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Article

The Kowtow and the Eyeball Test

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Abstract: Taking its departure from the kowtow controversy following the Macartney embassy to the Chinese emperor, the paper illustrates the ethical and aesthetic challenge of expressing respect between people from different cultural traditions. The ethics of humility in Confucianism is contrasted to forms of respect among free and equal citizens in the liberal republican tradition from Kant to Pettit. Republican conceptions of respect, paradigmatically expressed by standing tall and looking one another in the eye as part of an "eyeball test", reflect a specific European history. Culturally inflected forms of showing respect should not be naively universalized. The paper argues that radically different expressions of respect and civility, paradigmatically expressed in greeting rituals and the normative grammar they exemplify, are a major challenge for cosmopolitan forms of political and ethical theorizing.

Keywords: Confucius, kowtow, Kant, Pettit

Introduction

The first part of this essay will reconstruct the metaphors used to characterize respectful encounters among free and equal citizens in the republican tradition from Immanuel Kant to Philipp Pettit (I). These metaphors, one might object, can be easily ignored as insignificant with regard to the normative core of republican theorizing. And yet they strongly inform what we have in mind when imagining how free and equal citizens who are respectful of one another and can command respect think, feel and act. These images capture the imagination and play a crucial role in conceiving of what a republican utopia, including ideal conceptions of republican forms of civic life, ought to be like. The paper aims to challenge the assumption that the guiding metaphors – metaphors of standing tall and looking one another in the eyes without fear and deference – are as neutral and independent of specific cultural presumptions as republican theorists suggests they are. The culturally refracted root of these images poses a

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challenge with regard to the transcultural and cosmopolitan scope of the republican project. To further expose the normative implications of greeting rituals, the second part of this paper juxtaposes republican notions of respect among free and equal citizens with Confucian conceptions of respect expressed in acts of deference and humility (II). For Confucians, in contrast to the republican tradition as it emerged in Europe, certain types of deference and humility are not only legitimate, but also form an integral component of a harmonious society (*hexieshehui* 和諧社會). The deep-seated cultural difference between societies shaped by republicanism and those significantly influenced by Confucianism poses a distinct challenge as well as a significant opportunity that any republican theory with a cosmopolitan vision should take seriously (III).

Before addressing these challenges let me begin with an anecdote. On September 14th, 1793, the British Diplomat George Macartney petitioned for an audience with the Chinese emperor. Sent by king George III of England, Macartney was to congratulate and extend gifts to the emperor Qianlong on his 83rd birthday. The underlying motivation for this mission to the imperial court was the British crown's desire to expand trading rights from Canton in the South to the entire Chinese empire and to establish a permanent diplomatic presence in Beijing. The meeting at the emperor's mountainous summer palace in Chengde turned out to be nothing short of a diplomatic disaster. Judging in hindsight, it marked the turning point in the relationship between the British and the Chinese Empire and initiated the latter's decline that was accelerated during the opium wars and sealed in the unequal treaties. The touchstone of the discord was the question how to receive visitors from afar.[1] Prior to the meeting, Macartney was asked to perform the ceremonial kowtow (叩頭) ritual - in Cantonese, "*kautau*" -, a traditional greeting rite that consists of throwing oneself three times on one's knees and touching the ground with one's forehead nine times in front of the "son of heaven."[2] Macartney, a proud diplomat of Irish descent who was educated according to the convictions of the Enlightenment and recently elevated into the aristocracy, was challenged by how to deal with "genuflexions, prostrations and other idle oriental ceremony."[3] While or precisely because

[1] See James L. Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham and London: Duke University Press 1995) and Austin Coates, *Macao and the British: 1637-1842* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press 2009), chapter 4.

[2] An alternative form of kowtowing is dedicated to one's parents, spouse, or close friends. It has survived in contexts such as traditional wedding rituals or reunions among friends until today and usually consists in kneeling and touching the head to the ground four rather than eight times.

[3] Henrietta Harrison, "The Qianlong Emperor's Letter to George III and the Early-Twentieth-Century Origins of Ideas about Traditional China's Foreign Relations," in *American Historical Review*, 111 (2017), 688.

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Macartney was aware of the importance of protocol and keen on placing his sovereign as the equal of the Chinese emperor, he refused to engage in what he considered to be a demeaning ritual that would have put George III into a lower position than that of the Chinese emperor. Instead of performing the kowtow as other delegates paying tribute to the emperor next to him, Lord Macartney ingeniously offered to perform what one could call a kowtow among equals: he would kowtow to the Chinese emperor only if a Chinese representative of equal rank would simultaneously kowtow in front of a picture of king George III. What would have turned out to be a truly memorable - as well as unintendedly humorous - episode of an East-West ritual of respect did not come about. The Chinese side considered the proposal utterly unacceptable. As a result, rather than throwing himself to the ground just like the other foreign solicitors next to him, Macartney only bent one knee while slightly lowering his head before the seated Chinese emperor, a respectful gesture he would have also performed in front of his own king. Interestingly, the Chinese records state Macartney had indeed kowtowed. While both sides thus dealt with the situation somewhat flexibly, the failed encounter triggered significant repercussions. This event developed into a kowtow controversy in which Europeans came to reflect on what the kowtow means and whether one should or should not engage in it without, from the British perspective, losing one's honor and dignity.[4]

James Gillray, "The Reception of the diplomatique and His Suite at the Court of Pekin," 1792. National Portrait Gallery, London.

[4] Interestingly, Buddhists, who usually only bow to the Buddha and to Buddhist monks, also had difficulty of performing the kowtow ritual in front of the emperor. On the parallel between the controversies of Christians and Buddhists on this issue see Eric Reinders, *Buddhist and Christian Responses to the Kowtow Problem in China* (London: Bloomsburry, 2015).

