

Is New-Confucianism Still Confucianism?

A Comparison between *Ren* in the Philosophy of Tu Weiming and Classic Confucians

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1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Confucius 孔子 (*Kongzi*, Master Kong, 551 – 479 BCE) lived approximately 2500 years ago. His philosophy lives on to this day in the philosophical movement we now call New-Confucianism. But exactly how much of the first, Classical Confucianism is still visible in contemporary New-Confucianism? Is it suitable to consider New-Confucians to be proper Confucians? These questions will be answered through a case study, in which Classical Confucianism will be represented by three Confucian thinkers: Confucius, Mencius 孟子 (*Mengzi*, Master Meng, ca. 371 – 289 BCE), and Xunzi 荀子 (Master Xun, ca. 310 – ca. 210 BCE). New-Confucianism will be represented in this thesis by Tu Weiming 杜维明 (pinyin: Du Weiming, 1940 –), as he is one of the most prominent and authoritative New-Confucians.¹ Besides, he is considered to be “almost single-handedly responsible for the revival of Confucianism in China.”²

I will compare the philosophy of Tu Weiming with the philosophy of the three Classical Confucian thinkers on the basis of *ren* 仁. *Ren* is an important concept frequently used in both the Classical Confucianism of Confucius, Mencius and Xunzi and in the New-Confucianism of Tu. Considering the scholarly attention devoted to *ren*, it is a difficult and hard to grasp concept. Much attention will be devoted to illustrating this concept in Classical and New-Confucianism. I will analyze *ren* in the texts of the four philosophers: (1) the *Lunyu* (论语, *Analects*) of Confucius, (2) the *Mengzi* of Mencius, (3) the *Xunzi* of Xunzi, and (4) multiple essays by Tu Weiming.

The remainder of this introduction contains a literature review, research questions and hypotheses. Then, I list a brief overview of what to expect in each chapter of this thesis. This introduction ends with a concise introduction of the central figures and texts. And finally, I will lay out the contents and present linguistic choices.

¹ Lodén, 2006, 182.

² Swain, 2017, 221.

1.2 Literature review

When glancing over Ralph Weber's bibliography of Tu Weiming's works, it is quite evident that he has produced many books, papers, speeches, and lectures.³ This up-to-date list spans over 70 pages, listing almost every single item Tu Weiming has published. On the other hand, there are little publications with Tu Weiming as the subject in English literature. Many of these publications are biographical or focus on the outlines of his philosophy. Most of the time they are part of a larger work on New-Confucianism.⁴ This might have to do with Tu Weiming being often categorized as a philosopher of the third wave of New-Confucians. This third wave is a fairly recent movement.

There are scholars who focus more in depth on the philosophy of Tu Weiming. For example Berthrong, who studied Tu's axiology, or on Tu's stance obtaining knowledge through practice by Chi.⁵ Tsai further explores the obtaining of knowledge, while coupling Tu's Confucian theory to humanism.⁶ Tu's philosophy is often compared with Western philosophy. For example, Mollgaard's work suggests that Western "philosophers fail to realize that Confucian discourse is in an entirely different register from Western philosophical discourse."⁷ Yet in his article he still compares Tu's philosophy with Western philosophy, whereas this thesis solely focuses on Chinese philosophy.

Because *ren* is such an important concept in Confucianism, it goes without saying that many scholars have conducted research on this topic. They have done so for almost all aspects of it. Chinese scholar of philosophy Chan wrote an article on the evolution of *ren*.⁸ He started with the meaning before Confucius and ended with the New-Confucian Xiong Shili 熊十力 (1885 – 1968). Yang focused on the transition of the aesthetic meaning of *ren* to the moral meaning of *ren*, originally given to it by Confucius.⁹ Luo on the other hand compared *ren* with another concept in Confucianism, righteousness (义 *yi*), to find out which one is more important for Confucianism.¹⁰ What these works all have in common is that they try to find the true meaning of *ren*.

³ Weber, 2007.

⁴ See for example: Bresciani, 2001, 409-17; Lodén, 2006, 181-2.

⁵ Berthrong, 2008; Chi, 2005.

⁶ Tsai, 2008.

⁷ Mollgaard, 2007, 397.

⁸ Chan, 1955.

⁹ Yang, 2019.

¹⁰ Luo, 2011.

As can be concluded from this literature review, not much research has been conducted on the philosophy of Tu Weiming, and more specifically on *ren* in his philosophy. This gap in the literature is precisely where I locate my research. It will prove useful in the debate on New-Confucianism, as it will give insight into how modern-day Confucians interpret and use the roots of Confucianism. Their usage may prove to be close to the original usage, meaning that it is fair to see them as Confucians. But if their usage is far removed from the traditional and once intended usage, is it then fair to still use the term Confucianism? This thesis will not address the translational issue of the term 'Confucianism', but rather addresses its contents.¹¹

1.3 Research Questions and Hypotheses

To fill the gap currently existing in the literature, this thesis will focus on the topic of *ren* in the philosophy of Tu Weiming. This will be done using the following research question: How does *ren* in the philosophy of Tu Weiming compare to *ren* in the philosophy of Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi? I will attempt to answer this question using several subquestions: (1) How is *ren* portrayed in the *Lunyu*? (2) How is *ren* portrayed in the *Mengzi*? (3) How is *ren* portrayed in the *Xunzi*? (4) How is *ren* portrayed in the philosophy of Tu Weiming?

Because it would be unusual for the concept of *ren* to stay the same for over 2500 years, I expect to find that Tu's usage of *ren* differs slightly from the usage of the three Classical Confucian thinkers. This could contribute to insights into how close this contemporary movement of Confucianism still is to the original Confucian movement of Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi.

1.4 *Ren*, The Thinkers, and Their Texts

1.4.1 *Ren*

By now I have not yet provided a translation for *ren*, the central concept of this thesis. The reason for this is simple: *ren* is too dense and hard to grasp to provide a translation which covers the full meaning. Chan wrote that *ren* has seen many translations, for example:

¹¹ For more on the translational issue of the term 'Confucianism' see: Swain, 2017, 5-11.

benevolence, love, altruism, kindness, charity, compassion, magnanimity, perfect virtue human-heartedness, humaneness, and so on.¹² He stated that this fact alone, the many translations of *ren*, show that it is an “exceedingly complicated concept.”¹³ Although all translations together might cover the meaning, one on its own does not. Within the *Lunyu*, Confucius also varies with the meaning, as sometimes it is general and sometimes it is particular. General usage of *ren* entails that *ren* subsumes other virtues, whereas the particular usage stands on its own (see sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2).

Present-day scholars use a wide variety of translations in their works, but they tend to consistently stick to one translation most of the time. In line with this sentiment, I chose to leave *ren* untranslated, similar to more well-known concepts of *yin* 阴 and *yang* 阳.. While *ren* will stay untranslated, I will portray its meaning in the upcoming chapters. It will become apparent that meanings have shifted over time.

1.4.2 Confucius and the *Lunyu*

Ideas and concepts of Confucianism are most often traced back to Confucius. The *Lunyu* is the primary source in which we find many of his quotations.¹⁴ In this text, we find sayings of Confucius. These sayings are either monologues of Confucius or he is in dialogue with one or more of his students. The *Lunyu* in total consists of 499 passages, and of those, 58 contain an argument about *ren*.¹⁵ In these 58 passages, it is mentioned 105 times. While Confucian ideas are most often traced back to Confucius, it is certain that he did not write this book.¹⁶ Moreover, it still is rather uncertain when exactly the *Lunyu* was created. Makeham argued that the *Lunyu* we nowadays have was not around when Confucius was still alive. This present-day *Lunyu* can probably be dated to about 100-200 BCE, which is approximately 300 years after Confucius' time.¹⁷ The text I used in writing this thesis is translated by Peimin Ni, a Chinese American scholar of philosophy.¹⁸

¹² Chan, 1955, 295.

¹³ Chan, 1955, 295.

¹⁴ Rainey, 2010, 10.

¹⁵ Chan, 1955, 296.

¹⁶ Van der Leeuw, 2011, 35.

¹⁷ Makeham, 2018, 33.

¹⁸ Ni, 2017.

1.4.3 Mencius and the *Mengzi*

Now that I have covered Confucius and the *Lunyu*, we move on to Mencius. Mencius was only about three generations removed from Confucius. The text attributed to him, the *Mengzi*, was one of the *Four Books* (四书 *sishu*) that are traditionally used to express the essence of Confucianism.¹⁹ It is even said that Mencius has studied in the school of the grandson of Confucius himself, Zisi 子思 (ca. 483 – 402 BCE).²⁰ He is often considered to be the most important Confucian after Confucius, hence his title is the “Second Sage.”²¹

Mencius is known for his stance on human nature. He claims that every human being has the potential to become a good person. In Mencius’ words, every person is born with four sprouts (*siduan* 四端). When properly cultivated they become the full-fledged four cardinal virtues. These virtues are what make people into good humans. One of these sprouts will grow into *ren*, so it is a central concept in the philosophy of Mencius.

