On *Jing* 敬
Thinking Through Tang Junyi on Chinese Culture in Diaspora

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1. Introduction: Tang Junyi on Chinese Culture in Diaspora

In 1949, at the time of the communist takeover of China, a group of renowned Chinese scholars, including the late Professors Qian Mu and Tang Junyi, moved to Hong Kong and founded the New Asia College. Concerned about the potential threat to traditional cultural values posed by this political change, they dedicated themselves to preserving and promulgating Chinese culture outside the mainland, while at the same time nurturing new generations of students with a deep understanding of Chinese history and culture and a passion to contribute to the future development of China. The idea of 'New Asia' signifies for them the rebirth of Asia in the context of a history of colonization by western powers, and they envisioned new generations of New Asia graduates taking part in this endeavor.[1]

The three decades of political turmoil after 1949 proved them correct in their worries about the future of Chinese cultural values. In 1961, Professor Tang Junyi published a paper on "The Dispersal and Drifting About of the Flowers and Fruits of the Chinese Nation" (說中華民族之花果飄零). In it, he talked about how the rich cultural heritage of China was then like a fallen tree, with its flowers and fruits dispersed and drifting about with the wind, taking shelter under the trees of others in order to survive.[2] His point was that the political climate on the mainland posed a serious threat to traditional Chinese cultural values, which had to find a home among overseas Chinese. At the same time, he also lamented what he perceived as a failure of overseas Chinese to take their own cultural heritage seriously, such as by preferring to speak in a foreign language or by opting for a foreign way of life. The tone in the paper was largely pessimistic, conveying distress over the erosion of traditional values on the mainland while also critical of the Chinese who resided outside the mainland.

The paper drew significant attention, and a number of readers responded to the pessimistic and critical tone of the paper, sharing their observations about the many accomplishments of overseas Chinese. Taking note of this, Tang subsequently published a paper in 1964 titled "The Dispersal and Drifting About of Flowers and Fruits and the Self-Replanting of Our Spiritual Roots" (花果飄零及靈根自植). The paper conceded, in response to readers' comments, that wherever one might reside, one could still "self-replant one's spiritual roots" (自植靈根) in the sense that one could still embody one's

[1] See the elaboration on this theme in Tang, 1952.
[2] Tang, 1961, pp. 2-4.

cultural values and aspirations within one's way of life, albeit in a foreign environment.[3] If this could be done pervasively by overseas Chinese, it would enable the seeds of Chinese culture to be planted and to flourish everywhere.[4] Despite injecting a dimension of hope, the generally critical tone remains in this second paper. He lamented what he described as a "slave mentality" shared by many, though raising the hope that one could be more respectful of oneself and take oneself seriously (自尊自重) if one could be more self-reflective.[5]

The idea of self-reflectivity was already highlighted in the earlier paper, and put in terms of the 'self-awareness of one's heart/mind and spirit' (心靈自覚). We cannot view our own cultural heritage, including the language we speak, in the same detached fashion as we would view a foreign culture and language. We have special reason to maintain our cultural heritage as compared to some other culture, and to speak our language as compared to some other language. This is not a matter of convenience or inertia, or just a matter of the cost of revaluation and change. Rather, our identity is intimately bounded up with the culture and language with which we grew up. We could affirm this cultural heritage through the 'self-awareness of the heart/mind and spirit', namely, through our heart/mind's reflecting on itself, and there is no need for a justification of this affirmation from a more detached perspective.[6]

Tang was aware that the position he espoused is open to the potential charge of a self-perpetuating conservatism. Putting the issue in terms of a contrast between conservatism and progressiveness (保守與進步), he argued that conservatism is not problematic as long as it is rooted in self-reflection; there is no need for any further external justification of our affirmation of our own cultural heritage.[7] At the same time, self-reflection can alert us to what might be problematic in our own culture, and our aspiration to some higher ideal opens the way to progressiveness. What is important, though, is that the awareness of what is problematic and the aspiration to some higher ideal themselves take as their basis a general affirmation of our own culture that is based on the kind of self-reflection just described.[8]

What occupied Tang's attention in these two papers was what he perceived as a general tendency among many Chinese, especially those who resided overseas, to regard what is foreign as superior, a view that, even if not explicitly voiced, could be implicit in the way one lived and conducted oneself. Such a mindset was undoubtedly related to the decades of colonization and domination by western powers, the phenomenon that Qian Mu and Tang Junyi aspired to change when they espoused the idea of New Asia. This view of western superiority was in certain respects justified; the decades of domination were, after all, due to the technological and military superiority of western powers. What Tang took issue with was the extension of such a view to areas in which it is not justified, and

[3] Tang, 1964, p. 53
[4] Tang, 1964, p. 61
[5] Tang, 1964, pp. 52, 58-59.
[6] Tang, 1961, pp. 8-15.
[7] Tang, 1961, p. 16.
[8] Tang, 1961, pp. 23-25.

the resulting failure to recognize what is valuable within one's own culture.

