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From Ritual Culture to the Classical Confucian Conception of *Yi*

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Abstract
Yì 義 presents dual categories in classical Confucian conception. The first category is ethical-role duty originated from Zhou 周 ritual culture, which was a set of social norms defining ethical duties that fit each person's role and status in the kinship group and society and regulating what was appropriate for a person's behavior. The second category is moral conscience and rightness resulted from the internalization of social norms and ethical duties. From Confucius to Mencius, Xunzi 荀子, and others, while inheriting and elaborating *yì*'s ethical implication of role duty from Zhou ritual culture, they also gradually internalized *yì* to become the subject's moral conscience of doing right things. During this process, classical Confucianism gradually formed an ethico-moral conception of *yì* as both role duty and moral rightness that abridged the dual categories of social norms for interpersonal relations and moral values for personal autonomy.

Keywords *Yì* 義 · Role duty · Moral rightness · Classical Confucianism · Ritual culture

1 Introduction

Yì 義[1] is among the core concepts of China's ritual culture, Confucian ethics, and Chinese intellectual history. It is also, however, one of the most difficult terms to explicate and translate. *Yì* has been translated as "duty," "sense of duty,"

[1] Since this article involves the relationship between *yì* 義 and *yí* 儀, as well as the discussion of *lǐ* 禮 and *lì* 利, I add their tonal marks throughout in order to avoid confusion.

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"dutifulness," "role obligation," "rightness," "righteousness," "propriety," "appropriateness," "fairness," "justice," "morality," "altruism," "virtue," "principle," and so forth, and indeed in Chinese it has connotations of all these terms.

These terms can be roughly classified into two categories, one from duty to role obligation on the list above basically denoting the concept of ethical-role duty, the other from rightness to principle basically connoting the meaning of moral rightness or principle. These dual categories are different yet interrelated in classical Confucian ethico-moral theory. Some scholars have noted the first category (see mainly Boodberg 1953; Graham 1989: 10–13; Boltz 1986: 844; Roetz 1993: 113), while most scholars have started their discussions of *yì* from the second category (see mainly Cheng 1972; Schwartz 1985: 79–80; Hall and Ames 1987: 89–110; van Norden 2002; B. Wang 2005; H. Wang 2009; Zhou and Rong 2018; Choi 2019). Only a few scholars have indicated the dual categories of *yì* and tried to offer an explanation or a reconciliation of them. For example, in his translation of the *Analects* and *Mencius*, D. C. Lau finds in different contextual cases *yì* can be rendered as "duty and dutiful" or "righteous and morality," applying to both acts and agents, though his final conclusion is that *yì* "is basically a character of acts and its application to agents is derivative" (Lau 1979: 26–27). Eric Hutton indicates that, in the *Xunzi*, *yì* denotes two main meanings of a set of ethical standards and a virtue (Hutton 1996, 2014: 346). Kwong-loi Shun notes that for Mencius *yì* is both a quality of action and an attribute of a person, both of which involve certain ethical standards (Shun 1997: 56–65). Jiyuan Yu first describes two aspects of *yì* as the outer attribute of action and the inner quality of agent, and then uses the latter to unify the former (Yu 2006). Jinhua Jia and Pang-fei Kwok argue that the meaning of *yì* goes through an expansion from ethical-role obligation to general social standards connoting the meaning of righteousness (Jia and Kwok 2007). Alan K. L. Chan contends that Mencius elaborated *yì* as both social duties and rightness rooted in the heart (Chan 2011). All these studies are insightful and inspiring. Overall, however, there has not been adequate research on the dual categories of *yì* in classical Confucian conception.

In this essay, I extend my previous study on *yì* (Jia and Kwok 2007) to make a comprehensive examination on the origin, formation, progression, and interrelation of *yì*'s dual categories in classical Confucian ethico-moral theory. I argue that the category of ethical-role duty appeared earlier and originated from Zhou-dynasty ritual culture, which was a set of social norms defining ethical duties that fit each person's role and status in the kinship group and society as father or son, elder or younger, lord or subject, and so forth. These norms of role duties regulated what was appropriate for a person's behavior in hierarchical terms and hence also referred to actions carrying out one's role duties. On the other hand, the category of moral rightness was a later development and resulted from the internalization of social norms and ethical duties. From Confucius to Mencius, Xunzi, and others, while inheriting and elaborating *yì*'s ethical implication of role duty and action from Zhou ritual culture, they also gradually internalized *yì* to become the subject's moral conscience of doing right things, which comprised a part of the classical Confucian project of fostering ideal character. During this process, classical Confucianism gradually formed an ethico-moral conception of *yì* as both role duty and moral rightness that abridged the dual categories of social norms for interpersonal relations and

moral values for personal autonomy. The meanings of *yì* also gradually extended from the hierarchical prescriptions and actions of fitting specific role-duties to the public values and actions of common rightness, fairness, and justice.

