RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONFUCIAN ETHICS AND CARE ETHICS: A REFLECTION, REJECTION, AND RECONSTRUCTION

Qingjuan Sun*

Abstract: This essay first refutes two extant views on the relationship between Confucian ethics and care ethics, that is, 1) Confucian ethics is a care ethics, and 2) Confucian ethics and care ethics are virtue ethics. It then proposes that a better accommodation of Confucian ethics and care ethics into a single value system is to put them under relation ethics. While Confucian ethics is relation-oriented, care ethics is relation-constituted.

Regarding the relationship between Confucian ethics and care ethics, there are two kinds of mainstream opinions. One is represented by Chenyang Li (1994; 2008) and characterizes Confucian ethics, Mencius ethics included, as a care ethics. The other is hold by scholars such as Daniel Star (2002) and Raja Halwani (2003) and regards Confucian ethics and care ethics as virtue ethics. This essay in the following will reject both views and propose a new approach that can accommodate Confucian ethics and care ethics in a single value system.

To avoid confusion and ambiguity, two points should be clarified beforehand. First, by Confucian ethics, this essay does not refer to the broad and prolonged ethical tradition of Confucianism, which is far beyond its coverage. Rather, it succeeds previous discussions pertinent to the topic and focuses on Confucius ethics as well as Mencius ethics in elaborating Confucian ethical points. Second, when talking about care ethics, instead of referring it broadly as a cluster of normative ethical theories, this essay, following Li's arguments, draws support from Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings's works.

Rejection I: Mencius Ethics Is Care Ethics

This essay will begin with Li's enlightening article of *Does Confucian Ethics Integrate Care Ethics and Justice Ethics? The Case of Mencius* (2008). While some scholars hold that Confucian ethics embraces both care and justice, Li's article, by introducing the concept of "configuration of values," claims that care ethics and justice ethics cannot be integrated into Confucian ethics. He first distinguishes two kinds of perspectives: *perspectives as an aspect of view* or *single-aspect perspective* and *perspectives as interrelated aspects* or *configured perspective*, and argues that different ethics may embrace the same values from a single-aspect perspective, but they have different ways of configuration of these values. Li contends that while care and justice may be compatible as single-aspect perspectives within a configured

* Dr. QINGJUAN SUN, Assistant Professor, Yuelu Academy, Hunan University, China. sunq@hnu.edu.cn.

perspective since a configured perspective can embrace both values, care ethics and justice ethics are incompatible as configured perspectives because these two configurations contradict each other and cannot be incorporated into a single value system. Further, Li holds that although Mencius advocates both care and justice as single-aspect perspectives, he does not embrace care ethics and justice ethics as configured perspectives. Besides, in contrast to justice ethics, Confucian ethics attaches great importance to family relationships and, in maintaining such relationships, Confucian ethics is willing to give up impartiality. Therefore, Li concludes that Mencius ethics should be considered as a care ethics rather than a justice ethics or a mixture of these two ethics.

Li's approach is novel and inspiring and his arguments are systematic, however, there is an inconsistency of standard in his illustration of the relationships among care ethics, justice ethics, and Confucian ethics. It is said that care and justice are compatible as single-aspect perspectives, while care ethics and justice ethics are incompatible as configured perspectives, because these two ethics "give opposite answers to the question of which single-aspect perspective is more important" (Li 2008, 74-75). When it comes to the relationship between care ethics and Confucian ethics, however, Li suggests that Confucian ethics, or more precisely Mencius ethics, is a kind of care ethics. It is thus only reasonable to say that in Li's view both care ethics and Mencius ethics give the same answer to the question of which single-aspect perspective is more important, and they place the same value above the other in their configuration of ethical values. If the above analysis is correct, this essay holds differently from Li on this point.

Li's argument is based on the notion that *ren* (benevolence 仁) is the core concept in Confucianism. Undoubtedly, Confucian ethics takes *ren* to be *an* uppermost virtue. But we cannot say that *ren* is *the* uppermost value in Confucian ethics. In *Xunzi*, for example, *li* (ritual propriety 礼) is evidently more prominent than *ren*. In the following, this essay will argue that *ren* is not the uppermost value in Mencius either. Rather, it is only one of the four supreme virtues, namely, *ren*, *yi* (righteousness 义), *li*, and *zhi* (wisdom 智). It says that,

> The feeling of compassion is the sprout of benevolence. The feeling of distain is the sprout of righteousness. The feeling of deference is the sprout of ritual propriety. The feeling of approval and disapproval is the sprout of wisdom. People having these four sprouts is like their having four limbs. (*Mencius* 2A: 6)[1]

The four sprouts of the four virtues, that is, *ren*, *yi*, *li*, and *zhi*, parallel with each other. No particular stress is laid on any one of them. Besides, these four sprouts, as well as the four virtues, are intrinsic to every man. In *Mencius* 6A: 6, it says that,

[1] Quotations of *Mencius* are based on *Mengzi: with selections from traditional commentaries*, translated, with Introduction and Notes, by Bryan W. Van Norden (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2008).

