COMMENT/REPLY

Ethics of Care and Concept of *Jen*: A Reply to Chenyang Li

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This comparative study of the ethics of care and the Confucian concept of jen *argue against two assumptions made by Chenyang Li in his own study of these two traditions. Against him, I argue that a "feminine" morality is not adequate to address human equality, and that care-orientated theories like* jen *and care seem incompatible with the feminist commitment to oppose the subjection of women.*

The contemporary era of rapid globalization, often justified in terms of Western ethical concepts such as free trade and individual rights, has provoked a cultural backlash in many parts of the world. Intellectuals from nonwestern nations have asserted the importance and even the superiority of alternative ethical systems, such as that of Islam, and have sought to demonstrate the adaptability of these systems to the contemporary world. In particular, they have sought to establish the compatibility of these systems with full human rights for women (see Tayyab 1998).

For much of the twentieth century, and especially during the Maoist period, Chinese intellectuals and especially Chinese feminists waged fierce campaigns against the influence of Confucian ethics, which was castigated as reactionary and patriarchal. However, with the eclipse of Marxism in the 1990s and the recent entry of China into the World Trade Organization, intellectuals both in China and in the Chinese diaspora, in places as far-flung as Taiwan, Hawaii, and California, have been reviving Confucianism as an ethical system supposedly authentically Chinese and capable of providing moral guidance during a period

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of rapid social change (see Ong 1999). Like Islam, Confucianism emphasizes the importance of strong family loyalties and is therefore immediately suspect by feminists, who know that an appeal to family values is often a code rationalizing women's subordination. However, some theorists argue that Confucianism is compatible with full human rights for women.

In this paper, I challenge the idea that Confucian ethics can ever be acceptable to contemporary feminists, despite its similarity to the ethics of care. I focus especially on two books by Chenyang Li (1999, 2000), whose early work on this topic was published in *Hypatia* in 1994. This paper is a comparison of *jen* (or *ren*), a central concept in traditional Chinese thought, and care, a central concept in contemporary Western feminist ethics. It challenges the idea that these two concepts are so similar that traditional Chinese thought may be seen as a forerunner of feminist ethics. Specifically, it challenges Li's assumptions that since the ethics of care is a culturally feminine way of thinking about morality it must therefore exemplify a feminist approach that is not oppressive to women. It also challenges Li's second assumption that, since the Confucian ethics of *jen* is similar in many ways to the ethics of care, it cannot be oppressive to women, despite its origins in a hierarchical society rooted in systematic sexism as traditional Chinese society. I will show that both of these assumptions are mistaken.

I will start by offering a brief overview of the contrasts and similarities between *jen* and care. I then examine Li's argument in his comparative study.[1] I will argue that the concept of *jen* for centuries served an ideology of domination and that it is quite inhospitable to the values of equal concern and respect, which are central to contemporary democratic thinking, including feminist thinking. I will then go on to argue that, insofar as the concept of care is similar to *jen*, it may be a culturally feminine feature of morality but is very questionable as feminist ethics. I agree with some feminist challenges to the idea of care and I will explore the difference between feminine and feminist ethics. In the end, I will try to clear up an issue—why empirical gender matters in abstractly care-orientated theories like *jen* or care.

1. *Jen* and Care: Contrasts and Similarities

The Confucian concept of *jen* originated in a turbulent slave time of China called Spring and Autumn (722–481 B.C.). Confucius lived 551–479 B.C. in a transforming period from early developing slave society to its declining time. Facing such a revolutionary period of struggle, Confucius held a conservative political attitude, advocating the idea of overcoming oneself and restoring rituals in Chou dynasty (1111–249 B.C.). He thought those institutions of rites in Chou reflected various customs of respecting the old, benevolence, and mercy for all, and that Chou should be regarded as an ideal society (Zehou Li

1990, 2–6). Despite this, Confucius had to accept some innovations such as the abolition of the old custom of burying slaves with their dead owners (Yang, 1996, 18). He created a doctrine of *jen* in his discourses with his disciples and they edited those dialogues as a world famous book, *The Analects*.[2] *Jen* as a general virtue appears more than one hundred times in *The Analects*, and although Confucius did not give a precise definition of *Jen*, we can still understand what *jen* means through Confucius' own words.

In *The Analects*, Confucius emphasized the idea of *jen* as the humanity in humans, the benevolence or universal love, as an essence or substantial aspect connected with the old idea of *li* (rites), the regularization of rituals in previous Chou society. After his death, the doctrine of *jen* was developed by later Confucians, especially during the Han (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) and Song (or Song) dynasties (A.D. 960–1279). Confucianism had become the dominant state ideology through the greatest Confucian Tung Chung-hsu's reformation during Han; later it had been consolidated through its five classics[3] and reached its summit in its rising as ritualism in the Song dynasty. The doctrine of *jen* had played a great role in the evolution of Confucianism and radical challenges to it were barely seen publicly until early in the twentieth century, during the May Fourth movement in 1919.

The ethics of care has emerged recently in contemporary Western societies. It claims to embody a characteristically feminine approach to morality that is distinguished from so-called "male-stream" ethics. Care ethics advocates an alternative moral approach, which has drawn much attention from feminist ethical theorists. All members in feminist communities share a few common assumptions, which include the view that the subordination of women is morally wrong and that the moral experience of women is worthy of respect (see Jaggar 1992, 366–67). Insofar as the ethics of care relies on feminist assumptions, it contrasts with the Confucian concept of *jen* with its adherence to *li* (rites), which portray women as a lower rank of human, or as petty people (morally retarded people) (see *The Analects* 17.25).

Although *jen* and care emerged and developed in widely different times and places and with widely divergent goals, they do share some similarities in their ethical systems. As Chenyang Li pointed out in his article (1994, 71), the concept of *jen* and the ethics of care share some common ground that creates the possibility of their learning from and supporting each other. I believe this is true. The common thing between the two is "*ai*" in *jen* or "love" in care. Love, as the most natural sentiment of human beings, can be described as "the highest moral ideal," (1994, 71) simply because love or care "is important in itself," as Nel Noddings stated (1984, 7). Both concepts appear to be concerned with the same issues—love, altruism, kindness, charity, compassion, goodness, perfect virtue, true selfhood, etc. This similar concern has created a favorable impression in people's minds: *jen* and care can be trusted as a good, noble ethics.

