

Ritual in the *Xunzi*: A Change of the Heart/Mind

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Abstract

This paper seeks to advance discussion of Xunzi's view of ritual by examining the problem ritual treats and the way in which it targets the problem. I argue that the root of the problem is the natural inclination of the heart/mind to be concerned only with self-interest. The reason ritual works is that, on the one hand, it requires one to disregard concern for self-interest and observe ethical standards and, on the other, it allows one to express feelings in an ethically appropriate way. The ideal character shaped by ritual is one of respect in dealing with affairs and people; the ideal effect of ritual on the person is a sense of ease and security. Based on these conclusions, I will flesh out an implicit assumption Xunzi might have adopted about a pattern in human psychological constitution so as to further our understanding of Xunzi's moral psychology.

Keywords: Xunzi; heart/mind; emotions; ritual; reverence; li (pattern).

I. Introduction

This paper examines the concept of ritual in the *Xunzi* and the ideal kind of changes ritual yields.¹ My investigation begins with a diagnosis of the source of problem for which ritual addresses, followed by an analysis of *lǐ-yì* 禮義, a concept that encapsulates Xunzi's conception of ritual. Building on my interpretation of *lǐ-yì*, I will explore the functions of *lǐ-yì* and their effects on the person. It will be argued that *lǐ-yì* corrects the natural inclination of the heart/mind so that one's feelings can be enriched and expressed in an ethically appropriate way. Since I do not attempt to address the question of why ritual works, I will not be identifying the special features that justify ritual or render it effective. Even with this restriction of focus, the present study is still meaningful in that it provides a sustained analysis of the point of having ritual by looking into the source of the problem ritual treats and the effects of such treatment on the person. If successful, the conclusions will shed considerable light not only on Xunzi's conception of ritual but also the kind of ethical character idealized by Xunzi and the kind of moral development that is required to the ideal character.

All reference numbers, except otherwise noted, are to the chapter and line numbers in *Xunzi yinde* 荀子引得. In providing my own translation, I have in general consulted Knoblock's translations. All references to the English translations of the *Xunzi* are to chapter and section, volume, and page numbers in John Knoblock's translation. Other than the terms I explained, my translations of other Chinese terms are only tentative.

¹ My reference to Xunzi's thought is to the ideas presented in the *Xunzi* text. Assuming that the ideas expressed in the text are consistent, I will be teasing out certain implicit positions or assumptions Xunzi would have adopted in order for his claims to remain consistent. It is possible that Xunzi himself might not have thought through the problems I posed or be fully aware of the implications I draw from my analysis of the text. Nonetheless, I take these positions to be what Xunzi would have adopted in order for him to remain consistent.

Xunzi unequivocally claims that *lǐ-yì* can transform one's nature (*xing*) (23/5-10). "Lǐ" is usually translated as "ritual," and "yì 義" is sometimes translated as "propriety." While Xunzi sometimes discusses *lǐ* and *yì* separately, *lǐ-yì* also features prominently in the text as a concept in its own right, encapsulating Xunzi's conception of ritual. Although most scholars have taken for granted that *lǐ-yì* is what primarily captures Xunzi's conception of ritual, there are not many extensive analyses of the concept of *lǐ-yì* as such. Rather, it is generally assumed that Xunzi has used the terms "lǐ" and "lǐ yì" interchangeably. Chen Da-qi, for example, argues that *yì* is *lǐ* for Xunzi.² Similarly, Kurtis Hagen assumes that *lǐ-yì* is "nearly synonymous with lǐ."³ However, as Wei Zheng-tong aptly points out, if *lǐ* is equivalent to *yì*, it is difficult to see the point for Xunzi to use the expression "lǐ yì" instead of just "lǐ."⁴ There must be some reason for Xunzi to link *lǐ* with *yì*, yet few scholars have explored this linkage in discussing Xunzi's concept of ritual. Antonio Cua has a detailed and informative article that explores the various ways in which we can make sense of the co-occurrence of *lǐ* and *yì* in the *Xunzi*.⁵ However, the focus of the article is not on an analysis of Xunzi's concept of *lǐ-yì*. Cua accepts the established meaning of Confucian concepts of *lǐ* and *yì* and focuses instead on the different ways in which the two concepts are conceptually unified in Xunzi's thought.

In the *Xunzi*, although there are instances where *lǐ* seems to be used interchangeably with *lǐ-yì*,⁶ a cursory comparison of passages that discuss *lǐ* and *lǐ-yì* also reveals some subtle differences in the way Xunzi uses these concepts. When "lǐ" is used on its own, it is often used more narrowly to refer to tangible ritual practices that can be applied in action, such as how one should conduct oneself in the rite of mourning. When "lǐ" and "yì" appear together as a concept, it is used more broadly to refer to a general aspect of ritual practices that holds across situations and over time.⁷ In light of these observations, the first part of my investigation seeks to analyze *lǐ* and *yì* separately so as to elaborate on their significance in Xunzi's conception of ritual. In order to avoid the common practice of conflating *lǐ* and *lǐ-yì* in discussing Xunzi's conception of ritual, I hyphenate *lǐ-yì* in my discussion to suggest that *lǐ* and *yì* are each a distinctive dimension of ritual, though intimately linked to each other. This is not to suggest that *lǐ-yì* is an amalgamation of two stand-alone concepts, but an attempt to give a sustained treatment of the concept *lǐ-yì* by teasing out its nuances as much as possible. When I occasionally refer to *lǐ-yì* as "ritual," I am only adopting the translation for convenience to facilitate discussion.

Xunzi maintains that ritual has the functions of dividing (*fēn* 分), regulating (*jié* 節), and nourishing (*yang* 養). A common understanding of these functions is that ritual marks out social distinctions (*fēn*) so that goods in the society can be allocated

² See Chen Da-qi, *Xunzi xueshuo*, Taipei: Zhongyǎng wenwu gongyingshe, 1954, Chapter 9.

³ Kurtis Hagen, *The Philosophy of Xunzi: A Reconstruction*. Chicago: Open Court, 2007, p. 66 n24.

