral content but, worse yet, it is seen as antithetical to common sense and a major impediment to China's modernization.

The perception of Confucian *xiao* as morally perverted, obsolete, and fanatical continues to find its way into more recent Western scholarship. For instance, Walter Slote, in his psychocultural analysis of the Confucian family, counts *xiao* "the principal instrument" through which Confucianism as a form of authoritarianism is established and maintained (Slote 1998: 46). Donald Holzman, in his textual survey of *xiao*, calls it a "peculiar passion," a kind of "extreme devotion" to parents that is characteristic of China, and yet is unknown or very uncommon in the West (Holzman 1998: 185, 190). He then compares Chinese attitudes towards *xiao*

with religious fanaticism in the West. As Holzman concludes from his observation of popular Chinese filial anecdotes:

I believe the sometimes exaggerated and fanatical behavior we have seen in the anecdotes above show us that we are in the presence of the kind of fanaticism we are more familiar with in the West as associated with religion and, in particular, with the actions of Christian saints who attempts to show their absolute devotion to Christ and to God by performing acts of total self-abnegation and altruism, acts that are often at least as shocking and or as repulsive as those performed by the Chinese saintly sons and daughters. . . we have just seen (Holzman 1998: 198).

Chinese attitudes towards *xiao*, in other words, are as fanatical, irrational, and extreme as those associated with a religious cult. If so, then it stands to reason that anyone with mildly good sense must depart from *xiao*, a peculiar character of the Chinese. In the same way, Ranjoo Seodu Herr in her effort to assess the compatibility between care ethics and Confucianism sees the constant demand of Confucian *xiao* placed on the adult child as a rather bizarre feature of Confucianism. As she writes,

If we consult the *Analecets* and the *Mencius*, the central question with respect to intimate relationship is how to express love and respect for one's *parents*. In contrast to the almost complete silence with respect to parents' obligations toward children, the constant demand for filial piety seems almost bizarre (Herr 2003: 481).

Just as is true for Russell and Holzman, for Herr the Confucian emphasis on *xiao* on the ethical plane seems inscrutable, if not outright morally perverted.

Historian Lisa Raphals' reflection on the nature and nurture aspect of *xiao* in a rather comprehensive anthology on filial piety, unfortunately, also characterizes Confucian *xiao* as an archaic mode of cultural expression. Through her study of Warring States (*Zhanguo* 戰國) and Han 漢 texts, Raphals considers *xiao* "as a specifically Chinese emotion that is gendered in very different ways for men and for women" and then offers her speculative suggestion that Confucius and his disciples valorized *xiao* "as a very culturally specific variant of love, and considered it a natural emotion. For men" (Raphals 2004: 216–217). In other words, Confucian *xiao* is construed here as a culturally gendered, yet natural, emotion for men. Raphals proceeds to compare *xiao* with medieval *accidie*, an archaic mode of religious emotion, and then asks rhetorically in the concluding sentence:

Is filiality, like *accidie*, an emotion whose time has come and gone, artifact of a strongly hierarchical Confucianism that is obsolete? Or can (and should) it be reconceived in ways yet to be determined, and is it being done, as we speak here?" (Raphals 2004: 222)

In comparing *xiao* with *accidie*, the answer to Raphals' question is obvious. Confucian *xiao*, a culturally specific emotion for men, in other words, is as obsolete as *accidie*; or worse yet, *xiao* is nothing but a remnant of a hierarchal Confucianism. In sum, in popular Western perceptions, *xiao* is seen as an archaic, fanatical cultural expression of the Chinese that is morally irrelevant to modern discourse on ethics.

Despite all this, the effort to revive Confucian *xiao* is under way and worth our while. For instance, Philip J. Ivanhoe's revised piece, "Filial Piety as a Virtue," and Roger Ames' and Henry Rosemont's philosophical translation of the *Xiaojing*

