Scholar's Corner: Confucianism in and for the Modern World

The Ethics of Hospitality:
Tracing the Confucian Other

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Abstract

In this paper, I will explore the meaning of the Confucian "other" and its ethical implications in the light of the ethics of hospitality advocated by Lévinas and other poststructuralist philosophers in contemporary discourse. The questions I would like to raise in the paper include: Who is the "other" for Confucians? Can Confucian *ren* 仁 ("virtue of humanness-qua-relatedness") reconcile the particular and the universal, or an ethics of graded love and an ethics of inclusive care? Can the Confucian concept of *tianxia* 天下 ("all under the heaven") resolve a universal notion of humanity with a particularistic notion of cultural and political community? Is there such a thing as "Confucian ecumenism"? I am fully aware that whenever we bring a pre-modern intellectual tradition of the East like Confucianism into the conversation of contemporary Western ethical or political issues, we need to remind ourselves that the contemporary framework defines, to some extent, the parameter for the application of concepts and norms. But at the same time, the interpretation of an ancient tradition like Confucianism should not preclude an attempt to explore its thought and its possible connection to contemporary analogous issues within its own cultural context and form. The comparison in the paper intends to seek constructive ethical engagement in both traditions.

Keywords: Hospitality, Lévinas, Confucianism, the Other, *ren*, *shu*, generosity, relationality

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In recent years, a number of Chinese scholars intend to bring Confucianism into the conversation of contemporary Western thought via the ethical thinking of Emmanuel Lévinas. For example, in his "The Ontology of the Theory of *Ren*," Chen Lai mentions the ethical thought of Lévinas, contending that the Confucian selfhood in light of *ren* 仁 not only entails otherness but also gives the other a priority (2014, 60).[1] He then quickly points out that a major difference between Confucian ethics and Lévinas' philosophy lies in how self-other is perceived: The former looks for sameness whereas the latter focuses on differences. Shun Xiangyang in his "From Lévinasian notions of 'Transcendence' and 'the Other' to the Confucian Concepts of *Shengsheng* and *Qinqin*," discusses the virtue of relatedness by comparing the transcendent notion of the other in Lévinas with the Confucian ethics based on ethical particularism in terms of *qinqin* 親親, i.e., the priority of family affection for the members of one's family. Shun's study attempts to explore the possibility of an ethical transition from self to other within the framework of Confucianism (2020, 50-3).

In this paper, I will explore the meaning of the Confucian "other" and its ethical implications in the light of the ethics of hospitality advocated by Lévinas and other poststructuralist philosophers in contemporary discourse. The questions I would like to raise in the paper include: Who is the "other" for Confucians? Can Confucian *ren* 仁 ("virtue of humanness-qua-relatedness") reconcile the particular and the universal, or an ethics of graded love and an ethics of inclusive care? Can the Confucian concept of *tianxia* 天下 ("all under the heaven") resolve a universal notion of humanity with a particularistic notion of cultural and political community? Is there such a thing as "Confucian ecumenism"? I am fully aware that whenever we bring a pre-modern intellectual tradition of the East like Confucianism into the conversation of contemporary Western ethical or political issues, we need to remind ourselves that the contemporary framework defines, to some extent, the parameter for the application of concepts and norms. But at the same time, the interpretation of an ancient tradition like Confucianism should not preclude an attempt to explore its thought

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[1] Chen also published a book with the same title in 2014.

and its possible connection to contemporary analogous issues within its own cultural context and form. The comparison in the paper intends to seek constructive ethical engagement in both traditions.

I. Hospitality: An Ethics of Welcoming the Other

Emmanuel Lévinas' philosophy, as André Jacob puts it, "represents at once a revolution of the meaning of alterity with regard to traditional morality, but without losing what was best in morality" (Jacob 1986, 74, as cited in Critchle 2014, 9). For Lévinas, the word "ethics" becomes a question about the "wholly Other" that challenges the self-*qua*-being, thus separating itself from the traditional ontological framework of Being in the West. The ethics of hospitality deals with the problem of what otherness consists in, and what its foundation is, within the self-other relation. "Hospitality" (*hospitalité*) is commonly referred to as one of the meanings of the Latin *hospes*, a term associated with host, guest, visitor, and stranger. For Lévinas, hospitality is an ethics of welcoming the Other based on a recognition of the spectral phenomenology of the infinity of the Other.[2] The infinity of the Other is called "alterity" which, according to Lévinas, resists to be the subject-object formalism of intentionality (1969, 38), or what Lévinas calls the same (*le meme*).[3] The infinity opens up Lévinas' metaphysics of transcendence as it pervades human relations, for the metaphysical relation between human beings is characterized by what Lévinas calls "radical alterity" (*l'altérité radicale*). That is to say, the Other stands before me as irreducibly present and yet utterly strange. It points to

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[2] It should be noted that the term "Other" used by Lévinas entails strongly phenomeno-logical connotations. Therefore, the Other does not simply mean another person or another entity, but the modalities through which an entity/face appears as the Other and appears in a particular way (i.e., otherness).

