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Confucian Respect

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Abstract:

Confucius' ideal in life was to revive certain lost values from the past: humility, kindness, filial piety, a caring way of ruling to bring about peace among the people on earth. Among such values, *respect* is a central concept in Confucian anthropology. The present article essays to clarify the meaning of "respect" and to focus on its importance in Confucius' *weltanschauung*, given Confucius' overall project, and in the historical development of Confucian philosophy.

Keywords: Respect, Confucius, Analects, Junzi, Neo-Confucianism, Zhu Xi.

Confucianism, and even more so Neo-Confucianism, is a system of thought standing by itself. Each word it employs has a peculiar meaning, often not easy to grasp, also because of the length of the Confucian tradition spanning thousands of years. Without grasping the meaning of those recurring keywords, one finds himself lost. This is why there are people who, after a brief encounter with Confucian thought, would go away - a kind way of saying "gave up" - calling it "Confucian confusion". This paper investigates the word *respect* (or reverence, *jing*) which is one of those peculiar keywords or special technical terms that often puzzle those who are willing to learn and understand Neo-Confucian philosophy.

The Word “respect”

Dictionaries usually translate *jing* as “reverence / respect,” adding that it is often used together with *gong*, to become *gongjing* (respect, reverence). In his annotated edition of *Analects*, Zhu Xi explains that *gongjing* is made up of *gong* and *jing*, where *jing* involves caution and devoted attention toward the people one is dealing with, while *gong* has to do with attention to one’s appearance, posture, manners, and demeanor when dealing with others.

But all the above is not yet enough. To have a more complete picture of the semantic value of the word, we need at least to distinguish between *jing* as a transitive verb, and *jing* as an intransitive verb or noun, to see it exemplified in a relevant passage of *Analects*, and further also to be aware of the *Daoxue* Movement.

“Jing” as a Transitive Verb

As a transitive verb, *jing* means “to respect.” This is also the meaning to be found in the ancient Classics, such as Confucius’ *Analects*. When Confucius stated that one should “*jing spirits and divine beings*,” (*Analects* 6:22) he meant that one should “respect”, that is, honor, do some form of worship toward spiritual beings.

The same verb is used in the context of filial piety (*xiao*), which is an instance of respect, it is the virtue of respect for one's parents and ancestors. Respect toward parents, that is, “expressing filial piety,” is rather similar with the Biblical “honor your father and mother.” In this case, *jing* is often combined with *xiao* (filial piety) and becomes *xiaojing*.

Respect is due to Heaven and spirits, parents, ancestors, elder brothers (or elders in general), and persons socially in a higher position than mine. It

is due also to things that we consider of high value and importance, such as one's job, or certain affairs or things. In Kwong-Loi Shun's detailed analysis, the concept "is often related in early texts to *shen*, a cautious and attentive attitude, to *jie*, an attitude of being on guard, as well as an attitude of fully devoting oneself. Thus, *jing* involves caution, being on guard, and devoted attention when dealing with persons, affairs, or other things."¹

Regarding this "transitive" meaning of *jing*, something worth further exploring is the Confucian teaching that *jing* should be extended to all human beings. For Confucius, a person of high moral standard – a *junzi* – is supposed to deal with any person with respect. See for instance where Confucius states that "when going outside the family circle, you should conduct yourself as if you were receiving an important guest." (*Analects*, 12: 2). Here we do not see the word *jing*, but respect is implied in the conduct of someone who receives an important guest in his/her house. The same passage continues "Lead the people as if performing a great ceremony. What you do not wish for yourself, do not impose on others." From this we understand that Confucius is talking to public officials (leaders of people), or more exactly to young people looking forward to a career of government service. He teaches them not only to treat other people, any people, with utmost respect, but to perform their governing duty with a responsible attitude, giving it the most serious care and attention, same as when performing a very important religious ceremony. Together with the above two admonitions, comes the motivation: "What you do not wish for yourself..." Confucius expects that one treats other people with respect, because obviously one would not like that other people treat him/her without respect.