As part of the revival of Confucianism in Mainland China and among overseas Chinese all over the world, the similarities between *jen* and care are being used to rehabilitate Confucianism for contemporary people including women. Chenyang Li's comparative study is typical of such efforts.

2. The Argument That Confucian Ethics of *Jen* Is Compatible with Feminism

Chenyang Li claims that despite Confucianism being typically patriarchal and feminist care ethics appearing to be strongly anti-patriarchal,[4] the two theories share philosophically significant common ground. First, they both value care-orientation as the highest moral ideal. Second, they do not adopt general principles in their moral concerns. And third, both advocate love with gradations in intimate relations (1994, 71, 75, 80). Through these three common aspects between them, Li believes that they are quite compatible. Having drawn this conclusion from his comparison, which I think is correct, he feels puzzled about the charge that Confucianism has been notorious for its suppression of women. Feminism is primarily a fight for women's liberation. If it is possible that Confucianism and feminism are compatible in their ethical systems, then according to his interpretations, there should be a way in which to explain that Confucianism is not responsible for the oppression of women that has characterized the societies in which it has been dominant. His explanation is that Confucius and Mencius (1994, 81) should not be held responsible for later Confucianism, yet it is possible for later Confucianism (after Tung's yin-yang philosophy) to have oppressed women (1994, 85). Here, he is trying to make a distinction between Confucius and Confucianism in order to explain why such a care-oriented theory has seemed so uncaring about women. However, Li does not succeed in his argument that Confucius' doctrine of *jen* does not necessarily lead to Confucianism that advocates the view that women were born to be inferior to men. I will give more details to expose how *jen* would be likely to have different implications for women than for elite men or *junzi*, and that *jen* could be a useful tool for rulers to govern their subjects in order to keep a society supposedly harmonious and in good order.

Chenyang Li's argument can be reconstructed as follows.

(1) Care ethics is feminist
(2) *Jen* is similar to care in three aspects
(3) Because *jen* is like care, it must also be feminist
(4) *Jen* is the central concept of Confucian ethics and Confucianism has been typically patriarchal and oppressive of women
(5) Therefore, *Jen* must be patriarchal and oppressive of women
(6) *Jen* is either patriarchal or anti-patriarchal but could not be both Li

concludes that because of (3) *jen* is not patriarchal and oppressive of women (1994, 81–82).

Here are two alternative ways out of the dilemma: either reject *jen* as part of Confucianism and reject (5), too, which is the conclusion Li likes, or reject *jen* as a theory compatible with feminism (although it is compatible with care ethics), which I will do. To establish my conclusion, I will first clarify the relation between Confucius and Confucianism through some scholars' reading and my own reading of *The Analects* and other Confucian texts. Secondly, I will reject (1) and (3) by using feminist criticisms of care ethics. And finally, I will clear up the confusion that even though the concept of *jen* resembles care ethics, it is not compatible with feminism.

3. *Jen* and its Relation to *Li*

Confucius was the first to articulate the concept of *jen* as the center of his thought. The term "*jen*" is repeated more than 100 times in *The Analects*, but these words provide little by way of defining *jen*, as many scholars have noticed. As a result, the meaning of *jen* is very vague and variable, and interpretations of it differ according to different scholars without final agreement. My analysis will use the interpretations of Herbert Fingarette 1972; Yulan Feng 1948; Zehou Li 1990; and Weiming Tu 1985.[5] However, among all these interpretations, the emphasis has been put on two kinds of explanations: one focusing on man of *jen* (loving man) and the other on *jen* as overcoming oneself and restoring "*li*" (rite). Both of these accounts can be validated by reference to Confucius' own words. When his best disciple Yen Yuan asks about what *jen* is, Confucius responds, "He who can submit himself to li is *jen*" (*The Analects* 12:1).[6] What is the nature of *jen* itself? Confucius says, "A man of humanity, wishing to establish his own character, also establishes the character of others, and wishing to be prominent himself, also helps others to be prominent. To be able to judge others by what is near to ourselves may be called the method of realizing humanity" (*The Analects* 6:30).[7] Here, *jen* is intimately linked to the relationship between man and man; he seems to mean a reciprocal good faith and respect among men.[8] The reciprocal good faith is given a specific content: it is that set of specific social relationships articulated in detail by *li* or rites. In a word, where reciprocal good faith and respect are expressed through the specific forms defined in *li*, there is the way of *jen*. Thus, "*li* and *jen* are two aspects of the same thing" (Fingarette 1972, 42). And: "The man who really loves others is one able to perform his duties in society" (Feng 1948, 42).

According to their analysis, *jen* exists not in itself, not in speaking, but in doing, in the relationship between individual men, and in *li*. Virtues such as "loyal," "brave," and "kind" give us no insight or help in grasping the essence

of *jen*, because Confucius indicates repeatedly in *The Analects* (5:18, 5:7, 14:2, 14:5) that the possession of such virtues is insufficient for establishing that a man is *jen*. For him, it is action and public circumstances that are fundamental (see Fingarette 1972, 40). Given that a man who submits himself to *li* is *jen* (*The Analects* 12:1), *jen* and *li* are in a relation of each depending on the other. "Each points to an aspect of the action of man in his distinctively human role. *Li* directs our attention to the traditional social pattern of conduct and relationships; *jen* directs our attention to the person as the one who pursues the pattern of conduct and thus maintains those relations" (Fingarette 1972, 42). *Jen* and *li* cannot be separated in the sense that they are two aspects of the same thing.