⁴ Wei Zheng-tong, *Xunzi yu gudai zhexue*, Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1992, p. 8.

⁵ See Antonio Cua, "The Problem of Conceptual Unity," In *Human Nature, Ritual, and History: Studies in Xunzi and Chinese Philosophy*, 2005, pp. 99-120. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press.

⁶ For example, while the function of *fēn* is most of time attributed to *lǐ-yì* in the text, there are also instances where the function of *fēn* is attributed to *lǐ*. Compare, for example, *Xunzi* 5/28 and

⁷ For example, in the expressions "giving order to *lǐ-yì* 治禮義" (3/21) "exalting *lǐ-yì* 隆禮義" (8/95) and "accumulating *lǐ-yì* 積禮義" (8/114), the focus is not on applying *lǐ* in action but on carrying out actions to promote *lǐ-yì*. It is also in this broader sense that Xunzi speaks of the transforming effect *lǐ-yì* has on human nature (23/40). See Cua's "The Problem of Conceptual Unity" for elaborate discussions of instances where these terms seem to be used interchangeably.

in such way that it both regulates people's desires (*jie*) and maximally satisfies people's desires (*yang*).⁸ Instead of directly challenging this reading of the functions of ritual, the present study also seeks to develop a different approach to understanding the functions of ritual and the kind of transformation effected by ritual. Scholarly opinions tend to differ substantially in this regard. There are two major groups of interpretations. Scholars like Antonio Cua and T. C. Kline understand transformation in terms of the reconfiguration of one's desires.⁹ Other scholars like David Wong and Kim-Chong Chong propose a stronger reading of Xunzi's notion of transformation, arguing that not only the desires, but also one's character, are radically changed through ritual transformation.¹⁰ The account developed in this paper is meant as a defense of the stronger view. While I agree with the main claim of the stronger view that it is the entire person, rather than just desires, that is radically changed by ritual, proponents of the stronger view often seem to have trouble articulating the additional component (in addition to desires) that occurs in the process of transformation of character. One reason for such difficulty is that the interpreters have accepted the somewhat ambiguous assumption that desires are the root of the problem that ritual addresses. The ambiguity is largely a result of the unqualified use of the term "desire" to capture both Xunzi's notions of *qíng* 情 (feelings characteristic of human beings) and *yù* 欲 (sensory desires or the state of being drawn by a certain thing).¹¹ Since it is unclear what some scholars meant by "desire," I do not intend to reject altogether the assumption that desires are the root of the problem.

As it will be argued below, the root of the problem ritual addresses is the natural inclination of the heart/mind. Ritual counteracts the problematic inclination of the heart/mind and enriches psychological capacities with the appropriate ethical content. This will prepare the ground for our analysis of the ideal effects of ritual on the person, thereby furthering our understanding of the functions of ritual and the nature of transformation it yields. From this, the last section of this paper seeks to extrapolate Xunzi's position that there is a certain pattern of human psychological constitution that is ethically ideal.

II. Root of the Problem

Let us first begin with Xunzi's explanation for why *lǐ-yì* is needed. According to Xunzi, human beings have problematic tendencies (*xíng e* 性惡) and a crucial function of *lǐ-yì* is that it can transform (*hua* 化) such problematic tendencies of

⁸ For a position similar to this, see for example Philip Ivanhoe, "A Happy Symmetry: Xunzi's Ethical Thought." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59.2: 309-322. Knoblock's translation of 19.1a also suggests that ritual is concerned with allocating goods in the society.

⁹ See Antonio Cua, "Dimensions of Lǐ (Propriety)"; T.C. Kline "Moral Agency and Motivation in the Xunzi" in T.C. Kline III and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds., *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000, pp. 135-175 and "The Therapy of Desire in Early Confucianism: Xunzi," *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 5.2: 235-246.

¹⁰ See David Wong, "Xunzi on Moral Motivation," in T. C. Kline III and Philip, J. Ivanhoe, eds., *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi*; Kim-chong Chong, *Early Confucian Ethics: Concepts and Arguments*, Chicago: Open Court, 2007, chapter 7.

¹¹ According to Xunzi, "yu is the response of qing." (22/63) The distinction Xunzi draws between *qing* and *yu* suggests that there is a difference between feelings one naturally has and the state of being drawn by a particular object. See p.7 for Xunzi's definition of *qing*.

human beings.¹² We can begin with Xunzi's remark that the reason ritual is needed is that human beings naturally have the tendency to pursue their objects of desires (*yu* 欲), which will lead to strife and disorder if left unchecked:

禮起於何也曰人生而有欲欲而不得則不能無求求而無度量分界則不能不爭爭則亂亂則窮先王惡其亂也故制禮義以分之以養人之欲給人之求使欲必不窮於物物必不屈於欲兩者相持而長是禮之所起也

Why does *lǐ* arise? Humans are born with desires. When they desire something but cannot obtain it, it is inevitable that there will be pursuits of their objects of desires. If there are no limits and boundaries to their pursuits of objects of desires, it is inevitable that there will be struggles. Struggles then lead to disorder; disorder leads to poverty. The early kings loathe such disorder; therefore, they devise *lǐ-yì* to apportion (*fēn*) it, to nurture (*yǎng*) people's desires, and to supply them what they pursue so that desires do not surpass things and things will not be exhausted by desires. The two sustain each other and become long-lasting. This is the origin of *lǐ*. (21/1-3)

Elsewhere, it is said that the pursuit of objects of desire is subject to the heart/mind (*xīn* 心). For the present purposes, it suffices to note that the heart/mind for Xunzi is the seat of both cognitive and affective activities:

欲不待可得而求者從所可欲不待可得所受乎天也求者從所可所受乎心也
Desire does not depend on whether its obtainment is possible but the one who pursues follows what is possible. That desire does not depend on whether the obtainment of their objects is possible is subject to Heaven. That the one who pursues follows what is possible is subject to the heart/mind. (22/57-8; K 22.5a)

We can infer from these two passages that ritual can in some way correct the heart/mind.¹³ I shall take this as a starting point and explore the way in which the heart/mind needs to be corrected by ritual.