It goes by itself that those people who are superior to us – in role, in age, in status, in importance – deserve *jing* (honor / respect). But why also those people who are not superior to us deserve respect? With our

¹ Kwong-loi Shun, "On *Jing* 敬- Thinking Through Tang Junyi on Chinese Culture in Diaspora," in the journal *Chinese Studies* (漢學研究) 31:2 (June 2013), 7.

twenty-first century mind, we might suppose that the ancient Chinese already had the idea of the “dignity of the human person” or some similar concept. Actually, some writers have suggested that the reason for respecting also persons that are lower than us for education or social position rests on some elementary concept of the inner worth of the human person. The same Kwong-Loi Shun – a scholar specialized in Confucian ethical thought - reminds us that this is not the case; that this way of thinking is nothing else but looking at Chinese culture through the looking glass of Western culture, given that the concept of the “dignity of the human person” was not included in the ancient Confucian worldview.²

What was included, yet was basic, in the ancient Confucian worldview was Confucius’ ideal of striving for harmony in human relations, and the awareness that a selfish attitude is always lurking in a human heart to incline a person to look down on others, consequently, to disparage other people and put oneself above. To realize his ideal of harmony among humans, Confucius preached the need to establish the *Li* (rites or rules of propriety), which in concrete terms are described in the *Book of Rites* as “humbling oneself and honoring others” (*zibei er zunren*).³ Confucius was convinced that this was the right attitude in any interaction with other people, and therefore the true foundation of the practice of *Li*. In the same vein, the book of *Mencius* talks of *cirang* or *zibei*, where *ci* involves politely declining, and *rang* letting others have, something good or of honor to oneself, while *zibei* involves lowering oneself, or regarding oneself as lower than others.⁴

The above teaching of “humbling oneself and honoring others” is not to be taken in a literal meaning of humbling oneself in front of other people, but in the sense of having as basic low-key attitude in interacting with other people, that of dealing with every person as if the interlocutor is a high-ranking person. This involves also abstaining from showing off one’s

² *Ibid.*, 7-10.

³ Liji, *Quli* a: 11.

⁴ Kwong-Loi Sun, *On Jing*, 7.

talents and merits, whenever it is not needed. In conclusion, we go back to the original ancient meaning of *jing*, that of dealing with other people “with caution.” Along this trail of ideas, we understand that *jing* is the true spirit behind the practice of *Li* (rules of propriety). In the *Mengzi*, *ci* and *gongjing* are presented as the basis for the observance of *Li*, and the concept includes also what in the West is called modesty and humility.

“Jing” as Intransitive Verb or Noun

The above transitive meaning of respect is a common ideal trait of behavior since the ancient Classics. However, in the context of the development of the Confucian thought, especially in recent centuries, since the time of the Song Dynasty (960-1279), another meaning of respect has come to the fore. We call it “intransitive” (or a “noun”), because in this case the respect *jing* is not aimed directly at persons or things, but is an inner attitude, a state of mind. It is, according to the *Daoxue* tradition of Neo-Confucianism, a basic component of the so-called *gongfu*, the effort at moral cultivation expected from any serious responsible person.⁵

What is the Daoxue?

The Neo-Confucian philosophical movement, which flourished during the Song Dynasty (960-1279), was a movement of renewal of the Confucian tradition after centuries of domination of Daoism and Buddhism in Chinese culture. During the Tang Dynasty (618-907) Buddhist philosophy and religion dominated all over China, with numerous flourishing schools of thought and countless monasteries, some of them hosting several thousands of monks or nuns.

⁵ *Gongfu* is a term now universally known for martial arts. Actually in Chinese it is an ancient philosophical term, meaning the effort at personal cultivation in classical Confucianism (see Mencius) as well as in the Neo-Confucian age. Only later in time the term came to be applied to martial arts.

At the end of the Tang Dynasty, certain scholars such as Han Yu (768-824) reacted by fostering a revival of Confucian ideals and values, planting the seeds for a future flourishing. Later, with the Song dynasty - established in 960 AD - a large movement of Confucian revival came to life, which is now known under the name of Neo-Confucianism. It developed in various trends, but the trend that came to dominate the following centuries called itself *Daoxue*, that is, “the learning of the Way.” The main leaders of the *Daoxue* movement (or *Daoxue Fellowship*, as some scholars call it) were Zhou Dunyi (1017-1073), Zhang Zai (1020-1077), the two Cheng Brothers (Cheng Hao 1032-1085 and Cheng Yi 1033-1107), and finally Zhu Xi (1130-1200). These people meant to spread and transmit Confucius’ teachings and the Confucian Classics, which traditionally included active engagement with politics and ethics, but with the addition of a strong commitment to moral cultivation through ascetic life and meditation, evidently with the intent of both emulating, and overcoming the challenge of, the Buddhist religious ideal of the monk. The Buddhist ideal was to become enlightened, like Buddha; the Neo-Confucian ideal was to become a sage (*shengren*) like Confucius, or like Yao, Shun, and the other sage kings of antiquity.

