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Moral Psychology of Shame in Early Confucian Philosophy

Abstract In Western philosophy and psychology, shame is characterized as a self-critical emotion that is often contrasted with the similarly self-critical but morally active emotion of guilt. If shame is negative concern over endangered or threatened self-image (usually in front of others), guilt is autonomous moral awareness of one's wrongdoings and reparative motivation to correct one's moral misconduct. Recently, many psychologists have begun to discuss the moral significance of shame in their comparative studies of non-Western cultures. In this new approach, shame is characterized as a positive moral emotion and active motivation for self-reflection and self-cultivation. If shame is a positive and active moral emotion, what is its moral psychological nature? In this paper, I will analyze shame from the perspective of cultural psychology and early Confucian philosophy. Unlike many Western philosophers, Confucius and Mencius discuss shame as a form of moral excellence. In early Confucian texts, shame is not a reactive emotion of an endangered self but a moral disposition that supports a self-critical and self-transformative process of moral development.

Keywords shame, virtue, cultural psychology, moral psychology, early confucian philosophy, markedness theory, attribution theory

1 Introduction

In Western traditions of virtue ethics, specifically in the Greco-Roman tradition of aretaic moral excellence, a virtue is characterized as a carefully developed and refined inner ability that reflects the personal and practical excellence of a moral agent. It is a fully developed disposition that comes out of careful process of cultivation and results in the well-rounded character and the flourishing life of a

Received August 25, 2013

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person.¹ From the perspective of this traditional approach to virtue as moral excellence, personal dispositions such as humility, poverty, and shame are rarely regarded as virtues. These seemingly negative personal dispositions do not seem to represent the classical ideal of human excellence that can be found in Aristotle's moral philosophy (specifically in his *Nichomachean Ethics*), i.e., the active inner ability, carefully cultivated disposition, and consistent steadfastness that help a moral agent to deal with changing conditions of life without compromising her moral or psychological integrity. Rather, they are regarded as deprived, inferior, weak, and feeble dispositions of the mind, i.e., a lack of self-confidence, resourcefulness, and honor. Regarding shame, for instance, Tangney and Dearing say, by citing H. B. Lewis, that feelings of shame "involve fairly global negative evaluations of the self—the sense that 'I am an inferior, inadequate, unworthy (or bad, immoral, unprincipled) person'" (Tangney and Dearing 2002, 71).

In many schools of philosophy, particularly in non-Western traditions, however, some of these negatively described dispositions are respected and recommended as *major* virtues or *core* character traits.² Shame, for instance, is one of the major virtues of Confucianism. Confucius says that shame is an ideal ability that scholar officials should develop (*Analects*, 13.20) and Mencius takes it as one of the four foundations of the moral mind (*Mencius*, 2A6, 6A6). If shame is a Confucian virtue or a moral emotion, how does it reflect moral excellence and inner excellence of a moral agent? Can a person be virtuously shameful?

In this paper I will discuss shame as a moral emotion and virtue, and analyze its moral significance from the perspective of Confucian self-cultivation and self-reflection. I will start with the well-known distinction between shame and

¹ According to Aristotle (*Nichomachean Ethics*, Chapter 6 and *Eudemean Ethics*, Chapter 5), a virtue (arête kuria) comes out of intentional and developmental effort and becomes practical and moral excellence.

² Some of these negatively characterized virtues such as humility and poverty are regarded as major virtues of Christianity. The most prominent Medieval Franciscan order, the Order of Friars Minor, is basically a mendicant religious order which consists of people who practice poverty and humility following the spiritual teachings of Saint Francis of Assisi. Generally, virtues such as humility and poverty are accepted, accommodated, or even emphasized in religious traditions because religious devotion is often understood as complete dedication to non-material and spiritual values that are dissociated with worldly affairs such as accumulation of wealth and power. But Max Weber's (1905/2002) *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* explains that this general perception is not necessarily true. The rational pursuit of economic gain can be combined with life-long dedication to a profession, devotion to God, and service to society. Even though Weber's analysis is mainly limited to Calvinism, it demonstrates the general movement in Western society from relatively ascetic and self-effacing virtues to more pro-social, profit driven, yet equally dedicated dispositions in the religious mind. Humility and poverty, therefore, are not the central values of Protestant Christianity in post-industrial and capitalist Western society.

guilt in philosophy and psychology. Shame and guilt share similar psychological characteristics; they are self-conscious and self-critical states of the mind. But they are often categorized as two different or even opposite emotions. From the perspective Western psychology, anthropology, and philosophy, shame has been characterized as an inferior, negative, and deprived emotion, sharply contrasted with the healthy and mature self-evaluative emotion of guilt (Benedict 1946; Dodds 1951).³

Recently, however, many psychologists and philosophers have challenged this well-received characterization and have developed an alternative approach to shame as a self-conscious moral emotion and a virtue. Based on their comparative studies of shame, social psychologists, for example, argue that, in many cultures and subcultures, shame is regarded as a positive, socially adaptive, and morally progressive trait, often comparable to guilt. Shame, in those cultures, plays important roles in the development and cultivation of the moral self and the regulation of social behavior. This is particularly so in non-individualist or collectivist cultures where the identity and inner mental states of an individual are specified and understood in the context of their relations to other individuals.⁴ As I will discuss in the following sections, shame, in a collectivist culture, is a positive social and moral emotion: it is an other-regarding concern that positively motivates empathetic understanding and reparative behaviors, not a fearful experience of endangered self (threatened personal honor, pride, and reputation in front of others) that motivates hiding or avoiding behaviors and depressive feelings: it can be even intentionally developed and publicly recognized. In this culturally specific approach, shame seems to be fully reinterpreted and rehabilitated as a unique moral emotion, and is no longer the negative, depressive,

³ See the following characterizations of shame: “Shame feelings precede the development of the superego, although they may later be integrated into the superego formation. Guilt develops later during the Oedipal phase and requires the presence of a superego” (Creighton 1990, 286). “Shame, with its corresponding fear of rejection, is not a very effective sanction in American society, where individuals are encouraged to become independent” (Creighton 1990, 296). “Over the last 200 years in the history of modern societies, shame virtually disappeared. The denial of shame has been institutionalized in Western society” (Scheff 1997, 205). “Shame has been recognized since antiquity. A strong theme of shame exists in the early stories of Adam and Eve. However, it has only been in the last 20 years or so that shame has been subjected to systematic research and theory development” (Gilbert 1998, v).

⁴ This distinction seems overly dualistic and simplistic. Perhaps, there could be a culture that is not explained by either category. But the distinction represents different or opposing orientations of human cultures that can facilitate meaningful psychological generalizations. Additionally and more importantly, the distinction between individualist culture and collectivist culture, or similar distinctions (such as attribution patterns and cultural perceptions of shame) discussed in this paper, are well-developed, and carefully observed and measured distinctions in social psychology. See Hofstede (1980), Kondo (1990), Markus (1991), and Triandis (1988, 1993, 1995) for further detail.

and overly self-critical reaction to moral or social failure.

In addition to these positive roles shame plays in social interaction and moral awareness, it has unique moral psychological nature. Shame is not just a positive prosocial disposition and a self-evaluative moral sense, but is also an ideal character trait and a mark of moral excellence. In the following sections, I will analyze the moral psychological nature of shame, not only as a self-evaluative emotion and a social disposition, but also as a moral virtue and a moral ideal. Particularly, I will discuss why shame is a major moral virtue in Confucian philosophy. In early Confucianism, shame is not a painful and depressive emotion that accompanies moral failure, but as an ideal moral disposition that facilitates self-reflection and self-cultivation. By combining empirical studies and philosophical analyses of shame, I will explain how it is possible for a person to be shamefully virtuous.

2 Meanings of Shame

There are, *generally*, four different meanings of shame and shame-related words (such as shameful, ashamed, and shameless) in English⁵: (1) a painful feeling or experience resulting from one's awareness of one's own social or moral failure (inadequate or inappropriate behaviors) that is observed or known by others (2) dishonor or dishonorable events, situations, or objects that can cause (1), (3) an unfortunate or pitiful event, and (4) the sense or ability to recognize and discern what is appropriate and correct. Because of these different meanings, it is often difficult to understand what is exactly meant by shame when it is used in different contexts. For example, it is confusing to distinguish *shame* (in the sense of (1) above) in "shamefulness" from *shame* (in the sense of (4) above) in "shamelessness." From the perspective of word form, shamefulness ("full" of shame) and shamelessness ("lack" of shame) should have opposite meanings but their actual meanings are close to each other; both of them describe socially or morally problematic situations. One way to explain the semantic affinity of *shamefulness* and *shamelessness* is to bring in two distinct semantic dimensions of shame: one has to do with an experience or situation of negativity or

⁵ The first three meanings of shame, according to *The Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) are: "1. The painful emotion arising from the consciousness of something dishonouring, ridiculous, or indecorous in one's own conduct or circumstances (or in those of others whose honour or disgrace one regards as one's own), or being in a situation which offends one's sense of modesty or decency." "2. Fear of offence against propriety or decency, operating as a restraint on behaviour; modesty, shamefastness." "3. Disgrace, ignomy, loss of esteem or reputation." According to Lansky, English word "shame" is related to the desire to "disappear from view" or "comportment that would avoid the emotion (the obverse of shamelessness)" (Lansky 1996, 769).

inappropriateness, but the other has to do with an active sense or disposition of appropriateness or decency. Simply, what *shamefulness* has is the former and what *shamelessness* lacks is the latter. If the two semantic dimensions or poles of shame are recognized, then different meanings of shame can be categorized under the two general groups. It seems that (1), (2), and (3) above form a group that concerns the negative and reactive aspects of shame. (4) has another meaning that deals with the positive and dispositional aspects of shame.

