

Compassion in the *Lotus Sūtra* and Benevolent Love in the *Analects*: A Reflection from the Confucian Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This article is intended to examine and then compare ci bei ('compassion') in the Lotus Sūtra and ren ('benevolent love') in the Analects of Confucius. Despite many similarities, compassion and benevolent love have shown a difference between Mahāyāna Buddhist ethics and the Confucian moral system. This difference is revealed in the content and meaning of compassion and benevolent love, but more importantly through the ways they are practised, followed and expanded. Through different ways or paths, compassion and benevolent love have nevertheless established two different and yet mutually supplementary ideals that guide the spiritual and moral world of China and other parts of East Asia.

Keywords

Compassion, benevolent love, *Lotus Sūtra*, *Analects of Confucius*, *ren*, *ci bei*

This article is an attempt to examine and then compare *ci bei* ('compassion') in the *Lotus Sūtra* and *ren* ('benevolent love') in the *Analects of Confucius*.¹ The encounter of these two concepts took place in the overall context of Buddhist and Confucian dialogue on moral issues, which started as soon as Buddhist texts were introduced to China. After a full examination of early efforts to reconcile Buddhism to Confucian ethics, Kenneth Ch'en concludes that 'We are convinced that one of the primary reasons why Buddhism alone was able to gain a wide following among the Chinese was that it was able to adjust itself to Chinese ethical practice and beliefs' (Ch'en 1973, 60). While for Ch'en, the best example of this concerns 'filial piety and ancestral worship', the role played by Confucian virtues such as

1. We will see later in this article that the English word 'compassion' does not fully represent the two meanings of the Buddhist virtue, and the phrase 'benevolent love' is also merely a convenient English rough equivalent for 仁 (*ren*).

'benevolent love' must not be ignored. Indeed from the third century onwards, efforts were made to distil useful ideas from a number of earlier Buddhist texts² to facilitate informed comparison of Confucian and Buddhist virtues. Compatibility between Buddhism and Confucianism was already central to Mouzi's *Lihoulun* 牟子理惑论 (*Mouzi on the Settling of Doubts*), the 'first treatise on Buddhism to be written by a Chinese convert' (Ch'en 1972, 40), perhaps dating from the third century CE (Keenan 1994, 4). In the following centuries this process was accelerated. Sun Chuo 孫綽 (ca. 300–380) attempted to reconcile the other-worldly creed of Buddhism with this-worldly social virtues of Confucianism. For him, 'the difference between the two is mainly one of expediency; Buddhism, he said, represents the inner teaching and Confucianism the outer. The difference may be accounted for by the divergences in circumstances, but as to their inner nature, they are the same' (Ch'en 1972, 67). Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531–591), a Confucian scholar/official and the author of the famous *Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓 (*The Admonitions for the Yan Clan*), defined Buddhism as the teaching for the inner realm and Confucianism for the outer world, and identified the Confucian five constant virtues (benevolent love, righteousness, ritual/propriety, wisdom and trustfulness) with the five Buddhist precepts.³ Buddhist master Zongmi 宗密 (780–841) made it clear that 'Not killing is benevolent love'.⁴ Some Buddhists further argued that there was a functional agreement between compassion and benevolent love in terms of self-cultivation, education and social cohesion: 'Although what is termed by Confucians as *ren* ... and what the Buddha said about *ci bei* ... are two different concepts, is there any difference [between them] in terms of their function in establishing sincerity, cultivating one's character, making the world good and educating the people?'⁵ Later Buddhist masters consciously aligned Buddhist doctrines to Confucian moral teachings, developing various arguments that the heart of not-killing is the heart of *ci bei*; that *ci* (慈) can be equated with *ren* of Confucius (551–479 BCE), while *bei* (悲) with the 'compassionate heart' (*bu ren* 不忍) of Mencius (372?–289? BCE).⁶

Unlike Buddhists who were enthusiastic about the agreement between Confucian virtues and Buddhist precepts, Neo-Confucians made clear efforts to divest Confucian ethics of the so-called affinity with the 'foreign teaching'. For example, Zhu Xi (1130–1200) argued that 'Although there is a slight resemblance between the doctrines of the Buddhists and our own Confucian doctrines, they are really what is called similar in appearance but different in spirit, or appearing to be so but actually not', and that 'The mere fact that they discard the Three Bonds ... and Five Constant Virtues ... is already a crime of the greatest magnitude'.⁷

2. For example, the *Sūtra of Trapuṣa and Ballika*, which was frequently quoted by Buddhist masters of the Sui and Tang dynasties (589–906).

3. “內典初門設五種之禁，與外書五常符同。仁者不殺之禁也，義者不盜之禁也，禮者不邪之禁也，智者不酒之禁也，信者不妄之禁也。”顏之推：《歸心篇》Chapter on the *Returning Heart*, T52 107b. See Yan 2004, 250–3.

4. “不殺是仁”，《原人論》*Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity*, T45, 708c

5. ‘儒所謂仁……，與吾佛曰慈悲……，其為目雖不同，而其所以立誠修行、善世教人，豈異乎哉？’(Qisong 契嵩, 1007–1072, *Tanjin Wenji* 《禪津文集》, T52 686a)

6. ‘不殺之心，慈悲心也，慈即名仁，悲即不忍’(憨山德清 *Hanshan Deqing*, 1546–1623, *Hanshan Laoren Menyou ji* 《憨山老人夢游集》, X73, 759b).

