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Can Xun Zi's Proposition on "Establishing Ritual Practices in Accord with Qing" Be Validated?*

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SPECIAL ISSUE: RECONSTRUCTING THE GENEALOGY OF CONFUCIANISM: XUN ZI'S THOUGHT AND HIS HISTORICAL IMAGE

Can Xun Zi's Proposition on "Establishing Ritual Practices in Accord with *Qing*" Be Validated?*

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王国维曾对荀子“称情而立文”的命题提出质疑，认为这个命题直接与荀子“性恶”思想相矛盾。“情”在《荀子》一书中有实情、诚实和情感等几种意思。人们通常把《荀子》中作为“情感”的“情”仅仅当作贬义的东西。其实，《荀子》中的“情”也有褒义和中性的用法。笔者认为，“称情而立文”这个命题能在“性恶论”的前提下得以成立的唯一可能是存在中性的“情”；“称情而立文”就是要根据实际情况设立能适当满足人的正常的“情”之礼仪章法。荀子“称情而立文”这个命题可以成立。

关键词：情 性 礼 称情而立文

Wang Guowei expressed doubts about Xun Zi's proposition on "establishing ritual practices in accord with *qing*," arguing that it was in direct conflict with the philosopher's famous thesis that "human natural tendency is evil." The word *qing* (情) has several connotations in the *Xunzi*: it may refer to factual truth (实情), sincerity (诚实) or emotions (情感). Readers of the *Xunzi* tend to view the emotional connotation of *qing* in a negative light, but in actuality *qing* as human emotions can also be understood in a commendatory or neutral sense in the *Xunzi*. I argue that Xun Zi's proposition on "establishing ritual practices in accord with *qing*" can only be consistent with his view that "human natural tendency is evil" when *qing* is used in the neutral sense. In other words, "establishing ritual practices in accord with *qing*" means to establish, on the basis of actual circumstances, ritual practices and rules that adequately satisfy people's normal feelings. Xun Zi's proposition

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on “establishing ritual practices in accord with *qing*” can be validated within his own philosophical framework.

Keywords: *qing* (emotions/factual truth), *xing* (human natural tendency), *li* (ritual propriety), establishing ritual practices in accord with *qing*

Xun Zi put forward the proposition that man’s *xing* (性 natural tendency)¹ is evil, but also asserted that mourning ritual had to be established in accord with *qing* (情 emotions). Wang Guowei expressed doubts regarding these two propositions, saying: “But on what basis did the ancient kings establish ritual practices? ... Scrutinizing Xun Zi’s real intentions, it seems that he believed that ritual practices were founded on human emotions. So he said, ‘The practice (of allowing mourning to be extended into the third year) was established in accord with human emotions,’ and ‘The practice of extending mourning into the third year deals with occasions when the extreme pain of grief has reached its pinnacle, so mourning practices were established in accord with the emotions expressed.’ Therefore, Xun Zi’s philosophy on ritual practices cannot but directly contradict his premise that man’s natural tendency is evil. This is because the proposition that “ritual practices are established in accord with *qing*” presupposes that people’s emotions are good.”²

“Establishing ritual practices in accord with *qing*” can be understood as establishing ritual rules and practices on the basis of human emotions. According to Wang, Xun Zi’s proposition involves a dilemma. If he admits that human emotions are naturally bad, as implied in his view of man’s natural tendency, his proposition that ritual practices are established in accord with human emotions is untenable. If he concedes that human emotions are naturally good, his proposition on “establishing ritual practices in accord with *qing*” is tenable, but at the expense of direct conflict with his premise that man’s natural tendency is evil. Wang argued that this proposition of Xun Zi’s means that his thesis that man’s natural tendency is evil has to be rejected.

So, is there any way of extricating Xun Zi from this predicament? A proper understanding of the word *qing* is key to comprehending the philosopher’s proposition on “establishing ritual practices in accord with *qing*.” The word *qing* (情) has several connotations in the *Xunzi*: it may refer to factual truth (实情), sincerity (诚实) or emotions (情感). Readers of the *Xunzi* tend to view the emotional connotations of *qing* in a negative light, but the word can also be understood in a commendatory or neutral sense in this work. After a close analysis of the various connotations of the word *qing*, I argue that the only possible premise for Xun Zi’s proposition on “establishing ritual practices in accord with *qing*” is the existence of a neutral sense of *qing*. In other words, this proposition means establishing, on the basis of actual

1 *Xing* is often translated as “human nature” in English. Given that Xun Zi holds that *xing* can be transformed, “nature” is not appropriate in rendering *xing*. By *xing* Xun Zi means the natural tendency that people are born with but that can be regulated to comply with ritual propriety.

2 Wang Guowei, *Collected Works of Wang Guowei*, vol. 3.

circumstances, ritual practices and rules that adequately satisfy people's normal emotions. Thus, Xun Zi's proposition on "establishing ritual practices in accord with *qing*" is tenable.

