

## LI 禮 AND FILIPINO BEHAVIOURAL PROPRIETY

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper takes behavioural propriety as the source of ritual or the ritualistic in indigenous philosophy in the Philippines. Filipino understanding of behavioural propriety is seen in what have been identified as elements or features of indigenous philosophy in the country. These features are stored in pre-hispanic era (pre-16th century CE) maxims or proverbs and myths. In this paper, I engage conception of behavioural propriety in Filipino philosophy with that in Confucian philosophy. In Confucian philosophy, it is “li” 禮 which relates to ritual. Li encompasses ritual propriety and behavioural propriety. It is originally about ritual or ceremony and, as understood in contemporary scholarship, it has the general meaning of proper conduct; it refers first and foremost to rules of proper conduct. In this paper, I address the question of what each understanding offers for the enrichment of the other. I suggest that importantly, Confucian understanding of li offers the view of behavioural propriety as having an ennobling function, and that Filipino understanding of behavioural propriety offers a perspective on the debate in Confucianism about whether it is ren 仁 or li that is more fundamental in Confucius’s thought. A point that appears to be present in the Filipino understanding is that propriety in behaviour cannot be separated from humaneness (ren). The point comes from the view in the proverbs that a person of ren is necessarily a person of li. Accordingly, the perspective which the Filipino understanding offers proposes the view that behavioural propriety is a necessary condition for humanity (ren).*

**Keywords:** Ritual, li 禮, Confucian thought, indigenous philosophy in the Philippines, Filipino behavioural propriety

## INTRODUCTION

A number of the elements of Filipino indigenous philosophy are about behavioural propriety. *Li* 禮 in Confucian philosophy includes both senses of ritual propriety and behavioural propriety. In this paper, I explore both Filipino and Confucian conceptions of behavioural propriety and respond to the question of what each understanding offers for the enrichment of the other. I suggest that importantly, Confucian understanding of *li* offers the view of behavioural propriety as having an ennobling function, and that Filipino understanding of behavioural propriety offers a perspective on the debate in Confucianism about whether it is *ren* 仁 or *li* that is more fundamental in Confucius's thought. The Filipino perspective affirms the view that behavioural propriety is a necessary condition for humanity (*ren*).

Section one explores Confucian *li* as behavioural propriety, since this is most relevant to the elements of Filipino philosophy. Behavioural propriety is expressed adequately by the concept of *li*. In section two, I explore the Filipino understanding of behavioural propriety, before which I first address the question: *What is Filipino indigenous philosophy?* I address the question by discussing the elements of the philosophy identified by Emerita Quito and Florentino Timbreza, among other things. In the final section, I present my response to the question of what Confucian and Filipino understandings on behavioural propriety offer for the enrichment of each other.

## WHAT IS *LI*?

*Li*, a central Confucian concept, is difficult and complex. It is because, on the one hand, it is about “rules” but on the other, it is more than that – it is aesthetic-formative. Fundamentally though, it is related to ritual and ceremony. It is arguably originally about sacred rites and ceremony. That the concept is philosophical is justified by its direct relation to an undogmatic understanding of morality in Confucian thought, specifically Confucius's. Herrlee Creel points out that Confucius was nondogmatic. Creel writes: “[H]e carefully avoided laying down rules, because he believed that no creed formulated by another person can excuse any man from the duty of thinking for himself” (Creel 1949: 1). *Lunyu* 《論語》 (*Analects*) 6.29 and 7.20, for example, likely attest to this.<sup>1</sup> In this section, I first discuss *li* as it is related to ritual.

### ***Li* as Ritual or Ceremony**

It has been pointed out that the earliest use of the term *li* refers it to “religious rites.” Antonio Cua, a Chinese philosophy scholar, cites its *Shuowen jiezi* 《說文解字》 definition in connection to the point. The definition is, “compliance [with rules] for serving spirits (*shen* 神) and obtaining blessings.”<sup>2</sup> That *li* refers to these rites appears indicated through the radical in the character, 示 (*shi*). The radical has been thought to be a picture of a divination stalk,<sup>3</sup> or of “an altar with a stone on which sacrifices were made” (Lindqvist 2008: 274).<sup>4</sup>

According to Robert Eno (1992: 23), the graph of the character does not appear on early bronze inscriptions but that, seen retrospectively, the (Western) Zhou (ca. 1046–771 BCE) ruling class regarded *wen*<sup>pattern</sup> 文 as essential to guiding human actions suggests that the idea of *li* was nascent in the thinking. The original sense of *wen* is denoted by “pattern,” and according to Eno (1992), the term’s other uses or senses—“beautiful,” “cultured” and “honoured”—“reflect broadening of the term from an aesthetic notion to an ethical one.” Western Zhou’s *wen* is evident in the intricacy of ceremonial practices. This intricacy is expressed by Eno (1992: 22) in the following:

Throughout the period we see a growing profusion of the paraphernalia of ritual, particularly bronze ritual vessels. Nearly all contemporary inscriptions of any length describe religious or political ceremonies, often in great detail and invariably in language itself highly stylized. Even allowing for the exaggerated detail in later Ruist accounts of Chou ceremonies, the question can only be the degree to which ritual constituted the grammar of social intercourse among the elite, not the fact that it did.

Here, Eno deems the ceremonies of the dynasty as “constituting the grammar of social intercourse.” That it most likely is the case means that that *wen* in the Western Zhou was not just initially an aesthetic concept but was already ethical is clear.

Taking “rites” as the general meaning of *li*, Joken Kato takes issue with Hu Shih (1891–1962) on the view that *li* refers to *religious rites* in at least the Eastern Zhou period (771–221 BCE). Kato (1963: 81) cites the *Zhouli* 《周禮》, a Warring States (481–221 BCE) text, to show that ancient rites in China were not just “mourning and sacrificial rites,” which, according to Kato, are Hu Shih’s “religious rites” (Kato 1963: 81). For Kato, the religious rites include “the rites concerning war, the rites concerning the entertainment

of guests, and the marriage rites” (Kato 1963: 81). The classic presents five divisions of rites:

1. Auspicious rites: ... comprising various sacrifices to gods and ancestors.
2. Unauspicious rites: ... comprising mourning rites and rites observed during times of misfortune like epidemics, floods, fire, defeat in war, etc.
3. Audience rites: rites to be observed during audiences with the emperor and meetings of nobles.
4. War rites: rites to be observed during wars and manoeuvres [sic].
5. Festival rites: to be observed during banquets and on festival occasions like weddings, attainment of manhood, etc. (Kato 1963: 83–84).