Every scholar who reads *The Analects* would be familiar with Confucius' explanation of *jen*, namely, "To master oneself and return to propriety is humanity" (*The Analects* 12:1). This propriety is referring to rites in Chou society (1111–249 B.C.) The origin and core of rites established by customary rules in Chou is to show great respect by sacrifices to heaven and to ancestors. These rites and customs are supposed to keep society in good order within a hierarchical system. In Chinese characters, state and family can become one meaning. The origin of "state-family" is the starting point of Chinese history. Rulers never separated state and family; hence, filial piety is the first important element in *jen* structure. After the collapse of the kin and clan system, Confucius drew upon its historical traditions and turned them into a conscious ideology by emphasizing that the kinship gradation system should be kept as a universal and permanent social meaning and standing. This claim was readily acceptable to both rulers and ruled because of kinship's biological base, which provided a naturalistic rationale for its practice such as a customary three years mourning for parents' death.[9] In his book, *On the History of Ancient Chinese Thoughts*, Zehou Li gave an incisive explanation of why *li* plays an important role in performing *jen*. According to Li, Confucius explained the traditional three years mourning period as modeled on the intimated love relation between parents and their offspring, based on natural and psychological needs and dependencies (Li 1990, 11–12). Thus, Confucius could explain the whole system of rituals in kin relationship in terms of the concept of filial piety and also rationalize its practices by reference to everyday family loving relations. The external or behavioral constraints of *li* were seen as stemming from the inner emotional compulsions of human needs, and so the rigid compulsory rules become promoted into the conscious ideas of a good life in combining ethical rules and psychological desire (see Li 1990, 12). From this model, later Confucians would easily develop a complete role-ethics as their dominant ideology.

4. To Whom Is the Virtue of *Jen* Applied?

In *The Analects*, Confucius mentioned women three times: First, he mentioned that he visited the consort of Duke Ling of Wei, Nanzi, who was famous for both her beauty and her loose morals (6:28). Secondly, he said (in the case of King Wu): "With a woman amongst them [ten capable officials] there were, in fact, only nine" (8:20). Thirdly, he claimed that women and small-minded people are hard to deal with (17:25). It is the last that has been most frequently quoted to show his attitude toward women. Here are four alternative English translations of the Chinese original: "The master said, Women and people of low birth are very hard to deal with. If you are friendly with them, they get out of hand, and if you keep your distance, they resent it" (Waley 1938, 216–17). The second is: "In one's household, it is the women and the small men that are difficult to deal with. If you let them get too close, they become insolent. If you keep them at a distance, they complain" (Lau, 1979, 148). The third is: "Women and servants are most difficult to deal with. If you are familiar with them, they cease to be humble. If you keep a distance from them, they resent it" (Chan 1963, 47). The last one is: "It is only women and morally retarded men that are difficult to raise and provide for. Drawing them close, they are immodest, and keeping them at a distance, they complain" (Ames and Hall 1998, 88).

In my own reading and understanding of this passage, I consider it important to note that Confucius's audience would agree that small men or morally retarded men, including women, constitute a category that is quite different from the category of gentlemen or *junzi*. Confucius has dozens of comparative sayings about the difference between the two (the term of gentleman or *junzi* in Chinese is mentioned more than 100 times, similarly to the term of benevolence or *jen*). For instance:

> 4:16 "The gentleman understands what is moral. The small man understands what is profitable." 14:23 "The gentleman gets through to what is up above; the small man gets through to what is down below." 15:34 "The gentleman cannot be appreciated in small things but is acceptable in great matters. A small man is not acceptable in great matters but can be appreciated in small things." 16:8 "The gentleman stands in awe of three things. He is in awe of the Decree of Heaven. He is in awe of great men. He is in awe of the words of the sages. The small man, being ignorant of the Decree of Heaven, does not stand in awe of it. He treats great men with insolence and the words of the sages with derision." [The key of differing the two is in 14:6] "We can take it that there are cases of gentlemen who are un-benevolent,

> but there is no such thing as a small man who is, at the same time, benevolent." (Lau, 1979, 124)

All those contrasts place the gentleman or *junzi* higher than the small man, and the gentleman is an exemplary model to reach *jen* or benevolence. A small man is a morally retarded person, and so is a woman. Women are excluded from the discussion of how to reach a high level of being benevolent, as Confucius claimed, "The common people, in so far as they make no effort to study even after having been vexed by difficulties, are the lowest" (16:9). Nothing that Confucius says presenting *jen* as a perfect virtue has any application to women and small men. To Confucius, only the elite scholars like *junzi* can realize his idealistic model of *jen* and they must be highly self-cultivated men. Since women were too low to aspire to the high standard of moral state he imagined, he excluded them from his discussions of *jen* in *The Analects*.

With this reading in mind, consider the following famous passage in one of five classics of Confucianism, *LiJi* (*The Book of Rites*) (see LiJun 1980) in Han dynasty (Western Han 206 B.C.–A.D. 8 and Eastern or Later Han A.D. 25–220): "Women following man is the beginning of the correct relation between husband and wife: obedience to the father before marriage, to the husband after marriage, and to the son after the husband's death" (Li Jun 1980, 1003). These are the principle of Threefold Obedience—a specific virtue for women but not for the elite men.

Following *LiJi*, Ban Zhao, in later Han, wrote *NuJie* (*Admonitions For Women*) (1996) and these two became the canonical authority for later literature of moral instruction that expressed a systematic ethical theory of engendered virtues. Confucian ethics put its emphasis on *nei-wai* (inside-outside of household), on the difference between men and women, and their different roles in a hierarchical society. The ideas of *LiJi* and *NuJie* are too complex to analyze here, but the ideas of Threefold Obedience and women's four virtues in *NuJie* gave us enough essentials to show that obedience, following others, and being silent to authorities in the household are the special virtues for women (1996, 2–3). In defining the perfect virtue of *jen* for *junzi*, the master Confucius did not bother to discuss women, but his followers pursued tremendous and trivial discussions about the regulation of women's behavior in *LiJi*. A female *junzi*, Ban Zhao did an excellent job to instruct women with their special virtues.[10]

5. Yin-Yang Confucianism

Tung Chung-hsu (or Dong Zhongshu, 179–104 B.C.) was the greatest Confucian of his time and for several hundred years afterward. He established Neo-Confucianism with his specific doctrine of Yin-Yang and Five Agents, which were embedded in a complete cosmological pattern called the correspondence

of man and Heaven. Tung played a crucial role in transferring Confucianism into the dominant state ideology while abolishing a hundred schools of other ideologies during the Han dynasty (see Feng 1948, 191).