I

The proposition "establishing ritual practices in accord with *qing*" is found in "Discourse on Ritual Principles" of the *Xunzi*. The chapter begins with a discussion of the origin of *li*, followed by a discussion of "the three bases of *li*," "the rational ground of *li*" and funeral *li*, the source of the above proposition. As generally understood, establishing ritual practices with regard to the accouterments of mourning "in accord with *qing*" refers to establishing ritual practices and rules on the basis of an appropriate assessment of human emotions. Xun Zi proposes that "honoring the root" (贵本) and "employing familiar foods" (亲用) are two fundamental principles in the establishment of ritual practices. "Honoring the root" emphasizes the essence of ritual propriety, focusing primarily on the basic aims and purposes of ritual practices and rules. "Employing familiar foods" highlights the practical functions of ritual, underscoring that *li* must be feasible in practice. Without honoring the root, *li* is deprived of its theoretical justification; without practical usage, it cannot be put into practice. Xun Zi said, "Honoring the root is called 'good form'; employing familiar foods is called 'rational order.' The two of them are conjoined with perfected good form." Therefore, "establishing ritual practices in accord with *qing*" means to establish a ritual system that is not only practically feasible but also embodies the tenor of *li* in accordance with *qing*. Whether ritual rules and practices "honor the root" and "employ familiar foods" depends on whether they accord with *qing*. It is undeniable that *qing* plays a significant role in the process of establishing *li*, but what does it refer to in this particular context?

In the *Xunzi*, *qing* has three main meanings. The first is factual truth (实), or actuality (实情), indicating an objective state. The second is genuineness (诚) or sincerity (诚实), a subjective state. The third is emotions (情感): love, hate, delight, anger, sorrow and joy, as a manifestation of one's mental activities.

In Chapter 17 of the *Xunzi*, entitled "Discourse on Nature," Xun Zi writes, "How can contemplating things and expecting them to serve you be as good as administering them so that you do not miss the opportunities they present? How can brooding over the origin of things be better than assisting what perfects them? Accordingly if you cast aside the concerns proper to humanity in order to speculate on what belongs to Heaven, you will miss the *qing* of the myriad things."

In "Dispelling Blindness," Xun Zi writes, "Each of the myriad things has a form that is perceptible. Each being perceived can be assigned its proper place. Each having been assigned its proper place will not lose its proper position. Although a person sits in his own house, yet he can perceive all within the four seas. Although he lives in the present, he can put in its proper place what is remote in space and distant in time. By penetrating into and inspecting

the myriad things, he knows their *qing*. By examining and testing order and disorder, he is fully conversant with their inner laws. By laying out the warp and woof of Heaven and Earth, he tailors the functions of the myriad things. By regulating and distinguishing according to the Great Ordering Principle, he encompasses everything in space and time.”

And in “Nothing Indecorous,” Xun Zi says, “Hence by holding on to what is very small, he can undertake tasks that are extremely large, just as with a short ruler only five inches long one can measure the whole square of the world. Thus, the gentleman need not leave his own house, yet the *qing* of all that is within the seas are established and accumulated there. This is because of his holding on to the method in this fashion.”

In “On Strengthening the State,” Xun Zi writes, “Having moral principles and a sense for what is just moderates the person within and the myriad things without. Above they produce peace for the ruler, and below they create a fine-tuned balance for the people. Within and without, above and below, moderation is the *qing* of moral principles and of justice.”

In the first two quotations, the *qing* of the myriad things clearly refers to their nature or actual circumstances, akin to “the nature of all that is within the seas.” “The *qing* of moral principles and of justice” also refers to the substantive content of this particular moral concept. The usage of *qing* in both contexts is very similar to that in the “Discourse on Music” of the *Xunzi*, which states, “It is the nature of music to seek to exhaust the root of things and to carry change to its highest degree.” Evidently, the usage of *qing* here has no direct relation to human emotions.

The second meaning of *qing* is genuineness or sincerity. Xun Zi states in the “On the Model for Conduct” that “Jade is a thing the gentleman compares to inner power. It is refined, pleasant, and beneficial, like the principle of humanity. Its veining has regular patterns and an orderly arrangement. It is hard and strong and will not be bent, like morality. It is sharply angular, as though punctilious, yet does not cause injury, like proper conduct. It will break, but will not give way, like true courage. Its *xia shi* (瑕适 flaws and virtues) are both visible, like the genuine thing (*qing* 情). Strike it and its sounds will ring forth clearly and be heard in the distance, and when they cease, there is a sense of sadness, like modulated speech. Thus although the serpentine is carved, the result does not equal the natural markings of jade. *The Book of Songs* says: ‘I am thinking of my gentleman, how refined he looks, like jade.’ This expresses my meaning.”

The term “*xia shi*” (瑕适) has been interpreted to mean “*xiazhe*” (瑕滴), or flaws. Knoblock translates it as “flaws and virtues.” Given that the word *shi* (适) can mean “appropriate” and “satisfied,” and that here Xun Zi uses the expression “*xia shi bing xian*” (瑕适并见), namely “both *xia* and *shi* are visible,” the latter interpretation makes sense. When both flaws and virtues are in plain sight, with no attempt to conceal the flaws, this implies genuineness. This use of *qing* is however not common in the *Xunzi*. In “The Philosophical Connotations of *Qing* in the *Xunzi*,” Ouyang Zhenren gave a meticulous analysis of *qing*,³

