

【특집】 한국 유교의 자산과 그 현대적 변용

# Is Confucianism Compatible with Care Ethics?\*

— A Critique —

Ranjoo Herr\*\*

## I. Introduction

In recent years, some Confucianists have pointed out certain affinities Confucianism shares with the feminist ethic of care(Li 1994 & Rosamont 1997), and some even claim that feminism in Confucian societies might take the form of “new Confucianism” (Li, p.86). This is a surprising claim given the fact that Confucianism as the dominant ideology of East Asia for over two millennia has played a central role in subjugating women under one of the most systemic and prolonged patriarchy in human history. Against this disbelief, these scholars argue that what gave rise to the subordination of women was the distortion of pre-Chin Confucianism of Confucius and Mencius; were we to retrieve the original spirit of Confucius, they continue, reconceptualizing Confucianism as feminist would be

---

\* 이 논문은 한국학술진흥재단 1998년도 인문사회 중점영역연구 인문학분야 V-5 “한국유교의 자산과 그 현대적 변용”의 연구비 지원을 받아 수행된 연구결과물이다.

\*\* 허란주, 서울대 철학사상연구소

possible.

My purpose in this paper is to critically assess this claim by examining two aspects of Confucianism and Care Ethics that allegedly converge: First, their emphasis on human relationships, and second, their prescription as to how to maintain harmonious human relationships, the cultivation of *jen* in Confucianism and ethical caring in Care Ethics. By providing a rather detailed explication of Care Ethics along with that of Confucianism, I hope to illuminate their distinctiveness and even contradictory moral injunctions entailed by their respective ideals of *jen* and caring. While these two perspectives share certain surface similarities with respect to their emphasis on human relationships, a careful and methodical analysis of their respective prescription as to the best way to maintain human relationships will reveal their unbridgeable differences. The effort to assimilate Confucianism and Care Ethics, in my view, rests on the downplaying and neglect of the twin virtue of *jen*, *li*, in Confucianism, and on the misunderstanding of the feminist conception of care.

## II. The Importance of Human Relationships

### 1. Confucianism

The Confucian conception of the self is irreducibly interpersonal (Ames, p.105). The Confucian self emerges only in a net of five human relations(五倫)<sup>1)</sup> in which the self is expected to play definite roles. It is in the process of performing these

roles and performing them well that the Confucian self acquires a unique identity. It is in this context that one can say that the Confucian self is the totality of roles [he/she] live[s] in relation to specific others. (Rosemont, p.71) Every detail of these specific relationships affects this process, and if the constituent people of such relationships change, so will one's roles and *a fortiori* one's identity. Human relationships are important not only in this psycho-sociological sense that they constitute human identities, but also in the normative sense in that they are an integral component of the moral goal. For Confucianists, our embeddedness in human relationships is not only the point of departure for becoming truly human, but maintaining harmonious relationships is itself a goal of life. Although the Confucian self is malleable. (Tu 1989:30) and capable of developing and transforming itself in pursuit of selfactualization, (cf. *Analects*, 14. 25) Confucian selfactualization must occur not only within the confines of human relationships (Tu 1979b, p.20, p.22) but it is *itself* maintaining harmonious human relationships:

... society is not conceived of as something out there that is being imposed on the individual. It is in essence an extended self. The internalization of social values ... can therefore be interpreted as a creative step taken by the self to enter into human-relatedness for the sake of none other than its own

- 
- 1) Traditionally, there are "five human relations", i.e. relations between king and minister, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger, and friend and friend, that are crucial for Confucianism. As is evident from the fact that three among these are relations between family members, family relation, and especially that between parent(father) and child(son) is of particular importance.

realization.(Tu 1979b, p.25)

A life of a lone mystic is not a viable life-style for a Confucianist, at least not in the long run. The fact that the primary Confucian virtue, *jen*, is a relational virtue supports this interpretation.

The emphasis on human relationships does not necessarily imply that any human relationship, regardless of its inner dynamic, must be maintained. Most Confucian relationships presuppose reciprocity (Tu 1986, p.180; Tu 1979b, p.18), and if one party to the relation does not act in accordance with *jen* and express appropriate *li*, its external manifestation<sup>2)</sup>, then the other party need not reciprocate. In the king-minister relation, if the king does not act like one then he is a mere fellow who does not need to be treated as a king... (*Mencius*, 1B. 8)<sup>3)</sup> In *Li Chi*, the minister is allowed to leave the king if the king thrice does not heed his good advice.(*Li Chi*, Bk1, Ch. 2) In the friend friend relation, where exhorting each other to be moral is the proper responsibility, if one friend refuses to be moral and good, the other can abandon such a friendship.(*Mencius*, 4B. 30) Also if a friend *B* does not look after his friend *A*'s wife and children temporarily in his(*B*'s) care, then friend *A* may forgo

---

2) I shall explicate *li*, as a twin virtue of *jen*, in a later section(III.1); for the time being, let this brief definition suffice.

3) Mencius also states that If a ruler regards his ministers as his hands and feet, then his ministers will regard him as their heart and mind. If a ruler regards his ministers as dogs and horses, his ministers will regard him as any other man. If a ruler regards his ministers as dirt and grass, his ministers will regard him as a bandit and an enemy.(*Mencius*, 4B.3)

the friendship. (*Mencius*, 1B:6) In the marriage relation, it has been traditionally taken for granted that the husband can abandon his wife when she commits seven offenses (七去之惡).<sup>4)</sup> Although such regulations apply only to women and not to men, there are no corresponding obligations for husbands, and historically, these regulations have been abused as effective means to subjugate women in traditional Confucian societies. This at least proves that the marriage relation was not indissoluble.<sup>5)</sup> From this, we may safely infer that non-blood relations can be forsaken if either party does not act in accordance with the required *li*.