> Humans all have the feeling of compassion. Humans all have the feeling of disdain. Humans all have the feeling of respect. Humans all have the feeling of approval and disapproval. The feeling of compassion is benevolence. The feeling of disdain is righteousness. The feeling of respect is propriety. The feeling of approval and disapproval is wisdom. Benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom are not welded to us externally. We inherently have them.

More importantly, not a single one of them can be omitted or downplayed. The absence of any one of them will make a man not a man anymore. This could be backed up by the statement in *Mencius* 2A: 6 that, "if one is without the feeling of compassion, one is not human. If one is without the feeling of disdain, one is not human. If one is without the feeling of respect, one is not human. If one is without the feeling of approval and disapproval, one is not human." The equal importance of the four feelings is thus obvious.

Emerged from the four paralleled sprouts, the four virtues are not only equally important as single-aspect perspectives, but also as configured perspectives. That is to say, people should make their decision or behave based on a much comprehensive consideration of these four virtues in accordance with the concrete relationships and specific situations rather than acting merely out of *ren*. For example, in dealing with a lawsuit, *ren* is not the magistral virtue in Mencius. A judge should not be dominated by his feeling of compassion toward a wrongdoer. On the contrary, he should make a clear distinction between right and wrong, and deal with the wrongdoer in accordance with the principle of justice and law. It is clearly expressed in the *Wuxing* (The Five Conducts 五行), unearthed manuscript from Guodian Chu Tomb, that,

> If one lacks straightforward determination, he will not take action. If one does not harbor lenience, he is not discerning of the way. To mete out great punishments for great crimes is to have "straightforward determination"; to pardon minor crimes is to "harbor lenience." If one does not mete out great punishments for great crimes, he will not be taking action; if he does not pardon minor crimes, he will not be discerning of the way. (Cook 2012, 514)[2]

In addition, it also says that straightforward determination is the orientation of *yi*, and harboring lenience is the orientation of *ren* (Cook 2012, 514). Apparently, *ren* is not *the* single ultimate value in judging a crime. If it is a severe crime, the judge ought not to commiserate or harbor the wrongdoer, as the orientation of *yi* is being called upon in the case. Heavy punishment should be carried out. Nevertheless, it does not imply that the judge should cast off *ren*. It is still possible that when a judge severely punishes the criminal following the orientation of *yi*, he is at the same time showing his compassion towards the victim and other people, even things, involved. But he should uphold *yi* as his main principle and not be influenced by personal emotion of compassion and thus partial in sentencing. The case would be totally different if the crime is a minor one. The predominant value becomes *ren* and accordingly the

[2] Quotations of the *Wu Xing* text in this essay are based on *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian: a study & complete translation, vols. I,* translated by Scott Cook (Cornell East Asia Series, 2012).

orientation of *ren* should be applied. As a result, minor crime should be pardoned to harbor lenience. Mencius followed and developed this idea of the *Wuxing*. He does not presuppose a *single* utmost value. The four virtues, namely, *ren*, *yi*, *li*, and *zhi* are of equal importance and dominate in turn according to specific situations.

This equal importance of the four virtues constitutes one of the reasons why Mencius always promotes the virtue of *ren* and the virtue of *yi* simultaneously. According to Pang Pu's reading, the virtue of *yi*, rooted in the feeling of disdain, runs also as a kind of moral restriction to the virtue of *ren*. The feeling of disdain includes two components, that is, the feeling of shame (*xiu* 羞) and the feeling of dislike (*wu* 惡). The former makes people feel shameful when they are not morally good, and the latter is the detestation towards others when others are not morally good (Pang 2005, 452). With such a limitation, people should apply their feeling of disdain only to good people and on good deeds in an appropriate manner without abusing it. Another account for promoting *ren* and *yi* simultaneously is that people need to adjust their emphasis on different virtues from time to time based on the roles they are playing in society. It says in *Mencius* 7B: 24 that, "Benevolence between father and son, righteousness between ruler and minister, propriety between guest and host, and wisdom in relation to the worthy."[3] This shows the emphasis that Mencius places on specific virtues with respect to people's specific roles within different relationships. For example, in the relationship between a father and his son, the emphasis should be put on the virtue of *ren*. Let *ren* be the guiding virtue in the father-son relationship. When this father is facing the ruler, however, his role shifts from a "father" to a "minister." The virtue of *yi* accordingly stands out in the ruler-minister relationship. The same logic also applies to *li* and *zhi*.