According to Tung's interpretation, Heaven would allow yang to develop as it likes but not allow yin to do so; also Heaven would prefer good and kindness to evil and punishment (see Feng, 1948, 194). Since yin-yang doctrines can be accepted as a metaphysical ground for justifying social orders, Tung developed these thoughts into Yin-Yang Confucianism. Tung said, "In all things there must be correlates. Thus if there is the upper, there must be the lower. If there is the left, there must be the right. If there is cold, there must be heat. If there is day, there must be night. These are all correlates. The Yin is the correlate of the Yang, the wife of the husband, the subject of the sovereign. There is nothing that does not have a correlate, and in each correlation there is the Yin and Yang. Thus the relationships between sovereign and subject, father and son, and husband and wife, are all derived from the principles of the Yin and Yang. The sovereign is Yang, the subject is Yin; the father is Yang, the son is Yin; the husband is Yang, the wife is Yin. The three cords [Kang] of the Way of the [true] King may be sought in Heaven" (Feng 1948, 196–97).

According to Tung, three *Kangs* (the ruler, the father, and the husband) are to be standards of the ruled, the son, and the wife. *Kangs* mean principles as "the big ropes." All smaller ropes should connect with the big ropes and obey them as inferiors (Feng 1948, 196–97). Besides three *Kangs*, Tung also advocates the Five Norms (Humanity, Obligation, Rites, Wisdom, and Faith) corresponding to the Five Agents. The Three *Kangs* as social ethics, and the Five Norms as individual virtues, together combine into one called morality or moral law, which was established as the root of Chinese culture and civilization (1948, 197).

Encouraged by Yin-Yang Confucianism, the book *NuJie (Admonitions for Women)* (1996) by Ban Zhao in Eastern Han (A.D. 25–220), sets special roles for women to follow.[11] All advice in this women's bible informs women that to be inferior is to submit to all family members of the husband she married. A woman should subordinate herself completely to the family without any independent will, because women were born to be inferior and the subordinated according to Tung's Yin-Yang Confucianism.

Given Confucius' sayings about women in *The Analects*, we see that from the beginning of Confucianism a disdainful image of women dominated its discussions of relations between men and women and its extensive system of rules, norms, and admonishment about women's subordination to men. Women's situation seemed less miserable before the Song dynasty (A.D. 960) since they could marry again by their father's or brother's decision; but later Confucians after Song advocated that a "woman could only marry once all her life" (Tian 1982, 51). A second marriage was regarded as shameful; and this

opinion of women's chastity became very popular after Song. It gave widowed women no hope to live at all.

Another important Confucian was Chu His (or Zhu Xi, A.D. 1130–1200). He has exercised great influence on Chinese thought since the Song dynasty. He gave Confucianism new meaning, and for centuries dominated the thought of China and her neighboring countries. One of Chu's important doctrines is "the moon is everywhere visible." He holds an idea of A Supreme Ultimate, which is more mystical than Plato's Idea of the Good, or Aristotle's God (see Feng 1948, 298). According to his analysis, each individual can receive A Supreme Ultimate in its entirety, just like the moon shining in the sky, reflected in rivers and lakes. We can see the moon everywhere and would not say it is divided. This principle in the universe shows us its eternity without beginning or end. There are two fundamentals of the universe: Yin and Yang. The interaction of the Yin and Yang results in the production of the Five Elements, and from these elements the physical universe was produced. When this concept is applied to Chu's ethical and political philosophy, it implicates that the *Tao* of Heaven decides the destiny of the ruler and the ruled (1948, 303).

As for destiny, Chu was once asked: Yin and Yang should be equal and therefore the number of worthy and unworthy people should be equal. Why is it that there are always fewer superior men and more inferior men? He said: "Naturally things and events are confused and mixed. How can they be equal? If there were only a single yin and a single yang, everything would be equal. But because of the great complexity and infinite transformation of things, it is impossible to have everything just right. . . . The mere fact is that whenever the courses of material force reach a certain point and meet, a sage or a worthy is born. After he is born, it does seem that Heaven had such an intention" (Chan 1963, 627). All his answers seem to focus on predestination and conformity to the *Tao* of Heaven.

Under Chu's principle of Heaven and universal loving with difference and gradation, women are in the lowest position and the most unworthy to be cared about. The words of a famous scholar, Cheng Yi (Cheng I), show women's status: "a widow dying of hunger was a matter of little account, but remarriage, which would desecrate her chastity, was a serious matter" (Chow 1994, 210). To practice such martyrdom (starving to death or committing suicide before being raped) had become an increasingly popular custom (208).

Obviously, both Tung and Chu agree with Confucius that the concept of *jen* cannot be understood apart from that of *li*, for *li* represents *jen* in its particular acts, and emphasizes ritualism as the most important aspect of *jen*. The prominent position of ritual in Confucianism became increasingly crucial to consolidating the feudal and autocratic system of Chinese society, in particular, as a useful tool to oppress women. What remains common between

Confucius and later Confucianism is the implication of *jen*: love with gradation. People were born into stratification. Their biological identities determined their social ranks. A sage or a sovereign was sent from the Heaven, hence, a sage deserved the highest respect and love. But a petty man and a woman supposedly did not deserve equal respect, love, or caring as higher people did. This theory was welcomed by all rulers in Chinese feudal society and adopted as the state ideology for almost two thousand years. Only at the time when science and democracy were introduced into China during the turning from the nineteenth to twentieth century, especially the May Fourth movement in 1919, did the old unshakable standing of Confucianism begin to crumble. As a Chinese scholar of the May Fourth period, Da-zhao Li put it beautifully: "Attacking Confucius is not to attack the person himself, but rather the image of authority as all rulers made him to be, and the soul of autocratic politics" (Zehou Li 1990, 27).