3 Ouyang Zhenren, “Philosophical Connotations of *Qing* in the *Xunzi*.”

but his interpretation of *qing* as genuineness or sincerity in two cases of the *Xunzi* remains open to discussion. Firstly, in “On Self-Cultivation” of the *Xunzi*, Xun Zi writes, “If your deportment is respectful and reverent, your heart loyal and faithful; if you use only those methods sanctioned by ritual propriety and moral duty, and your emotional disposition (*qing* 情) is one of love and humanity.” Here, *qing* is mentioned in contrast to the heart or mind (心). *Qing* here relates to the faculty of loyalty and faithfulness; in this context it should also be understood as the faculty of exercising love (*ren* benevolence), and not simply as a state of mind. Understanding *qing* as a faculty can be supported by Wang Yinzhi’s commentary: “The body is the faculty of respectfulness and reverence, the heart is the faculty of loyalty and faithfulness, technique is the faculty of ritual principles and moral duty, and *qing* is the faculty of love and benevolence.”⁴ Secondly, Xun Zi says in “Nothing Indecorous” that “(One) who neither shows off his good qualities nor glosses over his faults but uses the true circumstances (*qing* 情) to recommend himself, is properly termed an ‘upright scholar’.” In a commentary, Hao Yixing writes, “*Qing* refers to actual circumstances, *jie* (竭) refers to the act of recommendation. What is said here is that because one speaks of one’s good qualities and faults on the basis of actual circumstances, with no contrived embellishment, he can be considered an upright scholar.” Wang Niansun concurs with Hao’s point, saying that Hao was right in that.⁵ The Tang commentator Yang Jing conducts his analysis from another perspective, arguing that “using actual circumstances to recommend oneself” (以情自竭) should be understood as “completely exhausting one’s *qing*” (竭尽其情), which translates into completely revealing one’s real circumstances without any attempt to conceal or hide them. As can be seen, the phrase “completely exhausting one’s *qing*” connotes genuineness or sincerity, but *qing* by itself does not have such connotations in this phrase.

Qing in the *Xunzi* is often used to mean human emotions (情感). When this is the case, it also has different usages. In most cases, it is viewed as contrary to *li*, with distinctly negative connotations. Xun Zi’s definition of *qing* can be found in Chapter 22, titled “On the Correct Use of Names”: “The feelings of liking and disliking, of delight and anger, and of sorrow and joy that are inborn with our natural tendency are called *qing*.” *Qing* in this sense is closely associated with man’s natural tendency (性) and desires (欲). Since Xun Zi posited that man’s natural tendency is evil, *qing* in this context is likewise bad. Below are some supporting examples.

In “Of Kings and Lords-Protector,” Xun Zi writes, “It is man’s natural tendency that the mouth is fond of flavors, yet no flavors or aromas are more refined than those enjoyed by the Son of Heaven; the ear is fond of sounds, yet no music is more grand.” In the same chapter, Xun Zi goes on to say, “It is man’s natural tendency that his eyes desire the most intense of colors, his ears the riches of sounds, his mouth the most intense of flavors, his nose the richest of aromas, and his mind the fullest relaxation and repose. Desiring these Five Limits of

4 Wang Xianqian, *Collected Explanations of the Xunzi*, p. 28.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 50.

Intensity is something that man's natural tendency cannot escape."

Prior to the transformation of their inborn natural tendency and the development of their acquired abilities, people's *qing* is innately drawn to intense flavors, sounds, colors and aromas. *Qing* in this sense is often used together with *xing* (性) to form *qing-xing* (情性), especially when Xun Zi is expounding his view that "man's natural tendency is evil."

In "Man's Nature is Evil," Xun Zi writes, "Now, it is the inborn *xing* of man that when hungry he desires something to eat, that when cold he wants warm clothing, and that when weary he desires rest—such are essential qualities inherent in his *qing* and *xing*. But when in fact a man is hungry, if he sees one of his elders, he will not eat before his elder does; rather, he will defer to him. When he is weary from work, he does not presume to ask to be given rest time, for he realizes that he should relieve others. A son's deference to his father and a younger brother's deference to his elder brother; a son's relieving his father of work and a younger brother's relieving his elder brother—these two modes of conduct are contrary to inborn *xing* and contradict his true *qing*. Nonetheless, it is the Way of the filial son and the proper form and natural order contained in ritual principles and moral duty. Thus to follow inborn *xing* and true *qing* is not to show courtesy or defer to others. To show courtesy and to defer to others contradicts the true *qing* inherent in his inborn *xing*. If we consider the implications of these facts, it is plain that human *xing* is evil and that any good in humans is acquired by conscious exertion."

In the same chapter, Xun Zi continues, "A love of profit and the desire to obtain it belong to man's essential and inborn *qing* and *xing*. Now suppose that younger and elder brothers have valuable goods that are supposed to be apportioned among them, and further suppose that they follow the true *qing* of their inborn *xing*—namely, a love of profit and the desire to obtain it—then younger and elder brothers will fall into fighting among themselves and robbing each other. Further, where they have been transformed by the proper forms and the natural order contained in ritual principles and precepts of moral duty, they will yield their claim to others of their own country. Thus, following one's essential and inborn *qing* and *xing* will lead to strife even among brothers, but when it has been transformed by ritual and morality, brothers will yield their claim to others of their own country."

From this perspective, *qing* and *xing* are closely linked. As Xun Zi says, "When each person follows his inborn *xing* and indulges his natural *qing*, aggressiveness and greed are certain to develop. This is accompanied by violation of social class distinctions and throws the natural order into anarchy, resulting in a cruel tyranny."