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From the Chinese perspective, what was at stake in failing to perform the ancient kowtow ritual was the threat of undermining the quasi-colonial tributary system centered around the middle kingdom, if not the continuity of the cosmic order with the emperor, the son of heaven, at its exclusive center. In his letter of response to king George III, the highly cultivated Manchu emperor responds to the solicitor from the small island off the Western periphery of the Eurasian continent as if dealing with an imposing child. The celestial emperor acknowledges that "the earnest terms" in which the King George's proposal was presented "reveal a respectful humility."[5] Nevertheless, emperor Qianlong did not concede an inch with regard to the proposal to expand diplomatic and economic relationships and rebukes George III by harshly dismissing the requests to intensify Sino-British commerce, stating that he neither had use for nor interest in strange and costly British goods. As Macartney had just demonstrated, the British, even if they were to try to acquire the rudiments of Confucian civilization, would prove themselves incapable of correctly implementing Chinese ceremonial rites at the Western periphery of the middle kingdom. Emperor Qianlong concluded by asking king George III to "respect my sentiments and to display even greater devotion and loyalty in the future" and to "tremblingly obey and show no negligence."[6] For the longest time the emperor's rejection of the British embassy's request has served to ridicule Chinese arrogance and its inability to acknowledge the rising power of the West. Confronted with the rise of China and the geopolitical but also philosophical implications it has, we might also reinterpret what is at stake in the kowtow controversy. During his lecture tour in China in the 1920s, Bertrand Russell suggested that "no one understands China until this letter has ceased to seem absurd."[7] The encounter between the British crown and the Chinese emperor demonstrates how to miscommunicate by exchanging insults.[8] At a deeper level, the episode of a marvelously failed encounter raises significant questions concerning the proper degree and expression of respect when individuals

[5] Cited in Paul U. Unschuld, *The Fall and Rise of China: Healing the Trauma of History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), 16-17.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China* (George Allen & Unwin, 1922), 51.

[8] Austin Coates contends that the Macartney embassy's result was not as disastrous as it might appear from the British perspective since "to have elicited a business letter from the Dragon was, like being presented to him without the kowtow, a unique achievement." See Austin Coates, *Macao and the British: 1637-1842* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press 2009), 89. Henrietta Harrison has argued that "up until the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, the focus on diplomatic protocol during the Macartney embassy was a primarily Western concern, while published Chinese accounts emphasized the British threat and the military measures taken to deal with it." See Harrison, "The Qianlong Emperor's Letter to George III and the Early-Twentieth-Century Origins of Ideas about Traditional China's Foreign Relations", 690.

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from radically different cultural backgrounds meet. What forms and expressions of respect should be adopted between people from different cultural traditions? Is it at all legitimate to speak of respect in an intercultural context? Who is setting the terms for what counts and what does not count as a respectful encounter?

Following the Macartney embassy, the kowtow became the symbol of a despised ritual gesture of submission that was unacceptable for free men and women (from Europe). In 1777, the Vatican declared the kowtow as intrinsically superstitious and thus forbidden. Especially in the tradition of republicanism, the kowtow came to symbolize the very opposite of how free and equal citizens would meet and greet. This has not changed until today. Philip Pettit, a contemporary republican political philosopher, elegantly summarizes the ideal of the free and independent person when he writes:

> In the received republican image, free persons can walk tall, and look others in the eye. They do not depend on anyone's grace or favor for being able to choose their mode of life. And they relate to one another in a shared, mutually reinforcing consciousness of enjoying this independence. Thus, in the established terms of republican denigration, they do not have to bow or scrape, toady or kowtow, fawn or flatter; they do not have to placate any others with beguiling smiles or mincing steps. In short, they do not have to live on their wits, whether out of fear or deference. They are their own men and women, and however deeply they bind themselves to one another, as in love or friendship or trust, they do so freely, reaching out to one another from positions of relatively equal strength.[9]

The republican tradition that cherishes the image of the free person that does not need to bend has been built on two connected ideals, one negative and one positive. The negative ideal is expressed in the principle of non-domination: *human beings should not be subjected to arbitrary forms of subjugation at the will of others*. Republicanism goes beyond this protection of individual liberties by stipulating the positive normative ideal: *human beings should be capable of determining their own lives on an equal basis*. The kowtow seems to violate both of these connected convictions in that it appears to involve subjugation to others and appears to be at odds with free and equal

[9] Philip Pettit, *On the People's Term: A Republican Theory and Model of Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 82.

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self-determination. Philip Pettit, who is in this respect closer to the cosmopolitan republicanism of Kant than to, say, Machiavelli, defends the trans-cultural reach of the joint ideals of non-domination and equal liberty.[10] Despite the historical roots of republicanism in Roman antiquity and early European modernity, more recent republicans, including Pettit, tend to consider themselves cosmopolitan. While vast diversity exists among cultures, the transculturally valid ideals of non-domination and equal liberty respond to a structural, interpersonal need that one can find in otherwise highly diverse cultural contexts. This universal need is, for Pettit, a need for respect: "there is neither a geography nor a history in our deepest, interpersonal needs, and nothing is deeper than our need to be able to command the respect of others, in particular the respect that ensures us a publicly acknowledged realm of ability and authority."[11]

In broad agreement with the normative pillars of equality and freedom that are rooted in a shared human need for respect, this article pursues the question what is involved in, to use Kant's familiar terms, treating the other, including persons from other cultural traditions, as an "end in itself" (*Selbstzweck*) with dignity (*Würde*), a member of a shared kingdom of ends (*Reich der Zwecke*). It will raise questions about the transcultural reach of the specific imagery as well as the suggested practices in characterizing what such respect entails.

Standing Tall and the Eyeball Test

The cultural roots of political theories are most obviously expressed in the metaphors employed to represent their guiding normative ideals. Pettit introduces a number of images to illustrate what it means to be a free citizen among equals. Under conditions of republicanism, he contends, "you can walk tall and assume the status of an equal with the most powerful in the land. At least, you can do so provided that you do not count under local criteria as excessively timid or paranoid."[12] The metaphors Pettit repeatedly employs for the republican kind of life that free and equal citizens enjoy - subjectively and objectively - include "walking tall", "standing on par with

[10] See *Ibid*., and Phillip Pettit, "Republicanism across cultures" in Jun-Hyeok Kwak and Leigh Jenco, eds., *Republicanism in Northeast Asia* (New York: Routledge 2015). On the parallels and differences between Pettit's and Kantian republican conceptions of non-domination see Rainer Forst, "A Kantian Republican Conception of Justice as Non-Domination," in Andreas Niederberger and Philipp Schink, eds., *Republican Democracy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 154-168.

[11] Pettit, "Republicanism across cultures", 35.

[12] Philip Pettit, *Just Freedom: A Moral Compass for a Complex World* (New York, W.W. Norton and Co, 2014), xxvi.