Methodologically, because the dual categories of *yì* did not emerge at the same time but went through a gradual development from the social norms of Zhou ritual culture to classical Confucian conception of ethico-moral theory concerning both interpersonal relations and personal subjectivity, it is necessary to combine philosophical analysis with historical narrative in this essay. First, the distinction between ethics and morality by a number of philosophers (see discussions later) can be applied to explain the construction of internal moral subjectivity through external social norms of ritual propriety, as well as the abridgment of the two, by classical Confucianism. Second, ethical norms and moral values are not abstract *a priori* but historical products of the conditions of specific times and places, and philosophy is "its own time comprehended in thoughts" and explains history afterward (Hegel 1991: 22–23). In order to describe the conceptional development of *yì* from external ritual norms to internalized moral values from the Western Zhou to Warring States period, we need a historical narrative to frame the philosophical analysis on the dual categories of *yì*. In what follows, I first examine the unity and divergence of *yì* 義 and *yí* 儀 in Zhou ritual culture, in order to define *yì*'s ritual function as hierarchical social norms stipulating a person's appearance, duty, conduct, and virtue. Then, I discuss the first category of classical Confucian conception of *yì* 義. Confucius and his followers inherited the ethical norms of Zhou ritual and emphasized that *yì* as ethical-role duty is the substantive content of ritual propriety for maintaining or recovering social order. Finally, I study the second category of the classical Confucian conception of *yì*. Mainly by Mencius' efforts, *yì* was internalized as a person's moral attribute and conscience of doing right things. Xunzi further bridged this internal sense of moral rightness with the external norm of role duty. *Yì* is both role duty and moral duty, both heteronomous ethical norms and autonomous moral determination. Thus, the classical Confucian ethico-moral conception of *yì* was formulated and has since exerted significant function in both maintaining interpersonal relations and social order and fostering moral attribute and ideal character in Chinese cultural tradition.

2 *Yì* as Social Norms in Zhou Ritual Culture

Originally, *yì* 義 and *yí* 儀 shared the same character and represented a set of social norms demanding that each person act in accordance with their social-familial positions and roles, including appropriate etiquette, appearance, conduct, and duties. Largely beginning from the late Spring and Autumn period, the character *yí* 儀 was derived from *yì* 義, as the notions of *liyì* 禮義 or ritual-duty and *liyí* 禮儀 or ritual-etiquette were differentiated.

Xu Shen 許慎 (ca. 55–ca. 149) explicated *yì* 義 as a compound ideogram (*huiyizi* 會意字) composed of the graphs for *wo* 我 (self) and *yang* 羊 (lamb) and referring to "one's awesome dignity" (*ji zhi weiyí* 己之威儀) (S. Xu 1963: 12.267). This explication by Xu Shen accords with the early meaning of *yì*, but inaccurately characterizes

the formal structure of the character. In the oracle bone inscriptions (OBI), this character is written as  , a symbol in which the graph *wo* in the form of a kind of dagger-axe weapon is adorned with feathers (Liu 1996: 112; J. Xu 1995: 526, 548; Jia and Kwok 2007). *Wo* was probably a type of ritual weapon, which inspired sentiments of awesome authority and martial power, while feather adornments produced a dignified aesthetic.

As for the character *yí* 儀, Xu Shen interpreted it as "proper measure, the form of awesome dignity" (*du ye, weiyi zhi xing ye* 度也, 威儀之形也) (K. Xu 1975: 184), which is similar to his explanation of *yì* as one's awesome dignity. Indeed, in bronze inscriptions from the Western Zhou to Spring and Autumn times, the term *weiyí* 威儀 (awesome dignity) was always written as *weiyì* 威義. In transmitted early texts, *yì* 義 and *yí* 儀 are also used interchangeably. All these indicate that originally *yì* and *yí* shared the same character and signified the meaning of *weiyì/weiyí* or awesome dignity (Jia and Kwok 2007). The earliest graph for *yí* 儀 discovered to date is found in the *Houma Mengshu* 侯馬盟書 (*Writings of Alliance from Houma*), records of oaths of alliance inscribed on jade artifacts unearthed near the city of Houma and dated to the late Spring and Autumn period, where *yí* was used as a personal name (Shanxisheng 1976: 360; He 1998: 857). However, according to the conceptional distinction between the terms *lǐ* 禮 and *yí* 儀 as recorded in the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (*Zuo's Commentary*) and *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects of Confucius*; see discussions in next section), the character *yí* 儀 seems to have been derived from *yì* 義 and used in the meaning of appearance and etiquette by the late Spring and Autumn period.

The term *weiyì* 威義 / *weiyí* 威儀 or awesome dignity represents an extremely important concept in Zhou ritual culture. It occurs fifteen times in just the *Shijing* 詩經 (*Classic of Poetry*; nos. 26, 220, 247, 249, 253, 254, 256, 260, 264, 274, 299) and numerous times in bronze inscriptions. The *Zhongyong* 中庸 (*Doctrine of the Mean*) discusses "the three hundred rules of ritual ceremony and the three thousand rules of awesome dignity" (*liyí sanbai, weiyí sanqian* 禮儀三百, 威儀三千), while the *Da Dai Liji* 大戴禮記 (*Elder Dai Record of Rites*) also quotes Confucius discussing similar rules (Gao 1984: 60.235).[2] Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200) believed that "the three thousand rules of awesome dignity" refer to the forms of ritual etiquette recorded in the *Yili* 儀禮 (*Classic of Rites*), which mainly gives detailed descriptions of the ritual ceremonies and standards of appearance with which cultivated gentlemen ought to accord (Zheng and Kong 2000: 10.1435b).

In the Western Zhou and Spring and Autumn culture of ritual-music that preceded the separation of *yí* 儀 from *yì* 義, however, the concept of *weiyì* 威義 / *weiyí* 威儀 or awesome dignity, as normative standards for cultivated gentlemen, not only referred to requirements of outward appearance but also included norms of ethical duty and conduct. For example, the *Zuozhuan* records that in 542 BCE (Xiang 襄 31) Beigong Wenzi 北宮文子 discoursed on ritual propriety three times during a visit to the state of Chu 楚. The third time was in response to Duke Xiang of Wei's 衛 inquiry as to the nature of awesome dignity. Beigong meticulously explained

[2] All translations of citations from the *Book of Songs* and *Record of Rites* in this essay are adapted from Legge 1994.

