

Article

The Multiple Dimensions of Confucian Relational Ethics and the “Way of Being With”

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Abstract: To reduce Confucian ethics to a “hierarchy of association” or to say that it is incapable of dealing with the problems of strangers is to only see that Confucian ethics stipulates different treatments for kin relations and the sexes. However, this fails to see the multiple different dimensions of Confucian ethics. In fact, the Confucians established universal relational ethics, rationality of social engagement, and a “way of being with” in the interpersonal relationships that are obtained between the self and others. This kind of ethics was not only effective in ancient society, but it is also effective at dealing with the problems of the modern “society of strangers”: it has a universal applicability. Beginning from two Confucian stories, and drawing on records of Confucius and his disciples in the *Analects* alongside supporting passages from the *Mengzi* and the *Xunzi*, this essay elucidates the notions of how self and other should treat each other, how wise people should know themselves and others, how benevolent people should love themselves and others, to argue that Confucianism possesses a universal relational ethics and a “way of being with”, and that the multiple dimensions of Confucian ethics cannot be reduced to just one.

Keywords: self; other; confucianism; relational ethics; multi-dimensionality



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1. Introduction

Understanding Confucian theories with their deep history and broad genealogies requires that we adopt a comprehensive way of thinking. It requires that when we understand one of its dimensions, we do not ignore its other dimensions, and that when we understand one of its narratives or theories, we do not ignore its other narratives or theories. One summarization of Confucian ethics says that the relational system that it founded is a kind of “hierarchical mode of association” (*chaxu geju* 差序格局)¹ (Fei 1985) and one suspicion cast on this kind of Confucian ethics says that it cannot respond to a modern society of strangers.² (Zhao 2007) However, these kinds of understandings only recognize one Confucian characteristic while concealing its other characteristics. This is to deny the value of Confucianism and limit its validity to the society of ancient China. It is a fact that Confucianism has a special ethical theory of kin relations and also recognizes the differential arrangement and order maintained by *li* 禮 (ritual, rites). However, it is also a fact that Confucianism emphasizes the equality of human nature, free will, and the development of personal character and, in addition, that it has a universal ethical theory of interhuman relationality.³

In order to illustrate the importance of exploring Confucian relational ethics and the question of its universality we need to situate our discussion within the context surrounding the debate on whether or not Confucian ethics is a particularism or a universalism. The modern world that values diversity reflected on and criticized the universalism of the Enlightenment era and thereby proposed new kinds of justice and reason (See MacIntyre 1989). People either focus on ethics with different kinds of universality, or they focus on ethics of difference, or they think that Confucian ethics is an instance of particularism (Zhang 2009, pp. 483–92), or they think that Confucianism is a kind of universal ethics (Yu

2006, pp. 160–77). The debate revolving around the question of whether or not the ethics represented in the Confucian notion that “relatives cover for relatives” (*qinqin xiangyin* 親親相隱) has been a heated one (See Guo 2004, 2011; Deng 2020) that does not seem to be ending anytime soon (Di 2019). During the Eastern Zhou (770–256 BCE), Confucianism was faced with challenges from Daoism, Legalism, Mohism, and other schools of thought and those original debates are still going on today. An example is the debate on which of Confucianism’s “love has ranks” (*ai you chadeng* 愛有差等) and Mohism’s “impartial love” (*jian’ai* 兼愛) is universalist, and which is particularist (Shen 1992, pp. 23–48). Non-Chinese scholarship regarding Confucian ethics’ universality mainly focuses on the degree of difference between positions. Joseph Levenson cast much suspicion on Confucianism’s modern transformation in the face of all that challenged it (See Levenson 1968) and Du Weiming 杜維明 thinks that both Chinese and non-Chinese scholars have not carried out enough work in response to this. In terms of this, the arguments proposed by Fei Xiaotong 費孝通 and Zhao Tingyang 趙汀陽 are just two examples where Confucianism is defined as a particularist set of ethics. Therefore, this article, which understands Confucianism as a universal set of ethics, is in part a response to such scholars who would see it understood as a particularist set of ethics.

The overall argument of this article is that Confucian relational ethics is an interpersonal “way of being with” (*xiangyu zhi dao* 相與之道)⁴ and a “way of social interaction” (*jiaowang zhi dao* 交往之道). It is established on the universal world of relations that obtains between people. Confucianism established this ethical theory not only in order to face relatives, friends, and acquaintances, but also strangers, too. This ethical theory is broadly applicable to all kinds of interpersonal relationships between self and other.⁵ Confucian relational ethics is plural rather than singular. Confucius’ 孔子 different presentations of the same ethical theory across different concepts and his different answers to the same questions of his different disciples all show the plurality of dimensions to Confucian ethics. This means that Confucianism cannot allow the human equality that obtains in its universal relational ethics to be concealed by kin relationships or its differentiating *li*.

2. The “Way of Being With” in Two Confucian Contexts

Confucian ethics can be summarized as a relational ethics or a “way of being with”. One of its theoretical forms particularizes human relations as those between father and son, husband and wife, older and younger brothers, ruler and ministers, and friends. These are normalized through such ideas as “familiarity” (*youqin* 有親), “duty” (*youyi* 有義), “(sexual) differentiation” (*youbie* 有別), “seniority” (*youxu* 有序), and “trust” (*youxin* 有信). (*Mengzi* 3A4) Three of these five relations are family or kin relations, and the other two are hierarchical political relations or social relations. In ancient society, the scope and space for human activities was small and social mobility was not very possible; therefore, social interaction was limited. For most of the time, people lived within the social circles defined by their families, villages, towns, friends, and acquaintances. Thus, the representations of Confucian ethics are connected to the ways in which people lived in ancient society. However, the space of Confucian ethics was never limited to the small circle of human communities or the relationships between people familiar with each other. Instead, there is another way of describing Confucian ethics: the universal ethical values and norms established in interpersonal relations, that is, the relationships that are obtained between the self and others.⁶ This is correlate with the Confucian call for a community where “all is one family within the four seas” or where there is a “great unity throughout the whole world”.

There are two passages which have not been given enough attention but nonetheless provide an appropriate point of entry for understanding this set of Confucian relational ethics. The first of these is contained in the *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳 (Outer Commentary of Han Family Odes):

Zi Lu said: “When people are good to me I am good to them in turn; when people are not good to me I am not good to them in turn”. Zi Gong said: “When people

are good to me I am good to them in turn; when people are not good to me then I guide them to be better". Yan Hui said: "When people are good to me I am good to them in turn; when people are not good to me I am good to them nonetheless". These three asked the Master about their differing opinions. Confucius said: "You's (i.e., Zi Lu) idea is that of the uncultured Man and Mo peoples; Ci's (i.e., Zi Gong) idea is that of friends; and Hui's idea is that family relations. (Han 2012, p. 102)

This is a story where Confucius answers the questions of his three disciples, Zi Lu, Zi Gong, and Yan Hui.