According to Kato, Hu Shih’s religious *li* only includes the first two divisions, because Hu understands religious rites in the narrow sense. In Kato’s view, in which religious rites is understood in the broad sense, “the religious rites go back to oldest antiquity when they were not something different from everyday life, but rather the forms of everyday life itself” (Kato 1963: 82). In other words, according to this, rites directed towards *shen*<sup>spirits; gods</sup> and ancestor-spirits (*gui* 鬼) are no more significant than the “everyday rites” (Kato 1963: 84). The broad understanding is that “the sacred” is not just the gods and ancestors but also, in Kato’s thought, “the course of man’s life from birth to death” (Kato 1963: 85). Accordingly, it is the sense that regards as rites those that are not in the narrow sense, for example, the rites in the last three divisions Kato spelled out.

As does Eno’s discussion on *wen*, Kato’s understanding of *li* suggests that “*li* as ceremonial” and “*li* as proper behaviour” are connected. In Kato’s understanding of *li*, that *li* includes “everyday rites” in its scope means that *li* is about proper behaviour (e.g., proper conduct in dealings with guests or with superiors). This is important because the connection shows that *li* “as ceremony” and “as proper behaviour” might not be separated. The link between them is also seen in the view that the ritual masters who taught ritual “incorporated moral principles into their curriculum” (Goldin 2011: 8). According to Paul Rakita Goldin, ancient texts make this very point. To the ritual masters, “it was not enough simply to carry out the appropriate sacrifice correctly; it was necessary to live up to the right moral standard” (Goldin 2011: 8).<sup>5</sup> Confucius as a ritual master certainly would be looked upon as one of the ritual masters. The link could also be seen in the

characterisation of *li* as *art*. Henry Skaja (1984: 2–3) articulates this characterisation. According to Skaja, *li* is behavioural propriety but because of its connection with *ren*<sup>benevolence; love</sup>, *li* is not science. His reasoning appears to be as follows:

1. *Li* is either art or science (of ethics).
2. If *li* is science (of ethics), then we should be able to see *li* as “some purely rational procedure of conformance to abstract, customary rules, or commandments” (Skaja1984: 2).
3. But we are not able to regard *li* as that procedure.
4. Therefore, *li* is not science. [From 2 and 3]
5. Therefore, *li* is art. [From 1 and 4]

We are not able to regard *li* as specifically only a rational activity of adhering to societal norms and rules, because *li* has a component that relates to intuition (Skaja 1984: 2). This component is *li*’s “relational definition,” which rational analysis cannot fathom, and which has been overlooked (Skaja1984: 2, 23). This “relational definition” might also be called “*ren* definition,” since it appears that for Skaja, *ren* and “relational” are convertible terms: “relational” is *ren*, and *ren* is “relational.” They are convertible, for Skaja, because of his definition of *ren*. An elucidation of the term’s definition in the *Shuowen jiezi*, Skaja defines it as “qualified affection, beginning with one’s own family members and then emanating outward to friends and other fellow human beings” (Skaja 1984: 2). According to this definition, first and foremost, *ren* is *relating*. It is in the “relational definition” where *li*’s ritualistic dimension is seen. The relational definition is the ritualistic dimension. This is clear in Skaja’s articulation of the reason for characterising *li* as art (Skaja 1984: 2):

The reason for this description of *li* as an art rather than a science is primarily because *li* behavior is best defined, in terms of *jen* [*ren*], as the properly cultivated and ritualistic, therefore aesthetic, *expression of natural human feeling* or love for others [*ren*].

For Skaja, that *li* behaviour is about relating with other people—thereby involving essentially being benevolent towards them—means that *li* is “ceremonial.” In conclusion, even though the characterisation made appears to begin with *li* “as behavioural propriety” rather than with it “as ceremony,” that there is link between the two in the characterisation shows that *li* as ritual and as behavioural propriety are interlocked.



### Analysis of *Li*

Antonio Cua's (2002) analysis of *li* offers helpful elucidations regarding the scope and function of *li*. On scope, he presents, following Hu Shih, how the extension of *li* evolved in three stages. Extension of *li* refers to its scope, which Cua also views to have expanded through time, although he is careful to say that his account is *not* historical (unlike Hu's). In the first stage, *li* is restricted to *religious rites*. In the second stage, the scope of *li* includes "all social habits and customs acknowledged and accepted as a set of action-guiding rules" (Cua 2002: 475). In his discussion of this stage, after writing that the stage's extension of *li* is as broad as "that of tradition comprising established conventions, that is, customs and usages deemed as a coherent set of precedents," Cua writes that *li* is "what distinguishes human beings from animals" (Cua 2002: 475). It seems that he writes that out to make the point that his account is indeed not historical, although the point also helps in understanding the nature of the stage. Added to *li*'s extension in the final stage are those rules "not used by the ancient kings" but pass *yi* (義)<sup>appropriateness</sup>—assessment (Cua 2002: 475). In the discussion of functions, he contends that the "ennobling" function presupposes the "delimiting" and "supportive" functions of *li*. Cua (2002: 481) writes:

The characteristic concern with the form of proper behavior is present. However, the form stressed is not just a matter of fitting into an established social structure or set of distinction nor is a matter of methodological procedure that facilitates the satisfaction of the agent's desires and wishes; rather it involves the elegant form (*wen*) for the expression of ethical character.

According to this, *li* is carried out to educate with attention to *ren* and *yi* (in order to embody Confucian ideals) but this does not mean that when *li*'s restrictive-regulative function and supportive function are in action, the ennobling function necessarily takes place automatically. Rather, the ennobling function of *li* is almost the end of the other two functions and it is an end that must be kept in mind, not to be forgotten.<sup>6</sup> This function, one could say, is what is meant by the irreducible, richer idea of ritual referred to by Peter Wong (2012: 248). According to this sense, ritual is "a performative event within the context of a life in community, that has the power to influence and transform participants and audience alike." It is this that is perhaps directly related to the point that understanding of the meaning of ritual practices is pre-requisite for effective human relating, which is therefore ennobling.