7. Chan 1963, 651, 646. Although the ruler-subject, father-son and husband-wife relations were

These views and debates had a profound background in history and were part of established Sino-Indian philosophical exchanges. However, they have also raised an important methodological question: how should two concepts from different traditions be linked or distinguished from each other in textual studies as well as in hermeneutical interpretations? This article is intended as a critical examination of the meanings, practical paths and applications of 'compassion' and 'benevolent love', by which we will argue that they are not totally incompatible nor simply identifiable. Instead they are similar and yet different; as part of practical ethics they are intended to lead Confucians and Buddhists to the ideal, but at the same time as central to their own doctrines, they are oriented for different values. This similar and yet different or different and yet similar nature underlies how Buddhists and Confucians treated each other, and explains their difficult and yet mutually supportive relation throughout most of their history in China.

COMPASSION IN THE *LOTUS SŪTRA* AND *REN* IN THE *ANALECTS*

Jonathan Silk has established that the *Lotus Sūtra* was relatively unimportant in India: 'To the best of my knowledge there are only three texts which quote or refer to the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* in Sanskrit: Ārya Vimuktisena's *Abhisamayālaṃkāravṛtti*, Śāntideva's *Śikṣāsamuccaya* and Haribhadra's *Abhisamayālaṃkāraloka*' (Silk 2001, 89). In contrast to this situation, the *Lotus Sūtra* is one of the most popular texts of Mahāyāna Buddhism in East Asia: 'throughout history, from the profound and complex philosophy of the T'ien-t'ai master Chih-i (538–97) to the various expressions and influence in the arts and literature, the Lotus Sutra has given birth to an immeasurable harvest of meanings in a wide array of fields' (Swanson 2002, 52). Or in other words, 'Of the countless scriptures of Mahāyāna Buddhism, few are more widely read or revered than the *Lotus Sūtra*. Its teachings thoroughly permeate most schools of Buddhism in China, Korea and Japan'.⁸

Within the scripture itself the *Lotus Sūtra* is said to be the 'king of all the sutras' or 'the most profound and the greatest among all the sutras preached by tathagatas'; it is stated that 'among all the sutra teachings, it is first', presumably because it is able to 'liberate all the living', or it enables 'all the living to be free from pain and suffering' (*LS* 358⁹). This kind of self-praising statements claiming

already central to all early Confucian masters, the first textual evidence of the 'Three Bonds' is found in a Legalist text: 'The Minister serves the king, the son serves the father, and the wife serves the husband. If the three are followed, the world will be in peace; if the three are violated, the world will be in chaos'. These three bonds were advocated by Confucians as the three guidelines for the empire during the Former Han dynasty (206 BCE–8 CE). The 'Five Constant Virtues' developed out of Mencius's five virtues of the five human relationships: 'love between father and son, duty between ruler and subject, distinction between husband and wife, precedence of the old over the young, and faith between friends' (Tu 1998, 122, 125).

8. <http://buddhism.about.com/od/MahāyānaSūtras/a/lotusSūtra.htm> (15 January, 2011).

9. Among the best known English translations of the *Lotus Sūtra* are those by H. Kern (translation from Sanskrit), Leon Hurvitz (based on the known Chinese versions of the text but including passages of the original Sanskrit that were omitted from the Chinese), and by Gene Reeves (translation from the Chinese of Kumārajīva). In this article we are using Kumārajīva's text, and refer to the English translation by Gene Reeves, one of the most recent translations, as we believe it serves our purpose better for comparing compassion and benevolent love in a Chinese context.

the *Sūtra* as the crown of the Buddha's teaching were totally accepted by many Buddhist masters in China; for example, Jizang 吉藏 (549–623) claimed that 'this *sūtra* is fundamentally the first of all the *sūtras*'.¹⁰ Modern Buddhist master Taixu 太虛 (1889–1947), like many of his predecessors, employed this *sūtra* to unify different Buddhist traditions: 'This *sūtra* is the king of all *sūtras* and shows that all the Buddha's teachings are only one vehicle'.¹¹

If it is true that the *Lotus Sūtra* was relatively unimportant in Indian Buddhism, then what is the reason for the ultimate position that it gained within Chinese Buddhism and why has it become the most popular *sūtra* since being introduced to China? Apart from most frequently cited explanations (its emphasis on faith, one vehicle, skillful means etc.), we here examine its moral and psychological appeal to the Chinese readers. It seems clear that 'compassion' (*ci bei* 慈悲) is placed in a primary position in the *sūtra*.¹² Of course compassion is also central to many other Buddhist texts,¹³ but these texts are not as influential or popular in China as the *Lotus Sūtra*. The combination of the popularity of the text and the centrality of the concept significantly elevated their position in the Chinese way of life. Since compassion is often interpreted as a highly admired virtue, the *sūtra* that embodies such a virtue could be easily incorporated into the moral culture that Confucianism had cultivated through various educational and political measures. When we focus our attention on Confucian *ren* and Buddhist *ci bei*, therefore, it is natural for us to select the *Lotus Sūtra* from Buddhism as an exemplar text.¹⁴

The *Analects* is the first of the four books in the Confucian tradition, and the fountainhead of Confucian teachings on ethics, religion, politics and education. Different from the *Lotus Sūtra* where dialogues are essentially concerned with passing on Buddhist beliefs, the *Analects* is a collection of what Confucius and his immediate disciples said and did, primarily on personal, moral, social and political issues, in which judgments are made, preferences given, attitudes expressed, and ideas interpreted. Unlike in the *Lotus Sūtra* where praise and worship are offered to the Buddha and his teaching, in the *Analects* such devotion is rare and Confucius is portrayed as a moral teacher rather than a religious saviour. In short, while extremely important respectively to their own traditions, the *Lotus Sūtra* and the *Analects* are two texts of a very different nature and function.