In other situations where Confucius and his disciples are answering questions, it is usually Confucius who raises the question before his three disciples answer. This story from the *Hanshi waizhuan* does not provide us with a particular scene. According to its similarities with stories recorded in other texts we can infer that Confucius asked the question "How should one best treat others?" at some point when they had all gathered together. Zi Lu, who was fond of acting first regardless of consequences, answered first with "When people are good to me I am good to them in turn; when people are not good to me I am not good to them in turn". Following him was Zi Gong's answer: "When people are good to me I am good to them in turn; when people are not good to me then I guide them to be better". Finally, Yan Hui answered with "When people are good to me I am good to them in turn; when people are not good to me I am good to them nonetheless". The answers that Confucius' three disciples provided to his one question are all very different. It is possible that Confucius did not immediately say anything and therefore his disciples actively sought his opinion on their answers. Thus, Confucius provided his appraisal: "You's idea is that of the uncultured Man and Mo peoples; Ci's idea is that of friends; and Hui's idea is that family relations". It is obvious that Confucius divided their answers into three categories ranking them from highest to lowest—from family relations, to friend relations, and finally to relations between strangers. We will refer to the ethical story contained in this passage as "Story A".

The second story regarding the Confucian ethical context recounts Confucius questioning his three disciples on what they think "wise persons" (*zhizhe* 智者) and "benevolent persons" (*renzhe* 仁者) are like:

Zi Lu entered, and Confucius said: "You! What is a wise person like? What is a benevolent person like?" Zi Lu replied: "A wise person allows others to know themselves (i.e., the wise person), a benevolent person allows others to love themselves (i.e., the benevolent person)". Confucius said: "This can be considered a scholar-official". Zi Gong entered, and Confucius said: "Ci! What is a wise person like? What is a benevolent person like?" Zi Gong replied: "Wise persons know others and benevolent persons love others". Confucius said: "This can be considered a scholarly gentleman". Yan Hui entered, and Confucius said: "Hui! What is a wise person like? What is a benevolent person like?" Yan Hui replied: "Wise persons know themselves and benevolent persons love themselves". Confucius said: "This can be considered an enlightened gentleman". (*Xunzi "Zidao"*)⁷ (X. Wang 1988, p. 533)

In comparison with the above story, this appears to be an interview that takes place inside a room between Confucius and his disciples where he allowed each to answer one by one. Confucius raised two questions: "What is a wise person like?" and "What is a benevolent person like?" He provided an appraisal of each answer on the spot. Each student provided a different answer and Confucius' response to them also ranks them differently—from the lowest "scholar-official", to the middling "scholarly gentleman" and to the highest "enlightened gentleman". However, Confucius does not explain what the differences between these three ranks are nor does he generally use this method to distinguish different types of personalities or characters. The ideal personalities of Confucianism are usually "scholar-officials", "gentleman", "worthies", and "sages". According to what is said in

the “Ai Gong” chapter of the *Xunzi*⁸ (Lou 2018), the three ranks here can be correlated with “scholar-officials”, “gentlemen”, and “worthies”. We will refer to this passage and its ethical context as “Story B”.

What kind of problem and meaning do these two ethical stories of Confucius and his disciples present? First, the questions that Confucius raised and the answers that his disciples provided all revolve around the mutual relationships of “self” and “other”. In terms of Story A, Confucius most likely asked the general question of how one should treat others. In Story B, Confucius was not concerned with how one should generally treat others, but instead asked the more particular questions of what wise and benevolent people are like. However, each of Confucius’ three disciples answered in terms of the relationship between self and other. Even though Yan Hui’s answer deals with how one should treat oneself, from the perspective of Confucian “moral learning for oneself” (*weiji zhi xue* 為己之學),⁹ his answer cannot be understood in terms of a “self” isolated from others.

Second, we need to adopt a comprehensive perspective on the “way of being with” expressed by Confucius’ three disciples in regard to the self/other relationship and Confucius’ appraisal thereof. Not limiting ourselves to these two stories, we can see that in other places Confucius and his disciples engaged in similar rounds of questions and answers (it is always Zi Lu who leads the way, followed by Zi Gong and then Yan Hui, and they each have three different answers; at the same time, Confucius’ appraisal always praises Yan Hui as the best, followed by Zi Gong with Zi Lu last). The different instances of Confucius and his disciples’ discussions often have different emphases, such as Confucius’ definition of concepts such as benevolence (*ren* 仁), appropriateness (*yi* 義), propriety (*li* 禮), wisdom (*zhi* 智), trustworthiness (*xin* 信), filiality (*xiao* 孝), dedication (*zhong* 忠), respect (*jing* 敬), and others. The different expressions of Confucius’ ethical theory in different contexts imbue it with a certain abundance and diversity of meaning. This is why we must adopt a sufficiently holistic perspective.

Third, there is a general meaning to the “way of being with” that obtains in the relationship of self and other that is expressed in the two Confucian contexts provided by Story A and Story B. Confucius’ appraisal is relative where he does not assign superiority and inferiority or affirm one to the exclusion of the other. Placing each in their proper temporal context and ethical tradition we can understand each as representing different “ways of being with”. There is a weight to the lower and upper limits of ethical values as well as a distinction between what is normal and what is abnormal. The altruism that treats others as oneself, loves others as oneself, and that sacrifices oneself for others is situated at the upper limit of ethical values and is applicable in abnormal situations. Doing no harm to others and being good to others, according to a basic understanding of ethical norms, can be understood as being situated at the lower limit of ethical values and is applicable in normal times. Ethical values situated at the lower limit and applicable in normal times are primary in establishing a good life, and secondary to these is those of the upper limit that are applicable in abnormal times. If we flip this around then we will fall into the trap of utopianism. Despite its rather strong rationalism and being criticized as a utopianism, the ethical interaction and “way of being with” of Confucianism is a holistic hybrid of lower and upper limit ethical values.

Below, we will discuss the way of social interaction represented by the two Confucian stories described above in terms of the totality of Confucian ethical theory to determine whether or not it can be reduced to a kind of “hierarchical mode of association” and whether or not it can respond to the problem of interactions with strangers, that is, whether or not it has to claim to be a universal set of ethics.

3. “Self” and “Other”: How Should People Treat Each Other?

The “way of being with” presented in Story A described above gives us a multifaceted relationship between the self and others. It includes four different modes: (1) altruistic, (2) punitive, (3) tolerant and (4) Utmost Good (*zhishan* 至善). Put in traditional language, these four modes are expressed by “repaying virtue with virtue” (*yi de bao de* 以德報

德), “repaying wrongs with wrongs” (*yi yuan bao yuan* 以怨報怨), “repaying wrongs with uprightness” (*yi zhi bao yuan* 以直報怨), and “repaying wrongs with virtue” (*yi de bao yuan* 以德報怨). The “altruistic mode” or “repaying virtue with virtue” is expressed differently in different ethical traditions (and has even been developed in modern ethics). A layman’s understanding of this mode says that when you are good to me then I will be good to you. In Story A, each of Confucius’ disciples say that “When people are good to me then I am good to them in turn”, we can call this a “theory of repaying good with good” (*yi shan bao shan lun* 以善報善論). What this means is very clear: when others are good to me then I will in return be good to them. In other words, when other people treat me well, then I will repay them by also treating them well. This is an ethical “ought” and justice. Not repaying the goodness of others with goodness or repaying them with ill behavior is indicative of an ethical lack and is even an ethical evil.