The situation is different in care ethics. From a configured perspective, *care/caring* plays the most important role. According to care ethics, the caring person[4], instead of appealing to reason, the universal principles, or other fixed rules, tends to make moral decisions or act based on feelings and a sense of "personal ideal." She tries to apprehend the real situations of the other and figure out what the other expects of her. Thus, caring behavior is actually related to the other's wants and

[3] According to Van Norden's translation, it follows that "the sage in relation to the Way of Heaven 聖人之於天道也." This essay, however, takes the character of *ren* 人 as a redundant word. Hence the sentence should be "sagacity in relation to the Way of Heaven 聖之於天道也. Most of the time, Mencius does not parallel sagacity (*sheng* 聖) with *ren*, *yi*, *li*, and *zhi*. This is because *sheng* belongs to the *tian*'s Way, while the other four belong to human Way. It says in the *Wuxing* text that, "When all five kinds of virtuous action are in harmony, it is called 'virtue'. When four kinds of action are in harmony, it is called 'good'. Good is the human Way. Virtue is tian's Way". "Five" refers to *ren*, *yi*, *li*, *zhi* and *sheng*, and "four" refers to *ren*, *yi*, *li*, and *zhi*. Mencius' focus is on the human Way, that is, *ren*, *yi*, *li*, and *zhi*.

[4] In discussing care ethics, this essay uses co'nsistently female pronouns and examples to refer to the one-caring. But neither does it mean all women would practice care ethics, nor will it exclude all men outside our consideration. It is not a rivalry between women and men. What this essay aims to illustrate here are two different approaches. And the use of female pronouns and examples only serve to avoid confusion.

desires, and also the objective problematic situations the other is facing. In addition, the caring relationship needs the one-caring to get rid of frame of self-reference and get into that of the cared-for. The mental engrossment focuses on the other, the cared-for, rather than the one-caring.

A comparison on sentencing is given by Nel Noddings in the *Caring* (2003). She comes up with two approaches in asserting the proper punishment of a particular crime. The father, who represents the traditional approach, concerns about the principles that the wrongdoer violates; while the mother, acting out of affection and regard, may want to inquiry more about the criminal and his victims. The former points directly to the abstraction, therefore he can deal with the case distinctly and logically despite the intricate interferences such as the particular person and specific circumstances. The immediate response of the latter, on the contrary, directs to concretization, involving herself in concrete facts, feelings and requirements of others, and personal relationships and histories. On account of these two different approaches, the father may uphold the principles and adhere to the rules at the expense of scarifying his criminal son. The mother, however, tends to protect her son regardless of all the principles and rules (Noddings, 2003, 36-37).

Another compelling example mentioned by Carol Gilligan's *In A Different Voice* (1982) also presents the caring perspective. The female lawyer Hilary, who considers self-sacrificing conducts courageous and praiseworthy, runs into dilemmas in both her personal life and professional life. She finds it impossible to avoid hurt "in a relationship where the truths of each person is conflicting" and "in court where, despite her concern for the client on the other side, she decided not to help her opponent win his case." She found, in both instances, "the absolute injunction against hurting others to be an inadequate guide to resolving the actual dilemmas she faced." Her final solution to such dilemmas is to claim "the right to include herself among the people whom she considers it moral not to hurt" (Gilligan, 1982, 165).

Therefore, the nearly insane conducts of Bree Van de Kamp in the TV series named *Desperate Housewives* seem understandable, or at least not that "insane." She exerts all her energies to cover the crime of her son who runs over one of her best friends' mother-in-law. She also does whatever she can to conceal her unmarried daughter's disgraceful pregnancy, even pretends to be pregnant herself and tries to raise the child as her own son. All these madnesses are at least partly out of a mother's caring toward her children. It is said by Noddings that "If I care enough, I may do something wild and desperate in behalf of the other … Hence, in caring, my rational powers are not diminished, but they are enrolled in the service of my engrossment in the other" (Noddings, 2003, 36).

From the above analysis and the distinct responses in dealing judicial issues, we can see that *ren* or caring is not *the* sole and most important consideration in Mencius. Compared with the caring in care ethics, Mencius' *ren* carries much more restrictions. People have to take other important virtues into account and think much more comprehensively. Besides, personal feelings and emotions are not always wanted in Mencius. In certain situations, subjective sentiments, like empathy and compassion, should be put aside. By contrast, private affections and regards are essential to care ethics. They are indispensable in any case. Hence, even though the notion of *ren* in

Mencius in some way resembles caring in care ethics as single-aspect perspectives, the ethics of Mencius and care ethics are different as configured perspectives.