[3] According to Lévinas, the same directs not only at the rescogitans, but also at the cogitate. If we borrow the terms by Edmund Husserl, the domain of the Same indicates not only the intentional acts of consciousness (noeses), but also the intentional objects which give meaning to those acts and which are constituted by consciousness (noemata). To responds to Husserl's concept of intentionality, Lévinas describes intentionality as "an openness of thought onto the thought-of" (1994, 152).

infinity of the other, the irreducible uniqueness of the other person who not only challenges my desire of domination and control, but also my expectation in terms of my obligation and responsibility:

> To approach the other is to put into question my freedom, my spontaneity as a living being, my emprise over things, this freedom of a "moving force," this impetuosity of the current to which everything is permitted. (Lévinas 1969, 303)

This ethics of alterity is revealed as a central issue in Lévinasian thought. To explain the concept of alterity, Lévinas employs the term of the "naked face" or "face-to-face" to redefine human sociality. This phenomenological account of the "face-to-face" encounter serves as the basis for Lévinas' ethics, according to which, the nakedness of the other's face is "a crisis of being" (i.e., our incapacity for capturing the concrete living presence of another person) because it is ultimately resistant to comprehension, representation, categorization, and containment in a conceptual framework. At the same time, self-identity is constructed in and through this face-to-face meeting, yet the relation should not be understood as a scene of reciprocity, but radical asymmetry and subjection. As Lévinas claims, the face of the other "speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation" (1969, 198). The subjectivity of the "I" is radically altered by the relation and the ethics of the other in that "I am the hostage of the other." Through the unique and phenomenological use of the term face, Lévinas paves the way for his phenomenological hermeneutic of the other.

It is intriguing here that Lévinas emphasizes the concrete living presence of another person on the one hand and tends to use the singular "Other" rather than the plural "others" on the other hand. For Lévinas, the Other is nameless singularity. However, Jean-Luc Marion, a French philosopher and Catholic theologian influenced significantly by Lévinas, has criticized Lévinas for failing to account for the individuation of the Other, thus leaving the face of the Other abstract, neutral, and anonymous. In his article, "From the Other to the Individual," Marion argues that Levinas' ethics of responsibility in a "face-to-face" encounter fails to offer an adequate account of the Other's individuation as a

particular person, and thus the Other remains "no person," "no individual," and "no so-and-so" (2005, 108). For Marion, love as a "pure gift" between lover and beloved is based on individuation rather than an abstract concept marked by impersonal anonymity. To respond to Marion's critique, Christine Gschwandtner contends that Lévinas' Other is "neither an identifiable individual nor an abstract universal, but rather an irreducibly singular Other who overflows his or her own phenomenal appearance, and breaks with every representational schema without thereby dissolving into nothing" (Gschwandtner 2005, 70-87, as cited in Guenther 2009, 168). Based on Gschwandtner's argument, Lisa Guenther further defends Lévinas' impersonality of the Other by making a distinction between "the individuation of the subject" through hypostasis and "the singularization of self and Other" in the ethical response. She points out, singularity in the most specific sense of the word "articulates an ethical relation for Lévinas rather than a strictly ontological one" (Guenther 2009, 169). Given the asymmetry of the ethical relation emphasized by Lévinasian otherness, the singularity of the face that commands a particular instance of alterity in general: "... the singularity of this Other who faces me here and now. This universality is precisely not a generality which effaces distinct singularities by subsuming them all indifferently under the same category...." (Guenther 2009, 170). I agree with Guenther's explanation that Lévinas' Other entails singularization that cannot be represented and categorized by the general language of "being." But I would like to add another reason for Lévinas' emphasis on the impersonality of the naked face is that his ethics of the Other points to a relation towards a total stranger as people of certain kind whose names are unknown and unidentifiable except being called the widow, the orphan, or members of a certain social group. This dimension is important especially when we discuss Lévinas' ethics of hospitality. Hospitality here does not simply refer to the idea of welcoming our family members and friends, but the Other as a total stranger who may challenge us.

In his seminal work *Totality and Infinity*, Lévinas tells us, "This book will present subjectivity as welcoming the Other, as hospitality; in it the idea infinity is consummated" (1969, 27). This Other, writes Lévinas, "speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with

a power exercised, be it enjoyment or knowledge (198)." It follows that while hospitality shortens the spatial space, it disrupts the conventional host/guest relation in that the guest "demands" the host to show an act of openness which requires the host to break the boundaries of his/her responsibility to move towards infinity of the other.[4] Yet this relationship is by no means romantic or even pleasant because the difference between "invitation" and "visitation" no longer exists. On the one hand, hospitality means greeting the other into one's home, accepting and welcoming the other; on the other hand, welcoming the other unconditionally means that the host cannot "design" his/her welcoming party in his/her own way. In this regard, hospitality has to be dependent upon the host's open-ended recognition of and responsiveness to the other, which is asymmetrical and infinite. In this regard, the host is constituted in a passive relationship of welcome.

The ethics of hospitality advocated by Lévinas makes a sense to a certain degree in a globalized world, with its unprecedented historical process of deterritorialization and cross-bordering, particularly in Europe when strangers such as immigrants from poor countries with different religious beliefs and political ideologies pose a threat to the traditional discourse of cosmopolitanism. For many cosmopolitans today, a civil society becomes global which has reframed the relation-ship between the particular and the universal, as well as the universal structure of particularity. Then how should we perceive the other in the process of seeking a cosmopolitan unity while at the same time not reducing difference to identity? Is it possible to extend the moral and political horizons of people across different states and ideologies? Lévinas' concern of the Other inspires Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006) who addresses a socially and culturally situated nature of cosmopolitan process and asks: What does it mean to be a citizen of the world? What do we owe strangers by virtue of our shared humanity? Lévinas' hospitality shows a tension between geographical intimacy and relational intimacy in which a de-territorialization of the responsibility

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4 According to Lévinas, infinity points to the sense of "what lies outside myself but eludes my comprehensive knowledge: the other person" (1969, 49). It is important to note that for Lévinas the relation with the other is always primarily a relation with a stranger.

to the other becomes problematic. Now, let me turn to the Confucian tradition to see how Confucian ethics deals with the question regarding the extension of responsibility to others.