the content, classifications, and ethico-political significance of awesome dignity. The content of awesome dignity included manners of appearance, dutiful conduct (action, speech, etc.), and virtue. The classifications of awesome dignity followed each person's roles and status within the kinship group and society, and were organized along the lines of the ethical roles of ruler and minister, father and son, older and younger sibling, and so forth. Each person's duties and conduct as well as norms of appearance and comportment varied accordingly. This explains why there were as many as three thousand rules of awesome dignity. The ethico-political significance of awesome dignity lay in "possessing one's state" and "protecting one's kinship group," that is, the continuous development of the protection and support for one's clan group and political order. Since Beigong Wenzi discussed ritual propriety three times during the same trip, this description of awesome dignity should also be seen as referring to the content of Zhou ritual.[3]

Occurrences of awesome dignity within textual records from the Western Zhou period, such as the *Shangshu* 尚書 (*Book of Documents*) and *Classic of Poetry*, have in the past mostly been explicated as referring only to appearance and comportment. However, reexamining these in light of Beigong Wenzi's explanation of awesome dignity, we find that in these texts it often also seems to include connotations of ethical duty, conduct, and virtue. For example, in the "Guming 顧命 (The Last Edict)" chapter of the *Book of Documents,* King Cheng 成 of Zhou enjoined his ministers to assist and protect Prince Zhao 釗 (who became King Kang 康) in overcoming hardships, dealing peacefully and cooperatively with both distant and neighboring states, and conducting himself in awesome dignity so as to avoid improper and even perilous affairs. Both the Song 宋-dynasty scholars Lin Zhiqi 林之奇 (1112–1176) and Cai Shen 蔡沈 (1167–1230) explicated this passage with reference to Beigong Wenzi's discourse, showing that here awesome dignity implies duties and conducts, not merely forms of bearing (Lin 1999: 37.11a; Cai 1999: 6.11b). Additionally, the "Minlao 民勞 (The People Are Exhausted)" poem of the "Daya 大雅 (Major Odes)" section of the *Classic of Poetry* states, "Let us be reverently careful of our awesome dignity, in order to cultivate association with the virtuous" (*jing shen weiyí, yi jin youde* 敬慎威儀, 以近有德), while the "Yi 抑 (Admonition)" poem of the same section further says, "Awesome dignity, cautious and grave, is an indication of virtue" (*yiyi weiyí, wei de zhi yu* 抑抑威儀, 維德之隅). Both thus discuss awesome dignity alongside virtue and seem to include the two elements of appearance and virtuous conduct.

Furthermore, another important ritual function of *yì* 義 was its corresponding relationship with *lì* 利 or profit. *Lì* or *quanli* 權利 (power-profit) was the social distribution of political power and wealth, and the principle of that distribution was corresponding role duty of *yì* 義. The king of Zhou had the duties and power-profits of a king, the ruler of a regional state had the duties and power-profits of a regional ruler, a minister had the duties and power-profits of a minister, and so forth. This reciprocal relationship is most clearly presented in ritual ceremonies of investiture, through

[3] For a detailed discussion of Beigong Wenzi's discourse on *weiyì* 威義 / *weiyí* 威儀, see Jia and Kwok 2007.

which particular power and profits (lands, people, goods, etc.) were bestowed on rulers and ministers while their relevant duties and responsibilities were also announced, as numerously recorded in bronze inscriptions, the *Book of Documents*, the *Classic of Poetry*, and so forth. It is also expressed in many discourses recorded in the *Guoyu* 國語 (*Discourses of the States*) and *Zuozhuan*, such as "fulfilling *yì*-duties to produce *lì*-profits" (*yì yi sheng lì* 義以生利) ("Zhouyu 周語 [Discourses of the Zhou]" and "Jinyu 晉語 [Discourses of the Jin]"), "fulfilling *yì*-duties to establish *lì*-profits" (*yì yi jian lì* 義以建利) (Cheng 成 16), and "*yì*-duty is the root of *lì*-profit" (*yì, lì zhi ben ye* 義, 利之本也) (Zhao 昭 13).[4]

The fact that Beigong Wenzi referred to appearance, comportment, duty, conduct, and virtue all within the category of *weiyì* 威義 / *weiyí* 威儀 or awesome dignity shows that the conceptual distinction between *liyì* 禮義 (ritual order and duty) and *liyí* 禮儀 (ritual ceremony and etiquette) had not yet developed. The late Spring and Autumn period, however, was one of great social and political turmoil. The enfeoffment system based on lineages of kinship began to unwind, and the culture of ritual-music to collapse. These developments forced people to reevaluate the nature and content of ritual, as well as its ethical values, and to seek grounds for upholding and restoring the sociopolitical order therein. Merely fifteen years after Beigong's visit, in 527 BCE, Nü Hou 女侯 (Nü Shuqi 女叔齊) of the state of Jin 晉 distinguished ritual propriety (*lǐ* 禮) from ceremonial forms (*yí* 儀), criticizing Duke Zhao 昭 of Lu 魯 for failing in his duty to order the state and protect the people despite upholding ceremonial forms and proper etiquette in his visitations, thereby reversing the order of importance between ritual propriety and ceremonial forms (*Zuozhuan*, Zhao 5). Twenty years later, in 507 BCE, You Ji 游吉, a minister from the state of Zheng 鄭, even more clearly pronounced the distinction between ritual propriety and ceremonial forms, interpreting the latter as appearances of particular etiquette and defining the former as the ethical order and duty of human relations such as those between rulers and ministers, fathers and sons, older and younger siblings, husband and wife, and so forth (*Zuozhuan*, Zhao 25). Clearly, Nü Hou and You Ji's differentiation of ritual propriety and ceremonial forms in fact distinguished *lǐyì* 禮義 or ritual-duty and *lǐyí* 禮儀 or ritual-etiquette.