Although the full semantic analysis of shame goes beyond the scope of the current paper, I will assume, in this paper, that the semantic distinction between a feeling of failure and a disposition of appropriateness exists in shame words in English and that a similar distinction can be made in some European languages. For example, *honte* and *pudeur* in French, *Schande* and *Scham* in German, *vergüenza* and *pudor* in Spanish, *vergogna* and *pudore* in Italian, and *foedus* and *pudor* in Latin all seem to show a general, if not a clear cut, distinction between negative-reactive and positive-dispositional senses of shame (Scheff 1991/2001, 7). These words from other European languages, of course, have broad semantic spectra with associated dimensions in their particular socio-linguistic environments and, therefore, their meanings cannot be completely captured by the two simple semantic dimensions of shame discussed here.⁶ Generally speaking, however, each word pair listed above seems to represent the two semantic orientations of shame found in English.⁷ For example, the French

⁶ Some of these words are used to refer to private parts of the body and particular styles of sexual life. Additionally, the two different (i.e., negative reactive and positive dispositional) meanings of shame coexist in some words of shame. But, generally, the first word in each pair means (1, 2, or 3) and the second word means (4) in the listed meanings of shame.

⁷ Shame, in this second sense, is mostly understood as a particular character trait—not a feeling of embarrassment, but a disposition of appropriately controlled self. In English, “shamelessness” means lack of modesty. This type of shame is often related to shyness and modesty (anything that limits excessive self-expression or invasive demeanor). One can argue, however, that an ashamed feeling (the first meaning of shame) comes out of this sense or disposition of an appropriately controlled self (the second meaning of shame). That is, the two meanings of shame are not really different because they share the same conceptual or psychological foundation. Feeling of shame or embarrassment (the first meaning of shame) is an active psychological state that comes out of the controlled disposition (the second meaning of shame). Perhaps these are related semantically, conceptually, or even psychologically. As I explained above, however, the two semantic dimensions of shame have very different foundations. If shamefulness and shamelessness are semantically close to each other, shame has two opposite semantic poles. Additionally, their psychological natures seem different too. Embarrassed feelings and desires to hide or withdraw (the first sense of shame) come out of such survival strategies as dominance negotiation, competition control, and threat management (Gilbert 1989; Keltner 1998; Weisfeld 1999). But a sense of appropriateness, modesty, or bashfulness (the second meaning of shame), I suppose, comes out of a different source, similar to the moral interest of cultivating an ideal self discussed by Confucius, Mencius, and Aristotle.

words *honte* and *pudeur* or the German words *Schande* and *Scham* may have other meanings, but, in their own ways, seem to represent the two semantic dimensions (negative reactive and positive dispositional dimensions) discussed here. As I shall explain shortly, this distinction has historical and philosophical significance in our understanding of shame.

It is enlightening to know that a similar semantic duality can be observed in ancient Greek terms such as *aidôs*, *aiskhunê*, and *aischros*.⁸ Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad* have several passages concerning shame and Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, *Nicomachean ethics*, and *Eudemian Ethics* have detailed discussion of its moral significance. Stoic philosophers also develop their analyses of shame and some of them distinguish shame's morally desirable or relevant (*aidôs*) and morally irrelevant or emotionally reactive (*aiskhunê*) dimensions.⁹ The Christian bishop Nemesius of Emesa (in the fourth century C.E.) is probably one of the philosophers who clearly specified the two different or perhaps opposite meanings of shame by focusing on their prospective or retrospective features: a person feels *aiskhunê* for things she has done in the past but feels *aidôs* for things that may put her in some sort of disgrace in the future (SVF, 3.416.17–22; Nemesius, *De Natura Hominis*, Ch. 20). According to Nemesius, *aidôs* is a healthy and moral desire for good behavior in the future, but *aiskhunê* is a depressingly or obsessively self-critical emotion linked to previous moral wrongdoings. As many scholars, such as Cairns (1993), today point out, this is not necessarily a correct interpretation of *aidôs* and *aiskhunê* in Aristotle,¹⁰ the Stoics, or other ancient philosophers. Nonetheless, Nemesius's distinction became popular and accepted as the distinction between the feeling of being ashamed of past failures and concern over the future consequences of an action, as is evident in two different meanings of shame in many modern languages.¹¹ As the following table (Table 1) shows, the two meanings of shame (*aiskhunê* and *aidôs*) specified by Nemesius can be summarized into two groups of behavioral, emotional, and moral characteristics.¹²

⁸ These three terms are not clearly distinguished for their separate meanings such as shame, shamefulness, and the sense of shame.

⁹ "Typically, the Stoics contrasted *aidôs* with *aiskhunê* treating the former as a healthy sentiment [eupatheia] characteristic of the sage, whereas *aiskhunê* was classified among the vicious emotions to which everyone except the sage is subject [SVF 431.1–9 = Diogenes Laertius 7.115]" (Konstan 2006, 96).

¹⁰ Aristotle says that shame (shameful feeling) is felt present, past, or future (*Rhetoric*, 1383b13). Nemesius's distinction, therefore, does not truthfully reflect Aristotle's definition of shame. In the other extreme, Grimaldi (1988, 105) argues that there is no difference in Aristotle's use of *aidôs* and *aiskhunê*.

¹¹ See Riezler (1948, 462–63), Lansky (1996, 769), and Scheff (1997, 209).

¹² See Konstan (2003, 2006) for separate historical, linguistic, and philosophical developments of this distinction.

Table 1 Distinction between Aiskhunê and Aidôs

First Meaning of Shame (as in “shamefulness”)	Second Meaning of Shame (as in “Shamelessness”)
<i>aiskhunê (interpreted by Nemesisus)</i>	<i>aidôs (interpreted by Nemesisus)</i>
<i>Feeling of Being Ashamed</i>	<i>Sense of Shame (Appropriateness)</i>
<i>Retrospective Stance</i>	<i>Prospective Stance</i>
<i>Reactive to Previous Wrongdoings</i>	<i>Proactive to Future possibility of Wrongdoings</i>
<i>Fear of Others' Observation</i>	<i>Respect of Others' Views</i>
<i>Resulting Disgrace</i>	<i>Resulting Modesty (Observation of Moral Codes)</i>

In this table, one can see how different aspects of shame are grouped under the distinction between aiskhunê and aidôs, and, perhaps, how the proposed distinction is related to or even parallel to the two different meanings of shame in many European languages. As I will elaborate further in the following sections, the three sets of distinctions, (aiskhunê and aidôs, being ashamed and the sense of being appropriate, shame and guilt) are neither the same nor parallel to each other, and, therefore, they should be separately explained and independently analyzed. But these distinctions are often used uncritically to support each other. For example, Dodds (1951) analyzes a prevalent image of the autonomous self in Western civilization (i.e., an independent and individual human person who freely chooses to do what he or she desires and is ready to assume the responsibility of the chosen actions and decisions) from the perspective of shame and guilt. He explains the development of a cultural image of the free and independent self by the emergence of guilt as a moral emotion in ancient Greek culture. The main characteristics that set guilt apart from shame, as analyzed by Dodds (1951) and Benedict (1946) in their studies of ancient Athens (around the fifth century B.C.E.) and modern Japanese culture respectively, are an agent's voluntary acknowledgement of moral transgression and her inner moral awareness of universal moral principles (Lewis 1971, 81). According to Dodds's and Benedict's interpretations, shame lacks the essential element of moral autonomy and the independent decision-making ability of an agent who readily takes responsibility of her actions and decisions. Even though shame is closely related to the self-image of an agent and the fear of losing her honor and reputation, it has little to do with the free and autonomous authority of the self and an inner sense of morality.¹³ For this reason, shame is characterized as an undeveloped or underdeveloped state of the mind in comparison with guilt, a mature and responsible trait of self (Creighton 1990;

¹³ Tangney and Dearing report that “shame involves fairly global negative evaluations of the (i.e., ‘Who I am’). Guilt, involves a more articulated condemnation of a specific behavior (i.e., ‘What I did’)...” (Tangney and Dearing 2002, 24).

Scheff 1997).¹⁴

Recently, positive and holistic interpretations of shame have been developed to rediscover the rich foundation of this self-evaluative and self-reflective emotion. In those interpretations, shame is not related to the fear of the vulnerable self or the escape from embarrassment and disgrace in front of others. Rather, it is regarded as a moral sense with active motivation for reparation and improvement. According to Cairns (1993), this new (positive, holistic, and inclusive) approach to shame is very important in interpreting ancient Greek literature and philosophy. In ancient Greece, shame is a fully developed sense of self-awareness and enriched social consciousness that can help a person to live a virtuous life. This type of self-reflective shame should be distinguished from reactive, recessive, and morally irresponsible forms of shame which Dodds (1951), Benedict (1946), and Creighton (1990) discuss in their analyses of the underdeveloped and morally inferior (i.e., heteronomous) self. According to them, shame is intrinsically associated with the insecure feeling of the weak and vulnerable self and the fear of being watched and judged by others. From the perspective of the inclusive and holistic approach to shame, however, shame is not necessarily associated with negative, reactive, or morally inferior emotions. As I discussed above, shame is not only self-critical but also self-reflective and self-nurturing. It is involved with diverse facets of the self. Therefore, the dichotomies of shame (i.e., shame vs. guilt, *aiskhunê* vs. *aidôs*, reactive vs. proactive aspects of shame) need to be revisited for a broad and deep understanding of the self-critical and self-reflective potential of the human mind.¹⁵

One way to understand the diverse characteristics of shame is to analyze them from the perspective of markedness theory. Markedness theory is proposed by Jakobson (1929, 1968) and Trubetzkoy (1969) as a structuralist theory about binary oppositions, i.e., two opposing linguistic or conceptual terms (such as old/young and good/bad) forming an asymmetrical relation in which one term is

¹⁴ See the following characterizations of shame: “Shame feelings precede the development of the superego, although they may later be integrated into the superego formation. Guilt develops later during the Oedipal phase and requires the presence of a superego” (Creighton 1990, 286). “Shame, with its corresponding fear of rejection, is not a very effective sanction in American society, where individuals are encouraged to become independent” (Creighton 1990, 296). “Over the last 200 years in the history of modern societies, shame virtually disappeared. The denial of shame has been institutionalized in Western society” (Scheff 1997, 205). “Shame has been recognized since antiquity. A strong theme of shame exists in the early stories of Adam and Eve. However, it has only been in the last 20 years or so that shame has been subjected to systematic research and theory development” (Gilbert 1998, v).