II. Virtues of *Ren* and *Shu*: Relationality and Reciprocity

The Confucian virtue of *ren* 仁 ("humanness" or "benevolence") is centered around the relations that one has with others. The ideographic Chinese character *ren* is composed of two radicals, with *ren* 人 ("person") on the left and *er* 二 ("two") on the right. This two-person ideograph of *ren* implies a desired societal formation for sharing goodness and spreading humaneness (Smith 1987). In "The Ontology of the Theory of *Ren*," Chen Lai defines *ren* as the "ultimate reality" for Confucians. As a way of self-cultivation, *ren* does not simply suggests a process of "learning for oneself" (*weiji zhi xue* 為己之學) as advocated by New-Confucians, but an ethical way towards others (Chen 2014, 60). Obviously, Chen's re-interpretation of Confucian ethics intends to bring Confucianism into constructive ethical engagement with the contemporary world. However, it remains a question if Confucian *ren* implied the notion of "prioritization of the other" (*tazhe youxian* 他者優先) as suggested by Chen. In contrast, Shun Xiangyang's explanation of *ren* still follows the traditional interpretation to focus on the dimension of kinship love (*qinqin* 親親 or *aiqin* 愛親), i.e., the priority of family affection for the members of one's family (2020, 50-3). A similar observation is given by William McNaughton when he defines *ren* as "the natural warm human feelings for others, graded according to one's relation to them" (1974, 27). In his defense of the Confucian concept of *ren* in the context of global ethics, Yong Huang further points out, "... the love that Confucians emphasize is a natural feeling or emotion of love. The term Confucius often used in his discussion of love, *zhi* 直, here translated as 'uprightness,' implies that his love is the true feeling of love" (2005, 41).

In the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*), Confucius states clearly that the ethical order was built upon humans' natural love for their kin. The five cardinal relationships (*wuchang* 五常) are established relationships

modeled after kinship in a patriarchal and patrilineal society. This familial model also guides social relationships in general whereby people understand their reciprocal obligations in that relationship. Reciprocity, therefore, has at least two meanings: (1) mutuality and (2) interaction (with "sympathetic understanding"). Human relations in this regard are more than "objective relations" regulated through a ritualized exchange but through a dynamic and concretized interaction based on life experiences. The question concerning responding to others qua *ren*, especially others beyond kinship has been well argued within the Confucian tradition through the concept of "extension" (*tui* 推), or to be more specific, the concept of "extending from oneself to others" (*tuiji jiren* 推己及人). This concept is closely connected to another key virtue in Confucian ethics, that is, the virtue of *shu* 恕, usually translated as "reciprocity," "consideration of others," "empathy," or even "altruism." For example, there is a well-known dialogue between Confucius and his student Zigong in the *Analects*:

> When Zigong asked, "Is there one expression that can be acted upon till the end of one's day?" The master replies, "There is *shu*: do not impose on others what you yourself do not want." (*Analects* 15.24, as translated in Ames and Rosemont 2010, 189).

The statement "do not impose on others what you yourself do not want" (己所不欲, 勿施於人), as a reversed principle of golden rule, is often called the Confucian "silver rule." It is perceived as a negative golden rule because the statement focuses on "not doing something" in terms of mutual interaction between self and other. The same negative expression is used by Confucius when he answers Zhonggong's inquiry about the definition of *ren* (*Analects* 12.2). In another passage of the *Analects* (4.15), the virtue *shu* is used along with the virtue of *zhong* 忠, meaning "loyalty" or "respect," which denotes that these two virtues are inextricably interwoven, pointing to an exemplary modus vivendi that only those who possess sage-like quality can have. In the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (Doctrine of the Mean), we encounter the negative golden rule again: "What he does not wish done to him he does not do unto others" (施諸己而不願, 亦勿施於人). One should know how to practice *ren*, as well

as how to practice *shu*. As such, both *ren* and *shu* are based on mutuality and reciprocity with regard to the relation between self and other.

I would like to argue that *shu* as a negative expression is more important when the other involved goes beyond familial and familiar relations. Although Confucius has not spelled out the social setting in which *shu* should be practiced, it points to a restrictive action. Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), a Neo-Confucian synthesist of the Song period, compares *ren* with *shu*, claiming that "ren is spontaneous, *shu* is cultivated." *Ren* is natural, *shu* is effort (Chan 1963, 633). Zhu Xi also sees *shu* as "an extension from self" (*tuiji* 推己) to others in the sense of being empathetic towards others. This observation goes along with the method of "analogical extension" (*leitui* 類推) advocated by Zhu Xi.[5] Meanwhile, Zhu Xi associates the concept of *shu* to the idea of "fully exerting oneself to do the utmost" (*jinji* 盡己) or "exhausting oneself to do the best" (*jiejin* 竭盡). In a similar vein, D. C. Lau translates *shu* as "using oneself as a measure to gauge others" (1998). Guo Qinyong, on the other hand, considers *shudao* 恕道 the "principle of forgiveness and empathy" (2012, 27). Wing-Tsin Chan uses "altruism" to translate *shu*, indicating that "putting oneself in another's place is an act of compassion and moral practice of concern for the welfare of others" (Chan 1963, 44). Vincent Shen also accepts Chan's use of altruism and goes further to appropriates *shu* as "common good" in his discussion of Confucian ethics in a global context (2015, 40-45).