However, one kind of relation must never be abandoned, and that is the parent child relation; this is the relation that Confucius considered to be the root of *jen*. (*Analects*, Bk 1.2)(C.Y.Lee, p.101) In the parent child relation, children should Never disobey their parents. (*Analects*, Bk 2.5) Even when parents have committed immoral acts, children should exemplify unconditional filial piety by conceal[ing] the misconduct of parents. (*Analects*, 13:18) This does not necessarily mean that Confucius endorsed unprincipled moral relativism. When parents

---

4) Traditionally, a wife can be driven out of the husbands home (where she was forced to reside after marriage) and returned to her maiden home if she (a) disobeys parents-in-law (不順舅姑); (b) cannot produce sons (無子); (c) has (or has thoughts of having) an extra-marital affair (淫行); is jealous of other women whom her husband has sexual relations with (嫉妬); suffers from incurable and prolonged illness that dissipates family resources (惡疾); interferes too much with and is vociferous about the husbands affairs (口舌); and steals (盜竊).

5) Contemporary Confucianist Tu Wei-ming admits that marriage can be relinquished because it is basically based on a contract (Tu 1986:185).

act against *li*, it is said that children may remonstrate(諫), albeit gently(隱微)(*Hsiao Ching*, 13); when parents are not inclined to listen, children should not complain but resume an attitude of reverence and not abandon their effort to serve them. (*Analects*, 4.18) In *Li Chi*, if parents thrice do not accept their gentle remonstrations, children are urged to follow them wailing loudly(號泣).(Bk.1, ch.2) Even if parents do not change their ways despite childrens efforts, children must never overstep what is prescribed by their filial duty and try to lead parents in the right direction as best as they can. There are intersubjective standards of *li* which should be followed by both parents and children, but should parents fail to adhere to *li* required of parents, children should not thereby neglect *li* required of children.

The reason for such a strict prescription to maintain the parentchild relation is that it provides us with the ultimate moral resources to draw from in the later years of our lives. The family is the natural home for nourishing the self and, specifically, for helping the self to establish fruitful dyadic relationships.(Tu 1986, p.183) The relation of love and caring that we experience early in life among family members, and specifically with our parents determines our character and patterns of interaction with non-relatives. In this tradition, love for our parents transcends even death and justifies the Confucian tradition of mourning rites and ancestor worship. Upon the love of kin that even death could not destroy, Confucians would order their society and claim that *hsiao* (filial piety) is the one root or the great principle of Heaven and Earth itself.(Lai, p.58) Family is the fundamental well spring of

love and affection, which is the basis of *jen* and *a fortiori* morality which must be extended in a somewhat diluted fashion to others not related to oneself.(cf. *Mencius*, 1A:7) As such, our love for our own family and kin has priority over love of strangers. When obligations toward family members and non-relatives conflict, the priority goes to family members.(cf. *Analects*, 13.18)

## 2. Care Ethics

That Care Ethics emphasizes human relationships is a relatively novel tendency in the Western philosophical tradition. The dominant ethical perspective in the West since the age of Enlightenment, liberalism, views the human self as independent, autonomous, and rational, capable of transcending its contingent circumstances, including personal relationships. In this respect, I shall briefly consider the view of the self proposed by John Rawls, who is one of the most influential liberal theorists and the major target of Care Ethicists, because it is mainly as an antithesis to his theory that Care Ethics developed its relational conception of the self. According to Rawls, human agents can best realize their nature as free, equal, and rational beings in the Original Position (to be abbreviated as OP hereinafter). (Rawls, p.515) In this hypothetical situation, agents are situated behind the Veil of Ignorance so that they are freed from natural contingencies and social accident(Ibid., p.252), such as their social, economic, political, and psychological status(Ibid., p.137). Here they exist as transparent moral agents who share two characteristics in common with all others, that they have a

conception of the good and a sense of justice. They are also endowed with a psychological characteristic of mutual disinterestedness in that they are primarily concerned with their own interest and not interested in others interests.

Despite Rawls's effort to distance his version of the self from charges of egoism,<sup>6)</sup> the line between mutual disinterestedness and egoism is indeed a fine one, especially when the resources available are scarce. In such a situation mutually disinterested selves in the OP could easily lapse into those who are in fierce competition with each other and are primarily concerned with their own individual self interest even in real life.(Grimshaw, p.166) It is true that the assumption of mutual disinterestedness is only an artificial thought experiment devised to guarantee the freedom of moral agents to pursue whatever their ends or purposes,(Rawls, p.254; cf. p.129) and that when the veil of ignorance is lifted, real individuals could opt for a life plan which gives caring relationships the top priority.(cf. Kohlberg et. al., pp.22-27; Sher, pp.186-7) However, it is also undeniable that Rawlsian agents are *not* obligated to form caring relationships, and that the obligation to show empathy and care is at best only a *conditional* one. In other words, even if the once mutually disinterested individuals in the OP do have a *choice* to lead a life fully connected to other people when the veil is lifted, it is perfectly legitimate for them not so to choose and remain mutually disinterested even in real life. The primary moral obligation for liberal agents is to adhere to the justice principles, and provided that this obligation is

---

6) For Rawls's own defense of his position against accusations of egoism, cf. Rawls, p.13, p.127, p.129.