¹⁵ Cairns (1993) and Williams (1993) criticize these dichotomies as being simple and limited interpretations of the diverse and active roles shame plays in our personal and public life.

unmarked (default, basic, general, dominant, etc.) but another term is marked (derived, developed, specific, special, etc.). Binary pairs such as happy/unhappy, fortune/misfortune, honest/dishonest, and man/woman are the relations typically analyzed and explained by markedness theory. Markedness relations are not symmetrical, because marked and unmarked terms, despite their seemingly symmetrical contrast, are not mutually exclusive or opposite. A marked term is differentiated from its unmarked term, but the latter can include the former (although not vice versa). For example, “lion” and “lioness” are two opposite terms, but “lion” is an unmarked term and “lioness” is a marked term because “lioness” is regarded as a lexical derivation from and a special form of its default term, i.e., “lion.” In a narrow sense, lion (male lion) is differentiated from and contrasted to lioness (female lion) but, in a broad sense, lion includes lioness because lionesses are lions (but not vice versa). Analysis of this type of asymmetrical and hierarchical relation found in human languages and social institutions is the goal of markedness theory. The following diagram (Fig. 1) shows a markedness relation of the lion/lioness pair.

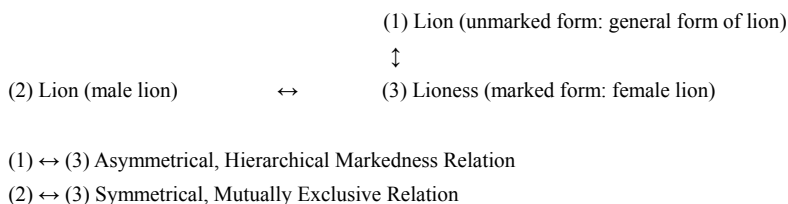


Fig. 1 Lion, Lioness, and Their Markedness Relations

Markedness theory was originally proposed to explain the linguistic properties of opposite terms, but it has been expanded to analyze psychological, cultural, and social terms and their relations (Andersen 1989; Battistella 1990; Waugh 1982). Generally, marked relations can be found in linguistically formed, psychologically developed, and socially constructed terms such as male/female, white/black, and fertility/barrenness. Perhaps contrastive distinctions of shame, such as *aiskhunê* vs. *aidôs*, feeling ashamed vs. sense of appropriateness, and shame vs. guilt can be explained from the perspective of markedness relations. For example, the distinction between shameful feeling (*aiskhunê*) and the sense of modesty (*aidôs*), proposed by Nemesius, is based on a symmetrical and contrastive relation between two meanings of shame. Aristotle’s discussion of shame, however, is not based on symmetrical or mutually exclusive meanings of shame. Aristotle discusses shame mostly in the sense of *aiskhunê* in his *Rhetoric* (see Konstan 2006, 96). and says that shameful feeling (*aiskhunê*) can be felt about one’s past, present, and future wrongdoings (*Rhetoric*, 1383b13). That is,

in comparison with *aidôs*, which is limited to future wrongdoings, *aiskhunê* seems to be an inclusive and general (i.e., unmarked) form of shame. That is, *aiskhunê* and *aidôs* form a markedness (asymmetrical and hierarchical) relation, if we follow Aristotle's distinction: *aiskhunê* is an unmarked (inclusive, general, and default) term and *aidôs* is a marked (specialized and derivative) term of shame. As the following diagram (Fig. 2) shows, shameful feeling (*aiskhunê*) and the sense of appropriateness (*aidôs*) can be symmetrically contrastive (à la Nemesius), but their relation can be interpreted as asymmetrical and hierarchical (à la Aristotle in his *Rhetoric*).

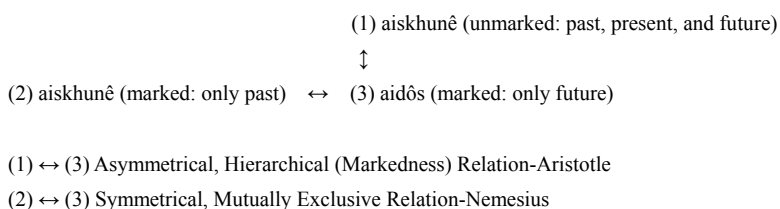


Fig. 2 Aiskhunê, Aidôs, and Their Markedness Relations

What this markedness analysis shows us is the complex (i.e., multi-layered or multi-dimensional) conceptual structure of shame. Shame has multiple semantic dimensions and characteristics with symmetrical or asymmetrical relations. Specifically, different meanings of shame do not necessarily form symmetrical and mutually exclusive relations. For example, *aiskhunê* and *aidôs* (like lion and lioness) are mutually exclusive at one level but inclusive at another level. Shame, therefore, should be understood in a more holistic way in which the relation between unmarked and marked meanings of shame can be carefully specified and distinguished.

Perhaps shame in Confucian philosophy can be analyzed from the viewpoint of markedness theory. Early Confucian philosophers are strong proponents of shame, as evidenced in many Confucian texts where they discuss shame and its moral potential.¹⁶ The value of a self-critical and self-reflective awareness of shame, for Confucian philosophy, is at the center of the moral mind. For Confucius, shame is the virtue of respectable officials (*Analects* 13.20), and for Mencius, shame is the one of the major foundations (*xiu* 羞 in *xiu wu zhi xin* 羞恶之心) of the moral mind (*Mencius* 2A6, 6A6). In general, the sense and disposition of shame is one of the important moral abilities of an ideal human person in early Confucian philosophy. Even though shame is felt most strongly

¹⁶ Shame is frequently discussed and highly regarded in early Confucianism but there is rarely any discussion of shame in Mohism and Daoism (Geaney 2004).

when one's behavior is watched by others, especially by those one respects and admires (*Mencius* 2B9, 7A20)¹⁷, it is not the fear of rejection or an obsession with one's self-image, but a self-reflective emotion toward ideal moral excellence that causes shame. That is, Confucian shame is not an underdeveloped form of moral stress or an affective withdrawal, but is positive energy toward self-improvement and motivation for continuous self-cultivation.

In the *Analects* and the *Mencius*, five Chinese characters, 耻 (*chi*), 羞 (*xiu*), 愧 (*kui*), 怍 (*zuo*), and 惭 (*can*) refer to an intense affective experience that is typically translated as shame in English. *Chi* is the most general form of shame in the *Analects* and the *Mencius*. Like (unmarked) *aishkunê*, *chi* covers many different aspects of shame. In the *Analects*, for example, *chi* means the feeling of being ashamed, the inner sense of appropriateness, disgrace, moral violation, and moral excellence. Among these different meanings of *chi*, two contrasting meanings can be identified: external *chi* and internal *chi*. I call external *chi* a shameful experience caused by one's bad or inferior exterior (i.e., appearance, cloth, behavior etc.), typically in front of or in comparison with others. In the *Analects* 4.9, Confucius discusses a situation where a person is ashamed because of her poor appearance (bad clothes) and diet (bad food) in comparison to others. In this situation of embarrassment or humiliation, Confucius seems to expect shame (i.e., external *chi*) as a typical (but not ideal or desirable) emotional reaction (*Analects* 4.9, 9.27). On the contrary, I call internal *chi* an inner sense of morality, such as the sense of modesty, honor, or appropriateness (*Analects* 2.3, 5.25, 14.27). A Confucian agent experiences this type of shame, for instance, if her actions do not match with her words (*Analects* 4.22). Generally, a virtuous moral agent, according Confucius, feels ashamed not because of her disgraceful appearance (bad clothes, bad food) *in front of others* but because of her feeling that her sense of appropriateness is violated or will be violated.

Please note that external *chi* does not necessarily refer to the "external" object or situation that can induce a shameful experience. Rather, external *chi* is typically induced by one self-critical perception of relative evaluation by or comparison with others. Perhaps external *chi* and internal *chi* can be called social shame and moral shame respectively. Social shame is shameful experience generated by one's sense of failure to live up to others' expectations, i.e., negative comparison or evaluation of one's self from others' perspectives. Moral shame is generated by one's sense of failure to live up to one's own ideal standard whether others are watching one's failure or not. Poor clothing (external appearance), for example, can generate external *chi* (social shame) if one's poor appearance is seen by others, or internal *chi* (moral shame) if one's parents are

¹⁷ See Aristotle for the similar observations of shame (*Rhetoric*, 1384a43, 1384a 35–36, 1384b 37–39).

dressed poorly because of one's negligence.

The distinction between internal and external *chi* is not same as Nemesius's distinction between *aiskhunê* and *aidôs* because internal and external *chi* are not lined up with prospective or retrospective emotions concerning one's wrongdoings. But these distinctions, even though their terms have slightly different meanings, are similarly constrained by markedness relations as contrastive terms (*aiskhunê* vs. *aidôs*, and external vs. internal *chi*) of shame. In several passages of the *Analects*, external *chi* and internal *chi* are compared to each other to illustrate the moral significance of internal *chi*. For example, bad clothes and bad food can cause external *chi* in front of others, but does not cause internal *chi*: a virtuous person is unaffected and undistracted by situations where external *chi* is easily aroused (*Analects* 9.27). On the contrary, fine words (巧言), deceptive appearance (令色), and excessive respect (足恭) do not typically cause external *chi* but do cause internal *chi* in virtuous people such as Zuo Qiuming (左丘明) and Confucius (*Analects* 5.25). External and internal *chi*, therefore, exclude each other as an opposite pair in several passages of the *Analects*. The following table (Table 2) summarizes the distinction between external *chi* and internal *chi*.