Rejection II: Confucius Ethics Is Care Ethics

When it refers to Confucius ethics, which considers the virtue of *ren* to be *the* utmost virtue, there undeniably are some similarities between the concept of *ren* in Confucius and that of caring in care ethics. With respect to the similarities, Chenyang Li mainly hammers at three major areas in his article *The Confucian Concept of Jen and the Feminist Ethics of Care: A Comparative Study* (1994). First, he contends that Jen (i.e. *ren*), being the highest moral ideal of Confucianism, can be best interpreted as *caring*, which is the highest moral ideal of care ethics. He says that, "Even if the entire concept of Jen (Jen of affection and Jen of virtue) cannot be reduced to 'caring,' at least we can say that 'caring' occupies a central place in this concept" (Li, 1994, 74). Second, the highest moral ideals as they are, neither Jen nor caring pursues general principles or universal rules. More importantly, they both "remain flexible with rules." Third, both Confucian ethics and care ethics promote their highest moral ideals, namely Jen and caring, with gradations. It is said that "although we should care for everyone in the world if possible, we do need to start with those closest to us," and this is "the only reasonable way to practice Jen and care" (Li, 1994, 81). Based on these similarities, Li comes to his conclusion that Confucian ethics is a care ethics.

Hot debates follow consequently. In the article *Do Confucians Really care? A Defense of the Distinctiveness of Care Ethics: A Reply to Chenyang Li* (2002), Daniel Star, on the one hand, critiques this Confucian care thesis, namely, the thesis that Confucian ethics is either philosophically very similar to care ethics or is actually a form of care ethics. He contends that Confucian ethics is better conceived of as a unique kind of role-focused virtue ethics. On the other hand, he also argues that care ethics is by no means merely a new approach to virtue ethics. Ranjoo Seodu Herr (2003) also rejects the proposition that Confucian ethics is a kind of care ethics by examining two aspects of Confucianism and care ethics that allegedly converge: their emphasis on human relationship and their prescriptions for maintaining harmonious human relationship, namely, the cultivation of *ren* in Confucianism and caring in care ethics. She analyzes that their respective prescriptions regarding human relationship are unbridgeable. And the effort to assimilate these two ethics rests on the downplaying and neglect of *li*, and on the misunderstanding of the feminist conception of care. Raja Halwani (2003), in the article *Care Ethics and Virtue Ethics*, argues that care ethics should be subsumed under virtue ethics by construing care as an important virtue, which allows us to achieve two desirable goals. First, we preserve what is important about care ethics, such as its insistence on particularity, partiality, emotional engagement, and the importance of care to our moral lives. Second, we avoid two important objections to care ethics, namely, that it neglects justice, and that it contains no mechanism by which care can be regulated so as not to go to morally corruption.

The above authors propose different kinds of tenable arguments to oppose the notion of considering Confucian ethics a care ethics. This essay is in sympathy with

them on this point. However, it is not satisfied with their notion of taking Confucian ethics and care ethics as virtue ethics. The essay will further argue against Li's notion in what follows by rejecting his three similarities, and in the meantime draw forth its own view on the relationship between Confucian ethics and care ethics.

The first similarity to be rejected is that neither Confucian concept of *ren* nor caring of care ethics involves general principles. Care ethics does not call on abstractions but devotes to concretizations. It "recognizes and calls forth human judgment across a wide range of fact and feeling" (Li, 1994, 77). Therefore, it is reasonable to attribute it as non-general-principle-needed. However, it is at least debatable to say that Confucian concept of *ren* "cannot be achieved by following general principles" (Li 1994, 76). As a matter of fact, this essay holds that Confucian ethics involves general principles, and the Confucian concept of *li* and its requirements actually serve as the kind of general principles regulating the virtue of *ren*.

First, *li* in Confucianism gives a series of general principles, acting up to which can lead to the accomplishment of *ren*. A conversation is recorded in the *Analects* 12.1:

> Yan Hui asked about *ren*. The Master said, "Restricting yourself and return to rites constitutes *ren*. If for one day you managed to restrain yourself and return to the rites, in this way you could lead the entire world back to *ren*. The key to achieving *ren* lies within yourself — how could it come from other?"
> Yan Hui asked, "May I inquire as to the specifics?" The Master said, "Do not look unless it is in accordance with ritual; do not listen unless it is in accordance with ritual; do not speak unless it is in accordance with ritual; do not move unless it is in accordance with ritual." Yan Hui replied, "Although I am not quick to understand, I ask permission to devote myself to this teaching." [5]

This passage conveys at least three messages. 1) One can attain the virtue of *ren* and become a person of *ren* by restricting himself and returning to *li*. In this sense, *ren* can be perceived as the internalization of *li*. The achievement of *ren* does not depend on others but is determined by one's own efforts. Therefore, it is inappropriate to say that *ren* cannot be accomplished by following *li* which contains a series of moral principles. 2) These indispensable "specifics" are the general requirements of *li*. They are always applicable and can be used to regulate people's behaviors in any situation at any time, which means they are general and universal. 3) Virtuous as Yan Hui was, he still modestly made practicing the four "specifics" his business. This concrete example shows indirectly the feasibility and efficiency of achieving *ren* by following the four specifics.