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others", and "standing on equal footing."[13] Conversely, the greatest evil for a free citizen of a republic, a *liber*, consists in being subjugated to the will of another person perceived as master or *dominus*.[14]

These vertical metaphors, which characterize the ideal form of an upright body posture during a respectful encounter between equal citizens, are complemented by a visual metaphor. Equal citizens, on Pettit's account, stand "eye to eye" with their fellow citizens; "(t)hey can look the other in the eye; they do not have to bow and scrape."[15] Perhaps with a touch of irony, Pettit elevates to the level of a test the ideal of standing tall and especially highlights the practice of looking into the eyes of the other as a yardstick for social relationships free of domination. What he calls "the eyeball test" is remotely similar to Rawls's heuristic devise of the original position insofar as both devises are supposed to provide a method for determining what is required in a just socio-political order. However, in contrast to Rawls's image of free and equal subjects who stand behind a veil of ignorance, Pettit's eyeball test is supposed to map on to existing intuitions and real-life practices. Drawing on this test is supposed to determine what it means to live a free life of respect among equals. Rather than an abstract philosophical thought experiment, Pettit's eyeball test is supposed to be rooted in and applicable to evaluating actual political decision-making processes. To take one of his examples, determining the laws governing same-sex marriage during the Spanish government under the Zapatero presidency involved the evocation of an imagined eyeball test between legislators and those fellow citizens whose lives would be significantly affected by same-sex marriage legislation.[16]

The eyeball test is supposed to determine whether citizens are indeed equal:

> At the level set by this test, the safeguards should enable people, by local standards, to look one another in the eye without reason for fear or deference. The achievement of that discernible and applicable ideal would make, intuitively, for the equality of people in their status as

[13] *Ibid*., 57 and 99; 60; and 80.

[14] In the preface to his *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*, Pettit recounts that his conception of freedom as nondomination is a reaction to his early education as a seminarian who was prevented from being able "to look the authorities in the eye" as well as his reading of Mary Wollstonecarft writing on the subjugation of women "who learned to bow and scrape, and to achieve their ends by ingratiation." Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), viii.

[15] *Ibid*., 5 and 87.

[16] See José Luis Martí and Philip Pettit, *A Political Philosophy in Public Life: Civic Republicanism in Zapatero's Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 79.

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> free persons or citizens: that is, in the free status that has long been an ideal in republican thinking.[17]

Pettit insists that local standards are supposed to determine whether minimal conditions of being able to command respect among equals are being met. The test is intended to combine universal as well as local dimensions. It is intended to be both culturally deep and interculturally wide. In addition to identifying an ideal republican society, the test is supposed to allow for an evaluation, comparison and even a ranking of cultures: "While we can use the principle for identifying an ideally just society – say, a society that is just enough to pass the eyeball test – we can also use it to evaluate and rank the rather less than ideal systems with which the real world presents us and to track piecemeal progress within them."[18] One could think that the very search for a test to determine the degree of intracultural as well as intercultural respect is a nonstarter that could only be evoked in an ironic way. Assuming it is intended as a serious suggestion how to measure a culture's level or extent of freedom, Pettit's proposed testing device raises a number of questions as previous commentators have worked out:[19] How can the presence of rational fear and devotion be measured? From which perspective would an evaluative ranking take place? Can ranking be performed only by someone who already lives in situations in which the eyeball test would turn out to be successful? Does the evaluator have to be part of – or at least closely familiar with and immersed in – the local cultural environment of the compared societies? I will not discuss these technical questions in any detail here and will leave aside the possibility that the eyeball test is set up in a viciously circular way. Instead, by way of a detour, I will focus on whether the ideal of walking tall and looking another in the eye is indeed a transcultural expression of what it means to show respect among equals.

A quick genealogical review shows that the ideal of rectitude and the corresponding dismissal of lowness and bending are deeply rooted in the European imagination. In the Allegory of the Cave from book VII of Plato's *Republic*, the prisoners are bent over, shackled and ignorant of the mechanisms producing the shadows they consider to be true. The philosopher, by contrast, stands up and turns his head around, leaves the shadow-world of the cave and, directing his gaze upwards to the sun,

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[17] Philip Pettit, *On the People's Term: A Republican Theory and Model of Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 47.

[18] *Ibid*., 242.

[19] Frieder Bögner, Jörn Elgert and Carolyn Iselt, "Focusing on the Eyeball Test: A Problematic Testing Device in Philip Pettit's Theory of Justice", in S. Derpmann, D.P. Schweikard, eds., *Philip Pettit: Five Themes from his Work*, Münster Lectures in Philosophy 1, Springer (2016), 123-131.

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contemplates the idea of the Good. Ever since Plato, verticality became the default posture for a liberated form of life that is capable of standing tall. As Heidegger has argued, the Allegory of the Cave marks the transition from the notion of truth as the unhiddenness (ἀλήθεια) of the immediately disclosed world of shadows to that of "orthotes", truth understood as, literally, straightness and, in its Roman derivative, rectitude or correctness (*rectum*). [20] This new conception of truth rests on a distinction between what is true and what is false and privileges the former over the latter.

In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle emphasizes that obeisance in the form of lowering oneself is a sign of honor only among barbarians.[21] In Roman times kneeling was identified with the discriminated-against religious practices of Jews and Christians. Jews and Christians bowed and prostrated themselves while free and equal Roman citizens stood tall.[22] As a consequence of emancipation processes, the practice of lowering oneself in acts of bowing, genuflection or prostration has been criticized and became largely extinct from the public realm, especially in modern republican societies.[23]

In republican theorizing, Immanuel Kant has been most influential in identifying inclination (*Neigung*) with the moral immaturity of following one's natural desires rather than acting out of duty and respect for the moral law. Autonomous subjects are those who relinquish their natural instinct to bend over, an instinct that frequently is associated by Kant with children, women and Asians. In a republican spirit Kant object not only to the acting out of inclination, but to servility more generally. In a section of *Metaphysics of Morals* titled "*Kriecherei*", servility, or "on the crawling that is genuine to worms and other insects", being servile (*knechtisch*, *animo servili*) violates self-esteem (*Selbstschätzung*), which is a duty of humans against themselves (*Pflicht des Menschen gegen sich selbst*). The capacity of being able to command respect rests, for Kant, on one's capacity for self-esteem. Since human beings partake in a sublime grandeur (*Erhabenheit*), acts of kneeling or, in his expression, crawling violate their sense of dignity: "Kneeling down or groveling on the ground, even to express your reverence for heavenly things,

[20] See Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth: On Plato's Cave Allegory and Theaetetus*, trans. by Ted Sadler (New York: Continuum, 2002).