Some scholars argue against the widely-accepted view that Xun Zi holds that "man's nature is evil," contending instead that he maintains that this natural tendency is a simple and uncarved state.⁶ Within the overall picture of Xun Zi's philosophy, however, these two views do not necessarily contradict each other. To say that "man's natural tendency is a simple and 'uncarved' state" is to describe this natural tendency as an inborn human condition. To say

6 Zhou Chicheng, "Xun Zi Holds That Human Nature Is Simple and Uncarved, Not Evil."

that “man’s natural tendency is evil” is to say that this inborn human condition is not a good one. The former statement describes what man’s natural tendency is, while the latter describes how it manifests itself; the former is an ontological judgment, while the latter is a value judgment. In other words, Xun Zi based his premise about man’s natural tendency on man’s inborn *qing*. For him, identifying this tendency as evil was based not only on its possible consequences (strife, chaos, and impoverishment), but also on the natural tendency of *qing*.⁷ What is suggested by the proposition “man’s natural tendency is evil” is that people are born (in a state of *qing* or an uncarved condition) “bad” or with a tendency toward evil. Similarly, what is suggested by the proposition “man’s natural tendency is good” is that people are born (in a state of *qing* or an uncarved condition) “good” or with a tendency toward goodness. Advocates of both propositions agree that one’s natural tendencies are innate. Therefore, proponents of the uncarved character of man’s natural tendency can at most clarify the meaning of this tendency; they cannot address any value judgment problems involved in it. In other words, the argument that man’s natural tendency is in itself uncarved and untainted cannot supersede Xun Zi’s view that man’s natural tendency is evil. Some scholars have raised doubts about the authenticity of the chapter “Man’s Natural Tendency is Evil” in the *Xunzi*, using this to reject the notion that Xun Zi had actually conceived a proposition about man’s natural tendency being disposed to evil. This, however, does not make the issue go away. According to Saul Kripke’s theory of designation, even if we were to find out one day that Xun Zi had not written the *Xunzi*, Xun Zi would still be Xun Zi, and academia would still be obliged to conduct research on the *Xunzi*. Moreover, we would still have to carry out hermeneutical inquiry into the validity of the views advanced by the author(s) of the *Xunzi*. If the views expounded in the work can be validated, there is no need for us to dismember it; what we are carrying out here is a philosophical analysis of the *Xunzi*, not a historical investigation. Since the object of our study lies solely in the text, failing further evidence proving that Xun Zi is not the author of the *Xunzi* or any of its chapters, what we mean by “Xun Zi” here is actually synonymous with the author(s) of the *Xunzi*. In this sense, we can say unequivocally that Xun Zi was an advocate of the view that man’s natural tendency is evil.

On the basis of his analysis of *qing-xing* (情性), Xun Zi fictionalized the following conversation between the sage kings Yao and Shun in “Human Natural Tendency Is Evil”: “Yao asked Shun: ‘What are the true feelings of mankind like?’ Shun replied: ‘Man’s true feelings are very unlovely things. But why need you ask about them? When a man has both wife and child, the filial obligations that he observes toward his parents decrease. When he has satisfied his desires and obtained the things he enjoys, his good faith toward his friends withers away. When he has fully satisfied his desire for high office and good salary, his loyalty to his lord diminishes. Oh man’s true feelings! Man’s true feelings—how very unlovely they are! Why need you ask about them!’”

7 For a detailed analysis of this issue, see Li Chenyang, “Xun Zi on the Origin of Goodness: A New Interpretation.”

Xun Zi believed his analysis clearly shows that inborn human *qing* is unattractive and that any attempt to act in accordance with them can only lead to chaos. Since this is the indisputable truth, why need one even ask about them!

However, the negative connotations of human emotions cannot exhaust the total meaning of the term *qing*. As Ouyang Zhenren has pointed out, human emotions can also have positive connotations in the *Xunzi*.⁸ For example, Xun Zi pointed out in “Discourse on Ritual Principles”: “Hence, to eat only a measured quantity of food, to measure the waist when trying the sash round it, and to try to surpass each other in appearing distraught and emaciated is the way of evil men. It is not the cultivated form of ritual and duty, nor is it the emotion proper to the filial son; rather, it is done for the sake of effect.”

Here, “emotion proper to the filial son” unquestionably refers to good human emotions. Similar usages can be found in Chapter 8 of the *Xunzi*, titled “The Teachings of the *Ru*”: “The state of becoming a teacher and the creation of a model are the result of human emotions and are not something received from one’s inborn natural tendency.” And in “Discourse on Ritual Principles,” Xun Zi writes, “Sacrifice originates in the emotions stirred by remembrance and recollection of the dead, and by thinking of and longing for the departed.”⁹ For Xun Zi, these positive human emotions are not inherent, as he posits that appropriate emotions are what man does not possess, but can nonetheless be created. According to Yang Jing’s commentary, what Xun Zi is saying here is that positive human emotions are not inborn but can nonetheless be directed to the right path with the help of external influences.¹⁰ Being directed to the right path is what Xun Zi would identify as “transformation,” by which he means edification and moral education.