Among the many virtues that Confucius and his disciples advocated, the most

10. "此經眾經中最为第一" (Jizang T34, 378c). According to him, 'The *Lotus Sūtra* embraces all the *Sūtras*' (Swanson, 1989, 250).

11. "本經為諸經之王，以显示唯一佛乘故" (Taixu 2005, vol. 10, p.28).

12. In the Kumārajīva version of this *sūtra*, *ci bei* as a single term appears 13 times, while separately counted *ci* appears 27 times and *bei* 31 times. In the translation by H. Kern, the word 'compassion' is used 39 times, 'compassionate' 9 times, 'benevolence' 5 times and 'benevolent' 4 times.

13. For example, 'In the Theravāda tradition, Buddhaghosa (fifth century CE) wrote the *Visuddhimagga* ... whose ninth chapter contains some excellent material on lovingkindness and compassion. ... In the Mahāyāna tradition ... Nāgārjuna (c.150–250 CE) wrote the *Rāja-parikathā-ratnamālā* ... as advice to a king on how to rule compassionately' (Harvey 2000, 5–6).

14. It seems odd that the compatibility between compassion and benevolent love has not yet been taken into account either in Buddhist or in Confucian studies. Among contemporary scholars, Ok-Sun An is the only one who singles out these two important concepts and is engaged in a comparative study between them, but his Buddhist sources on compassion is drawn from the *sūtras* of early Pali *Nikāyas* (An 1998).

important one is *ren*, as seen from the fact that the word appears 109 times in this short book.¹⁵ Apart from a couple of cases in which this word is used as identical with that for humans (*ren* 人), on all other occasions it primarily denotes goodness or virtue.¹⁶ In a sense we may say that *ren* is considered to be the central thread running through the whole of Confucius' teaching and giving meaning and value to all other virtues.

Ren in the *Analects* has many meanings or many dimensions of meaning. In general Confucius uses *ren* as an expression for the ideal of a human being. This character has been translated variously as 'benevolence', 'humanity', 'humaneness', 'human-heartedness', 'kindness', 'goodness', 'humankindness', etc., which themselves speak volumes about its multi-dimensional meaning. As the highest virtue humans can achieve or manifest, and as the central line running through all the teachings of Confucius, *ren* is both a good will and an action, and both a quality of excellence and marker of an admired person. For example, 'A person of *ren* reaps the benefit only after overcoming difficulties' (*An* 6:22¹⁷); 'To return to the observance of the rites through overcoming the self constitutes *ren*' (*An* 12:1); 'There are five things and whoever is capable of putting them into practice in the world is a person of *ren*: respectfulness, tolerance, trustworthiness in word, quickness and generosity' (*An* 17:6). However all these are, arguably, representative of the practical aspects of *ren*, and the meaning that underlies all these aspects can be found only in what Confucius said: '*Ren* is to love others' (*An* 12:22).¹⁸ In this sense it may be practically convenient if *ren* is translated as 'benevolent love', rather than 'benevolence' or 'humanity'.

On the other hand, compassion is the chief virtue in Mahāyāna Buddhism. There is an overt similarity between *ren* and compassion.¹⁹ Is there any compatibility in context between them? Han Yu (768–824) took a negative stance on this. He defined *ren* in terms of universal love: 'To love largely [universally] is called humaneness (*ren*); to act according to what should be done is called rightness (*yi*)' (de Bary and Bloom 1999, 569); from this he attacked Buddhism, because the Buddha 'understood neither the duties that bind sovereign and subject nor the affections of father and son' (p. 584).²⁰

15. Zhu Xi said that the [Confucian] sages and worthies talked about 'benevolent love' most frequently. ('圣贤说仁处最多', Zhu Xi 2004, 111)
16. '*Ren*' in the *Analects* is both a virtue and the sum of all virtues, regarded as a supreme and yet comprehensive quality for human beings, occupying the top position in the Confucian virtue pyramid (Yao 1996, 81).
17. All quotations from the *Analects* in this article are from D.C. Lau (1979), with necessary modification, unless otherwise indicated.
18. '仁者爱人.' The character of *ai* contains a particle for 'heart' (心 *xin*), and has been defined as selfless devotion to the beloved with all one's heart and mind. The identification of '*ren*' and '*ai*' is not only accepted by Confucius' followers, but also recognized by their opponents such as Legalist Han Fei (ca. 280–233BCE) who explained the core of *ren* is to love others out of one's original heart (仁者, 為其中心欣然愛人也. Liang Qixiong 1960, 140). The greatest Neo-Confucian master, Zhu Xi, also confirmed that '*Jen* [Pinyin *ren*] is the principle of love ... if there is *jen*, there is love' (Chan 1963, 633).
19. In the *Analects*, there are other important virtues such as *yi* (duty or rightness or righteousness), *zhi* (wisdom) and *li* (rites or propriety). A full understanding of *ren* cannot be totally detached from the understandings of these key virtues. In a similar way, in the *Lotus Sūtra*, there are also other important virtues such as 'wisdom' and 'practice' which have been said to be the other two corners of a triangular structure of the Buddhist way.
20. Since Confucians in general relate *ren* and affection [between parents and children], when

Buddhists were in general more positive about the compatibility between compassion and benevolent love, but they tended to supplement this compatibility with an important qualification that, because of involving the past, present and future worlds, Buddhist precepts were more effective in enforcing social morals than Confucian teachings, which only concerned the present world. While compassion is the key idea for our project, conceptually it is not always central to all kinds of Buddhist doctrine. In different traditions of early Buddhism, the position of compassion varies greatly. For example, in Theravāda Buddhism the doctrinal centre lies in the overcoming of the 'I am' conceit, i.e. self-centredness, through insight into all as non-Self (*anātman*), rather than compassion.²¹ In Mahāyāna Buddhism, however, the ideal of insight into Selflessness is ranked as a lower achievement, and in its place are those of compassion, which is clearly demonstrated in the *Lotus Sūtra*, and insight into emptiness. To fully understand the compatibility between compassion and benevolent love, we must make a further investigation into how they are understood and realised respectively in the Buddhist *Lotus Sūtra* and the Confucian *Analects*.