Table 2 External *Chi* and Internal *Chi*

External <i>Chi</i>	Internal <i>Chi</i>
Feeling Ashamed	Inner Sense of Appropriateness
Feeling of Self-Demotion in front of others due to -Bad/Inferior External Appearance -Bad/Inferior Food (<i>Analects</i> 4.9, and 9.27)	Inner Sense of Modesty and Rightness (<i>Analects</i> 2.3, 5.25, and 14.27)

It is important to note that the distinction between external and internal *chi* does not follow the similar distinctions made by scholars who interpret shame as inner moral consciousness or internally inspired moral motivation in Confucian philosophy. As Geaney (2004) points out, several scholars, such as Eberhard (1967), Ng (1981), Roetz (1993), Santangelo (1992), Shun (2001), and Van Norden (2002), developed positive and morally relevant interpretations of shame.¹⁸ To highlight the moral significance of shame in Confucian philosophy against popular interpretations that take shame as a morally irrelevant,

¹⁸ Geaney says that “scholars of Confucian ethics have made use of new studies in psychology, anthropology, and philosophy that present shame in a more favorable light. These studies contend that shame involves the internalization of social moral codes. By adapting these new internal models of shame, Confucian ethicists have reinterpreted the emphasis on shame in early Confucianism. Instead of reflecting a fear of external judgment and retribution, they argue, shame represents a motivation that is internally inspired” (Geaney 2004, 13).

underdeveloped, and reactive emotion, they often distinguish Confucian shame from the fear of judgment by others or the experience of being embarrassed in front of others. For example, Shun says that shame “is not associated with the thought of being seen or heard, and the reaction typically associated with it is not hiding or disappearing” (Shun 2001, 235), and Van Norden (2002) stresses the difference between conventional shame and ethical shame and discusses the latter’s moral significance in Confucian philosophy. Even though I am mostly sympathetic to their interpretations of shame and their emphases on the positive moral significance of shame and its relevance to Confucian virtue, my analysis of shame does not follow their two-way distinction between morally significant shame and socially or conventionally relevant shame. I believe that, in addition to these contrasting forms of shame, there exists an un-marked *ur*-shame that includes the broad spectrum of characteristics of a self-critical emotion with its unique psychological, social, and moral functions in the mind of a moral agent.

The ultimate goal of my analysis is to explain different meanings of shame and its moral significance. Particularly, I will explore the possibility of finding a unique form of shame that is neither internal/moral nor external/social. That is, if the dichotomy of internal and external shame or any of its variations does not fully explain the whole range of shameful experience and its moral significance, shame has to be understood openly and broadly from the perspective of human psychology and not limited by dualistic distinctions such as the distinction made by Nemesius or other philosophers. For this reason, I do not intend to support an internal interpretation of Confucian shame where shame’s moral significance is explained purely from the perspective of inner moral sense or motivation. Perhaps markedness theory can help us here to develop a better understanding of diverse forms of shame in Confucian philosophy.

In my analysis of *chi*, I focus on the third category of *chi* that includes, enriches, and interacts with internal and external *chi*. This inclusive form of *chi*, or “unmarked” *chi*, includes broad psychological characteristics: the feeling of embarrassment, disgrace, moral violation, and personal virtue, in addition to other specialized feelings. If unmarked *chi*, and the two exclusive forms of *chi* (i.e., internal and external *chi*) constitute a markedness relation, the different forms of *chi* can support both binary opposition and asymmetrical hierarchy.¹⁹ As a lioness is not a male lion (in its oppositional relation to male lion) but is still a lion (in its asymmetrical and hierarchical relation to default lion), we can perhaps say internal *chi* is not external *chi* (in its opposition relation to external *chi*) but still *chi* (in its hierarchical relation to default, unmarked *chi*) as illustrated in Fig. 3.

¹⁹ Originally, a markedness relation holds among overtly identified lexical terms (such as lion and lioness). Here, I apply it to covert semantic or conceptual dimensions of shame.

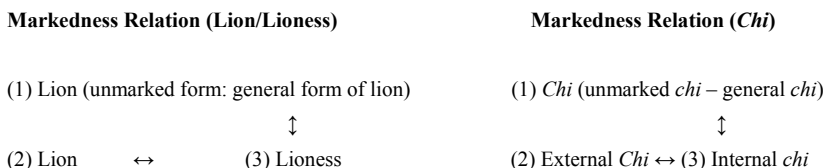


Fig. 3 Markedness Relations (Lion/Lioness and Meanings of *Chi*)

Generally, early Confucian texts do not provide sufficient information about different meanings of *chi* and their relations amongst each other, but there are several passages of the *Analects* and the *Mencius* where one can find some clues for a particular markedness relation among different forms of *chi*. First, as I explained above, external and internal *chi* are contrasted in several passages of the *Analects*. For instance, the two passages of the *Analects* contrasts external *chi* and internal *chi*: “a scholar who is fully committed to the Way [*dao* 道] does not associate with those who feel [externally] ashamed of bad cloth and bad food” (*Analects* 4.9),²⁰ and “fine words, deceptive appearance, and excessive respect—Zuo Qiuming is [internally] ashamed of them and Confucius is also [internally] ashamed of them” (*Analects* 5.25). In these passages, bad food and bad cloth do not induce shame in Confucius, but fine words, deceptive appearance, and excessive respect do. It is unclear, however, why Confucius does not like a good appearance or fine words, but is accommodative of bad cloth or bad food. Based on these limited passages in the *Analects*, one can hardly develop a grand hypothesis on Confucian shame, but it is at least certain that Confucius’s (in the *Analects* 5.25) is a unique form of shame. Perhaps, it is not a particular type of things that Confucius is ashamed of, but a particular way that these things are presented or obtained that makes him uncomfortable or even ashamed. One can find a hint in another passage of the *Analects*. Confucius (*Analects* 14.24) says that “in ancient days, people studied for themselves but nowadays people study for others” (古之学者为己, 今之学者为人). That is, one should learn for one’s own cultivation, not in order to display it to others. Considering Confucius’s emphasis on the value of genuine self-cultivation and the distinction between external *chi* and internal *chi*, one can hypothesize that the reason Confucius is ashamed of fine words, deceptive appearance, and excessive respect is not because they represent material values or external resources, but because they are the kind of things that are typically displayed to others to show off one’s greatness. Confucius does not like to see people showing off their resourcefulness to impress or intimidate others. If, as I discussed above, external

²⁰ The original passages are “士志于道, 而耻恶衣恶食者, 未足与议也” (*Analects* 4.9) and “巧言、令色、足恭, 左丘明耻之, 丘亦耻之” (*Analects* 5.25).

chi is associated with social shame and internal *chi* is associated with moral shame, Confucius's *chi* in these passages of the *Analects* can be characterized as an internal and moral shame that comes out of one's awareness of the gap between one's moral ideal and one's failed attempt to achieve it. *Chi* described in the *Analects* 4.9, however, is external and social shame: a person feels shame because she is seen by others as inferior, deprived, or unattractive. Confucius does not associate with people who develop this type of external *chi* and does not like to see people motivated (by their concern of external *chi*) to show themselves off with fine words, deceptive appearance, and excessive display of respect. Since one can be ashamed internally (morally) without being so externally (socially) and vice versa (as described in the *Analects* 4.9 and 5.25), internal *chi* and external *chi* are independent forms of shame. Additionally, the two forms of shame come out of two different conditions (i.e., internal moral conditions, [inner moral standard] and external social conditions [other's evaluation]). External *chi* and internal *chi*, therefore, can form a contrastive markedness relation. That is, external *chi* and internal *chi* exemplify a binary opposition with a symmetrical contrast.

Second, Mencius (7A6) talks about a very special type of *chi*, i.e., *chi* of *chi*-lessness (无耻之耻, shame of shamelessness). Shamelessness, as we know in many languages, refers to the lack of internal shame (the lack of one's sense of modesty), but this is not necessarily external shame because one can be shameless without being (externally) ashamed by it. The shame that comes out of one's realization of shamelessness is neither internal nor external shame but *ur*-shame or meta-shame that looks over one's self and feels an affective sense of self-awareness for any moral or social violations. Thus Mencius says that "as one has the shame of shamelessness, one does not have to be shameful anymore" (无耻之耻, 无耻矣, Mencius 7A6). Therefore, shame of shamelessness is the third, more inclusive, general, or foundational form of shame, and, for that reason, it is the default, unmarked form of *chi*. Other than external and internal *chi*, there exists a general form of *chi* that Mencius picks up as the shame of shamelessness. Put together, the markedness relation of *chi* (illustrated in Fig. 4) consists of external *chi* and internal *chi* forming an oppositional relation and default unmarked *chi* forming asymmetric, hierarchical relations to marked forms of *chi*.

As illustrated in the diagram above, there is an inclusive meaning of *chi* in addition to the two contrasting meanings of *chi* (external and internal *chi*). A clear distinction between this inclusive meaning of *chi* and marked meanings of *chi* is very important in understanding the social and moral significance of shame in Confucian philosophy. One of the unique characteristics of shame in early Confucian texts is the wide range of things to which shame can be attributed. Shame refers not only to shameful feelings regarding moral violations and

wrongdoings, but also to properties of events and states of affairs that fall short of expected norms and standards. In a broad sense, almost everything can be an object of shame. For example, wealth, poverty, honor, meanness, cloth, (*Analects* 8.13) and even a state or a political regime (*Mencius* 4A7) can be objects of shame. Compared with Aristotle's characterization of shame mainly as an emotional state of the mind, Confucian shame is broad and general and aims at not only inner emotional states (subjective experience) but also at external events or situations that can induce shame. It is even possible for several people to share shame. Shame can be attributed not only to a single person but also to a group of people (*Analects* 2.3) or a country (*Mencius* 4A7). A whole country is a shame if it promotes inappropriate political actions endangering its good reputation. In this sense, shame is close to guilt; it is not unusual for a state or nation to be guilty of a certain policy or a decision that resulted in harm to other states or nations.²¹

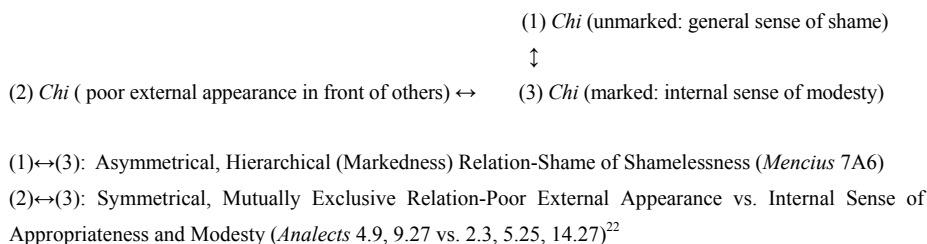


Fig. 4 Markedness Relations and Meanings of *Chi*

Shame can be aroused in the mind of a person who does not do anything shameful. In the *Mencius* (1B3), there is a story about King Wu. When King Wu was ashamed (*chi*) of a man who violated norms in his kingdom, he rightly expressed his anger and made his country peaceful again. King Wu's shame is not self-blame or remorseful feeling directed at the man. It is King Wu's reactive attitude against moral violations.²³ In other passages of the *Mencius* (2A6, 6A6),

²¹ For example, Barkan describes guilt when it is attributed to a whole country. "One new measure of this public morality is the growing political willingness, and at times eagerness, to admit one's historical guilt" (Barkan 2000, xxviii).