Nevertheless, it should be noted that within the Confucian ethical framework, *shu* is often understood through the idea of "the Dao of the carpenter's square" (*qiju zhi dao* 絜矩之道). The "carpenter's square" is a metaphor for a proper principle to approach human relations. According to Confucians, different people (others) should be treated in accordance with a hierarchical regulation, i.e., distinctions between above and below (*shang xia* 上下), before and after (*qian hou* 前後), and left and right (*zuo you* 左右) as indicated in the *Daoxue* 大學 (*The Great Learning*). Reciprocity does not presuppose equality, and it consists of relationships that are nonidentical and nonreversible yet mutually

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[5] For Zhu Xi, "analogical extension" has both ethical and epistemological implications. For discussion on this issue, see Kim (2004, 41-57).

obligated. Meanwhile, *shu* as the way of treating others has moral implications for both private and public life. Hence, we read, "There has never been a man who does not cherish *shu* in himself and yet can teach other people. Therefore, the order of the state depends on the regulation of the family" (*Daxue* 9, as translated in Chan 1963, 91). This notion of extension from family to state also fits into the Confucian notion of "extension" in general.

Two questions need to be asked when we reflect the Confucian concept of *shu* or reciprocity from a perspective Lévinas' ethics of the Other: Is the ethical demand of not imposing upon others what you yourself do not desire an asymmetrical responsibility placed on oneself regardless of the actions of the other? Does the idea of "an extension from self" still operate within the system of "I-consciousness" or the "self-qua-being" challenged by Lévinas? Since alterity evokes the expectation of exchange and moral symmetry, Lévinas therefore rejects (1) analogical inference as our primary means to approach others, and (2) the subjective mind or emotion as our primary means to make ethical judgment. However, we can find sayings by Confucius which indicate that he does not always justify ethics through reciprocity or subjectivity. For example, Confucius says "one does not worry about the fact that one is not appreciated by other people but worries about not appreciating other people" (*Analects* 14.30). He also tells us, "Do not be concerned that no one recognizes your merits. Be concerned that you may not recognize others" (*Analects* 1.16). These remarks show that for Confucius one should asymmetrically demand more of oneself than of others.

One of the contemporary scholars who defends the Confucian ethics of "self-extension" by using the ethics of the other is Vincent Shen who has coined a neologism "strangification" or *waitui* 外推in Chinese to contend that the Confucian virtue of *shu* "is always necessary in order of ethical and political implementation" (2008, 296).[6] As Shen puts it, the act of *shu* "can enlarge their [human] existence to a larger realm of existence from oneself to the other, to family, to

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[6] Shen (2008) speaks of three forms of strangification, namely linguistic, pragmatic, and ontological.

social community, to the state, to all under heaven, now interpreted by the term globalization" (294). Shen follows the Confucian model of extension via the process of *shen* 身 to *jia* 家 to *guo* 國 to *tianxia* 天下, i.e., "oneself" then "family" then "the state" then "all under heaven."[7] The gist of Shen's argument is that *shu* is meaningful only on the condition it can be "strangificated." Strangification in this sense means the act of going outside oneself to the other, or the act of going outside the familiarity of the self to the strangeness of the other. It is interesting to see Shen use the concept of *tianxia* 天下 or "all under heaven," a concept central to traditional Chinese worldview, as well as the ideologies frequently mentioned in contemporary discussion of cosmopolitanism or globalization.[8] What does it mean when we talk about the strangification from the inner circle towards the outer circle through human interconnectedness? Is Shen too optimistic about the Confucian version of *tianxia* given that he calls for the element of equality in the global era? Before we try to answer this question, let us look at how traditional Chinese culture, including Confucians, see the true other, i.e., the strangers who have challenged the Chinese and confused the self-identities of the Chinese due to their inherent differences.

III. Traces of the Confucian Other

According to the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, the ancient book on Chinese philology compiled by Xu Shen 許慎 (147-121 CE), the ideographical character for *ta* 它 or "other" is said to have originally referred to a long insect (*chong* 蟲) that looks like the curled body of a snake. The entry *ji* 己

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[7] According to the *Great Learning*, the root of the world (*tainxia*) is in the state (*guo* 國), the root of the state is in the family (*jia* 家), the root of the family is in cultivating oneself (*shen* 身). What does it mean when we talk about the transfiguration from self towards the other represented by the interconnected relationships in terms of self, family, state, and the world? Can the Confucian notion of being hospitable to one's family members and friends implied in its ethical particularism accept a Levinasian ethic of hospitality that focuses on the moral sensibilities to strangers?

[8] It should be noted, however, that the concept of *tianxia* is neither "empire" nor "nation" in modern political theories. For a detailed discussion of the idea of *tianxia* and ancient Chinese kingship and *tianxia* order, see Hsing (1987, 3-41) and Watanabi (2017).

or self, in contrast, originally referred to a human stomach, indicating the notion of the "central palace" (*zhonggong* 中宮). As such, the Self is perceived as the stomach that digests the world whereas the Other is viewed as the snake that creeps behind human beings (Wang 2012, 359). Although the *Shuowen jiezi* was compiled during the late Han dynasty (25-220 CE), it reflects, to a certain extent, the Chinese view on self-other relationship in the pre-Han periods yet a kind of exclusive orientation that the Confucian idea of *tianxia* ("all under heaven") intends to overcome.