Altruism is established on the good intentions and actions of both parties. In this kind of altruistic mode, the doer of “good” is the other, and the receiver of “good” is the self. Whether or not others are good to me is a matter of the others’ intentions, choices, and actions, and whether or not I am good to them in turn is determined by me. In terms of moral reason, others who do good usually do so to gain something from the one they do good to and the one who is beneficiary of the good of others will repay them. Additionally, if one does indeed repay the good of others with good, then the altruistic ethical value between self and other is realized. The case is the same even if I am the doer of good and the other is the beneficiary of the good. Thus, we can deduce the proposition that “If I want others to be good to me then I *must* be good to others first”. Mengzi 孟子 expresses this idea thus: “He who loves others is enduringly loved by others; he who respects others is enduringly respected by others”. (*Mengzi* 4B28) This is an even more direct deduction of the proposition that “However, I am is however the other is”. For Confucianism, self-cultivation and discipline are primary where demands are first made of oneself regarding how others are treated before anything is expected in return from others. Even though we have failed to meet our expectations, we still cannot lightly blame others but instead must reflect on whether or not we truly did treat others well. If we have indeed done so, then we can know how to respond. Mengzi’s altruism is closely connected to this.

Confucius’ disciples’ “repay good with good” is just one expression of Confucian ethical altruism¹⁰ and we can easily relate it to the altruism expressed by Confucius’ “repay virtue with virtue” and the *Liji’s* 禮記 (Book of Rites) “ritual values reciprocity in interpersonal conduct” (*li shang wanglai* 禮尚往來; literally “ritual values goings and comings”). Confucius’ “repay virtue with virtue” uses “virtue” to express the altruism between benefactor and beneficiary. The saying “ritual values reciprocity in interpersonal conduct” comes from the “Quli 曲禮” chapter in the *Liji*: “It is not ritually proper to give and not be given back to; neither is it ritually proper to not give back when one is given to”. This expresses the altruistic relationship of benefactor and beneficiary in terms of particular rituals. The “Quli” chapter divides ethical values into two ranks: “The ruler values virtue and those below him take giving and repaying as their duty”. According to this, the highest value is “valuing virtue” (*guide* 貴德) followed by “giving and repaying” (*shibao* 施報). In comparison with “giving and repaying as their duty”, the ethical value expressed by “valuing virtue” means that the ruler only benefits others but does not demand repayment. This is an ethical value that is higher than “giving and repaying” but which cannot in the end wholly replace “giving and repaying”. The “Quli” chapter’s saying that “ritual values reciprocity in interpersonal conduct” is a definition of “giving and repaying”. The theory of giving and repaying in a broad sense also includes ideas on punishment and revenge.¹¹ Thus, the *Liji’s* “ritual values reciprocity in interpersonal conduct” represents a narrow theory of giving and repaying. Even though “repaying the good with good”, “repaying virtue with virtue”, and “ritual values reciprocity in interpersonal conduct” are all different expressions, they more or less all belong to the altruistic mode. This is one important area of the Confucian “way of being with”.

The altruistic mode is common to all three of Confucius' disciples as well as a mode that he approved of. In Story A, the disparity in Confucius' appraisal of his three disciples' answers is because they each gave expression to different modes of the "way of being with": punitive, tolerant, and the Utmost Good. Zi Lu's idea that Confucius said was that of the "uncultured Man and Mo peoples" can be said to represent a "theory of repaying wrongs with wrongs" or what is commonly known as "an eye for an eye". This is a relational mode that is geared towards punishment or vengeance. This is a mode of "being with" that gives others a taste of their own medicine, that is, it unreservedly repays one bad deed with another bad deed. Its most extreme form is vengeance. To repay bad deeds with bad deeds is actually to punish the doer of bad deeds, it is to realize responsibility for the perpetrator's bad deeds and exact a certain cost. This is an effective method for maintaining ethical norms and restoring social order; it is ethically correct. What right does the perpetrator have to harm others? Punishment is not limited to ethics, instead, according to Robert Axelrod, the personal benefit of rational people is best obtained by adopting an attitude of "repaying deeds in kind". The main mechanism of the law is punishment, it is just that legal punishments are not soft ethical punishments but are much harsher. Criminal law forces the perpetrator to lose their freedom and civil law compensates the victim.

Zi Lu's idea of repaying bad deeds with bad deeds involves a general theory of ethical punishments. Confucius' criticism of him shows that he entirely rejected this kind of idea. The so-called "uncultured Man and Mo peoples" refers to tribal peoples in the southern and northern parts of ancient China and serve as a metaphor for savagery and barbarism. However, theories of punishments are not limited to barbaric societies, instead, they are also found in civilized societies as well. One of the reasons why Confucius criticized Zi Lu so harshly is because the answers provided by Zi Gong and Yan Hui were far better. Another reason for his criticism is because he believed that one should "repay wrongs with uprightness".

However, Confucius did not actually reject punishment in its entirety. Two passages recorded in the *Analects* 論語 clearly show this: "The Master said: 'It is only those who are benevolent who can both be good to others and bad to others'" (4.3) and "The Master said: 'I have yet to see someone who is overly fond of benevolent conduct and despises poor behavior. Those who are benevolent cannot be praised any further; despising poor behavior is already to be benevolent, it is so that the ill deeds of others do not find their way to oneself". (4.6) For Confucius, someone who is benevolent is someone who can "despise others". Why can benevolent people despise others? The reason that Confucius gives is because they are "not benevolent" (*buren* 不仁). These kinds of people should be despised and moreover, despising them is a means of being good to them. Despising people who behave poorly is actually a kind of punishment. This is certainly not to be considered "repaying virtue with virtue" and neither can it be said that it is "repaying wrongs with uprightness". It is hard to see how Confucius' criticism of Zi Lu's theory of punishment in one case and his praise of it in another are compatible with each other.

The theory of giving and repaying that we described above in terms of altruism and punishment has a classical provenance. The "Tanggao 湯誥" chapter of the *Shangshu* 尚書 (Documents) understood this in terms of the justice of an anthropomorphized deity and utilized this theory to argue for the legitimacy of the Shang dynasty replacing the Xia dynasty. There are many poems in the *Shijing* 詩經 (Classic of Poetry) that express a similar idea of repayment, such as the "Yi 抑" poem (no. 256) that says: "There are no words that do not have a response and no virtue that does not have a reward". The "Mugua 木瓜" poem (no. 64) also says: "She gave me a *mugua* fruit and in return I rewarded her with a jade ornament", thereby giving expression to the feelings of repayment. This Confucian theory of giving and repaying is an extension of this way of thinking. The *Xunzi*, *Kongzi jiaoyu* 孔子家語, *Hanshi waizhuan*, and the *Shuoyuan* 說苑 all record Confucius as saying: "Tian rewards whoever does good with blessings; tian punishes whoever does bad with misfortune". The *Zhongyong* 中庸 also records that Confucius uses Shun as an example to illustrate his theory that good deeds are necessarily rewarded: "Thus, whoever is greatly virtuous

will necessarily have an official position, an official salary, and a good reputation . . . thus, whoever is greatly virtuous will be given the mandate". The "Wenyan 文言" appendix of the *Zhouyi* 周易 (*Book of Changes*) also promotes the necessary relationship of giving and repaying: "The family that accumulates good deeds will have a surplus of beautiful goods and the family that accumulates bad deeds will have a surplus of calamities". These all belong to the Confucian theory of giving and repaying and are consistent with that found in Story A. It is an expression of philosophical causality in the world of ethics.