Ultimately, it is clear in these discussions that underlying the concept of *li* is the matter of rule following. *Li* ennobles precisely because, together with its supportive role, *li* is restrictive-regulative. According to Cua's judgement, *li* is fundamentally about "rules," leading him to say that Homer Dubs' translation of the term as "rules of proper conduct" is probably the best (Cua 2002: 474). This is highlighted by the general agreement among scholars about what *li* basically refers to, one which lends itself to contemporary discussions across boundaries. *Li* refers to good manners, etiquette or proper conduct. For example, according to Angus Graham (1989: 11), "[*Li*] embraces all rites, custom, manners, conventions, from the sacrifices to ancestors down to the detail of social etiquette. *Li* in social intercourse corresponds to a considerable extent with Western conceptions of good manners." Peimin Ni (2002: 52) relates *li* with *ren*<sup>humanity</sup>; for him, *li* is "the body of external behavior patterns" used to express *ren*. Herbert Fingarette takes *li* fundamentally to mean traditional conventions or mores. In his view (Fingarette 1972: 4), *li* is related to the "magical" – by which he means that, because *li* is linked to "moral power," it is able to accomplish things by doing nothing (*wuwei* 無為) or just by being oneself (*Analects* 2.1, 12.19).

Although this general meaning of *li* as proper conduct is helpful in understanding the concept, that this is its only meaning is not without objections. One criticism, by Paul Rakita Goldin (2011: 20–21), states that if *li* is merely the codes of proper behaviour, then that would make Confucius in the *Analects* a contractarian. His observation shows that the ennobling function of *li* identified by Cua and expounded in the *Liji* 《禮記》 and the *Xunzi* 《荀子》 is also in the *Analects*. *Li* is ennobling because it necessarily must contribute to a person's maturity in *ren*. *Li* is said to adequately "encapsulate" *ren*, in that when one was to even perform an instance of *li*, there is no way but for them to be morally transformed. Perhaps it could be said that if observance of *li* is mere observance of a code, then perhaps the Moists are right in claiming that nothing can be gained from it. But as Karyn Lai (2006a: 68) points out, they missed the point that *li* serves the purpose of restraining desires. This purpose is one which could be looked upon as a stage in the training of the moral competence of persons (Lai 2006b: 69–83). A view that could also be taken as a criticism of those who understand *li* only as a code of behaviour is that of Kwong-loi Shun (1993: 458), who asserts that *li* gets to be *li* because the ultimate foundation of practices included in its scope is reverence (*jing* 敬); the implication being proper conduct in particular situations is never performed without reverence for others. Another view that could be taken as a criticism of the Moist position is the idea that Confucian

thought is revivalistic. “Revivalistic traditionalism” is the term used by Bryan Van Norden (2011: 22). The idea of a *revivalistic kind of traditionalism* is that it is incorrect to say that honouring tradition is useless, for it has helped civilisations (Norden 2011: 23). For Norden, Confucius was revivalist, in that he “sought to awaken people to the highest values implicit in their own tradition in order to give them alternative ideals to force, violence, and greed” (Norden 2011: 23). Revivalism is a criticism of the Moist position because *li*-practices are practices of honouring tradition, but the practices are not conservatism; rather, they are ways of constantly interacting with tradition, which helps the present.<sup>7</sup> Karyn Lai elaborates on the idea in the article “*Li* in the *Analects*: Competence in Moral Training” and puts forth the conclusion that Confucian thought in the *Analects* “promotes a continual and conscientious engagement with existing norms, by paradigmatic persons” (Lai 2006b: 79).

*Li* cannot also be just anything that people deem to be “ritual” or “ritualistic.” It has been pointed out by ritual scholars that it is not the action itself that makes itself ritual. They say it is the framing, by which they seem to mean *proper, formal context* of an action. According to Seligman et al. in *Ritual and Its Consequences* (Seligman et al. 2008: 5–6, 180), participation in the Eucharist and shaking hands, for example, are actions that can “be understood nonritualistically, at least on their margins,” because of framing. Seligman et al. seem to be implying that, because many instances of going through the motions are devoid of the element of human relating, these many instances are non-ritual. Although this implication is difficult to accept, it is certainly true that the routine of checking of whether one has a pen before going to school would not count as ritual, but saying goodbye to loved ones before leaving for school would be. The proper, formal context of the action of bidding farewell is characterised essentially by human relation. Furthermore, ritual ought not be deemed as “an authoritarian, unquestionable, irrational set of constraints on the individual” (Seligman et al. 2008: 180); the mistaken view is a result of an overemphasis on individual autonomy in modernity (Seligman et al. 2008: 179).

What does this tell us about *li*? Seligman et al. consider how early Chinese and Judaic writers viewed ritual as a response to patch up broken relationships in community. According to them, to these *non-Protestant* (their term) writers, ritual involves “the endless work of building, refining, and rebuilding webs of relationship in an otherwise fragmented world” (Seligman et al. 2008: 180). Accordingly, *li* is to be viewed as being situated and understood within the context of human relations. It cannot be otherwise.



As understood in contemporary scholarship, *li* refers first and foremost to the rules of proper conduct. This has arisen from *li*'s original link to Zhou ritual and ceremony. Points about *li* in the *Xunzi*, elaborated on by Cua, include that *li* is propriety in behaviour, or proper etiquette, or good manners. This meaning is also evident in modern Chinese. Apart from “rites” or “rituals,” “good manners” is also part of the understanding of *li* in Chinese usage. In modern Chinese, *limao* 禮貌 (literally, the manners of *li*) is description of someone who is “well behaved” or “well mannered.” This fundamental meaning is interesting and important, but so is the ennobling function of *li*. That it has the function indicates that *li* or ritual is more than rule- or norm-conformity.

### ***Li and Ren***

An important issue involving *li* that is related to the discussion regarding Confucian *li* and Filipino understanding of behavioural propriety is the debate on whether *li* or *ren* is more fundamental in Confucius's philosophy. As alluded to in the previous sections, *ren* is humanity, goodness, or human-heartedness. This cluster of translations for *ren* appears to be the embodiments of what could be called, “inner morality.”<sup>8</sup> *Ren* as inner morality, then, could be taken to be the justification of *li*, which is “outer morality.” The problem is that if *li* is dependent on *ren* for its justification, then how can we account for the view that, for the *Analects*, *li* is necessary in cultivating humanity (*ren*)?<sup>9</sup> Another way of stating the problem is through the question: How do we reconcile the two following true assertions: (1) *ren* is necessarily manifested or externalised through *li* (thus making *ren* foundational); (2) *li* is necessary for the inculcation of humanity (*ren*) (making *li* basic)? There is good support for each of the two theses. But which of them is correct?