As a comment specifically on the attitude of overseas Chinese, Tang's observation appears over-pessimistic. Those who reside overseas, especially first generation immigrant Chinese, do place value on traditional Chinese culture, as seen from their efforts to ensure that their children learn the Chinese language and have a familiarity with Chinese history and culture, or from the establishment of various Chinese cultural centers in cities with a sizeable immigrant Chinese population. However, as a general observation about a mindset that regards what is western as in some way superior, his observation might still have merit. There might be specific areas in which such a mindset is still justified, such as technology and the establishment of proper processes. But the mindset can also be found in areas in which it is arguably unjustified, even areas in which the west has much to learn from Chinese traditions. In my paper, I will focus on one such area.

What I have in mind is the way the comparative study of Chinese thought has been approached in the past several decades. By the study of Chinese thought, I refer to a study that focuses on ideas, going beyond philological and historical studies of the relevant texts. And by the comparative study of Chinese thought, I refer to attempts to link up Chinese traditions of thought with other traditions, especially western philosophical traditions. For some decades, there has been a fairly pervasive tendency to approach Chinese thought using the frameworks and concepts of western philosophical traditions. And this tendency is found not just in western academic communities, but also shared by many conducting their study in Chinese academic communities. By contrast, we rarely find sustained studies that proceed in the other direction, namely, studying western thought using the frameworks and concepts of Chinese traditions of thought. In an earlier paper, I have discussed this asymmetrical phenomenon and raised doubts about its justification.[9] This phenomenon gives testimony to Tang's concern about how priority might be given to other traditions over Chinese traditions in a way that is not grounded.

In that same paper, I argued that approaching Chinese thought in this manner often results in our missing what is distinctive of Chinese traditions.[10] I proposed instead that we should study Chinese thought on its own terms, beginning with close textual studies, and then relating the ideas we extract from the relevant texts to our own experiences. Only by doing so can we extract the distinctive elements of our object of study and determine their significance to our present day experiences. The idea that we need to relate these ideas to our own experiences bears an affinity to Tang's idea of the 'self-replanting of

[9] Shun, 2009, pp. 470-476.

[10] This is intended as an observation about a certain general tendency in the contemporary literature. It is not intended as a critical observation about comparative study as such; in fact, this paper is itself an attempt at comparative study in the sense of seeking to establish linkage between Chinese and western traditions of thought. Also, this observation about the asymmetrical phenomenon is not intended to preclude the possibility that there could be comparative work that is firmly based in textual studies, that deploys western philosophical frameworks with care, and that uses such frameworks to approach Chinese thought in a fruitful manner. I am indebted to two anonymous reviewers of this journal for pointing out the need to add these qualifications.

one's spiritual roots' (自植灵根) through the 'self-awareness of one's heart/mind and spirit' (心灵自觉).

Indeed, this is an idea that Tang emphasized in other writings, though put in different terms. For example, in his study on *The Establishment of the Ethical Self* (道德自我之建立), he emphasized that one's own ethical awareness (道德意识) and embodiment of such awareness (道德意识之体验) provide the foundation for one's ethical perspective.[11] Though this work is not specifically directed to the study of Chinese thought, the implication is that our understanding of ideas in Chinese traditions of thought depends on our relating them to our own ethical experiences. And he exemplified such an approach in his scholarly works, such as the multivolume study *Discourse on the Original Meaning of Chinese Philosophy* (中國哲學原論), where his interpretation of key ideas in Confucian thought is often framed in terms of their relation to our ethical experiences. For example, in explaining Mencius' idea that nature (*xing*) is good, he gave priority to Mencius' views on the 'ethical heart/mind' (德性心), namely, the heart/mind in relation to its ethical awareness and experiences. It is these experiences, such as the spontaneous ethical responses of the heart/mind, that provide evidence for the goodness of nature.[12] According to Tang, Mencius' comments on nature are primarily based on his insights into the heart/mind (即心言性), namely, the ethical responses and experiences of the heart/mind.[13]

In the remainder of this paper, I will further explore these ideas of Tang's using an example to illustrate his observations. In section 2, I will consider the phenomenon of asymmetry, arguing that there is no justification for this approach to the comparative study of Chinese thought. In section 3, I will use the early Confucian understanding of *jing* as an example to illustrate how approaching key ideas in Chinese thought from the perspective of western philosophical conceptions can skew our understanding of these ideas. In section 4, I will propose a different approach to the Confucian understand of *jing* that I believe brings out its distinctive features. Finally, in section 5, I will return to Tang and relate the discussion of this example to his observations.

2. Bridging Chinese and Western Traditions of Thought

There have been excellent studies that focus on ideas in Chinese thought without attempting any linkage to western thought, and the issue of asymmetry does not arise for such studies. There have also been studies that attempt the linkage but do so in a symmetrical fashion. For example, there have been comparative studies of thinkers or themes from different traditions, such as comparative studies of Confucius and Aristotle, or of the Confucian notion of *chi* 恥 and the contemporary western understanding of shame. Such comparative studies often involve discussions of similarities and differences

[11] Tang, 1970, pp. 2-3.
[12] Tang, 1978, pp. 75-79.
[13] Tang, 1974, pp. 20-32.

between two traditions, and are conducted in a way that is symmetrical between the two traditions.