Because Mencius is regarded as the Second Sage and *ren* is such an important concept in his philosophy I choose to discuss the *Mengzi* in this thesis. Similar as with the *Lunyu*, there is no consensus yet on the authorship and dating of the book.²² It is argued that the *Mengzi* was partly created by Mencius himself, and partly by his students.²³ The translation I used in writing this thesis is made by Van Norden, an American scholar and translator of Chinese philosophy.²⁴

1.4.4 Xunzi and the *Xunzi*

The last Classical Confucian thinker to be discussed is Xunzi. Together with Confucius and Mencius, Xunzi is often seen as the third thinker in the foundation of Classical Confucianism. Where Mencius thought that human nature was good, Xunzi thought the opposite. In *Xunzi* chapter 23 he wrote: “Mencius says: people’s nature is good. I say: This is not so.”²⁵ However, the two generally appear to be quite like-minded.²⁶

¹⁹ Carey and Vitz, 2020, 695; Van Norden, 2008, xiii.

²⁰ Lai, 2008, 36; Rainey, 2010, 88; Van Norden, 2008, xiii.

²¹ Rainey, 2010, 87.

²² Lodén, 2006, 50.

²³ Van der Leeuw, 2011, 50.

²⁴ Van Norden, 2008.

²⁵ Hutton, 2014, 252.

²⁶ Swain, 2017, 84.

The *Xunzi* consists of 32 sections, and like the *Lunyu* and the *Mengzi* was not compiled by the thinker himself.²⁷ The *Xunzi* is compiled by Liu Xiang 刘向 (77 – 6 BCE). Over time, the text has been rearranged many times. Currently, scholars are primarily using the edition arranged in 818 CE.²⁸ The *Xunzi* which I used in writing this thesis was translated by Erik Hutton, a scholar of (Chinese) philosophy.²⁹

There is no doubt that Xunzi needs to be discussed in this thesis. His ideas shaped Classical Confucianism and his merit is great. While Xunzi discussed *ren* about as much as Confucius, he did not change its meaning. This becomes apparent from Chan's article on the evolution of *ren*, in which Xunzi is not mentioned.³⁰ Therefore, I will keep the analysis of *ren* in the *Xunzi* in chapter 4 to a minimum.

1.4.5 Tu Weiming and his Works

Now that I have briefly introduced the three Classical Confucian thinkers, let us move to the New-Confucian Tu Weiming. Tu is an American scholar of Chinese descent. He first got interested in the Confucian doctrine through his mentor Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909 – 1995). Mou was one of the foremost New-Confucians of the second generation. After studying under Mou, he obtained his Ph.D at Harvard University.³¹ Then he stayed in the United States to teach for a few more years. This combination led to Tu being fluent in both Confucian and Western philosophy.

Bresciani wrote that Tu's general topic of his work had two main objectives: (1) Spread the knowledge of Confucianism to Western people and (2) research the future of Confucianism.³² It is through the spread of knowledge of Confucianism that Tu wants to contribute to "a global dialogue for achieving an authentic and sustainable humanism."³³ Tu does not just aim to let the world embrace Confucianism, he wants "to absorb the essence of Western Christian theology, in order to develop the immanence and transcendence of

²⁷ Hutton, 2014, xviii, xxi.

²⁸ Hutton, 2014, xviii.

²⁹ Hutton, 2014.

³⁰ Chan, 1955.

³¹ Bresciani, 2001, 409.

³² Bresciani, 2001, 410.

³³ Swain, 2017, 222.

Confucianism.”³⁴ In other words, by combining bits of Confucian and Western philosophy, he strives to create a way of living that benefits all.

1.5 Contents and Conventions

The order of this thesis is as follows: First, in chapter 2, we will take a look at *ren* in the Lunyu. Then, chapter 3 focuses on *ren* in the Mengzi. Chapter 4 is the last chapter of the three Classical Confucians; this will be a brief chapter about *ren* in the Xunzi. Chapter 5 focuses on *ren* in the philosophy of Tu Weiming. Lastly, I will make a comparison between chapters 2-4 and 5 in chapter 6. The thesis will end with a concise conclusion about the main findings and its implications.

As a final note I would like to clarify that throughout this thesis I will consistently use pinyin romanization. However, some exceptions call for the use of the Wade-Giles romanization system. These exceptions mainly arise when Wade-Giles is more common, for example in the name of Tu Weiming. Likewise, any other name will be listed as the form most frequently used in the English language. Confucius is used instead of Kongzi, and Mencius is preferred over Mengzi. When referring to the texts of Classical thinkers, I choose to use the original Chinese name in pinyin, which makes it easier to differentiate between thinker and text (except for Xunzi). Finally, all of the concepts of Confucian philosophy will be rendered in their closest English translation, except for *ren*.

³⁴ Bresciani, 2001, 416.

2 *Ren* in the *Lunyu*

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will illustrate how *ren* is portrayed in the *Lunyu* of Confucius. It starts in 2.2 with the question what *ren* looked like before Confucius gave the character its new meaning. This will contribute to our understanding of the meaning that Confucius added to it.

Next, in 2.3, I will focus on the meaning of *ren* in the *Lunyu*. This section will be divided into three main parts: (1) general usage of *ren*, (2) particular usage of *ren*, and (3) achieving *ren*. According to some scholars, the usage of *ren* in the *Lunyu* can be divided into two categories: general and particular. Therefore, I made the choice to consider this division as well.

Then, lastly, in 2.4, I will look at what it requires for a person to become *ren* according to the *Lunyu*. This is an important aspect, which returns in the philosophies of Mencius and Tu Weiming as well. While section 2.3 lists some necessary virtues to be *ren*, 2.4 primarily focuses on what people themselves need to do. Its main topic is how to cultivate these virtues.

2.2 The Origin of *Ren*

The character 仁 (*ren*) consists of two parts: A person (*ren* 人) on the left, and two (*er* 二) on the right. Many scholarly works have devoted attention to the etymology and usage of this character prior to Confucius. Chen draws upon Zheng Xuan's 郑玄 (127 – 200) definition, who most cleverly saw this character as a pair of two people. According to Chen, this origin is widely accepted among scholars.³⁵ However, scholars have not reached consensus on why the character for 'two' is in *ren*.

Di Fiori and Rosemont wrote that before Confucius gave an "ethical orientation" to *ren*, the term was not widely used.³⁶ Yang affirms this by writing that "Confucius made a significant contribution to the idea of *ren* by adding a moral dimension to it."³⁷ They both agree on the fact that *ren* existed before Confucius adopted it into his philosophy. But what meaning did it have before that? Chan argued that it was barely mentioned in pre-Confucian texts. But when

³⁵ Chen, 2010, 507.

³⁶ Di Fiori and Rosemont, 2017, 96.

³⁷ Yang, 2019, 239.

it was, it “meant something along the lines of kindness, most often kindness of a ruler to his subjects.”³⁸ Yang agreed on the limited usage as he drew upon the research of Li, which showed that the “character *ren* 仁 did not appear until a few decades after 770 B.C.E.”³⁹ But he then continued that it “was first found in two poems from the *Book of Poetry (Shijing 诗经)*.”⁴⁰ The meaning in the *Book of Poetry* was different than the one Chan found. Yang quoted Takeuchi and Lin, writing that it meant “praise for a hunter’s exceptional external manly beauty.”⁴¹ Lin, in her article specifically refers to Chan’s argument, and falsifies it quite convincingly.⁴² Besides quoting Lin on this issue, Di Fiori and Rosemont also find this meaning in Brooks and Brooks, they seem to link the meaning of *ren* to a “martial flavor”.⁴³

It seems that the first use of the character of *ren* can be dated back to an earlier period of time. In recent research, Gang argued that *ren* was first found on a bronze vessel dating about 300 years before Confucius, or approximately 100 years before the poems in the *Shijing*.⁴⁴ Here however, the character has the radical for dead body (*shi* 尸) on the left, instead of the radical for person (人). Gang “concluded that [*ren*] originally denoted a practice in ancient china where a man with respectable social rank sacrificed himself to defend the codes of honor.”⁴⁵

Definitions and origins of pre-Confucian *ren* seem to vary widely. The earliest usage of *ren* has something to do with honorable sacrifices. Later it changed to the external manliness of a hunter. Chen took the route of linguistics and etymology to clarify the origins of this character and argued that it had something to do with two persons. He linked ‘two’ to *yin* 阴 and *yang* 阳 and the generation of the myriad things.⁴⁶ Yang also studied ‘two’ and wrote that the “distinctive pictograph of *ren* suggest that we are inevitably living in a world with others.”⁴⁷ Hence the meaning of human context that Confucius attached to it.

³⁸ Chan, 1955, 295.

³⁹ Yang, 2019, 240.

⁴⁰ Yang, 2019, 240.

⁴¹ Yang, 2019, 240.

⁴² Lin, 1974, 174.