Second, although *li* is not *the* utmost virtue in Confucianism as configured perspective, it is indispensable as single-aspect perspective to the virtue of *ren*. In the *Analects*, it is mentioned in many places the essential functions that *li* plays. For

[5] Quotations of *Analects* are based on *Confucius Analects*, translated by Edward Slingerland (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2003), with modifications when necessary.

example, it appears repeatedly that, "Someone who is broadly learned with regard to culture, and whose conduct is restrained by the *li*, can be counted upon to not go astray" (*Analects* 6.27; 12.15). Yan Yuan also says that "The Mater is skilled at gradually leading me on, step by step. He broadens me with culture and restrains me with rites" (*Analects* 9.11). From these we can see, in order to prevent one from going against the utmost virtue of *ren*, it is imperative to restrain oneself by *li* and act in coherence with its requirements. According to Confucius, if people do not behave in accordance with *li*, they do not really achieve the full excellence (*Analects* 15.33). Therefore, it is safe to say that he who wants to be a person of *ren* should conduct according to the requirements of *li*. Otherwise, if a person does not learn and understand *li*, he could not even take his place in the society (*Analects* 20.3, 16.13, and 8.8). In addition to *ren*, the restrictive function of *li* also works well when it is applied to other important Confucian virtues, which are concrete presentations and different aspects of the utmost virtue *ren* in specific situations. To name some, the virtue of *gong* (respectfulness 恭), *shen* (carefulness 慎), *yong* (courageousness 勇), and *zhi* (upright 直), etc. These virtues are highly praised and greatly promoted as single-aspect perspectives in Confucianism. Nonetheless, they will go astray without the regulating of *li*: respectfulness becomes exasperation, carefulness becomes timidity, courageousness becomes unruliness, and upright becomes inflexibility (*Analects* 8.2).

Third, most of the requirements of *li* are flexible and open to modifications in their application, though, there are certain unchangeable universal rules of it. We can examine the example proposed in Li's article. In *Analects* 4.18, the Master says that, "In serving his father and mother a man may gently remonstrate with them. But if he sees that he has failed to change their opinion, he should resume an attitude of deference and not thwart them."[6] Different from Li, this essay reads from it the absolute obedience and respect for a son towards his parents. A son should always serve his parents with reverence and respect. Even in cases when his parents are wrong, a son should not point out their mistakes straightly or impolitely. He should give his advice in an appropriate way and at an appropriate degree. If his parents do not take the advice, he should not complain or be dissatisfied with them, but attend upon them with an even higher degree of reverence and respect. Besides, he should not give up easily but continue to hold on to his responsibility until he convinces his parents successfully and assists them to become better persons (Herr, 2003, 472-473). This is not blind filial piety, but a great wisdom in dealing with the intricate inter-personal relationships in Confucianism. The son preserves *yi* without violating *li*, not to mention that he turns his parents into better persons as well.

In denying that filial piety to one's parents is absolute, Li also resorts to the collision between filial piety to one's parents and loyalty (*zhong* 忠) to the ruler, and asserts that "Confucianism offers no general rules to solve the problem" (Li 1994, 78) when they conflict with each other. Tension, or even conflict, does exist between filial piety and loyalty sometimes, but the two can be accommodated. Mencius holds that

[6] This translation is adopted from Li's article.

the greatest service is severing one's parents (*Mencius* 4A: 19), therefore loyalty is logically secondary to filial piety. When addressing the seemingly dilemma of Shun being so laboriously engaged in the sovereign's business that he was unable to nourish his parents, Mencius says that of all which a filial son can attain to, there is nothing greater than his honoring to his parents; while of what can be attained to in honoring his parents, there is nothing greater than nourishing them with the whole kingdom (*Mencius* 5A: 4). In other words, being loyal to the sovereign by serving the state is actually the greatest filial piety towards one's parents. A sound account would be that by serving the state, one helps to maintain the state in peace and prosperous, which will in turn benefit one's family and let the family prosperous in a peaceful environment. As is expressed in the *Springs and Autumns of the Lu's Family* (*Lüshi Chunqiu* 吕氏春秋), if the whole state is in chaos, there is no stable family within it. It would be impossible for people to live and work in peace and contentment and to be happy and prosperous if the whole state is devastated and ravished.