THE PATHS OF COMPASSION AND BENEVOLENT LOVE

In a general sense, compassion and *ren* can both be interpreted as benevolent 'love'.²² However the meaning of 'love' can be different, and paths that lead to true love are also different in different traditions. In the *Lotus Sūtra*, lovingkindness (*ci* 慈) is realized through giving happiness or joy (*yu le* 與樂) to others and compassion/sympathy (*bei* 悲) is realised through removing suffering (*ba ku* 拔苦), while in the *Analects*, benevolent love is to be carried out through loyalty (*zhong* 忠) and consideration (*shu* 恕).

Compassion is not merely a normal virtue in Buddhism. In the *Lotus Sūtra* it is said that the *Sūtra* must not be taught unless the audience 'enter the room' of the *Tathāgata*, 'put on his robe', and 'sit on his seat'. What do these three conditions mean? 'To enter the room of the *Tathāgata* is to have great compassion for all living beings. To wear the robe of *Tathāgata* is to be gentle and patient. To sit on the seat of the *Tathāgata* is to contemplate the emptiness of all things' (LS 231). Among the three virtues, compassion is placed as the first, suggesting that it is

Han Yu said the Buddhists did not understand affection then he really meant that Buddhists intentionally destroyed 'universal love' (*bo ai* 博愛).

21. In a review of Ok-Sun An's book, Damien Keown has made a point: 'I am not persuaded that compassion (*karuṇā*) is the core virtue in early Buddhism' (Keown 1999, 183). In Theravāda *Abhidhamma*, compassion is subordinated to equanimity, as an 'occasional wholesome mental factor (*dhamma*)' whereas equanimity is a 'universal wholesome mental factor'. Compassion is not a diagnostic feature of enlightenment in the Theravāda, although it would be the inevitable response of the enlightened mind in response to suffering, and it is indeed one of the four *brahmavihāras*: lovingkindness, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity.
22. 'Love' is normally defined as a deep, intense and ineffable feeling of affection and solicitude toward the beloved. However here for Buddhism it is used as 'compassionate mercy' rather than affection or desire or attraction. It is therefore differentiated from sensual desire (*kāma*) or thirst, avidity, craving (*trṣṇā*), one of the twelve *nidānas*, which must be transcended. Hence Buddhists differentiate 'defiling love like that towards wife and children, and undefiling love like that toward one's teachers and elders' (Soothill and Hodous 2004, 400). If we accept that Buddhism values 'love', then this love is ethical or religious, a selfless love towards others. This kind of love is not love in a normal sense; it can only be 'compassion', in a sense like Christian *agape* rather than *eros*.

the most important. When interpreting the *Lotus Sūtra*, the founder of Tiantai Buddhism, Zhiyi智顛 (538–97) places compassion as the highest of all Buddhist virtues.²³ When commenting on the above three qualities, Jizang confirmed that they are listed in descending order of importance, and with compassion [*ci bei*] as the most important, it being great sympathy to eliminate suffering and great lovingkindness to bestow joy or happiness. They constitute the solid foundation of enlightenment and the original meaning of enlarging the [Buddhist] Way.²⁴

The Chinese phrase *ci bei* has been translated as ‘compassion’ in English. However, in its original form, this phrase contains two words: *ci* (*maitrī*, lovingkindness) and *bei* (*karuṇā*, sympathy, though itself generally translated from Sanskrit as compassion). *Ci* refers to ‘affection (as that of a mother), mercy, compassion, tenderness’, while *bei* is understood as ‘sympathy, pity for another in distress and the desire to help him’ (Soothill and Hodous 2004, 399, 371). In Buddhism *ci bei* is seen at its height in the selfless love of the Buddhas and *bodhisattvas* where self-benefiting is totally abandoned for the sake of saving all sentient beings. The two aspects of *ci bei* are defined as ‘giving happiness to all the beings and rescuing all the beings from suffering’.²⁵ In the *Lotus Sūtra*, both meanings are emphasized. On giving joy to all sentient beings, it is said: ‘Through the power of wisdom, knowing the nature and desire of living beings, I [the Buddha] teach them the Dharma using skillful means, bringing them great joy’; on the side of ridding beings of suffering, the Buddha says that ‘For the sake of these living beings I have great compassion’ (LS 96, 97). These two aspects are unified in the Buddha himself who is the highest possible embodiment of giving joy and eliminating suffering: ‘I am the father of all living beings and should rescue them from suffering and give them the joy of immeasurable, unlimited Buddha-wisdom, so that they can find enjoyment in it’ (LS 116).²⁶ In this sense, giving happiness and eliminating suffering are two paths by which *ci bei* is to be fully realised.

In the *Analects* we find that *ren* is defined by ethical ‘love’: ‘Fan Ch’ih asked about benevolence. The Master said, ‘Love your fellow men’ (An 12:22). However, love here is still a general term; it has not yet given us any clue how this love can be realised. To fully practise benevolent love, according to the *Analects*, we must follow two paths: one is loyalty (*zhong*) and the other is consideration (*shu*).