⁴³ Di Fiori and Rosemont, 2017, 97.

⁴⁴ Gang, 2019, 10.

⁴⁵ Gang, 2019, 10.

⁴⁶ Chen, 2010, 509.

⁴⁷ Yang, 2019, 247.

Scholars all take different approaches and come to different conclusions about the origins of *ren*. Now we know a bit more about the background of *ren*, let us move on to the next section, in which I will analyze Confucius' notion of *ren*.

2.3 *Ren* in the *Lunyu*

Ren is arguably the most important concept in Confucius' philosophy. It is often paired with propriety (*li* 礼). Many studies focus on whether *ren* or propriety is more dominant, showing they are both important in Confucius' philosophy.⁴⁸ However, for this thesis it does not matter which one is more dominant, as it is solely about *ren*, one of the (if not) most important terms. As *ren* is central to this thesis and to the philosophy of Confucius in the *Lunyu*, this section will purely focus on *ren* in the *Lunyu*.

In section 2.3.1 it will become clear that *ren* could be interpreted as a general, overarching, and all-compassing virtue in the *Lunyu*. I will demonstrate this substantiated with examples from the *Lunyu*. But it can also be seen as a particular virtue, the focus of section 2.3.2, where it means something along the lines of benevolence or love.⁴⁹

2.3.1 *Ren* as General Virtue

According to Chan, *ren* as a general virtue embodies the meaning of moral life to its fullest.⁵⁰ Somewhat clearer than Chan, Luo describes it as "an umbrella term used to cover a variety of virtues."⁵¹ This variety of virtues leads to moral life at its best, but what exactly are these virtues? This is exemplified by moral philosopher Yu Jiyuan:

Ren as human excellence [that is: general] includes the particular virtues as components. At *A[nalects]* 17:6, one disciple Zizhang asks what *ren* is; the Master replies that "There are five things and whoever is capable of putting them into practice in the Empire is certainly *ren*." These five things are five particular virtues: respectfulness [*gong* 恭], tolerance [*kuan* 宽], trustworthiness in word [*xin* 信], quickness [*min* 敏] and generosity [*hui* 惠].⁵²

⁴⁸ Yang, 2019, 242.

⁴⁹ Luo, 2011, 427.

⁵⁰ Chan, 1955, 297.

⁵¹ Luo, 2011, 427.

⁵² Yu, 2007, 166.

We see in the quote above that in *Lunyu* 17:6 *ren* consists of five virtues. It is not limited to just these five. When looking at *Lunyu* 1:2, “it is said that filial piety [*xiao* 孝] and brotherly respect [*di* 弟] are the root of *ren*.”⁵³ Because *ren* encompasses all of the above virtues we could say that it is the overarching or all-encompassing virtue.

Confucius’ notion of *ren* also sees some overlap with the Confucian notion of a gentleperson (*junzi* 君子).⁵⁴ Luo wrote that this only is the case when “*ren* is used in the general sense.”⁵⁵ This indeed shows that *ren* is general, as a gentleperson is not a virtue on its own but rather a person who possesses many virtues. It is however not always the case that *ren* equals gentleperson. Lai argued that a gentleperson’s “life is characterized by engagement in social and administrative matters although this is not necessarily the case for [a person of *ren*].”⁵⁶

When Chan was searching for the concrete meaning of *ren* as a general virtue he wrote: “Confucius offered neither a precise definition nor a comprehensive description. However, when a pupil asked him about [*ren*], he replied, “It is to love man” [12:22].”⁵⁷ Present-day scholars disagree that *ren* in the general sense is equal to love. They claim that love is either a sub-virtue of *ren* in the general sense or that love is *ren* in a context where it is a particular virtue.⁵⁸ *Ren* as a particular virtue will be the topic of the next section.

2.3.2 *Ren* as Particular Virtue

Lai rendered *ai ren* 爱人 in *Lunyu* 12:22 as loving all of humanity, leaning on the translation of James Legge.⁵⁹ It is not the case that a person of *ren* should love all of humanity. To substantiate this claim she quoted *Lunyu* 4:3 which states that ““only the man of *ren* knows how to like and dislike others’, which suggests that the person of *ren* is discriminating in his assessment of others. Furthermore, in *Lunyu* 17:24, Confucius is explicit about the kinds of

⁵³ Lai, 2008, 22.

⁵⁴ Yu, 2007, 91.

⁵⁵ Luo, 2011, 429.

⁵⁶ Lai, 2014, 84.

⁵⁷ Chan, 1955, 299.

⁵⁸ Chen, 2010, 517-8.

⁵⁹ Lai, 2008, 22.

people he dislikes.”⁶⁰ Therefore, *ren* most certainly is not equal to loving all humanity, as there are people who he dislikes.

However, love is not the end goal of *ren* but a mean, a sub-virtue. In *Lunyu* 1:5 and 1:6, Confucius also speaks of love (*ai ren* and *ai zhong* 爱众 respectively).⁶¹ Again, Confucius lists it in an enumeration of other particular virtues, instead of making it equal to *ren*. *Ren* thus is not equal to love but love certainly is a part of *ren*.

Besides love, Luo wrote that translations like benevolence, altruism, kindness, and compassion all belong to the category of particularism.⁶² The number of particularis uses in the *Lunyu* are few, for examples in *Lunyu* 4:2, 6:23, 9:29, 15:33 and 17:8 according to Chan.⁶³ Here, I doubt Chan’s reasoning because *Lunyu* 4:2 hints at wisdom (*zhi* 知) being a part of *ren* rather than equaling *ren*. Ni also has another opinion on this, as he wrote that “a wise person, even if not really [*ren*], would normally act as such”, because “being [*ren*] is beneficial.”⁶⁴ In other words, when being wise, but not *ren*, one would act as *ren* because it is beneficial. Acting *ren* could lead to actual *ren*, which means that being wise leads to *ren*, and thus wisdom is a sub-virtue of *ren*. Therefore, *ren* could be interpreted as a general virtue in this passage.

Then, in *Lunyu* 17:8, Confucius talks about multiple virtues, among them *ren*. As we will see in chapter 3.4, Mencius almost always lists *ren* as the first virtue, similar to what Confucius does in *Lunyu* 17.8. This suggests the importance of *ren*. Hereafter follow five other virtues, which then leads to Chan’s argument of *ren* being just one particular virtue among many in this passage. *Lunyu* 17:8 states that being fond of *ren* without being fond of learning leads to foolishness.⁶⁵ For the other virtues, Confucius also says that they do not go well without learning. Based on this sentence alone, it is hard to define *ren* as a particular virtue because it could also be interpreted as general. However, taken as just one of many other virtues in the list, the argument can hold strong. But, considering that many other usages in the *Lunyu* are indeed general, it would make sense that Confucius is referring to the overarching virtue here as well.

⁶⁰ Lai, 2008, 22.

⁶¹ Luo, 2011, 429.

⁶² Luo, 2011, 427.

⁶³ Chan, 1955, 297.

⁶⁴ Ni, 2017, 132.

⁶⁵ Ni, 2017, 394-5.

Luo would side with me on this argument, because he argued that this particular meaning is “Mencius’ idea of *ren*, rather than Confucius’.”⁶⁶ This makes sense, as the particular meaning cannot be found in the *Lunyu* aside from a minimum number of instances. But even in these instances it is questionable whether it is a particular virtue instead of a general one.

In sum, from sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 it becomes clear that most of the time the usage of *ren* in the *Lunyu* is a general one. It is the overarching virtue, which encompasses all other virtues. There are a few cases where it could be argued that *ren* is used particular, but this is limited to such a small number that it is almost negligible. In the next subsection I will address the topic of achieving *ren*.

2.3.3 Achieving *Ren* (How to Become a *Ren* Person)

Now we have reached a basic understanding of what *ren* is according to the *Lunyu*. A question that arises is how one becomes or achieves *ren*. Achieving *ren* is different for each person. It becomes clear in the dialogues between Confucius and his disciples, as he customizes the road to *ren* for each of them. Di Fiori and Rosemont adequately describe this in their claim “that being able to act in a *ren*-like manner is a highly personal matter, and exemplars thereof all exemplify it in their own way, according to their specific roles.”⁶⁷ Lai also seems to acknowledge this fact. The title of one of her articles is “*Ren* 仁: An Exemplary life.”⁶⁸ She “deliberately used the indefinite article “an,” rather than the definite article “the,” to allow for *different instantiations* of exemplary lives.”⁶⁹ According to her, there is no such things as one exemplary life, precisely because *ren* is different for everyone.

This personal treatment of Confucius is visible in several dialogues in the *Lunyu*, e.g. 15:10. Here Confucius advises one of his disciples, Zigong 子贡 (520 – 456 BCE), one of his disciples, to “seek out the best examples and learn from them”.⁷⁰ This is a personal advice for his disciple, because of Zigong’s “intensive questioning regarding the virtues and faults of others, it would seem that [he] was very much interested in just how Confucius viewed others.”⁷¹ In other words, because Zigong often judges others, Confucius advises him to look

⁶⁶ Luo, 2012, 40.