[21] See Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1361a36.

[22] Especially the New Testament recounts numerous cases of (1) prostration in front of God, (2) falling to one's knees before another as well as (3) kneeling while praying. It mentions the word for kneeling, "proskynein" (προσκυνεῖν), alone fifty-nine times to characterize a liturgical gesture that was performed by Jesus and whose significance transcends, according to Christian belief, any merely cultural practice.

[23] The outdated phenomenon of genuflection survives, if at all, in the private realm, i.e. in the self-consciously old-fashioned – and also predominantly male – practice of proposing in marriage rituals.

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is contrary to human dignity .... Bowing or scraping before another seems in any case to be unworthy of a man. ... Whoever makes himself a worm cannot complain when he is then trampled underfoot."[24] Kant does emphasize a moral justification for politeness and especially humility. He distinguishes two senses of humility (*Demut*). False humility (*humilitas spuria*) is distinguished from true moral humility (*humilitas moralis*) in virtue of the relationship to the moral law. The "false" form consists in submissiveness (*Unterwürfigkeit*) to others, which undermines self-esteem that is essential for an ethics of autonomy. Subjects who determine their lives first need to possess a sense of their own dignity that contradicts submissive forms of self-humiliation. Even the true form of humility can easily succumb to arrogance or an excess of ambition (*ambitio*). This happens when a sense of pride for possessing virtue (*Tugendstolz*) replaces the process of measuring oneself against the structurally higher moral law. True self-esteem consists of an unfinalizable elevation (*Erhebung*) to the moral law rather than a comparison with others. Kant prefers to speak of reverence (*Achtung*) rather than respect (*Respekt*) or awe (*Ehrfurcht*) when it comes to intersubjective relationships of recognition since the latter two notions are based on a sense of fear. Awe, in particular, denotes an unbridgeable distance that is characteristic of relationships to the vastness of nature as well as the moral law.

Another instance documenting the association of genuflection with pre-modern or pre-Enlightenment culture comes from Hegel. The defender of Prussian constitutional monarchy, in a slightly melancholic tone of voice, claims that the epitome of veneration's decay in modernity is most visible in the realms of art and religion: "our knee does not bend"[25] in front of even the most religious artworks after they have seized to be the highest expression of a culture of advancing equal freedom. To be modern, on this account, means to be no longer capable of keeping one's self-esteem and sense of dignity while genuflecting.

This tour de force shows that the metaphor of standing or walking tall is no doubt prevalent especially, even if not exclusively, in the European

[24] Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysik der Sitten*, (Königsberg: F. Nicolovius, 1798), 436ff. It was a common trope to identify such expressions of servility with Asian cultures influenced by Confucianism. For example, the anthropologist Ruth Benedict writes about the bowing gestures in Japanese families, "the one who bows acknowledges the right of the other to have his way in things he might well prefer to manage himself (…). Hierarchy based on sex and generation and primogeniture are part and parcel of family life." Ruth Benedict, *The Crysanthenum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Cleveland: Mariner Books, 2005), 49. In addition to the imperial ritual of the kowtow and the various forms of bowing in different social contexts, Asian practices of meditation was also commonly interpreted in the European tradition as an undignified desire to make oneself small that.

[25] Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, 3 vols., trans. by T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1975), vol. 1, 142.

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republican tradition that Pettit holds dear.[26] Republicanism has repeated, in a normative register, the anthropological evolution from forms of bent-over four-legged animals to current forms of bipedal standing humans. Four-legged pre-humanoids have been superseded by the seemingly more progressive homo erectus, homo habilis and, ultimately, homo sapiens. Uprightness, being straight and having rectitude are only a few of the many metaphors that suggest a correlation between one's vertical corporal posture and the possession of dignity and moral integrity. And indeed, it can hardly be denied that human practices of kowtowing, kneeling, and bowing have most often served the purpose of providing symbolic expression to hierarchical power relationships. Subjects usually kneel before superiors such as emperors, who are more important – and thus in need of more respect – than their subalterns. They might also kneel before their God who is imagined infinitely greater than them and bow to religious authorities who claim legitimacy within religious institutions. In the European tradition, the ideal of walking tall has been closely linked to the process of the emancipation of self-conscious citizens who have liberated themselves by rising up and becoming steadfast in their struggles against the powers of domination.[27] The citizens demanding a republic broke with the yoke of older traditions of deference that required its practitioners to make themselves small in front of elites such as the aristocracy.[28] Bowing or kneeling, as well as other acts of publicly displayed deference, are the behavioral codes that have been increasingly regarded as forms of non-republican subjugation and domination, in which hierarchies were established and protected by elites against egalitarian aspirations. In extreme cases of domination, the enforcers of such political systems, metaphorically and even literally, break the backs of their subjects. To cut a long story short, the assumption that the person who does not stand tall is subjected to an illegitimate hierarchical relationship in which he or she is systematically dominated by others has been deeply

[26] In Chinese cultural contexts it is also common to praise great human beings (大人) while "small" or "petty human" 小人） is a demeaning term. However, in spite of this figure of speech, normative achievement consisted in the seemingly paradoxical practice of making oneself small in practices revealing humility (see next section).

[27] A different kind of emancipation consists in the democratization of the right to be seated. In pre-republican times, the right of sitting in public and political ceremonial contexts was reserved to officials of superior rank such as kings and popes while citizens had to bow and stand below the throne. Nowadays the inflation of sitting and the transformation of *homo erectus* into *homo sedens* is identified as a major civilizational health risk. See Hajo Eickhoff, *Himmelsthron und Schaukelstuhl: Die Geschichte des Sitzens* (Munich: Hanser, 1993).

[28]Kurt Bayertz, *Der aufrechte Gang: Eine Geschichte des anthropologischen Denkens* (Munich: Beck, 2013) and Bernd Jürgen Warneken, "Biegsame Hofkunst und aufrechter Gang," in Ludwig-Uhland Institut, ed., *Der aufrechte Gang: Zur Symbolik einer Körperhaltung* (Tübingen: Tübinger Vereinigung für Volkskunde, 2010) and "Bürgerliche Emanzipation und aufrechter Gang: Zur Geschichte eines Haltungsideals," in *Das Argument*, 32, no. 179 (2010), 39-52.