In “Discourse on Nature,” Xun Zi writes, “When the work of Nature has been established and its achievements perfected, the physical form becomes whole and the spirit is born. Love and hate, delight and anger, sorrow and joy, are stored within—these are described as the emotions given us by nature. The eye, ear, nose, mouth, and body each have the capacity to provide sense contact, but their capacities are not interchangeable—these are termed the faculties given us by nature. The heart/mind that dwells within the central cavity is used to control the five faculties—it is called the lord provided by nature. The mind takes advantage of things not belonging to the human species and uses them for the nourishment of humans—these are termed the nourishment provided by nature. The mind calls what conforms to the properties of its category “fortunate” and what rebels against the properties of its category

8 See Ouyang Zhenren, “Philosophical Connotations of *Qing* in the *Xunzi*,” pp. 41-47.

9 Both Yang Liang and Wang Niansun observe that *qing* (情) in these two sources should be read as *ji* (积 accumulation) (Wang Xianqian, *Collected Explanations of the Xunzi*, pp. 143, 376). Their argument is probably based on the subsequent discussions on the negative connotations of *qing*. However, if we do not deny that *qing* as used in “emotions proper to the filial son” (孝子之情) has distinctively positive connotations, we do not need to interpret *qing* in these contexts as *ji*.

10 Wang Xianqian, *Collected Explanations of the Xunzi*, p. 144. Yang also said, “Or we can say: *qing* (情) should be understood as *ji* (积).”

“cursed”—this is called the rule of order in nature. To darken one’s natural lord, bring confusion to the natural faculties, reject one’s natural nourishment, rebel against the natural rule of order, turn one’s back on the natural emotions, and thereby destroy the achievement of nature—this indeed is called the ‘Great Calamity.’ The sage purifies his natural lord, rectifies his natural faculties, completes his natural nourishment, is obedient to the natural rule of order, and nourishes his natural emotions and thereby completes nature’s achievement. If this situation obtains, then he knows what is his to do and what is not his to do. Then Heaven and Earth perform the work of officers, and the myriad things serve him as foot soldiers.”

Here, “natural emotions” or “emotions given to us by nature” refer to those developed by moral education. The word *zang* (臧) has the meaning of goodness (善) or success.¹¹ That “love and hate, delight and anger, sorrow and joy, are in good condition within” is to say that once the work of nature is established and its achievements perfected, when the physical form becomes whole and the spirit is born, human emotions will be appropriately moderated. Conforming to the “emotions given to us by nature” will bring good fortune; rebelling against them will lead to calamity; and nourishing them will complete nature’s achievements. Like “the emotions proper to the filial son,” the “emotions given to us by nature” do not have negative connotations and should be understood in the positive sense.

Another example can be found in “Dispelling Blindness,” which says: “The sage follows his desires (*zong* 纵) and fulfills (*jian* 兼) his emotions, but having regulated them, he accords with rational principles of order. Truly what need has he for strength of will, for endurance, or for circumspection?”

The Qing commentator Wang Xianqian interpreted the word *zong* (纵) here as *cong* (从), which means to follow, arguing that “the Sage does not indulge his desires.” Yang Jing interprets *jian* (兼) as *jin* (尽), which means “to fulfill.”¹² Overall, Xun Zi posits that the Sage can follow his desires and fulfill his emotions, and regulate his desires and emotions in accordance with the rational principles of order. In this sense, the desires and emotions referred to here cannot be bad. In “Discourse on Nature,” Xun Zi claims that “(Regulations contained within ritual and moral principles were established in order to) nurture the desires of men, and to supply the means for their satisfaction. They so fashioned their regulations that desires should not want for the things which satisfy them and goods would not be exhausted by the desires. In this way the two of them, desires and goods, sustained each other over the course of time.” When “desires should not want for the things which satisfy them,” desires in such context should not be construed in a negative sense. We can understand these desires to be either positive or neutral. The same applies to human emotions. The Sage can completely fulfill his emotions without transgression, because emotions in this context are understood in a positive or, at the

11 The *Xuangong* 12 chapter of the *Zuo Zhuan* states, for example, “Handling affairs by following the appropriate way is *zang* (success).”

12 Wang Xianqian, *Collected Explanations of the Xunzi*, p. 404.

very least, a neutral sense.

According to Xun Zi, these emotions that can be fulfilled are the product of (moral) cultivation. The fundamental role of ritual propriety is to nurture or cultivate, as is evident from the description in the “Discourse on Ritual Principles,” “Acting in accordance with ritual and moral principles and observing good form and reason are how to nurture his emotions.” Here, “nurturing his emotions” is mentioned in the same breath as “nurturing the mouth,” “nurturing the nose,” “nurturing the eyes” and “nurturing the ears.” Clearly, emotions nurtured by ritual and moral principles and good form and reason should be understood in the neutral sense.¹³

We can find other neutral usages of *qing* in the *Xunzi*. For example, in the words of the “Discourse on Music,” “Music is joy. Being an essential part of man’s emotions, the expression of joy is, by necessity, inescapable.” In “Nothing Indecorous,” Xun Zi writes: “That one who has just washed his body will shake out his robes and that one who has just washed his hair will dust off his cap is because of the essential *qing* of humans.”

The first quotation suggests that people cannot do without joy, because the expression of joy is, by necessity, inescapable. On the one hand, the human emotions expressed here cannot be understood in a negative sense, otherwise there would be no way we could account for the necessity of joy. On the other hand, Xun Zi gives no indication that they are good. Good things have to undergo a process of nurturing and cultivation, like “the emotions proper to the filial son,” but the human emotions expressed here are innate. The second quotation says that to shake out one’s clothes and dust off one’s cap after washing body and hair is an instinctive action. The human emotions displayed are clearly the natural *qing* of common people in everyday life, and should not be subject to moral judgment. In other words, these human emotions should be understood in the neutral sense.