In highlighting the phenomenon of asymmetry, I have in mind studies that attempt to bridge Chinese and western traditions and that approach the former from the perspective of the latter. There are different variations of such an approach. For example, some may adopt a western philosophical framework in approaching a Chinese tradition. Examples include studying Confucian thought using a Kantian framework or as a form of virtue ethics, and studying Mozi as a utilitarian or Zhuangzi as a relativist. And some may focus on certain topics from western traditions and discuss how Chinese thinkers might approach such topics, such as how Confucian thinkers might view weakness of will or whether they have a conception of rights. The striking contrast is that we do not find a similar trend from the other direction. For example, we find engaged discussions about whether Mozi is a utilitarian but not discussions about whether John Stuart Mill is a Moist. We find debates about whether Chinese traditions of thought have a conception of rights, but not whether western traditions have a conception of *li* 禮. And we find discussions of Confucian ethics as a form of virtue ethics, but not discussions of Aristotelian ethics as a form of *lixue* 理學.

Approaching Chinese thought from a western philosophical perspective but not vice versa makes sense in certain contexts, such as in attempts to make Chinese thought more accessible to a Western audience, perhaps in the larger context of arguing that Chinese thought should have a place in the institutional setup surrounding the practice of philosophy in western academic communities.[14] But what is perplexing is that this trend is often found outside of such contexts, in discussions that seek to make substantive intellectual points. That is, there appears to be some sentiment that approaching Chinese thought using Western philosophical frameworks has a certain intellectual value that studies from the other direction might not have. The question is whether there is intellectual grounding to such a sentiment.

If there were such intellectual grounding, then it must have to do with certain differences between Chinese and western traditions. One possible suggestion is that western philosophical frameworks and concepts have a certain universal application that is absent from Chinese traditions. This supposed universality can be understood in two different senses. First, the point might be that western philosophical ideas have an intelligibility that is independent of the historical contexts within which they evolved. Or, put more accurately, these ideas can be abstracted from their historical contexts in a way that they have such an independent intelligibility. For example, the utilitarian framework can be made intelligible without reference to the specifics of J.S. Mill's thinking. Second, the point about universality might have to do with the appeal of certain western philosophical ideas. Using ethics as example, the point might be that certain ideas in western ethical traditions, after having been abstracted from their historical contexts, engage with shared human experiences in a way that, even if we might not fully endorse these ideas, we can

[14] See Shun, 2009, pp. 471-472.

at least see their appeal when viewing them from a contemporary or a different cultural perspective.

The point about universality, understood in either manner, is reasonable. After all, what we find worth exploring in a certain philosophical tradition is often something we find both intelligible and of some appeal when abstracted from the historical specifics. What would not be reasonable is to assume that this same point about universality is not true of ideas from Chinese traditions of thought. There is, as far as I can tell, no less reason to expect similar observations to hold of such ideas – that they can be abstracted from their historical context and be made intelligible and of appeal to a contemporary audience and to other cultures. Indeed, I take it to be one of the main tasks in the contemporary study of Chinese thought that we approach its ideas in this manner. What we need to do is to understand the key ideas in a Chinese tradition on the basis of close textual studies, relate them to our contemporary experiences, and abstract from them elements that are intelligible and of appeal to us nowadays.

In this process, we will likely relate these ideas to comparable ideas from western philosophical traditions. This in itself is reasonable and helpful, as establishing such linkages helps enrich our perspective on phenomena that engage the attention of different cultural traditions. The danger, though, is that we might let western philosophical conceptions shape our understanding of ideas from Chinese traditions, leading us to miss what is truly distinctive of such traditions or even distorting our understanding of such ideas. The tendency to frame our discussion of Chinese thought in terms of western frameworks and concepts can potentially lead in that direction.

To avoid such dangers, what we need to do is to view the discourses of Chinese thinkers in their own historical context, engaging in close textual studies on the basis of which we can approximate the ideas of these thinkers. To make these ideas intelligible to us and to bring out their contemporary relevance, we will need to relate them to our present day experiences and to our own understanding of the human condition. In doing so, we will be abstracting from and to some extent going beyond the perspectives of the Chinese thinkers. This is inevitable and is not a problem as long as we are conscious and explicit about what we are doing. On the basis of this exercise, we can get at those elements of Chinese traditions of thought that are intelligible and of appeal to us nowadays and then also relate them to western philosophical discussions. Establishing the linkage at this point rather than at the outset will minimize the danger of our letting western conceptions shape our interpretation of Chinese traditions.

In the next two sections, I will use an example to illustrate the danger of viewing ideas in Chinese thought from the perspective of western philosophical frameworks. I will focus on the early Confucian understanding of *jing* 敬, the spirit behind the observance of *li* 禮. In section 3, I will present an approach that assimilates the Confucian notion of *jing* to western conceptions of respect for persons. In section 4, I will show how, if we attend closely to the texts without being influenced by western philosophical conceptions, we will arrive at a quite different understanding of *jing*.