With this historical perspective in mind, we are better positioned to perceive the goals and aspirations of the Neo-Confucian masters. “Respect (*jing*)” was one of the key words of their practice of moral cultivation as a road to sagehood. In their lexicon, the term *jing* as a transitive verb of course remains valid, it preserves the idea of respect or reverence for people, first of all parents, ancestors, teachers, etc.. As a noun, or intransitive verb, it is somewhat new. Now it has been deeply interiorized and has become a basic pillar of their ascetic efforts. As a matter of fact, for Zhu Xi and fellow *dao*xue masters, *jing* is the actual method of moral cultivation. What does it consist of?

The Essence of Moral Cultivation

First of all, as we mentioned earlier, the term *jing* existed in the ancient Classics as a noun expressing an attitude or state of mind, that of “caution”. The Daoxue masters took that lead and applied it to moral cultivation. They were thinking of the human situation, where nature is oriented toward the good, but selfishness is always hampering the way. Therefore, they requested that the learner, the person willing to pursue the ideal of Confucian sagehood, be thoroughly attentive to the activity of his/her mind. They insisted that the true method for achieving sagehood is a state of mind of constant caution, a state of vigilance over one’s inner feelings and thoughts.

Cheng Yi exhorted people to abide in reverence (*jing*) and extend knowledge, a formula that balanced between action and contemplation. In this perspective, meditation – which Cheng Yi encouraged, the type known as *jingzuo* - was not an end in itself, but a means to an end, to achieve an attitude of reverence (*jing*).⁶

Learning from Cheng Yi, Zhu Xi practiced meditation and also stressed its use. However, after the age of 39 he changed his mind and moved more and more to a balanced formula of reverence (*jing*) and study. Earlier he talked of stillness (meaning silence, tranquility, meditation); later he preferred to talk of “reverence” (*jing*) because it can be practiced in both activity and tranquility.

So, in the Neo-Confucian system of thought, reverence/respect (*jing*) came to mean a discipline of vigilance over the mind, and Zhu Xi further explains that reverence refers to keeping the principles of Heaven and getting rid of human desires.⁷ “The aspirant to sagehood needs to nurture

⁶ Julia Ching, *The Religious Thought of Chu Hsi*, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000, 119.

⁷ Here the reference is to Mencius’ theory of the “four sprouts” (*siduan*) instilled by Heaven inside every human heart.

the seeds of goodness in his/her mind-and-heart, and reverence refers to this process of nurturing as well as to the goal of harmony of the emotions – an abiding state of mind characteristic of the sage.”⁸

How should the Neo-Confucian concept of “respect” be expressed in Western languages? The complexity of the concept can be seen in the large variety of English translations. To quote some examples, modern New Confucian philosopher Zhang Junmai (aka Carsun Chang, 1886-1969), writing for an American audience, translated *jing* as “attentiveness and concentration.” The respected British sinologist A. C. Graham (1919-1991) chose to translate *jing* as “composure” (i.e. self-control). Chu Chai chose “prudence.” Chen Rongjie (aka Wing-Tsit Chan, 1901-1994), an eminent translator of philosophical materials, after pondering over the various current translations, chose to adopt the translation used by Joseph Percy Bruce (1861-1934), and translate it as “seriousness.” At times, we might also find it translated as “sincerity” or “purity.” We cannot say that the various translations we just mentioned are mistaken; we can say that each of those eminent scholars caught one side of the picture.⁹

From all we have reported so far, it appears evident that moral cultivation was important in classical times and along the Confucian tradition, down to the Daoxue Movement. Its importance was stated peremptorily in the opening lines of the *Great Learning (Daxue)*:

“The ancients who wished to illuminate their ‘illuminating virtue’ to all under Heaven first governed their states. Wishing to govern their states, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their personal lives. Wishing to cultivate their personal lives, they

⁸ Julia Ching, *Ibidem*, p. 124. As a matter of fact, regarding the practice of reverence in self-cultivation, Zhu Xi himself often used the verb *shoulian* 收斂 (collecting together).