Zi Gong's idea that one should not seek retribution against those who do one harm belongs to the tolerant mode and, on the whole, belongs to Confucius' theory of "repaying wrongs with uprightness". In order to understand Zi Gong's tolerant mode, we need to consider his saying that "when people are not good to me then I guide them to be better" alongside Confucius' appraisal thereof and his notion of "repaying wrongs with uprightness". In response to an anonymous questioner asking what "repaying wrongs with virtue" is like, Confucius answered: "How should one repay wrongs with virtue? Wrongs should be repaid with uprightness and virtue should be repaid with virtue". (*Analects* 13.34) It is possible that this passage is incomplete. Nevertheless, according to Confucius' answer, we can infer that he imagined two questions: "How to repay wrongs?" and "How to repay virtue?" For Confucius, the ethical value of "repaying wrongs with uprightness" is greater than the punishment dealt by "repaying wrongs with wrongs" but is lesser than that of "repaying wrongs with virtue". This is thus a compromise situated between the two and is similar to Zi Gong's "I guide them to be better".¹² For example, in terms of the father-son relationship, the father's care and the son's filiality belong to the theory of "repaying virtue with virtue". However, if the son is not filial then the father can seek retribution; at the same time, if the father does not render care, the son cannot easily seek retribution. For Confucius, when it is the father who has done wrong, then the son needs to adopt a stance of "subtle remonstrance" that both "repays wrongs with virtue" (as seen in his praise of Shun's filiality) and "repays wrongs with uprightness".

The "idea of friends" (*pengyou zhi yan* 朋友之言) implies friendliness and good intentions. However, what kind of opinions or ideas belong to "friendliness" requires our analysis. There are three measures for making friends according to Confucius: (1) making friends with upright people, (2) making friends with trustworthy people, and (3) making friends with educated people. (*Analects* 16.4). In addition to this, Confucius also has a principle of encouraging friends to better themselves: "Be honest in pointing out the faults of others and guide them well. If they cannot be guided then stop. Do not therefor humiliate yourself". (*Analects* 12.13) In comparison with these two standards, Zi Gong's "guiding" is a means of getting along with friends who treat one poorly by "being honest in pointing out their faults" and "only going with them as far as is appropriate". The phrase being translated here as "guide them to be better" is in the original Chinese *yin zhi jintui* 引之進退. The latter two characters (literally "advancing and retreating") have the meaning of taking an official position, retreating from political life, or being relieved of one's government post. It also refers to whether or not one's conduct accords with ritual stipulations as well as acting only after considering and measuring up a situation. Zi Gong's "guide them to be better" can be understood to be in accord with "ritual" and to be a serious matter whose proper application in social situations requires serious care. It is quite natural for people who have been mistreated or harmed to have feelings of resentment or anger towards those who have done them wrong and want to punish them. Contrarily, tolerance is when I have a strong power of self-control and do not seek to punish those who have done me wrong but instead tolerate, accept, and keep respectful distance from them. Not only is this the case, but I will also amicably guide them and hope that they change for the better—"turning enemies into friends". This requires a higher-level ethical value that is more tolerant and that even repays wrongs with virtue.

Feelings of friendliness are a valuable virtue that, in being more intimate relations, transcend normal human relations; such relationships are not easily founded. Friends have been said to be another self, to be "birds of a feather", but in the same way that

one will complain about oneself, for two individuals to come together as “best friends” (*zhiji* 知己, *zhixin* 知心) both require they be of the same mind and that they mutually respect each other’s differences. The Confucians talk about friendship in many places and focused on the development of the feelings of friendship and excluded being friends with “pretentious”, “flattering”, and “glib” people. (*Analects* 16.4) They also maintain that one “should not be friends with someone who is not as good as you” (*Analects* 1.8) It is already difficult to make friends with someone one has no previous enmity towards, let alone anyone else! Confucius understood Zi Gong’s idea to “guide” those who have done him harm as one of the methods for making friends. This is the “way of being friends” that does not consider the special cases of previous wrongdoings but is instead tolerant and helpful; therefore, it is a standard of friendship higher than common friendship. Tolerance is a human virtue and unless one has an open-mind and capacious perspective, it is very hard to achieve a tolerant attitude. Therefore, it has a much lesser degree of socialization than the punitive mode.

Yan Hui’s idea that one should treat others well even if they treat one poorly constitutes the Utmost Good mode of “repaying wrongs with virtue”. It is not only ethically higher than Zi Gong’s tolerant mode but also more ideal. It is also what Confucius praised as the “idea of relatives” (*qinshu zhi yan* 親屬之言). Family feelings are the most natural of human emotions and primarily find expression in the family or the household. The Confucians affirmed this ethical value and moreover hoped that the ruler-people relation of the political realm would become a father-son relationship, that all peoples “within the four seas” would become siblings, and that all peoples would become one family. Confucius’ praise of Yan Hui’s position shows that he also maintained a stance of “repaying wrong with virtue” rather than one of “repaying wrongs with uprightness”. It is the hardest to tolerate and accept others who have done one harm let alone treat them even better than before. It is difficult to achieve this among families and friends and even more so among strangers. Yet, as a human ethical value, there is a place where it can find certain application. The Confucians greatly hoped for this to take place during the Warring States period. The legendary Shun was seen by the Confucians as a classic example of someone who enacted this ethical value. He was very unlucky in that his father, step-mother, and younger brother all treated him poorly and did him great harm on several occasions. He nevertheless found a way each time to escape danger and in return to continue to treat them well.

If we rank the four Confucian “ways of being with” in terms of their ethical value, then the mode of Utmost Good is the highest, followed by the tolerant and altruistic modes, and then finally with the punitive mode at the bottom. In terms of practice, those ranked higher are more difficult for people to enact. Fortunately, the healthier a society is, the more widespread is the altruistic mode and the opportunities for the punitive, tolerant, and Utmost Good modes become rarer. The sicker a society becomes, the more the punitive, tolerant, and Utmost Good modes are necessary in order to deal with the greater number of people who do bad deeds. Altruism is constructive in that it is the best method for establishing and maintaining good social order. The remaining three modes are wasteful in that they expend resources to make up for lacks or failures. Punishment is mostly a supplement of altruism; tolerance and the Utmost Good use a great deal of good intention and energy to save those who harm themselves and others. These four are all necessary in any society, it is just that the degree to which each one is needed is determined by what kind of society it is.

4. “The Way of Mutual Knowing” of the “Wise”: “Knowing Oneself” and “Knowing Others”

What is a wise person supposed to be like? When Confucius asked his three disciples this question they responded according to their own ideas and his positive response to each of their answers shows that he was satisfied with them. In Story B, the “way of being with” of the “wise person” and the “benevolent person” is such that people know each other and love each other. These two deal with the Confucian concepts of “wisdom” and

“benevolence” as well as with the concepts of “knowing” and “loving”.¹³ The answers provided by the three disciples and Confucius’ appraisal thereof constitute three different kinds of “wise people” and “benevolent people” in addition to three different kinds of “ways of being with”. These three kinds are allowing others to know oneself, allowing oneself to know others, and allowing oneself to know oneself. Let us first take a look at the three different “ways of being with” of “wise persons”.