²² In Mandarin Chinese, there are several terms to describe distinct forms of shame (Bedford 2003, 2004). *Xiukui* (羞愧) is a challenge or threat to the private or inner self, while *xiuchi* (羞耻) is external and public disgrace usually in front of others. They seem to be parallel to internal shame and external shame in this diagram. *Cankui* (惭愧) is another term that refers to an event which jeopardizes one's personal ideal.

²³ Perhaps, King Wu's shame here is the combination of moral courage, power, and self-awareness of disgrace. It is probably comparable to the shame of Hindu goddess Kali. See Menon (1994).

Mencius characterizes this explicitly moral aspect of shame as an innate orientation of the moral mind (*xiu wu zhi xin* 羞恶之心) toward the foundation of righteousness.²⁴

Additionally, shame is associated with things that are not typically related to personal failure. Shame is usually associated with social failures and moral wrongdoings that are disgraceful to a person. In the *Analects* (1.13), shame and disgrace (*ru* 辱) are used next to each other to indicate this close relation between the two. But shame can be attributed to things that do not seem to be related to personal disgrace or failure. In the *Mencius*, losing battles (1A5), not following the commands of one's master (4A7), and dying in one's country without food (6B14) are all shameful events.

If shame is extended further, it can be understood as an object of public exchange. Although it is not a commodity which can be bought or sold, it can be given or taken in a social relation. Like trust, analyzed by Solomon and Flores (2003), shame can be exchanged in social interactions by following the general norm of reciprocity.²⁵ If I acknowledge or respect shame in my dealings with others, I can expect others to do the same in similar occasions. This is the process of shame-giving and shame-taking in ideal social relations in a tightly knit community. As I will discuss further in the following section, the communal and reciprocal dimension of shame is not much discussed in Western moral traditions and, at the same time, differs greatly from the modern concept of guilt characterized predominantly as the *inner* (i.e., enclosed) moral sense.

From the viewpoint of the broad interpersonal, social, and moral dimensions of shame, the reason one should be careful about one's own behavior is not because one's personal reputation is ruined by others' watching one's personal wrongdoings, but because one cares about one's whole self living a virtuous life in changing personal, social, and moral environments. Shame, in this sense, is a self-evaluative emotion, a constant process of reflective evaluation of oneself against one's moral ideal in the diverse and challenging conditions of human life. Particularly broad applications of the experience of shame to diverse targets of shame evidenced in many early Confucian texts shows that the fundamental driving force of shame is one's caring interest for one's own self, i.e., for its well-being and continuous development in the varying contingencies of life.

This tendency of caring for one's self takes a serious moral turn in early

²⁴ King Wu's shame can be interpreted as his sense of pride and honor (to rule a perfect country). As an example of morality and virtue, however, his shame can be better interpreted as his reaction to a moral violation than to the threat to his pride.

²⁵ Like trust, shame is not just an emotional state but it is also a process and a result of social exchange.

Confucian philosophy. In Confucianism, one's shame is not necessarily aroused by an anonymous public or one's neighbors, but by someone one respects and cares about (that is, wise sages or respectful teachers, *Mencius* 2B9) or even by impersonal Heaven (the ideal standard righteousness, *Mencius* 7A20). A Confucian moral agent is ashamed by her own wrongdoings because of her commitment to or respect for her cherished values. In the *Mencius*, this shameful feeling includes one's self-examination and full awareness of one's moral ideal. Three characters (*kui* 愧, *zuo* 作, *can* 惭) are used to describe this type of shame. Shame, in this context, means *remorseful feelings of self-criticism* (愧, 作, 惭) *in front of* (于) *others*. Typically this type of shame is a negative feeling (embarrassing experience) due to the disappointment of someone whom an agent respects and cares about. It is a distinct moral emotion discussed in the *Mencius* (2B9, 7A20). According to Mencius, a virtuous person has three delights, and the second one is this type of shame. "Above, he is not ashamed to face Heaven (仰不愧于天); below he is not ashamed to face man (俯不作于人)" (*Mencius* 7A20; Lau 1970, 185). It is interesting to see that all the characters of shame in this category have the same radical *xin* (心, mind), seemingly supporting the interpretation that these characters (*kui* 愧, *zuo* 作, *can* 惭) refer to uncomfortable inner feelings of moral violation but are also used in the context of a moral agent's relation to anonymous others or to people (i.e., moral authority or norm) she respects. That is, when a person is ashamed, she feels an *inner sense* of violation *in front of* her moral ideal, manifested in the form of exemplary figures or Heaven. This unique moral shame combines external shame (feeling ashamed in front of others) and internal shame (inner sense of morality) together in a unique and inclusive emotion of self-reflection and moral challenge.

Confucian shame, if it can be differentiated from Nemesis's shame or Stoic shame, is intrinsically a social and moral emotion that combines the interior and exterior of a moral agent. It is neither a reactive and instinctual reaction toward self-protection against wrongful actions, nor a disgrace coming from personal failures seen by others, nor an entirely inner episode or sense of morality; it is one's self-reflective concern for personal integrity and a good life in a community where people can share their emotions and support their moral ideals. Therefore, this type of inclusive moral shame (reflected in the diverse use of shame terms in Confucian texts) can hardly be captured by its marked, narrowly specified, or symmetrically contrasted senses. In Confucian philosophy, shame is a uniquely inclusive moral emotion and self-reflective moral disposition. But is this type of moral shame as psychologically realistic as it is philosophically convincing? To complete my interpretation of Confucian shame, I will develop a psychological analysis of moral shame in the following sections.

3 Social and Cultural Psychology of Shame

As I discussed in the previous section, shame has narrowly specified “marked” features and broadly specified “unmarked” features that include a personal sense of disgrace, self-conscious awareness of moral violations, and caring interest for one’s moral and social self. Aristotle’s discussion of shame in the *Rhetoric* and the *Eudemian Ethics* and Confucius’s and Mencius’s discussion of shame focus on this inclusive, unmarked sense of shame that can even overlap with some of general characteristics of guilt. But does this type of shame really (i.e., psychologically) exist as a fully developed character trait, an ideal moral virtue, or a foundation of the moral mind? Does psychology help us understand the nature of Confucian moral shame?

An emotional state is an inner mental state that is typically identified by three dimensions: its intentionality (representational or directional characteristics-what it is about), phenomenology (felt qualities-how it is felt) and motivation (action facilitation function-what it motivates).²⁶ Anger, for example, is directed toward moral or social violations, experienced in strong and negative feelings, and facilitates aggressive behaviors. Certain emotions, mood and depression for instance, do not have clear intentional objects or particular motivational orientations, but, overall, most emotions have specific characteristics in these three dimensions.

A moral emotion is an emotional state caused by morally inspiring or repulsive events and behaviors. Anger, guilt, shame, disgust, pity, compassion, and sympathy are moral emotions, but it is unclear whether they are fully dedicated (domain specific) moral emotions or domain general emotions applied to moral issues. Guilt, for instance, is typically understood as a morally specific emotion, but shame is not always directed at moral violations. It could be aroused by morally neutral or irrelevant events (Babcock 1990; Hultberg 1988; Thrane 1979).

Both shame and guilt are self-evaluative and self-critical emotions, but they have different psychological profiles. Many social psychologists believe that shame is a negative, self-conscious, painful, destructive state of the mind, but that guilt is a constructive, reparative, and other-regarding moral consciousness (Lewis 1971; Tangney 1991, 2002). Their differences are consistently and reliably observed and measured with such diverse methodologies as content analysis of shame-guilt discourses and narratives, quantitative ratings of personal shame-guilt experiences, analyses of causal attribution patterns of shame-guilt,

²⁶ To these dimensions one can add valence (whether a given state is stressful [negative] or pleasant [positive]) and temporal mode (an emotional state can be an occurrent state [an episode of emotional arousal] or a dispositional state [a long term, habitual state]).

analyses of counterfactual thinking, and qualitative analyses of cases studies (Tangney 2002, 2007; Tracy 2006). Although there are some diverging views (Luyten 1998; Sabini 1997), the general distinction is supported by many psychologists (Lewis 1971; Tangney 1991, 1993, 2002). According to them, shame is a threatening challenge to one's core identity or global self, but guilt is a moral assessment of one's particular behaviors (Tangney 1992a, 1992b, 1996). More generally, shame and guilt are directed at different targets (intentionality), are felt differently (phenomenology), and are linked to different motivations and behavioral orientations (motivation). The following table (Table 3) summarizes the difference between the two self-critical emotions.²⁷

Despite the carefully observed, measured, and analyzed psychological properties listed in Table 3, shame and guilt are not always clearly distinguished and fully separated. Many counter-examples to the proposed distinction are reported: shame and guilt are clustered together under the general category of sadness (Shaver 1987), and shame, like guilt, can target particular aspects (not the global self) of a moral agent (Wikan 1984; Swartz 1988). Most important, the general distinction between shame and guilt seems to collapse in the minds of people who live in a collectivist culture. In contrast to individualist cultures where the independence, autonomy, and equality of individuals are emphasized, collectivist cultures promote group solidarity, conformity, and interdependence (Hofstede 1980; Kondo 1990; Markus 1991; Triandis 1988, 1993, 1995). To people who live in a collectivist culture, shame is a salient or prevalent emotion (Benedict 1946; Crystal 2001; Frijda 1994; Kitayama 1995) and a positive and constructive character trait (Mascolo 2003). In these cultures (such as Chinese, Japanese, Indian, and Indonesian cultures) shame, like guilt in individualist cultures, motivates adaptive and reparative behaviors. For example, in their study of rural Javanese and Raramuri Indians, Breugelams and Poortinga report that "shame may be related to constructive social behavior in Non-Western groups" (Breugelams and Poortinga 2006, 1117).²⁸

²⁷ See Lewis (1971, 88, 90–91) for similar distinctions between shame and guilt.