According to Xunzi, the heart/mind has a natural preference for certain things.¹⁴ While the senses naturally prefer sounds and colours, the heart/mind prefers “profit” (*lì* 利):

目好色耳好聽口好味心好利...是皆生於人之情性者也

The eyes are fond of colours, ears are fond of sounds, the mouth is fond of tastes, the heart/mind is fond of profit...all these are products of human fact/inborn feelings (*qíng*) and nature. (3/25-26)

Xunzi also thinks that the natural state of the heart/mind is one that does not know *lǐ-yì* and is only concerned with *lì*:

¹² According to Xunzi, it is only through *lǐ-yì* devised by the sages that one's problematic nature can be modified and adorned, ordered, and transformed (23/40).

¹³ In this paper, I take for granted that the heart/mind, for Xunzi, is a defining capacity of the person; hence, a description is tantamount to a description of the person. I set aside the issue whether *xīn* constitutes personhood for Xunzi.

¹⁴ For a more elaborate argument on the heart/mind's natural preference for *lì*, see my paper “*Yu* in the Xunzi: Can Desire by Itself Motivate Action?”

人之生固小人無師無法則唯利之見耳...今是人之口腹安知禮義...無師無法則其心正其口腹也

Humans are originally born as petty persons. Without teachers and models, they will only see profit....Now how can the mouth and stomach of a person know *lǐ-yì*?...without teachers and models, a person's heart/mind is just like his mouth and stomach. (4/50-2)

It is presumably due to this natural preference of the heart/mind that it has a natural tendency to initiate the pursuit of *lì*. In the *Xunzi*, the term “*lì* 利” is often used in a narrower and more negative sense to denote what interests that pertain exclusively to the self.¹⁵ It follows from this that the objects of desires are automatically part of one's *lì*.¹⁶ Since the pursuit of the objects of desires is the reason *lǐ-yì* is needed, and since the pursuit stems from the heart/mind's natural preference for *lì*, we can further infer that the root of the problem lies in the heart/mind's natural preference for *lì*. This impression is reinforced by *Xunzi*'s belief that rulers who are fond of *lǐ-yì* do not have a heart/mind that covets *lì* (12/12). Let us examine closely this natural preference of the heart/mind that *Xunzi* finds problematic.

Xunzi characterizes the state in which one is guided by self-interest as *qīng* 傾. The term “*qīng*,” used adjectivally, can be translated literally as “being tilted” or “being skewed.” This suggests that the heart/mind is naturally drawn towards self-interest. Once the heart/mind comes into contact with objects of desire, the heart/mind will be naturally drawn away. According to *Xunzi*:

唯利所在無所不傾若是則可謂小人矣

Where only *lì* lies, there is nothing that does not tilt (*qīng*) the person/the heart/mind. Such kind of person can be called a petty person. (3/44; K 3.11)

When *Xunzi* says that a person is being skewed by *lì*, he seems to mean specifically that the heart/mind is skewed:

小物引之則其正外易其心內傾則不足以決庶理矣

If external objects (*wu*) attract it, then its proper position is externally changed. When one's the heart/mind internally tilted (*qīng*), it is not enough to determine even gross patterns. (21/56-8; K 21.7b)

In the *Xunzi*, the term “*wu* 物” is frequently used to denote the objects of desire.¹⁷ It is implied in the above passage that the heart/mind has a tendency to be pulled away by external objects of desire. The imagery of the skewed heart/mind further suggests that

¹⁵ For instance, one's material possessions such as emolument or grains are considered as one's *lì* (11/78-80). It is occasionally used in a broader and more positive sense to denote whatever that is beneficial to the general public (e.g. 9/72; 18/19). When *Xunzi* speaks of one's natural inclination, the term “*lì*” is used in the narrower and negative sense.

¹⁶ “*Lì* 利” is frequently associated with concepts related to material possessions such as *huo* 貨 (goods, commodities), *cai* 財 (valuables, wealth), *fu* 富 (wealth, abundance), *gong* 功 (achievements, good results), and *quan* 權 (authority, political power) (e.g. 5/18, 8/90, 10/8, 4/19). Elsewhere, it is also said that humans all *yu* to have the entire kingdom, good food, big palaces, achievement, and admiration of the people (e.g. 11/74-76).

¹⁷ One recurring idea, for example, is that *wu* in the world are inadequate to satisfy *yu*. See, for example, *Xunzi* 4/72 (K 4.12/1/195), 10/5 (K 10.1/2/120), 19/3 (K 19.1a/3/55).

the heart/mind's natural preference for *li* will translate into a tendency to be pulled away by objects of *li*. By contrast, the ideal state of the heart/mind, one that is not skewed by *li*, is said to be guided by *yì*:

義之所在不傾於權不顧其利舉國而與之不為改視重死持義而不撓是士君子之勇也

Where *yì* is, one is not skewed (*qīng*) by power, does not care about his own profit, does not change standpoint even when offered the whole state, uphold *yì* and does not bend even though he takes death seriously. This is the courage of scholarly superior person. (4/19-20)¹⁸

Contrary to the petty person who is dominated by considerations of *li*, the superior person is said to be guided by considerations of *yì* and can use the “public *yì* (*gong yì* 公義)” to trump “selfish desires (*sī yu* 私欲)” (e.g. 2/49; 12/59). The term “*sī*” is usually translated as “private” or “selfish.” The emphasis of *sī* in Xunzi's usage is on what pertains solely to the self. It is frequently contrasted with *gong* 公 (public, impartial) to convey the point that one cannot place what pertains to the self before what is at stake for the public (e.g. 8/121; 13/45). *Sī* is also used in conjunction with *yù* (desires) to refer to desires that pertain exclusively to the self. One who relies on *sī* is partial in their view of things (21/3-4) and cannot see things in a proper light (3/40-1; 12/86). As opposed to one who is concerned with *li* is unable to distinguish right from wrong, those who do not choose on the basis of *sī* and is therefore able to distinguish right from wrong. The juxtaposition between *li* and *yì* shows that Xunzi's concern is not directed at benefits that pertain to the self in general but at benefits that pertain to the self exclusively.¹⁹ In my subsequent discussion, I will for convenience label this problematic sense of *li* as “self-interest.”