fulfilled they are free to choose any kind of life plan that suits their particular taste, however impoverished or barren it may be. Given the sad reality in which those who try to care for others and maintain a caring relationship are often exploited, it is not inconceivable that most people would prefer an individualistic and career-oriented life plan at the expense of intimate relationships.(cf. Baier, p.49, 53; cf. Held, p.187, p.212, Chapter 10; Whitbeck, pp.55-58)<sup>7)</sup>

Care Ethicists concerned with the limitations of the liberal self have proposed an alternative conception of the self intricately enmeshed in human relationships.<sup>8)</sup> According to the relational theory of the self, human relations are ontologically basic (Noddings, p.4, cf. p.51); the basic fact of human existence (ibid.) is that we are beings who are enmeshed in relationships with actual flesh and blood other human beings for whom we have actual feelings and with whom we have real ties(Held, p.58). Every human being is naturally related to other particular people ever since, or even before, their birth. From nourishment to socialization we depend on other particular human beings with whom we have close connections in lived relationships. While it is possible for a human being to choose to be alone, it certainly is not a natural condition to be

---

7) For further criticism of the liberal self, not necessarily Rawlsian, as being egoistic and atomistic, see Benhabib, p.161; Code, pp.358-360; E.F.Keller, pp.101-2.

8) The seed of such a theory can be found throughout the works of Chodorow, Gilligan, and Noddings, but an independent discussion of such a view is given by Held(1993, p.60) and Whitbeck(1989, pp.63-5). For a similar conception of the self, see also Baier(1985). Ferguson (1989) calls this conception of the self the difference theory on self.

in.(Noddings, p.51) Not only does our survival depend on relationships, but our identity is constituted by them.(Whitbeck: 62) A person is an historical being whose history is fundamentally a history of relationships to other people.(Whitbeck, p.64) Further, in Care Ethics, much like Confucianism, intimate and caring human relationships are important not only psychosocially, but also normatively. They are not only constitutive of human identity, but also of moral goals. Caring relations are the most superior kind of human relationship(Noddings, p.83) and are premoral good which ultimately grounds morality(ibid., p.84).

[Natural caring is] that condition toward which we long and strive, and it is our longing for caring—to be in that special relation—that provides the motivation for us to be moral. We want to be moral in order to remain in the caring relation and to enhance the ideal of ourselves as one-caring.(ibid., p.5)

In Care Ethics the mothering relation is taken to be the caring relation *par excellence* the manifestation of care in which should be emulated in other relations. While mothering has traditionally been conceived as a primarily biological function and therefore not so far removed from the realm of the nature in the West,(cf. Ortner 1974) feminists take it to be a distinctly cultural activity involving language and culture that forms human social personhood and develops morality for all of us who were once children.(Held, p.55, p.60) Moreover, it is a relation in which caring, primarily expressed as natural caring, is most saliently exhibited. In the context of mother child interactions mother has no difficulty in feeling with the child,

receiving and sharing the child's feelings.(Noddings, pp.30-1) However, most Care Ethicists acknowledge the possibility that this ideal type of caring interaction might not be present in all mothering relations,(Ruddick, Held) and, unlike Confucianists who consider parent-child relation as sacred, do not advocate that all mothering relation should be maintained at all costs.

There is a passage in Noddings's work which might suggest that family relations should be preserved at all costs *a la* Confucianism: Noddings claims that a Ms. A who sides with her racist family members, despite her moral disagreements with them, cannot be criticized from the care perspective. (Noddings, pp.109-112) In case the one caring is forced to terminate a caring relationship, Noddings continues, she inevitably diminishes her ethical ideal.(Noddings, p.115) However, this is not an unconditional allegiance to family ties, because Noddings makes clear that in Ms. A's case, the family provided her with proper care, and it is caring relation she has with them that justifiably inhibits her decision to follow an abstract anti-racist moral principle. For Confucianism, on the other hand, the maintenance of family relation is categorical whether or not parents provided caring to children. Although Care Ethics and Confucianism may seem to resemble each other, the difference here is that in this Western feminist view, value is placed above blood-relation.

### III. Jen and Care

Given this emphasis on human relationships, both moral

views provide prescription as to how to maintain harmonious and caring relationships. The cultivation of *jen* in Confucianism and caring in Care Ethics are considered the key in this respect. Those who point out the similarity of the two perspectives have argued that these two moral ideals are ultimately equivalent. Let us examine in this section whether indeed this is the case.

### 1. Jen

What is *jen*? In answering this question, I shall focus on how it is actually referred to in the ancient Confucian texts, for it is there that true spirit of Confucianism without the sexist taint of later developments can be found, according to some.(Li, pp.81-2) When we examine *Analects*, however, we may find that it is not an easy matter to pin down what exactly *jen* is, since *jen*, as a concept that appears most frequently in the *Analects*.<sup>9)</sup> When we focus on statements of *jen* as a virtue