‘Tzu-kung asked, “Is there a single word which can be a guide to conduct throughout one’s life?” The Master said, “It is perhaps the word ‘*shu*’. Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire” (An 15.24). ‘*Shu*’ here is to consider others with sympathy, and it is translated as ‘altruism’ or ‘consideration’, placing oneself in the shoes of others so that one shares their feelings, emotions, wishes and desires. The connection between ‘*shu*’ and ‘*ren*’ is clearly established in the following conversation: when a disciple asked Confucius how to realise *ren*, Confucius gave three conditions for this: ‘When abroad behave as though you

23. ‘眾德之中，慈悲最高，普覆一切’ (Zhiyi, T34 72a).

24. ‘然此三門則為次第，大悲拔苦，大慈與樂，蓋是種覺之洪基，弘道之本意’ (Jizang, T34 361a).

25. ‘拔苦曰慈，與樂曰悲。依慈故拔一切眾生苦，依悲故遠離無安眾生心’ (Tanluan 曇鸞 476–542, T40 842b) .

26. A more popular saying by Nāgārjuna that ‘Great lovingkindness is to give joy to all beings, and great sympathy is to rid all beings of suffering’ (T25 256b) could have been rooted in the *Lotus Sūtra*.

were receiving an important guest; when employing the services of the common people behave as though you were officiating at an important sacrifice. Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire. Be free from ill will whether in a state or in a noble family' (*An* 12:2). In this conversation, Confucius highlighted three practical aspects of benevolent love: in actions towards others one must be respectful (*jing* 敬), in dealing with the relation between oneself and others, one must follow consideration (*shu* 恕), and within one's own self, one must be free from complaint or resentment (*wu yuan* 無怨). Among the three aspects, the centre is the Golden Rule that 'Do not do to others what you do not like yourself'.²⁷ This is defined somewhere else, at *An* 15.24, as '*shu*'. By this we know for certain that Confucius takes *shu* as one of the pathways to benevolent love.

While sympathetic consideration is of great value for realising benevolent love, it does have its weakness. If following this path only, benevolent love may not be fully realised because *ren* is, in the words of Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085), 'to devote oneself to the benefit of other people and things' (Chan 1963, 541). If one is merely not to impose upon others what one does not like oneself, one can achieve at most the position in which no harm has been brought to others, but one has not yet manifested all one's good will and good feeling towards others. Benevolent love is more than that. It is not only negatively refraining from imposing one's own will upon others, but also to bring benefit positively to others or help them to advance to a higher (moral or social) position. This cannot be realised unless one actively contributes to their wellbeing. For example, if one would like oneself to be fully established in society, then one should also help other people to be fully established, and if one would like oneself to gain recognition and reputation, then one should also help others to gain recognition and reputation. Only by this can benevolent love become real love (*An* 6:30). This statement has been interpreted as 'loyalty' by later Confucian commentators, as one of the two paths of carrying out benevolent love.

The two sides, sympathetic consideration and loyalty, combine and benevolent love is fully achieved. These two paths of benevolent love parallel, and yet are differentiated from, the two aspects of Buddhist compassion. In general both Buddhist compassion and Confucian benevolent love are concerned with tender affection towards others and involve the good will to help others. However compassion in Buddhism is composed of two aspects, bringing joy and eliminating suffering, by which Buddhists demonstrate an actual will and action to do good to others. Benevolent love in Confucianism also has two aspects, consideration and loyalty, by which one consciously takes others into account when deciding to do or not to do anything. Confucius places an emphasis on the will or motive which motivates beneficent and benevolent action, while the Buddha in the *Lotus Sūtra* places a direct emphasis on action. For Confucius, it is more important to rectify one's will by which one would be able to behave rightly. In this sense benevolent love is first of all an internal motive, and love is preconditioned on self-cultivation in which benefiting others is important but this is just an extension of one's inner virtues. In the *Lotus Sūtra*, compassion is necessary because of the world's suffering and it is urgent for Buddhists to follow the Buddha's teaching to eliminate suffering through dispelling ignorance. In this sense compassion is not only an

27. A similar, negative version of the Golden Rule is also found in Buddhism at *Samyutta Nikāya* V.353–4.

inner motive but also an external behaviour, directed towards all beings.

In terms of practical paths, compassion in the *Lotus Sūtra* and benevolent love in the *Analects* share similarities but can be differentiated. While 'loyalty' and 'giving joy' are both concerned with positively benefiting others, and 'consideration' and 'eliminating suffering' both contain elements of not harming others, the emphasis is different. Through 'loyalty' and 'consideration', Confucius stresses the importance of a 'rectified' will, and through 'giving joy' and 'eliminating suffering', the *Lotus Sūtra* places an emphasis on taking action. To appreciate this difference we must further investigate the real meaning of compassion in the *Lotus Sūtra* and benevolent love in the *Analects*.

GREAT COMPASSION AND EXTENDED LOVE

The *Lotus Sūtra* emphasizes that compassion be extended to all beings or lives, not merely to humans or to one's own family. Following the tenet that all sentient beings are ultimately of an equal value and different kinds of beings are mutually transferable in endless rebirths, Buddhists tend to define their compassion as universal or cosmic 'love', or more precisely 'great compassion' in contrast to 'small love' that is confined to one's own family or to the people one knows. Different from Buddhist compassion, Confucians taught that the starting point of love is to have affection to one's parents which, if practised well, would be naturally extended to other family members and beyond.²⁸ From the Confucian perspective it is practically advantageous to start love with parents and to extend this love to others. However, the critics of Confucianism take it as a 'graded love', the intensity of love being differentiated according to one's relations, from parents, to relatives and then to others.