provide a starting point for the revitalization of *xiao* (Ivanhoe 2007; Rosemont and Ames 2009; see also Chap. 7 in this volume). Like Simon Keller, Ivanhoe rejects both the “gratitude” as well as the “friendship” account of filial obligation. In their stead, Ivanhoe proposes a virtue account of *xiao*, a virtue Ivanhoe considers not only central in Chinese culture, but also central in the general discourse of virtue ethics, since “as human beings, we all have to work out our way through the special relationship we have with our parents” (Ivanhoe 2007: 297). On the other hand, Ames and Rosemont in their proposed role-based ethics also argue for the importance of *xiao*. And by studying Confucian *xiao* as a viable alternative to our own ethical sensibilities, their hope is that a more inclusive, cross-cultural understanding can emerge (Rosemont and Ames 2009: xiii). As a self-proclaimed feminist, I will take a step further and make the revitalization of Confucian *xiao* not only an ethical and cultural movement, but also a feminist one as well. In other words, Confucian *xiao* is not only far from being an oppressive mode of cultural expression or inscrutable religious fanaticism, a blend of Confucian *xiao* and care ethics can provide a practical, ethical guide for all to navigate the terrains of life where each and every one of us are intractably interwoven in the fabric of interdependency. Life begins and ends in dependency, and hence any ethics that overlooks or minimizes the centrality of human interdependency that makes life possible in the first place will distort the existential facts of experience and therefore be inept in charting the actual contours of life’s challenges. Care ethics, unlike dominant Kantian liberalism, takes the caring labor in the context of mother-child relationship seriously and thereby brings forth the ethical value of caring for and meeting the needs of the dependent. Much like care ethics, Confucian *xiao* also recognizes the importance of caring for the dependent, but it takes caring a step further and extends that caring labor intergenerationally. *Xiao* is an intergenerational labor of love, or to borrow from care ethicist Eva Kittay, it is love’s labor (Kittay 1999, 2002). In conceiving caring labor intergenerationally, Confucian *xiao* expands the theoretical horizon of care ethics from a uni-directional personal care to a bi-directional social and political care. In return, feminist care ethics that brings a sharp focus on the gender inequities of the caring labor will thereby bring much needed modifications to Confucianism to meet the feminist demands of gender equity. In short, a proposed hybridized Confucian *xiao* is not only cultural and ethical, but also feminist as well.

In contrast to the Western ethical traditions that often neglect and marginalize the issue of family care viewed as devoid of any ethical values in the public realm, caring for one’s family has a central importance in the Chinese moral sense. As various historical studies have shown, the centrality of *xiao* (caring for one’s family) in the Chinese moral sensibility predates the rise of Confucianism (Knapp 1995; Holzman 1998). Indeed, *xiao* is a shared ethos in various textual traditions such as Ames and Hall (2003) *Daodejing* 道德經, Watson (1968) *Zhuangzi* 莊子 and Johnston (2010) *Mozi* 墨子, not just Confucianism (Chan and Tan 2004). But the ethical importance of *xiao* in Confucianism is also indisputable. As is said in the *Analects*, *xiao* and *ti* 弟 (deference) constitute the root of *ren*, the ultimate state of virtuous living (1.2). Or as found in the *Shuoyuan* 說苑 (*Garden of Sayings*), Confucius is quoted as saying,

“Among human practices, none is greater than *xiao* 孝” (Chan and Tan 2004: 1). This in turn is echoed in the familiar Chinese proverb, “Of the hundred excellent things, *xiao* 孝 comes first”. *Xiao*, in a word, is not only the starting point of Confucian *ren*, the ultimate realization of virtuous humanity, but more broadly constitutes a uniquely Chinese moral sense, or what Holzman calls a “peculiar passion” of the Chinese (Holzman 1998: 185).

Although the specific content of *xiao* varies throughout history, the general form of *xiao* as a concerted devotion to the welfare of one’s family, nevertheless, remains constant (Chan and Tan 2004: 1; Knapp 1995: 197). And one’s devotion to *xiao* is premised based on the understanding that one owes one’s existence to the care of one’s parents and those who came before (Shun 2003: 793). As is clear in the discussion of the practice of the 3-year mourning ritual in the *Analecets*, one’s genuine grief for one’s departed parents is but a sedimentary result of the parental affection and care that one has received when one was young (17.21). In other words, Confucius uses the vulnerability of the child in need of care, not the autonomous adult male in commerce or in politics, as the starting point of moral thinking. In a similar vein, care ethicists such as Virginia Held and Eva Kittay argue for the ontological primacy of caring relations in human existence where human children’s survival must presuppose the activity of care being performed (Held 2006; Kittay 1999, 2002). In Confucian moral sensibility, just as in care ethics, one’s personhood is first and foremost understood in the context of reciprocal care and human interdependency. In contrast to the liberal, Kantian vision of an autonomous self, unencumbered by affective phenomenal attachment seen as external to the noumenal self, utterly free and self-determined, the Confucian self takes the affective human attachment as a constitutive component of morality. And *xiao* as the root of *ren*, or moral perfection, starts with a genuine devotion to the welfare of one’s family.