One interesting response to the problem is the view that neither of the two is fundamental; rather, both *ren* and *li* are primary, in that they are interdependent concepts. An articulation of this *ren-li* interdependence response is in a paper by Shun Kwong-loi. Shun shows the interdependence of the two concepts through a linguistic analogy (1993: 457–479): it cannot be that the use of tense in various contexts does not presuppose mastery of tense, and at the same time, it cannot be that the mastery of tense does not presuppose its use. Surely, one cannot master the use of tense without first using it, yet how can one exercise the use of tense without mastery? Accordingly, it cannot be that *ren* does not presuppose *li* and vice versa. Although Shun's articulation has been described as creative and philosophically satisfying in that “it raises

other important issues, including the criteria or basis for modifying *li*,” and is a seeming resolution to the problem, it raises a question that reveals the nature of the seriousness of the problem (Lai 2006a: 72). Karyn Lai (2006a: 73) points out the question in the following:

... if *ren* is understood to be necessarily interdependent with *li*, how can it be simultaneously evoked as a standard upon which *li* may be modified? In other words, if one learns to embody humanity and to realise oneself through *li*, the socially accepted ritual forms, how might one also learn to be *critically independent* of them?

The problem is more acute, according to the foregoing, because if *ren* and *li* are interdependent, how is one to know *ren* in order to modify *li*? If both are primary, how does a person use one of them to evaluate the other? If it is necessary to modify a *li*-practice, then it would be because it seems that it is not a correct externalisation of *ren*. But if that is the case, then it raises the question of what makes *ren* to be the basis when *li* is also basic – should not *ren* be the one to be modified according to the *li*-practice? *Analects* 9.3 has been mentioned as presenting the problem of *li* modification, prompting the question of whether *li* or *ren* is more fundamental. The problem is the question of why Confucius allows modification in one *li*-practice (the type of material for cap in ritual) but not in another (location of hall kowtowing). It prompts the question because if the criterion for modifying or not modifying the *li*-practice is *ren*, or if “[i]n the event where *li* is corrosive of human well-being, *ren* is called in to realign *li*-practice with human welfare” (Lai 2006a: 71), then *ren* is basic. But if it is so, how is the view that *li* is primary to be explained, as discussed by Henry Skaja (1984: 7–9, 16–17) seen previously? Resolution of the problem is relevant to a clear understanding of Confucian *li*.

## **BEHAVIOURAL PROPRIETY IN FILIPINO INDIGENOUS PHILOSOPHY**

Filipino understanding of behavioural propriety is seen in what have been identified as elements or features of indigenous philosophy in the Philippines. In this section I first take up the question of what Filipino indigenous philosophy is, and then, I explore a Filipino view of behavioural propriety.

## Traditional or Indigenous Philosophy in the Philippines

This paper assumes that the so-called Philippine or Filipino philosophy is preserved in the myths, legends and maxims or proverbs of its peoples. Some of the contents may be allochthonous, in that these contents have been described as foreign. According to Paul Rodriguez Verzosa (1950: 18), pre-hispanic (i.e., pre-1521 CE) Tagalog proverbs, for example, have been influenced by western and Chinese and Hindu views. Exchanges (trade) between the Chinese and Filipino before the arrival of the Spaniards have been recorded (Scott 1983: 1–19). Given the exchanges and interactions, the question of whether an aspect of the Chinese mind now lies in that of the Filipino has even been explored (see Co 1988). But that these myths, legends, maxims and proverbs are indigenous means that the philosophies they convey are *autochthonous*. As shown by these myths, legends and proverbs, Filipino indigenous philosophy is a philosophy that is not speculative; rather, it is practical, in that it is a collective reflection about being human with the aim of surviving and flourishing in this part of the world. It is a *philosophy of life*. According to Emerita Quito (1990 [1983]: 732), it is thinking connected to survival reflections about mortality and one's relation to the almighty. According to Florentino Timbreza (2003: 183), it is “reflection on the answer to the mystery of human existence... their explanation and interpretation to the ever-changing situations and occurrences in the world.” This comes from Timbreza's seemingly insistent view that Filipinos have a “world-view,” which he defines as “a picture of reality which provides a plausible explanation of human existence” (Timbreza 2003: 183).

Both Quito and Timbreza are scholars known for expressing the view that Filipino philosophy is “philosophy of life” stored in pre-hispanic era maxims or proverbs and myths.<sup>10</sup> I discuss each of their perspectives in this section.

### Quito's view

In “Structuralism and the Filipino *Volksgeist*,” Quito (1990 [1983]: 732) discusses the view that there is Filipino philosophy. The article may be looked at as a response to the issue of whether there is “Filipino philosophy.” Concerning this issue, a paper by Jeremiah Joven Joaquin (2010) critically discusses two Filipino scholars' responses to it: that of Rolando Gripaldo and that of Napoleon Mabaquiao Jr. Gripaldo's (2000: xi–xiii) response is seen in approaches to studying philosophy which he calls *traditional* or *philosophical* and *constitutional* or *rational*, as different from what could

be called *anthropological*. According to Joaquin, these approaches already assume existence of works in Filipino philosophy. I believe that although this assumption appears to sidestep the issue of whether there is Filipino philosophy, it does not ignore it. That is because Gripaldo, as I see it, presents *ways* to address the issue. On Mabaquiao’s response, Joaquin says that the analysis of the concept *Filipino philosophy* is philosophically interesting. It is important and illuminating to clarify the meanings of the terms “Filipino” and “philosophy.” Knowing that a work is *Filipino philosophy work* just in case:

- (1) it is or possesses all of these:
  - (i) its topic deals with fundamental questions in philosophy (*T*)
  - (ii) the method used is philosophical (*M*)
  - (iii) it issues an assumption or conclusion supported by reasons (that is, there is argument) (*A*); and
- (2) it is either one of these:
  - (i) the topic has to do with the Philippine nation (*B*)
  - (ii) the author has Philippine citizenship (*W*)
  - (iii) the work is written in Filipino (*S*)

[or in symbols:  $(Px \ \& \ Fx) \equiv (((Tx \ \& \ Mx) \ \& \ Ax) \ \& \ (Bx \ \vee \ Wx \ \vee \ Sx))$ ]

(Mabaquiao 2012: 39–56) surely helps in the quest. I believe though that the issue of whether there is Filipino philosophy is a question of whether there is a work in this part of the world that is comparable (in terms of being a classic) to works of Plato and Aristotle or to the *Analects*, the *Mencius* 《孟子》, the *Zhuangzi* 《莊子》, among others. These are works which have been commonly considered as Axial Age “products.” It seems that the question is whether Philippine wise sayings are also Axial age works, or if they could be similarly viewed as such.