There seems to be an obvious difference between this kind of love and Buddhist compassion, as the latter is considered to be universal and non-graded. However we must see this seemingly difference as caused by the different starting points and by the different level at which compassion and benevolent love are supposed to function. Universal compassion is intended primarily as the tool to deliver the ignorant out of suffering while benevolent love is regarded as the moral path to become a true gentleman (*junzi* 君子). In the *Lotus Sūtra*, compassion is attached to the Buddha and advanced heavenly *bodhisattvas*, rather than to the path of the human *bodhisattva*, and is the 'great compassion' of the Buddha or advanced *bodhisattvas* who out of compassion come to save the world, while in the *Analects*, the focus of benevolent love is on the moral motive and quality to be achieved through education, self-cultivation and making right choices.

In the *Lotus Sūtra*, although ordinary people can be led to compassion by following the example of the Buddha and advanced *bodhisattvas*, as stated in the sentence that 'To enter the room of the Tathāgata is to have great compassion

28. Since the beginning of Buddhism in China, Buddhists were faced with criticism that they did not value filial love between parents and children: 'Once a person joined the monastic order, he severed all relations with his family and society, so that he was no longer bound to honor the memory of his ancestors' (Ch'en, 1972, 208). Establishing Buddhist filial piety, therefore, became crucial for Buddhism to expand its influence. Zongmi wrote commentaries on the *Sūtra of Ullambana*, arguing that filial love is the root for both Buddhism and Confucianism, but Buddhist filial love is far superior to the Confucian one. Qisong published the *Treatise on Filial Love*, confirming that filial love is highly regarded in all traditions, but in Buddhism it is particularly honoured (夫孝，諸教皆尊之，而佛教殊尊也。T52 660a).

for all living beings', on a majority of occasions it is actually referred to as the 'great compassion' of the Buddha: '[The Buddha's] great mercy and compassion never stop. He always seeks the good, whatever will enrich all beings' (LS 115). The Buddhist faithful are said to beg the Buddha to teach them by invoking his compassion over beings: 'We beg you to proclaim the Dharma! By the power of your great compassion, save living beings from their suffering and agony!' (LS 186). It is claimed that 'the Tathāgata has great compassion, is not stingy or begrudging, has no fear, and gives to living beings Buddha-wisdom, Tathāgata-wisdom, natural wisdom' (LS 352). From this we can safely say that in the *Lotus Sūtra* although the ultimate goal is to achieve wisdom that enables liberation or awakening, the acquiring of wisdom is said to start with the Buddha's compassion that alone makes it possible for humans to gain the truth.

Compassion in Mahāyāna Buddhism is often divided into three kinds: living beings-based compassion, *dharma*-based compassion and *sūnyatā*-based compassion, which are also referred to as non-Buddhist compassion, 'Hīnayāna' compassion and *bodhisattva* (Mahāyāna) compassion.²⁹ The first kind of compassion is based on the belief that all beings are real and refers to the affection and sympathy that arises from seeing the sufferings of all beings. Out of this compassion good people aim to bring happiness to others and to reduce or eliminate their suffering. According to Chinese Buddhism, all non-Buddhist traditions such as Confucianism and religious Daoism hold on to this kind of compassion, which although valuable is low graded and cannot really eliminate suffering and bringing joy to all beings. The second kind of compassion is based on *dharma*s (*dharmāmbana-karuṇā*), the compassion possessed by *arhats*, i.e. the ultimate spiritual figure of the *śrāvaka* tradition. They have realised fully the understanding that phenomena are composed of *dharma*s (ultimate irreducible objects/processes) and these are what 'truly' underlie the experienced world. Therefore when they feel compassion they feel it towards the processes of interacting *dharma*s, i.e. towards causes and conditions that underlie experience. Understanding that beings live at odds with this truth about things, they have compassion for them. However, because they regard *dharma*s as 'real', their own liberation is limited and their ability to gain freedom from suffering is restricted. The third and the highest is the compassion based on the truth that all the world is empty by nature (*xing kong*) — beings and *dharma*s lack not only Self, but also any essence, and in compassion all beings including *bodhisattvas* are equal.³⁰ In Sanskrit it is *anāmbana-karuṇā* 'compassion without basis/cause/object', possessed by Buddhas alone and out of a direct understanding of ultimate reality as conceived in Mahāyāna Buddhism.³¹ This kind of compassion is to tell all beings the prin-

29. *Maitrī* has three kinds of objects: sentient beings, *dharma*s and *sūnyatā*. So do the other three *brahmavihāras*, *karuṇā*, *mudita* and *upekṣā*: '慈有三緣，一緣眾生，二緣法，三則無緣。悲喜捨心亦復如是' (*Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* T12 452). 'Each of the four *brahmavihāras* has three kinds of condition' (四無量中皆有緣 (Huiyuan 慧遠《大乘義章》，T44 689a).

30. '[B]ecause of the accomplishment of concentration, the Pure Mind is realized in substance, the nature which is without duality is harmonized through principle (*li*, rational nature of things), these and all sentient beings are harmoniously identified to form a body of one single character' (Chan 1963, 404).

31. This varies a bit between different *Sūtras* — for those expounding a Perfection of Wisdom perspective, it is emptiness in the sense of the absence of 'own-being' in all persons and *dharma*s.

ciple that all the beings are empty of Self and all the *dharma*s are also empty of essence. Therefore all things and beings are equal, and relinquishment of ego, or non-attachment is the only way to the truth. Moreover, the *Lotus Sūtra* also talks of the practical compassionate help that the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara/Guanyin will give to those who call on him/her. Thus the wisdom aspect of the Mahāyāna path is complemented by lovingkindness and sympathy, to reach the unity of compassion and wisdom, the highest realm in all understandings.