3. *Jing* and Respect

I have conducted in previous publications a textual study of the early Confucian understanding of *jing* 敬, and will only provide a brief summary here.[15] *Jing* can be directed toward persons, one's undertakings, affairs one is dealing with, and other things such as one's conduct or the beginning of life. It is often related in early texts to *shen* 慎, a cautious and attentive attitude, to *jie* 戒, an attitude of being on guard, as well as to an attitude of fully devoting oneself. Thus, *jing* involves caution, being on guard, and devoted attention when dealing with persons, affairs, or other things. *Jing* is used without an object to refer to a state of mind that one dwells in and that provides a way to cultivate oneself. In these contexts, *jing* likely retains the connotations of caution, being on guard against things going wrong, and devoted attention, though without being directed to any specific object.[16]

Jing is often presented in early Confucian texts as the spirit behind the observance of *li*, and it involves caution and devoted attention toward the persons one is dealing with. In such contexts, *jing* is often related to *gong* 恭, *bei* 卑 and *rang* 讓; *rang* 讓 or *bei rang* 卑讓 is sometimes presented as the crucial element in the observance of *li*. In the *Mengzi*, *ci rang* 辭讓 and *gong jing* 恭敬 are presented as the basis for the observance of *li*.[17] By contrast to *jing*, *gong* has to do with attention to one's appearance, posture, manners, and demeanor when dealing with others. *Ci* involves politely declining, and *rang* letting others have, something good or of honor to oneself, while *bei* involves lowering oneself, or regarding oneself as lower than others. Thus, *jing* belongs to a cluster of notions that have to do with properly attending to others and putting others ahead of oneself.

For the Confucians, *jing* should be directed not just to those actually in higher positions, such as superiors and elders, but should also be extended to humans in general. The nature of the attitude involved is not at issue – it involves being cautious and on guard against things going wrong, and paying devoted attention to the persons one is dealing with. What is at issue is whether, as some have argued, the Confucians' understanding of *jing* in such a context is akin to the notion of respect for persons found in western philosophical discussions. More specifically, the issue is whether *jing* is something called for by, and in response to, a certain inherent quality in humans describable as the 'worth' of a person.

I will sketch a line of thought that leads to such a conclusion, drawing on some recent discussions of respect and of *jing* in relation to respect.[18] To start, let us consider the way

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[15] See Shun, 1997, pp. 52-55, and Shun (c).

[16] This use of *jing* is highlighted in later Confucian thought to refer to a mental exercise that is part of the self-cultivation process. My paper will not be concerned with this use of *jing*. I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer of this journal for pointing out the need to add this qualification.

[17] *Mengzi* 2A:6, 6A:6.

[18] In presenting this line of thought, I have benefitted from reading Sin-yee Chan's excellent discussion of *jing* in relation to respect. Though I refer to her discussion from time to time in sketching this line of thought, I am not suggesting that Chan bases her conclusions simply on an assimilation of *jing* to western

respect is discussed in the contemporary philosophical literature. Various authors have drawn distinctions between different types of respect. Some have distinguished between respect of a kind that is a response to a positive appraisal of some quality of an object, and respect of a kind that does not involve such appraisal.[19] Others, on the other hand, have argued that respect is always a response to some quality of an object that calls for such a response.[20] On this latter view, respect is always 'object-generated' in that it involves one's believing that there is something about the object that makes it worthy of respect; respect is something called for and deserved by the object. This is contrasted with other responses that are 'subject-generated' in the sense of being grounded in one's own likes or desires. Respect, unlike these other responses, is grounded in the nature of the object itself; we perceive the object as having value in its own right and not only in terms of its relation to us.[21] A consequence of this way of viewing respect is that, in respecting an object, I also regard that object as worthy of respect by others and would regard others as committing a cognitive error if they fail to respect that object. The quality that makes the object worthy of respect, so to speak, confers a 'worth' on the object.

From this brief overview, we see that, independently of whether we regard all forms of respect for persons as describable in this manner, at least one common use of the notion is that respect for a person is a response to some quality in the person, describable as the 'worth' of the person. Let us now turn to *jing*. When *jing* is directed toward persons, it is often presented as a function of the qualities of the persons to whom it is directed. Aside from the frequent reference to *jing* toward those in a higher position, such as a ruler or an elder, there are also explicit references to how *jing* varies with the quality of the object to which it is directed as well as the circumstances. The *Lunyu* contains a passage describing how Confucius' disciples ceased to *jing* the disciple Zilu upon hearing a comment Confucius made of Zilu, and the *Mencius* contains a passage describing how *jing* directed to elders varies with not just the age of the person, but also features of the circumstances in which that person is situated.[22]

Suppose now that we view the notion of *jing* as akin to the notion of respect when *jing* is

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philosophical discussions of respect for persons. Chan does attempt to base her conclusions on a textual discussion, though I believe the textual evidence does not support the conclusions she draws.

[19] For example, Stephen Darwall distinguishes between what he calls appraisal respect and recognition respect. Appraisal respect of a person depends on one's positive appraisal of some excellence of the person; not all persons are deserving of appraisal respect and different persons can be deserving of more or less respect by virtue of their personal characteristics. Recognition respect does not depend on such positive appraisal, and it involves weighing certain features of the object appropriately in one's deliberation when dealing with the object. According to Darwall, when we say that all persons are entitled to respect just by virtue of being a person, it is recognition respect that is involved. (Darwall, pp. 38, 40, 45-46)

[20] Robin Dillon takes such a position. She believes that even in what Darwall calls recognition respect, there is something about the object that calls for the kind of treatment involved; recognition respect for persons involves appreciation of the intrinsic moral value of the person and is grounded in certain morally significant features of persons. (Dillon, pp. 110-113)

[21] Dillon, 108-110.