⁹ It is interesting to note that, even though she still often used “reverence,” Julia Ching pointed out that the Confucian concept of reverence/respect is similar to the Western ascetic concept of *recollection* (Latin *recollectio*, Italian *raccoglimento*). (*Ibidem*).

first rectified their hearts and minds. Wishing to rectify their hearts and minds, they first authenticated their intentions. Wishing to authenticate their intentions, they first refined their knowledge. The refinement of knowledge lay in the study of things. For only when things are studied is knowledge refined; only when knowledge is refined are intentions authentic; only when intentions are authentic are hearts and minds rectified; only when hearts and minds are rectified are personal lives cultivated; only when personal lives are cultivated, are families regulated; only when families are regulated are states governed; only when states are governed is there peace all under Heaven. Therefore, from the Son of Heaven to the common people, all, without exception, must take self-cultivation as their root.¹⁰

Reading a Page of the Analects

Confucius (551-479 BCE) lived twenty-five centuries ago. His teachings did not come in a vacuum. He was born in a cultural and religious tradition going back many centuries, a tradition he worked hard to revive by recovering lost values. After his death, his teachings have influenced several Far Eastern countries enormously. Altogether, there have been numerous developments, countless Confucian thinkers, and various currents of thought. But the core ideas working inside the Confucian tradition have been coming all along from a modest book of sayings known in the West as the *Analects*.

The *Analects* are extremely concise recordings of certain utterances of Confucius, or of his main disciples, or more often of conversations between Confucius and his disciples, or of his disciples among themselves, in rare cases of Confucius with some outside person.

¹⁰ *Great Learning, Introduction*, transl. Chan, Wing-tsit, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1973, p. 86.

The *Analects* is definitely a very special book. You cannot read it from the first page on. You would just get bored and soon put it aside. If one reads it the same way we read books, one will find it quite difficult to grasp its real message. The distance in time and culture is such that a first reading tells you very little of its true content. In my opinion, the only way to profit from the reading of *Analects* is to go through three steps.

The first step is to get hold of several good translations. One is not enough. To have at hand at least two or three valuable translations will help you gather a more nuanced understanding of the sentences in the text.

The second step is to get acquainted with the keywords in the Confucian terminology, words such as, for instance, *junzi*, traditionally translated as “gentleman” or “superior man,” and more recently as “authoritative person,” “exemplary person”, and the like; or *ren*, usually translated as benevolence or empathy; or *jing*, usually rendered as “respect.” After realizing the difficulty in translating such terms, numerous sinologists have been urging people to use the original words, instead of a translation, so that, in this globalized world of ours, such words as *ren* or *junzi* are becoming familiar even in western languages. Familiarity with the basic terms of the Confucian ideology will make it easier to grasp the import of Confucius’ utterances.

The third step is that of reading one passage at a time, meditating on it and discovering its connections with other related sayings. Here, for instance, we are going to read one of the 511 sayings of *Analects*, and meditate on it to discover, if possible, the actual *weltanschauung* of Confucius. *Analects* 14: 42 reports the following:

Zilu asked about being an exemplary person (junzi).

The Master said, “Cultivate oneself in reverential carefulness (jing).”

“Is this all?” said Zilu.

“Cultivate oneself so as to bring peace to others,” was the reply.

“Is this all?” again asked Zilu.

The Master said, “Cultivate oneself so as to bring peace to all the people. To cultivate oneself so as to bring peace to all the people – wasn’t that difficult even for Yao and Shun to achieve?”¹¹

Among all the conversations recorded in *Analects*, this passage is one of those that best reveal the overall social and anthropological project of Confucius. The conversation happens between Confucius and Zilu (542-480 BCE), one of the most devout disciples of the master.¹²

In simple terms, Confucius’ statement that the ideal man is the one who cultivates himself by nurturing respect (or “reverential carefulness”) is just a way of paraphrasing the golden rule, i.e., “you should not do to others what you would not like others do to you.”

There is no need to say that such a way of behaving is not easy at all; it requires a careful and constant moral cultivation by the person involved. We infer from this that the *junzi* is a person who is able to exploit every minute of his life, who watches over himself, and feels as he is observed even when he is alone. “to be careful when alone” (*shendu*) is a familiar theme in Confucian discourse. It means that one should be especially careful about what is going on in his/her mind, where he/she is totally alone.

¹¹ Transl. by Ni Peimin in *Understanding the Analects of Confucius - A New Translation of Lunyu with Annotations*, Albany: State University of New York, 2017, 348-349.