In fact, the idea of *tianxia* represents the Confucian imagination of a unified empire brought about by means of rituals. Historically speaking, ethnic exclusionism has not been a distinct tradition within China since the Chinese tend to believe in the power of the Chinese culture to assimilate neighboring "barbarians" through a peaceful process of *wenhua* 文化, i.e., *yiwen huacheng* 以文化成 ("cultivation via culture") or *laihua* 來化 ("coming and being transformed"). The idea is to "conquer" the other through "soft power."[9] It also means that ethnic exclusionism is replaced by cultural exclusionism, suggested by a plethora of terms used to make self-other distinctions such as *Hua/Yi* 華夷 and *Hua/Hu* 華胡. Although *tianxia* is noticeable for its all-inclusive connotation, the distinction between the insider and the outsider in terms of the Chinese (*Hua*) and the barbarians (*Yi* 夷 or *Hu* 胡) is clear. This is the reason why Benjamin I. Schwartz argues that the Chinese notion of *tianxia* represents a world order that is Sinocentric (1968, 227). A similar argument is held by some Chinese scholars. Yu Hai, for example, contends that xenophobia and the legitimization of discrimination against other ethnic groups in China is largely due to the Confucian tradition. He points out, the Confucian tradition, which has shaped Chinese culture, emphasizes a dichotomy between *Huaxia* (an ancient name for China) and *Manyi* ("neighboring barbarians"), because the way of Confucius maintains that "they [*Manyi*] do not share the same blood as we do, so they must be different from us in nature" (Yu 2005,

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[9] That is, the distinction made is based on culture rather than ethnicity, which means the Other can be accepted as the same as long as the Other gives up his/her otherness by adopting the Chinese way of living.

2, as quoted in Berenpas 2022, 161). Yu's view represents a contested interpretation of the Confucian position on the other. Nevertheless, we can find some explicit expressions by Confucius in the *Analects* who considers the Chinese culture superior to the neighboring states. For example, Confucius says, "Even the [barbarian] Yi and Di tribes that have their princes can't match the various states in our land that don't have rulers" (*Analects* 3.5). On another occasion, when asked why one could go to the barbarian land and live with those barbarians, Confucius replies, How could it be a barbarian one once a superior man dwelt among them? (*Analects* 9.14).

Such a view of the self-other did exist in ancient China, but it remains a question if it is indeed a Confucian view to distinguish Chinese from non-Chinese because of ethnic difference. As aforementioned, Confucianism cares more about culture and morality rather than ethnic differences. As such, Sinicization or Confucianization entails a specific meaning: a common community guided by common morality and ritual practice. In his analysis of Hua-Yi relationship in ancient China, Yuri Pines (2005) has observed that although the Hua people called the Yi people birds and beasts, this was not a racist expression, since for people at that time humans differ from beasts by their distinctive ritual practice (*li* 禮). Moreover, some pre-Qin thinkers such as Mozi and Zhuangzi challenged the conventional distinction between the Hua and Yi as well as the cultural superiority of the former (59-102). I think that Pines' view is more accurate than Yu's since it is important to note that the Confucian Other is a cultural Other, not a racial Other. In other words, as long as the cultural Other is willing to adopt the Confucian way of living, they are brothers and sisters, i.e., they are "one of us" (*zijia ren* 自家人).[10] With the rise of the concept of *tianxia* in the Warring States period, the line between Hua and Yi became more blurred. The universal ideal of *tianxia* has greatly contributed to the formation of multi-ethnic communities later in which people from varying locations (physical, economic, etc.) enter relationships of mutual respect despite their differing beliefs (religious, political,

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[10] Of course, the Confucian idea of cultural assimilation would be viewed as an act of reducing the other to sameness from a Lévinasian perspective.

cultural, etc.). For example, Dunhuang 敦煌, the ancient cosmopolitan city of the Sui (518-618) and Tang (619-907) dynasties, was the main center of communication between ancient China and the rest of the world and a major hub of commerce and trade on the Silk Road. This cosmopolitan golden age was also marked by its religious and cultural diversities.

Nevertheless, when we try to answer the question if the Confucian ethics of the other does justice to the stranger, there is no easy answer. It is true that in ancient times, hospitality usually indicated the process of receiving outsiders, changing them from strangers to guests, and transforming them to insiders, if possible. When Confucius tells us that "all those within the four seas are brothers" (*Analects* 12.5), he indicates an inclusiveness that transcends the geographical boundaries. The all-inclusive nature of *tianxia* is more than geographical since it entails the notion of "all the people" with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. What makes things more complicated is that the Chinese hold a strong sense of orthodoxy despite that the notion of "orthodoxy" (*zhengtong* 正統) is a contested normative claim in Confucianism. As Rao Zongyi has pointed out, the idea of orthodoxy is derived from the Qin's unification of *tianxia*, which influenced Han scholars' interpretation of the history, the idea of the mandate of heaven, the change of calendar, the ritual practice, as well as the concept of *tianxia* (1996, 3-7). However, later history shows that what is considered "orthodoxy" versus "heretic" can be changed or even reversed. Within the Confucian system itself, the definition of "the Confucian other" depended on who was in power. For example, state orthodoxy in late imperial China did not embrace a wide range of Confucian schools, but was based on the narrowly sectarian rendering of Zhu Xi's interpretation of the Confucian tradition (Wilson 1996, 561).