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rooted in the Western political imagination and the republican tradition in particular. Acts of lowering oneself are connected to an aristocratic ritual that has become empty of meaning while continuing to protect hierarchies.

The modernist artist Paul Klee created an ironic rendition of a "kowtow among equals". In his etching "Two Men Meet, Each Believing the Other to Be of Higher Rank", Klee depicts two naked men who engage in referential rituals. The informed spectator is able to identify them as the Austro-Hungarian emperor Franz Ferdinand I and the German emperor Wilhelm II. Since both are nude, they are incapable of determining the other's rank. Rather than dismissing protocol, they show excessive forms of ritualistic deference. Klee ridicules the emptiness of aristocratic rituals and thereby makes fun of the submissiveness that characterizes aristocratic regimes from head to toe.

Paul Klee, "Two Men Meet, Each Believing the Other to Be of Higher Rank"

These examples confirm: free and equal citizens walk tall.[29] But is this depreciation of deferential rituals indeed shared across cultural boundaries? As the opening anecdote about the (failed) kowtow during the Macartney Embassy in China suggests, deference has been an integral part of the Confucian tradition to which I shall now turn.

[29] One noteworthy exception are Sartre's reflections on being seen. The ambivalent consequences of becoming visible through self-rectification have been largely ignored by philosophers. The person who looks the other into the eye becomes visible, vulnerable and at the same time intransparent in that his intentions do not need to coincide with his facial expression. See Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1993), 340-400 and Hans Blumenberg, *Beschreibung des Menschen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 2006).

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The Challenge of Confucian Deference

While one needs to be careful not to introduce an East-West dichotomy and to simplify a manifold of internally complex and pluralistic traditions, a look beyond the Western political imagination to the classical - and recently revived - Chinese tradition of Confucianism shows that the emphasis on standing tall and looking someone in the eye without deference is far from self-evident.[30] The kowtow anecdote referred to at the beginning of this paper illustrates the centrality of ritualistic forms of deference in traditional Confucian culture. After Maoism had identified modernization with an overcoming of traditional Chinese culture during the "cultural revolution", more recently we can witness a return, some speak of a renaissance, of the classical Confucian tradition. This return is not simply state orchestrated but is also rooted in grass roots initiatives such as the founding of Confucian academies devoted to studying and applying the Confucian classics throughout China.[31] In the most recent wave of modernization, China is rediscovering its ancient traditions, especially Confucianism, which are being branded as promoting distinctively Asian values. This renaissance of the old no doubt draws on a sense of Chauvinism connected to the rise of China and a self-assertive differentiation from supposedly Western values including excessive forms of individualism. However, the cultural renaissance is also being fueled by a critical diagnosis of a one-sided process of modernization in terms of an expansion of markets and the destructive consequences of an economy exclusively based on ambition and competitiveness.[32] One can witness a widespread sense of existential void and lack of identity as a consequence of the latest stage of Chinese development after the Maoist promise of equality has been overshadowed by a widening gap between rich and poor.

There is not one single equivalent to the notion of deference in Confucian sources, but a number of related notions that fall under the broader umbrella concept of deference. They include *ci* 辭, to decline politely, *rang* 讓, to yield or defer to others, *shun* 順, to be compliant, *xiao* 孝, to practice filial

[30] Recent reconstructions of the political dimensions of the Chinese Confucian tradition include Stephen C. Angle, *Contemporary Confucian Political Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012); Daniel Bell, *The China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); and Joseph Chan, *Confucian Perfectionism: A Political Philosophy for Modern Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

[31] Mario Wenning and Jinting Wu, "The postsecular turn in education: Lessons from the mindfulness movement and the revival of Confucian academies," in *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 35, no. 6 (2016), 551-571.

[32] Evan Osnos, *Age of Ambition: Chasing Fortune, Truth, and Faith in the New China* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014).

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piety, *ti* 悌, to hold brotherly respect, *jing* 敬, to show reverent respect, as well as the entire rituals collectively known as *li* 禮. The rituals take on a significant role in the recent renaissance of Confucian culture and political philosophy. As Herbert Fingerette has argued, Confucianism can be understood as conceiving of the secular as sacred by way of attributing a transformative role to everyday rituals, especially civil rituals expressing politeness. Interestingly, Fingerette's key example for a social ritual's binding force is a handshake. He was keenly aware of the role of greeting rites, but unfortunately borrowed the ritual greeting that is associated primarily with Western culture. Handshakes emerged in ancient Greece and served the purpose of showing to the other person that one was not carrying a weapon.

Different modes of deference were not only seen as being instrumentally efficacious in sustaining a harmonious society but were also considered to possess intrinsic value by Confucians.[33] The kowtow belongs to the classical ritual system that is laid out in the three Rites canons, the *Yili* 儀禮, the *Liji* 禮記, and the *Zhouli* 周禮. It goes beyond mere custom in that it, when conducted in a sincere manner, expresses a sense of humility and modesty that is considered an important comportment of human excellence independent of cultural background. Confucianism conceives of human beings as inherently bound by social relationships which need to be cultivated. Learning to properly bend one's body to the other person as if done in a natural manner takes on a central role in this distinctive form of subjectivization. The etymology of the Chinese character for human being, ren 人, is often claimed to represent a walking person. However, if one traces the etymological roots in the Shang dynasty bronze scripts used since the 2nd millennium BC, one sees that the character originally resembles a bowing person:

[33] Robert Cummings Neville, *Ritual and Deference: Extending Chinese Philosophy in a Comparative Context* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008) and Aaron Stalnaker, "Confucianism, Democracy, and the Virtue of Deference," in *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*, 12, no. 4 (2013), 441-459.

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Acts of bodily inclination are a major component of a traditional Chinese mode of life. Their importance has been particularly emphasized in the tradition of Confucianism. In the most influential collection of Confucian sayings, the *Analects*, Confucius emphasizes the importance of performing the kotow ritual even against trends to transform or overcome it:

> A subject kowtowing on entering the hall is prescribed in the observance of ritual propriety (*li*). Nowadays that one kowtows only after ascending the hall is a matter of hubris. Although it goes contrary to accepted practice, I still kowtow on entering the hall.[34]

The modification of the rituals known as *li*, while sometimes justified, is not to be taken lightly, especially when it comes to the cultivation of moral competences.[35] While some flexibility in performing rituals is not only allowed for, but also recommended, what should be the motivating reason when making such changes is that the performance of rituals is to be conducive to the cultivation of one's moral character. For Confucius, ritual is important in the process of self-cultivation because it allows the person engaging in it to step back from and thereby curb immediate individual desires.[36] The cultivation of genuine humility and modesty expressed in a deferential attitude and practice is a central component of self-cultivation, which is identified as a taking-oneself-back or, literally, a lowering of oneself. In analogy to the eyeball-test, one could conceive of an analogous Confucian testing devise, a "kowtow test" that would determine the degree and scope of Confucian forms of respect in a society in a harmonious society. The scope of respect would be reflected in the degree of practices of humility which citizens cultivate to varying degree of virtuosity in a variety of social as well as other contexts differentiated according to the addressee of respect.