In summary, *qing* has many different connotations in the *Xunzi*; it may refer to factual truth, genuineness, or human emotions. When understood as human emotions, it can be further classified into human emotions in a negative, positive or neutral sense. Strictly speaking, however, *qing* as a psycho-physiological state can only refer to the same thing. The negative, positive or neutral usages of *qing* as “human emotions” are different manifestations as seen from different moral viewpoints. Seen from the viewpoint that following inborn human emotions without restraint will lead to strife, chaos, and impoverishment, human emotions are bad. Seen from the viewpoint that people’s natural tendency can be transformed and their acquired abilities cultivated, emotions are good. The fact that whether human emotions develop positively or negatively, they are still *qing*, means that they are neutral.

13 Yang seems to understand the human emotions that are nurtured by ritual rules and practices in the negative sense. In his commentary, he says, “Without proper ritual rules and practices, people will indulge in their emotions and desires with no sense of restraint.” See Wang Xianqian, *Collected Explanations of the Xunzi*, p. 349.

II

After inspecting the various possible meanings of *qing* in the *Xunzi*, we shall now look at the possibility of validating Xun Zi's proposition that "ritual practices are established in accord with *qing*." First of all, it is obvious that the second meaning of *qing* (genuineness 誠 or sincerity 诚实) is unrelated to this proposition. "Establishing ritual practices," particularly "funeral rites" (*sang li* 丧礼) has no direct relation to genuineness or sincerity. We can strike "genuineness" and "sincerity" off our list in validating this proposition.

Secondly, if we accept that *qing* in this context refers to the factual truth or actual situation, then "establishing ritual practices in accord with *qing*" implies that one must weigh up the actual circumstances and establish ritual rules and practices accordingly. This understanding of *qing* is no doubt closely related to the principle of "employing familiar foods," one of the two principles on which the establishment of ritual practices is based. As discussed earlier, ritual practices must be feasible, and their establishment should certainly take into account actual circumstances. Such an understanding of *qing* can easily be supported by textual evidence in the *Xunzi*. When asked why mourning was extended into the third year, Xun Zi answered, "It was established in correspondence with the emotions involved. Use of these forms ornaments social relations. They provide distinctions between the obligations due near and far relations and the eminent and humble. They admit neither of diminution nor of addition. Thus it is said that they are methods that are matchless and unchanging." Here, ornamenting social relations and providing distinctions between the obligations due near and far relations, and the eminent and humble, can be taken as referring directly to the establishment of rituals. In other words, the purpose of establishing proper ritual rules and practices is to "provide distinctions," and this is also the organizing principle of human society. In the same chapter, Xun Zi says, "What is meant by 'distinctions'? I say that these refer to the gradations of rank according to nobility or baseness, disparities between the privileges of old and young, and modes of identification to match these with poverty or wealth, insignificance or importance." Here, the "modes of identification" can be understood as "matching actual circumstances." In Chapter 9 of the *Xunzi*, titled "On the Regulations of a King," Xun Zi writes, "Humans possess vital breath, life, and awareness, and add to them a sense of morality and justice. It is for this reason that they are the noblest beings in the world. In physical power they are not as good as an ox, in swiftness they do not equal the horse; yet the ox and horse can be put to their use. Why is that? I say it is because humans alone can form societies and animals cannot. Why can humans form a society? I say it is due to the division of society into classes." Here, "division" is analogous to "distinctions." Xun Zi believes that it is only through proper "division" and "distinctions" that a civilized society can be formed. This is exactly why ritual propriety plays such an important role.

The sentence "establishing ritual practices in accord with *qing*" appeared twice in the *Xunzi*, both in the Chapter "Discourse on Ritual Principles." Although the above explanation

of *qing* as actual circumstances makes sense in the context of the first occurrence of the statement “establishing ritual practices in accord with *qing*,” it is not consistent with the second occurrence. After mentioning “methods that are matchless and unchanging,” Xun Zi continues to say, “The greater the wound, the longer it remains; the more pain it gives, the more slowly it heals. The practice of mourning into the third year deals with occasions when the extreme pain of grief has reached its pinnacle, so the mourning practices were established to equal the emotions expressed.” In this passage, there is no doubt that Xun Zi is referring to emotions when he talks about *qing*. According to the text, it is because “the greater the wound, the longer it remains; the more pain it gives, the more slowly it heals” that three years have to be put aside for funeral rites to assuage the intense anguish felt by those who have lost their loved ones. The Han commentator Zheng Xuan said much the same in his commentary on the chapter “Questioning the Three-Year Rule of Funeral Rites” in *The Book of Rites*: “(Mourning) practices were established in correspondence with the emotions expressed, ritual practices were enacted on the basis of the weight of the expressed emotions.”¹⁴ At the same time, it must be noted that to understand *qing* in “establishing ritual practices in accord with *qing*” as human emotions is actually consistent with Xun Zi’s previous statement about “ornamenting social relations and providing distinctions between the obligations due near and far relations, and the eminent and humble”; people’s feelings for their parents should be deeper than those for others. Therefore, it is logical to say that ritual practices are established in accord with different human emotions, distinguishing between “near and far relations” and “the eminent and humble.” Here, *qing* as used in the context of “in accord with *qing*” should be understood as human emotions, not factual truth. This understanding of *qing* largely coincides with the popular understanding of this proposition.