To cultivate familial attachment, attachment to which one owes one’s existential self, is for the Confucians as basic as holding on to one’s moral self. Echoing Confucius in seeing *xiao* as the root of one’s moral character, Mengzi 孟子 writes, “There are many duties one should discharge, but the fulfillment of one’s duty towards one’s parents is the most basic. There are many things one should watch over but watching over one’s character is the most basic” (*Mengzi* 4A19).³ Morality is nothing but holding onto one’s character and the most basic duty that one carries out in accordance with one’s moral character is filial duty. The self that is existentially constituted by human relationships starting with the familial ones, however, is not a hollow self that is nothing but a puppet strung together by social roles. Instead, the goodness of one’s moral self is always the center onto which one anchors one’s social roles. *Xiao* is practiced for the sake of cultivating the goodness of a moral self, but at the same time, one’s moral self cannot simply bypass the realm of the affective and personal for the realm of the disinterested and the universal. Morality is located in everyday life, and how to productively respond to the affective ties to which one’s existential self is invariably attached is the beginning of Confucian moral thinking. In short, *xiao* is a necessary and

³ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the *Mengzi* are from the Lau 1970 translation.

constitutive part of one's moral cultivation, but its parameter is always defined by the integrity of the moral self, a sense of moral goodness.

Unlike the moral theory of Kant where rational contemplation reigns supreme, *xiao* is not an absolute virtue that overrides all for its own sake, but neither is *xiao* a mere instrumental means to another noble end. *Xiao* functions as the root of one's moral character whose maturity is demonstrated through the ability to incorporate various virtues ever more inclusively, encompassing both private and public, familial and non-familial. So one's journey to moral self-cultivation must always begin with *xiao*, but it does not end there at the expense of other virtues. For one thing, *xiao* is not synonymous with absolute obedience to parental authority. Instead, *xiao* involves genuine love and respect for one's family. To merely be able to provide material comfort in accordance with social convention is not yet *xiao*; *xiao* is all about one's internal sense of deference and care. As Confucius observes in the *Analects*, "Those today who are filial 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). Laboring for one's parents fulfills only the form of the *xiao* dictated by social convention, but the meaning of *xiao* hinges on one's genuine care and respect. Confucius responds to his student Zixia's 子夏 inquiry regarding *xiao*, emphasizing this: "It all lies in showing the proper countenance. As for the young contributing their energies when there is work to be done, and deferring to their elders when there is wine and food to be had – how can merely doing this be considered being filial?" (2.8). At the same time, when the parents go astray, Confucians recognizes that remonstrance is in order. For instance, in the *Analects*, the *Mengzi*, the *Classic of Filial Piety (Xiaojing 孝經)*, and the *Xunzi 荀子*, to remonstrate against parents' morally questionable conduct is seen as a necessary part of the practice of *xiao* (*Analects* 4.18; *Mengzi* 6B3; *Xiaojing* 15; Knoblock 1999: 29.1–29.2).

Moreover, to be complicit in or to tolerate parents' unreasonable behavior is seen as antithetical to *xiao*. As recorded in the *Zhouzhuàn*, a fourth century B.C.E. text that records the story of Duke Zhuang of Zheng 鄭莊公 (dated 722 B.C.E.), Duke Zhuang was faulted for being unfilial for his constant pampering of his mother and younger brother who later on became bold and incited a rebellion against the Duke. The unfortunate event of exiling the mother, according to all the commentators, is first caused by Duke Zhuang's tolerance of the mother's unreasonable behavior and hence he is at fault for being unfilial (Holzman 1998: 186–88). When parents' malevolent intent is known, one doesn't simply comply at the expense of one's well-being. As recorded in the *Family Sayings of Confucius (Kongzi jiayu 孔子家語)*, disciple Zengzi 曾子 was scolded by Confucius for taking a severe beating from his violent father without protest (*Kongzi jiayu* 4.15; Wang 1996). The reasonable response in the face of a parent's serious mischievous behavior, according to both Confucius and *Mengzi*, is to flee from abuse and to make one's concerns known (*Mengzi* 6B3; *Kongzi jiayu* 4.15). In other words, in the face of violence and abuse that demands corrective action, *xiao* would not require complicit tolerance. The end of practicing *xiao* is to bring forth the moral goodness in of a parent-child relationship in which the parents are affectionate and the children are filial. King Shun 舜, the ultimate personification of *xiao* emphasized in the *Mengzi*,

is able through his tireless filial persuasion to lead his wicked father to see the light of moral goodness that the father should embody in the position of a father. *Xiao* thereby not only brings forth the moral goodness in the father, but also helps shape the moral character of the son (*Mengzi* 4A28 and 5A4). In short, *xiao*, the embodiment of a genuine care for the welfare of one's family in order to bring forth goodness within, is morally basic.