In comparison with “the benevolent” and “the brave” or simply just in comparison with the former, the Confucian notion of “the wise” has several different meanings.¹⁴ Several instances in the *Analects* record such passages as “The wise are not confused” (9.29), “The wise enjoy water” (6.23), “The wise are happy” (ibid.), “The wise move” (ibid.), and many more. These different usages of “wise/wisdom” all point up its different characteristics: “the wise are not confused” means that people understand the affairs of the world rather than are confused by them; “the wise are happy” and “the wise enjoy water” refer to people’s contentment and enjoyment of water; “the wise move” implies that people enjoy activity and vitality. However, for the Confucians, “wise/wisdom” mostly refers to human intelligence and rationality and at the same time is closely linked to the recognition and selection of ethical values and virtues. “Wise people” are rational people as well as virtuous people. According to Story B, wise people are those who are capable of allowing others to know the wise person, are capable of knowing others, or are capable of knowing themselves. The “wise person”, firstly, has been limited to those who have achieved an intelligent and thorough comprehension of others in their relationship therewith rather than generally referring to someone who has knowledge of the things of the world. Secondly, because Confucius’ disciples have a different understanding of what a wise person is, therefore, in terms of the mutual recognition that obtains in interpersonal relationships, each define the “wise person” in a way that illustrates different kinds of “ways of being with” or “ways of mutual knowing”.

It is a feature of “the way of being with” that in interpersonal relationships each person in the relationship needs to recognize and understand the other person. Between “knowing others” and “knowing oneself”, it is Zi Lu’s “wise person” that is capable of allowing others to know oneself. People desire to be known and affirmed by others, those who are your “best friend” (in Chinese “*zhiji* 知己” and “*zhixin* 知心”, the former literally “knowing oneself” and the latter “knowing [one’s] heart/mind”) are those who understand you the best, sometimes even to the point that they are willing to die on your behalf. It is likely that those who have high aspirations and intentions or who are talented will feel resentment if they are not recognized by others. Because of this, Confucius said “Is it not the exemplary person who does not feel wronged when left unrecognized?” (*Analects* 1.1) Zi Lu thought that it was those who were recognized by others that could be considered “wise persons”.

Zi Lu was renowned for his bravery even beyond the Confucians, and Confucius often criticized him for being too rash. Many of his promises and actions illustrate that he was always eager to prove his bravery to others, that he wanted others to recognize his bravery. Furthermore, Confucius even lauded bravery as a virtue, and in several places said such things as “Exemplary persons disdain the prospect of not leaving behind a reputation after they have died” (*Analects* 15.20) and “If by the age of forty or fifty years old someone has yet to make a name for themselves, what reason is there to respect them?” (*Analects* 9.23) The key is how one realizes the recognition of others or by what means one wins a reputation. The Confucians maintained that reputation must be based in fact, that one should only achieve a good reputation as a result of moral cultivation. It is often the case that when one’s reputation does not match the facts it is that such a person is virtuous in name only. These kinds of people do not conduct themselves in a moral manner and thus lack anything by which to earn a reputation; therefore, they rely on their authority to establish a name for themselves. Such a reputation is neither true nor enduring, neither is it moral. This is something that the Confucians obviously criticized and rejected. Another case is where reputation and fact do not match up, in other words, even though someone has done much, they have yet to be properly recognized. This is unfortunate and obviously not something

that the Confucians were fond of happening. However, the real concern of the Confucians was not that someone having done good does not have a reputation, but instead that the reputation one does have does not align with the facts. This is why Confucius said, “Do not worry that others do not know you, concern yourself with what you can and cannot do” (*Analects* 14.30) and “Exemplary persons worry about being incapable and not whether people recognize them or not”. (*Analects* 15.19)

We cannot say that Zi Lu was someone vainly searching for fame. Instead, he thought that wise people allowed others to recognize and praise them due to their possession of actual virtue.¹⁵ If this was not the case then Confucius would not have praised his answer as being the standard of a “scholar-official”. It is just that Zi Lu’s position of “allowing others to know oneself” does not begin from Confucius’ position that one should seek virtue in oneself before seeking it in others.¹⁶ Zi Lu begins from a want for others to recognize him first rather than focusing on how he should conduct himself. This turns Confucius’ position on its head and seems to be a bit arrogant and incompatible with Confucius’ ideal as seen in such statements as “Do not worry about others not recognizing you, worry about not understanding others”. (*Analects* 1.16) and “Do not worry about not having any official position, worry about the means by which you obtain one. Do not worry about others not recognizing you, worry about the means by which you gain their recognition”. (*Analects* 4.14) Perhaps the reason why Confucius does not praise Zi Lu as highly as Zi Gong is because of this.

The “way of mutual knowing” of wise people is articulated as “knowing others” by Zi Gong. Confucius praises this as higher than Zi Lu’s. Zi Gong’s idea that “the wise know others” perhaps directly accepted Confucius’ own position. *Analects* 12.22 records Fan Chi asking about “knowing”, to which Confucius replies that “knowing” means “to know others”. This clearly defines “wisdom” as “knowing others”. The line from *Analects* 1.16 quoted above also emphasizes this point. However, why do we need to “know others”? Generally speaking, “knowing others” contains two presuppositions: First, there are differences between people, between myself and others in regard to such things as character and disposition, likes and dislikes, intentions, and values; some of these are innate and some are acquired. Second, people cannot but live within a community, oneself and others cannot but interact and engage with each other. Therefore, in order for us to interact and engage with “others” in a way that is conducive to good order requires that we understand and recognize them. My own characteristics are not those of the other people, neither are my own desires and preferences the same as other people. Even if I am good-intentioned, if I impose my own wants on others, then problems are sure to arise. The Confucian sayings that “One should extend what one wants to others” (*ji zhi suoyu yi shiyu ren* 己之所欲亦施於人) and “One should not extend what one does not want to others” (*ji suo buyu wu shiyu ren* 己所不欲勿施於人) are both limiting propositions. One should treat others in accordance with their wishes and not in accordance with one’s own. It is only when we recognize and understand others that we can treat them in the ways that they desire to be treated. Our modern society that values diversity and differences should aspire to this.

Zi Gong did not concretely explain why we need to know others or how we can know others. For Confucius, it is necessary to “know others” in government so as to be able to “promote worthies” because it is only when rulers “know others” can they “use them appropriately” (*shenren* 善任). In the family, in order for one to properly serve their parents, it is necessary that they “know others”. However, it is not easy to “know others”. Confucius pointed out one of his previous mistakes: “In selecting people according to their words I falsely blamed Zai Yu; in selecting people according to their appearance, I falsely blamed Zi Yu”. (*Shiji* “Zhongni dizi liezhuan” 史記·仲尼弟子列傳). Is this perhaps the evidence behind the *Zhuangzi*’s saying that the Confucians “Understand ritually appropriate conduct but do not understand the human heart”? Actually, “to select people according to their words” and “to select people according to their appearance” are mistakes easily made in trying to understand others. This shows that truly understanding others is the only

means for avoiding such mistakes. Moreover, understanding someone's "words", that is, differentiating their opinions, is another means of recognizing them: "Without knowing what other people say there is no means to know them". (*Analects* 20.3) Just the same, by truly understanding people they will not be asked to accomplish things unsuited to them nor will ill things be said of them.