---

9) Jen appears 105 times in the 58 chapters of the total of 499 chapters of *Analects*(cf. Tu 1981:48; Chan:296), appears in various ways in different contexts. Sometimes *jen* is referred to as a virtue that encompasses other virtues. A person who is *jen* is also brave(勇) (*Analects* 14.5), generous (寬), trustworthy(信), agile(敏), clement(惠) (*Analects*, 17.6), courteous(恭), reverent (敬), loyal(忠)(*Analects*, 5.18; 13.19; 18.1), filial(孝)(*Analects*, 17.21), wise(知)(*Analects*, 5.18), and accords with li(禮)(*Analects*, 12.1).(cf. Chan: 297; Tu 1981: 48-9) At other times, *jen* is reputed to be a fundamental virtue which grounds all other virtues. For example, even if one is brave(勇), without *jen* one is prone to become reckless or to engage in crime(*Analects*, 14.5); on the other hand, knowledgeability(知) is undoubtedly inferior to *jen* (*Analects*, 15.33), and even when one has attained wisdom, it cannot last without *jen*(cf. *Analects*, 15.32). Also, however impeccable one

pertaining to the treatment of others, however, we may find some clues: *Analects* 6.28 states that a person of *jen*(仁子) is one wishing to be established himself, seeks also to establish others; wishing to be enlarged himself, he seeks also to enlarge others; according to 12.2, *jen* is not to do to others as you would not wish done to yourself(cf. *Analects*, 4.15, 15.23, 5.11); in 12.22 *jen* is defined as to love all men. From these various references, two kinds of requirement of *jen* can be discerned, one positive and the other negative. The positive requirement is to establish and enlarge oneself as well as others.(*Analects*, 6.28)<sup>10)</sup> The negative requirement is implied in the concept of “*shu* (恕)” as a prohibition not to impose on others what one does not want to be imposed on.(*Analects*, 12.12; 15.23)<sup>11)</sup> Conceiving *jen* as a virtue in dealing with other people in the above manner seems to be the most widely accepted

---

may be in his/her adherence to the established *li*, if *li* is not accompanied by *jen* one is likely to be disingenuous.(cf. *Analects*, 3.3) Although these phrases show us what kind of virtues a person of *jen* may display, they do not explain what *jen* itself is.

- 10) To serve my father as I would expect my son to serve me. ... To serve my ruler as I would expect my ministers to serve me. To serve my elder brother as I would expect my younger brothers to serve me. To be the first to treat friends as I would expect them to treat me. (*Chung Yung* 13)
- 11) What a man dislikes in his superiors, let him not display in the treatment of his inferiors; what he dislikes in inferiors, let him not display in the service of his superiors; what he hates in those who are before him, let him not therewith precede those who are behind him; what he hates in those who are behind him, let him not therewith follow those who are before him; what he hates to receive on the right, let him not bestow on the right. This is what is called the principle with which, as with a measuring-square (矩之道), to regulate ones conduct.(*Ta Hsueh*, 10)

interpretation.(cf. Fung, pp.13-4; Chan, p.299; *Analects*, 12.22)

However, adhering to *jen* as the double-sided Golden Rule does not necessarily imply caring for others, for one can do so out of abstract respect for other people's moral status much like a Kantian agent. It is Mencius who adds a personal touch to the concept of *jen*. As the translation of Mencian *jen* as "love with distinction (差等愛)"(Chan) and "love with gradation"(Lai) suggests, *jen* is not a universal prescription the fulfillment of which manifests evenly across all relationships. Urged by the need to counteract Mo-zi's doctrine of Universal Love(兼愛說) which urges that we should love everyone to the same degree, Mencius claimed that love for our own family and kin has priority over love of strangers. If love is not bloodless(Lai, p.58); the closer and more intimate a person is, the better able are we to empathize with his or her emotional configuration. Those who are closest to us in the Confucian worldview are our family members, especially our parents. This is most succinctly expressed in Mencius' words, Treat with respect the elders in my family, and then extend that respect to include the elders in other families. Treat with tenderness the young in my own family, and then extend that tenderness to include the young in other families. Then you may move the world in the palm of your hand.(1A:7) Strong emotional tie between family members justifies our preferential treatment of them, and it is toward them that *jen* should be most strongly exhibited. Unlike most Western moral perspectives, universal love, for Confucianists, is love for those near to us extended and derived in a somewhat diluted and attenuated form to those far away.(cf. *Mencius*, 3A:5, Lai, pp.56-7)

Granted that *jen* is to be expressed in varying degrees, how should it be expressed in specific contexts to maintain harmonious relationships? For this, we must consider another distinctive Confucian virtue of *li*.<sup>12)</sup> For Confucianists, it is not enough that one has *jen* as inner morality. It must be externally expressed in a certain manner appropriate to each role. This fits with the notion that the Confucian self is the totality of roles. That is, *jen* should manifest itself in accordance with certain public expectations pertaining to each role. Such objective criteria are *li*(禮).

In general, *li* refers to all those objective prescriptions of behavior, whether involving rite, ceremony, manners, or general deportment, that bind human beings and the spirits together in networks of interacting roles within the family, within human society, and with the numinous realm beyond.(Schwartz, p.67) Specifically, there are three functions pertaining to *li*: The first is delimiting in that it sets boundaries of legitimate actions and prohibits certain actions. The second is supportive in that it provides legitimate channels through which the agent can satisfy his or her needs and desires. The third is ennobling in that it functions as a moral and aesthetic ideal to be

---

12) Although *jen* is the most crucial virtue of Confucian ethical system, what differentiates Confucianism and renders it a unique philosophical perspective is the virtue of *li*. Although Western tradition also has a similar notion, after the advent of Enlightenment, such a system of established norms was regarded with suspicion as inhibiting the self-expression of individuals. In Confucianism, however, such a normative system was not considered as inhibiting individual self-actualization but on the contrary considered as its necessary prerequisite.

emulated.(Cua, p.164) The conception of *li* as the manifestation of the supreme Confucian virtue *jen* is in line with the third function.