III. *Lǐ-yì*

In light of the above observations, we can infer that *lǐ-yì* targets the problematic tendencies of the heart/mind to seek after self-interest.²⁰ This is also consistent with the linkage between knowing *lǐ-yì* and not having a skewed heart/mind in Xunzi (13/25-6). We can explain the difference between a skewed heart/mind and an upright heart/mind in terms of the heart/mind being guided respectively by self-interest or by *yì*. Xunzi makes it clear that the ethically superior persons are ones whose consideration of *yì* overcomes their consideration of self-interest (27/65-7). In the text, *yì* is also characterized as public (*gong* 公) and is contrasted with selfish desires (2/49). This suggests that notion of *yì* precludes any considerations of self-interest. According to Xunzi, the basis of judgment for a heart/mind that is guided by *yì* should be *Dao*, the correct ethical standards. It is by fully abiding by *Dao* that a skewed

¹⁸ I understand that term “*quan* 權” in this context to refer to political or social power held by authority and influential people. Xunzi adopts this sense of *quan* when he uses the compound expression “*quan lì* 權利” (e.g. 1/49) and “*quan shì* 權勢” (e.g. 6/36). The usage of *quan* in this passage is therefore different from the sense of weighing options discussed here.

¹⁹ I am grateful to Peter Wong for helping me to make clear this distinction.

²⁰ I have also argued elsewhere that, for Xunzi, the source of ethical failure lies in the heart/mind and what Xunzi means by human nature is bad is that *xin* has predisposed inclination to seek the objects of desires for oneself in a way that disregard others. See Winnie Sung, “*Yu* in the *Xunzi*: Can Desire by Itself Motivate Action,” forthcoming in *Dao* 11:4.

heart/mind can be rectified. Xunzi defines *Dao* as the proper standard one should observe:

道者古今之正權也離道而內自擇則不知禍福之所託

Dao, from the past to the present, has been the correct counterweight. If [one] abandons *Dao* and chooses by own standards from within, then he does not know where misfortune and fortune lie. (22/74)

We do not have to go into detail on the concept *Dao* here. For the present discussion, it suffices to use the term “*Dao*” in a general sense to denote Xunzi’s conception of ethical standards. Since a person who acts on *yì* observes ethical standards, he will not change his standpoint in the face of self-interest such as immense material benefits (e.g. 13/27; 30/8-9). Unlike those who are guided only by considerations of self-interest can do anything to pursue what benefits oneself, there are certain things that those who follow *yì* simply will not do to advance their own interest.²¹

We can infer from the above observations that the emphasis of “*yì*” in *lǐ-yì* is on counteracting the natural tendency to seek after self-interest so that one can abide by ethical standards. As a capacity, *yì* refers to one’s capacity to disregard considerations of self-interest; as an ethical quality, it refers to one’s observance of ethical standards. In the following, I will show that *yì* as a capacity is necessary for one’s engagement in *lǐ* practices and that *lǐ* practices will in return actualize the quality of *yì*. It should be noted that even though *yì* precludes one from judging on the basis of self-interest, this is still a step away from saying that one’s concern has to be directed towards others for their own sake. It is possible that, by ethical standards, what benefits the self in a particular situation is indeed weightier than what benefits others. For example, it could be in accordance with ethical standards for someone who is ill to choose to rest at home rather than babysitting her friend’s child. This means that a heart/mind guided by *yì* can still take into consideration what benefits the self. It just cannot adopt self-interest as basis for judgment.²²

The emphasis of “*lǐ* 禮” in *lǐ-yì* is on giving expression and filling in ethical content to one’s feelings. When used as a single term, *lǐ* is often discussed in relation to *qíng*. By contrast, *yì* as a stand alone term is never used in relation with *qíng*.²³ Xunzi defines *qíng* as “the feelings of like and dislike, of delight and anger, and of sorrow and joy that are given from birth” (22/3). As Kwong-loi Shun points out, the term “*qíng*” is often used in classical Chinese texts to refer to “the facts about a situation” or to “certain deep features that reveal what things of this kind are really like.”²⁴ We can also find *qíng* in the *Xunzi* being used to refer to features that are

²¹ It should be noted that there is a distinction between the quality of firmness displayed by someone who abides by *Dao* and one’s rigidity in action. It is exactly because of this firmness in abiding by *Dao* that one has to be flexible in action. For example, a filial son is required to disobey his father where appropriate because following *yì* is more important than following his father (29/3-6). Hence, what Xunzi finds problematic is not one’s being flexible in actions as such but one’s being flexible in a way that is not grounded in *Dao*.

²² I am indebted to an anonymous referee for prompting me to address this point more clearly.

²³ There is one reference to the “*qíng* of *yì* 義之情” but the usage of *qíng* in this instance is different from its usage in relation to *lǐ* and *Dao* (16/79).

²⁴ Kwong-loi Shun, *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, p.184. See, idem, pp.184-5 for a detailed discussion of the usages of *qíng* in the classical texts.

characteristic of human beings.²⁵ For example, Xunzi maintains that the presence or absence of *qíng*, like the phenomena of life and death, is not subject to human modification in any substantial way (22/3). In addition, there are passages that present the *qíng* of human beings as what all people will do in certain situations, such as dusting their caps when they have just washed their hair (3/25-6). Xunzi also speaks of human beings having a common *qíng* such that they all desire similar things like wealth and the prestige of the Son of Heaven (4/72; 11/23-4). Since these feelings are deep-seated features of human beings, they are presumably difficult to be changed in a substantial way. Hence, we can understand *qíng* in Xunzi as encompassing feelings that are characteristic features of human beings.