¹² “He was the second best disciple among those who excelled in statecraft. Noted for his courage and his sense of justice, he was true to his word and eager to practice what he had learned. Versed in government, he served first as house officer in the noble house of Jisun and later as magistrate of the Wei minister Kong Kui’s fief. He was eventually killed in the internal strife in that state.” (Chichung Huang, *The Analects of Confucius*, Oxford University Press, 1997, 203).

Going back to the conversation between Zilu and Confucius, we see that it continues with a second question from Zilu: “*Is that all?*”, and a reply from Confucius: “*The junzi is someone who cultivates himself so as to bring peace to others.*” A person who cultivates himself, a committed and responsible person, for sure will spread harmony to the persons living around him, starting from the members of his family and his neighbors and acquaintances.

Zilu insists and advances a third question: “*Is that all?*” Confucius explains that such a person as the *junzi*, if he spreads his peace beyond the border of his family, so as to put in order, or pacify the state where he lives, and then the whole world, for sure he will contribute to world peace. What more can be asked for? What more can we dream of?

In this third case, it is obvious that Confucius refers to a state leader, or even a world leader, powerful enough to realize peace throughout the world.

By the way, according to Confucius’ mind, some individuals have the power to influence a state, or the whole world, if Heaven has destined them to it. However, the *junzi* ideal is for any human being, since any person cultivating him/herself is undoubtedly contributing to social peace. A quotation again from *Analects* is here to confirm our assumption:

Someone said of Confucius, “Why is the Master not engaged in government?”

The Master said: “The Book of Documents says: filial, simply in being filial, and befriending your brothers, the influence will extend to government. This is also engaging in governing. Why must there be any extra ‘engagement in government?’”
(*Analects*, 2: 21)

One final observation on the mention of Yao and Shun at the end of conversation of *Analects* 14: 42. Yao and Shun, as mentioned, are two

sovereigns of legendary antiquity renowned as models of virtue and virtuous rulership. Compared with such a person as a true junzi, who is able to bring about world peace, even those two sage mythological rulers could not dream of doing more for the human community.

Traditionally, Chinese writers, when debating important political issues, used to refer always to a golden age of antiquity, when sage kings ruled, and the country was well governed. Confucius is no exception. His final quip, however, reveals that he is not a naïve believer in a legendary golden age of antiquity. He mentions Yao and Shun, two major sage rulers of that age, but notes that if a junzi is able to bring about universal peace and happiness, he will overtake Yao and Shun with his accomplishments. There are scattered records in history (or better, in legendary tradition) that in the age of Yao and Shun, even though the rulers were sages, there were problems, such as pockets of dissatisfaction among the people, and sometimes even rebellions.

The Confucian Project

As we have realized, the important keywords in the above conversation of *Analects* 14:42 are “junzi,” “moral cultivation”, and “respect,” and also “peace” and “sages.” We know that “junzi” is, according to Confucius, the ideal human being. Junzi is definitely one of the main keywords of the *Analects*.¹³ After our inquiry on the meaning of “respect”, we are equipped to thoroughly understand the gist of the above conversation. It deals with Confucius’ ultimate ideal in life. He believed that the world had lost a moral compass (the values of old), and he felt invested by Heaven with the mission of reviving those values.¹⁴

¹³ Among the keywords of the *Analects*, *junzi* is the second in frequency of appearance, 107 times, overtaken only by *ren* (benevolence, empathy, love), 109 times. I have analyzed all the 107 occurrences in my recent book *Il Junzi, ovvero l’Uomo Ideale secondo Confucio*, Passerino Editore, Online Edition, June 2020.

¹⁴ I was going to write that Confucius felt invested with the mission to “teach those values,” but then it occurred to me that this would be incorrect. Confucius was a teacher

Confucius felt he was invested by Heaven of the special mission to revive the ancient values, foremost among them respect for people, starting from filial piety, and in rulers and governing officials a feeling of responsibility. A famous page of the Classics vividly reports Confucius' dream:

“Once Confucius was taking part in the winter sacrifice. After the ceremony was over, he went for a stroll along the top of the city gate and sighed mournfully. He sighed for the state of Lu. His disciple Zilu, who was by his side, asked:

‘Why should the junzi sigh?’