Yan Hui's "the wise know themselves" is another example of the Confucian "way of mutual knowing". That Confucius praised his idea as being higher than the others is another example that he truly delighted in him. Unlike how Confucius talked about "wisdom" in terms of "knowing others", he did not much discuss "wisdom" in terms of "knowing one's self". However, that he praised Yan Hui's view the most shows that among the various "ways of mutual knowing" it was "knowing one's self" that Confucius saw as primary. Who understands oneself the most if not for oneself? Do not the economists say that no one understands what one wants more than oneself? This being so, what is the point in saying that "knowing one's self" is the characteristic of "wisdom"? Additionally, why did Confucius praise it so highly? Neither Confucius nor Yan Hui explain what the "self-knowledge" of "the wise" is, but it goes without saying that their "knowing one's self"—much like Socrates' "know thyself"—is much more complex than what is generally acknowledged. The fact that people value this kind of "self-knowledge" shows that it is not easily achieved.

In many cases people more often than not project themselves onto others, therefore, "knowing one's self" requires first of all the reflective turn of one's attention away from others and toward oneself. The Confucians' "seek in oneself through reflection" (*fanqiu zhuji* 反求諸己) is just this kind of inwards turn. The *Qionгда yi shi* 窮達以時 emphasizes that "Exemplary persons are sincere in their self-reflection". However, what is it that people need to reflect on and why do they need to reflect at all? The Confucian ideal is perfection through self-cultivation, therefore, reflecting on one's moral conduct is to recognize the places where one falls short. Reflecting on one's shortcomings has the goal of elevating oneself, it is in order to "align oneself with the worthies when in their presence and to reflect on oneself when not" (*Analects* 4.17) or to "be strict with one's self but lenient with others" (*Analects* 15.15) In terms of knowledge, we easily take our ignorance for knowledge, we easily think we know the truth of something when in fact we do not. Therefore, Socrates thought that "knowledge" was knowing that one does not know something. For Confucius, "knowledge" is understanding that "knowing is knowing and not knowing is not knowing". (*Analects* 2.17) It is only when one understands what one does not know that one can gain knowledge.¹⁷ For Mengzi, knowing oneself is first of all a matter of recognizing one's moral mind and moral potential to thereby expand and realize one's moral knowledge and capabilities.

Human interaction and engagement are based on mutual knowledge. In Story B we see three different kinds of "ways of mutual knowing". These are also three different "ways of being with". It is just that their focus is different. To allow others to know oneself focuses on the other as witness, this is to see oneself in the eyes of the other; to know others is to focus on respecting others, this is to see others through one's own eyes; to know one's self focuses on the autonomy of the other, this to see a one's own self that differs from others from one's own perspective. All of this is required for human interaction.

5. "The Way of Mutual Love" of "The Benevolent": Self-Love, Loving Others, and Being Loved

The "benevolent person" (*renzhe* 仁者) in Story B mostly expresses a "way of mutual love" (*xiang'ai zhi dao* 相愛之道). It presents three different kinds of "benevolent persons" each corresponding to a different kind of "way of mutual love". What is strange about this is that it is Zi Gong's description of "benevolent persons" that is the standard Confucian answer regarding "the way of mutual love". Even though much Confucian discussion revolves around this topic of how one should love others, Confucius nevertheless appraises it as being in between the lowest and highest values. Zi Lu's ("allowing others to love

oneself") and Yan Hui's ("benevolent persons love themselves") models are both quite rare and Confucius praises the former as of low value and the latter as of high value. It is easy to understand why Zi Lu's model does not match up with Zi Gong's; however, it is not so easy to understand why Confucius praised Yan Hui so highly. Below we will connect this passage with other Confucian texts in order to better understand Yan Hui's "theory of self-love".

Previously, this was the only instance in the Confucian texts where the term "love oneself" (*ziai* 自愛) appeared. However, fortunately, the Jianshui Jingtuan Han bamboo *Qi lunyu* 齊論語 (*Qi Analects of Confucius*) provides us with a record of Confucius using this term: "Confucius said: 'Loving oneself is the pinnacle of benevolence; respecting oneself is the pinnacle of wisdom.'" If this is the origin of Yan Hui's theory, then we can say that his and his master's concept of "benevolence" not only contains a "theory of love" (*renai lun* 仁愛論) but at the same time also contains a "theory of self-love" (*ziai lun* 自愛論).¹⁸ We can further ask the following questions: why did Yan Hui give more prominence to "loving oneself"? Why did Confucius praise it as being a value higher than "the benevolence of loving others" (*airen zhi ren* 愛人之仁)? What is the relationship between "self-love" and Confucius' so-called "moral study for oneself"? What is the relationship between "loving oneself" and "loving others"?

It would seem that "self-love" is easily confused for selfishness and egoism in the same way that the "moral study for oneself" is. Yang Zhu 楊朱 is famous for his notions of "acting for oneself" (*weiwo* 為我), "valuing one's self" (*guiji* 貴己), "focusing on one's self" (*zhongji* 重己), and "placing oneself first" (*xianji* 先己). His saying that he "would not pluck out a single hair even if it would benefit the whole world" has been understood as representing a kind of selfish and egoistical stance. Mengzi forcefully criticized him, even arguing illogically that this "acting for oneself" is to lack a ruler and to be no more than a simple animal. Mozi 墨子 understood "self-love" as bad. This is because, for Mozi, "self-love" is not just selfishness for one's own benefit, it is selfishness for one's own benefit at the expense of others. This kind of "self-love" leads to struggle and disorder. Mozi's logic is very clear:

If the father loves himself and not his son, then he will take from his son for his own gain; if the older brother loves himself and not his younger brother, then he will take from his younger brother for his own gain; if the ruler loves himself and not his ministers, then he will take from his ministers for his own gain. Why is this? It is all because they do not mutually love each other. (*Mozi* "Jian'ai I") (Sun 2001, p. 99)

To put it in Aristotelean terms, this is a kind of bad self-love. The "self-love" and "for oneself" of the Confucians obviously have nothing to do with this kind of selfish and egoistical "self-love" that is harmful to others. Instead, their "self-love" and "for oneself" are exactly the opposite: they are purely good, they have the goal of loving oneself in the best way possible and at the same time expanding their love to the greatest number of people possible.

Yan Hui's idea of "self-love" is the same as Confucius'; it is also the same as the "for oneself" in Confucius' notion of "moral study for oneself". In the same way that Confucius criticized the "for others" in the "moral study for others", their concern was for internal moral development and self-realization that takes form within and is applied without as a unity (Cheng 1990, pp. 1004–5).