In the “Lǐ Lun 禮論” chapter, Xunzi describes *lǐ* as what modifies and beautifies the common *qíng* of human beings (19/75). For example, the mourning rites arise because human beings should have feeling of remembrance and longing for their loved ones. Without the mourning rites, these natural feelings cannot have expression. For this reason, the early kings establish a form that allows one to express their feelings of remembrance and longing for their loved ones (19/119-120). It is said that when what one does coincides with *lǐ*, it is an indication that her *qíng* is secured in *lǐ* (2/38). According to Xunzi, *lǐ* is at its perfection when both *qíng* and the form of *lǐ* (*wen* 文) reach to their utmost. These *lǐ* forms, such as one’s clothing and living condition, are decorative practices that emanate the *qíng* of human beings (e.g. 19/69-75). While colorful clothes with elaborate embroideries emanate joyous feelings, coarse hempen garments emanate sorrowful feelings. Ideally, *qíng* and the *lǐ* forms should go together in balance as one in the inside and one on the outside (19/37-40).²⁶ These observations suggest that *qíng* is the reason why *lǐ* is needed and that *lǐ* expresses *qíng*. In what sense does *lǐ* express *qíng* then? One way to understand this, which is also the conventional interpretation, is that *lǐ* channels or makes manifest in concrete forms the feelings that are already present in the inside. Another way to understand is that *lǐ* gives certain feelings substantive ethical content. It seems that the latter is a more plausible reading of Xunzi’s view.

It is worth noting that in explaining the importance of the three-year mourning period, Xunzi says that the rite is needed to “match up with (*cheng* 稱) *qíng* and establish forms (*wen*)” so as to adorn and make clear social relations (19/95).²⁷ In the text, the construction of “X *cheng* Y” implies that Y calls for certain degree of X as substantiation, or else Y would lack substance and expression. For example, a teacher’s words should *cheng* his role as a teacher (27/85) and one’s abilities should *cheng* the position one holds in office (18/40-1). The role of teacher calls for the presence of certain abilities, knowledge, and character. If someone fails to possess any of them, it is difficult to see how he is a teacher in a full, substantive sense. Due to this mismatch between his role and what is required of his role, he becomes less of a teacher. In other words, he is only a teacher in a minimal sense. This suggests that the presence of Y (being a teacher) is not subject to the presence of X (having good qualities), nor does the presence of X entail the presence of Y; however, the presence

²⁵ See the Appendix of A. C. Graham’s “The Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature,” *Ching-hua hsueh-pao (Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies)* 6: pp. 215-271.

²⁶ See also Xunzi 27/45.

²⁷ The early usages of *wen* are mainly used in the sense of decorative forms or adornment (e.g. *Guoyu Zhouyu* 26; *Zuozhuan* B12.7). When contrasted with “zhi 質,” which roughly means substance or supporting material, *wen* takes on the connotation of a form that gives its content expression (e.g. *Lunyu* 6.18, 12.8).

of X is constitutive of Y. Without X, Y only exists in a superficial and bare sense. On this reading, what Xunzi means by the rite “matches with” *qíng* seems to be that *qíng* calls for a matching amount of ritual practices to substantiate it. Without the proper ritual practices, one’s ethically appropriate feelings are only present in a minimal and bare sense. In the mourning rites, for example, one needs to go through certain ethically appropriate motions so that one’s feelings for their deceased loved can be filled in with substantive content. Hence, Xunzi seems to think that *qíng* exists only in a minimal or bare sense without *lǐ*. It is through *lǐ* that *qíng* is given ethical content and therefore a richer expression. On this interpretation, *lǐ* does not channel full-blown feelings into concrete visible forms. It also does not understand *lǐ* as having feedback or conditioning effect that makes one develop feelings one has not yet acquired. Rather, it regards *lǐ* practices as integral to the process of enriching and refining feelings that human beings characteristically have.

Xunzi’s view can perhaps be better appreciated with an analogy to wine tasting. Although human beings are all born with the capacity to taste, it is most likely that an oenophile will have a qualitatively richer experience in drinking a glass of fine wine than a person who is untrained in wine-tasting. Her knowledge of the standards in wine assessment and her grasp of technical terminologies will enhance her sensitivity in differentiating and perceiving the aromas, texture, and other characteristics of the wine.²⁸ There are also certain things she can do to maximize her experience of the wine. The untrained person, by contrast, gulps down the wine and finds it “nice.” Compared with the wine connoisseur, the untrained person’s feeling that the wine is nice is shallow and lacks nuance. Analogously, one’s knowledge of the proper standards through *lǐ-yì* will refine one’s sensitivity to the various dimensions in the ritual practices. Thus, compared with those who are untrained by *lǐ-yì*, the feelings of those who are trained by *lǐ-yì* are both richer and more refined in content, which befit the context and the special relation to whom they stand.

The above analysis shows that the emphasis of *yì* is on disregarding consideration for self-interest and abiding by ethical standards, while the emphasis of *lǐ* is on the expression of ethically appropriate feelings. We can further infer from the text Xunzi’s assumption that it is only when one has exercised the capacity of *yì* to counteract natural tendency to pursue self-interest that one’s feelings can be expressed in an ethically appropriate way. Xunzi defines *lǐ* in terms of *gong* 恭 and *jing* 敬, suggesting that it should be the kind of attitude that accompanies *lǐ* performances (13/43). *Gong* and *jing* are often rendered respectively as “respectful” and “reverential.” For convenience, we will label Xunzi’s conception of *gong* and *jing* as an attitude of respect. According to *Analects* 5.16, *gong* concerns how one conducts oneself, whereas *jing* concerns how one serve those above. The *Xunzi* text retains the sense that *gong* is directed towards the self while *jing* is directed towards others. *Gong* is used to describe the state in which one’s body, thoughts, or intention are courteous. In this regard, *gong* does not immediately involve how one relates to others. Moreover, *gong* is also associated with moderation (*jian* 儉), suggesting that *gong* requires the exercise of self-control in conducting oneself whether it is in action or in thoughts. *Jing* in the *Xunzi* is akin to “reverence” in the sense that it can be an attitude directed to those above oneself,²⁹ but it is clearly not limited to those who are above

²⁸ I am indebted to Karyn Lai for helping me to clarify this analogy.