Another dimension of the Chinese culture in contrast to the universal ideal of *tianxia* is the concept of *renqing* 人情 (an exchange of favors), along with the idea of *guanxi* 關系 ("social connections"). Both have significant impacts on the Chinese understanding of the self-other relationship. This tradition can be traced back to ancient Chinese rural society where people have known each other for generations which has created strong family bonds and connections. Fei Xiaotong, a well-

known Chinese sociologist, has carefully examined the distinctive feature of the social network in traditional Chinese communities with special attention to the closeness of the associations between the person at the social center. Fei discovers that this person's relation to different people is conditioned by the distance between the respective circles from the center. The shorter the distance, the closer the relationship. In other words, the self-other relationship is determined by the status quo of the person involved (Fei 1992). The notion of the irreducibly singular other is not relevant here since relationality, whether an internal, external, or intermediary other, is able to be transformed into the intermediate circle provided that the reciprocal benefits can be envisioned. Hospitality as such is clearly reciprocal and hierarchical.

IV. The Confucian Hospitality and Generosity

Hospitality is often linked with the virtue of generosity. Shen interprets the Confucian generosity in terms of liberality and magnanimity (2008, 291-300). While liberality focuses on generosity in material wealth, magnanimity on the spiritual dimension in the sense that a person is able to deal with troubles and injustice in a calm and tranquil mind. In the case of giving up one's material things to others, we can find the example of Confucius who encourages his house servant to share his grain stipend with his neighbors (*Analects* 6.5). In the case of spiritual generosity, Shen uses the example of Zengxi who lives a free lifestyle to actualize his genuine existence (11.26). In fact, magnanimity is a concept Shen loans from Aristotle in book IV of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. After a discussion of generosity and magnificence (both concern the matter of wealth), Aristotle turns to magnanimity and speaks of it as an "adornment of the virtues" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1124a1). Shen speaks of Confucian generosity in light of magnificence because he intends to show that Confucian generosity is not limited to material things. As for how the virtue of magnificence works in self-other relationship, Shen does not address this question explicitly but shifts the discussion to the importance of harmony in relationality.

In Chinese culture, hospitality (*haoke* 好客) is often associated with friendship. Confucius asks, "When friends come from distant places, is this not joy?" (*Analects* 1.1). Zilu is happy to share his resources with friends. Confucius also encourages his house servant to share his grain stipend with his community. Being generous and hospitable to one's relatives and friends is in agreement with Confucian ethical particularism. But how about the other who does not belong to the inner circle? Can the Confucian notion of being hospitable to one's family members and friends implied in its ethical particularism accept a Lévinasian ethics of unconditional hospitality that focuses on moral sensibilities towards strangers? In a certain way, the Confucian hospitality can be understood as ritual-oriented (*haoli* 好禮) and trust-oriented (*haoxin* 好信) for the people from far away. As it is said in the *Analects*, "When remote people are here, they will be made contented" (16.12). Again, the idea is to "use culture and virtue" (*xiu wende* 修文德) to attract the strangers.

We have to admit that in ancient China the social setting was completely different from modern society characterized by high social mobility. As such, it would not be surprising to see that the Confucian ethics focused on kin instead of strangers. Nevertheless, the idea of social inclusion has never been totally absent in the Confucian tradition, which involves transitions across different levels of interpersonal relations. For example, according to Joanna F. Smith's study, an entirely new charitable institution, the "Benevolent Society" (*tongshan tang* 同善堂), emerged during the late Ming Dynasty (1987, 309-37).[11] The charitable institution that transcends family, class, and religious boundaries was organized by Confucian officials, the gentry class, and merchants to help the poor and sick, as well as establish a humane society. Smith offers specific case studies to show how people make hard choices with regard to whom to help, how to make charitable distribution, and how to balance the need of communities against the interests of family and self. This example shows the all-embracing nature of *ren* and the Confucian virtue of generosity that goes beyond

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11 "Benevolent Society" is still an active charitable institution in Macau today.

family members and friends. The other, then, is no longer the other, but an extension of the I.

For Lévinas, hospitality is an invitation to human generosity that entails the notion of gift and welcome. Meanwhile, pure hospitality means a welcome extended without condition to an unanticipated guest or unanticipated request. He emphasizes generosity as a pre-reflective ethical openness to the other. Hence, Lévinas' generosity indicates the "aporetic constitutive function" of the gift, an argument further explored by Derrida and Marion in their critiques of the reciprocal relations of exchange. Both Lévinas and Derrida maintain that for there to be a gift, there must be no reciprocity (Hénaff 2019, 11-29). This non-reciprocal form of gift-giving is called "the aporia of the gift" by Derrida which he sums up as follows: Giving is always understood as a relationship between a giver and a receiver, an exchange that generates a debt within the confines of economic reciprocity; in this, the gift becomes the opposite of what it claims to be.[12] Marion uses the theological concept of "pure gift" to continue Derrida's deconstruction of the gift relationship. In his book *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, Marion (2002) distinguishes the phenomenon of gift (the pure act of giving) from the economy of exchange. Lévinas' ethics of hospitality inspires the postmodern philosophical discussion of pure gift as his ethics of the alterity questions ontologically the transcendental reduction to the subjective I. Eric S. Nelson also uses the Derridean term "aporetic" to describe Lévinas' ethical project. He says, "The ethical moment [in Lévinas] is aporetic because it is 'impossible': the possibility of the impossible, the otherwise, interrupting the usual, the probable, and the calculable. . . . The aporetic and interruptive is the condition of the ethical" (Nelson 2013, 178). Pure gift or givenness, therefore, is employed to intentionally transgress traditional categories of understanding in terms of relation and modality in the West.