The point I want to make is this: love, or care, is wonderful for every person. If this love is a kind of universal and not peculiar to one sex, as Chenyang Li argued in his *Hypatia* article (1994), it should not be true that women deserve less love or care because of their biological sex. The deep in-egalitarianism of Confucius and Confucianism inevitably resulted in a view that oppressed women. Now I can clarify the connection of Confucius and Confucianism: they conform each other systematically on the issue of women, either excluding women in the application of *jen* in *The Analects*, or including women with their special virtues of being subordinated in later Confucianism.

6. The Ethics of Care: A Feminine Approach to Ethics

The ethics of care was first articulated in Carol Gilligan's book: *In A Different Voice* (1982). She reported that the moral development of girls and women was significantly different from that of men. Females tended to fear separation from the people close to them and often construed moral dilemmas as conflicts of relationships and responsibilities rather than abstract rights and principles, whereas males tended to see closeness as dangerous and make moral decisions by appeal to abstract rules. Furthermore, women were most likely to act on their feelings of love and compassion for particular individuals, whereas men typically adhered to a morality of justice. Hence, she claimed that studies of moral development based only on a morality of justice did not provide an appropriate standard for measuring women's moral development and should be recognized as male biased (1982, 31, 160–64, 173–74).

Some feminists consider *In A Different Voice* as offering a characteristically feminine approach to morality, an approach that seemed to provide a basis for a distinctively feminist ethics. Nevertheless, it is far from clear whether this

approach could be reliably deployed to solve so-called women's issues and to advance the feminist goal of ending women's subordination (Jaggar 1995).

Among many proponents of care ethics, the most radical theorist is Nel Noddings (1984, 1995). She holds a view of caring as the highest moral ideal or virtue. According to her view, care ethics comes from the natural caring, built up in personal relationships that reach out to others and grows in response to the other. There is no ethical effort required in caring: when we care, we just do what we want and ought to do. We feel "we must do something" in response to the needs of the cared for. Otherwise we are in a pathological state (1995, 11–12).

Noddings identifies at least three features in her care thinking. First, "since caring is a relation, an ethics built on it is naturally other-regarding" (1995, 26). Care ethics focuses on concrete relationship between one-caring and being cared for. Since ethical caring requires an effort to care for other's needs and response, it should not be "tender-minded" but rather tough in demanding that a caregiver "[be] strong, courageous, and capable of joy" in the other's well being. Secondly, it seems that care ethics allows and even encourages self-sacrificing, but Noddings stresses that "it does not separate self and other in caring". Since I am defined in the relation, I do not sacrifice myself when I move toward the other as one-caring. When the one-caring feels in conflict, she must seek a way to remain as one-caring. So, "Pursuit of the ethical ideal demands impassioned and realistic commitment." Thirdly, caring "will not allow us be distracted by visions of universal love, perfect justice, or a world unified under principle" (1995, 26 and 27). Instead, a caregiver always acts out of feelings, sensitivity, or sentiments for particular others rather than for principles or rules. So, three things are crucial in Noddings's description of caring: other-regarding, relational self, and particular feelings in concrete situation.

Responding to these views, many feminists are skeptical about the ideas of caring. Three questions emerge from an examination of feminist critics on issues of care ethics: (1) Does the idea of other-regarding matter for women's position in the hierarchical societies? (2) If there is no separation between caregiver and being cared for, how can others as being cared for be benefited? (3) If particular feelings are crucial in care ethics, how can the concept of caring be applied to broad situations beyond family? Feminist theorists have addressed all of these questions.

7. Feminist Critiques of the Ethics of Care

Beginning with the first question, some feminist theorists have investigated the ways in which our genders determine the sorts of virtues open or closed to us in a hierarchical gender system. It is a woman's moral luck to be expected by almost every culture to devote herself to the caring of her family even

at substantial personal cost to herself (Card 1990). This is exactly the case followed by the codes of Confucian ethics that I analyzed above in which morality is a matter of performing one's proper role in the society. The proper role for women is at home and that of men is outside the home. Women's role to serve primarily her family (children and husband) is her destined duty. Thus, in Confucian ethics a woman's fate is determined under manmade moral laws. She should always have regard for others without self-concern, for supposedly her self should be included in the interests of the family and community. However, the idea of other-regarding as a virtue in care ethics, as some feminists criticized, tends to ignore the distinctive forms of violence within family and community. The suggestion of forgetting the self may make women be silent and accept the historical male control of women's sexual and reproductive capacities and activities, and worse, it would rationalize this male control rather than challenging the existing social acceptance of it. Thus, as Marilyn Friedman pointed out, the care ethics [the concept of *jen*, too] "does not (yet) constitute a sufficiently rich or fully liberatory *feminist* ethics" (1993, 151).

An ethics that recommends neglecting self will not encourage women to change their position of subordination. Regarding my first question, I would say that whether or not the ethics of care or *jen* explicitly advocated the suppression of women, its implicit consequences are unfavorable with regard to the position of women.

Secondly, concerning the relational self, some feminists such as Jean Grimshaw considers two aspects (1986). It is true that an individual is fundamentally a social being, a situated self, relationally and communally defined. On the other hand, the well being of an individual person can be separated from other persons and the relationships with which he or she is nevertheless deeply intertwined. Our social institutions should respect his or her individual or self-regarding needs, rights, or abilities to make decisions.

Joan C. Tronto noted that even care thinking also requires self-awareness and self-knowledge, because as she says, attentiveness requires "a tremendous self-knowledge so that the caretaker does not simply transform the needs of the other into a projection of the self's own needs" (1989, 178).

Both Grimshaw and Tronto's discussions are helpful in addressing the second question. A relational self does not mean a self should not separate itself from others, for one must know how others can be benefited by her caring labor. "If I see myself as 'indistinct' from you, or you as not having your own being that is not merged with mine, then I cannot preserve a real sense of your well-being as opposed to mine. Care and understanding require the sort of distance that is needed in order not to see the other as a projection of self as a continuation of other" (Grimshaw 1986, 182–83). In other words, care for others, and understanding of them, are only possible if one can adequately distinguish one's self from that of others.