²⁹ In both the *Xunzi* and other early texts, *jing* is associated with an attitude one should assume towards Heaven and the spirits (e.g. *Shijing* 3.2; *Xunzi* 3/16). The impression that *jing* is concerned with the attitude towards those above oneself is further intensified by the references to *jing* as the attitude a younger brother towards his elder brother (e.g. *Zuozhuan* 32/11; *Xunzi* 12/21).

oneself. Xunzi maintains that a benevolent person should *jing* both the ethically worthy and the unworthy people (13/39-41) and a good ruler in his high position should also be *jing* (14/16-17). It is also worth noting that *jing* entails swiftness (*ji* 疾 13/31). It is often contrasted with lack of speed and indolent attitude (*man* 慢) (3/16-9).

Two important inferences can be made from Xunzi's conception of the respectful attitude one who practices *li* should display. First, a respectful person must have made a commitment to abide by ethical standards. The contrast between a person who is *jing* and an indolent person mentioned above is significant because it is conceivable that an indolent person is also alerted to exigencies in a situation but is not prompted to respond to the situation in any way. What differentiates an indolent person and a person who is *jing* is probably that the indolent person does not hold herself to ethical standards, thus unwilling to make the necessary effort to respond in an ethically appropriate way. By contrast, the person who is *jing* must have committed herself to observing ethical standards and is therefore prompt and diligent in response. This explains the readiness to make ethical demonstrated by those who are *jing*. It also helps us better understand why Xunzi thinks that *jing* should ideally be what underlies devotion (*zhong* 忠) (13/31), for it is only when one is committed to following ethical standards that one will be ready to devote one's efforts in an ethically appropriate way. The first dimension is tied in with the second dimension of *jing*. Recall that Xunzi regards abiding by ethical standards and pursuing self-interest as excusive. If one has made a commitment to abide by ethical standards, one must be ever cautious of the heart/mind's natural inclination to pursue self-interest. This is supported by the association Xunzi made between an attitude of respect and that of restrain and caution (*jin* 謹 and *shen* 慎) (e.g. 4/12). Hence, the two dimensions that constitute the ideal attitude of respect is one's commitment to abide by ethical standards and one's mindfulness of the ever-present possibility that one will revert to following natural inclination. The dimension that one has to be alert to exigencies in circumstances that call for immediate ethical response is captured by *jing*; the dimension that one has to be restrained and cautious of the ever-present danger of reverting to following natural inclination is captured by *gong*.

In light of the above observations, the reason Xunzi uses *jing* to refer to both the attitude directed towards those above oneself and those who have a presumably lower social or ethical status is that *jing* is an attitude that arises from the way one views oneself in relation to others, rather than the way one stands in relation to others. After the heart/mind is rectified by *li-yi*, one's focus is shifted from what interests the self to what is in accordance with ethical standards. Hence, one can become respectful and deferential (*cirang* 辭讓) in her dealing with others.³⁰ Such a shift of perspective entails a perceptual "bending (*qu* 訕)" of oneself in one's engagement with others and yet one's commitment to adhering ethical standards also ensures that she does not improperly abase oneself or become servile.³¹ The person is reverent towards others not because others are socially or ethically superior to her but because she is the kind

³⁰ In this sense, concepts such as *jing* (reverence), *zhong* (loyalty), *cirang* (deference) have a reflective dimension for Xunzi because they can only be attained by first counteracting natural inclination. For example, *zhong* (devotion/loyalty) is different from pre-reflective loyalty because while the latter can be a raw natural affection one has towards those who stand in special relation to oneself, *zhong* requires mental effort to countervail natural tendencies to satisfy self-interest.

³¹ In contrast to *qu*, *bei* 卑 is always used in a negative sense by Xunzi to denote low moral standing. This is probably due to the difference between abasing oneself and adopting a perspective that sees oneself as below others.

of person who abides by ethical standards and does not solely focus on the importance of the self. In other words, whether one exhibits *jing* does not depend on whether the other party is in fact worthy or unworthy but on the ethical attention one assumes. Although the ethical attention of a respectful individual is directed to ethical standards rather than the self, such an individual will not regard herself as ethically superior to others, for she is acutely aware that she, like everyone else, can easily revert to following natural inclination and fall short of ethical standards. Furthermore, since Xunzi thinks that it is only when someone who is secured in *li* that one can be *jing*, the response of someone who *jing* must be sustained by ethically appropriate feelings, rather than a mere commitment to uphold moral standards that is devoid of feelings.

Let us now spell out the interdependent and complementary relationship between *li* and *yi* in the concept of *li-yi*. Since the proper respectful attitude that underlies *li*-performances can only be attained when one is committed to observing ethical standards, it is in virtue of the capacity *yi* that one's feelings can be ordered by *li* in an ethically appropriate way. In this sense, *yi* is conceptually necessary for *li*. A person whose feelings are ethically appropriate then assumes a respectful attitude that prompts her to conduct herself and respond to others in an ethically appropriate way. In this sense, it is in virtue of the *li* that one can actually abide by ethical standards. This means that *li* is necessary to the actualization of *yi*. When both *li* and *yi* are fully realized, actions that are in accordance with ethical standards are also actions that express the ethically appropriate feelings. Hence, in an ideal state, *li* and *yi* becomes identified with each other in Xunzi's concept of *li-yi*.