One's journey into the moral maturity of *ren*, perfect humanity, thus begins with *xiao*, which not only substantiates the affective tie between parent and child, but also provides a moral rectitude in the familial relationship. The Confucian self is a moral self that expands outward through strengthening and rectifying those existential, affective ties, starting with the familial ones. Generally speaking, without anchoring one's self in one's existential, affective ties is to be without a sense of the self, since one's attachment is what gives substance, or what gives "weight" so to speak, to the self. The Kantian noumenal self that only thinks from the vantage point of the rational and the universal unattached to this phenomenal world of relations and affections is unrecognizable to any of us who are someone's mother, daughter, spouse, friend or neighbor. Those affective ties are the fabric of our existential being and the anchor of life itself. To discount those existential attachments is to flee into the realm of Kantian abstraction where the self is with neither sense nor substance. As Bernard Williams puts it in his "wife rescuing" scenario in which a rescuer deliberates impartially whether or not to save his wife over a stranger, this sort of moral deliberation is really "one thought too many" (Williams 1981: 18). In the same way, to deliberate whether one has a filial obligation toward one's parents is also one thought too many. One's affective attachment to another person is what gives life substance and conviction in the first place. Just like one's attachment to one's spouse, one's attachment to one's parents is one of the deepest attachments that one is able to experience. Perfect detachment and neutrality demanded by the Kantian impartial moral law hence can only have an imperfect hold on oneself. As Williams goes on to argue, one's affective attachments to others might run the risk of offending against impartial moral laws, "yet unless such things exist, there will not be enough substance or conviction in a man's life to compel his allegiance to life itself." Furthermore, "[l]ife has to have substance. . . ; but if it has substance, then it cannot grant supreme importance to the impartial system, and that system's hold on it will be, at the limit, insecure" (Williams 1981: 18).

Just as Kant observes in the realm of knowledge that thoughts without content are empty and intuitions without concepts are blind, one might say that affective attachments are what gives life its content and without which life is also empty as well. And when life is devoid of affective attachments, it also loses its hold on one's commitment to life itself. Rae Langton's piece on the correspondences between Kant and Maria von Herbert provides a rare glance at the sort of challenges possible to Kant's detached moral will on the existential level, demonstrating the inadequacy of impartial moral law's hold on one's self when one's affective ties are in disarray (Langton 2000). Maria von Herbert is a sister of Baron Franz Paul von Herbert and a keen Kantian student seeking Kant's moral guidance on the

permissibility of suicide during a time of personal desolation. In Kant's initial response, he advises Herbert to follow the universal moral law of truth telling without taking into account the consequential impact on her friendship with her male suitor, from whom she has concealed a previous, intimate relationship. Once the truth was discovered, the male suitor lost interest in Herbert and she was left living in a state devoid of passion and contemplating suicide. Kant insists that the loss of affective ties should not impede one's ability to act morally, since the moral will demands a complete detachment from inclinations. To Kant, it is not only that one's moral will must be made in the absence of corresponding inclinations, such as sympathy, but more so that one must follow the moral law with a sense of "moral apathy" which Kant describes as a state of divine bliss, "a state of complete independence from inclinations and desires" (Langton 2000: 206).

But as a keen student of Kant, Herbert in fact finds following the moral law too easy in a life without passions, since moral imperatives are obeyed by default. Without the presence of passions, Herbert sees no point in living. She then proceeds to ask what sort of life Kant leads: "I would like to know what kind of life your philosophy has led you to – whether it never seemed to you to be worth the bother to marry, or to give your whole heart to anyone, or to reproduce your likeness" (Langton 2000: 204). Kant's indifference to the pursuit of familial, affective ties is a puzzle to Herbert who now finds life without passions empty of content and her commitment to life itself consequently slipping. Kant, after classifying Herbert's condition as feminine hysteria over romantic love, didn't respond to the query further, and Herbert then committed suicide. It is clear that to Kant affective ties are not only morally irrelevant, but an impediment to morality. Yet without affective ties to anchor one's sense of the self, one also loses conviction in life itself as well. Unlike Kant, Confucians understand the importance of human relations, and to substantiate familial, affective ties with moral rectitude is what makes life worth living in the first instance.

***Ren and Datong* 大同**

Xiao is the beginning of morality, but Confucian ethics does not stop at the door of one's household. Just as is true of care ethics, Confucian ethics also aims at providing a normative ethics beyond the personal. A hybrid Confucian care will extend the moral demands of familial care to wider social relations. Confucian moral cultivation, although it begins at home, must extend outward to encompass both familial and non-familial social relations as indicated in the Confucian five core social relations: parent-child (familial), ruler-subject (political), husband-wife (spousal), older-younger (communal), friends (social). For the self is conceived not as socially detached and free to discard external relationships; instead the self is conceived as a moral self that grows ever more inclusively in the web of relationships both familial and non-familial. Unlike its transcendental Kantian counterpart where the self is defined solely and exclusively by its rationality in

the noumenal world, the Confucian self is decisively an existential one whose moral perfection is achieved only through one's continuously productive responses to the needs of one's affective ties in this human-all-too-human phenomenal world.