The intimate connection between *jen* and *li* is evident in *Analects* 12.1, which defines *jen* as to subdue oneself (*ke-chi* 克己) and [to] return to *li*.(*fu-li* 復禮) Which is prior between *jen* and *li* is, however, is a matter of dispute. Fingarette, who proposes a highly idealized portrayal of *li*, interprets *jen* as a decision to follow *li*, (p.51)<sup>13)</sup> and relegates *jen* to a secondary status to *li*. However, if there is no independent moral criterion to judge the morality of *li* rooted in concrete traditions, emphasizing the adherence to *li* amounts to uncritical conventionalism.(cf. Weber, pp.243-4) Indeed, *li* is NOT to be equated with the merely accepted conventions of one's society. When Confucius spoke of *li*, he was referring to the idealized *li* of Chou, not the existing conventions of Spring and Autumn period that he was living in. Confucius was deeply concerned about the corrupt state of his time and this is the precise reason why he wanted to restore the lost *li* of the ideal Chou period. Further, even though he looked up to *li* of Chou, if it did not conform to what he believed was proper, he showed the independence of mind by urging people to follow the customs of his own time.(*Analects*, 9.3) Therefore I would like to follow the interpretation that puts *jen* before *li*. According to this interpretation, *jen* refers to an inner-morality which is independent of *li*, giving meaning to *li*.(cf. Tu 1979a, p.9) Confucius's question: If a man is not humane(*jen*), what has he

---

13) Similarly, Arthur Waley misinterpreted *fu li* as to submit to rituals. (Tu 1979a, p.6)

to do with ceremonies(*li*), seems to support just such an interpretation (*Analects*, 3.3).

However, although *li* may represent enlightened tradition in the spirit of *jen*, (Cua, p.162) *li* is first and foremost objective or inter-subjective prescriptions based upon communal consensus. Even when a *chon-tzu*(君子) like Confucius exercises his independence of mind and prefers an alternative *li* to an existing convention, he must eventually appeal to the majority for its acceptance as a tradition. *Li* also has ritualistic implications as it is often translated as rites. It is expressive of refined ways of treating other people with loyalty and respect.(Pingarett, p.7) Human desires and needs are processed through *li* and becomes cleansed of biological impurities, so to speak. The interaction between people becomes ritualistic and aesthetic and one step removed from the direct expressions of raw emotions. It reflects the aesthetic and moral sensibility of the predecessors in the tradition: *li* is the civilized expression of human impulse.(Ibid.) As such, it doesn't come naturally to people to adhere to *li*. Novices must go through years of inculcation and habituation to be able finally to internalize *li* and make it their second nature. This is a very difficult process, and Confucius himself was able to completely internalize *li* only at the age of seventy so that, even though he was freely pursuing his heart's desire, he would not overstep the boundary set by *li*.(*Analects*, 2.4) As such, *li* does not give much room for spontaneity of individuals, and one cannot behave out of subjective whim and expect it to be considered as an adherence to a new *li*. Although both *jen* and *li* have emotional beginnings, the final cultured expressions of

them are far removed from them.

## 2. Care

In Care Ethics, which takes caring relations to be of utmost importance, the most significant moral imperative is to form and maintain caring relations. We might call this the care principle.<sup>14)</sup> While care principle can best be implemented in intimate relationships, Care Ethics cannot ignore non-related others. It must address the issue of dealing with strangers who come within the range of one's caring as well as members of one's own family and friends. Noddings deals with this issue by introducing the notion of "ethical ideal" or "ethical self."

The ethical self is an active relation between my actual self and a vision of my ideal as one-caring and cared-for. It is born of the fundamental recognition of relatedness; that which connects me naturally to the other, reconnects me through the other to myself.(Noddings, p.49)

The reason why I must care for total strangers or those I find repulsive when they ask for my care is because I have an interest in enhancing my ethical ideal.(Ibid., p.50) Therefore the

---

14) Whether there can be a care principle and what its status might be is a moot question within Care Ethics. Although Noddings vehemently rejects universal principles for their inability to preserve the uniqueness of human encounters,(Noddings, p.5, cf. p.36, pp.84-5) Held rightfully warns against the tendency to reject all kinds of principles, since it entails an invitation to capriciousness.(Held, p.75) Like Held, I think Care Ethics is based on principles that are compatible with particular judgments based [...] on feelings of empathy and on caring concern.(Held, p.35)

caring agent must care for loved ones and strangers alike, whether she feels inclined to do so or not, if they are within the reach of her caring.(cf. *ibid.*, p.84) In the effort to include those for whom natural caring does not arise, Care Ethics requires caring that goes beyond natural caring; such caring is “ethical” caring.(*Ibid.*, p.80) Even so, ethical caring must not be considered as more fundamental than natural caring; rather, ethical caring is “dependent upon, and not superior to, natural caring.”(*Ibid.*)

Despite the caveat about strangers who enter the domain of one’s care, it seems unquestionable that the care principle is applicable first and foremost to a small circle of people. Noddings claims that the advantage in so confining the domain of applicability lies in the fact that the world of one caring is always “manageable.”(*Ibid.*, p.89) Being able to fulfill her obligations of care within such a manageable world, she can achieve and “complete” the goal of her ethical ideal as a responsible and caring individual. Rather than clinging to a notion such as universal love, the completion of which cannot ever be achieved, the one-caring concentrates on those to whom she can reach out and “complete” her caring.(*Ibid.*, p.86) It may sound rather cruel and insensitive to limit one’s caring to those within one’s reach; yet, according to Noddings, caring with completion in mind is a much more responsible attitude than, for example, the impracticable idea of caring for all humanity. Here we see the similarity between caring and *jen* as love with gradation.