Quito’s view is that if the term *philosophia* is strictly understood as Pythagoras had understood it, then there is no Filipino philosophy. But if philosophy is taken to mean as something like “a philosophy of life,” then there is one. A philosophy of life of a people, according to Quito, is their *way of life*. She takes “a way of life” to be the meaning of the Hindu *darśana* and that of (the Chinese) *dao* 道, which is what Filipinos have. Moreover, she takes it to be identical to folk wisdom or folk spirit (*volksgeist*) (Quito 1990 [1983]: 732). Filipino philosophy, according to Quito, is spirit of the Filipino

people. Quito's use of the concept *volksgeist* appears to invite a search for Filipino national identity. This is because, according to Lewis W. Spitz (1955: 459–460), Johann Gottfried Herder, who “created the conception of the ‘Volksgeist,’” conceived of it from his view of individuality and cultural nationality. However, in the last analysis, it is the identified features of Filipino philosophy of life of Quito which are significant here. The features are: (1) *bahala na* philosophy, (2) *gulong ng palad* philosophy, (3) *kagandahang loob*, (4) reciprocity, and (5) *hiya*.

*Bahala na* could be translated as “God will take care of it.” *Bahala* is the Tagalog *bathala*, meaning “God,” the creator of things. The philosophy is a philosophy of trust in providence. It is an evidence of the Filipino's belief in the creator of things in the world, to whom he entrusts “his destiny, his future, his entire lot” (Quito 1990 [1983]: 734).<sup>11</sup> Related to this meaning of *bahala na* are two features that can be found in common parlance in modern Philippine society: (1) a person's resignation to whatever the future may bring or to fate, after having done everything she could; (2) simply deciding on a course of action in the hope that things will turn out alright.<sup>12</sup> The first point is not unrelated to *bahala na* because it appears as a philosophy echoing the idea of “Do your best and God will do the rest”; resignation to one's fate is the philosophy here and has nothing to do with God. The second point is related to *bahala na* because this thinking is in line with the idea that the decision is now placed in God's hands for blessing.

*Gulong ng palad* (literally, “wheel of fortune or fate or destiny”) philosophy speaks of “the circular manner of thinking” (Quito 1990 [1983]: 734). According to Quito, this is *Bathala's* wheels setting things “aright in the course of time like a true wheel of *karma*.” Virtues based on this thinking are prudence and optimism. It appears for Quito that there is prudence because it is prudent to know this philosophy (the image of which is the wheel's cyclic movement), and that there is optimism because one ought to remember this philosophy when she is at the “bottom” (Quito 1990 [1983]: 735). *Kagandahang loob* is “goodness of the heart” or “inner goodness.” According to Quito, it “does not only mean goodness of the heart but it is really generosity coupled with the French words, *gentillesse* and *delicatesse*” (Quito 1990 [1983]: 735). This means that care and culture are important qualities in *kagandahang loob*. *Kagandahang loob* is about being kind to others, especially towards strangers. Reciprocity is the Golden Rule. Under this, Quito places the practice of “respect for elders,” which is captured in the Confucian *xiao* 孝 (filial piety), together with *pakikisama* (“spirit of camaraderie”) and *utang na loob* (“debt of gratitude”) (Quito 1990 [1983]: 735–736).



Finally, *hiya* connotes “shame” and “saving face.” Because the term means “taking no action or initiative,” it is linked to non-aggressiveness and to “trust[ing] in the right order of things” (Quito 1990 [1983]: 737). It appears that, for Quito, *hiya* refers to situations such as one in which a person admonishes another not to pursue a course of action because it is improper. This thinking is expressed in the reason for the admonition in the following: *Huwag mong gawin ‘yan. Ma-hiya ka* (Do not do that action. You must have shame). In this (Tagalog or Filipino language) reasoning, *hiya* means “feeling or sense that the action that one is contemplating to do is either ugly, crazy, or wrongful.” This meaning appears linked to the point that a person without shame (*Taong walang hiya* [Filipino]) is a person who does not feel guilt at a wrong deed she has done. The meaning of *hiya* as “sense that the action that one is contemplating to do is contrary to propriety” is, I believe, what leads to the meaning of *hiya* as *sense of propriety* or “awareness of what is proper behaviour.”<sup>13</sup> If this is correct, then Quito’s view is that *hiya* is simply acknowledgement of the “right order of things.”<sup>14</sup>

### Timbreza’s view

In *Filipino Philosophy Today: A Source Book in Teaching Filipino Philosophy*, Timbreza (2008: xiv) contends that Filipino philosophy is a kind of “philosophy of life.” By “philosophy of life,” he (Timbreza 2003: 183) means the idea of a philosophy of life discussed by William H. Halverson (1976). Halverson (1976: 414) conceives of a philosophy of life as “those beliefs about life that are exhibited in the pattern of one’s life (because these are beliefs a person grants *with her life*, not with her intellect).” According to Halverson, these beliefs are answers to “the most fundamental questions that can be asked about human existence”: (1) “What is man’s place in the universe?”; (2) “Does human life have any meaning, and if so, what is that meaning?”; and (3) “On what basis ought one to decide what to do with one’s life?” (Halverson (1976: 414–417). According to Timbreza, Filipino answers to these questions are “embodied in the literature and culture” (2008: xiv–xv). By literature and culture, he means the following sources: literature and oral tradition, lives and works of heroes and heroines from pre-hispanic era to the present, field interviews with tribal leaders and old folks, and works of contemporary Filipino scholars.

Timbreza (2003: 183) also uses the idea of “world-view” to show that there is Filipino philosophy of life. The idea of “world-view” is also discussed by Halverson (1976: 383–387). Timbreza believes that the ideas in the sources constitute a world-view. As Timbreza (2003: 183–184) writes:

... the people's philosophical world-view interprets and orders their perception of reality into a comprehensive system. It functions as the framework against which they understand the nature of the universe.

For Timbreza, this world-view is a philosophy of life and the Filipino people's world-view is "Filipino philosophy of life." By using Halverson's terms of a *philosophy of life* and *world-view*, Timbreza seems to be trying to conceptualise a holistic view of this "philosophy of life." *World-view*, for Halverson, however, is "'total-view' of reality" (1976: 383); it is the same thing as *philosophy*. Philosophy is defined by Halverson as "[human being's] quest for the unity of knowledge: it consists in a perpetual struggle to create the concepts in which the universe can be conceived as a *universe*, not a *multiverse*" (Halverson 1976: 383). Two world-views expounded on by Halverson are *ethical theism* and *naturalism* (388–392). Ethical theism is "quest for the unity of knowledge," because it is an attempt to account for what exists as God's providence. An ethical theist explains the existence of the world as due to God. Naturalism is that quest, because it is an attempt to account for what exists as due to physical matter. It seems clear that these two world-views are each "a perpetual struggle," as each is even today a live option and, it appears, will continue to be so. Given that "world-view" is this perpetual quest or struggle, it seems doubtful that the five elements identified by Timbreza (discussed here) could be regarded as about a single quest. Since a list of what things exist can be made from them, the elements seem to be about "unity of knowledge," but it is not clear that, as a whole, they express a single "quest for unity of knowledge."<sup>15</sup> Be that as it may, it is clear that Timbreza's work involves discussion of philosophy indigenous in the Philippines. In *Filipino Values Today*, Timbreza (2003: 183–214) discusses five elements of this philosophy, which are mostly extracted from sayings or proverbs collected from various parts of the country. These are: law of reversion, balance of nature, cyclic concept of nature, centripetal morality, and concept of life and death.