How did Confucius make his understanding of benevolent love universal? In the *Analects* benevolent love is exercised on two interrelated levels: one is to love one's parents and family, and the other is to love all others. Loving one's parents is fundamental to Confucian ethics, which demonstrates that Confucian understanding of love is based on the family. For Confucians, it is important to start practising love within the family; only then can one extend love to other people.³² It seems to be natural for them to argue that if one cannot even love one's parents, how can one love others? It is in this sense we may understand why one of Confucius' disciples defines filial love (*xiao* 孝) to one's parents and fraternal love (*ti* 悌) to one's brothers as the root of practising benevolent love (*wei ren* 為仁, *An* 1:2).

Benevolent love starts with one's family. A question arises from this concerning whether or not benevolent love is confined to familial affection. The opponents of Confucianism, in particular Mohists and Legalists, focused their attack on the narrow understanding of love within the Confucian tradition, accusing Confucians of loving their parents at the expense of others and the state. For them, Confucian love has no universal element and is merely a tool to justify family patriarchy and hierarchy. However, this criticism is too simplistic. As we have already quoted above, Confucius did define '*ren*' as 'loving others' or 'loving humans' (*ai ren* 愛人, *An* 12:22) and here '*ren*' as human beings are not confined to one's family. In comparing different purposes of learning the Way by a gentleman (*junzi*) and a narrow-minded man (*xiao ren* 小人), Confucius commented: 'A gentleman studies the Way in order to love others; a narrow-minded man studies the Way in order to be easily employed' (*An* 17:4). On both occasions Confucius did not put up any qualification such as one should love one's parents only etc. Mencius further specified this as 'The benevolent man loves others, and the courteous man respects others. He who loves others is always loved by others; he who respects others is always respected by them' (Lau 1970, 134). Although it can be argued that Mencius justifies 'loving others' from a consequentialist perspective, it is nevertheless clear that he does not place any condition on the love which is naturally derived from one's character and virtue.

If benevolent love contains a universal element, then it is natural for the love to be extended to all humans, namely the people with whom one may or may not be related. This is what is termed as 'universally loving all' (*fan ai zhong* 泛愛眾). When Confucius designed a curriculum for his students, he provided a list of efforts they should make, including practising filial love (toward parents) at home, faithful respect (toward others) abroad, caution in speech and being trustworthy in keeping one's word, love towards everyone but cultivating intimacy with the benevolent (*An* 1:6).

32. It is interesting to note here that in Theravāda Buddhism, *maitrī* is first focused on oneself, and then on others; in Tibetan Buddhism, *maitrī* and *karuṇā* are first focused on one's mother, and then on others.

Although benevolent love is universal, at least in being directed to all humans, *in practice* it is held in Confucianism that it must be based on familial affection. It is a fundamental Confucian understanding that one cannot love others without first loving one's parents; or in other words, one's universal love must originate from the limited love.³³ For Confucius, loving everyone without discrimination can be achieved only through 'filial love and faithful respect'. The reason for this has been explained in realist terms by Mencius when he claimed that benevolent love comes from one's innate heart: 'There are no young children who do not know loving their parents, and none of them when they grew up will not know respecting their elder brothers. Loving one's parents is benevolence; respecting one's elders is rightness. What is left to be done is simply the extension of these to the whole Empire' (Lau 1970, 184). From this realist view of love, Mencius further argued that humans are capable of treating all others as family members: 'Treat the aged of your own family in a manner benefiting their venerable age and extend this treatment to the aged of other families; treat your own young in a manner benefiting their tender age and extend this to the young of other families'. This, Mencius argued, will enable anyone to rule the world easily (Lau 1970, 56).

It seems clear that compassion in the *Lotus Sūtra* and benevolent love in the *Analects* share some basics, but differ in nature and practical methods. Compassion is the 'great love', because it is great and universal by itself, and does not rely on anything else. As great love it contains three constituent elements. First, only Buddhas and advanced *bodhisattvas* can fully manifest this ultimate love, and compassion resides in, or is identified with, the nature of Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*.³⁴ Secondly, this love is without any discrimination in practice; in other words, Buddhist compassion in the *Lotus Sūtra* does not differentiate between one's parents from the parents of others, nor does it differentiate between the people one knows from those one does not know. Thirdly, this love is not only a love for human beings; it is also a love toward all kinds of life, a love to all sentient beings, and is truly universal.³⁵

In the eyes of Buddhists, compassion is, at its height, 'great love' or 'great mercy', without any qualification and limitation. However, for Confucians, this universal love can cause problems rather than solve them. For them, love without starting from one's own family is unnatural and unsustainable. Zhu Xi, for example, criticised Buddhists for their classification of three levels of compassion, with a particular target being the so-called *bodhisattva* compassion. For him,

33. In the *Karaiṇīya-mettā Sutta* of Śrāvakayāna Buddhism, the love of a mother for her only child is seen as the ideal that should be extended towards all beings.

34. But this is also seen as a feature of the Buddha-nature, which all beings have, whether or not they know this or properly manifest it.