According to the classical Chinese and especially the Confucian tradition, one ought to be deferential to the standards of heaven (*tian* 天) and the course of the world (*dao* 道) because they exceed the individual's will and control while providing a normative reference point for evaluating one's ethically relevant performance. One owed respect to one's ancestors and more mundane forms of respect within the five significant human relationships (*wulun* 无论) between government and citizens, parents and children, spouses, siblings, and friends. For a Confucian, the inability to

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[34] Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, trans. by Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont Jr. (New York: Ballentine Books, 1999), 9:3.

[35] Karyn Lai, "Li in the 'Analects': Training in Moral Competence and the Question of Flexibility," in *Philosophy East and West*, 56, no. 1 (2006), 69-83.

[36] See Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius*, 12.1.

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genuinely feel and adequately express deference in front of one's parents and ancestors, but also to people holding a certain rank or office worthy of esteem, is a serious character flaw. It is considered an impediment to moral development and a flourishing community. Respect, as expressed in greeting rituals, is not limited to intersubjective relationships, but extends to the natural world. One example are depictions of the famous artist and critic Mifu (1051-1107). Mifu is said to have reacted to a stone by greeting and bowing to it out of a sense of respectful awe and referring to the stone as shixiong 石兄 (elder brother stone).[37]

Chen Hongshou, Mifu praising a rock
(First half of the 17th century)

Jen Po-nien, The Poet Mifu (19th century)

The capacity of being polite and deferring to others worthy of respect is a sign of an exemplary person and extends to all areas of life, including those that do not appear to be characterized by ritual encounter. In *Analects* 3.7. Confucius states about the *junze* 君子, the exemplary person or gentleman, i.e., the one who has cultivated virtuous manners and learned to be polite within ritual encounters such as archery competition:

[37] See Wolfgang Welsch interprets Mifu's respectful encounter as an example of overcoming of self-assertivene arrogance by acknowledging nature to the point of "becoming rock" (*Fels werden*). See Wolfgang Welsch, *Blickwechsel: Neue Wege der Ästhetik* (Stuttgart: Reclam 2012), 161-164.

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> Exemplary persons (*junzi* 君子) are not competitive, except where they have to be in the archery ceremony. Greetings (*zui yi*, i.e. bowing with hands folded in front of the chest, MW) and making way for each other (*rang*), the archers ascend the hall, and returning they drink a salute. Even in contesting, they are exemplary persons.[38]

Practices of deference involving bending and bowing to the other were very common and an integral part of showing respect. In the archery ceremony, the winner was expected to prepare the drink for the person who lost. For the Confucian, deference as well as a trusting commitment to the other person and a faith in the possibility of goodness precedes the striving for recognition that has been dominant in the Western ethical tradition at least since Hegel.[39] The striving for recognition and competition was to be constrained and replaced by an aptitude for learning and for being humble.

In classical Chinese culture, looking another person straight in the eye would violate a sense of respect, which is closely associated to shame. Performing the eyeball test, as Pettit suggests, would put unnecessary pressure on the other and could be perceived as, if not disrespectful, at least tactless or rude. Even in English, "to eye" or "to eyeball" someone suggests either a degree of suspicion or indicates an excessive (often sexual) interest concerning the person that is the object of one's gaze. The very setup of the eyeball test closely resembles a duel in which two people measure each other with piercing stares while always remaining ready to strike if needed. From a Confucian perspective, respect as measured in the eyeball test, would be a continuation of warfare by other means. In contrast to engaging in staring contests, Confucian cultures have often been characterized as shame cultures in which it is considered paramount not to lose face or make the other lose face by engaging in direct visual confrontation. In contrast, Western guilt cultures focus on direct face to face confrontation.[40] In the contemporary world, it is highly problematic to uphold such binary conceptions of cultural difference centered around the notions of shame and guilt.[41] It makes more sense to conceive of shame and guilt as different dispositions that are

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[38] Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius*, 3.7.

[39] See Alexei Procyshyn and Mario Wenning, "Recognition and Trust: Hegel and Confucius on the Normative Basis of Ethical Life," in: *Dao*: *A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*, 18 (2019).

[40] Benedict, *The Crysanthenum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*, 222-227.

[41] The simplistic juxtaposition of an inward-directed sin- vs. an outward-directed shame cultures does not even hold true for classical formulations of Chinese ethics. Heiner Roetz, "Chinesische Schamkultur vs. westliche Schuldkultur? Ein Versuch zur Korrektur eines Klischees," in Michael Fische and Kurt Seelmann, eds., *Körperbilder: Kulturalität und Wertetransfer* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011).

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developed to a lesser or greater extend in different cultural contexts and, perhaps more significantly, in different social settings and different personalities. Yet, in our context of inquiring into different cultural expressions of as well as different normative grammars of what respect entails, it is important to note that shame-based ethical codes that flourish in cultures that have been strongly influenced by Confucianism are to be distinguished from the unreasonable forms of fear, timidity and paranoia that Pettit mentions as potential obstacles for performing the eyeball test. Not being inclined to look the other into the eye could be an expression of existential humility rather than a sign of unreasonable fear, timidity or paranoia. In contrast to fear, timidity or paranoia, shame is closely linked to a distinctively moral sensitivity. It emphasizes the desire not to violate one's own and, even more so, the other person's sense of being exposed, visible and thus existentially vulnerable. A person with a capacity for shame organizes her life by anticipating and keeping in mind the feelings and evaluations of others, real or imagined. It is precisely out of deep respect of the other person that a direct encounter at eye level is being circumvented.