IV. Ideal Effects of *Li-Yi*

With the above clarification of *li-yi*, we can better understand the three main functions of *li-yi* mentioned in the beginning of this article. A key function of *li* is drawing social distinctions (*fen* 分) (5/23-8). According to Xunzi, the reason human beings are able to form societies but animals cannot is that human beings can draw social distinctions by exercising the capacity *yi* (9/69-71). For Xunzi, the distinctions between noble and base, old and young all have their own weight (10/16-7). Since *li* are delineations of the proper ethical standards and boundaries (in Xunzi's words, the "marker of ethical standards") (17/48-51),³² when *li-yi* is employed to *fen*, the kind of distinctions made on the basis of *li* will be in accordance with ethical standards – the noble and the base, the old and the young, and the wise and the fool are properly distinguished (4/73-74). Given these objective distinctions, one's feelings should also be appropriate to the relation in which one stands. For example, it is appropriate for one to have more grief for one's parents than one's distant relatives, but not vice versa. It is for this reason that the mourning rite prescribes different lengths of mourning period for different people so that the length of the period reflects the appropriate degree of affection that parallels the kind of relationship one stands to the deceased. While *li* gives expression to one's feelings, it also ensures that feelings are manifested in an ethically appropriate way. It should be in this sense that Xunzi

³² Note that in another instance Xunzi says *li-yi* is the marker of *Dao* (27/10-11). This is another example that shows Xunzi occasionally uses *li* and *li-yi* interchangeably.

speaks of *lǐ* as “the standard of regulation (*jié* 節)” (14/20).³³ Through *lǐ*, one’s feelings are regulated so that they are expressed in a properly balanced way that is in accordance with ethical standards. In the mourning rite, for example, since it is inappropriate to feel disgusted by the corpse of one’s loved ones, the body has to be adorned so that the inappropriate feelings of disgust towards one’s loved ones will not be aroused. Hence, it is said that *lǐ* “trims what is long, extends what is short, cut back what is excessive, and enrich what is deficient” (19/63).³⁴

According to Xunzi, in an ideal state where both *qíng* and ritual practices are maximally expressed, one finds delight and satisfaction (19/26). Xunzi stresses that one who observes *lǐ-yì* experiences a *greater kind* of satisfaction, for nothing provides security (*an* 安) and ease (*le* 樂) to the person more than *lǐ-yì* does (16/46-8). Although all human beings desire security and honour, it is only through observing ethical standards that one finds great security (大安) and great honour (大榮) (11/1). The question as to why observing ethical standards will result in greater satisfaction will be taken up in section V. For now, let us focus on the kind of satisfaction that *lǐ-yì* yields.³⁵ On the proposed interpretation, this is because the person is transformed by *lǐ-yì*, her heart/mind becomes rectified and to borrow Xunzi’s imagery, the rectified heart/mind is grounded in *Dao*. As a corollary, all her feelings and decisions now stem from a straightened heart/mind, rather than a skewed heart/mind. It is in this sense that she is “transformed”. Hence, the feeling of security and contentment that arises from a rectified heart/mind is qualitatively different from that which arises from a skewed heart/mind that blindly pursues self-interest. The former should approximate something like fulfillment, contentment, completeness, and a sense of being grounded; by contrast, the latter is akin to desire gratification and is only transient. In such cases, even if one obtains her objects of desire, she will not be able to experience the ideal kind of contentment. It is most likely in this sense that Xunzi thinks the feeling of security and contentment that arises from a rectified heart/mind is “greater” than a skewed heart/mind that blindly pursues self-interest.

It should be clear by now that although *lǐ-yì* nurtures (*yǎng* 養) desires, it is not that done through allocating goods in the society to maximally satisfy people’s desires. The point of *lǐ-yì* lies in training the heart/mind to shift from its natural focus on self-interest to ethical standards.³⁶ It corrects one’s natural inclination to be concerned only with self-interest and brings out feelings in an ethically appropriate way. Hence, the obtainment of the ideal kind of satisfaction, for Xunzi, is consequent upon one’s ethical standing. The proposed interpretation significantly differs from the line of argument that understands *lǐ* as that which keeps in check certain inappropriate feelings. Chen Daqi, for example, thinks that it is by limiting or checking against certain feelings that *lǐ* brings these feelings into alignment with *Dao*.³⁷ On Hagen’s account, “some impulses need to be suppressed during a period of training”³⁸ It is

³³ Xunzi also understands *yì* 義 (propriety) in terms of *jié* the person within and *jié* the thousand things without (17/78). The subsequent line says that a person who *jié* will “produce peace 安” for the ruler above and create a “fine-tuned balance 調” for those below (16/78-9).

³⁴ See also *Xunzi* 19/74.

³⁵ Xunzi also correlates appropriately measured happiness and anger with order of the four seasons and the movement of the stars (19/25-28).

³⁶ I am indebted to Kwong-loi Shun for helping me to think through this point and for letting me consult his paper, “Early Confucian Moral Psychology.”

³⁷ See Chen Da-qi, *Xunzi xueshuo*.

³⁸ See Kurtis Hagen, “Artifice and Virtue in the *Xunzi*,” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*, p.90.

unclear if Hagen has drawn a distinction between natural inclinations for objects of desires, i.e. *yu*, on one hand, and feelings human beings characteristically have, i.e. *qíng*, on the other. Although Hagen has also pointed out that practicing *lǐ-yì* is indeed satisfying for human beings, they tend to see satisfaction derived from obtaining objects of desires and the satisfaction derived from observing ethical standards as of the same kind. On the proposed interpretation, the process of ritual training counteracts the natural inclination of the heart/mind to pursue objects of desires rather than *qíng* itself. What is being changed is not the objects of desires but the state of heart/mind. It is only when *lǐ-yì* has corrected the heart/mind that one can come to take delight in *lǐ-yì*. The sense of ease and satisfaction experienced is a consequence of correcting the state of the heart/mind. Moreover, since the heart/mind's inclination to pursue objects of desire is the root of the problem to begin with, it is unlikely that Xunzi would think the problematic natural inclination can be corrected by maximally satisfying selfish desires. In Xunzi's words, the "impurities" of a person should not be modified on the basis of these impurities but by removing the impurities. The superior gives order to *lǐ-yì* and does not give order to what is contrary to *lǐ-yì* (3/20-24). Hence, it is by first correcting the root of the problem, namely, the heart/minds natural tendency to pursue objects of desire, that the person can be rectified.