The interrelationality of the Confucian self is clearly demonstrated by its interchangeability with the perfect virtue of *ren*. As stated in the *Mengzi* and the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong* 中庸), “*ren* 仁 means person” and “to realize oneself is *ren* 仁” (*Mengzi* 7B16; *Zhongyong* 20, 25).⁴ *Ren*, the most prominent Confucian concept, etymologically is composed of the character person (*ren**人) and numerical two (*er* 二), denoting the ethical effort in sustaining and expanding complex human relations in achieving the perfect virtue of *ren* (Hall and Ames 1987: 114; Tu 1985: 84). To be *ren*, at the most basic level, is to have compassionate feelings toward others. Confucius responds to the query on the meaning of *ren* in the *Analects* by saying simply, “Love others” (12.22). In the same way, *Mengzi* says, “The person of *ren* loves others” (*Mengzi* 4B28). Hence, generally speaking, cultivating affective ties constitutes the practice of *ren*, and the virtue of *xiao* that displays one's genuine care for one's familial ties is the starting point of one's moral cultivation.

However, *xiao* is not the end point of *ren*. *Ren* as an inclusive virtue encompasses all particular virtues that govern human relations such as *qin* 親 (affection) in the parent-child relation, *xin* 信 (trustworthiness) in friendship, *yi* 義 (righteousness) in ruler-subject relations and *bie* 別 (division of labor) in spousal relations, etc. Unlike the Kantian supreme moral law that can only be deliberated by a rational will unattached to the phenomenal world of relations and affections, the Confucian supreme virtue of *ren* can only be realized through the expansion of the web of human relations in which one is intractably embedded. A self structured by the Kantian liberal principles of personal autonomy and de-subjectivized rationality is a self that is unattached to anyone, a self that depends on no one and is not morally obliged to reciprocate either. By contrast, a Confucian self not only recognizes the dependency and vulnerability of human existence, but also is morally obliged to extend its sphere of concerns, beginning with the personal but expanding to the social, the political, and the global. In other words, the personal must be granted a moral claim over oneself by virtue of the fact that one's self is constituted by that very attachment.

In a contextualized personhood, the substance of one's self is necessarily and essentially dependent on the extent of the existential relationships that one is able to sustain qualitatively and quantitatively with moral rectitude. Taking care of others, especially those socially dependent and vulnerable ones, is then seen as a strength, not a distraction from human flourishing. The well-being of others is seen as intrinsically intertwined with one's own, and hence the journey to one's moral cultivation must be made intersubjectively. As said in the *Analects*, “*Ren* 仁 persons in seeking to establish themselves establish others, in seeking to promote

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the *Zhongyong* are from the Ames and Hall 2001 translation.

themselves promote others” (6.30; with a minor modification). In other words, it is only through one’s caring labor intersubjectively one is able to realize moral maturity within.

Confucian ethics is not a familial ethics that is only applicable to intimate, familial relationships; neither is care ethics. A care ethics infused with Confucianism seeks comprehensive care for all by, on the one hand, expanding one’s sphere of concern motivated by one’s recognition of the interdependency and vulnerability of human existence, and, on the other, expanding the social capacity to care for all. This expanded care is clearly delineated in the celebrated Confucian ideal society of *Datong* 大同 (Great Community) where social harmony is measured by its capacity to care for the chronically dependent and vulnerable. As it says in the classical text of the *Record of Rituals* (*Liji* 禮記):

When the great *Dao* prevailed, the world belonged to the general public. They chose the worthy and capable, were trustworthy in what they said, and cultivated harmony. Therefore, people did not love only their own parents and did not treat only their own, rear their own children. Thus the aged could live out their lives, the strong have their function, the young have their growth, and the widowed, the lonely, the orphans, the disabled and the sick all find their care. Men have their roles and women have their homes. They hated casting away goods, but not necessarily to keep them for themselves. They hated leaving their strength unemployed, but not necessarily to employ it for themselves. Therefore, scheming had no outlet, and theft, rebellion, and robbery did not arise, so that the outer doors were left unlocked. This is called the Great Community 大同 (Lai Tao 2000: 226–227, with minor modifications; Legge 1885: 364–366).

Or as said again and again in the *Mengzi*, the greatness of a true king is measured by his compassionate care to all at home and abroad, and especially to the socially vulnerable, such as the old, the young, the widowed, and the orphan (*Mengzi* 1A7, 1B5, 1B12, 3A3, 4A13, 6B7, 7A22). In fact, the vulnerability of a newborn infant is taken as the measuring stick in understanding the extent of one’s care for others in the realm of the personal as well as in political governance. As told through the *Mengzi*, the Confucians praised the ancient rulers for acting “as if they were tending a new-born babe” (3A5) and claimed that “a great man is one who retains the heart of a newborn babe” (4B12). Citing the *Book of Documents* (*Shujing* 書經), the *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學) also states that one governs the state as if one is attending to the newborn babe (*Daxue* 1994: chap. 9). In other words, for the Confucians, the personal and the political are essentially governed by the same principle of attentive care for the socially dependent and vulnerable.