The third aspect concerns the particular situation of one-caring. A mother applies "right" or "wrong" most confidently to her own decisions based on her attitudes in concrete and particular conditions. The decisions a mother makes may not depend on any rules but on her feelings for the individual being cared-for. These decisions are typically made in a dyadic situation: a particular relation of caregiver and care receiver. This small-scale particularity has its limitation and weakness to address moral issues in other situations as some feminists realized (Card 1990, 205; Sarah Hoagland 1991, 253, 260; Jaggar 1995, 194). Alison Jaggar's article, "Caring As a Feminist Practice of Moral Reason," expresses concern about "Care's Focus on the Particular" (1995, 193).

Most women as caregivers focus exclusively on the particular. That is not their fault, but the limitation of social structures, "the ways in which male dominant social structures limit the life chances of women and men" (Jaggar 1995, 195). Male dominant society would be happy to see that women put their close attention to the specificity of small-scale situations since those attentions "may obscure perception of the larger social context in which they are embedded" (1995, 195). For example, attention to your family's immediate needs for food, shelter, and comfort may distract from moral scrutiny of the social structures that create those needs or leave them unfulfilled (1995, 195). It is so natural and easy for many women to focus their attention on the particular rather than on general features of the society they live in, simply because they spend most of their time and energy at their home.

Care reasoning seems to pay most attention to particular persons, feelings, and situations. These considerations often limit its views of broader moral issues such as Third World dependency, the globalization of environmental pollution (women mostly are vulnerable in these cases), and most importantly, the social structures and systems that perpetuate women's subordination. Noddings's version of care ethics has failed to address many broad moral issues beyond the family area. It cannot deal with the problem of justice within the family, either.

Questioning Noddings's three aspects in her view of caring (1984, 1995), feminists suggest that such a narrowly orientated care ethics may not promote women's emancipation but rather may reinforce and even intensify and justify the unequal social arrangements and treatments of different sexes. The puzzle here might not be exposed if we try to derive a philosophical ethics from what is naturally good without critical reflection on how the so-called natural is socially constructed. If care-orientation is the most natural and virtuous character for humans to possess, why did so many Confucian followers spend their lifetime on the hard work of consolidating this "natural" virtue? Why did they seem to be so afraid of people not committing themselves to this nature, and why did they need to create a Heaven to convince women to be virtuous!

As we see, the ethics of care encourages women to do a good job as a caregivers, for it seems a good and natural thing to do. This ethic draws women's attention to focus on women's roles rather than their rights. The very right of women to be treated with equal concern and respect is neglected from the ideas of care thinking. Thus, the ethics of care cannot meet the feminist political goal—men and women should care and receive care equally. Now I can clear up the confusion in Li's argument: care ethics (*jen* too) seems not necessarily an anti-patriarchal ethic; and the points made by Grimshaw (1986) and Tronto (1993) seem true: a "feminine" ethics might reinforce the very stereotypes it seeks to overcome because it does not respond to actual gender in all cases.

Li depends on an early version of care ethics that is most like the concept of *jen*. This early idea of caring has been debated since the middle of the 1980s. Some feminist critics have been revising care ethics during the 1990s. For instance, Tronto has suggested that our vocabulary for discussing caring seemed impoverished and narrowed because of the way caring is "privatized" (Tronto 1989, 185). She pointed out the need to "rethink as well how those particular circumstances are socially constructed" (1989, 185) and importantly how the need to rethink appropriate forms of caring raises broad questions about the shape of social and political institutions in society. The charge of the narrowness of care ethics encourages a new direction of rethinking caring, which will relate caring to a broad, global-size ethical thinking. For instance, Fiona Robinson developed a revised version of caring in her recent book *Globalizing Care* (1999).

In the idea of globalizing care, we still need to answer the question "Who cares for whom?" According to Robinson, the answer "is not only a moral but a social and political question, which requires an analysis of the social construction of roles relationships, communities, and institutions in their different sociopolitical contexts" (1999, 33). Such an analysis beyond moral theory and reaching sociopolitical contexts will constantly remind us that all relations are infused with power and within every relationship there exists the potential for exploitation and domination. A new version of caring provided by Robinson is trying to raise critical feminist approaches to examining human relations and focusing on the potential for exploitation and coercion. This more sophisticated and feminist version of care ethics is quite different from the traditional Confucian version of care ethics.

8. Why Actual Gender Matters for Ethical Theory

Do we need to respond to empirical gender norms in order to determine whether Confucianism is helpful or not to end women's oppression? For the sake of clarification, I will explore the view of another expert of Confucianism, Tu Wei-ming, who argues that the notion of *jen* in Neo-Confucianism does not

lead to women's oppression because it is sexually neutral and a general virtue for all people (1985, 144). This view tries to tell us that empirical gender norms are irrelevant in a discussion of ethical theory. Nevertheless, this so-called gender-neutrality was not true in the practical implications of both Confucius and Confucianism in my previous discussion. Let us see Tu's view and what it meant to women during the Neo-Confucian period (since the Song dynasty of A.D. 960).

Tu gave a different interpretation from Chenyang Li of Neo-Confucianism in Song dynasty. He describes *jen* "as a living metaphor," compatible with his explanation of Confucius' concept of selfhood. He focuses on the Neo-Confucians' contribution to the concept of self, which entails a continuous enlargement of the self. As for the Neo-Confucian position on the role of women, Tu argued that women, like men, actively shape their moral character. The task of learning to be human involves "a dynamic process of growth rather than mere submission to assigned social roles" (1985, 144). In accord with this viewpoint, the Neo-Confucian masters easily hold the universalistic claim that every human being, in the sense of the sexually neutral form of *jen*, has the potential to form a unity with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things. It seemed that Neo-Confucians did not prescribe any practices of excluding women from highly moral self-realization according to Tu's argument.