An important question arises: if we understand *qing* as used in the proposition “establishing ritual practices in accord with *qing*” in terms of human emotions, can this particular proposition be validated in Xun Zi’s philosophy?

As mentioned before, *qing* as human emotions can be understood in a negative, positive or neutral sense. Human emotions in the negative sense refer to inborn, unembellished, original emotions. Such inborn emotions are the cause of strife, chaos, and impoverishment, and thus cannot be used as the basis on which ritual rules and practices are established. In other words, ritual practices that correspond to the negative state of human emotions can only lead to practices that promote strife, chaos, and impoverishment. This is clearly in direct conflict with Xun Zi’s ideal of ritual propriety.

Unlike human emotions in the negative sense, human emotions understood in the positive sense are those that are in accordance with ritual propriety. For example, “the emotions proper to the filial son” are the feelings of reverence, gratitude and reciprocity that a son has for his parents. Ritual rules and practices established on the basis of such positive emotions would doubtless be good. However, the problem is that according to Xun Zi, these positive

14 *Thirteen Classics with Commentaries*, p. 1663.

emotions are not inherent; instead, they are the product of the transformation of people's natural tendency and acquired abilities. He believes that people's original emotions are "very unattractive," and if pursued immoderately can only lead to situations where "when a man has both wife and child, the filial obligations that he observes toward his parents decrease" ("Human Natural Tendency Is Evil"). He writes in the same chapter, "A son's deference to his father and a younger brother's deference to his elder brother; a son's relieving his father of work and a younger brother's relieving his elder brother—these two modes of conduct are both contrary to inborn *xing* and contradict his true *qing*." In "Discourse of Ritual Principles," he again writes, "Thus, the Ancient Kings acted to establish proper forms wherein men could express the full measure of their obligation to pay honor to those deserving honor and to show affection to those whom they cherished." In other words, human emotions in the positive sense can only come after the establishment of ritual practices.

If the purpose of "being in accordance with *qing*" is to "establish ritual principles," then understanding human emotions here in the positive sense will only lead to tautology, because these emotions themselves are the product of the transformation of man's natural tendency and acquired abilities and therefore correspond with ritual propriety. Such an argument is a cat chasing its tail; there is no way it can be explained coherently and logically. Even in the unlikely scenario that certain men's emotions happen to coincide with the ritual practices later established by the sages, human *qing* prior to the establishment of these ritual practices can only be understood in the neutral sense. They cannot be deemed to be in accord with ritual propriety or intrinsically "good," because ritual practices have yet to be established.

Now the only option left to us is the neutral sense of "according with *qing*." I argue that Xun Zi's proposition on "establishing ritual practices in accord with *qing*" means establishing proper ritual rules and practices on the basis of human emotions in a neutral sense. Human emotions, as suggested here, are neither good nor bad, but neutral. The neutral state of human *qing* is of necessity inescapable, whilst its negative and positive states are avertable or modifiable. If the true objective of ritual rules and practices is to cultivate emotions so that they are well-regulated, then the efficacy of these rules and practices must depend on how well they "nurture *qing*." So what kind of ritual rules and practices are most effective in "nurturing *qing*"? As Xun Zi saw it, the establishment of ritual rules and practices has to be in accordance with the emotions (in the neutral sense) that people need to express, for which suitable rituals are tailored accordingly to satisfy different emotional needs. This is what it means to "establish ritual practices in accord with *qing*."

To put it more specifically, "correspondence with *qing*" requires that human emotions are appropriately expressed, while at the same time ensuring that practical needs in life are sufficiently catered for. Thus, "correspondence with *qing*" is manifested in at least two ways. First, ritual practices should allow most people to express their normal emotions. Second, proper ritual rules and practices should seek an equilibrium between different aspects of life. On the first point, Xun Zi believes that the anguish of losing one's loved ones is an