In fact, filial piety and loyalty not only can be accommodated, but they are essentially in agreement to Confucians. According to the chapter of "A Summary Account of Sacrifices" (*Ji Tong* 祭统) in the *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 礼记), "There is a fundamental agreement between a loyal subject in his service of his ruler and a filial son in his service of his parents" (25.2). In the chapter of "The Meaning of Sacrifices" (*Ji Yi* 祭义), it also says that, "if (a man) in serving his ruler, he be not loyal, he is not filial" (24.26). Confucius is also quoted in the *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiao Jing* 孝经) as saying that filial piety is the root of all virtues. Filial piety is divided into different stages: "it commences with the service of parents; it proceeds to the service of the ruler; it is completed by the establishment of character" (1.1). Hence, the seemingly contradiction between filial piety and loyalty cannot be used to deprive the absoluteness from filial piety.

Rejection III: Care Ethics Is Merely a Virtue Ethics

When comes to Li's third similarity, this essay agrees that gradation appears in both Confucian ethics and care ethics. Nonetheless, this essay argues that the gradation of *ren* is essentially different from that of caring. It believes that the extension of Confucian utmost virtue of *ren* is self-oriented, while the application of caring in care ethics is other-concerned and caring-centered.

The Confucian belief in "love with gradations" (i.e. *ai you cha deng* 爱有差等) means that instead of loving or caring for all people universally without distinction, one should first start from loving or caring one's own family members and then gradually extend it to others. It is also reasonable for Confucians to love or care his family more than strangers. Mencius says in 1A: 7 that, "Treat your elders as elders, and extend it to the elders of others; treat your young ones as young ones; and extend it to the young ones of others." We should love our own elders and young ones first and then extend it to the elders and young ones of others, not the other way around.

What should be noticed is that Confucian love is self-oriented. It is from *my* family that the love, or caring, is being extended. I begin with *my* family, love *my*

own elders and young ones, and then extend the love and caring to others. It is both mentioned in the *Analects* 12.2 and 15.24 that, "Do not impose others what you yourself do not desire." This principle is considered as the Confucian Golden Rule. And it says in 6.30: "Desiring to take his stand, one who is benevolent helps other to take their stand; wanting to realize himself, he helps others to realize themselves. Being able to take what is near at hand as an analogy could perhaps be called the method of benevolence." In these two statements, caring also starts from the self. It is centered on one's own desires and feelings, and likes and dislikes, and further supposes that others are the same as the caring-self, and have the same needs as the caring-self. Accordingly, the caring-self should give others what himself wants, and should not impose on others what himself does not want. The problem of this notion is that it neglects the real needs and requirements of the others involved. Is what *I* want necessarily the same as the others do, and is what *I* do not want necessarily useless to others? There is no response in Confucian ethics, but it is not hard to imagine a negative case in real life. For example, there are plenty parents who want their children to live out their own unfulfilled dreams which denies the opportunity of their children to live life for themselves. While the husband hates all kinds of flowers, his wife may be expecting a bunch of roses on their anniversary. In such cases, people should give up being self-oriented.

Care ethics, on the other hand, is other-concerned and caring-centered. Even though the feelings of the one-caring are important, they are not the key consideration. Noddings says that, "Caring involves, for the one-caring, a 'feeling with' the other. We might want to call this relationship 'empathy,' but we should think about what we mean by this term." It is not that "the power of projecting one's personality into, and so fully understanding, the object of contemplation" as defined in *The Oxford Universal Dictionary*. She elaborates that the idea of "feeling with" involves, instead of projection, reception which she calls "engrossment." It is neither about the extension of my feelings and needs, nor about what I would feel in certain situations as Confucian ethics holds. Rather

> I receive others into myself, and I see and feel with the other. I become a duality. I am not thus caused to see or to feel—that is, to exhibit certain behavioral signs interpreted as seeing and feeling—for I am committed to the receptivity that permits me to see and to feel in this way. The seeing and feeling are mine, but only partly and temporarily mine, as on loan to me. (Noddings, 2003, 30)

In this way, as long as the one-caring receives the cared-for, she is totally with him. What we really care is not the problematic situations, but the person. When one cares, she stands in the view of the cared-for, his objective needs, and his actual expectations from her. The one-caring's attention and mental engrossment are on the cared-for, not on her own feelings. Thus, the reasons for the caring conducts are related both with the cared-for's wants and desires and with the objective factors of his problematic situation, not the one-caring's own personal frame of reference into the cared-for (Noddings, 2003, 24).