Confucius replied: ‘The practice of the Great Way, the illustrious men of the Three Dynasties – these I shall never know in person. And yet they inspire my ambition! When the Great Way was practiced, the world was shared by all alike. The worthy and the able were promoted to office and men practiced their good faith and lived in affection. Therefore, they did not regard as parents only their own parents, or as sons only their own sons. The aged found a fitting close to their lives, the robust their proper employment; the young were provided with an upbringing and the widow and widower, the orphaned and the sick, with proper care. Men had their tasks and women their hearths. They hated to see goods lying about in waste, yet they did not hoard them for themselves; they disliked the thought that their energies were not fully used, yet they did not use them for private ends. Therefore all evil plotting was prevented and thieves and rebels did not arise, so that people could leave their outer

most of his life; but his teaching was a makeshift solution to his failure in finding employment in the government, as Simon Leys rightly asserts: “For 2,000 years Confucius was canonized as China’s First and Supreme Teacher. This is a cruel irony. Of course, Confucius devoted much attention to education, but he never considered teaching as his first and real calling. His first vocation was politics. He had a mystical faith in his political mission.” See “The Analects of Confucius, Translation and Notes by Simon Leys, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997, xxiii.

gates unbolted. This was the age of Great Unity.”¹⁵

This celebrated page – known as “the Great Unity document” (*Datong pian*) - belongs to a book, the *Book of Rites*, which was compiled, in the way it is now, during the Han Dynasty (206 BC ~ 220 AD). It would be incorrect to ascribe its content to the Han age. In fact, we see that its driving theme matches perfectly with the *Analects* conversation we have been examining. In the conversation of *Analects* 14: 42, we have discovered that everything starts from “respect.” The values Confucius was striving to revive are concentrated in the word “respect.” Confucius’ logic is: if people commit themselves to moral cultivation and strive to become junzi, world peace is assured. In the case of rulers, if they stick to the ways of the sage rulers of old and “are constantly attentive to ritual (the *Li*), make manifest their righteousness and act in complete faith; if they expose error, make humanity (*ren*) their law, and humility their practice, showing the people wherein they should constantly abide,”¹⁶ then their state, yet the whole world will achieve peace.

Conclusion

My purpose in this article was to examine the meaning of the term “respect” in Confucian thought. In the end, I have come to realize how important the concept of *jing* (respect) is in the Confucian vocabulary. *Jing* (respect or reverence) is not only an important word in early Confucianism, but it becomes central to the method of moral cultivation expounded by Zhu Xi. By the way, all this means that – despite the appearance of a philosophical change from classic Confucianism to Neo-Confucianism - actually there was no real change, but rather a development.

¹⁵ *Book of Rites* (*Liji*), chapter 9, transl. by Wing Tsit-Chan in Wm. Theodore de Bary, Ed., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, New York: Columbia University Press, Volume I, 175-176.

¹⁶ *Book of Rites* (*Liji*), chapter 9, transl. by Wing Tsit-Chan in Wm. Theodore de Bary, Ed., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, New York: Columbia University Press, Volume I, 176.

I have also perceived that *jing* is connected to “moral cultivation,” which in concrete terms refers to the rules of propriety (the *Li*). There is no need to remind that *Li* – most often translated in English as “ritual,” which does not express its real meaning - has been all along a primary concern of the Confucians. The concept of “*Li*”, in its turn, is also tightly connected with *ren*, the main Confucian virtue (love, benevolence, humanity). As a matter of fact, Confucius used to say that the practice of *ren* comes down to this: “controlling oneself and returning to the rules of propriety” (Keji fuli). (*Analects*, 12: 1). The character *ren* expresses what ought to occur when two human beings come together. *Ren* is often translated as love or benevolence, or humanity, or whatever; but in Confucius’ mind it rather appears to mean an aptitude of respect toward self and others, an aptitude which is basic to make human social life possible at all.

In the end, we can say that a simple word like *jing* actually brings us straight to the core of the message of Confucius, a message adeptly summarized in these lines: “For a Confucian, the meaning of life can be realized only in learning and practice through self-cultivation and self-transformation, in committing oneself to the welfare of the family, community and society, and in effecting a lasting influence over the world by one’s achievement in moral and cultural realms.”¹⁷

Glossary

cirang 辭讓	li 禮
dadong pian 大同篇	ren 仁
daoxue 道學	shen 慎
gongjing 恭敬	shendu 慎獨
jie 戒	shoulian 收斂
jing 敬	siduan 四端
jingzuo 靜坐	xiao 孝
Keji fuli 克己復禮	zibei er zunren 自卑而尊人

¹⁷ Yao, Xinzhong, *An Introduction to Confucianism*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, 285.

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