²⁸ For the general distinction between individualist culture and collectivist culture, see Triandis (1988, 1993, 1995) and Hofstede (1980). The distinction is based on experimental measurements of social and cognitive orientations associated with different social groups. Please also consider Nisbett (2003) and Morris (1994, 1995) on culturally embedded cognitive difference. Individuals who live in different cultures tend to develop different cognitive patterns that are clearly distinguishable and even predictable. Some of these cultural differences are measured in carefully controlled experimental conditions. For example, people who live in an individualist culture are less likely to make the fundamental attribution error in comparison to people who live in a collectivist culture. As a technical distinction between different cultural orientations, this individualist/collective distinction seems to be significant and useful in psychology.

Table 3 Psychological Distinction between Shame and Guilt

Intentionality (What does it aim at?)
(1) Self: Whether it affects the whole self (the whole agent) [shame] or part (action) of the self [guilt]
(2) Morality: Whether it exclusively reacts to moral violations and transgressions [guilt] or not [shame]
Phenomenology (How does it feel?)
(1) Degrees of Intensity and Painfulness: Whether it feels intensely painful [shame] or not [guilt]
(2) Degrees of Disruptiveness: Whether it feels highly disruptive [shame] or not [guilt]
(3) Vulnerability of Self: Whether the (small, worthless, and powerless) self is exposed vulnerably [shame] or not [guilt].
(4) Distress or Empathy: Whether it is linked to self-oriented distress [shame] or other-regarding empathy [guilt]
Motivation (What does it motivate?)
(1) Maladaptive or Adaptive Behaviors: Whether it motivates maladaptive (reactive, aggressive, or violent) behaviors [shame] or adaptive behaviors (such as remorse, regret, reconciliation, or reintegration) to social norms and others' expectations [guilt]
(2) Destructive or Constructive Anger: Whether it is linked to destructive (aggressive, violent) anger [shame] or constructive (correctional or reparative) anger [guilt]
(3) Hiding/Escaping Behaviors: Whether it motivates hiding or escaping behaviors [shame] or reparative actions (such as apology, confession, or empathy) [guilt]
(4) Self-Challenge/Self-Objectification/Self-Denial: Whether it leads to self-objectification or self-denial [shame] or not [guilt]
(5) Criminal Orientation: Whether it is related to criminal behaviors [shame] or not [guilt]
(6) Psychopathologies: Whether it is linked to psychopathologies (such as depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suicidal thoughts, substance dependence) [shame] or not [guilt]
(7) Patterns of Counterfactual Thinking: Whether it facilitates or is facilitated by a particular type of counterfactual thinking (such as "If only I were [or were not] such and such a person" [shame] or "If only I had (or had not) done such a thing") [guilt]
(8) Developmental Patterns: Whether it contributes to the development of childish, regressive, and maladaptive reactions to moral or social failures [shame] or to the progressive and adaptive development of the morally autonomous and responsible self [guilt] ²⁹

Shame is often associated with the public awareness of social norms and expectations (Bagozzi 2003; Wallbott 1995) in collectivist cultures. It is publicly shared and exchanged: people can feel and experience shame not only for their

²⁹ In addition to the motivational characteristics of shame, its neuro-specificity can be discussed. In comparison to shame, guilt (trait guilt) tends to associate with particular neural substructures (such as the right orbitofrontal cortex). See Wagner (2011).

actions but also for others' actions. That is, shame can be experienced vicariously and shared in group contexts (Camras 2004; Stipek 1998; Tsai 2006) and appears in public discussions and conversations (Tsai 1996). Shame is also used as a social control, a parenting technique (Fung 1999, 2001) and a method of moral training (Wilson 1980, 1981).

Table 4 summarizes two psychological images of shame, one from individualist cultures and the other from collectivist cultures.

Table 4 Shame in Individualist Cultures and Collectivist Cultures³⁰

	Shame in Individualist Cultures	Shame in Collectivist Cultures
Intentionality	One's Own Violation	Self/Others/Group failure
Phenomenology	Pain and Distress (Negative)	Positive and Shared Experience
Motivation	Maladaptive Behavior	Adaptive Behavior
	Destructive Behavior	Constructive Behavior
	Hiding/Escaping, Anger/Violence	Reparative Behavior
	Psychopathologies (e.g. Depression)	Healthy Moral Sense
Development	Childish Regression	Socializing/Moralizing Process

As the table summarizes, shame plays important social and moral roles in collectivist cultures.³¹ As I shall discuss shortly, shame, in individualist cultures, can be a psychological burden because its self-critical tendency may generate strong damage to the integrity of an individual whose heavily loaded moral and social responsibilities are not generally shared with others. In collectivist cultures, however, the identity and the social role of an individual are mostly determined by collective interaction among individuals. Self-critical tendencies of shame,

³⁰ The table is developed on the basis of empirical researches on the cultural experience of shame as listed or discussed in this paper. The terms, individualist culture and collective culture, are defined in many studies of social psychology based on several identifying factors and variables such as interpersonal relationship, attribution patterns, determination of individual identity, etc. See Hofstede (1980), Kondo (1990), Markus (1991), and Triandis (1988, 1993, and 1995) for further details on this distinction. According to this table, individuals in a collectivist culture see shame as a "positive and shared experience." This characterization of shame experience does not necessarily refer to subjective phenomenal experience of shame, something that can be difficult to measure objectively. Rather it means that in collectivist cultures (any cultural groups that satisfy certain conditions of collectivity) individuals perceive shame as a positive social and moral emotion and a medium of interpersonal interaction that can be encouraged and shared.

³¹ Guilt is a more prominent moral emotion in individualist cultures. From an individualist viewpoint, shame is typically characterized as the weakness of an underdeveloped and heteronomous self. For example, Creighton says that "shame, with its corresponding fear of rejection, is not a very effective sanction in American society, where individuals are encouraged to become independent" (Creighton 1990, 296).

therefore, do not target a single individual and, for this reason, individuals in collectivist cultures can deal with their socialized and publicized shame relatively easily without major psychological issues such as depression, withdrawal, or anxiety.³² In Indian culture, for example, shame is regarded as a positive and socially constructive emotion (Menon 1994; Rozin 2003). Chinese and Japanese subjects take shame as a positive emotion (Romney 1997; Tsai 2006). Filipino salespersons, unlike their Dutch counterparts, understand shame not from the perspective of a self-protective behavior but from the perspective of a relationship-building process (Bagozzi 2003). Since social relations, in collectivist cultures, are characterized as interactions among interdependent individuals and their social expectations, shame, as a humble awareness of the self in its interaction with others, plays positive roles in socialization and moralization processes (Kitayama 2000). Without inducing a serious threat to the integrity of self, which is psychologically burdensome to people who live in an individualist society, shame can promote constructive self-awareness and moral consciousness in people who live in a collectivist culture (Kitayama 1997). These culturally specific and comparative analyses demonstrate that positive and constructive shame is a psychologically real phenomenon, particularly for people who live in a collectivist culture. These analyses also give us an important clue to help us understand shame as a Confucian virtue. Perhaps Confucian shame can be understood as a positive and constructive moral emotion from the perspective of cultural psychology, i.e., culturally specific conditions of the mind and the self.

4 Moral Psychology of Confucian Shame

As comparative studies in social psychology demonstrate, shame, in some cultures, is not understood or experienced as a negative and maladaptive emotion but as a positive, healthy, and constructive emotion. Based on recent analyses of the long forgotten tradition of human psychology which sees shame as a healthy form of self-critical awareness (Cairns 1993; Williams 1993), one can argue that Dodd's (1951) and Benedict's (1946) views are narrow and limited because shame is more than personal embarrassment or a painful experience of disgrace but a positive self-awareness. But in its idealistic form, shame is not just a positive personal and social awareness but a virtue, an ideal disposition, and a moral

³² Since shame is basically a self-critical emotion, psychological tension always exists. Under certain circumstances (strong social shame in a face culture), shame may generate extreme forms of psychopathologies (depressive and suicidal tendencies). Other than these extreme conditions, shame, in a collectivist culture, is generally perceived as a healthy, positive, and adaptive sense of personal, social, and moral appropriateness.

excellence. This is particularly true of Confucian moral philosophy.³³ Confucius does not just say that we experience shame in a positive manner; he says that we should develop shame as an ideal character trait (*Analects* 2.3, 13.20).³⁴ How can this moral imperative to shame in Confucian philosophy be explained? In addition to the psychological explanation of shame's positive social roles, a philosophical explanation of its ideal moral significance is necessary.

In social psychology, an attribution style refers to a person's predisposed way of understanding causes of events and actions (Weiner 1974, 1986). For example, people tend to ascribe internal causes for their successes and external causes for their failures. Usually, they believe that they achieve their goals successfully because they worked hard (*internal attribution*) but they blame external contingencies such as other people and uncontrollable events when they fail to achieve their goals (*external attribution*). Often, our attribution styles reflect our understanding of the self, the environment, and social relations.³⁵

From the perspective of attribution theory, one can develop a hypothesis about the relationship between attribution patterns and mental health. When a person deals with events that are *internal*, *stable*, and *uncontrollable*, she tends to develop depression and frustration (Peterson 1984). Since changing or modifying unchangeable or uncontrollable things such as her natural predispositions, physical constitutions, or fully formed personal traits is a formidable (if not impossible) challenge to her, she will most likely feel stressed, frustrated, and depressed if she needs to change them. Perhaps this is the reason why shame and tendencies toward depression are consistently linked (Kendler 2003; Tangney 2002). Because shame is a self-critical and self-modifying motivation, it becomes a major psychological threat, particularly to people who live in an individualist culture where the self is regarded as the internal, stable, and relatively inflexible foundation of one's character and behavior. Since a shamed person is forced to face her disgraced self and has to deal with a strong and self-critical challenge, she can easily develop depression if escape or evasion not possible. On the contrary, guilt, in comparison with shame, does not generate major stress or depression in people who develop guilt feelings. Since guilt arises from criticizing or blaming only modifiable parts of the self, such as controllable actions or correctible decisions, a person with guilt feelings can deal with

³³ More than 10% of the chapters of the *Analects* include discussion of shame and its moral significance (Chu 1972).