Even though Shen does not mention Lévinas, Marion, and Derrida in his writings, he employs an unusual term "original generosity" to

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[12] Interestingly, there has been a heated debate in Taiwan concerning the understanding of the Confucian "filial piety." Some young people complain that filial obligation is like paying back debts they owe to their parents. Some even use the term "emotional blackmail" to describe the traditional Confucian ethics.

reconstruct Confucian ethics in the contemporary context. Original generosity, according to Shen, means an act of "going outside one-self" which "should be seen as the condition of *sin qua non* of all situations of reciprocal relationship" (2007, 181). Shen's idea of "going outside oneself" suggests a Lévinasian gesture that attempts to go beyond the Confucian notion of "using oneself as a measure to gauge others" implied in the virtue of *shu*. Shen's original generosity can be understood as a form of "authentic generosity" in the sense of "giving to give, not get." In his essay "Globalization, Christianity, and Confucianism: On Strangification and Generosity to the Other," Shen (2007) also brings up the Christian concept of "gift" and the notion of exchange discussed by Marcel Mauss whose ethnographic studies of the obligation to give, receive, and reciprocate disclose the core of the gift relationship.

The Chinese term for gift is *liwu* 禮物, meaning literally "a ritualized thing." The ritual emphasizes the horizontal level of human relations and interaction. An ethic of gift exchange as such is not simply about gifts as "things" utilized to form, maintain, and symbolize human relationships, but the ritual action that binds people together. Gift exchange has always been an important part of social functions and is very often intertwined with economic affairs, such as gift exchange in marriage proposals. In his study of the Confucian understanding of the gift economy, Eric C. Mullis points out that gift exchange within the broader context of the etiquette of ritual practice is extremely important since it "entails acknowledging and manifesting social distinctions and deferring to one's cultural tradition" (2008,183). Since gift exchange happens both at the interpersonal level and interstate level, the moral and political significance of gift exchange becomes evident, and the notion of social harmony is often associated with the performance of gift exchange. For Confucians, the ritual performance of gift exchange is more important than the monetary value of the gift, and conceiving gift exchange primarily in terms of monetary value is an act of instrumental reductionism. Despite that Confucians do not use the language of "pure gift," they emphasize the ethic of relationality and hospitality involved in gift giving. As Mullis puts it, Confucian ethics "demonstrates how gift exchange can retain its religious, moral, political, and aesthetic

significance and consequently shows how the gift economy can be saved from the instrumental logic characteristic of the monetary economy" (2008, 186).[13]

V. Concluding Remarks

The Confucian way towards the other is through the means of "analogical extension." The method of "extending" (*tui* 推) is possible because the other, according to Confucianism, belongs to the same "kind" (*lei* 類). This shows that Confucian ethics believes in a shared humanity or common morality beyond the social relations of qinqin, a universal ideal represented by the Confucian ideal of tainxia. "Analogical extension" also indicates a process of cognitive transformation from what is known to what is unknown. Yet the Confucian approach to the other may be problematic for Lévinas due to the possibility of reducing the other to the same by analogical reference. This is the one of the reasons why Lévinas does not focus his ethics on the relation of kinship which, for him, ultimately leads to the totality of the thinking I because my kin are like me. Confucian ethics, in contrast, thinks differently. As P. J. Ivanhoe has clearly pointed out:

> If we try to think about and feel for other people on the analogy of how we feel about our own siblings, we are called on to have much greater sympathy for those we do not know. . . . Confucians ask us to extend the love, generosity, patience, and understanding we naturally tend to have for our siblings to everyone in the world. This is a much better aim and method than seeking to extend a sense of city fellow-feeling, for the latter is not deep or committed enough to carry us through the difficulties that extension entails. (Ivanhoe 2014, 38)

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[13] Mengzi also talks about gift exchange, believing that gifts must be exchanged in order to clarify relationships and or reaffirm one's commitment to a particular relationship. But he also speaks of some exceptional cases. For example, in the Mengzi 4B.4, when a student asks whether or not gifts from rulers, when given inappropriately, should be declined. Mengzi replies that to do so would be disrespectful, and he goes on to add that even Confucius would accept a gift from a morally questionable ruler as long as the gift was given according to the dictates of rituals (Mullis 2008, 187).

Moreover, Lévinas' Other in terms of infinity insists that "[I]nfinity overflows the thought that thinks it. Its very infintion is produced precisely in its overflowing" (Lévinas 1969, 25). Yet from a Confucian perspective, Lévinas' critique of the post-Enlightenment subjectivity (with the totalizing force of the I) may not be a problem for Confucians, because the starting point of Confucian ethics is "self-cultivation" (*xiushen* 修身) that aims at getting rid of one's ego-logical self in the first place, and then helping others. In other words, the mission of "helping others to complete" (*chengren* 成人) is based on "completing oneself" (*chengji* 成己).[14] In this light, the "self" in analogical extension is a "well-cultivated self" and concerns for people in close proximity can be transformed into active concern for distant strangers.[15] As the question concerning the infinite dimension of the other or the otherness of the other, I think that classical Confucianism is relatively weak in comparison with other philosophical thought (Zhuangzi's Daoism, for example) in pre-Qin China, not mentioning Lévinas.[16] Meanwhile, it should be pointed out, Lévinas' unique understanding of the problem of the other has a lot to do with his personal experience as a Jew in Europe and his memory of the Holocaust. His ethics is, to some extent, a philosophical response to the Holocaust and other tragedies and atrocities in the twentieth century of human history.[17] This also accounts the reason that for Lévinas a relation with the Other is primarily a relation with a stranger, with the radical unknown.