3 The Classical Confucian Conception of *Yì* (I): Ethical Order and Role Duty

Nearly contemporary with You Ji, Confucius (ca. 551–479 BCE) put forth the notion that *yì* 義 was the substance of *lǐ* 禮 or ritual propriety, even more clearly differentiating *lǐyì* 禮義 from *lǐyí* 禮儀 and beginning to formulate a Confucian ethico-moral conception of *yì* 義 founded on Zhou ritual culture.

[4] For a detailed discussion of the relationship between *yì* and *lì* in Zhou ritual, see Jia and C. X. Huang 2019.

According to the records of the *Analects*, Confucius conceptionally distinguished between ritual order and ethic on the one hand and ritual ceremony and etiquette on the other, focusing on elucidating and emphasizing *yi*'s connotation of role duty defined by the hierarchical ritual-ethical order. Confucius (and his disciples) indicated that formal etiquette and ceremonies such as jade and silk, bells and drums, are only external appearances of ritual (*Analects* 17.11); rather, *yì* is the substantive content of ritual (*Analects* 15.18). The basic connotation of *yì* is a set of ethical norms regulating human relational duties and actions, which delimit the duty bestowed on each person in accordance with their stations and roles in society and kinship groups as noble or humble, lord or subject, father or son, elder or younger, and so forth. Educated persons are to take up official posts in order to carry out their role duties, and failure to take up such posts is considered a disturbance to the ethical order. As Zilu 子路 clearly remarked:

> To refuse office is to fail to carry out one's *yì* 義-duty. If the norms between the elder and younger cannot be abandoned, how could one think of abandoning the *yì*-duties between ruler and subject? This is to throw the most important human relations into turmoil in one's efforts to remain personally untarnished. The opportunity of the gentleman to serve in office is to carry out his *yì*-duty. (*Analects* 18.7)[5]

Although here Zilu emphasized "the *yì*-duties between ruler and subject," the duties between the elder and younger and other interpersonal relations are implied (which can be more clearly seen in the following citations from Mencius). Even the most courageous actions need to accord with the acting person's role duties; otherwise, these will disrupt the sociopolitical order (*Analects* 17.23). This set of ritual-ethical norms and duties are heteronomous and normative, meant to regulate each person's conduct and maintain the hierarchical interpersonal relations, upholding the sociopolitical order of clan institutions. Therefore, the basic meaning of *yì* in the *Analects* can be interpreted as duty, role duty, and dutiful action in accordance with the hierarchical ethical order and ritual norms.

Confucius' explication of *yì* as prescriptive role-duties and dutiful actions also presented in his discussion of the reciprocal relationship between *yì*-duty and *lì* 利-profit. *Analects* 14.13 records a conversation between Confucius and Gongming Jia 公明賈 in which Confucius asked if it was true that Gongshu Wenzi 公叔文子 never took any profits, and Gongming replied that Gongshu in fact "takes when it is consistent with his *yì*-duty, and so people do not get tired of his taking" (*yì ranhou qu, ren buyan qi qu* 義然後取, 人不厭其取). That is, no matter how much wealth and profit Gongshu acquired the people would not object, as long as the wealth and profit accorded with his role, position, and duty. This was in conformity with the Zhou ritual institution of the reciprocal relationship between duties and power-profits, and therefore Confucius fully endorsed Gongshu's conduct.[6]

[5] All translations of citations from the *Analects* in this essay are adapted from Legge 1994, Lau 1979, Ames and Rosemont 1998, Nylan and Leys 2014.

[6] For detailed discussions of Confucius' view of the relationship between *yì* and *lì*, see Jia and C. X. Huang 2019.

Moving into the Warring States period, followers of Confucius further developed the basic meaning of *yì* in terms of ethical order and role duty. The *Chengzhi* 成之 (*Completion*) text of the Chu bamboo manuscripts unearthed at Guodian 郭店 states:

> From heaven descended the great constancy to pattern human relations, instituting *yì*-duty between ruler and minister, implementing affection between parent and child, and creating distinction between husband and wife. (Jingmenshi 1998: 168; Cook 2012: 599)

As Mencius similarly describes:

> This gave the sage king further cause for concern, and so he appointed Xie [契] as the Minister of Education to teach the people human relations: affection between father and son, *yì*-duty between ruler and subject, distinction between husband and wife, precedence of the elder over the younger, and trust between friends. (*Mencius* 3A4)[7]

These passages trace the origin of *lǐ*-ritual and describe the content of *yì* in terms of human relations, ethical order, and role duty. The five human relations are in fact five ethical, reciprocal duties, and all these terms—affection, duty, distinction, precedence, trust, filial piety, obedience to elder brothers, respect of the old—refer to the relational-ethical order that ought to be followed and the role duties that ought to be carried out. Just like the cases in the *Analects*, because the reciprocal relations and duties of rulers and ministers are the most important, the *yì*-duties between them are especially emphasized. Yet other human roles and relations, along with their respective duties, likewise fall within the norms of *yì*-duties. For example, in other places Mencius also talked about "the *yì*-duty of filial piety and fraternal respect" (*xiao ti zhi yì* 孝悌之義) (*Mencius* 1A3, 1A7) and "the content of *yì*-duty is obeying elder brothers" (*yì zhi shi cong xiong shi ye* 義之實從兄是也) (*Mencius* 4A27).