⁶⁷ Di Fiori and Rosemont, 2017, 98-9.

⁶⁸ Lai, 2014 (emphasis added).

⁶⁹ Lai, 2014, 84.

⁷⁰ Di Fiori and Rosemont, 2017, 102.

⁷¹ Di Fiori and Rosemont, 2017, 102.

for examples of *ren* in others in order to become *ren* himself. Di Fiori and Rosemont continue this argument using Zigong as an example. It seems that he spoke too much, rather than put his knowledge into practice. Therefore, Confucius recommended him to do the following: “Zigong asked about being a [gentleperson]. The Master said: “Act first on what you are going to say, and only then say it.”⁷² Zigong is not the only student they argued getting a personal treatment/lesson on *ren*. Di Fiori and Rosemont also argued that Fan Chi and Yan Hui got personal lessons.⁷³

It thus seems that *ren* is also different for every person, or as Yang puts it: “Instead of evaluating someone based on norms and abstract rules, looking into someone’s environment and process of development may prove to be more fruitful and effective.”⁷⁴ In other words, it is hard to find rules for *ren*, and it differs from person to person.

2.4 Conclusion

Confucius did not invent *ren*, but rather changed its meaning from aesthetic to moralistic. Through this moral meaning, it became the most important and central concept in the philosophy of Confucius. *Ren* seems to be an overarching and all-compassing virtue, the key to Confucius’ philosophy. While achieving *ren* is different for each person, the outcome is mostly the same. It is a person, maybe even a gentleperson, who compasses all of the good virtues. Examples of these virtues are respectfulness, tolerance, trustworthiness in word, quickness, and generosity.

⁷² Ni, 2017, 104.

⁷³ Di Fiori and Rosemont, 2017, 103-6.

⁷⁴ Yang, 2019, 247.

3. *Ren* in the *Mengzi*

3.1 Introduction

The question to be answered in this chapter is: What precisely has Mencius done with the concept of *ren*? In short, he has further developed the concept of *ren* of Confucius.⁷⁵ In the *Mengzi*, Mencius uses many analogies to convey his philosophy.⁷⁶ When explaining *ren*, he also tends to use analogies. First, in section 3.2, I will describe how *ren* is achieved, which is based on the analogy of sprouts. Then, in section 3.3, another important aspect of *ren* will be described, which is the reach of *ren*. Finally, in section 3.4, I will discuss whether the usage of *ren* in the *Mengzi* is general or particular.

3.2 Achieving *Ren*

As I have mentioned in the introduction, Mencius' philosophy revolves around the four cardinal virtues. In *Mengzi* 2A6 he listed these virtues: "The feeling of compassion [*ceyin zhi xin* 惻隱之心] is the sprout of *benevolence* [*ren*]. The feeling of disdain is the sprout of *righteousness*. The feeling of deference is the sprout of *propriety*. The feeling of approval and disapproval is the sprout of *wisdom*."⁷⁷ The virtues are *ren*, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom. The analogy holds close to nature, all four cardinal virtues come from a sprout (*duan* 端), or a seed as it is sometimes called as well.

Mencius claims that each person is born with these four sprouts, but that they have to be properly cultivated in order for them to grow into full-fledged virtues.⁷⁸ *Mengzi* 2A6, one of the most cited passages, elaborates on this feeling of compassion and shows that everybody is born with the sprout of *ren*:

Suppose someone suddenly saw a child about to fall into a well: anyone in such a situation would have a feeling of alarm and compassion—not because one sought to get in good with the child's parents, not because one wanted fame among one's neighbors and friends, and not because

⁷⁵ Mancilla, 2013, 59.

⁷⁶ Lai, 2008, 37; Sun, 2020, 507.

⁷⁷ Van Norden, 2008, 46-7 (emphasis added).

⁷⁸ Carey and Vitz, 2020, 696, 702; Liu, 2016, 50.

one would dislike the sound of the child's cries. From this we can see that if one is without the feeling of compassion, one is not human.⁷⁹

In order to achieve *ren*, compassion has to be developed and cultivated. According to Yu and *Mengzi* 4A27 compassion is outed as filial piety.⁸⁰ In section 2.3.1, we saw that Confucius also thought that filial piety is the root of *ren*. Mencius' argument here is thus quite comparable to Confucius'. Compassion is also the meaning that Van Norden gives to *ren* in the *Mengzi*.⁸¹ In sum, each person has sprouts, among which a sprout for *ren*. To borrow Liu's words, "[i]f [they] are brought up properly, these sprouts will grow, bloom and bear fruits."⁸² Only if the sprout of *ren* (the heart of compassion) is properly cultivated it becomes the full-grown virtue of *ren*. Therefore, the basis of *ren* lies in compassion.

3.3 The Reach of *Ren*

This brings us to the second point, that is the reach of *ren*. According to the *Mengzi*, *ren* should be extended to everyone, including animals. On this specific notion, many scholars cite *Mengzi* 1A7. Mancilla for instance, wrote that "[c]ompassion, the "germ" of benevolence [*ren*] is not only felt toward other human beings, but also toward every creature capable of joy and suffering. This can be found in the passage where King Xuan of Qi is wondering whether he is benevolent [*ren*] enough to rule his people."⁸³ In this passage, king Xuan of Qi saw an ox that was about to be ritually sacrificed, in reaction he said: "Spare it. I cannot bear its frightened appearance, like an innocent going to the execution ground. [...] Exchange it for a sheep."⁸⁴ The king here shows compassion towards the ox. Compassion eventually becomes *ren*, so it extends to animals too.

Extending the reach of *ren* is not an easy thing to accomplish. *Mengzi* 7B1 claims that *ren* should also be outed to "what they [people of *ren*] do not yet love."⁸⁵ It is not limited to loving that what you do not love yet. According to *Mengzi* 7B31, people should also extend

⁷⁹ Van Norden, 2008, 46.

⁸⁰ Yu, 2010, 662.

⁸¹ Van Norden, 2008, 199.

⁸² Liu, 2003, 50.

⁸³ Mancilla, 2013, 65.

⁸⁴ Van Norden, 2008, 8.

⁸⁵ Van Norden, 2008, 185.

ren to things they cannot bear.⁸⁶ Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130 – 1200), a prominent Neo-Confucian thinker, commented on this passage:

People all have the hearts of compassion and disdain. Hence, no one fails to have things that he will not bear or will not do. These are the sprouts of benevolence [*ren*] and righteousness. [...] But if they extend what they are able to do [bear] so that they reach to what they were unable to do [bear], then there will be nothing in which they are not benevolent [*ren*] and righteous.⁸⁷

Liu has paraphrased this and made it more understandable: “[E]veryone has the feeling of sympathy or love, but it is not true that everyone is able to extend that feeling to all people consistently. If one makes the effort [...] to consistently extend sympathy or love to not just those who are close to her but also those who are not, [*ren*] will be the result.”⁸⁸ In sum, to extend *ren* to everything, it is necessary to make effort in being consistently sympathetic and compassionate. This should be done even to those things you do not yet love or cannot bear. Beginning from filial piety, compassion should extend to everything in order to achieve *ren*.

Confucius said in *Lunyu* 2:7 that both parents and dogs/horses are provided with nourishment. The difference between animals and parents lies in the different degree of respect towards them. Parents deserve more respect than animals.⁸⁹ The same is true for Mencius, as he claims that there are gradations of *ren*. I have already mentioned that *ren* extends to animals, but Mencius claims in *Mengzi* 7A45 that:

Gentlemen, in relation to animals, are sparing of them but are not benevolent [*ren*] toward them. In relation to the people, they are benevolent [*ren*] toward them but do not treat them as kin. They treat their kin as kin, and then are benevolent [*ren*] toward their people. They are benevolent [*ren*] toward the people, and then are sparing of animals.⁹⁰

This is actually quite contradictory with the story of king Xuan and the ox, in which the king is compassionate toward the ox. While it might not fully be *ren*, it begins with compassion and

⁸⁶ Van Norden, 2008, 192.

⁸⁷ Van Norden, 2008, 192.

⁸⁸ Liu, 2003, 49.

⁸⁹ Ni, 2017, 101.

⁹⁰ Van Norden, 2008, 183.

from compassion follows *ren*. In *Mengzi* 7A45 we thus see three levels of *ren* from least to most they are: (1) animals, (2) people, and (3) kin. To the first category, animals, it is just compassion, which basically is a lower degree of *ren*, as this will develop into *ren*. In sum, while *ren* should extend to everyone and everything, there are gradations and rules for *ren*.

3.4 *Ren* as General or Particular?