Besides, care ethics concerns relatively less about self-feelings and takes caring as responsibility. For example, in Gilligan's classic study, Claire, one of the female participants mentioned, considered Heinz's dilemma, that is, whether he should steal the drug or not, by focusing on the failure of response, rather than on the conflict of rights. She not only believes that Heinz should steal the drug since his wife's life was more important than anything, but also thinks that the druggist has a moral obligation to show compassion to the patient and he does not have the right to refuse. She also says that, "the wife needed him at this point to do it; she couldn't have done it, and it's up to him to do for her what she needs." In analyzing this, Gilligan says that, "Whether Heinz loves his wife or not is irrelevant to Claire's decision, not because life has priority over affection, but because his wife is another human being who needs help. Thus the moral injunction to act stems not from Heinz's feelings about his wife but from his awareness of her need." In this case, a person's responsibility equates the need to respond that "arises from the recognition that others are counting on you and that you are in a position to help." The one-caring does not resort to any principles and rules before conducting. She usually cares naturally and directly, just because she wants to responds positively to people who turn to her (Gilligan 1982, 54).

Therefore, even though both *ren* and caring have gradation, they gradate differently in an opposite direction. The Confucian notion of r*en*, being self-centered, puts most emphasis on the self and the feelings of the self. The extension of *ren* starts from the self and is based on the closeness of relationships between the self and the others. The caring in care ethics, however, is other-oriented. It prioritizes the cared-for and the feelings of the cared-for. It considers caring as responsibility, and focuses on the establishment of the caring relation.

Conclusion: Confucian Ethics and Care Ethics Are Relation Ethics

The above analysis has shown that Confucian ethics, from the perspective of Confucius and Mencius, is not care ethics or a care ethics. Then what is the relationship between the two ethics? Star proposes to integrate both into a role-focused virtue ethics (2002). This essay will argue that it is inappropriate to equate care ethics a kind of virtue ethics.

According to Noddings' definition, there are two meanings of caring, that is, 1) caring as a certain kind of relation or encounter; and 2) caring as a virtue, as an attribute or disposition frequently exercised by a moral agent (Noddings 2003, xiii). Based on the second meaning, we might well consider care ethics as a kind of virtue ethics, however, it is not all-inclusive for the first meaning has been overlooked. More importantly, Noddings points out that, "Both concepts are useful, but care theory itself makes its special contribution through the relational sense" (Noddings 1999, 37). Care ethics puts its emphasis on the caring relation. It is believed that relations, rather than individuals, are ontologically basic. This means that different from traditional moral philosophy, which does not pay enough attention to the contributions of the cared-for, care ethics not only requires the one-caring to have the virtue of caring, but also depends on the cared-for to successfully receive and accept the caring emitted by

the one-caring. It is only after the cared-for receiving and accepting such caring that the caring relation can be established. Noddings contends that the primary message of caring is that we cannot justify ourselves as carers by claiming "we care." If the recipients of our caring insist that "nobody cares," caring relations do not exist (Noddings 2003, xiv). The caring actions and the caring relations largely depend on the cared-fors, not the ones that care. Noddings gives an example. On the one side, the students in high school want their teachers to care for them, but they feel nobody cares; while on the other side, the teachers convincingly insist that they do care since they work hard and hope their students to succeed. In this case, both sides may be blameless. But, the teachers obviously care only in the second sense of caring. Although they do have the virtue of caring, they fail to establish the caring relations. From the perspective of care ethics, caring as a virtue and caring as a relation are both important but the later takes a larger share of the importance. In other words, the establishment of caring relation is more essential than having the virtue of caring. Therefore, from a configured perspective, care ethics should be better described as a relation ethics than a virtue ethics.

According to Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont Jr., the pre-Buddhist Confucianism is best described as a role ethics which embodies first "a specific vision of human beings as relational persons constituted by the roles they live rather than as individual selves," and embodies as well "a specific vision of the moral life that takes family feeling as the entry point for developing a consummate moral competence and a religious sensibility grounded in this world" (Ames and Rosemont 2011, 17). This means that Confucian ethics lays stress on the realistic life where people are interdependent and interactional. Once we were born, we interplay with others and live in a web of relations (being self-oriented and starting from family relations). As we growing up, the relational web may become more and more expanding and intricate. According to Confucianism, we should act in line with our roles within our relational web. In this sense, Confucian ethics can also be better characterized as relation ethics. For one thing, it is believed that we are relational persons, playing different roles in society and aiming to formulate a harmonious web of relations. For the other thing, roles are relative and changeable. It only exists when there is/are relation(s). For example, in a family, the mother is so called only because the existence of her child. Without this mother-child relation, there are no roles of mother and son/daughter. No relation, no role(s). Role(s) can only make sense within the framework of relation. Hence, relation ethics may well be more appropriate a name than role ethics from a configured perspective.