In addition, Mencius' view of *yì* as the proper path of humans has often been interpreted by scholars as the dynamic unfolding of the proper path of morality through the subject's heart-mind (*xin* 心) and nature (*xing* 性) (see, e.g., Zhou and Rong 2018: 44–51). Yet such interpretation of Mencius' notion of the path of *yì* usually strips it from its context, freely interpreting its meaning independent of related passages of the text in which it is embedded. If, however, we look more carefully, we find quite the opposite. Of the four passages discussing the path of *yì* in the *Mencius*, one lacks clear contextualization (*Mencius* 6A11), while the other three all connect the path of *yì* with the externally normative force of ritual-ethical order and role duty. Of these the clearest is 5B7. In this passage, Wanzhang 萬章, Mencius' disciple, asks why a commoner goes to corvée under a lord's command but refuses to go when he is summoned to an audience. Mencius answers that it is in accord with *yì*-duty for a commoner to go and serve, but it is not in accord with *yì*-duty for him to present himself to a lord. Mencius further illustrates this point with an example. When Duke Jing 景 of Qi went hunting and summoned his gamekeeper with a pennon, the gamekeeper did not come and was not afraid of the Duke's order of executing him. Then, Mencius concludes as follows:

[7] All translations of citations from the *Mencius* in this essay are adapted from Legge 1994 and Lau 2003.

> When the gamekeeper was summoned with the rites appropriate only to a counsellor, he would rather die than answer the summons. How would a commoner dare to answer when he is summoned with the rites appropriate only to a nobleman? How much more would this be the case when a worthy person is summoned with the rites appropriate only to one who is neither good nor wise! To wish to meet a worthy person while not following the proper way is like wishing him to enter while shutting the door against him. *Yì*-duty is the road and *lǐ*-ritual is the door. Only a superior person can follow this road and go in and out through this door. (*Mencius* 5B7)

In the whole passage, *yì* undoubtedly refers to role-duties defined by the hierarchical ritual-ethical order. A commoner's duty is to go to corvée but not to present himself to the lord. Gamekeepers, commoners, noblemen, and worthy persons each fulfill the particular *yì*-duties and observes the particular *lǐ*-rites corresponding to their positions and roles within the socioethical order. This order does not allow for any transgression or violation. Role duty is the path necessary to accord with this order, while ritual is the gateway necessary for entering this order. The Dao of worthy persons and the gateway of treatment of worthy persons correspond to the path of role duty and the gateway of ritual propriety, respectively. This clear statement elucidating Mencius' conception of the path of *yì* thus involves neither the heart-mind nor human nature. In addition, in 7A33, when talking about the path of *yì*, Mencius says that "to take what does not belong to one is contrary to *yì*-duty" (*fei qi you er qu zhi fei yì ye* 非其有而取之非義也). Just like Confucius' conversation with Gongming Jia cited above, Mencius delineated the relation between duty and profit as determined by ritual propriety: people can enjoy the profits that align with the duties of their particular stations and roles, but should not partake of those profits that do not so align. In 4A10, Mencius again criticizes those who forsake humane conduct and role duties as "abandoning oneself" (*ziqi* 自棄) and "thinking oneself incapable of dwelling in *ren*-humaneness and following the path of *yì*-duty" (*wu shen buneng juren youyì* 吾身不能居仁由義).

Turning to the thought of Xunzi, *yì*'s content of ethical order and role duty was even more clearly defined. Xunzi argued that humankind is able to distinguish itself from and surpass other animals in virtue of its capacity for organizing kinship groups (*qun* 群) (X. Wang 1988: 5.164),[8] while the survival of the kinship groups is made possible through establishing an ethical order of human relations with hierarchical distinctions that "noble and humble have their ranking and elder and younger maintain their disparity" (*gui jian you deng, zhang you you cha* 貴賤有等, 長幼有差) (X. Wang 1988: 13.347). The key for maintaining this ethical order is *yì*-duty: "To treat the noble as noble, the superior as superior, the virtuous as virtuous, the aged as aged, and the elder as elder—these are the *yì*-duty of human relations" (*gui gui, zun zun, xian xian, lao lao, zhang zhang, yì zhi lun ye*

[8] For a detailed discussion of *qun* as referring to kinship group, see Jia 2001.

貴貴, 尊尊, 賢賢, 老老, 長長, 義之倫也) (X. Wang 1988: 27.491).[9] Xunzi further elaborated this point:

> When one encounters his lord, then he enacts the *yì*-duty of a minister and subordinate. When one encounters his fellow-villager, then he enacts the *yì*-duty of an elder or younger. When one encounters his seniors, then he enacts the *yì*-duty of a son or younger brother. When one encounters his friends, he then enacts the *yì*-duty of ritual restraint and deference. When one encounters those who are humble or young, then he enacts the *yì*-duty of being guiding and tolerant. (X. Wang 1988: 3.100)

In this passage, *yì* is most clearly defined as role duties that ought to be carried out in all kinds of interpersonal relations in accordance with the hierarchical ethical order and ritual norms. The *Record of Rites* similarly explains:

> What is called human *yì*-duty? Kindness on the role of the father, and filial duty on that of the son; gentleness on the role of the elder brother, and obedience on that of the younger; dutifulness on the role of the husband, and submission on that of the wife; kindness on the role of elders, and deference on that of youngers; humaneness on the role of the ruler, and loyalty on that of the minister—these ten are called human *yì*-duty. (Zheng and Kong 2000: 22.802b)[10]

Thus, in early Confucian writings, *yì*-duty is described as prescriptive and authoritative, regulating what actions are appropriate for a person to take within social and familial relations, and the five basic human relations are in fact reciprocal duties toward one another. The duty of rulers is to be humane and loving toward their subjects and people, and thus to protect their interests. The duty of ministers is to loyally serve their rulers. The duty of fathers is to raise their children with care and love, and the duty of children is to be filial and complaisant to their parents and elder siblings, and so forth.[11] The purpose of *yì*-duty is to assign each person with specific role tasks: "What the superior person defines as *yì*-duty is that both the noble and humble all have their tasks in the world" (Zheng and Kong 2000: 54.1727b). When all people carry out their specific *yì*-duties properly, "positions of the ruler and minister and the gradations of the noble and humble would be correctly exhibited, the *yì*-duty of high and low would be carried out" (Zheng and Kong 2000: 20.759a). As a result, the hierarchical sociopolitical order will be maintained or recovered.