3.4.1 *Ren* as General

Now that we have an idea of how a person can achieve *ren*, I will briefly address the notion of general and particular usage of *ren* in the *Mengzi*. According to Carey and Vitz, *ren* in the philosophy of Mencius is primarily used in its particular sense, as part of the four cardinal virtues, described in section 3.2.⁹¹ They argue that it is the more important virtue by citing *Mengzi* 2A7. Van Norden cited Zhu Xi, who explained *Mengzi* 2A7 as follows: “Benevolence [*ren*] is the heart of Heaven and Earth in giving birth to things. One gets it first of all, and it links all four virtues together.”⁹² This explanation shows us that *ren* is related to all other virtues and also that it is even more important than others. But it also shows us that it could be interpreted as general, because everything is centered around *ren*.

In his glossary, Van Norden wrote that *ren* is mostly used as a particular virtue but sometimes it is used as a general virtue as well.⁹³ The example he gives is *Mengzi* 7B16, in which Mencius said: “Benevolence [*ren*] is simply being human. The Way is simply to harmonize with benevolence [*ren*] and put it into words.”⁹⁴ In order to be human and to be *ren*, one has to encompass all virtues. Therefore, in this passage *ren* is used in the general and overarching sense. Other scholars, like Shun and Yu, have also noted the general usage of *ren* in *Mengzi* 7B16.⁹⁵ Yu, for example, wrote that “*Mengzi*, 7b16 is one of the major textual sources to render *ren* as “humanity”.”⁹⁶ This translation is important to remember for later, in chapter 5, on *ren* in Tu Weiming’s philosophy.

⁹¹ Carey and Vitz, 2020, 695.

⁹² Van Norden, 2008, 47.

⁹³ Van Norden, 2008, 202.

⁹⁴ Van Norden, 2008, 188.

⁹⁵ Shun, 1997, 49; Yu, 2010, 663.

⁹⁶ Yu, 2010, 663.

3.4.2 *Ren* as Particular

The general sense is an exception in the *Mengzi* because it is limited to this select number of passages: 2A7 and 7B16. In other passages, we find *ren* to be a particular virtue, often belonging to the four cardinal virtues. This brings us to our last point of *ren* in the *Mengzi*, that is the status of *ren* as a particular virtue. Chen wrote that Mencius “claimed that benevolence [*ren*] reigns over other virtues.”⁹⁷ When looking at the four cardinal virtues, it is a stronger virtue than righteousness, propriety, and wisdom. Now, how does this appear in the *Mengzi*? Liu has found two things that show this reign of *ren*: (1) “He puts [*ren*] constantly in the first place on his list of virtues”, and (2) “[h]e frequently compares [*ren*] to ‘home’, while he compares other virtues to a ‘road’ or a ‘gate’ and so on.”⁹⁸ This combination makes it so that *ren* is indeed a particular virtue, but most certainly more important than all others.

In sum, on rare occasions in the *Mengzi*, *ren* is used as a general virtue. Contrary to *ren* in the *Lunyu*, it is almost always a particular virtue in the *Mengzi*. However, we do see that *ren* is superior to other virtues when it is a particular virtue. It is also the general virtue because it compromises the four cardinal virtues. Therefore, I would say that *ren* is a particular virtue with a special status, being the most important virtue of all.

3.5 Conclusion

Concludingly, this chapter answered three questions to explain *ren* in the *Mengzi*: (1) Where does *ren* come from and how to achieve it; (2) How far does *ren* reach; (3) Is *ren* a general or particular virtue? The answer to the first question lies in the sprouts, which are available in every person. The sprout of *ren* is the feeling of compassion and through cultivating it will grow into full-fledged *ren*. Take *ren* and apply it to everything, including animals, and even to that which you cannot bear is part of the answer to the second question. The second part of the answer is that there are gradations of *ren*. *Ren* is strongest towards one’s parents and gradually falls off to things further removed from them. Third and last, *ren* in the *Mengzi* is primarily a particular virtue, as part of the four cardinal virtues. Yet, on a few occasions, it is interpreted as a general virtue. On the other hand, when it is a particular virtue, it is the most

⁹⁷ Chen, 2016, 226.

⁹⁸ Liu, 2003, 71.

important of all the virtues. Now that we know how *ren* is portrayed in the philosophy of Mencius, we move on to *ren* in the philosophy of Xunzi.

4. *Ren* in the *Xunzi*

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will be significantly shorter than the previous two of *ren* in the *Lunyu* and in the *Mengzi*. The reason for this is simple: *Xunzi* is not often mentioned in the works of Tu Weiming, much less than Confucius and Mencius.⁹⁹ Besides, as mentioned in the introduction, he did not really add anything to the meaning of *ren*. I will now briefly outline the concept of *ren* in the philosophy of *Xunzi*.

4.2 A Short Definition of *Ren* in the *Xunzi*

4.2.1 Importance of *Ren*

First, it is important to immediately state that *ren* is an important concept in the philosophy of *Xunzi*. While it might not have changed much, it still is one of the two more prominent virtues in the *Xunzi* (along with righteousness).¹⁰⁰ A true king, for example, has both *ren* and righteousness, which “tower[s] over the world” and causes all people “to care for and honor him.”¹⁰¹ Again, we see that *ren* and *righteousness* are related to each other, and maybe even equal to each other in this case. According to Hutton, *Xunzi* demands “that *ren* [should] be enacted through ritual [propriety] and *yi* [righteousness].”¹⁰² Therefore, one could argue that *ren* is more important than righteousness and that the former is merely outed by the latter. *Ren* is also more important than propriety, for *Xunzi* wrote that “a true king puts *ren* first and puts ritual [propriety] behind.”¹⁰³

That *ren* is important to *Xunzi* is also reflected in that he considers *ren* as the most important characteristic of a sage.¹⁰⁴ And becoming a sage is the highest moral achievement to *Xunzi*, according to Hutton.¹⁰⁵ *Ren* is not the end goal of *Xunzi*, it is rather the sage, “who is *ren*, plus something more.”¹⁰⁶

⁹⁹ Weber, 2016, 247.

¹⁰⁰ Hutton, 2016b, 71.

¹⁰¹ Harris, 2016a, 116.

¹⁰² Hutton, 2016b, 87.

¹⁰³ Hutton, 2014, 290.

¹⁰⁴ Hutton, 2016c, 202.

¹⁰⁵ Hutton, 2016c, 202.

¹⁰⁶ Hutton, 2016c, 202.

4.2.2 *Ren* as Love

Ren is also equal to love or care for *Xunzi*, just as we have seen in Confucius. In *Lunyu* 12:22, Confucius says “It [*ren*] is to love people” (*ai ren*).¹⁰⁷ Similarly, in the *Xunzi*, *Xunzi* equals *ren* to love people (*renzhe ai ren* 仁者爱人).¹⁰⁸ However, Hutton prefers to render *ai* as care, as do other scholars, like Harris and Tiwald.¹⁰⁹ In sum, *ren* in the *Xunzi* definitely is characterized by love or care, similar to *ren* in the *Lunyu*. This does not mean that *ren* should only be rendered as love or caring because that would not do justice to the complexity of the concept.

In the philosophy of *Xunzi*, we see once again a gradation in love or caring. *Xunzi* thinks that “the caring that *ren* involves is not equal care for all, but rather *ren* demands different amounts of care for different people.”¹¹⁰ This is similar to what we have seen in the philosophy of Mencius, where there were different gradations of *ren*. In the *Xunzi*, Hutton noted that “familial affection” is the most important caring for *Xunzi* and many other Confucians.¹¹¹

4.2.3 *Ren* and Sincerity

Lastly, what is different from both Confucius and Mencius is the occurrence of the term sincerity or integrity (*cheng* 诚). It is barely used in the *Lunyu* and *Mengzi*. And when it is used, it is not in relation to *ren*. The contrary is true for the *Xunzi*. Sincerity is a concept which is mentioned relatively often in the *Xunzi*. According to Ni, this concept is introduced by later Confucians, *Xunzi* in this case. It stands for a “higher level of truthfulness.”¹¹² The *Xunzi* says the following about sincerity in relation to *ren*:

For the gentleman’s [gentleperson] cultivation of his heart, nothing is better than integrity. When you have achieved integrity, there is nothing more to do than to cling to *ren* and to carry out *yi* [righteousness]. If you cling to *ren* with a heart of integrity, then you will come to embody it.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ Ni, 2017, 296.

¹⁰⁸ Hutton, 2014, 155.

¹⁰⁹ Harris, 2016, 116; Tiwald, 2016, 469.

¹¹⁰ Hutton, 2016b, 74.

¹¹¹ Hutton, 2016c, 225.

¹¹² Ni, 2017, 69.

¹¹³ Hutton, 2014, 19.

So, for Xunzi, an important characteristic of *ren* is integrity or sincerity. To cultivate one's heart one has to practice sincerity. When one possesses the utmost form of sincerity, he or she can only stick to *ren*. When this is done properly, one achieves *ren*. Therefore, according to Xunzi, sincerity leads to *ren*. It thus is important characteristic of *ren*, which we had not seen before in the *Lunyu* or *Mengzi*.