Although Tu agrees with the idea that China was unquestionably a male-dominated society, he denied any connections between women's status and Neo-Confucian ethics. He thinks that Neo-Confucians hold that the governing virtue between husband and wife is based not only on the idea of the division of labor but also on the value of mutual appreciation or respect. The idea of mutual respect based on the principle of reciprocity led Tu to argue that a wife-mother, just like a husband-father, could also function creatively at each stage of her self-realization. She realized herself through the "procedural freedom" that she cultivated despite of her structural limitation (Tu 1985, 144). This argument met a challenge from Margery Wolf, in "Beyond the Patrilineal Self" (1994, 254). Through the investigation of shaping the self in the family, Wolf argues that the male-dominated family is the context within which the self is formed and the adult self is measured; hence, sex really matters in shaping the self. The challenge makes me doubt that Neo-Confucianism allows a woman, as a man does, to creatively achieve herself-realization, as Tu believed. There were a few exceptions in the long history of Chinese society such as Ban Zhao who could be self-fulfilling as a Junzi, but she is a counter-example to what she advocated in her *NuJie* (*Admonitions for Women*): "Lack of talent is a virtue in a woman" (1996, 3). "Being untalented is a virtue for women" (Lee 1994, 6). Hence, whether a woman can be self-realizing, just as a man can be, seemed mysterious and dilemmatic in a woman's actual situation in the Confucian world. Furthermore, Ban Zhao came from a family of high rank and

had economic advantage to develop her talents. Women of lower-class families would have little opportunity to shape their selves in their specific situations. Thus, Tu's argument of universalistic moral self-realization cannot be true in regard to different women's contexts.

Self-transformation and self-realization, I believe, have at least two presuppositions: self-knowledge and self-determination (self-governing), which also demand good education and leisure of learning. Confucianism's three dependencies (Threefold Obedience) usually prevented women from gaining these abilities. Most likely, Chinese families would give boys priority of education and not be willing to pay for girl's learning. Lacking the ability of self-knowledge and self-governing, a woman could rarely realize anything she wished. Every decision she made should be consulted with her father, husband, or son. In the male-centered culture, a woman could only adjust her self to fit the existing social norms and customs supporting this patriarchal society. How could a woman creatively realize her self if she had to learn from the very beginning (as a little girl) to serve for others at home without a concern of her self?

The Neo-Confucian masters such as Chu His (Zhu Xi) did insist that respect and mutual appreciation should be valued in the relationship between woman? and man, and they do encourage women's participation in shaping the form of human-relatedness in the family. Chu encouraged education for women within the proper limits of moral tracts and directions toward the proper goals of assisting a husband. He articulated what was to become a standard position on women by saying: "A wife submits herself to the will of another; her rectitude consists of not following her own will" (Raphals 1998, 255). However, at best, Chu's instruction means that women would be conscientiously participating in shaping their roles properly and would become actively involved in perfecting those roles. The conscientious efforts in shaping moral character have significant influence on women's faith about their fate, which is conforming to the idea that woman is born for the service of man.

The Neo-Confucian masters did a great job of encouraging women to adjust themselves into virtuous women through their ultimate self-transformation. Cheng Yi (Cheng I) gave his famous claim in reply to the question whether widows may remarry: "a widow dying of hunger was a matter of little account, but remarriage, which would desecrate her chastity was a serious matter" (Chow, 1994, 210)—second time this reference is used. In Cheng's mind, perhaps the total commitment to the sacredness of marriage could be applied equally to husband and wife. But in practice, a husband could have concubines when his wife was alive and his wife could lose her integrity in remarriage after her husband died. Furthermore, in Cheng's theory, the true meaning of matrimony was not simple economic need, or romantic love, but rather mutual responsibility. Mother and father should treat each other with full respect. But mother should conduct herself with humility and obedience. According to Confucian

logic, reciprocal respect and mutual responsibility have different meanings for mother and father, wife and husband. The division of labor between the inner (domestic) and the outer (public) spheres of responsibility makes it necessary for a wife to play major role at home. A good wife should prefer consulting her husband even in small matters because she has no right to make independent decisions. Her position of obedience keeps her continuously adjusting herself to fit her roles and only at the time when passive acceptance of her fate has changed into positive participation in shaping those roles can she reach the ultimate self-realization. A virtuous woman without any talents would be a perfect model of social roles in the Neo-Confucian text. A conscientious woman with a deep faith in Neo-Confucian ideology would be most earnest to teach and train women as role performers and becoming fully human in Confucian world. This can be illustrated by the fact that it was women themselves who forced their daughters to be foot-bound. A virtuous woman would be happy to see her husband having more concubines to keep the male family line strong.

Before the Song dynasty, instructions and special virtues for women might be less known in the whole society. However, under the influence of Song and Ming Neo-Confucianism, a wide variety of those instruction texts reinterpreted and reinforced earlier flexible formulations of women's virtues. Women were encouraged to learn and participate in transforming self to follow Confucianism with particular emphasis on four main aspects: "(1) physical, social and intellectual separation, (2) submission of the woman to the husband within the family, (3) emphasis on complete monogamy of the woman, through requirement for chastity and prohibitions against remarriage, and (4) the exclusion of women either from direct or indirect political activity" (Raphals 1998, 254). Obviously, I would say, a causal relationship between the rise of Neo-Confucian culture in the tenth century and the prevalence of such appalling social customs as binding women's feet and concubinage is suggested by women's great efforts of self-transformation. The Neo-Confucian ideology significantly contributed to instructing women to accept their subordinator during that period.

In assessing the adequacy of an ethical theory, it is important to consider its implications for ethical practice. Feminist philosophers have shown that, in a deeply gendered social context, an ostensibly gender-neutral theory may have consequences that are disproportionately damaging for women. Neo-Confucianism's instructions for women definitely did more harm to women's status and increased women's oppression and subordination.

9. Conclusion

Now return to Chenyang Li's argument. His first premise that care ethics is feminist seems problematic. A feminine theory is different from a feminist one,

and the concept of *jen* seemed gender neutral but favored elite men in ethical practices. In her recent article "Feminist Ethics," Alison M. Jaggar pointed out: "One necessary condition of an ethical theory's being feminist is that it should provide conceptual resources adequate for criticizing all forms of male dominance" (Jaggar 2000, 362). The Confucian concept of *jen* failed to meet this necessary condition since it had never been a conceptual resource to be used for challenging traditional forms of domination in a hierarchy society. Similarly, the old version of care ethics failed to provide us the guidance in determining which caring responses are ethically appropriate to favor a pursuit of an ideal society that will not tolerate sexual inequality.