[9] All translations of citations from the *Xunzi* in this essay are adapted from Knoblock 1994 and Hutton 2014.

[10] Unless specified, all translations are mine.

[11] Similar ideas can be found more or less in the *Mozi* 墨子, *Guanzi* 管子, *Shangjunshu* 商君書 (*Book of Lord Shang*), *Han Feizi* 韓非子, *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, and other early texts. From this we see that the notion of *yì*-duty originated from Zhou ritual was generally accepted among many thinkers of the Warring States period.

4 The Classical Confucian Conception of *Yi* (II): Subjective Conscience and Moral Rightness

During the Warring States period, against the backdrop of the unraveling of feoffment and clan institutions and the collapse of ritual order, and through the sustained discussions and debates of philosophers of that time, the meaning of *yì* was continuously extended and developed. From the socioritual norms of ethical order and role duty concerning interpersonal relations, *yì* was further extended to connote the meaning of subjective conscience and moral rightness.

As scholars have indicated, Confucius explicated *lǐ*-ritual as grounded in *ren*-humaneness and hence internalized external, social, and ethical norms to personal intention and moral subjectivity (Schwartz 1975; Z. Li 1986: 7–51). Furthermore, in Confucius' saying, "The superior person sets his mind in *yì*-duty, while the petty person sets his mind in *lì*-profit" (*Analects* 4.16), the superior person views *yì*-duty more important than *lì*-profit, which also implies his subjective choice of taking up social responsibilities.

Mencius followed Confucius to further internalize *yì* as moral conscience. In the famous debate between Gaozi 告子 and Mencius over the internality or externality of *ren* 仁 (humaneness) and *yì*, Gaozi argued that *ren* is internal and *yì* external. His principal reasoning was that *ren* is the internal feelings of familial affection, whereas the respect for elders associated with *yì* is an external social norm and duty that all persons ought to abide by and practice (*Mencius* 6A4–5).[12] Similar views are also seen in the excavated Guodian manuscripts *Yucong Yi* 語叢一 (*Miscellaneous Discourses I*) and *Liude* 六德 (*Six Virtues*), and the "Jie 戒 (Admonition)" chapter of the *Guanzi*, from which we see the prevalence of this view in the Warring States period.[13] Mencius argued in opposition to this that *ren* and *yì* are both internal. He proposed that the four germs of *ren*, *yì*, *lǐ* (ritual propriety), and *zhi* 知 (wisdom) are incipiently possessed by humans and can be extended and filled out. Taking respect for elders as exemplary, Gaozi used this to explain *yì* as external social norms; Mencius elsewhere similarly emphasized the social-role duty of "precedence of the

[12] For a detailed discussion of this debate, see Shun 1997: 94–112.

[13] In the *Yucong Yi*, inner humaneness is identified with treating relatives with affection (*qin qin* 親親), and outer duty is identified as treating the noble reverently (*zun zun* 尊尊; Jingmenshi 1998: 194–197), which is about the same as Gaozi's definition. The *Liude* uses inside the gate (*mennei* 門內) to define internal humaneness, and outside the gate (*menwai* 門外) to define external duty, the former referring to the emotional connection of father, son, and husband, and the latter the differentiated status of lord, subject, and wife (Jingmenshi 1998: 188). Similar opinions or distinctions are also seen in the *Liji*, the *Dadai Liji*, and the *Classic of Changes*. These opinions vary on expressions but are essentially close to Gaozi's view. The *Guanzi* 管子 records, "*Ren* is from interior and *yi* behaves in exterior … filial piety and fraternal submission are the root of humaneness." This defines filial piety and fraternal submission as humaneness and interior, which is also about the same as Gaozi's definition. See X. Li and Y. Liang 2004: 10.509–510. The *Mozi* 墨子 simply does not agree in differentiating *ren* and *yi* as interior or exterior. See Sun 2001: 10.391. Scholars have discussed these Warring States arguments, though their interpretations differ from those of this article. See mainly B. Wang 2005; T. Liang 2008: 308–309, 387–389; Tang 2008.

elder over the younger" (*Mencius* 3A4). However, since Mencius also interpreted *yì* as internal emotions and intentions of the heart-mind and attributes, he added connotations of subjective moral conscience to these external ethical norms. The social-role duty of respecting the elder was thereby transformed into what Zhu Xi 朱熹 explained as "having a heart-mind that respects the elder" (*wo zhang zhi zhi xin* 我長之之心) (Zhu 1992: 157), passing beyond the scope of the hierarchical ethical norm on interpersonal relations and representing a moral agent's moral-consciousness of respecting the elder.

Similar internalization of *yì* is also seen in other Warring States Confucian texts. The Guodian manuscript *Xing Zi Ming Chu* 性自命出 (*Human Disposition Comes from Heaven's Mandate*) states that the Dao of human or *lǐ*-ritual began with *qing* 情 (*Dao shiyu qing* 道始於情 or *Li zuoyu qing* 禮作於情). *Qing* includes human emotions/feelings (*qinggan* 情感), empirical experiences (*jingyan* 經驗), and existential circumstances (*qingkuang* 情況), which collectively and unconsciously influenced the formulation of the external social customs and norms. Once the social norms of *lǐ*-ritual were formulated, they became authoritative, external codes regulating people's daily actions. Because ritual and dutiful actions have their source in human emotions and experience, external *yì*-duty can reciprocally be internalized as individual subjectivity and moral conscience, which is no longer the early collective human feelings and experiences but a rational and moral sublimation of them (Jingmenshi 1998: 179–180). The *Wu Xing* 五行 (*Five Conducts*), an excavated text found in both the Guodian bamboo manuscripts and Mawangdui silk manuscripts, also describes *yì* as having both internal and external formulations: "What is formed internally is called action of virtue; what is not formed internally is called action" (Pang 2005: 2.117–151).[14] Here the internal formulation of action refers to virtuous action being guided by subjective intention of the heart-mind, while the external formulation of action refers to ethical action following social norms.