4.3 Conclusion

As a brief conclusion for this short chapter, I would like to state that *ren* in the *Xunzi* is quite similar to what we have seen in both the *Lunyu* and the *Mengzi*. There is one exception, that is the introduction of the concept sincerity. When one embodies sincerity, it opens the path to *ren*. Other than this, three main points have been depicted in this chapter: (1) *ren* is an important concept in the *Xunzi*; (2) *ren* is equal to love or care; and (3) there are gradations of *ren*, where care for family is most important.

This also concludes the part about the Classical Confucian thinkers Confucius, Mencius and Xunzi. To all three of them *ren* is a foremost important virtue. In the next chapter I will look at the last definition of *ren* to be addressed, that is the meaning Tu Weiming adheres to it.

5 *Ren* in Tu Weiming's Philosophy

5.1 Introduction

We have seen that *ren* is one of the most important concepts in the philosophy of Classical Confucians. In his works, Tu Weiming also often speaks about *ren*. In this chapter, I will discuss what *ren* means according to him. He mostly translates this term as 'humanity'. We have seen this translation before in chapter 3, where the translation 'humanity' denotes a general usage of *ren*.

Tu has explicitly analyzed *ren* in his article "The creative tension between jen [*ren*] and li [propriety]."¹¹⁴ This is one of his most discussed and frequently quoted papers, according to himself.¹¹⁵ This dynamic between *ren* and propriety will be the topic of section 5.2. Then, in section 5.3, because Tu often draws upon Mencius, I will discuss this relationship. In that section I will also discuss particular and general usage of *ren* by Tu Weiming. Section 5.4 shows how far *ren* extends according to the works of Tu. In the same section I will address sincerity as a characteristic of *ren*. Learning and self-improvement is the topic to be addressed in section 5.5. Then finally, in section 5.6 I will briefly cover *ren* as love.

5.2 *Ren* and Propriety

As I have mentioned in section 2.3, *ren* is often paired with propriety. In these cases, it is often questioned which of the two is more dominant. In his article on *ren* and propriety, he did not answer this question of dominance. Rather he argued that there should be a tension between *ren* and propriety. He also argued that one should "engage in moral self-cultivation", for *ren* is achieved through it.¹¹⁶ While he did not answer the question, he thinks that *ren* is most important in Confucianism and that propriety is most well-known.¹¹⁷ He argued that "*li* [propriety] becomes the externalization, objectification, socialization and concretization of *ren*."¹¹⁸ In other words, a person should properly internalize *ren* in order for propriety to come out. Furthermore, Tu claims that "[t]he value of *ren* must be realized through *li* [propriety];

¹¹⁴ Tu, 1968.

¹¹⁵ Tu, 2014, 117.

¹¹⁶ Tu, 1968, 31, 38.

¹¹⁷ Tu, 1968, 29.

¹¹⁸ Tu, 2014, 118.

otherwise it will become an abstract concept.”¹¹⁹ It is evident that Tu sees a strong connection between *ren* and propriety, where *ren* is internal, and propriety external.

In “Pain and Suffering in Confucian Self-cultivation”, Tu wrote that Confucius condemned a person “who perfunctorily follows the mores of his time and superficially please those apt to maintain status quo.”¹²⁰ We find that the source of this argument is *Lunyu* 17.11: “The Master said, “When we say ‘rituals, rituals,’ are we merely speaking about jade and silk? When we say ‘music, music,’ are we merely speaking about bells and drums?”¹²¹ Ni annotated this translation and wrote: “Most commentators interpreted the passage as showing the importance of the substance (*zhi* 质) of rituals and music over their refined forms (*wen* 文) of expression.”¹²² Thus, according to Tu, it is *ren* which comes first, from which subsequently the right form of propriety follows.

Someone who acts according to propriety without *ren* would be called a *xiangyuan* 乡原, meaning hyper-honest villager, an enemy of virtue (*de* 德).¹²³ While *ren* is not mentioned in *Lunyu* 17:13, Confucius speaks of virtue and this can be extended to the concept of *ren*. Therefore, Tu thinks *ren* to be more important, as propriety seems meaningless and even wrong without it. But it is propriety, which is outed and expressed, which can explain why it is the more well-known concept. Tu gives another explanation by writing that *ren* is the most important core value of Confucianism to scholars in China or the Chinese diaspora. It is just in American academic circles that propriety is valued over *ren*.¹²⁴

5.3 Tu and Mencius

Tu not only draws upon the notion of *ren* of Confucius, but also on the interpretations of Mencius and Xunzi. It is no secret that Tu is attracted to the philosophy of Mencius.¹²⁵ For instance, when questioning what *ren* means, he answered that “Mencius said, “*ren* means human.””¹²⁶ For Tu, “[*r*]en is the human who is most authentically human, and who most

¹¹⁹ Tu, 2014, 118.

¹²⁰ Tu, 1993, 51.

¹²¹ Ni, 2017, 397.

¹²² Ni, 2017, 397.

¹²³ Ni, 2017, 398; Tu, 1993, 51.

¹²⁴ Tu, 2014, 119.

¹²⁵ See for example: Berthrong, 2008, 433; Tsai, 2008, 362; Weber, 2016, 246-7.

¹²⁶ Tu, 2014, 122.

splendidly represents human value.”¹²⁷ An example he gives is a meeting of Goethe and Napoleon, who said to Goethe: “This man is extraordinary. He is a man.”¹²⁸ Here, the former ‘man’ refers to Goethe, the latter means *ren*. It represents “the highest values of humans”, and Goethe himself “represented the peak of the human integrity.”¹²⁹ We can conclude that for Tu ‘human’ is an important characteristic of *ren*. This could be one of the reasons for him to prefer rendering *ren* as ‘humanity’ in English translation.

He also used arguments of “one of the most brilliant original thinkers of seventeenth-century China” in the essay “Subjectivity in Liu [Zongzhou’s 刘宗周 (1578 – 1645)] Philosophical Anthropology.”¹³⁰ Towards the end of this essay, Tu argued that to realise humanity (*ren*), one has to practice self-cultivation, “the mind needs to be disciplined, cultivated, and nourished.”¹³¹ Then, this cultivated mind needs to be brought into harmony with the four sprouts of Mencius’ philosophy.¹³² These sprouts in turn grow into the four cardinal virtues, of which *ren* is one. To put it more concretely, in order to achieve *ren*, one must put his or her mind to the four sprouts and combine it with action. Here, Tu and Liu Zongzhou seem to combine the metaphysicality (self-cultivation of the mind) with the four principles of Mencius. It seems to have some overlap with a gentleperson, as a gentleperson’s “learning for the sake of himself is not only contemplation but also action.”¹³³

A more concrete example of Tu drawing upon Mencius on the topic of *ren* is found in “Pain and Suffering”. Here, he elaborates Mencius 6A:18, the analogy of water subduing fire:

Mencius said, “Humaneness [*ren*] overcomes inhumaneness [*bu-ren* 不仁, non-*ren*] just as water overcomes fire. Those today who practice humaneness [*ren*] do it as if they were using a cup of water to put out the fire consuming a cartload of firewood, and then, when the flames are not extinguished, they say that water does not overcome fire. This is to make an enormous concession to what is not humane [non-*ren*], and in the end it must inevitably result in the destruction of humaneness [*ren*].”¹³⁴

¹²⁷ Tu, 2014, 122.

¹²⁸ Tu, 2014, 122.

¹²⁹ Tu, 2014, 122.

¹³⁰ Tu, 1993, 93; Tu, 1993, 93-116.

¹³¹ Tu, 1993, 115.

¹³² Tu, 1993, 115.

¹³³ Tu, 1993, 52.

¹³⁴ Ivanhoe and Bloom, 2009, 131.

Through this analogy of Mencius, Tu claims that as “long as we fail to enlarge our humanity [*ren*], until it can overcome the dehumanizing tendencies in our society, our once-powerful humanness [*ren*] becomes inoperative as a deterrent against “evil”.¹³⁵ Tu is claiming that in the past our capacity of *ren* was large enough to deal with the “evil”. But according to Mencius, this is a misconception, which Tu Weiming himself also admits.¹³⁶ Our capacity for *ren* is as large as before, because every person possesses the sprouts of *ren*, the feeling of compassion.

While Tu seems to often draw upon Mencius, he does not only use the *Mengzi* for defining *ren*, because Mencius is more often linked with the particular usage of *ren*. In Mencius’ philosophy, *ren* is one of the four principles, while Confucius sees it as the overarching, and thus general virtue. Tu chooses to embrace the latter usage, siding with Confucius.¹³⁷ He claims that the “meaning of general is twofold: One is that it can be compatible with other values, and the other is that any Confucian value must contain the element of *ren*.”¹³⁸

5.4 Sincerity and the Reach of *Ren*

In this section, I will discuss a quote from Tu’s essay “The Neo-Confucian concept of man.”¹³⁹ While it seems that it would fall out of the scope of this thesis, he does cite classics and gives insights to *ren* in this essay. What we will find is that sincerity is an important aspect of *ren*. Another aspect I will address in this section is the reach of *ren*.