What does caring for others entail in practice? How does caring function to maintain actual relationships? As Flanagan

and Jackson aptly states,

morally good caring requires seeing others thickly, as constituted by their particular human face, their particular psychological and social self. It also involves taking seriously, or at least being moved by, one's particular connection to the other. (Flanagan & Jackson, p.623, emphasis mine)

Seeing others thickly implies being attentive to the emotional states, idiosyncracies, and particular features of the person with whom one is interacting, for these characteristics as a whole make the person the unique individual that he or she is. We must try to find out the cared-for's particular personal history, emotional states, idiosyncracies, and needs by continuously engaging in actual dialogues with them.(cf. Held, p.41; Gilligan, pp.29-31) The focus is on the care-for's welfare, and the one-caring should always try to direct [o]ur attention, our mental engrossment [...] on the cared-for, not on ourselves. (Noddings, p.24) This may require at least two things: First, the one-caring must assume "a dual perspective" to see things from both the one-caring's own perspective and that of the cared-for. Noddings calls this "inclusion."(ibid., p.63) Also the one-caring must try to see "the best self in the cared-for" and to work with him to actualize that self. Noddings calls this "confirmation."(Ibid., p.64) According to this perspective, failing to do so with respect to the cared-for incurs criticism just like a mother who is held morally reprehensible for failing to pay proper attention to, and respond to, particular needs of each and every child of hers.

Construed thus, the care principle imposes a lot of responsi

bility on the one-caring. It is primarily an ethic of responsibility, as opposed to an ethic of rights such as liberalism. Regardless of whether the cared-for has any right to the one-caring's caring, the one-caring has a responsibility to care. Caring agents have a responsibility to prevent harm to others, but it is not enough to prevent objective harm which arises due to the infringement of objectively or intersubjectively agreed upon rights. They also have obligation to prevent subjective harm as well, which encompasses subjective feelings of hurt, disappointments due to unfulfilled expectations, and loneliness, all of which do not necessarily result from the infringement of rights. Care Ethics, however, is not thereby to be equated with an ethic of self effacement; as Gilligan has shown, the morally mature caring agent must recognize that caring for oneself is as important as caring for others.<sup>15)</sup> It requires a constant effort to harmonize conflicting responsibilities to care for others as well as oneself. But undoubtedly such a balancing act must be conducted against the backdrop of maintaining caring human relationships which is fundamental for human flourishing.

---

15) Gilligan's developmental scale consists of five stages: 1st perspective, caring for the self in order to ensure survival; 1st transition, this judgment is criticized as selfish; 2nd perspective, the good is equated with caring for others; 2nd transition, the criticism of the equation of conformity with care and the illogic of inequality between other and self; 3rd perspective, caring becomes the self-chosen principle which encompasses not only those we care for but also oneself. (Gilligan, p.74)

## IV. Comparison

There are prominent similarities between the two perspectives. First of all, both Confucianism and Care Ethics take intimate caring relationships as crucial not only as constitutive of our identities but also of moral goals; in other words, they are not only psycho-socially but also normatively significant. Since the ontological reality is relational, and humans cannot live worthwhile human lives apart from human relationships, nurturing and maintaining such positive relationships are one of the most important moral ends. Both positions regard what they regard to be the most intimate family relation, the parent-child relation in Confucianism and mother-child relation in Care Ethics, as the most significant relation, although their reasons for so regarding are different. For Confucianism, it is a relation that must be maintained for its symbolic significance as the root of *jen*, while for Care Ethics, it is valued and taken as the model caring relation for the manifestation of care usually found in this relation.

A second similarity between Confucianism and Care Ethics is the intimate connection they make between emotion and morality. According to both perspectives, empathy, compassion, sensitivity, and caring are prerequisites for morality, and a truly moral person is not someone who controls her emotions with reason, but who develops such positive emotions to the fullest. For Mencius the four constant virtues of *jen*, *yi*(righteousness 義), *li*, and *chi*(wisdom 智) are based upon the feelings of com-

miseration(惻隱), shame and dislike(羞惡), modesty and yielding (辭讓), and the sense of right and wrong(是非) respectively. (*Mencius*, 2A.6) Care Ethicists, unlike their archrival liberals who consider all emotions as prone to bias and egoism, maintain that some emotions are conducive to morality. Caring, empathy, hopefulness, indignation in the face of cruelty may be crucial in developing appropriate moral sensibilities and positions. The caring so central to Care Ethics, for example, is itself partly emotional. When we naturally care for someone, we “feel with” the person.(Noddings, p.30) To be sure, natural caring involves more than feeling in that non emotional requirements such as a motivational shift is also needed.(*Ibid.*, p.33) However, both the feeling of care and the motivational shift are not rational, and in this sense natural caring is “fundamentally nonrational.”(*Ibid.*, p.61)

From these similarities, does it follow that the prescriptions of *jen* and care are equivalent and that Confucianism can encompass Care Ethics to become feminism of the future in East Asia? The answer is an emphatic no. Even if we interpret *jen* as love with distinction,<sup>16)</sup> *jen* is not equivalent to caring advocated by Care Ethics. This is so because, aside from their similar theoretical assumptions in the abstract, what Care Ethics *practically* requires differs from what Confucianism *practically* requires. As we have seen, what is practically enjoined by Care Ethics is for the one caring to see the other