35. The *Lotus Sūtra* makes unqualified statements of 'truth', while taking a lot of practical detail for granted, and in that sense is dealing with broad principles only. Benevolent love in the *Analects* and *Mencius* is a more practical and intimate exposition, illustrated in discussions between individual people. However, if we look at, for example, a Buddhist manual, like the *Visuddhimagga* and the *Sūtra on Upāsaka Precepts* (T 24 1488), we also find detailed discussions of how a Buddhist practitioner is expected to cultivate various desirable emotions/mental states from humble beginnings, in almost the same way as Mencius does. Furthermore, Buddhists do insist that it is particularly bad to harm one's own parents and harming a human being is worse than harming an animal (Harvey 2000, 156, 52). All these points, though of importance for us to compare the Buddhist and Confucian ethics, are beyond the scope of this article.

it is unjustifiable to place the love of animals above or equal to the love of parents, children or brothers (Zhu Xi 2004, 3031).³⁶

Later Confucians often identified Buddhist compassion with Mohist universal love (*jian ai* 兼愛), and made good use of Mencius' attack on Mohism. Mencius took a naturalist approach, arguing that it is in human nature that they love their own family more than others, and that 'Mo advocates love without discrimination, which amounts to a denial of one's father' (Lau 1970, 114). Looking at Mencius' argument against Mohist love, we find that criticism was made primarily from a practical perspective: love without discrimination is impracticable and therefore unbelievable.³⁷ It is clear that although Confucius did hold a view that one should love all the people, this love is out of one's virtue, and one's virtue should have been cultivated in one's love for parents and siblings; in other words, practising love is a process of extension in accordance with the degree of closeness in relationships. The same is also applicable to people in general. In the context of the *Analects*, 'ren' (人) is used both in a broad sense and in a narrow sense. In the former, it refers to all people, while in the latter it refers only to one's fellow men including one's relatives and close associates, which is differentiated from 'min' (民, the common people) (Yang 1980, 4). On the one hand Confucius defines benevolent love as loving all humans (*An* 12:22), but on the other hand when talking about the administrating measures for a large state, he separates 'loving one's fellow men' from 'employing the labour of the common people in the right seasons' (*An* 1:5). Mencius further developed this differentiation in his statement that 'A benevolent man loves everyone, but he devotes himself to the close association with good and wise man' (Lao 1970, 156). He used three different words for different categories of the objects: caring love (*ai* 愛) for things/beings, benevolent love (*ren* 仁) for all people, and affectionate love (*qin* 親) for parents: 'A gentleman is sparing with living creatures but shows no benevolence towards them; he shows benevolence towards the people but is not attached to them' (Lao 1970, 156).³⁸ All these three words indicates 'love' in general and imply that 'love' can be extended to all categories of beings. However, Confucian 'love' changes its contents when applied to different kinds of objects and is differentiated into three grades in which 'benevolent love' stands in the middle and connects 'caring love for things and beings' (*ai wu* 愛物) on the one hand and 'affectionate love for parents' (*qin qin* 親親) on the other. This has shown that it does not have the universal nature that characterizes compassion in the *Lotus Sūtra*.

CONCLUSIONS

To put compassion in context we can say that compassion is part of Buddhist educational practice. In the *Lotus Sūtra* the Buddha uses various skillful meth-

36. In his attacking of Buddhism, Zhu Xi appeals to the common sense that humans are superior to animals which was established in Mencius. It is clear that this criticism does not do justice to Buddhist universal love, because Buddhism does not see animals as more worthy of love than humans. Indeed in the *Vinaya*, intentional killing of a human is a very serious offence for a monk, entailing expulsion from the monastic order, while killing an animal is a lesser offence.

37. '墨氏謂愛無差等，欲人人皆如至親，此自難從，故人亦未必信也' (Zhu Xi 2004, 3007).

38. Lau explains in a note to his translation that 'Throughout this passage Mencius is exploiting the fact that the word *ai* means both "to love, to be attached to" and "to be sparing, to be frugal"' (Lao 1970, 156).

ods to convince his audience of his compassion and of the enlightening effect of Buddhist wisdom. Similarly benevolent love is also the key for Confucian education and cultivation, for which Confucius adapted its meanings to different audiences — six times he was asked about it and six times he answered differently in accordance with the nature and character of the enquirer. However, different from the *Lotus Sūtra* where compassion is revealed in the embodiment of *bodhisattvas*, in the *Analects*, benevolent love is revealed in moral cultivation through conscientious practices in family and community.

The difference reflects the gap between compassion in the *Lotus Sūtra* as a religious text and benevolent love of the *Analects* as an ethical collection. The *Lotus Sūtra* is primarily focused on the compassion of the Buddha and heavenly *bodhisattvas*, rather than on how a human *bodhisattva* should act, and the Buddhas and *bodhisattvas* are claimed to carry out compassion through converting their audience and extending it to the world. The *Analects* is primarily focused on benevolent love as humaneness, in which benevolent love is said to be firmly rooted in one's person and Confucius taught his students to practise it through behaviour, observance and learning. To put it simply, compassion in the *Lotus Sūtra* comes from a source outside oneself, in which compassion is exercised as the Buddha's mercy or grace upon all beings, and as an act to give joy to them and to eliminate their suffering. Therefore this particular Buddhist text, unlike many others, does not talk about the cultivation of compassion; only making oneself ready to accept it would be enough. In contrast, benevolent love in the *Analects* comes from a process of inward cultivation. Although benevolent love is to love others, to bring goodness to others or not to impose harm on them, love arising from some external inspiration is only a means by which one's virtues is cultivated; or in other words, love extended to others cannot be done unless one already possesses benevolent love within³⁹. The inward and outward movements demonstrated in the compassion of the *Lotus Sūtra* and in the benevolent love of the *Analects* have thus constituted the two dimensions of the spiritual life in China.

ABBREVIATIONS

- An *The Analects of Confucius*, translated by D.C. Lau. 1979. *Confucius — The Analects*. Penguin Books.
- LS *The Lotus Sutra: A Contemporary Translation of a Buddhist Classic*, translated by Gene Reeves. 2008. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- T Taishō

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39. This contrast must be confined to the two texts we have come to compare. As soon as we go beyond them we will find that Buddhist texts other than the *Lotus Sūtra* see compassion as an aspect of the Buddha-nature that all beings are seen to have, which bears close resemblance to the view championed by Confucius.

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