In view of hospitality, Lévinas' reversal of the host/guest relation is, for certain, influenced by his religious view, particularly the notion

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[14] As P. J. Ivanhoe puts it when he discusses Zhu Xi, "Such personal fulfillment necessarily involved in activities that contributed to the betterment of society, and to the flourishing of all under Heaven" (2019, 35).

[15] The Confucian ethical project, according to Zhu Xi, is to "promote what he regarded as the true and proper way to live, which was fulfill the potentiality that human shares with the creative forces of Heaven and Earth" (Ivanhoe 2019, 35).

[16] Zhuangzi's thought can be called "ethics of difference" or "ethics of singularity" in which he criticizes the tendency of self-identifying other. For more detailed discussion on this issue, see Huang (2010, 65-99) and Zhang (2018, 533-53).

[17] Excepting his wife and daughter, most of Lévinas' family members were killed during the Holocaust. Through construing ethics as first philosophy, Lévinas intends to see a global unity in which others could be respected simply as others.

of "the divine command" in Judaism. For Lévinas, relationship is both horizontal and vertical: the former is one's relation to God whereas the latter is to other people.[18] Despite the fact that Lévinas mentions on several occasions that his ethic of the other is not conditioned by his religious faith, we can still notice the religious influence in his argument on the transcendent of the Other.[19] His idea that the other who is invoked in self-other relation as ontological priority of infinity is ineffable also has certain mystical elements that Derrida would call "undecidability" which, according to Derrida, means that decisive action always involves the suspension of definite answers.[20] At the same time, the concept hospitality has a pivotal role for Lévinas' ethical thinking because of the collective experience of Jewish exile. Lévinas himself was a stranger throughout his life on a foreign/Christian land, which reminds him of his own strangeness/Jewishness and otherness.[21] Against this context, how can a stranger know that the hospitality he or she has received is not a "temporary shelter"? This question leads to the question raised by Appiah (2006) in his discussion of cosmopolitanism today: What does it mean to be a citizen of the world? What do we owe strangers by virtue of our shared humanity?

Indeed, hospitality is not simply about shortening the spatial space, or the cosmo-geographical boundaries of the "four seas" where both the insider and the outsider are transformed into a commonplace, the

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[18] There is a vertical dimension in Confucianism in terms of "the mandate of heaven" (*tianming* 天命), yet it lacks a clear notion of the divine command as we see in Lévinas.

[19] Scholars have different opinions on the religious aspect in Lévinas' ethics. For example, Nelson insists that for Lévinas, the religious is primarily about ethics rather than faith understood as subjective belief, and so ethical atheism is a powerful moment of religious maturity (2009, 184).

[20] For Lévinas, such negativity is not only used to address the limit of language but also to address the limit of moral action, especially in the context of political policies. Mark C. Taylor points out, "Since reason is, for Lévinas, always thematic, alterity cannot appear to consciousness as such. Alterity, which eludes the binary opposites of being and non-being, neither becomes conscious nor remains unconscious" (1987, 194). Meanwhile, Lévinas' God is not an ontological God, but a God of the Otherwise than Being, an ethical relationship, who escapes all phenomenological manifestations.

[21] In recent decades, hospitality has become a major theme in the West as it directly links to current political debates about migration, asylum, and cosmopolitan citizens. See Derrida (2001) on hospitality and cosmopolitanism.

one "all under heaven", but about universal love and care that enable us to establish what is required to shape interpersonal relations in a harmonious way.[22] Nevertheless, the Confucians would not feel comfortable about Lévinas' eternal hymn of otherness or the radical alterity; instead, they will do everything to make sure that their guests "feel at home" and that the process of culturation would not be done by coercive action but on a volunteer base, i.e., a Confucian version of "ecumenism" as we see in "Boston Confucianism."[23] The globalized world has blurred a spatial distinction between responsibilities to proximate others and responsibilities to distant others. If we would like to re-shape the Confucian ideal of *tianxia* as a vision for the future global ethics, we need to continue to promote the Confucian virtue of *ren* as both human relatedness and love, but avoid the cultural politics of othering via the language of exclusion and constitutive outsides. Confucianism in the contemporary context must address the issue of the other in a pluralistic world; if this cannot be done in a Lévinasian manner, then Confucianism at least must acknowledge the other as mutually related and mutually challenged. Lévinas' ethics of hospitality encourages us to recuperate the relational dimension of identity, subjectivity, and community. So does Confucianism. By virtue of a genuine extension, Confucianism can be employed as an ethic that affirms openness over closure, and inclusion over exclusion.

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[22] According to Lévinas, the act of hospitality is ethical in nature since hospitality demonstrates an openness toward complete alterity, transcendence from the boundaries of subjectivity, which is a movement toward infinity, as well as towards God.

[23] "Boston Confucianism" refers to a form of "New Confucianism" promoted by a group of scholars in Boston who ask what it means to study and practice Confucianism in a context outside China and East Asia (see Neville 2000).

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