Confucian expanded care resonates well with care ethicist Eva Kittay’s triadic concept of “*doulia*” where society must assume commitment to preserve the well being of the dependent relation between the caregiver and the dependent (Kittay 1999, 2002). “*Doulia*,” derived from Greek meaning slave or servant, is redirected by Kittay to denote “a caregiver who cares for those who care for others” (Kittay 1999: 107). The principle of *doulia* recognizes the importance of the preservation of a caring relationship between the cared-for and the care-giver, and hence it demands that the public provides a condition in which the care-giver can give and thrive at the same time (Kittay 1999: 107). In other words, sustaining the caring

relationship must be a public responsibility. The cared-for, care-giver, and a social commitment to care for the care-giver form the triadic concept of *doulia*. For both care ethics and Confucianism, maintaining caring relations is seen as a moral good for the interdependent self as well as society at large, and hence the caring labor performed at home must be supported by society, so that the care-giver and the cared-for can both thrive. The greatness of society is, in turn, measured by the sort of commitment it makes to sustain that caring network to care for the socially vulnerable at home and abroad.

In order to facilitate the broadening of the scope of one's concerns, all human relationships in Confucian care are viewed as only different in degree, but not in kind. As is evident in all five Confucian social relations, all relationships are characterized by reciprocity and mutuality. Confucian care views human relations as a continuous spectrum with strangers on the one end and intimate loved ones on the other. The difference between strangers and family is only one of degree, since strangers have a potential to be made intimate through marriage or friendship, for instance. Our colloquial expression that refers to our best friends as our family is really indicative of the permissibility of the boundary between familial and non-familial relationships as well as the centrality of family in our conception of the most endearing and intimate attachment that one can possibly experience existentially.

The centrality of family, as Henry Rosemont and Roger Ames point out, permeates all areas of Chinese history including the sociopolitical, economic, metaphysical, moral, and religious (Rosemont and Ames 2009: xi). Family, for a Confucian self, is an inclusive metaphor that exerts moral pull to incorporate distant others into the intimate circle of mutual trust and care either by direct interaction or by moral extension through sympathy. Confucian ethics emphasizes the moral nature of the human heart in its encounter with or in its anticipation of human suffering as seen in the Mengzi's example of seeing a child about to fall into a well (*Mengzi* 2A6, 3A5). In the same way, care ethics also emphasizes the imperative to care extending from the understanding that infants' survival depends on our willingness to respond to their needs. As Held puts it, we all start out as "human children" (Held 2006: 66), or as Kittay writes, "we are all some mother's child" (Kittay 1999: 19). In other words, Confucian care sees caring for others as a spontaneous act of the moral heart that internalizes the needs of dependent and vulnerable others and hence can respond to it with utmost sincerity. There are various degrees of intimacy in one's existential relationships ranging from strangers, friends, to intimate loved ones, but the ultimate moral aim for Confucian care is to incorporate others into one's inclusive metaphor of family where *xiao* in the non-voluntary familial relationship is the moral origin for all voluntary relationships. Once again, as said both in the *Analects* and the *Xiaojing*, Confucius takes *xiao* as the root of all moral excellences and urges his disciples not only to be filial at home, deferential in the community, but also to be trustworthy in one's words and "love the multitude broadly" (1.1, 1.6; *Xiaojing* 1). Confucian care is extensive in its scope and at the same time is solidly grounded in the intimate relationships at home.

Extending the love and respect that one has for one's family to the rest, for the Confucians, is not just a good moral practice in one's private life but also is the key to good governance. Thus the *Mengzi* states, "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 manner befitting their tender age and extend this to the young of other families, and you can roll the Empire on your palm" (*Mengzi* 1A7). And, "Loving one's parents is *ren*, respecting one's elders is *yi*. What is left to be done is simply the extension of these to the whole Empire" (*Mengzi* 7A15, with minor modifications). In other words, the moral challenges for the Confucians are to find ways to extend one's affection and care for one's family to others, so as to seamlessly expand the scope of one's moral concerns in the web of one's existential relationships. The point is that strangers are not completely outside the purview of one's moral compass for Confucian care. Instead, precisely because strangers are defined by a lack of intimate relationship with oneself, a Confucian self that grows in the web of relationships seeks to extend intimacy to strangers as well, so as to transition strangers to acquaintance, to friends, and ultimately to family.