Each specific role corresponds with certain responsibilities and rights. To maintain the relations, everybody within it should perform his responsibilities dutifully. As is recorded in the *Analects*12.11,

> Duke Jing of Qi asked Confucius about governing. Confucius responded, "Let the lord be a true lord, the ministers true ministers, the fathers true fathers, and the sons true sons." The Duke replied, "Well put! Certainly if the lord is not a true lord, the ministers not true ministers, the fathers not true fathers, and the sons not true sons, even if there is sufficient grain, will I ever get to eat it?"

Here, "the lord be a true lord, the ministers' true ministers, the fathers' true fathers, and the sons' true sons" means that the lord, ministers, fathers and sons all act in line with their roles respectively, or more precisely, with the specific responsibilities endorsed by their roles. For Confucians, not only the above four roles, but actually all roles should act in this way. It is demonstrable from the Confucian notion of rectification of names (*zhengming* 正名), which means that "things in actual fact should be made to accord with the implications attached to them by names" (Steinkraus, 1980, 262). To be noted, the roles serve to define one's responsibilities, but it is not for the roles themselves, but rather, it is for harmonious relationships and ultimately a harmonious society weaved together by all kinds of relationships that everyone act upon their responsibilities accordingly.

The difference between these two relation ethics, namely, care ethics and Confucian ethics, is that the former is relation-constituted, while the latter is relation-oriented. This is because care ethics has already embraced the notion of relation in its definition of caring from a configured perspective. The caring-relation constitutes the essential element of care ethics. Confucian ethics, however, does not include such notion in its definition of *ren*. But efforts of Confucian ethics are devoted to harmonious relations within the society, it thus is relation-oriented.

To sum up, on the one hand, through the study of Confucius ethics and Mencius ethics, it is illustrated that Confucian ethics should not be considered as (a) care ethics. Because, *ren* is not the most important virtue in Mencius and Confucius' *ren* is different from caring in care ethics from a configured perspective. On the other hand, care ethics is not merely about the virtue of caring. Rather, it places more emphasis on the relational sense of caring. Therefore, care ethics is not a virtue ethics from a configured perspective. This essay holds that Confucian ethics and care ethics can be accommodated in relation ethics. The former is relation-oriented, guiding people towards harmonious relations; and the latter is relation-constituted, embracing relation as its most important element from a configured perspective.

References

Ames, Roger T., and Henry Jr Rosemont. 2011. "Were the Early Confucians Virtuous?" In *Ethics in Early China: An Anthology*, edited by Chris Fraser, Dan Robins, and Timothy O'Leary, 17-39. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Book of Rites. Accessed January 16, 2019. https://ctext.org/liji/zh?en=on.

Classic of Filial Piety. Accessed January 16, 2019. https://ctext.org/xiao-jing/zh?en=on.

Cook, Scott. 2012. *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian: A Study & Complete Translation, Vols. I.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Gilligan, Carol. 1982. *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Halwani, Raja. 2003. "Care Ethics and Virtue Ethics." *Hypatia* 18, no.1: 161-92.

Herr, Ranjoo Seodu. 2003. "Is Confucianism Compatible with Care Ethics? A Critique." *Philosophy East & West* 53, no.4: 471-89.

Li, Chenyang. 1994. "The Confucian Concept of Jen and the Feminist Ethics of Care: A Comparative Study." *Hypatia* 9, no.1: 70-89.

Li, Chenyang. 2008. “Does Confucian Ethics Integrate Care Ethics and Justice Ethics? The Case of Mencius.” *Asian Philosophy* 18, no.1: 69-82.
Noddings, Nel. 1999. “Two Concepts of Caring.” *Philosophy of Education*, 36-39.
Noddings, Nel. 2003. *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Pang, Pu. 2005. *Pangpu Wenji* 庞朴文集 (*Collected Works of Pang Pu*). Jinan: Shandong University Press.
Slingerland, Edward. 2003. *Confucius Analects.* Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
Star, Daniel. 2002. “Does Confucians Really Care? A Defense of the Distinctiveness of Care Ethics: A Reply to Chenyang Li.” *Hypatia* 17, no.1: 77-106.
Steinkraus, Warren. 1980. “Socrates, Confucius, and the Rectification of Names.” *Philosophy East and West* 30, no.2: 261-64.
Van Norden, Bryan W. 2008. *Mengzi: with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.