³⁴ According to Bedford (2004), there is a particular type of shame (*cankui* 慚愧) that does not result from others' judgment. *Cankui* motivates people to try their best to achieve their ideals (Bedford 2004, 46). The Confucian idealization of shame is very close to this type of shame.

³⁵ Heider (1958) started this research program and Weiner (1974, and 1986) developed it as a major theoretical framework in social psychology.

self-critical tendencies relatively easily by correcting part of herself without modifying her whole person. Therefore, guilt, unlike shame, tends to facilitate constructive correction and reconciliation, not avoidance, anger, or social withdrawal.³⁶

If we consider these motivational orientations of shame and guilt and their proneness (or lack of proneness) to develop into psychopathologies, we can easily understand how shame and guilt are intrinsically tied to our understanding of the self. Is the self fully fixed and cemented in the particular individuality of a person, or is it a temporary formation that goes through continuous change like Theseus's ship? If the former is the case, shame is a great danger to the self-integrity of a person. There is no possibility for a healthy and solid self if a particular episode of shame delivers a frontal attack to the self-integrity of a person. In other words, shame can be a great psychological danger—a negative, depressive, and maladaptive threat to the fully fixed, inflexible, and established self.³⁷

In contrast, shame in collectivist cultures, unlike shame in individualist cultures, tends to carry less psychological burdens such as depression, anxiety, and withdrawal.³⁸ Shame is still a disturbing and disappointing emotion even in collectivist cultures. Some forms of shame, such as social shame (external *chi*), can be destructive and harmful to individuals who fail to develop and maintain positive or expected interpersonal images.³⁹ For example, in many East Asian

³⁶ See Tangney (1993, and 2002) for the details of psychological profiles of shame and guilt.

³⁷ Regarding the destructive power of shame, Tomkins says that shame “is the affect of indignity, of transgression and of alienation Shame strikes deepest into the heart of man. While terror and distress hurt, they are wounds inflicted from outside which penetrate the smooth surface of the ego; but shame is felt as an inner torment, a sickness of the soul The humiliated one ... feels himself naked, defeated, alienated, lacking in dignity or worth” (Tomkins 1963, 118).

³⁸ If we compare shame (that is contrasted with guilt) in an individualist culture with shame (that is not necessarily contrasted with guilt) in a collectivist culture, the former is typically associated with psychopathologies but the latter is observed to be less psychopathological. But this general observation seems to be only a relative comparison. Since shame, whether it is experienced in an individualist culture or a collectivist culture, is basically a self-critical emotion, it challenges the self and can be “potentially” damaging to its integrity. This is particularly true of social shame (external *chi*), but moral shame (internal *chi*) may take this type of self-critical challenge not as a beginning of depression or anxiety but as an opportunity for self-improvement and self-cultivation. As I shall discuss shortly, Confucian shame is this type of self-transformative virtue.

³⁹ Here, social shame does not refer to the social dimension of shame as one of the major cultural characteristics of a collectivist culture. Even though it is part of broad social dimension of shame, it is only related to certain aspect of the dimension. Social shame refers to shameful experience deriving from an endangered interpersonal self. For example, as discussed above in the context of Confucian shame, a poor appearance in front of others can generate shameful feeling, and this feeling of interpersonal inferiority is the essential nature of social shame. Social shame is usually related to one's face (interpersonal self) in collectivist cultures. In this sense, it is comparable to external *chi* in the Confucian discourse of shame.

countries some people who fail to live up to others' expectations (i.e., fail to save their "faces," i.e., interpersonal identities) often commit extremely violent behaviors and develop psychopathologies (suicide, self-injury, depression etc.). However, other forms of shame, such as moral shame (internal *chi*), which is often compared to guilt in individualist cultures, do not put this type of strong pressure on individuals and are less likely to generate negative and depressive human behaviors. Failure to live up to one's moral ideal may generate some frustration or struggle, but does not necessarily cause the major psychopathologies and suicidal tendencies found in extreme forms of social shame because the ultimate goal of moral shame is not to *torture* but to *nurture* the genuine moral self. From the perspective of self-awareness and self-cultivation, therefore, shame not only shares some of positive characteristics of guilt, but also motivates constructive social and moral behavior, as many social psychologists report. It is a fully adaptive, positive, and healthy sense of self-consciousness and a constructive motivation for social and moral interaction among interdependent individuals.

Perhaps, the reason shame is not a negative threat or destructive danger to the integrity of the self, but a foundation for moral development and healthy motivation for self-criticism, is because the self, particularly in a collectivist culture with its prevailing external pattern of attribution, is a fluid (not fixed) and expandable (not limited) entity open for continuous cultivation and improvement. The fluid nature of the self can be observed in a peculiar attribution pattern of people who live in some Asian countries (Nisbett 2003). According to several studies (Hamid 1994, Hsieh 1969, and Tseng 1972), Chinese subjects attribute causes of their behavior to external factors. They believe that external forces, such as social roles, obligations, social/physical environment, fate, luck, and chance can influence the choices and decisions they make. That is, they understand and explain themselves and their actions through external variables and contingent factors that they cannot directly control.⁴⁰ This attribution pattern is sharply contrasted with that of American subjects who focus more on internal factors (inner states of the stable self, such as character traits, dispositions, and intentions) than external factors (situational and environmental contingencies). For example, Morris and colleagues (1994, 1995) report that when asked about

⁴⁰ In general, many Chinese, including educated populations, believe in external forces in human affairs. When they explain and understand their actions and decisions, they tend to focus more on external conditions and contingencies than on their inner dispositions and intentions. Particularly, fate or destiny is frequently used in their explanation of human behavior. For example, one of the customary beliefs in Chinese culture is that personal relationships are determined by the force of destiny, called *yuan* (緣). *Yuan* is an unpredictable, uncontrollable, or unexplainable event that influences a personal relationship. Hong Kong and Taiwan university students, for instance, believe that *yuan* affects their friendships and romantic relationships (Yang 1988; Huang 1983).

causes of events such as mass murders, most American subjects tend to concentrate on internal causes (mental instability and other negative dispositions of murders), whereas the majority of Chinese subjects explain the same events with external causes (situational, contextual, and societal factors).⁴¹

What this peculiar attribution pattern exposes is the open and malleable self behind the externalizing pattern of attribution. Since most of one's actions and decisions, in this pattern of attribution, are believed to be caused by external factors, the inner cause, i.e., the self, has less authority over its actions and decisions. To the permanently fixed or fully established self, however, an external pattern of attribution will create an unavoidable conflict because external forces challenge the inner authority of the self over actions and the decisions of an agent. Obviously, this conflict will result in major frustration and depression that will endanger the integrity and authority of the self. Therefore, the self, under the external pattern of attribution, is more flexible or resilient. Otherwise, it would be difficult to explain how the integrity of the self is maintained under external causes and influences.

Perhaps, people, who live in a culture where external attribution is common, experience or suffer from shame related self-critical depression or anxiety less severely. Although a particular form of shame (social shame) may be a contributing factor in suicide and depression in some Asian cultures, resilient self-identity and broad moral dimensions of shame will decrease individual responsibility and provides a means to cope with self-critical challenges generated by shame. In other words, the externalizing pattern of attribution is typically associated and matches well with a more flexible and resilient self and a less severe experience of shame (particularly internalized moral shame) in collectivist cultures.

In individualist cultures, however, shame, whether it is socialized or moralized, is damaging to shamed individuals. With its self-confrontational and self-critical tendencies, shame directly challenges the integrity of the self because self-identity and responsibility are concentrated on the individual self, not dispersed widely to external environmental conditions. With this internalizing tendency of attribution, shame can be a very threatening emotion. On the contrary, in collectivist cultures, the consequences of and responsibility for of an action are distributed to inner and outer environments. With this externalizing tendency of attribution, the inner self of an agent does not have to assume full

⁴¹ Lee, Hallahan, and Herzog (1996) report the similar attribution pattern. In describing and explaining sports events, American sports writers focus on the disposition of individual team members (i.e., internal factors) but Hong Kong writers use more contextual explanations (i.e., external factors). But there are some exceptions to this externalizing pattern. Several researchers report that Chinese students consistently attribute internal causes to their academic achievements (Chiu 1986; Crittenden 1989).

responsibility for her actions and decisions. Therefore, strong self-criticism associated with shame, particularly moral shame, does not pose a major frontal attack on the integrity of the self. As many psychological studies show, shame is psychologically affordable (sustainable) and less damaging to individual minds in collectivist cultures where external attribution is common.

If the self is fluid and flexible, shame can be experienced positively. That is, shame can be less frustrating to people who attribute external causes to their actions. As many psychologists point out, people who live in Western individualist cultures (Americans and Europeans) tend to understand shame as a negative and depressive experience (Shaver 1987), but people who live in Asian cultures such as Chinese, Japanese, and Indians associate shame with positive and constructive experience (Breugelmans 2006; Kitayama 2000; Menon 1994). Cultural variance in the experience of shame correlates with how people in different cultures understand the self and the causes of their behavior. With external attribution and the fluid self, shame can be experienced as a less threatening or disturbing emotion even though it stimulates critical thoughts on the whole self.⁴²

The close relation between an external pattern of attribution and the fluid self is a foundation of my moral psychological analysis of shame in Confucian philosophy. Confucian philosophers believe that the self is fluid, flexible, and expandable. It is a continually evolving structure of development, cultivation, and innovation. Confucius says that an ideally virtuous person (*junzi* 君子) is not a vessel (君子不器, *Analects* 2.12) or confined to his given ability: he is not a virtue machine or a machine with a limited ability to grow or improve. Nor is he attached to a group of people without developing balanced and extended relationships (君子周而不比, 小人比而不周, *Analects* 2.14). Simply, he is not a biased partisan. *Junzi*, therefore, does not have a permanently fixed self with confined relationships and limited ability. Rather, he is continually cultivating himself to become a better person.