Gender Rectification and Culture of Care

In its intersection with feminism, it is obvious that Confucianism's gender based roles will have to change, since feminism as a whole aims at abolishing all forms of gender-based oppression. The spousal relationship, as one of the five cardinal social relations, governed by the virtue of *bie*, the division of labor, will have to give way to a genuine sense of cooperation based on mutually beneficial task sharing that enhances both partners' long-term capacities instead of diminishing them. Feminism brings gender into a sharp focus in any intercultural dialogue, and the way women are fashioned into particular genderized beings often significantly limits their practical abilities to experience the world, to share in cultural capital, and to fully thrive and flourish beyond the dictates of gender roles. Care ethics in particular sheds light on the importance of caring labor, but also the disproportionate amount of burden that women shoulder in caring for others at home as well as in the work place. Confucian ethics, if it is to be relevant to women, will have to come to terms with that. As mentioned earlier, Kittay's triadic concept of *doulia* is helpful here to alleviate the burden placed on women by making caring for the caregiver a societal commitment. The Confucian's contribution of *xiao* further normalizes the existential facts of interdependency and vulnerability in human lives, acknowledging that the young are cared for by the old, who in turn, leans on the young to move forward. But none of these caring tasks should be gender specific; that is to say, women should not be the only ones who care for the young, the old, the widowed, the lonely, the orphans, the disabled, and the sick, while men are free to choose whether to care or not to care. There has to be a better solution, and both Confucian ethics and care ethics must go beyond the emphasis on the importance of caring for others by dealing directly with the inequity between men and women in performing actual caring labor.

To urge women to abandon their caring tasks is not the solution. As Kittay, who has a disabled child, writes passionately:

Someone must care for dependents. If men do not take up the role, women will not simply abandon it. Feminists may persuade women that liberation and equality demands refusing nonreciprocated affective labor directed at fully functioning adults. . . . But no feminist movement would, could, or should urge women to neglect the needs of their dependent children, or those of their disabled, ill, or ailing family members and friends (Kittay 2002: 238).

No ethical theory, let it be feminist or otherwise, should advocate voluntary abandonment of meeting the caring needs of the vulnerable simply because equally capable others will not take up the task of caring labor. Like care ethics, Confucian *xiao* is a life-long commitment that one has toward one's family, both living and dead. The different perception on the inevitable dependency that comes with old age, according to early twentieth century Chinese writer LIN Yutang 林語堂, is what separates the East from the West; the old in the West, due to their love of independence and their shame of being dependent on others, prefer living alone (Lin 1989: 679). But there is no greater joy than being cared for by one's own children when one is infirm. To love and care for one's parents, for Confucians, is a mark of cultural maturity. As the saying goes, "A natural man loves his children, but a cultured man loves his parents" (Lin 1989: 677). And in China one lives for nothing else but growing old gracefully and being loved and cared for by one's family (Lin 1989: 679). Confucian *xiao* is an intergenerational labor of love, or as Kittay reflects on her care for her chronically dependent daughter, it is love's labor (Kittay 1999, 2002). And no one should walk away from that. Life is based on mutual help starting at home. Men no less than women should cultivate that sense of care for the young, the old, the widowed, the lonely, the orphans, the disabled, and the sick. But here lies the difficulty: As Kittay writes, "It seems to me that the difficulty is, first, to cultivate in men a sense of care as deep and extensive as we find today in women. . . , and second, to join the sense of care with the sense of justice" (Kittay 2002: 245).

Leaving aside the question of whether Kittay genderizes care and justice, the inequity between men and women in performing actual caring labor is a practical problem. On what ground, can men be mandated to be caring, and in a sense be "coerced" into performing caring labor? Just as in most traditions, Confucian tradition also relies on women to perform most caring labor, as is delineated in the classical text of the *Liji* (*Record of Ritual*) regarding the two different sets of educational curricula, where boys are to receive extensive literary education while girls are instructed on domestic skills and household management (Legge 1885: 471–479). Or as said in the *Mengzi*, the caring labor to keep the aged warmly clothed and fed on a daily basis falls on women (*Mengzi* 7A22). This sort of gender-based division of labor is the beginning of the inequity of caring labor. And nothing is more pronounced than the caring labor performed by mothers and wives. As stated earlier, gender-based division of labor in the spousal relationship will have to give way to a genuine sense of cooperation that mutually benefits both partners in enhancing their long-term capacities instead of diminishing them. In my estimation,

spousal relationship will have to give way to peer friendship in order to address the problem of inequity in caring labor. Such a substitute is not altogether unjustified. If one takes away biological reproduction as the sole basis for marriage, then what is left is companionship between two mature adults in search of a shared sense of the good life. Peer friendships and spousal relationships converge even more in modern times, since marriage is nothing but two strangers coming together to form voluntary peer friendship and then through mutual commitment make a cohesive family. Gender-based division of labor will have no role to play in mutual peer friendship, since a shared sense of the good life is its only *raison d'être*.