[22] *Lunyu* 11.15; *Mengzi* 6A:5.

directed toward persons. That is, *jing* is something called for by certain qualities of the person to whom it is directed, such qualities conferring a 'worth' on the person that demands *jing* as a response.[23] And suppose we take the further step of saying that, when the Confucians advocate extending *jing* to all humans, they are saying by implication that all humans have 'worth', and that *jing* has to do with recognizing and appreciating this 'worth' in humans.[24] On this view, "respect" would be an appropriate translation of *jing* when directed to persons, and the Confucian advocacy of *jing* for all humans shows that respect for persons in the sense discussed in western philosophical traditions is a cornerstone of Confucian ethics.[25]

There is a crucial assumption in this line of thought. Namely, *jing* when directed to persons is called for by the relevant qualities of the person to whom it is directed, such qualities conferring a 'worth' on the person and demanding *jing* as a response. Let us now examine this assumption more closely.

Consider the observation that the Confucians advocate *jing* toward those in a superior position, such as a ruler or an elder, and also believe that *jing* should vary with the qualities of the person to whom it is directed as well as the circumstances. On the basis of this uncontroversial observation, we might go on to say that *jing* is a response to, or that it is called for by, certain qualities of the person to whom it is directed. This additional comment could be construed in two different ways. It could be just a restatement of the original observation about how *jing* varies with the qualities of its object; as such, it is not problematic. But it could also be construed as an *explanation* of this observation. Namely, *jing* is 'object-generated' in the sense described earlier – that it is called for by certain qualities inherent in its object, and that it is a cognitive error not to so respond to this object, independently of how we ourselves might relate to it. Put differently, it is certain qualities inherent in the object that provide the reason for our so responding to it, independently of any other consideration.

Once we construe the comment in this way, we can then take the next step of introducing an abstract notion of 'worth' that somehow subsumes all the different qualities of persons that might warrant *jing* as a response, and conclude that such 'worth' is the ultimate ground for *jing*.[26] As a further step, we can say that the Confucian advocacy of *jing* toward all humans shows that the Confucians believe that all humans have 'worth', and then try to reconstruct some basis for this idea of universal 'worth' of humans, such as by referring to the Confucian belief that all humans have the potential to become a sage.[27]

Taking the uncontroversial observation in this direction assumes that it is the inherent qualities of the object of *jing* that provide the reason for our so responding to the object, independently of any other consideration. That this is an assumption can be seen from the

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[23] Thus, Chan thinks that *jing* involves the "recognition of the worth of its object", that it is something "due to others because of their worth"; see Chan pp. 229, 232-233, 242.
[24] See Chan, pp. 234-235, 237-238, 242, 244.
[25] See Chan, pp. 241, 244.
[26] See Chan, pp. 233-234.
[27] See Chan, p. 234.

following example. Suppose I treat some object with care because I see value in certain qualities of the object and want to avoid damage to it. This attitude of treating an object with care is a function of the qualities of the object – I would not have treated the object with care if it had not had qualities that I value, and how carefully I treat the object might also vary with the extent to which the object has qualities that I regard as of value. But, in this example, the reason for my treating the object with care has to do not just with the qualities of the object, but also the perspective I take toward such qualities – if I had not viewed such qualities as valuable, I would have had no reason to treat it with care. It is not true that some inherent qualities of the object demand my response, independently of any other consideration.

So, it does not follow, from the observation that *jing* may vary with the qualities of its object, that these qualities alone, independently of any other consideration, provide the reason for so treating the object. That *jing* need not be 'object-generated' in this sense does not mean that it is 'subject-generated' in the sense that it is grounded just in one's likes or desires. The choice between 'object-generated' and 'subject-generated' is itself a false dichotomy, as the reason for directing *jing* to an object might refer to both features of the object to which *jing* is directed and features of the person who responds to that object with *jing*. This, I will argue in the next section, is a more plausible explanation of the Confucian advocacy of *jing* toward all humans.

4. The Confucian Understanding of *Jing*

Our question is what, from the Confucian perspective, the reason is for our directing *jing* to all humans – whether this has to do solely with certain qualities that confer a 'worth' on all humans, or whether it has to do with other considerations. As an example, let us consider a passage in the *Analects* which says: "when going abroad, conduct yourself as if you were receiving an important guest".[28] The typical attitude appropriate to an important guest is *jing*, so although *jing* is not explicitly mentioned in the passage, it appears clear that what Confucius is advocating is that we should extend *jing* to other humans with whom we interact, even though they might not actually occupy the positions toward which *jing* is a typical response. What might lie behind this position of Confucius'?