Somewhat resembling the law of *karma*, the law of reversion (*batas ng panunumbalik*) has four aspects. First, it is about the idea that one's views and actions determine how she will become. Second, the law is about the nature of debt – one is required to repay one's debt. The third aspect is the view that one's actions affect not just herself but her family as well. The final aspect is the view that one's treatment of one's parents is like seed sown or planted which you would one day reap (Timbreza 2003: 185–189; 2008: 100–113).

Balance of nature (*katarungan ng kalikasan*) has three aspects. Its first aspect is the point that nature has no favourites; everything has positive and negative traits or aspects. Second, every being has a counterpart, which, to Timbreza (2003: 192), is expressed in the Tagalog proverb, *Pagkalaki-laki man ang palayok may kasukat ding saklob* (No matter how huge an earthen jar is, it has a lid that fits it).<sup>16</sup> The third aspect concerns responsibility. According to this, nature ensures that the extent of one's responsibility is determined by her position or status in life.

That nature is cyclic is the philosophy of *gulong ng palad*. In addition to Quito's ideas, Timbreza points out that this philosophy is about change or impermanence (Timbreza 2003: 197–199; 2008: 112).

“Centripetal morality” is the element of Filipino philosophy that is about ethics. Timbreza calls it *centripetal* because it is a morality which tends towards having the self (*sariling pagkatao*) as an “anchor.” It is not *subjective*, since the self is not the standard. The self only acts as a “balancer”; it “balances moral valuations,” according to Timbreza (2003: 200). This is seen in selfhood as expressed in, among many qualities of civility, “personal honor (*angking karangalan*), *kabutihang loob* (good will), *kagandahang asal* (good breeding [or manners]), *malinis na pangalan* (clean name), *marangal na hanapbuhay* (honorable occupation), *magandang pamilya* (reputable family), *mabuting kaibigan* (good friend), *magaling makisama* (morally excellent companion)” (Timbreza 2003: 200). Timbreza (2003: 200–201) also writes that this feature “revolves around the golden rule and the nonjudgmental and noncritical moral principles of the people,” by which he means the principles which arise from aphorisms that enjoin one to know one's self first before looking at and criticising others (2003: 202–206). It may properly be called *principle of non-deeming*, because the idea is about doing away with judging other people.

The Filipino's concept of death and life involves acceptance of mortality and the view that humans move towards death (Timbreza 2003: 207–214). That human life is transient is captured by the native bamboo metaphor. Timbreza (2003: 213) writes that it is a famous metaphor of the people: “The parent stem grows, matures, and develops a bamboo shoot. By the time the parent stem becomes old and its shoot has grown big, it will gradually begin to wither and not long after, it will wear out and die. And the time will come when the present shoot likewise matures and another bamboo shoot will come out of it. Once the new shoot reaches maturity, it will likewise wilt and dry up. The same process will continue with the next generation of bamboo shoots.” That humans come and go is the view that is certainly expressed.

A point that must be noted here is that the contributions of Quito and Timbreza may be viewed as attempts to identify features or elements of a common philosophy among the peoples of the Philippine nation. Because significant aspects might have been left out, the features identified by Quito and Timbreza are likely contentious. While it is fair to say that these features ought to be regarded with suspicion, for they appear to be hasty generalisations, however, the work of Quito and of Timbreza are not without any valid basis. Quito and Timbreza's considerations have their source in the culture and life of the peoples of the Republic of the Philippines. While there might be questions about what truly constitutes Filipino philosophy, there can be no doubt that their articulations represent a possible account. Yet, it still ought to be said that there exists the danger of over-generalising the views of the nation's peoples. It is important to respect the peoples' views, and it is good to acknowledge these views. It is important though that the sayings of each people now form as a resource for the formation of a Filipino philosophy, which is always a work in progress.

### **Filipino Behavioural Propriety**

From the foregoing discussion, I propose that it is clear that some of the identified features of Filipino philosophy of life by Quito and Timbreza are about behavioural propriety. The stress on behavioural propriety in the philosophy has also been seen in the proverbs. In one of these proverbs, the view that behavioural propriety and humanity are inextricably linked and yet that the former is a necessary condition for the latter, is present. In this section, I first explain how some of Quito and Timbreza's features may be viewed as comprising a possible account of Filipino behavioural propriety. This proposal, though, is probably a partial view, and will need further revision.

### **Elements of behavioural propriety in Quito's features**

Among the features that Quito identified as constituting Filipino indigenous philosophy of life, *kagandahang loob* (inner goodness) philosophy, reciprocity and *hiya* stand out as expressions of or closely related to behavioural propriety. It must be said, though, that the other features are not unrelated to these three. *Bahala na* philosophy, for example, might be said to be importantly related to them in that they could be rooted in belief in *Bathala*. It might even be posited that it is the core of the five elements.

*Kagandahang loob* is about behavioural propriety because expressions of it pertain to good manners. Quito cites practices as expressions of kindness to others. The practice of offering one's abode to guests without expectation of pay is an expression of kindness to strangers. *Bayanihan* is the "offering of one's services gratis" (Quito 1990 [1983]: 735). *Bayanihan* is seen, for example, in help offered to a family in moving their dwelling hut to another location, where we together lift the whole hut using, typically, bamboo poles placed underneath and around the abode.<sup>17</sup> *Pasalubong* and *pabaon* are also mentioned by Quito. The former is a present you give to someone (usually a member of the family or friend) as token from a place you visited or went to. It expresses *kagandahang loob* for it says to the receiver that they are valued by you, because you took the time to find something for them from your trip. The latter is a gift you give to someone (usually a member of the family or friend) who is about to embark on a long journey or is moving to another place. It expresses *kagandahang loob* for it conveys well wishes to the other person.