Xunzi also has a good explanation of this:

The learning of the ruler enters his ears and appears in his heart-mind spreading through his four limbs to find expression in action and rest. Even though he speaks softly and moves subtly, his speech and actions can all be taken as standards for conduct . . . The learning of the ruler is that by which he beautifies his person. (*Xunzi* "Quanxue")

For Confucius, cultivating one's person, nourishing one's nature, and completing oneself is an end itself and cannot be reduced to a means to gain something else. If we instrumentalize it, then it becomes "moral learning for others" and has nothing to do with the learning intimately linked to one's own life. It is only good words and good actions that are the best for oneself as well as for others. The "for oneself" and the "completion of oneself" (*chengji* 成己) that begins from it is also what is best for "completing others" (*chengren* 成人) and "completing things" (*chengwu* 成物). The love that is best for oneself is also the love that is best for others.

Yan Hui's "theory of self-love" is Confucius' way of treating others through dedication and empathy (*zhongshu zhi dao* 忠恕之道) that "extends oneself to others" (*tuiji jiren* 推己及人). The alternative composition of the character for "benevolence" (*ren* 仁) that is composed of "body/person" (*shen* 身) over "heart/mind" (*xin* 心) stems from the love and concern that one has for one's own person. Confucius' way of treating others through dedication and empathy is also the way of "extending oneself to others" as is expressed in such terms as "establishing oneself" and "establishing others", "achieving in oneself" and "achieving in others", and "applying what one wants" to others and "not applying what one does not want" to others. If a person is going to understand "loving others" then that person needs to understand that they themselves require love first. In terms of the similarities and commonalities of human beings, whoever understands that one oneself requires love will be able to understand that others also require love. In light of this "shared feeling", such persons will not only love themselves but will also love others and they will not only cherish themselves but will also cherish others. It is just as the *Daxue* 大學 says: "The ruler only seeks in others what he already has in himself and what he himself does not have he does not seek in others". The *Zhongyong* 中庸 also contains a similar idea but expresses it in the negative: "Treating others through dedication and empathy is not far from the way, it lies in not doing to others what one does not wish done to themselves". Someone who is numb to the needs of others not only lacks self-love but also lacks love for others. So-called cold and emotionless people are also like this. In terms of emotional intelligence, a person should love oneself and respect oneself at the same time as being warm and open to others. However, it is the case that there are people in society who neither love nor respect themselves. It is up for debate whether these kinds of people are actually incapable of loving and respecting others or not. It is quite possible the other people will not love someone who does not love themselves. This is what Yang Xiong 楊雄 inferred: "People must love themselves before they can love others; people must respect themselves before they can respect others" (*Fayan* "Junzi") (Yang 1992, p. 326).

Yan Hui's "self-love" is similar to Aristotle's theory of *philautia*. For Aristotle, someone who loves themselves well or truly is a good person. As one of Aristotle's Chinese translators remarks, such a person "should be one who loves themselves the most because reason chooses what is best for oneself and appropriates the greatest good for oneself. Such people wish the noble to triumph over everything else; they are true lovers of the self" (Aristotle 1990, p. 201). This kind of person always undertakes affairs in a just manner, with self-control, or in accordance with all kinds of virtues. They are such persons as that can satisfy the *logos* in their spirit, listen to their intellect, and can even sacrifice themselves in times of need for the public or their country (Aristotle 2017, p. 301). Aristotle's theory of *philautia* is at the same time a theory of love of others because those who truly love themselves do well in making friends, are happy to abandon their wealth on behalf of their friends, and willingly distribute the good to them. These kinds of people are able to love their friends and enter into deep relationships with them. It is just that such love and friendship are, for Aristotle, matters of reason and wisdom whereas for Yan Hui it is a matter of the ethical value of benevolence. Yan Hui's "self-love" includes a more general "love of others" that understands others through true love of oneself.

The Confucians have various answers to the question of "what is benevolence?" However, it can be said that Zi Gong's definition that "benevolence is loving others" (*renzhe airen* 仁者愛人) is the most direct and easily understandable (but not easily achieved). *Analects*

12.22 records Confucius as defining “benevolence” as “loving others” and “wisdom” as “knowing others”. Thus, Zi Gong’s definition can be said to be the standard one and is not only accepted by the Confucians but the other masters as well. For example, Mengzi also claims that “benevolence is loving others” (*Mengzi* 4B28). In addition, the *Xunzi* records a certain Chen Xiao’s 陳囂 confusion regarding how the use of state apparatuses can be unified with “loving others” to which *Xunzi* responds:

This is not something you understand. Benevolence is loving others, and because one loves others therefore one despises when harm is done to them. Appropriateness is following the correct patterns, and because one follows the correct patterns therefore one despises when they are disordered. (*Xunzi* “Yibing”) (X. Wang 1988, p. 279)

“Loving others” and “indiscriminate love” (*jian’ai* 兼愛) appear throughout the *Mozi*; the “Heavenly and Earthly” chapter of the *Zhuangzi* records Confucius as saying “As for *dao*, it covers and holds up the ten thousand things vastly like a great sea! . . . Loving others and benefitting things is called benevolence”.

Finally, let us discuss Zi Lu’s “benevolent people allow others to love themselves”. This model does not appear to be saying that one first loves others in order to obtain their love in return. What it is actually saying is that a person being loved and treated well by others is a result of loving and being good to others first. This is just what Mengzi means when he says that “Those who love others are enduringly loved by others; those who respect others are enduringly respected by others”. (*Mengzi* 4B28) There is a passage on *li* 禮 recorded in the “Records of Jin” section in the *Guoyu* 國語 that gives clear expression to the “causality” of the loving others/being loved by others relationship:

The “Treatise on Rites” says: “If you are going to make a request of someone else, then you must first do something for them. If you desire others to love you, then you must first love them. If you wish others to defer to you, then you must first defer to others. It is wrong to ask something of others when you yourself lack virtue”. (Xu and Wang 2002, p. 338)

While we are not certain what this “Treatise on Rites” (*lizhi* 禮志) mentioned here is, we see a similar expression in the excavated manuscript *Chengzhi wenzhi* 成之聞之 found at Guodian:

Therefore, the exemplary person does not overly give back in recompense nor do they make requests of those of distant relations, they reflect on themselves and thereby know others. Therefore, if one desires to be loved by others then they must first love others. If one desires to be respected by others then they must first respect others.

According to these texts, we can see that it is not likely that someone who does not love others first will be loved by others. That Confucius affirmed Zi Lu’s saying shows that he did not mean that a person being loved by others does not imply that they themselves do not love others. (It is just that Zi Lu’s wording easily leads us to such a misconception.)