It might be objected to an insistence on ritualized forms of deference that it can easily be misused to establish and protect privileges of elites while it is blind to those at the bottom of hierarchies. Deference, its critics argue, is an obstacle to bottom-up emancipation movements. It is incompatible with democratic forms of contestation and dissent. Paying respect by performing deferential rituals would violate the egalitarian spirit of modern republicanism. Admittedly, from the perspective of republicanism, the Confucian insistence on rituals of deference could appear like an outdated ethic of a subservient feudalistic society stratified into distinct social classes with the son of heaven at its center. It seems to be at odds with the egalitarian spirit of modern republicanism. An anecdote has it that Sun Yatsen, the founder of the Republic of China, raised to his feet a visitor saying that one need not kowtow to the president of a republic. [42]

As Eske Møllgaard has argued, the main function of Confucian ritual consisted in enforcing those social hierarchies, which were already outdated remnants of the Western Zhou dynasty when being promoted by classical Confucianism.[43] According to Møllgaard, Confucian ritual is incompatible

[42] Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in in China 1911-1929* (New York: Oxford University Press 2000), 54.

[43] See Eske Møllgaard, "Confucian ritual and modern civility," in *Journal of Global Ethics*, 8, nos. 2-3 (2012), 227-237. The emphasis on ritualized forms of lowering oneself and taking oneself back has been one of the primary reasons for the contested thesis of the existence of an "oriental despotism" that prevented Asian societies from democratization and from embracing republican principles as well as genuinely civic virtues. See August Karl Wittfogel, *Die orientalische Despotie: Eine vergleichende Untersuchung totaler Macht* (Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1957).

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with the salient features of modern civility. Modern civility, in contrast to traditional forms of family loyalty that are praised by Confucians, consists in a bond among free and equal citizens.[44] And yet, it seems that the Confucian insistence on cultivating interpersonal forms of deference are at least remotely related to and compatible with civility in that both are responses to the fact that human beings depend on each other, including the good will of others, in a degree which can never be discharged or paid back.

Some of the intuitions concerning deference, when it is being understood as reverence to fellow humans one depends on, are not fully foreign to the republican tradition. Republicans too have emphasized the importance of cultivating interpersonal bonds, most notably in the form of civic virtues, including a sense of civility with regard to others.[45] Simple acts of civility do not have to count as kowtowing or submissiveness in the derogatory republican interpretation of the term analyzed above. Civility can manifest itself in being considerate of others such as when holding the door open or letting the other person speak first. Such acts of politeness or kindness cannot be demanded in that civility is not a duty or an entitlement. Yet, being civil does not merely reflect a free choice of subjects independent of each other. Civility involves, in Robert Pippin's terms, an "appreciation of the dependence of my life on others within some community of dependence and the enactment of social forms appropriate to that dependence."[46] Such an appreciation is an important good that is cherished as much as it is not a moral or legal entitlement. Civility is not identical with morality and yet it can be efficacious in contributing to a shared social space in which agents express and cultivate mutual respect.[47]

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[44] Robert B. Pippin, *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 231.

[45] See Pettit, *Republicanism*, chapter 8.

[46] Pippin, *The Persistence of Subjectivity*, 231.

[47] See Angle, *Contemporary Confucian Political Philosophy*, chapter 6. Perfectionist reconstructions of Confucian civility have argued that it is necessary to assign different degrees of respect according to merit as well as a person's contribution to the common good. See Chan, *Confucian Perfectionism*, 93-94. This proposal contradicts widely shared egalitarian conceptions of moral worth. The perfectionist assumption of the common good as a yardstick for measuring whether a person is worthy of more or less respect can hardly be defended in highly complex civil societies marked by a plurality of conceptions of the good among citizens who participate in democratic forms of life, i.e., citizens who are free and equal while acknowledging their mutual dependence.

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A Confucian Supplement to Republicanism

Are republicanism and a Confucian ethics of humility thus incompatible just as the paradoxical formulation of a kowtow among equals seems to suggest? The answer to this question depends on whether it is possible to imagine a society that would cherish the normative ideals of equality and freedom as non-domination while also inviting the cultivation of virtuous forms of deference.

From a republican point of view, the most significant drawback of an ethos of deference appears to be that it prevents contestation and dissent, which are integral parts of democratic civil societies. It is difficult to imagine emancipatory movements that grow out of overly deferential practices such as kneeling and deference might even help sustain problematic forms of hierarchy. And yet such practices of expressing dissent by way of bodily deference do exist. Acts of kneeling, for example, have been used to express political resistance.[48]

The Confucian could respond to the objection that practices of deference, while they may not always be symmetrical, are nevertheless not one-dimensional. Practicing deference puts the recipient of the deferential act into a relationship of bearing responsibility for the role or office with which he or she is being identified. For example, if one shows a deep level of respect to someone who holds an official office, such as a judge, the person who holds an office imbued with this status will likely be reminded of the responsibilities and expectations that come with performing his or her position well, for example listening to multiple perspectives without bias and considering human beings as innocent unless proven guilty.

In an imagined Confucian republic, it would be essential that citizens are able to refrain from being deferential if the office holder fails to live up to his or her responsibilities or if one has other convincing reasons to do so. Acts of defying rituals of politeness can for example involve the refusal to accept gifts where receiving the gift would put oneself into a potentially unwanted situation of forced gratitude to a donor who could then use his wits to bribe the recipient. Mengzi, one of Confucius successors, mentions that one of his role models, Zisi, refused to accept repeated gifts from the duke because it would have involved kowtowing to the duke's messenger, which he preferred not to do. Similarly, we read in the *Kongzi jiayu*,

[48] To demonstrate against police brutality and racial inequality in the United States, the NFA player Colin Kaepernick kneeled during the playing of the US national anthem. Other athletes have emulated this practice to express solidarity with and respect for the victims of inequality and excessive forms of police violence. The kneeling has been interpreted as a sign of disrespect by some, including president Trump, while President Obama emphasized the right to kneel and not to stand as a form of legitimate protest.