Although morality (*daode* 道德) and ethics (*lunli* 倫理) are often discussed together and even used interchangeably, ever since Plato philosophers have from time to time distinguished between the two in various ways. For example, Hegel differentiates the sphere of morality (*Moralität*) from the sphere of ethical life/order (*Sittichkeit*). The former refers to the Kantian morality of autonomy, subjectivity, and free will, while the latter refers to "ethical behavior grounded in custom and tradition and developed through habit and imitation in accordance with the objective laws of the community" (Hegel 1991: §106, 145, 150, 153; Hegel 1998: 266). Hegel further advocated abridging these two spheres by a progressive transition from morality to ethical life through the ethical system of the family, civil society, and state (Hegel 1991: §142–340). However, this Hegelian progressive abridgement of the two spheres is basically an ideal, abstract, and logical inference. Li Zehou 李澤厚 makes a clearer distinction between ethics and morality, defining the former as external institutions, customs, regulations, and conventions and the latter as internal psychological states such as will, concepts, and emotions. He further describes the interrelationship between the two, contending that

[14] A number of scholars contend that the *Wuxing* was written by Zisi 子思 or his disciples; see mainly T. Liang 2008: 184–231; Chen 2012: 48–88, 100–119.

ethics constructs morality and morality in turn feeds back to ethics (Z. Li 2019: 24–28).[15] This distinction and interrelation between ethics and morality seems to better accord with historical actuality and can be applied to explain the construction of internal moral subjectivity through external ethical norms of ritual propriety, as well as the abridgment of the two, by classical Confucianism.

As mentioned above, Confucius' explication of *lǐ*-ritual in terms of *ren*-humaneness internalized external ethical norms as the demands of an individual's conscience, starting to construct the notion of the moral subject and elevating strict and coercive social requirements to become the subject's conscious reason. His discussion of *yì* emphasized its ritual function of ethical-role duty, yet he also noticed the subject's self-determination in taking up social responsibilities. Heteronomous ethical norms and autonomous moral conscience thereby began to reconcile, from which was founded the ethico-moral mode of Confucian theory. Following Confucius, Mencius further internalized *ren*-humaneness, *yì*-duty, *lǐ*-ritual propriety, and *zhi*-wisdom as the moral agent's attributes and consciousnesses. He identified the "heart-mind of shame and dislike" (*xiu wu zhi xin* 羞惡之心) as the beginning of the subjective conscience of *yì*. The feelings and attitudes of "shame and dislike" implicate ample meanings,[16] but basically they arise against conducts that are inappropriate, disgraceful, wrong, or unreasonable. As Mencius stated, "All persons have things they are unwilling to do. To extend this to what one is willing to do is *yì*" (*Mencius* 7B31). *Yì* is the moral conscience of doing right and good things, which "is common to heart-minds" shared by all people (*Mencius* 6A7). In this sense of consciously doing the right things driven by each person's subjectivity, *yì* is extended to connote the meaning of moral rightness. The moral subject no longer just accepts the ethical-role duties assigned to him by society and kinship group, but also listens to her/his internal voice of moral rightness. The authoritative socioethical demand of "acting in conformity with *ren*-humaneness and *yi*-duty" (*xing ren yi* 行仁義) is thus transformed into the self-conscious moral practice of "acting from *ren*-humaneness and *yi*-rightness" (*you ren yi xing* 由仁義行) (*Mencius* 4B19).

The difference between these two kinds of actions is to a large extent the difference between means and end. Within the sociopolitical order based in the hierarchical ritual-ethical order, role duties are responsibilities assigned to individuals by society and kinship group. While carrying out these assigned responsibilities, the individual also acquires corresponding power-profits. The power-profits acquired by carrying out particular role-duties are in the interests of particular individuals and their kinship groups. In this sense, then, *yì*-duty as social norms is primarily a means rather than an end. When internalized as people's moral conscience of rightness, however, *yì* shifts from being a means to an end in itself. Through the autonomous choice of the moral agent's heart-mind, one consciously takes on social responsibilities and acts independent of consideration of personal interests and material profits.

[15] The distinction between ethics and morality is now commonly applied in discussions of codes of conduct in business or ethical principles in religions and organizations (e.g., Hazels 2015). It is also worth noting that, unlike most scholars, some philosophers define morality as social norms and ethics as personal virtues. This difference seems to have come from different definitions of ethics and morality (e.g., Dworkin 2011: 191).

[16] For a sophisticated analysis, see Shun 1997: 58–63.