We can imagine that it is the case that the reason a person is loved by others is because they are friendly and get along well with others. Does this not match with the Confucian “way of being with” contained in the notions of “allowing” (*shi* 使), that is, in the notion that one must behave a certain way first in order to be treated in a certain way by others? Winning the emotional resonance of others through one’s own virtue is not only good for oneself but also good for others as well. This is what is meant by “completing others” and “completing oneself”. There can be exceptions to this, however. Someone who loves others is not always loved by others in return nor is it the case that someone who does not love others is not loved by others. Yet, another of Confucius’ disciples, Zengzi, does not accept this kind of exception. He provided an inference of necessity:

If I am not loved by those whom I travel with then that is necessarily due to my own failure to love them. If I am not respected by those whom I interact with then that is necessarily due to my own failure to take the lead. If I am not trusted by

those whom I have financial matters with then that is necessarily due to my own failure to be trustworthy. These three are all matters of my own conduct; how could I blame others? Those who blame others are poor and those who blame contingent conditions (*tian* 天) are ignorant. How could it not be going too far to demand of others what one oneself has lost? (X. Wang 1988, p. 356; Z. Wang 1990, p. 27) (*Xunzi* “Faxing”)

6. Conclusions

There are many different kinds of ethics in both the East and the West, among which is Confucianism with its enduring and far-reaching genealogy. How is it possible that it can be said that this kind of ethics can only provide social arrangements based on a person’s identity so that each person receives specific treatment allocated to their social status, or that this kind of ethics is incapable of facing and responding to a modern society of strangers? Is it possible that this kind of ethics truly contains a deficit that makes it untenable? Or have we entirely misunderstood it? Or have we expanded whatever lack it does have to the point that even its positive features have been concealed or denied? I think that the third case is most likely. If we examine the Confucian ethics of “three relations” in terms of human rights, then we will not defend criticisms of Confucianism’s inequality of the sexes; how much more so when we take into account the historical rejections of Confucian ethics by Daoism and Buddhism? The problems of Confucian ethics are not limited to this, others include the excessive demands of its so-called “inner sage and outer king” or the dilution of its ethics of “world peace” centered on self-cultivation and familial order. Confucian ethics certainly orders society based on the differences brought about by ritually stipulated conduct and regulations and it also certainly puts great emphasis on the “filiality” of family relations and the establishment of relational norms based on paradigmatic social relations. However, this is only one part of Confucian ethics and not the whole thereof. There is still much room for Confucian ethics to expand: this mainly revolves around its understanding of interpersonal relationships and those universal relations that obtain between self and other. Beginning from the too-often neglected Confucian stories discussed above in combination with a great deal of Confucian ethical ideas from other sources, we have come to recognize a more universal and diverse “way of being with” and a world of rational interactions that goes beyond the standard Confucian regulation of social relationships. This is what cannot be forgotten let alone denied no matter the case. Otherwise, we will truly be unable to understand why Confucianism is what it is and the profound and vast influence it has been able to achieve.

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Notes

¹ According to Fei Xiaotong’s diagnosis, the Confucian ethics of a “hierarchical mode of association” differs from the Western “organizational mode of association” in that it maintains the order of private family and clan relationships and is incapable of adapting to modern society that is composed of strangers (Fei 1985, pp. 6–7, 21–53). All translations of first- and second-hand Chinese materials are the translator’s.

² For example, Zhao Tingyang 趙汀陽 concludes that “Fei Xiaotong’s analysis of Confucianism’s ‘hierarchical mode of association’ has revealed that there is an internal difficulty when it comes to social cooperation. That is, the system of Confucian morality has been unable to establish a universal ethical structure. In other words, Confucian ethics is not a pure ethics that transcends its actual practice. Its universal principle always disappears in particular situations. Confucianism’s status as the dominate force in Chinese history has made it unable to reflect on its own theoretical incompleteness, and this internal difficulty or paradox is evident in the face of modern challenges” (Zhao 2007). See also 柯小剛 Xiaogang Ke (2011) who responds to Zhao. The term “stranger” is an interdisciplinary concept that involves sociology, psychology, ethics and many more fields of study. That there were strangers in traditional societies does not need to be mentioned, especially for those people who all lived in cities. However, the connotation of the term “stranger” is much broader when it comes to modern society, and it especially refers to people who live in cities and the great number of social interactions that they entail. People are packed tightly in cities, and they rub shoulders

with people they do not even know or even pay attention to at all. This is a state of affairs that those who lived in the country and in villages of ancient society could not imagine. When Zhao Tingyang says that Confucian traditional ethics is incapable of adapting to a society of strangers, he is referring to people who live in modern cities. For more on the concept of “strangers”, see T. Huang (2018), Simmel (2008), Yan (2018), and Gong and Zheng (2011).

³ Ethics is mostly a product of the relationships of human interactions, it is a moral standard and measure for normative human behavior. Regarding relational ethics, see (removed for peer review). For more on interpersonal relations and roles in Confucian ethics, see Roger Ames (2011, pp. 41–255), Bryan van Norden (2011, pp. 18–47), Behuniak and Ames (2005, pp. 287–304), 陳來 Lai Chen (2014, pp. 30–99), and 黃勇 Y. Huang (2019, pp. 79–186).

⁴ This “being with” is to be differentiated from Heidegger’s *mit sein*, which is translated in Chinese as *gongzai* 共在.

⁵ I am using the concepts of “self” and “other” in a broad sense. The relationship between “self” and “other” gives expression to the general relationship between people.

⁶ By claiming that Confucian ethics is universal, I mean that it is not an ethics limited to a particular time and place, i.e., ancient Chinese society, but instead can find application in all times and places, including the modern world.

⁷ This story is also found in the “San Shu” (Three Forbearances) chapter of the *Kongzi Jiayu* 孔子家語 with minor textual differences.

⁸ Xunzi said: “Confucius said: ‘Human beings have five modes: being vulgar, being scholarly, being gentlemanly, being worthy, and being greatly sagacious’ See Lou (2018, p. 602).

⁹ So-called “moral learning for oneself” is opposed to “moral learning for others” (*weita zhi xue* 為他之學) in that the former emphasizes the value of moral cultivation as its own reward whereas the latter emphasizes moral cultivation as a means to gain reputation or other benefits. See Section 4.

¹⁰ Guanzi “Baxing” also has the expression “He who is good to others is done good to by others” (Li 2004, p. 459).

¹¹ The Confucian appeal to a “theory of fortune and misfortune” where good deeds are repaid with fortune and bad deeds with misfortune by the powers of a semi-anthropomorphized supernatural will is another expression of this kind of idea.

¹² For more on “repaying wrongs with uprightness”, refer to Y. Huang (2019, pp. 81–108).

¹³ The characters for “knowing” (*zhi* 知) and “wisdom” (*zhi* 智) were often interchangeable in the classical Chinese corpus.

¹⁴ The Confucian concept of “wisdom” (*zhi* 智) is polysemantic. Generally, it means intelligence and rationality, but it also has a sense of ethical recognition and awareness.

¹⁵ *Analects* 5.14 records: “Li Zu was worried that he would hear something new to practice before he had practiced something he had already heard” (Cheng 1990, p. 324).

¹⁶ According to Confucius’ saying that “Exemplary persons look to themselves while petty persons look to others” (*Analects* 15.21), Zi Lu appears to first “look to others”.

¹⁷ *Lüshi chunqiu* “Xianji” 呂氏春秋·先己 has an alternative logic: “Thus, those who desire to triumph over others must first triumph over themselves; those who wish to debate with others must first debate with themselves; and those who desire to know others must first know themselves” See Xu (2009, p. 72).

¹⁸ Laozi also maintains a theory of “self-love”. Chapter 72 says: “Love oneself but do not overly value oneself”. This distinguishes between “self-love” that is good and “valuing oneself” that is bad.

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