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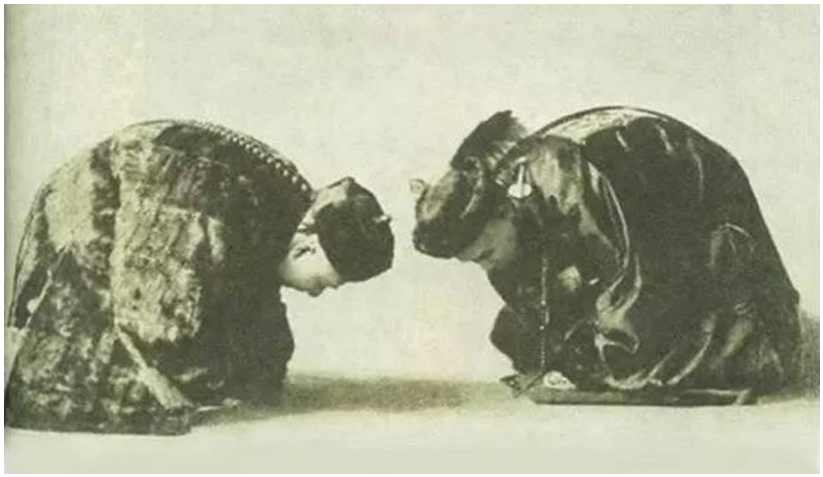
> Zengzi (Zeng Shen) in his worn-out clothes worked in the fields in Lu. When the Duke of Lu heard of this, he offered him a domain. Zengzi refused it with polite, yet determined words. Somebody said to him, 'The ruler wants to give it to you by his own initiative without your having asked for it. Why do you refuse it so determinedly?' Zengzi said, 'I have heard: He who accepts the favors of another, will always live in awe before him. And he who gives something to another will always look down upon him. And even if the ruler graciously should not look down upon me—would I myself be free of awe before him?' When Confucius heard of this he said, 'Shen's words suffice to keep his moral integrity intact.' [49]

From a republican perspective, these Confucian accounts suggest that what is essential when engaging in acts of deference is that (1) those acts are being performed in a voluntary manner and (2) that the rituals engaged in preserve or help to establish equality or at least significant levels of reciprocity among those that show respect to each other.



[49] Cited in Heiner Roetz, *Confucian Ethics of the Axial Age: A Reconstruction under the Aspect of the Breakthrough toward Postconventional Thinking* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 298.

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In *Empire of Signs*, Roland Barthes characterizes the act of bowing and gift giving as follows:

> in order to give a present, I bow down, virtually to the level of the floor, and to answer me, my partner does the same: one and the same low line, that of the ground, joins the giver, the recipient, and the stake of the protocol, a box which may well contain nothing—or virtually nothing, a graphic form (inscribed in the space of the room) is thereby given to the act of exchange, in which, by this form, is erased any greediness […] The salutation here can be withdrawn from any humiliation or any vanity, because it literally salutes no one; it is not the sign of a communication—closely watched, condescending and precautionary—between two autarchies, two personal empires (each ruling over its Ego, the little realm of which it holds the "key"); it is only the feature of a network of forms in which nothing is halted, knotted, profound.[50]

Interestingly, for Barthes the performance of rituals as both void constitutes a substitution of religion by politeness. Rituals of radical politeness are subversive of the tendency to humiliate others or to worship oneself in acts of vanity.

As the above image demonstrates, radical rituals such as bowing to the floor do not need to preserve the status quo. Indeed, they can level hierarchies. As Michal Nylan has argued, rituals can have a transformational and even utopian impact: "The ritual proper highlights the aura of change by its temporary inversions of the social order […] ritual practices, because of this attempt at union, tend to evoke a coherent picture of ideal worlds in which hierarchy is always offset by reciprocity, so that the social order may become entirely equitable, if not entirely equal in the modern Euro-American sense."[51] The transformative power often derives from placing the other person into a position where he or she is invited to take on an obligation. The obligation is not necessarily fulfilled, but the ritual context creates the possibility for its realization. It establishes a context in which the participants of the ritual are measured by how well they fulfill the duties they take on as part of being treated in a respectful and reverential manner.

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[50] Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, trans. by Richard Howards (New York: Hill and Wang, The Noonday Press, 1989), 65-66.

[51] Michael Nylan, *The Five "Confucian" Classics* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2001), 191.

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By way of conclusion, some of the directions in which an imagined contemporary version of Confucian republicanism could justify the inclusion of deferential practices include:

1. The Confucian notion of deference is rooted in the fact that, under usual circumstances, human beings depend on and owe more to others, especially their parents and ancestors, than they are capable of returning directly. Deference is the proper expression of a sense of existential humility, modesty and gratitude in light of being born into forms of life that are being passed on. These forms are open to even radical forms of revision and transformation.

2. While bowing, kneeling, or kowtowing are classical expressions of deferential rituals, deference comes in different degrees and shapes and is closely connected to civility. Expressions of civility include handshakes, giving way to another person and other gestures of reverence. While one might initially cultivate forms of deference and civility in small circles such as families, under favorable conditions the interpersonal level can gradually spread outward to include forms of curtesy and friendliness and care to distant strangers.

3. In contrast to classical Confucianism, deference in a modern Confucian republic would not presuppose fixed hierarchical relationships. This does not preclude that some expressions of deference are asymmetrical, for example gift giving or treating the elderly with respect. At a transgenerational level, however, these forms of asymmetrical deference are part of a reciprocal process of taking turns.[52] Each generation is burdened with the task of appropriating, preserving, transforming and passing down traditions and forms of life that they have inherited.

4. Genuine deference is performed out of a sense of voluntariness. To count as genuine, deference flourishes in contexts free of domination as well as free from the blind following of rituals. Everyday ritual invocations such as saying "please" or "thank you" recognizes the other person's power to decline. In many contexts declining might not be a real option and yet acts of speaking and acting in a civil manner is essential to create the illusion of a shared civil space that is necessary for a flourishing community of free and equal citizens.

[52] See Matthias Fritsch, *Taking Turns with Earth: Phenomenological and Deconstructive Approaches to Intergenerational Justice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018).

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Such illusions, in contrast to lies or ideologies, are not intended to deceive, but create a shared "subjective" space of reciprocity in which human beings can feel and act as free and equal players.[53] The cultivation of playful forms of deference could serve as an important corrective in many social contexts. Understood as a spiritual exercise of taking-oneself-back by stepping-back-from-oneself and making-oneself-small, it could counteract the pernicious tendency of "standing tall" to appear as snobbery and self-assertiveness. The Confucian emphasis on deference is a radicalized version of such acts of cultivating a culture of humility and respect. It invites us to imagine a republic in which the kowtow would indeed be performed among equals.[54]

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[53] See Adam B. Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael J. Puett, and Bennett Simon, *Ritual and its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 21-22

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