One of the works he cited is the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (*Doctrine of the Mean*), which was arguably written by Zisi, the grandson of Confucius, or Confucius himself. Tu first quoted a passage on sincerity in the *Zhongyong* and then commented on it:

As we have already pointed out, the sage in the Neo-Confucian sense is the most authentic and genuine man. We can now add that the sage is also the most sincere man, which means the man who is most truthful to his humanity [*ren*]. Real humanity [*ren*] is of course not confined to the individual self. [...] Yet, only through concrete self-realization, which means the full

¹³⁵ Tu, 1993, 48-9.

¹³⁶ Tu, 1993, 49.

¹³⁷ Tu, 2014, 126.

¹³⁸ Tu, 2014, 126.

¹³⁹ Tu, 1998, 71-82.

manifestation of the most authentic, genuine, and sincere humanity [*ren*] inherent in oneself, can one become a man in the true sense of the word. It is quite understandable that humanity or humanheartedness [*ren*] is thus defined as man ([*renzhe ren ye* (仁者人也)]).¹⁴⁰

The argument to this quote from Tu is fourfold. First, it shows that the sincerest person is the person who is closest to *ren*. Therefore, a person of *ren* is sincere according to Tu. Second, *ren* is not limited to the individual, but rather expands to everything. But, to achieve *ren*, one should start with the self in the form of self-realization. In relation to this is the third finding that *ren* seems to be inherent in oneself. In other words, it is an internal virtue, similar to Mencius and his theory of the four sprouts. Fourth and last, Tu adheres value to the *Zhongyong*, as he adopts its definition of *renzhe ren ye*: *ren* is equal to 'person'. Remember, we saw in the previous section (5.3) that Tu conceives *ren* as human, quite similar to this definition. The difference is that in this section he drew upon the *Zhongyong*, which is also closely related to Classical Confucianism.

Let us take a closer look to the argument of sincerity. That sincerity is an important aspect of *ren* for Tu Weiming becomes most evident in one of his other essays. Tu claims that sincerity's "creative power never ceases to function in the inner dimensions of humanity [*ren*]" and that this "creative power of sincerity is inherent in the very structure of man."¹⁴¹ More importantly, Tu thinks that learning "how to be sincere is ultimately an attempt to become truly human. For humanity [*ren*] in its ultimate sense is the fullest manifestation of sincerity."¹⁴² In other words, in order to reach *ren*, one has to fully develop his or her sincerity, and be the sincerest person.

How far does Tu think *ren* could reach? The answer lies in the essay on the concept of man. Besides the reach of *ren*, we also find that Tu adheres values to sensitivity in this essay. Tu quotes the Song dynasty 宋朝 Neo-Confucian Cheng Hao 程颢 (1032 – 1085), who claims that all things are one body, and all things are himself. Therefore, he wonders whether there can "be any limit to his humanity?"¹⁴³ This is a standpoint common in Neo-Confucianism according to Tu.¹⁴⁴ Tu himself then further elaborates on this:

¹⁴⁰ Tu, 1998, 73.

¹⁴¹ Tu, 1998, 98.

¹⁴² Tu, 1998, 98.

¹⁴³ Tu, 1998, 74.

¹⁴⁴ Tu, 1998, 75.

Accordingly, to embody all things in one's sensitivity is not only humanly possible but necessarily human. For the scope of humanity [*ren*] as characterized by sensitivity is limitless. If one fails to "extend" one's sensitivity to embrace all things, it is not because of the intrinsic weakness of humanity. Rather, it is because one's humanity [*ren*] is somewhere paralyzed and thus falls short of its utmost capacity. The problem of humanity [*ren*] so conceived has some far-reaching implications. For example, being insensitive to the sufferings of others or to the destruction of nature becomes much more serious than a lack of social responsibility or an indifference to ecological conditions. It should be interpreted as an expression of inhumanity.¹⁴⁵

This is yet another dense quote from this essay, central to it are three concepts: sensitivity, *ren*, and extending. In short, a person should extend his or her sensitivity to embrace all things, and *ren* can be characterized by sensitivity. Sensitivity is a concept from Cheng Hao's philosophy and means "that a person of humanity [*ren*], [...] is sensitive to the pain of other beings, not only human beings but also non-human beings, in the same way that one is sensitive to one's own pain."¹⁴⁶ Sensitivity is thus related to the pain of other beings, and so is *ren*. Therefore, a person of *ren* should be sensitive to everything. Or, in other words, *ren* should be extended to everything. While Tu does not specifically mention that *ren* should be extended to animals, it could be interpreted that way from this passage.

But Tu does see some issues with this explanation of *ren*. Namely, being insensitive to the sufferings of others leads to being inhumane to everything because everything is connected. Tu thus does not believe that everything is connected and that through this connectedness *ren* could extend to everything. No, this is merely "empty talk", rather it should extend on its own, through self-cultivation.¹⁴⁷ Tu accuses Neo-Confucians to be too transcendental and too metaphysical on this matter.¹⁴⁸ Thus Tu seems to be distancing himself from the metaphysics of Neo-Confucians and staying closer to Classical Confucians.

In sum, Tu Weiming thinks that *ren* should extend to everything. However, this should be done through self-cultivation and not through transcendental metaphysics, once argued

¹⁴⁵ Tu, 1998, 74-5.

¹⁴⁶ Huang, n.d.

¹⁴⁷ Tu, 1998, 75.

¹⁴⁸ Tu, 1998, 75.

by Neo-Confucians. It also became clear that sincerity is an important characteristic of *ren*. Only when a person is truly sincere, one can achieve the status of *ren*.

5.4 Learning and Self-Improvement

One cannot deny that Tu possesses a lot of knowledge of Confucianism and Confucius. He knows for example how to approach the texts, and the contents are clear to him, this is evident in the following quotation. On differentiating between students, he wrote:

[Y]ou must understand the context. When Confucius talked about *ren*, the questions his students asked were basically all of this type: They were all about knowledge of bodily experience, and all the questions were raised after a longtime consideration and practice. Then Confucius made various responses. Among Confucius' disciples were different kinds of people with different talents. [...] There were all different kinds of personalities.¹⁴⁹

Here we see that Tu described that *ren* is different to each person, through the words of Confucius. The point here is that Tu and Confucius think that even the weakest of them (Yan Hui 颜回 (521 – 481 BCE)), deserves to be taught. It is even the case that Yan Hui is Confucius' favourite disciple.¹⁵⁰ This is true, for Yan Hui is fond of learning and "could adhere to *ren* for as long as three months."¹⁵¹ Then Tu goes on and pairs learning (*xue* 学) with awakening (*jue* 觉). According to the *Mengzi*, this "awakening indicates that the person has abundant inner resources."¹⁵² To put it more concretely, Yan Hui had nothing, except he was fond of learning, which leads to awakening and achieving *ren*. Through these means, Yan Hui improved himself, not only mentally, but also in a practical way. Learning and self-improvement are thus important aspects of achieving *ren*.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ Tu, 2014, 120.

¹⁵⁰ Lo, 2013, 84.

¹⁵¹ Tu, 2014, 121.

¹⁵² Tu, 2014, 121.

¹⁵³ Tu, 2014, 122.

5.4 *Ren* as Love

Chan claimed that “there can be no doubt that [*ren*] is love for all.”¹⁵⁴ Tu does not really agree with this, and the situation is a bit more nuanced. He claims that “*ren* is not indiscriminate love [*jian'ai* 兼爱],” because “*ren* must be differentiated from the high values in other great traditions,” Mohism in this case.¹⁵⁵ The reason Tu gives for this distinction is based on an argument of Mencius. He stated that “indiscriminate love was problematic [because] if you force everybody to love others as he loves his parents, in effect that means he is as callous to his parents as he is to others.”¹⁵⁶ There thus is a gradation of *ren* when characterized as love. One should feel more love towards ones parents than to other persons.

Ren, in Tu’s eyes, does however contain the notion of love. *Ren* might not be equal to love, but love is certainly a characteristic of *ren*: “You do not consider the others as outsiders who pose as competition to you. The others may be your parents, brothers and sisters, colleagues, or even strangers. You must gradually expand your scope to include various kinds of others, and that is the basic idea of the love of *ren*. It is so to require you to be so with the nature of *ren*.”¹⁵⁷

In sum, love should reach all but there are gradations to it. Not everyone is expected to receive and share love in the same way.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have analyzed *ren* in the philosophy of Tu Weiming. Important findings are that Tu thinks that there is a strong connection between *ren* and propriety. *Ren* is an internal virtue, which is outed by propriety. Even though Tu seems to draw upon Mencius so often, I found that he does prefer to embrace the general meaning of *ren*. This became clear from two things: He uses the translation humanity, which is found to be a general meaning. But he also explicitly stated that he embraces this meaning. Important characteristics of *ren* are sincerity and love. However, sincerity is much more important than love. Tu also made clear that love most certainly is not equal to the Mohist concept of universal love, which means that there

¹⁵⁴ Chan, 1955, 303.