As we do what is reasonable for the sake of the well being of our friends, we do what is reasonable for the sake of the well being of the family unit. For some feminists such as Susan Okin, a complete “equal split” in every task might be the vision of gender equality (Okin 1989). But others, such as Richard Arneson, have criticized the inefficiency of this “equal split” scenario and some sympathetic theorists, such as Anne Phillips, see mandating such an equal split impractical (Arneson 1997; Phillips 2007). At one point or another, we all have done more than our fair share for our friends; friendship is not about a formally equal take-and-give contractual transaction. Rather, it is a commitment to each other’s well being. Such friendship based on virtue obviously is different from the sort of friendship built based on utility or pleasure, as shown in various kinds of friendship delineated in the *Analects*: “One stands to be improved by friends who are true, who make good on their word, and who are broadly informed; one stands to be injured by friends who are ingratiating, who feign compliance, and who are glib talkers” (16.4). From the standpoint of a Confucian self, friends demand goodness from each other in addition to mutual affection and trust. As said in the *Analects* in regards to the moral cultivation of the *junzi* 君子 (exemplary person), “Take doing your utmost and making good on your word (*xin* 信) as your mainstay. Do not have as a friend anyone who is not as good as you are. And where you have erred, do not hesitate to mend your ways” (1.8). Friends are made for the sake of improving one’s moral self, and in taking care of one’s friends or one’s family, one doesn’t lose sight of what is good. A relationship that demands self-abnegation that significantly diminishes one’s capacity to experience the world, to share in cultural capital, and to thrive and to flourish falls below the minimal threshold of what is reasonable.

One cannot walk away from caring for the vulnerable, but one can definitely demand help from other equally capable adults to contribute to the growth of a productive web of human relationships. The Confucian concept of ritual and shame can definitely play an effective role in “coercing” free riders to do their reasonable share. And if all things fail, the less effective means of laws and social policies can then serve as the last corrective measure for a short-term gain. As Confucius says in regards to effective governance, “Lead the people with administrative injunction (*zheng* 政) and keep them orderly with penal law (*xing* 刑), and they will avoid punishments but will be without a sense of shame. Lead them with excellence (*de* 德) and keep them orderly through observing ritual propriety (*li* 禮) and they will develop a sense of shame, and moreover, will order themselves” (2.3). In other words, Kittay’s *doulia* that mandates social policies to care for the caregiver is only

part of the solution; to form a culture of care, in which to care for dependent others and to be cared for as the circumstances demand is no longer seen as contrary to one's wholesome self, should be the main task at hand. To cultivate a sense of Confucian *xiao* as an intergenerational dependency and care at home should then be the starting point, as Confucius avers in stating that *xiao* is the foundation of all moral education (1.2; *Xiaojing* 1). By embodying Confucian *xiao* inter-generationally, one is thus fashioned into a caring being with a proper sense of shame that instills self-corrections according to what is appropriate and reasonable in response to the needs of the vulnerable starting with one's loved ones.

Conclusion

In the end, caring for my mother-in-law is as much as about meeting her needs as it is about meeting my moral self, face to face. As Kittay so powerfully observes, “. . .no feminist movement would, could, or should urge women to neglect the needs of their dependent children, or those of their disabled, ill, or ailing family members and friends” (Kittay 2002: 238). I too will not walk away, not even when nothing is expected of me in a society that is dominated by the liberal emphases on individual autonomy and detachment. Learning from Confucian *xiao*, I understand that intergenerational dependency is an existential given. The asymmetry of dependency between my mother-in-law and me is not the sole determinant of the extent of my caring labor, since I too stand in asymmetry with my own now already departed parents for whom I can no longer care to reciprocate all the goods that have been bestowed on me. In a real sense, I can only pay it forward. And in a broader sense, we all are recipients of all the social goods that we have enjoyed thus far. The quintessential image of Confucian *xiao* as the old leans on the young to move forward crystallizes the centrality of intergenerational dependency in the making of one's moral self that perpetually stands in asymmetry with those who cares for oneself and whom one cares for. Paying it forward intergenerationally, as dictated by Confucian *xiao*, seems not only fair and reasonable, but also moral as well. And through my caring labor, I see my own feminist self in the making.

Postscript

After the initial draft of this paper was completed, my mother-in-law passed away. Even with all the difficulties in caring for her to the end of her life, I am grateful for all the experiences that my mother-in-law had afforded me. In my caring for her, my mother-in-law taught me that caring for one's family is not an inconvenience to achieving one's goals in life; quite the opposite, only through caring for others, does life have a meaning at all. I can only hope that I have shown my own daughter that caring for one's family is what we are. For what is family, if we cannot count on

each other for good times and bad times? The great lesson about life is the greatest lesson that I have learned from my mother-in-law and with that I am forever grateful for having the privilege of being her daughter-in-law. I would like to dedicate this paper to my mother-in-law, Judith E. Rosen (1940–2012), through whom I meet my feminist self within.

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