---

16) As mentioned previously, this is not the only interpretation of *jen*, for Confucius regarded it as the supreme moral virtue, which may not necessarily involve feelings of care, and neo-Confucians considered it as an abstract principle that regulates the universe and engenders the harmony of all things.

thickly, to be attentive and responsive to the particular characteristics of the cared-for, to see things from the cared-for's perspective, and to work together with the cared-for to actualize the best self he is capable of. To some extent, it requires the one-caring to tear down the emotional boundary that separates them and to become the cared-for's alter-ego. In a relationship such as the mother-child relation, in which the one caring is usually in a superior position, whether emotionally, morally, or intellectually, to the cared-for, the one-caring should level down to become a complete equal of the cared for. It is noteworthy that in Care Ethics, the caring required is usually from the one caring with such superior qualities toward one who is not her equal.

What about Confucianism? If we confer *Analects* and *Mencius*, the central question when intimate relationships are discussed is how to express love and respect for ones *parents*. Although Confucian *jen* is required of both parties to the five relations, the general tendency is that it is more emphasized for the one occupying the subordinate position. This tendency, however, is amplified when it comes to parent-child relation. In comparison to the almost complete silence with respect to parents obligations, the constant demand for filial piety seems almost bizarre. Some Confucianists contend that the reason why there is dearth of discussion of parental obligation might be that love parents feel for children is so natural that it doesn't deserve much discussion; on the other hand, since children's love for parents is not so natural, it needs to be emphasized. Granted that love parents feel for children is natural, not every expression of such love is acceptable, and, I believe, not to

discuss this explicitly is a grave default on the part of Confucianism. When Confucianists do discuss how parents should treat children, it is only in regard to the daughter-in-law, for whom parents-in-law typically do not feel natural caring, and against whom various atrocities have been traditionally committed. (*Li Chi*, Bk 5, 12)

Let us, however, set this problem aside. Perhaps this is due to the contingent, but not inconsequential, fact that East Asia was and still is a highly hierarchical society. Let us grant, for the sake of the argument, that in Confucianism discussions about how one should comport in an intimate relationship goes both ways. Still, what is required in Confucianism is not at all similar to how the one caring should act toward the cared for. According to the *Analects*, filial child must do the following: when parents are alive, one should serve them according to *li*; when they die, one should bury them according to *li*, and honor them according to *li*. (2.5) Here, acting in accordance with the required *li* is crucial. As mentioned earlier, *li* is expressive of refined ways of treating others with respect, and in *Hsiao Ching* Bk.2, *li* is equated with reverence (敬). In *Li Chi* how to comport oneself in front of parents is extensively discussed, and the unifying theme there is to sincerely serve one's parents and to maintain a courteous and respectful manner and attitude. To adhere to *li* is to be reverent toward the other, (2.7) and this implies that there must be a certain deferential distance, whether social or psychological or emotional, between them. Therefore, in the parent-child relation of Confucianism, however intimate the relationship may be, parents and children cannot become friends. For example, in Confucian cultures,

whether ancient or contemporary, father and son smoking or drinking together face to face is prohibited by custom.(cf. *Li Chi*, Bk1) This is in stark contrast to what Care Ethics prescribes, which is to dismantle the emotional and psychological barrier and to become friends on equal terms.

Of course, it may not be entirely fair to compare Confucianism of the Ancient China, in which hierarchy was the norm, with Care Ethics of twentieth century U.S, in which egalitarianism is the norm. The distance between them, temporal, geographical, and cultural, is too great. However, the difference between them is not merely circumstantial; there is also philosophical/conceptual difference. The key factor here is the concept of *li* which makes Confucianism so unique among all intellectual traditions. Because *jen* must be expressed in *li*, in a refined and communally accepted formal standards, usually reflective of unequal positions of the parties to the relation, spontaneous expressions of emotions are in general prohibited and a certain deferential distance between the parties is required. It would, however, be possible to reconceptualize *li* to be more egalitarian and expressive of emotions. This is a project that I shall not take up here. The point for now, however, is that without such a reinterpretation of *li*, which has yet to be offered by Confucianists, *jen* as love with distinction and ethical caring cannot be considered as equivalent.

## V. Concluding Remark

My purpose here is not to disparage Confucianism because it

cannot match up with the framework offered by Care Ethics. This would be not only anachronistic but also eurocentric. I believe Confucianism has a unique place in the intellectual legacies of the world, and it should be the mission of contemporary Confucianists to accentuate the strengths of Confucianism, while reducing, if not eliminating its weaknesses, to fit the present world of traditionally Confucian societies. Reinforcing Confucianisms strengths, however, does not imply ignoring its past ills. Although some contemporary Confucianists argue that at least Confucius and Mencius did not disparage women and therefore that Confucianism is inherently non sexist, historical Confucianism *was* undoubtedly sexist, and contemporary Confucian societies of East Asia are still suffering from its legacies. While ahistorically comparing and assimilating Confucianism and a branch of contemporary Western feminism may pique intellectual curiosity, from a feminist perspective, it would be more fruitful to engage in an historically grounded analysis of why remarkable pre-Chin Confucianism has deteriorated into a sexist and classicist dogma.