Many Confucian philosophers believe that transformative and innovative changes are possible for a moral agent even at the level of her core identity and character. That is, the whole self can be and should be modified in the process of ideal self-cultivation. Like the whole person approach to character education, Confucian self-cultivation aims at holistic and transformative change at the level of the whole self. Mencius says that there is nothing one cannot achieve if one works hard. One can become like a legendary sage king such as Yao or Shun (*Mencius* 6B2). Mencius says that “if one dresses like Yao, speaks like Yao, and acts like Yao, one can become (a person like) Yao” (子服尧之服, 诵尧之言, 行尧

⁴² According to Kitayama, Markus, and Matsumoto (1995), however, shame can be potentially harmful to people in a collectivist culture. Shame does not always bring a threat to the self and does not necessarily generate internal or external anger, but it can still pose a threat to collectivist morale. In a collectivist culture, shame can be publicly shared and exchanged.

之行，是尧而已矣, *Mencius* 6B2). Xunzi sees the transformative potential in Confucian learning. He believes that, through ceaseless learning (*xue* 学), one can transform oneself into a better person (*Xunzi*, Ch. 1, 劝学). He says that “blue dye comes from the indigo plant but it is bluer than the plant and ice comes from water but it is colder than water” (青取之于蓝而青于蓝，冰水为之而寒于水). *The Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大学) captures this innovative and transformative process as ceaseless daily renovation: “renovate yourself one day and keep doing that every day” (日新又日新). Perhaps this unlimited potential of growth and innovation sets a virtuous Confucian agent apart from ordinary people and distinguishes Confucian ethics from other schools of virtue ethics.

To some, this characterization of the self as a fluid entity and the possibility of its holistic transformation are too idealistic or overly optimistic, but it is consistently pursued by and continually discussed in Confucian philosophy of education and learning. In fact, the Confucian ideal of life-long learning (*xue* 学) carries the same message of the holistic and transformative nature of self-cultivation: Confucian learning (*xue* 学) is not achieved by accumulating information or acquiring practical skills, but by a global and holistic transformation of one’s whole person. Confucius clearly stresses the value of learning for oneself, not for others (*Analects* 14.24). An ideal Confucian agent, therefore, should seek what is within herself, not in others (君子求诸己，小人求诸人, *Analects* 15.21).

If self-cultivation essentially includes the whole self and learning requires continuous self-renovation or self-transformation, it is very important, from the perspective of Confucian self-cultivation, to develop an ability to stimulate and inspire the self to overcome its natural inclinations and to renovate itself without losing its integrity. A constructive self-critical process, therefore, is essential to Confucian moral development. Shame does just that. As a self-evaluative and self-critical disposition, shame supports the self-transformative process. Unlike guilt, it challenges the whole self but, unlike shame in individualist cultures, it facilitates positive and constructive changes in the mind. Since the Confucian self is fluid and transformative, critical challenges to the whole self do not necessarily result in its demolition.⁴³ For this reason, shame is not a negative

⁴³ The emphasis on serious self-reflection and ceaseless transformation is a hallmark of Confucian self-cultivation. For ideal moral development, the whole self has to go through continuous transformation via challenging moral emotions like shame. However, these emotional challenges and moral motivations should not threaten the integrity of the self. Otherwise the process self-development can turn into the dangerous challenge of self-destruction or self-suppression. Confucian shame provides an ideal opportunity for continuous self-cultivation because it does not necessarily pose a threat to self-integrity. There is no reason to worry about endangering one’s self in experiencing shame, because the Confucian self is resilient enough to accommodate self-critical challenges and turn them into constructive opportunities for self-improvement.

emotion of depression or self-withdrawal, but a constructive and holistic motivation toward self-transformation in Confucian philosophy. It is a global and self-reflective ability of the mind and moral excellence because it helps the self to transform (i.e., to go beyond) itself.⁴⁴

Confucian philosophers are very clear about the fluid and expandable self and the moral significance of shame in the transformative process of self-cultivation. A moral agent without shame, according to Confucius, is a person who simply follows laws (codes of conduct) blindly or selfishly without morally challenging and modifying herself (*Analects* 13.20). She should examine herself deeply and holistically and live up to her moral ideal, like Confucius's disciple Zengzi (曾子), who examined himself three times a day (*Analects* 1.4) to challenge himself and to internalize his moral ideals. The same can be true of the central Confucian virtue, *ren* (仁). *Ren* is typically understood as benevolence or love (*Analects* 12.22), in one passage of the *Analects*, Confucius characterizes it as the ability of self-transformation, i.e., the ability to overcome one's current self and its natural disposition to redirect the self to the ideal *li* (礼, propriety) (克己复礼为仁, *Analects*, 12.1). That is, to grow and transform itself continually and consistently, the Confucian self needs shame (the ability of healthy and continuous self-criticism and self-improvement). Therefore, Xunzi says that "the gentleman is ashamed not to cultivate himself, even though he is not ashamed of being seen as impure (故君子耻不修不耻见污, *Xunzi*, Ch. 6, 非十二子).

If Confucian shame brings a tough challenge to the moral self and stimulates the readiness for self-improvement, it is a very special ability of a Confucian moral agent. If a virtue is carefully developed moral excellence, a disposition deeply engrained in the character of a moral agent, Confucian shame is a virtue, but it is not an ordinary virtue with a narrowly specified ability or a fully detailed capacity of the mind. Aristotle characterizes shame as modesty or the sense of appropriateness (*aidêmôn*) that exists in the middle point between shamelessness and shyness (*Eudemian Ethics*, 1122a1) and, in his *Rhetoric*, he says that shame can be felt on its own sake (1384a32) with one's awareness of one's own moral worth. In the early Confucian tradition, however, shame is a more important and global virtue than the Aristotelian virtue of modesty. It is a self-reflective and self-critical disposition that cultivates the moral awareness of an agent, but it is not a particular ability or capacity of the self, like Aristotelian modesty. It is a meta-virtue; it is the ability to develop a new ability and the ability to modify an existing ability to support continuous moral development of the self. Given that the Confucian moral self is not a fixed entity but a continually developing mind,

⁴⁴ This emphasis on shame continues to later Confucian schools. According to Tu (1979), Wang Yangming regards shame as a human moral emotion that supports to one's moral development and conscience.

a Confucian agent needs a virtue to guide existing virtues and to develop new virtues. Shame can serve these global and developmental functions of the Confucian mind.⁴⁵

There are, in fact, several virtues serving this moral ideal at the global level of the Confucian self. Shame is one of them but not the only one. Emptiness (*xu* 虚) is another meta-virtue. Emptiness is not an ordinary virtue because it does not cultivate or develop any particular moral disposition. Rather, it is a virtue that facilitates other virtues. It helps us to understand how to prevent the mind from accumulating deceptive biases and illusions so that the self can continue to grow (*Xunzi*, Ch. 21, 解蔽). *Xunzi* says that many people have the problem of fixating on one thing (凡人之患, 蔽于一曲) and do not clearly understand the true nature of things in their relations to other things. But people can understand the Way (*dao* 道) through the mind (*xin* 心) because the mind is empty, never holding onto things yet continually accommodating and understanding the changing world.⁴⁶ The Confucian self needs these types of global and reflective meta-virtues, in addition to ordinary virtues such as benevolence, wisdom, or righteousness, because the self is growing constantly and continually.

Shame can support the transformative process of Confucian self-cultivation because shame confronts the whole self (not just its part) and effectively challenges and stimulates the self without destroying it. In this sense, one can understand why shame is an important Confucian virtue and why it is a meta-virtue, a virtue that addresses the whole self and regulates other virtues. I believe that the need for continuous transformation at the level of the whole self explains the moral significance of shame in Confucian philosophy.

5 Conclusion

Shame is a unique self-critical emotion that receives diverse philosophical and psychological interpretations. From the perspective of the Greco-Roman traditions of virtue ethics, shame does not seem to reflect the inner power and excellence of a moral agent. Even under a favorable interpretation, shame is typically associated with moral violations or social failures and the disturbed mind of the weak self. In Confucian moral philosophy, however, shame is a

⁴⁵ The close relationship between shame and self-cultivation is, perhaps, well-known to Chinese philosophers in the Warring States period. According to Van Norden (2002, 69), other Chinese schools of thought did not discuss shame as Confucians did because they believed that shame is a predominantly Confucian topic concerning self-cultivation and character development. They did not have much interest in self-cultivation or character development.

⁴⁶ The original text is 心未尝不臧也, 然而有所谓虚; 心未尝不两也, 然而有所谓壹; 心未尝不动也, 然而有所谓静。

major virtue with utmost moral significance. It is not only a positive emotion, but also a moral disposition of the self-reflective ability of the mind. It is, in fact, a virtue that promotes the continuous growth and renovation of a moral agent at the level of the whole person. Since the self is open and fluid (neither fixed nor uncontrollable) in Confucian moral philosophy, shame does not necessarily negate or destroy the self to achieve its transformative moral goals. Even with its strong critical orientation towards the whole self, it does not promote self-annihilation. Instead, shame motivates healthy growth and development in the process of ideal self-cultivation. Quite paradoxically, therefore, the Confucian gentleman is a shamefully excellent person.

Acknowledgments The research for this paper was supported by the grant provided by the Neag Professorship of Alvernia University. The author wishes to express his gratitude to the generous support. The author also wishes to thank an anonymous reviewer and a copy reader for their detailed and constructive comments.

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