Let us consider a comparable situation, such as when someone is urged to interact with junior scholars at professional conferences as if they were accomplished scholars. There are certain attitudes that we typically direct toward accomplished scholars, and what this person is urged to do is to extend a similar attitude toward the junior scholars. The person should treat them respectfully, such as by paying focused attention to what they have to say, be courteous when raising objections to an intellectual point, etc. He might even perceive these junior scholars as if they were accomplished scholars, though without actually believing that they are. And, in urging this person to so treat junior scholars, one is not saying that junior scholars have certain qualities akin to qualities in accomplished scholars that call for this kind of treatment. More likely, the reason for taking this

[28] *Lunyu* 12.2.

position is to counter a tendency among some to treat junior scholars dismissively, or at least not fully respectfully, because of their junior position. What one is urged to do is to view the junior scholars as if they were in a higher position, as a result of which one will treat them in a more respectful manner.

Similarly, in advocating *jing* toward all humans, the Confucians are urging that we extend to all humans a certain attitude that is typically directed to those in a higher position by virtue of social position or circumstances. In doing so, we might even perceive other humans as if they were in a higher position, though without actually believing that they are. It does not follow from their taking such a position that the Confucians believe that there is some shared 'worth' of humans that calls for this kind of response. If the notion of respect is understood in a way that carries such implications, then it would be premature to view *jing* as akin to such a notion of respect. Instead, *jing* would be closer to the notion of respectfulness, or treating someone respectfully, which does not carry such implications.

More likely, the Confucians advocate *jing* toward other humans because of the tendency for one to focus on one's own importance, as a result of which one treats others without sufficient respectfulness. Early Chinese texts contain references to such a human tendency. For example, the *Guoyu* observes that the sages emphasize *rang* 讓 because of a characteristic tendency of humans (*ren xing* 人性) to elevate themselves over others.[29] What the Confucians are urging is that we resist such a tendency, and a way of doing so is to view those with whom we interact as if they were in a higher position.

There is another, closely related, aspect of the human condition that is highlighted in early texts. Humans are sensitive to the way they are treated by others, and being treated disrespectfully can lead to discomfort or even conflict. This sensitivity distinguishes humans from other animals – while a human person would be reluctant to accept food given with abuse even when starving, this would not be true of other animals.[30] In early China, being treated in certain ways is regarded as insulting (*wu* 侮), and being so treated can lead to strong reactions. One regards such treatment as disgraceful (*ru* 辱), and this can lead to anger and to vengefulness. The Confucians themselves advocate that we transform ourselves in a way that we view as disgraceful only our own moral shortcomings, not the way we are treated by others. But they are nevertheless aware that humans will need to undertake a radical transformation to reach this point, and that the sensitivity to the way one is treated is very pervasive and deep seated among humans.[31] Thus, the potential for human conflict arises not just from the competition for limited resources, but also from this kind of dynamics in human interactions. Xunzi took note of this, and regarded social harmony as part of the rationale for *li* 禮, where *li* for him encompasses both institutionalized social arrangements that govern division of labor and

[29] *Guoyu* 2.14b.
[30] See *Mengzi* 6A:10.
[31] See Shun (a) for a more elaborate discussion.

distribution of resources, as well as codes of behavior related to respectful treatment of others.[32]

As we noted earlier, *jing* belongs to a cluster of notions – including *gong* 恭, *bei* 卑, *ci* 辭 and *rang* 讓 – that have to do with properly attending to others and putting others ahead of oneself. *Li* is related not just to *jing*, but also to these other attitudes. For example, the *Zuozhuan* observes that *jing* 敬 and *bei* 卑 together ensures that one does not deviate from *li*, and the *Mengzi* regards *ci rang* 辭讓 and *gong jing* 恭敬 as the basis for *li*.[33] Probably, these different attitudes are just different aspects of a more general attitude that the early Confucians believe should underlie the observance of *li*. *Jing* involves taking the other person seriously, focusing attention on and treating the other person with caution. *Gong* involves attending to the outward presentation of oneself in dealing with the other person, including one's appearance, posture, manners, and demeanor. Together, *gong* and *jing* demonstrate a serious regard for the other person, in a way that would have been appropriate to someone of higher status than oneself. *Ci*, *rang* and *bei*, on the other hand, involve a posture that focuses on declaring one's being in some sense lower than the other. This does not mean that one literally has a low opinion of oneself; rather, it is a matter of not having oneself at the forefront of one's thinking when interacting with others, such as by not unnecessarily displaying oneself. Together, these attitudes are two sides of a more general attitude that underlies the observance of *li*, an attitude that is described in the *Liji* as "humbling oneself and honoring others" (*zi bei er zun ren* 自卑而尊人; *bei ji er zun ren* 卑己而尊人).[34] This attitude is not a matter of one's literally believing oneself to be in a lower position, and others to be in a higher position. Instead, it is a matter of one's shifting one's attention away from oneself toward others in a way that is akin to one's attitude when interacting with people in a higher position.[35]

The reason for the Confucians to advocate *jing* toward all humans probably has to do with the two aspects of the human condition just described – that humans are sensitive to the way they are treated by others, and at the same time also tend to focus on their own importance and assert themselves over others. By urging us to direct *jing* toward humans in general, the Confucians are seeking to steer us away from this tendency to emphasize our own importance, and toward treating others in a way that takes into account this human sensitivity. Doing so conduces to social harmony and peaceful coexistence, and helps to build a community characterized by mutual respectfulness.