This is a project that requires an extensive investigation in its own right, but I suspect the culprit is the misinterpretation of *li* over the two millennia. *Li* in itself may not be pernicious. Maintaining a certain distance in the spirit of reverence, when required of both parties to a relationship, is perhaps necessary in all relationships including intimate ones, at least some of the time. Even hierarchy may not be entirely deleterious if the involved parties can indeed be construed as *benefactors* and *beneficiaries* who can exchange their roles, whether between themselves or with others in an overarching web of human

relationships.(Rosemont, p.74) Perhaps Care Ethics is going too far in the other direction by valorizing intimacy. However, *li* is problematic when it becomes ossified and starts to function to subjugate certain groups of people, whether women or lower-class or children, as has happened in East Asia throughout the long history of Confucian dominance. Such a misappropriation of *li* by the dominant class to guard its privileges is clearly against the spirit of *jen*. If indeed the true spirit of *jen* is to be found in ancient Confucianism, what seems critical is to clearly deconstruct and chart the steps of deterioration of Confucianism throughout its dominance, making sure such degeneration will not occur again. I believe this is the only way that we can prevent Confucianism from lapsing into the oppressive ideology it once was and to revive it to gain relevance for contemporary East Asians.

## Bibliography

- Analects, Mencius, Chung Yung, Ta Hsueh, Li Chi, Hsiao Ching.*
- Ames, Roger T. 1991. Reflections on the Confucian Self: A Response to Fingarette. In *Rules, Rituals and Responsibility: Essays Dedicated to Herbert Fingarette*, ed. M. Bockover. LaSalle: Open Court.
- Baier, A. 1987. "The Need for More than Justice". In *Science, Morality and Feminist Theory*, ed. M. Hanen & K. Nielson. Calgary: The University of Calgary Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1985. Cartesian Persons. In *Postures of the Mind: Essays on Mind and Morals*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Benhabib, S. 1987. "The Generalized and the Concrete Other." In *Women and Moral Theory*, ed. Eva Feder Kittay and Diana T. Meyers. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Chan, Wing-Tsit. 1963. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1955. "The Evolution of the Confucian Concept of *Jen*." *Philosophy East and West* 4 (4): 295-319.
- Code, L. 1987. Second Persons. In *Science, Morality and Feminist Theory*.

- Cua, A.S. 1996. "The Conceptual Framework of Confucian Ethical Thought." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 23.
- Davion, V. 1993. Autonomy, Integrity, and Care. In *Social Theory and Practice* Vol.19, No. 2.
- Fingarette, H. 1972. *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*. New York: Harper Torchbooks.
- Flanagan, O. & K. Jackson. 1987. "Justice, Care, and Gender." *Ethics* 97.
- Fung, Yulan. 1948. *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, (ed.) Derk Bodde. New York: MacMillan.
- Furguson, A. 1989. "A Feminist Aspect Theory of the Self". *Women, Knowledge, and Reality*, ed. Garry & Pearsall. Boston: Unwin Hyman, Inc.
- Gilligan, Carol. 1982. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theories and Women's Development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Grimshaw, J. 1986. *Philosophy and Feminist Thinking*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hartsock, N. 1986. *Money, Sex, and Power*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Held, V. 1993. *Feminist Morality: Transforming Culture, Society, and Politics*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Keller, E. F. 1985. *Reflections on Gender and Science*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Kohlberg, L. & Hewer. 1983. *Moral Stages: A Current*

- Formulation and a Response to Critics*. Basel, Switzerland: S. Karger.
- Kohlberg, L. and Kramer, R. 1969. Continuities and Discontinuities in Childhood and Adult Moral Development. *Human Development* 12.
- Lai, Whalen. 1991. "In Defence of Graded Love". *Asian Philosophy: An International Journal of Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Buddhist, Persian and Islamic Philosophical Traditions* 1 (1): 51-60.
- Lee, Cheuk-Yin. 1991. "The Dichotomy of Loyalty and Filial Piety in Confucianism: Historical Development and Modern Significance." *Confucianism and the Modernization of China* Mainz, Germany: v. Hase & Koehler Verlag.
- Li, Chenyang. 1994. "The Concept of *Jen* and the Feminist Ethics of Care: A Comparative Study". *Hypatia* Vol.9. No.1.
- Noddings, N. 1984. *Caring*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ortner, Sherry. 1974. Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture? In *Woman, Culture, and Society*, eds. M. Rosaldo & L. Lamphere. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Rawls, J. 1971. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.
- Rosemont, Henry. 1997. "Classical Confucian and Contemporary

- Feminist Perspectives on the Self: Some Parallels and their Implications". *Culture and Self*, Allen, Douglas (ed). Boulder: Westview Pr.
- Schwartz, B. 1985. *The World of Thought in Ancient China*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.
- Sher, G. 1987. "Other Voices, Other Rooms? Women's Psychology and Moral Theory". In *Women and Moral Theory*.
- Tu, Wei-Ming. 1989. "The Confucian Sage: Exemplar of Personal Knowledge". *Way, Learning, and Politics*.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1986. "An Inquiry in the *Five Relationships* in Confucian Humanism". *The Psycho-cultural Dynamics of the Confucian Family: Past and Present*. Seoul: International Cultural Society of Korea.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1981. "Jen as a living metaphor in the Confucian Analects". *Philosophy East and West* 31 pp.45-54.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1979a. "The Creative Tension between *Jen* and *Li*". *Humanity and Self-Cultivation*.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1979b. "*Li* as Process of Humanization". *Humanity and Self-Cultivation*.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1979. *Humanity and Self-Cultivation: Essays in Confucian Thought*. Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press.
- Weber, M. 1951. *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, (tr.) H. Gerth. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Whitbeck, C. 1989. "A Different Reality: Feminist Ontology". In *Women, Knowledge, and Reality*.