Reciprocity, as Quito says, is *the Golden Rule*. The Golden Rule is the moral principle of "Treat other people as you want to be treated." It is probably correct to say that reciprocity and the Golden Rule are one and the same thing. This is because the Confucian term *shu* 恕, explicated in *Analects* 15.24 as 己所不欲, 勿施於人 (What you yourself do not desire, give it not to others),<sup>18</sup> has been affirmed as a formulation of the Rule, and the term has been rendered as "reciprocity."<sup>19</sup> However, given that Quito places *utang na loob* under this feature of Filipino indigenous philosophy, it seems that what she means by "reciprocity" is not the Golden Rule but the "I scratch your back-you scratch mine" principle. This principle, which is contractarian, connotes *debt* as soon as the "first scratcher" has done her part. For example, as soon as I loan some money to a friend in need, my friend would have *utang na loob* to me – and it is on top of her monetary debt to me. *Utang na loob* is debt of gratitude *that a person has in her being, given another has done a kind deed to her*. If this is correct, then *utang na loob* is contrary to the meaning of the Golden Rule. The Golden Rule does not connote debt nor debt of gratitude (*utang na loob*). *Utang na loob* has the element of debt in it. "Utang," in the term *utang na loob*, means "debt." Debt (of gratitude) is absent in practices of the Golden Rule. *Shu*-practice does not make others have debt. *Shu* as 己所不欲, 勿施於人 (which could be translated as "What you do not desire for yourself, others must not receive it") appears to be the injunction, "Prevent giving to others (*ren* 人) what you do not (*bu* 不) desire (*yu* 欲) for yourself (*ji* 己)." The injunction implies clearly that others may not know the



actions I have prevented from being given or applied to them, much less my intention. Because they may not know it, it is close to impossible that they will ever have debt of gratitude in them.

*Shu* as the Golden Rule is about behavioural propriety, albeit indirectly. This is because there is a link between behavioural propriety (*li*) and *ren*, and the way of *ren* is expressed through regularity in *shu*-practice. We find the link in *Analects* 12.2: certain *li*-practices and practice of *shu* have the goal of attainment of *ren*.

The practice of *pakikisama* (being with), which Quito also places under the feature of reciprocity, is about behavioural propriety. This is because *pakikisama* seems to convey the idea that it is proper to join or to be with the group. Although the practice is regarded unfavourably in that it means “just getting along” and “being uncritical,” it is one that would, in the right place and at the right time, favour unity (Quito 1990 [1983]: 735–736). Given Quito’s explanation, the idea seems to be that it is correct behaviour to be with or to support the group because it is for the sake of unity.

*Utang na loob* is about behavioural propriety. This is because *utang na loob* is “internal debt of gratitude” (Quito 1990 [1983]: 735–736). In “Structuralism and the Filipino *Volksgeist*,” Quito (1990 [1983]: 735–736) elaborates on the meaning of *utang na loob*:

This attitude springs from a sense of justice owing to the belief in a Supreme Being. Unconsciously, the Filipino believes that a good deed done him deserves a just reward, and if he cannot reciprocate at the moment, he internalises it.

In future, once they get the chance, one finds a way in any form to reward or repay the deed. *Utang na loob* is about behavioural propriety because the attitude connotes the idea that it is good manners to repay the good deed or at least have sense of awareness of debt.

The famous saying in the country, *Ang hindi marunong lumingon sa pinnangalingan ay hindi makakarating sa paroroonan* (common, Tagalog)<sup>20</sup> (one who does not know to look back to their origin will never reach their destination), is regarded as an expression of *utang na loob* (1990 [1983]: 737).<sup>21</sup> That is because the saying conveys the sense that one ought to acknowledge the kind deeds one has received from one’s parents (principally) or friends in attaining one’s accomplishment. That one ought to acknowledge a debt of gratitude, lest she would not reach her goal in life, is conveyed by the saying (Verzosa 1950: 16). It is also about *xiao* (filial piety) because the saying implies that the acknowledgment of the deeds of one’s parents is

manifestation of one's respect for them. This trait of respect is acknowledged by Quito as shared by other Asians, and further notes that it is in Confucian thought. Quito (1990 [1983]: 735–736) writes:

It should not be surprising that Filipinos possess this Oriental trait since it is also practiced by other Asians.

The Confucian doctrine of the Mean is evident in this practice. A person is always midway between two entities. A son has a father before him and a son after him. While he is still a son now, he will certainly be a father later, and whatever he does to his father now will be done to him by his future sons. It is therefore folk wisdom to sow seeds of respect to a father in order to reap respect from one's sons. Likewise, a person would do better to respect his superior now if he is to be respected by his inferiors later; or a student, his teacher, etc. Actions from the right will have a complementary reaction from the left, up from down, etc.

In this discussion, Quito relates *utang na loob* to the expected display of respect in relations such as those she mentions. Quito probably has in mind the Three Bonds (*sangang* 三綱) doctrine in Confucianism here. The doctrine is said to “embed” filial piety in it (Nuyen 2004: 204), and bonds that Quito uses are mentioned. The relations being referred to in the doctrine are between prince (*jun* 君) and minister (*chen* 臣), father (*fu* 父) and son (*zi* 子), and husband (*fu* 夫) and wife (*qi* 妻). The doctrine, which is possibly “not canonically Confucian” (according to Nuyen 2004: 206), pertains to “being at service” (*shi* 事) of the latter to the former, implying subservience to so-called authority or superior.<sup>22</sup> If I am right, then Quito is correct in pointing out that the act of *giving respect* is present in these bonds. In her discussion, she says: “a person would do better to respect his superior now.” The inferior gives respect by “being at service.” The respect, however, is expected, and it appears to imply being coerced to do it. The respect is expected because the inferior, it appears, is expected to cater the superior's needs. As a consequence, in her discussion, Quito is thinking more about filial piety than about *utang na loob*.

However, given that what Quito probably means by reciprocity is the *back-scratching philosophy*, it is wrong to say that filial piety and *utang na loob* are unconnected. For Quito, one's respect for parents is *utang na loob*. It is the children's *utang na loob*. It is their debt of gratitude towards their parents; it is repayment for their deeds. If this view is adopted, it follows from

it that, to have filial piety (*utang na loob*) is proper; to have it is correct inner (*loob*) behaviour.

Finally, *hiya* relates directly to behavioural propriety, because it means *sense of propriety* or the *awareness of what is proper*. It is awareness of what is proper or proper course of action in situations. For instance, one would not deny one's parents or taint their reputation in order to promote one's self. That is a shameful thing to do. It is, just as embezzlement is a shameful thing to do. *Hiya* is awareness that these are shameful actions. Akin to conscience, it has a role of preventing us from performing actions such as these.