V. Possible Assumption

If my above interpretation is correct, I shall put forth the following speculation. An implicit assumption Xunzi could have adopted is that what allows human beings to become ethical is a certain ideal pattern that underlies *qíng*. That observing *lǐ-yì* entails greater satisfaction might have to do with Xunzi's understanding that there are certain factual characteristics of human beings that can be arranged into an orderly pattern – *lǐ*^a 理 – by ritual.³⁹ Xunzi often speaks of the ritual practices, *lǐ*, as having a pattern, *lǐ*^a (19/30-31). It is also said that the ideal form of *lǐ*, *wen*, is coupled with *lǐ*^a (19/21). According to Paul Demiéville, *lǐ*^a in its earliest occurrence is probably used verbally to mean dividing land into lots.⁴⁰ In the Warring States texts, the term "lǐ^a" is linked to the activity of dressing jade.⁴¹ As a noun, *lǐ*^a means the veins in jade. The

³⁹ This pattern can well be one that aligns with a cosmological pattern. Xunzi also correlates appropriately measured happiness and anger with order of the four seasons and the movement of the stars (19/25-28). There is also a clear connection between *Dao* and *lǐ*^a in the *Xunzi*. According to Xunzi, those who only have partial knowledge of *Dao* are shut off from the great *lǐ*^a. In the opening passage of the "Jie Bi" chapter, it is said that "All people suffer from being obscured (*bi* 蔽) by one bend (*qu* 曲) and are shut off from the great *lǐ*^a (21/1). While in another passage, Xunzi criticizes other thinkers' understanding for being obscured by one aspect (*bi*) and says that those who know the bend see things from one corner of *Dao* (21/21-24). In addition, there is also a correlation between how well one knows *Dao* and how well one put things into order. The superior person who is guided by *Dao* is able to *lǐ*^a Heaven and Earth without uncertainty (12/28; K12.3/2/179). There is another passage that says the Heaven and Earth is not *lǐ*^a if there is no superior person (*Xunzi* 9/65-6).

⁴⁰ Wing-tsit Chan, "The Evolution of the Neo-Confucian Concept *Lǐ* as Principle," *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies*, p. 123. The term appears in the *Shijing* in the sentence "wo qiang wo *lǐ*^a 我疆我理" in *Shijing* (2/6/6). In the *Zuozhuan*, the ancient kings are also said to *lǐ*^a the land in accordance with what is suitable for its produce (*Zuozhuan* 797).

⁴¹ As Wing-tsit Chan notes, both the *Yinwenzi* and the *Hanfeizi* understand jade as a piece of crude stone that has been dressed. See Chan "The Evolution of the Neo-Confucian Concept *Lǐ* as Principle," p.128.

term is later evolved to refer to the pattern of a thing.⁴² Since one has to follow the veins in the jade in order to polish jade, *lǐ^a* as a verb probably has to do with putting things into an orderly pattern by observing the factual characteristics of a thing. Here we can infer two intertwined connotations of *lǐ^a*: the underlying pattern of a thing and one's putting things into order in light of the pattern. The former concerns given factual characteristics of an item that are not subject to modification; the latter concerns activities that bring order to that item by observing the given characteristics. Just as the natural veins of jade are already there but await the activity of dressing jade to put them into order. In speaking of ritual as having *lǐ^a*, Xunzi probably means that there are certain given pattern underlying *qíng* by virtue of which human feelings are ordered in an ethically appropriate way. Due to the natural inclination of human beings to pursue self-interest, *qíng* by default is not arranged in accordance with this pattern. It is only by counteracting our natural inclinations and observing ethical standards through exercising *yì* that one's feelings are in line with the pattern and hence become ethically appropriate. The kind of human activities that put *qíng* into this orderly pattern is precisely *lǐ*. In other words, *lǐ* is not something that is arbitrarily devised by the sage kings but is derived from observing the given pattern of *qíng*. It also does not force one to conform to ethical standards. Through one's engagement in these ritual practices, the pattern that underlies one's *qíng* is brought into sharper focus. Presumably, the more this pattern in one's *qíng* is brought into sharper focus, the more one's feelings are ethically appropriate.

Xunzi famously claims in the “Wang zhi” chapter that what distinguishes human beings from plants and animals is that human beings have *yì* (9/69-71). But if my speculation is correct, another distinctive capacity of human beings that is not explicitly spelt out by Xunzi is *qíng*. More precisely, it is the malleability of emotional propensities that can be ordered and shaped in accordance with an ideal pattern. This will mean that the point of ritual is not just correcting the state of the heart/mind but it is also the same process that shapes and develops the distinctive capacities of human beings. If so, then this ideal pattern will have both descriptive and normative dimensions. It is descriptive in the sense that it is a psychological fact about human beings; it is normative in the sense that given we are human beings, we have to bring ourselves in line with this pattern. Even if Xunzi does think that there is such a pattern, it does not entail that the reason one feels comfortable when practices ritual is that ritual conforms to innate human characteristics. As discussed earlier, ritual is not a set of artifices that merely channels innate human tendencies into the external. Rather, it can actively define the content of one's *qíng*.⁴³ Hence, it is not necessary for Xunzi to posit the existence of some innate moral tendencies. Up to this point of investigation, we have not found any claims or assumptions in Xunzi that would contradict his claim that human nature is bad (*è*).

My hypothesis proposed here will receive stronger support from a full investigation of Xunzi's concept of *Dao*, the questions of why *lǐ-yì* works, and why human beings abide by *Dao*. These are important issues I cannot pursue further due to the scope of this paper. If the interpretation being proposed here is correct, the present investigation can contribute to a larger study of moral psychology and moral development in Xunzi's thought.

⁴² In the *Mencius*, for example, *lǐ^a* is used to mean the harmonious pattern of music (*Mencius* 5B:1). And in the *Xunzi*, *lǐ^a* is once used to refer to the pattern of a face (*Xunzi* 21/55).

⁴³ For an example of this view, see Paul Goldin *Rituals of the Way: The Philosophy of Xunzi*. Chicago: Open Court, 1999, chapter 3.

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