One might present such a view by saying that, in treating others respectfully, we are acknowledging the dignity of others, a dignity shared by humans but not other animals.[36]

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[32] See the "Li Lun" chapter of the *Xunzi*.

[33] *Zuozhuan*20.24a; *Mengzi* 2A:6, 6A:6.

[34] *Liji* 1.3a, 17.5a.

[35] For further discussion of the nature of such an attitude, see Shun (b).

[36] Sarah Buss makes similar observations about how respectful treatment of others conduces to social harmony and peaceful coexistence (Buss, pp. 799, 805). At the same time, she thinks that, in treating others respectfully, we are acknowledging the intrinsic value and dignity of persons, and that it is such dignity that makes humans worthy of such treatment (Buss, p. 796-797, 801-803).

Such a presentation is consistent with the Confucian position if the idea of dignity is understood in terms of the human sensitivity just described, namely, a sensitivity to the way one is treated by others. We could even say that it is this dignity that makes human worthy of respectful treatment, in the sense that the reason for such treatment refers in part to the human sensitivity under consideration. What is not implied by the Confucian position is that there is some other quality of 'worth' on top of this human sensitivity that is shared by all humans, a 'worth' that somehow demands such respectful treatment. The Confucian advocacy of *jing*, and related attitudes such as *gong*, *bei*, *ci* and *rang* is not based on the belief that humans share such a 'worth'. Instead, it has to do with the tendency and sensitivity just described.

In this regard, the Confucian position is closer to contemporary philosophical discussions of such traits as modesty and humility than discussions of respect for persons. In these discussions, modesty and humility are presented as traits that involve a similar shift of attention. One difference, though, is that these discussions often provide this shift of attention with a cognitive and evaluative basis – it is supposed to involve our correcting an over-exaggerated view of ourselves and coming to view others as having some appropriate worth. For example, some believe that modesty involves one's not overestimating oneself and one's viewing other humans as having a fundamental worth similar to one's own, a commonality that dwarfs other differences.[37] Some think that humility involves having an accurate sense of oneself, and withstanding the pressure to think too much of oneself.[38] And some thinks humility involves an outward orientation, focusing on others rather than oneself, that involves one's seeing how one depends on others for one's success, thereby diminishing one's egocentrism.[39]

While these cognitive and evaluative adjustments describe possible routes by which the shift of attention might come about, it is important to note that the Confucian view of *jing* is not primarily about correcting cognitive errors about one's own importance or forming evaluative judgments about the worth of others. Instead, *jing* is primarily an attitude that has to do with the way we direct our attention. That attitude can be described in terms of how we view ourselves and others – in 'humbling ourselves and honoring others', we view ourselves as in some sense lower and others as higher. But this way of viewing ourselves and others is not an independent cognitive or evaluative judgment. It is itself part of the attitude involved, and is not an explanation of the attitude in the sense that the attitude results from some cognitive or evaluative adjustment. That is, in advocating that we view ourselves and others as if we were in a lower position and as if others were in a higher position, the Confucians are not talking primarily about correcting exaggerated views of oneself or coming to recognize a certain 'worth' in others, as a result of which our attitude toward others would change. They are talking primarily about our adopting a certain view of ourselves and others that is itself part of the attitude being advocated.

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[37] See Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, pp. 235, 237.
[38] See Novin Richards, pp. 254, 256.
[39] See Joseph Kupfer, pp. 251, 257, 259.

5. Epilogue: Returning to Tang Junyi

We started our discussion by referring to a theme that runs through two papers published by Tang Junyi in the sixties. Namely, according to Tang, there was at his time a certain mindset about western superiority in areas in which such a view is not justified, resulting in a failure to recognize what is distinctive and valuable within one's own culture. In relation to this theme, I proposed that, in the past few decades, there has been a tendency in the comparative study of Chinese thought to approach Chinese thought from western philosophical perspectives, a tendency that can potentially lead us to miss what is distinctive and of value in Chinese traditions.

I illustrated this potential danger with the example of the Confucian understanding of *jing*. When directed to persons, *jing* is often translated as "respect". Respect for persons is often regarded in western philosophical discussions as a response based on a certain evaluative judgment about the 'worth' of persons. We form a positive appraisal of some quality in human persons, and respect is a response to such a positive appraisal. If we approach the Confucian notion of *jing* from such a western philosophical perspective, it is tempting to draw the conclusion that the Confucian advocacy of *jing* toward all humans reflects a similar view about respect for persons. On this interpretation, the Confucians also regard *jing* as a response based on our recognizing and appreciating the 'worth' of humans, namely, some quality in human persons that we positively appraise. A failure to respond with *jing* to a human person involves a cognitive error, a failure to recognize some universal 'worth' shared by all humans.