¹⁵⁵ Tu, 2014, 127; For Mozi’s universal love see: “Universal Care” in Fraser, 2020.

¹⁵⁶ Tu, 2014, 127.

¹⁵⁷ Tu, 2014, 132.

are gradations in *ren*. Through sincerity and love, I also found that *ren* extends to everything, including animals. Lastly, being fond of learning is the base of becoming *ren*. The example he provided was Yan Hui, who had nothing and was really poor. Yet, through learning and self-improvement he managed to become *ren*.

6 A Comparison

6.1 Introduction

Now that we have a proper understanding of *ren* in the philosophy of Confucius, Mencius, Xunzi and Tu Weiming, I bring the four philosophers together in this chapter. I will discuss how exactly Tu's definition of *ren* compares to the definition of the three Classical Confucian thinkers. I will do this based on six themes, which all will be discussed in their own section.

6.2 General or particular?

First, Confucius and Tu both see *ren* as the general and overarching virtue. Some scholars have argued that Confucius has used *ren* in the *Lunyu* as a particular virtue, but I do not find this evidence convincing. As I have written, along with me there are several scholars who also argued that Confucius' usage of *ren* is that of the general virtue. Tu explicitly stated that he "consider[s] *ren* as the general virtue, which can be connected with all the other Confucian values."¹⁵⁸ While this is similar to Confucius' usage, it is different from Mencius' usage. Namely, Mencius sees *ren* as a particular virtue. On this specific notion, it can be concluded that Tu is close to the Classical Confucians, particularly Confucius in this case.

6.3 *Ren* as the Most Important Virtue

The topic of this section is in line with the previous one. Because *ren* is depicted as the overarching virtue, it is only logical for it to be the most important virtue. In the chapters on Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi we have seen that *ren* is arguably the most important virtue. We saw that in the philosophy *ren* is often paired with propriety. The same is true for Tu Weiming, who devoted an extensive article on this topic. We also saw that *ren* is an important virtue in the *Mengzi*. Mencius puts it constantly in the first place when he lists virtues. He often compared *ren* to home, and other virtues to a road or gate. For Tu it is no different, he sees *ren* as the most important concept in Confucianism, while propriety is the most well-known. He claims that *ren* is an inner virtue, which is outed through propriety. Therefore, the

¹⁵⁸ Tu, 2014, 126.

latter is more well-known. That *ren* is more important follows from the argument of the *xiangyuan* (hyper-honest villager). When one acts according to propriety, but does this without *ren*, that person is an enemy of virtue. In conclusion, Tu regards *ren* as the most important virtue, which we also saw in the philosophy of Classical Confucians.

6.4 *Ren* as Love?

For Confucius and Xunzi we have seen that love is an important characteristic of *ren*. Similarly, in the chapter on Mencius we have also seen that one should aim to love what one does not love yet. Sure, love is one of the constituents of *ren*, but it would be too particular to pair *ren* directly with love. In section 2.3.2, I have written that *Lunyu* 4:3 states that a “person of *ren* is discriminating in his assessment of others.”¹⁵⁹ It is precisely this what Tu Weiming also addresses: *Ren* is not indiscriminating or universal love as once argued by Mozi.

This is not the only similarity based on love. In chapter two I wrote that some scholars argued that love could be seen as a particular virtue. Tu Weiming himself has also sees love as a particular virtue, a characteristic of *ren*. Indeed, not as a substitute for *ren*, but as a virtue subordinate to *ren*. Therefore, he stays close to Classical Confucians on this topic.

6.5 Metaphysicality

Fourth is the topic of metaphysicality in the philosophy of Tu Weiming. Tu seems to be influenced by Neo-Confucians, who are known for their metaphysical approach to Confucianism. This was most visible in the fact that Tu thinks that “the mind needs to be disciplined, cultivated, and nourished.”¹⁶⁰ But it seems that this is not just a legacy of Neo-Confucianism. The *Mengzi* often speaks about the heart-mind (*xin* 心) and so did Xunzi.¹⁶¹ Tu pairs this improvement of the mind with the four sprouts of the philosophy of Mencius. Therefore, we could say that Tu invokes on the philosophy of Mencius and Xunzi concerning the topic of metaphysicality. He also speaks about awakening, an idea found in the *Mengzi*,

¹⁵⁹ Lai, 2008, 22.

¹⁶⁰ Tu, 1993, 115.

¹⁶¹ Swain, 2017, 76, 84.

but not in the *Lunyu*.¹⁶² But, Tu says that Neo-Confucians are too metaphysical and disassociates himself from them. On this topic he thus also stays close to Classical Confucians.

6.6 Sincerity

I have mentioned the term sincerity before in chapters 4 and 5. It is barely used in the *Lunyu* and *Mengzi*. Even when it is used it is not in relation to *ren*. In the *Xunzi* however, we see it for the first time being related to *ren*, and it seems to be important too. Then, in chapter 5, I found that Tu also adheres much value to sincerity on achieving *ren*. It seems that Tu deviates from the meaning of Confucius and Mencius and instead is leaning towards the definition of Xunzi. He did not cite Xunzi on this, but Neo-Confucian Zhou Dunyi 周敦颐 (1017 – 1073). The point is, claiming that sincerity is an important characteristic of *ren* holds close to the original meaning introduced by Xunzi. Therefore, on this notion he tends to stay close to Classical Confucians as well.

6.7 Learning

Tu claimed that learning is an important aspect of *ren*. Learning leads to awakening, which eventually leads to *ren*. Similarly, the *Lunyu* states that being fond of *ren* without being fond of learning leads to foolishness. In other words, one needs to learn to become *ren*. Confucius did not mention the intermediate step of awakening. Likewise, I have not found evidence that Xunzi mentions awakening in the context of *ren*. It is based on one small part of the *Mengzi*. This means that Tu Weiming created an intermediate step based on shallow evidence of the *Mengzi*. But all in all, he does stay close to the textual sources of Classical Confucianism on the notion of learning.

6.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I compared findings of chapter 2 to 4 with the findings of chapter 5. From the topics in this chapter, it becomes clear that Tu's notion of *ren* lies close to the original meaning

¹⁶² Tu, 2014, 121.

once introduced by the three Classical Confucian thinkers. I found that Tu's meaning lies sometimes closer to Confucius, and other times to Mencius. This is because the meaning of *ren* of the Classical Confucians is not always exactly the same. There is one case in which the meaning lies closest to Xunzi's, being sincerity. Sincerity is not found in the philosophy of Confucius and Mencius. Love is another aspect that is found in the *Xunzi*, but also in the *Lunyu* and the *Mengzi*. I found that *ren* is the most important virtue for all three Classical Confucians, which is in line with Tu Weiming. This is closely related to whether or not *ren* is a general, overarching virtue. For both Confucius and Tu, it is clear that *ren* is an overarching virtue. All in all, we could say that Tu Weiming holds similar views based on these six themes.

7 Conclusion

In this thesis I attempted to answer the following question: How does *ren* in the philosophy of Tu Weiming compare to *ren* in the philosophy of Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi? Chapter 6 provided us with a rather one-sided answer on this question: *Ren* in the philosophy of Tu Weiming is similar to the original usage by the three Classical Confucian thinkers. Through analyzing *ren* in the texts of Confucius, Mencius, Xunzi, and Tu Weiming and making a comparison I formed this conclusion.

Tu's definition of *ren* sometimes lies closer to one thinker than to the other. An example is that Tu sees *ren* as the general virtue, similar to Confucius but different from Mencius. Overall, on the notion of *ren*, he stays close to the Classical Confucians, I illustrated this using six themes: (1) They both see it as a general virtue; (2) They both see it as the most important virtue; (3) They both see *ren* as love, but not as indiscriminating love; (4) They both contain metaphysicality to a certain extent; (5) They both see sincerity as an important characteristic of *ren*; (6) They both see learning and self-improvement as necessary for achieving *ren*.

This research gives us an insight on how closely related New-Confucianism is to its roots. It stands not just for Tu and *ren* but can possibly also be extended to other concepts and other New-Confucian philosophers. This is also one of the limitations of this study. It only accounts for one concept in the philosophy of one New-Confucian. Therefore, it would be fruitful for follow-up studies to account for other concepts and other philosophers. Only then will we be able to truly say how Confucian New-Confucians actually are. Yet, this research shows us that – at least based on the concept of *ren* – it is viable to call Tu Weiming a proper Confucian because he stays close to the original meaning once shaped by the three Classical Confucian thinkers.

Thus, even though the foundation of Confucianism was laid over 2000 years ago, we can say that the philosophy of a contemporary New-Confucian still holds true to *ren*, a value shaped in Classical Confucianism. It is quite extraordinary that a philosophy in its revival 2500 years later stays so close to its roots. New-Confucianism uses a concept almost as similar as they used it in Classical Confucianism.

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