As mentioned earlier, Xunzi's discussion of *yì* largely referred to the more traditional understanding of ritual-ethical norms. In addition to clearly defining *yì*'s connotation as role duty, Xunzi also acknowledged the reciprocal relationship between *yì*-duty and *lì*-profit in Zhou ritual institution: "*Yì*-duty and *lì*-profit are two things that humans have. Even Yao 堯 and Shun 舜 could not get rid of the common people's desire for *lì*-profit" (X. Wang 1988: 19.502). However, Mencius' internalization of *yì* as personal subjectivity and moral rightness is also elaborated and developed in the *Xunzi*. Xunzi argued that, through forms of internal moral cultivation, one can come to the Dao of *yì*-rightness outweighing power and profits: "Cultivating one's will and intention, one then will disregard wealth and nobility. If one's concern for the Dao of *yì*-rightness is great, then one will take kings and dukes lightly" (X. Wang 1988: 1.27–28). Hence, Xunzi proposed "valuing *yì*-duty and devaluing *lì*-profit" and "using *yì*-duty to regulate *lì*-profit" (X. Wang 1988: 18.462, 12.331–332). The superior person should move beyond the ethical norms of *yì*-duty and corresponding power-profits to reach *yì*-rightness of moral courage and integrity:

> Wherever *yì*-rightness lies, not to be swayed by power, nor to focus on profit, not even changing one's glance when offered the whole state in bribery, to uphold *yì*-rightness unswervingly while yet taking death seriously—such is the courage of the cultivated and superior persons. (X. Wang 1988: 2.56)

Here *yì*'s implication as moral conscience and rightness regardless of power-profits is especially pronounced and thus also presents the same shift from means to end as Mencius did.

Nevertheless, in contrast to Mencius' discussion of *yì*-rightness principally in terms of the moral subject's heart-mind and attributes, Xunzi's notion of *yì*-rightness seems to place greater emphasis on the moral subject's action and influence in society and the public values of rightness, fairness, and justice formulated from this kind of action and influence, as well as attempt to bridge the dual categories of *yì*-duty and *yì*-rightness for promoting ideal government and sociopolitical order. Xunzi states:

> As for being in charge of the post of prime minister, that is to prevail over people by means of one's position of authority. Treating what is right as right, treating what is wrong as wrong, treating those capable as capable, treating those incapable as incapable, shutting out private desires, all these must follow the Dao. The Dao of public rightness and the current *yì*-duty can be compatible mutually—this is the Dao that prevails over people. … If things were like this, then who in the state would dare not to practice *yì*-duties? If the lord and the ministers, superiors and subordinates, noble and lowly, senior and junior, right down to the common people, all practiced *yì*-duties, then who anywhere in the world would not want to conform to *yì*-duties? (X. Wang 1988: 11.295)

A good prime minister makes correct judgement on right and wrong and fair treatment on the capable and incapable; in order to do so he must shut out his private desires to hold the "Dao of *gong*" (*gongdao* 公道). In early Chinese texts, the character *gong* 公 connotes various meanings such as *gonggong* 公共 (public, common), *gongzheng* 公正 or *gongping* 公平 (fairness, rightness, or justice), and *gongmen* 公門 (the state or court) (Mizoguchi 2011: 230–259). Since here the "Dao

of *gong*" involves fair judgment of right and wrong and treatment of people, and rejecting private desires, it refers to the Dao of rightness, fairness, and public interests and can be translated as the Dao of public rightness. As the *Liji* states: "In the eras when the great Dao prevailed, the world was shared by the public (*gong*). The worthy was selected and the capable was appointed. People stressed trustfulness and promoted harmony. Therefore, they did not regard as parents only their own parents, or as sons only their own sons" (Zheng and Kong 2000: 21.769a). In the *Xunzi*, *gongdao* is used synonymously with *gongyì* 公義 (*yì*-public rightness), which also rejects private desires and holds unbiased fairness and rightness for the general public. For example:

> When the Dao of public rightness (*gongdao*) succeeds, the private gate is blocked; when *yì*-public rightness (*gongyì*) shines bright, private things disappear. (X. Wang 1988: 8.239)

> Through *yì*-public rightness the superior person is able to overcome private desires. (X. Wang 1988: 1.36)

On the other hand, in the term *tongyì* 通義, *tong* 通 means *tongxing* 通行 (current) or *changgui* 常規 (common norm or routine); together *tongyì* refers to the current role-duties hierarchically grounded on ritual propriety, as Xunzi explained elsewhere: "For the young to serve their elders, for the humble to serve the noble, for the unworthy to serve the worthy—these are the current *yì*-duties (*tongyì*) of all people" (X. Wang 1988: 3.113). Xunzi believed that "the Dao of public rightness and the current *yì*-duty (*tongyì*) can be compatible mutually," and if a minister holds to this, "who in the state would dare not to perform *yì*-duties." Here the fair minister represents the ideal moral character, who both conforms with and goes beyond the prescriptive ritual-ethical norms regulating a person's duties and interests, thereby aligning with *yì*-rightness oriented by the interests of the public and state. In this way, Xunzi deliberately bridged internal moral conscience with external ethical norms.[17] *Yì* is both social norms and subjective intention, both heteronomous ethical duties and autonomous moral actions. Xunzi thus further developed and completed the ethico-moral theory of classical Confucianism, which views a person as both a social being whose identity derives from his interaction with and action within the community and a morally autonomous individual who is capable of resolving his own will and performing righteous action regardless of personal interests.[18] During the formational process of this theory, the meaning of *yì* was gradually extended from the category of ethical-role duty to the category of the moral agent's conscience and the public moral values of rightness, fairness, justice, and so forth.

[17] Huang Chun-Chieh, noticing Xunzi's concept of justice, has connected it to the relationship between individual and group, though his analysis and conclusion differ from those of this article. See C. C. Huang 1991: 145–159.

[18] It is notable that the teachings found in the *Mozi* also stress that the practice of *yì* must be determined by a standard of whether or not it benefits all people, demanding the elimination of private desires and interests, breaking the ethical order of familial care and meritocratic gradation, and calling for public values of rightness and justice. See Sun 2001: 7.209, 2.46, 10.334; Hsiao 1948: 98–100; Graham 1978: 44–52; Ivanhoe 1998; Sato 2016: 329–330. Their discussions of the concept of *yì* in the *Mencius* and *Xunzi*, however, differ from those of this essay.

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