example of a person's normal emotions. He writes in "Discourse on Ritual Principles" that "As a general principle, all creatures that live between Heaven and Earth and have blood and breath are certain to possess awareness; having awareness, each of them loves its own kind. Consider the case of large birds and animals: if one loses its mate or is separated from its group, then even after a month or season has passed, it is sure to circle when it passes its old home. It looks about, round and round, crying and calling, sometimes moving, sometimes stopping, gazing about uncertainly and hesitantly, before it can leave the place. Even small birds like swallows and sparrows chatter and cry for a few moments before they can leave. Hence, since no creature with blood and breath has more awareness than man, the feeling of a man for his parents is not exhausted even till death." Ritual practices (funeral rites) were established to allow people to express emotions of anguish like this. At the same time, there is an inner yardstick that mediates human emotions. For example, the amount of food or drink one consumes has to be subject to bodily restrictions. Too much or too little will upset the balance of normal life; as Xun Zi says in "On the Correct Use of Names," "Injury to original *xing* is called 'illness.'" However, emotional states may vary with different people. Xun Zi writes in "Discourse on Ritual Principles" that "Will we follow after those stupid provincials and depraved men who by evening have forgotten a parent who died that morning? And if we indulge in such behavior are we not lower even than these birds and beasts? How can we even dwell together in the same community with such men and not have disorder! Or will we follow after those 'cultivated and ornamented' gentlemen? For them the twenty-five months of the three-year mourning period pass as quickly as a running horse glimpsed through the crack in a wall, and if we follow their example, mourning will have no limit at all. Therefore the Ancient Kings and Sages acted to establish some mean, and to regulate it with a definite interval. As soon as enough time has been allowed to perfect cultivated form and to fulfill the dictates of reason, then mourning was to be put aside." The emotional states of men are not same throughout. On one extreme, there are those foolish and depraved men who may "by evening have forgotten a parent who died that morning"; such men, devoid of love for their families and parents, are no different from beasts, and are objects of disdain for morally refined persons. At the other extreme, there are those who see the twenty-five-month mourning period pass as quickly as a running horse glimpsed through a crack in a wall; judging from the emotional state of such people, their mourning period will have to be indefinitely prolonged. Both extremes are undesirable; that is why the ancient kings and sages adhered to the principle of balance, and established equitable ritual rules and practices based on people's normal emotions. As Xun Zi sees it, three years (twenty-five months) of mourning is neither too short, in that it takes into account that "the grief and pain have not ended and thoughts of the dead and longing for him have not been forgotten," nor too long, with no end in sight. Therefore, he writes in "Discourse on Ritual Principles" that "Rites trim what is too long, stretch out what is too short, eliminate excess, remedy deficiency, and extend cultivated forms that express love and respect so that they increase and complete the beauty of conduct

according to one's duty." The purpose of "nurturing *qing*" is to "extend cultivated forms that express love and respect" and to "complete the beauty of conduct."

In reality, however, people's emotions and their expression are influenced by culture. It is common knowledge, for instance, that men are expected to be less emotional than women in most if not all cultures. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that human emotions have a natural basis, regardless of cultural variants. Their natural basis provides the grounds corresponding to the establishment of ritual practices.

The effect of culture on human emotions takes us to Xun Zi's second consideration with regard to "establishing ritual practices in accord with *qing*," namely, the fact that proper ritual rules and practices must seek an equilibrium between different aspects of life. In "Discourse on Ritual Principles," Xun Zi writes, "Hence, their utilization of elegant adornment does not go so far as to be sensuous or seductive, nor gross ugliness so far as to produce emaciation or self-neglect. Their use of music and happiness does not go so far as to be wayward and abandoned or indolent and rude; nor do weeping and sorrow go so far as to produce dependency or injury to life. Such is the middle course of ritual." Yang Jing defines "the middle course of ritual" as the Middle Way or Course.¹⁵ Equilibrium in this sense does not apply only to the proper use of materials during funeral rites, but also to the appropriate expression of human emotions. There should be happy and cheerful music, but it should not go so far as to be wayward and abandoned or indolent and rude; there should be weeping and sorrow that aptly expresses one's emotions, but it should not go so far as to produce dependency or injury to life. As Xun Zi says, "(one should) eat only a measured quantity of food, and measure the waist when tying the sash round it."¹⁶ To allow human emotions to be expressed appropriately and in this state of harmony is the most important purpose of ritual practices. Here, we can even go further and say that *qing* in Xun Zi's proposition of "establishing ritual practices in accord with *qing*" can also imply practical circumstances. In other words, "establishing ritual practices in accord with *qing*" means allowing people to express and satisfy their normal emotions on the basis of the actual circumstances of life. We may also refer back to Xun Zi's two fundamental principles in the establishment of ritual practices, namely "honoring the root" and "employing familiar foods;" the former places emphasis on the essence of ritual principles, focusing primarily on the basic aims and purposes of ritual regulations, while the latter highlights the practical functions of rituals, underscoring the fact that they must be feasible in practice. As said by Xun Zi in "Discourse on Ritual Principles," "The two of them are conjoined with perfected good form." The primary objective of "establishing ritual

15 Wang Xianqian, *Collected Explanations of the Xunzi*, p. 364.

16 *Ibid.* In translating these statements, Knoblock errs in grouping them together with the next sentence: "Hence, to eat only a measured quantity of food, to measure the waist when tying the sash round it, and to try to surpass each other in appearing distraught and emaciated is the way of evil men" (John Knoblock, *Xun Zi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works* (III), pp. 65-66). There should be a full stop after "tying the sash around it." Xun Zi did not take "eating only a measured quantity of food and measuring the waist when tying the sash round it" to be the way of evil people.

practices in accord with *qing*” is to attain this “perfected good form.”

To conclude, the main purpose of ritual propriety is to “transform man’s *xing*” and to “nurture *qing*.” The ritual rules and practices that are established have to be relevant and realistic, and must not ignore the attributes and characteristics of human emotions. This is what Xun Zi means by “establishing ritual practices in accord with *qing*.” This proposition does not suggest that inborn human *qing* is the sole criterion for the establishment of ritual practices. Instead, it suggests that the establishment of ritual practices should take into consideration the attributes and characteristics of human *qing* (understood in a neutral sense), and also pay close attention to the actual conditions of the wider environment to ensure that they are suited to “nurturing *qing*.” Seen in this light, with the proviso that it does not contradict his view that man’s natural tendency is evil, Xun Zi’s proposition of “establishing ritual practices in accord with *qing*” is tenable.

Notes on Contributor

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