As I analyzed in this paper, the Confucian views of women based on the concept of *jen*, either in its exclusion or inclusion of women, did not value women equally with men. All the results of their ethical theories on women enforced a familiar saying for all Chinese: men respectable and women humble, justified simply by the will of heaven according to Confucian cosmologist doctrines. The apparently natural differences of sexes did help Confucianism's belief in differentiation of genders in ethical practice. The feminine virtue of caring for others without a further exploration of its social implications to actual gender would not establish its feminist credentials as a liberatory theory. The three obedience and four virtues prescribed as women's virtues in classical Confucian teachings inevitably determined women's subordination in Confucian society, although different women's suffering were different due to concrete contexts. Without an examination of how those ethical canons affected women's life status, there is no way to clarify why the concept of *jen* does not care for women in the same way as it cares for the *junzi*. The virtue theory started from Confucius, strengthened by Confucianism, and perfected in Neo-Confucianism did not help women, and men as well, to pursue a social ideal of equal concern and respect for all including people of different race, gender, ethnic, age, etc. Instead, it encouraged people, including women, to make efforts in keeping supposedly harmonious orders of a patriarchal society, which was deeply gendered in all social institutions, norms, and customs.

The ethics of care started from *In A Different Voice* (1982) did raise the issue of whether women's moral voices matter or not, and it significantly changed ethical dialogues in the past decades. It must take the feminist political commitment of ending women's oppression in its exploration of what counts as a right theory as feminist critiques pointed out. In regard to the charge of the narrowness of care thinking, Jaggar claims: "Care's narrow focus is valuable in encouraging awareness of moral complexity and individual responsibility in small-scale situations but it may well obscure perception of the macro-situations that provide the context for individual encounters" (Jaggar 2000, 363; also see 1995, 196–97). Robinson said that this claim is one of the most penetrating criticisms of care ethics (1999, 103). I agree with this comment for the point

it made: when an agent is focusing on the concrete specificities of a situation, she is not attending directly to the social institutions that structure it and vice versa. Jaggar argues convincingly that this has been a limitation of many existing interpretations of an ethics of care, and I believe it is also a limitation of the concept of *jen*.

In today's era of rapid globalization, we are facing the issue of Western domination and exploitation of the disadvantaged poor countries of the Third World. Critics of care ethics have pointed out that relational ideas carry risks for vulnerable people if the underlying patterns of power remain unchanged and many theorists—feminist and non-feminist—have expressed reservations about relational or interpersonal ethics: they are worried about the potential for exploitation and coercion. The revised feminist version of caring thinking will enlarge care to a global scale while considering an appropriate approach that does not exclude those powerless voices in their specific situations. Whether Confucianism and feminism can help and support each other needs more careful study than we see in Chenyang Li's *The Sage and The Second Sex* (2000).

Notes

1. This study appears first in Li's article (1994), secondly in his book, *The Tao Encounters the West* (1999), and thirdly in the book edited by him, *The Sage and the Second Sex* (2000), with the same title and formula: "The Confucian Concept of *Jen* and the Feminist Ethics of Care: A Comparative Study."

2. The English translations of *The Analects* are various. I use the most reliable interpretations: one is D.C. Lau (1979); the second is Arthur Waley (1938); the third is Wing-tsit Chan (1963). I check them with the Chinese original and its interpretation by Yang Bo-jun (1996).

3. See Routledge 2000. *Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: Chinese classics, 135–36. Five classics include *Zhouyi* (Zhou changes), *Shangshu* (Documents), *Shijing* (*Odes*), *Liji* (Book of Rites), and *Chunqiu* (Spring and Autumn Annals).

4. Here Li saw care ethics as part of feminist ethics, but I will show later that this assumption is mistaken in some way.

5. These four scholars are universally recognized as experts in Chinese philosophy. I ignore the question of whether or not their interpretations of *The Analects* bear patriarchal characteristics and simply appropriate the valuable parts of their thoughts about Confucius.

6. Unless I am comparing different translations of the same passage, I will follow the practice of referencing the classical text using conventional section numbers rather than page numbers of the modern translations. See note 2 for information on the modern translations I have used.

7. In Chan's translation this section is in 6:28, but in original Chinese text it is in 6:30. See Bojun Yang's Chinese original and Lau's translation.

8. Here I follow most translation of Confucius' "*jen*" into "man." I believe Confucius meant "man," but "*jen*" could be used in a gender-neutral way to refer to humans.

9. Confucius has a famous talk about this essence in *The Analects*: Tsai Yu asked about the three years mourning and said he thought a year would be quite long enough. Confucius replied, "Would you then (after a year) feel at ease in eating good rice and wearing silk brocades?" and "If you would really feel at ease, then do so. But a true gentleman is in mourning, if he eats dainties, he does not relish them, if he hears music, it does not please him, if he sits in his ordinary seat, he is not comfortable. That is why he abstains from these things. But if you would really feel at ease, there is no need for you to abstain." When Tsai Yu had gone out, Confucius said, "How inhuman Yu is! Only when a child is three years old does it leave its parents arms. The three years mourning is the universal mourning everywhere under Heaven. And Yu—was he not the darling of his father and mother for three years!" (7:21).

10. See Ban Zhao's story in Lili Xiao Hong Lee (1994). Ban Zhao seems the first thinker to formulate a single complete statement of feminine ethics. She provides specific instructions on a women's personal conduct and the way in which a women should behave in relationships with her husband and members of his family in her book *NuJie* (1996). Ironically, she did not exemplify the lowly woman she advocated so strongly: she had received an excellent education in the classics but she did not encourage other women to follow in her footsteps. She must be an exception to the category of women she tried to instruct.

11. *NuJie* (*Admonitions For Women*), 1996. Quoted in seven short chapters:
    (1) Petty, low, and fragile first
    (2) Rituals between husband and wife
    (3) Respect and cautious
    (4) Four virtues of women (loyalty, proper speech, modest demeanor, and diligent work)
    (5) Single-hearted devotion
    (6) Obedient to all
    (7) Being kindness to husband's siblings

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