By contrast, I proposed an alternative interpretation of the Confucian position, one on which *jing* is not based on the kind of evaluative judgment just described. If we examine closely the use of *jing* in early Chinese texts, we see that it belongs to a cluster of notions, including other notions such as *gong*, *bei*, *ci* and *rang*, all of which are related to *li* in early texts. Together, they represent different dimensions of a more general attitude of 'humbling oneself and honoring others', an attitude that the *Liji* regards as underlying the observance of *li*. Furthermore, we also find in early Chinese texts certain related observations about the human condition. On the one hand, humans have a tendency to focus on their own importance and assert themselves over others. On the other hand, they are sensitive to the way they are treated by others. The attitude at issue involves a shift of attention that helps to steer us away from this tendency to emphasize our own importance, and toward treating others in a way that takes into account the human sensitivity to the way one is treated. It thereby conduces to social harmony and peaceful coexistence, building a community characterized by mutual respectfulness. This, I proposed, is the reason for the Confucian advocacy of *jing* toward all humans.

On this account, the Confucian position is not based on some evaluative judgment about a certain quality shared by all humans that they positively appraise; instead, it is based on the observations about the human condition just described. So, the Confucian position does not involve the idea of a universal 'worth' to all humans, and differs from a certain contemporary western philosophical understanding of the idea of respect for persons.

While this understanding of the Confucian position takes it closer to western philosophical discussions of such traits as modesty and humility, it also differs from the way these traits are presented in these discussions. Like modesty and humility, *jing* involves a shift of attention away from oneself toward others. But, unlike the way modesty and humility are presented in contemporary discussions, the Confucian position is not committed to viewing this shift of attention as based primarily on some cognitive or evaluative adjustments, such as correcting over-exaggerated views of oneself or evaluative judgments about the common 'worth' of all humans.

Thus, the Confucian position reflects their insights into the human condition, understood not in terms of some universal 'worth' that humans share, but in terms of the kind of tendency and sensitivity just described. Our discussion illustrates how approaching Chinese thought from the perspective of western philosophical frameworks can lead us to miss these insights of Chinese traditions of thought. The tendency to approach Chinese thought from such a perspective also illustrates how Tang Junyi's concern about the failure to do justice to the resources of our own Chinese cultural heritage remains a genuine concern in the contemporary intellectual realm.

Tang's own proposal is that, to do justice to our own cultural heritage, we should engage in what he calls "self-awareness of one's heart/mind', that is, self-reflection on one's own ethical experiences. His own study of Chinese thought also seeks to probe the kind of ethical experiences that lies behind the ideas recorded in the relevant texts. Our approach to the Confucian view on *jing* adopts a similar approach. By attending closely to the relevant texts, we come to grasp the insights into the human condition that lies behind the ideas recorded in these texts. These observations about the human condition also engage with our own experiences since we can, through our own reflections on the human condition, come to see the validity of such observations. Our account of the Confucian position on *jing* is based on such reflections.

Tang saw urgency to the efforts to preserve and do justice to our own cultural heritage in the context of the political changes in 1949 and the ensuring political turmoil. For us in the twenty first century, there is also urgency to the efforts to examine Chinese traditions of thought on their own terms, free from the influence of western philosophical conceptions. The philosophical study of Chinese thought, namely the study of Chinese thought with a focus on ideas and on their contemporary relevance, has been gaining attention for the past few decades, in both Chinese and western academic communities. At the same time, the asymmetrical phenomenon of viewing Chinese thought from the perspective of western philosophical frameworks but not vice versa has also become more prevalent. Such an approach to Chinese thought runs the danger of leading us to subsume ideas from Chinese traditions of thought under western categories, as a result of which we also miss the distinctive insights of Chinese traditions.

To reverse this trend, what we need to do is to attend to the relevant texts on their own terms, paying particular attention to the experiences that lie behind the discourses of the relevant thinkers. After doing so, we can also relate the ideas of these thinkers to our own present day experiences, so as to identify those elements of their thinking that are of

contemporary relevance and significance. By doing so, we will be in a better position to do justice to the rich ethical insights of the Chinese thinkers. As we noted earlier, our abstracting from Chinese traditions of thought ideas that are intelligible and of appeal to us nowadays is one of the main tasks in the contemporary study of Chinese thought. In this process, there is no reason not to bring Chinese traditions of thought alongside western traditions so that they mutually illuminate and enrich each other. What is important is that we approach the former on their own terms, not through the lenses provided by the latter, so as to do justice to their insights before we take on the comparative tasks. This is what we should do whether working within a Chinese or a western academic community. But doing so while working within a western academic community is particularly important because of the greater temptation to view Chinese thought from a western perspective. Success in doing so will enable the kind of ‘self-planting of our spiritual roots’ to which Tang alludes.

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論敬
對唐君毅之<說中華民族之花果飄零>之反思

信廣來*

摘要

唐君毅在 <說中華民族之花果飄零> 及 <花果飄零及靈根自植> 二文中，提及現代以西方為主導而忽視自身文化根源之心態. 此一 心態, 於當代比較哲學研究中, 呈現為以西方哲學概念來解釋中國傳統思想之趨勢. 本文以早期儒者對敬之理解為例, 指出此種研究方法, 將導致對中國傳統思想之誤解. 若要真正了解
中國傳統思想之精義與洞見, 我們應先從對經典作出審慎而細緻之研究著手, 繼而將經典中之義理, 以己身之生活經驗印證. 最後, 才對中西思想傳統作出對照及整合.

關鍵詞: 唐君毅　敬　禮　比較哲學　中國思想之當代研究

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