### Elements of behavioural propriety in Timbreza's features

Centripetal morality is related to behavioural propriety. This is because it is about the self in relation to discussions on morality of reciprocity or mutuality. The Golden Rule or at least a version of it is expressed, for example, in the Hiligaynon saying, *Dautan kanimo, dautan sa imong isig katawo* (Timbreza 2003: 201), which can be translated as: "What is harmful to you is harmful to others."<sup>23</sup> Timbreza (2003: 201) cites an Ilocano saying as supporting this point, *Ti saplit iti padam a tao, saplit met ita bagim* (A whip to your fellow humans is also a whip to your body).<sup>24</sup> The proverb, according to him (2003: 201), says that "what hurts others also hurts you and vice-versa." That the Ilocano proverb uses the image of whipping seems to show reciprocity's direct relation to behavioural propriety. Clearly, according to it, we are not to hurt others, for that is not appropriate behaviour.

The principle of non-deeming, the second aspect of centripetal morality, also shows that the principle is about behavioural propriety. The reason for the injunction to refrain from judging is related to the primacy of self-knowledge. The idea is that one is in no position to judge others unless one is capable of knowing oneself. The following proverbs from various parts of the country express the idea: *Kutyain mo muna ang iyong sarili bago mo kutyain ang iba* (You should first deride yourself, before you sneer at others) – Tagalog; *Sighidan mo nguna sa sadiring natad bago ka mainghid kan sa ibang natad* (Sweep your own backyard first before you sweep another's backyard) – Bicolano; *Bayu ca manatsa, magsalamin ka pa* (Before you criticise, look yourself first in the mirror) – Pampango; *Mamung hi ambung kan batak parahal sali sali buslot* (The rattan basket criticises the palm basket and yet both of them are full of holes) – Tausug; *Dika uyawen ti kaarubam no dika pay nakaykayan ti arubayam* (You should not reprove your neighbour, if you have not swept your own backyard) – Ilocano (Timbreza 2003:

202–204).<sup>25</sup> The Tausug proverb is particularly interesting because it conveys the point that it was folly for the person who criticised another to have done so because she is not cognizant of her own failures. In this way, the lack of self-knowledge is her downfall; for she herself is vulnerable to criticism by someone else. The proverb seems to be a variation of “Refrain from judging others.” This is because there exists a possibility that a person’s criticism of another is one that could be thrown at herself.

### **Stress on behavioural propriety in proverbs**

Three main proverbs seem to be about good manners or proper etiquette. The first is: *Di man nagmana ng ari, nagmana ng ugali* (Tagalog) (Eugenio 1992: xvi, 211, 539, 541). This says that “one may not have inherited material wealth but her having inherited good manners is precious enough,”<sup>26</sup> begetting perhaps the interpretation “One need not inherit wealth if he inherits good manners” (Eugenio 1992: 541). *Ugali* is “manners” or “attitude” but the context makes it clear that it ought to be rendered here as “good manners” or “exemplary attitude.” The proverb seems at least to instruct the listener to realise that good manners is as valuable as material wealth. However, it actually goes by recommending that one could simply acquire good manners and forget about wealth. Hence, even if a person is materially poor, she is still regarded as wealthy because of her good manners. In other words, when expressed from the perspective of *li* as ennobling, the poor person can be considered wealthy because of her refined behaviour.

An important point that could be drawn from the proverb is that just as material wealth can be inherited from one’s parents, one can also receive good manners from parents. Therefore, if persons of refinement have taught their children good manners, then the children are lucky indeed.

Furthermore, the proverb also appears to regard behavioural propriety highly. As stated in one possible interpretation, behavioural propriety is as precious as material wealth or gold, *ginto* (in Tagalog) or *bulawan* (in Bisaya or Cebuano, a language in the Visayas), as this is used also in the country as representing riches. That acquisition of wealth could be disregarded for acquisition of proper behaviour suggests that behavioural propriety is even more valuable than riches.

The second proverb: *Mabuti pa ang kubo na ang laman ay tao, kaysa bahay na bato na ang laman ay kuwago* (origin, Tagalog) (A hut that has a human dweller is better than a house of stone with an owl living in it) (Eugenio 1992: xviii, 247).<sup>27</sup> While this proverb does not appear to be directly

about propriety in behaviour, it actually suggests that behavioural propriety is a necessary condition for being a humane person. It is about good manners embodied in human persons (*tao*). If the term “*tao*,” which is also a term in Cebuano language, is simply translated as “human person,” this does not fully express the sense of its usage in the proverb. That is a general meaning of the term, as in “There is somebody (*tao*) outside the house.” For this proverb, “*tao*” ought to be rendered in terms similar to “a person of *ren*” as found in Confucian classical texts; that is because *tao* is a person who is humane or benevolent. Another interesting point about this is that while *tao* is aptly translated as “person with humanity,” it is insufficient. It is insufficient because a connotation of *tao*, as a term of art in the thinking (probably principally in the background) about morality and human beings (philosophical anthropology) in the country, is “a person with good manners” and this is not expressed. However, to translate it as “a person with good manners” would not do. “A person with humanity and good manners” would also not do because that is saying too much. To render it as “person with humanity” is still best. The subtle sense of this proverb involves viewing *a person with humanity* as *a person with good manners*. “A person with humanity” is thus not a translation. According to this understanding, perhaps we could say that the proverb expresses the view that a person of *ren* is a person of *li*. Here, perhaps the proverb understood in this way offers us a means to respond to the question raised earlier, whether *ren* is more fundamental than *li* in Confucius’s thought. According to this, since a person of *ren* is necessarily a person of *li*, it is *li* that is more fundamental.

If the proverb expresses the view that a person of *ren* entails a person of *li*, the Mencian view about the goodness of human nature is also relevant here. We can also express the Mencian view in the context of the proverb under discussion: *tao*<sup>a human person</sup> is directly related to *tao*<sup>a person with humanity</sup>, human persons are naturally beings with humanity.

To expound on the proverb, because an owl (*kuwago*), according to Eugenio (1992: 1, see note 21), represents “a miserly and grasping rich man,”<sup>28</sup> it is better to have a hut with people (*tao*) living in it than a house made of stone with an owl living in it. The idea is that a house is made great by the sort of people living in it. If an owl, referring to a mean, ill-natured person or one who lacks refinement, lives in a house made of stone, though the house be huge and sturdier, it is not considered great. A house that is great has residents who are humane. So, a hut, though small and perhaps weak, is great because humans live in it. There are a number of assumptions here. They include: a stone house is owned by rich people; a hut is a poor



person's dwelling place; and because *tao* is “a person with humanity,” the owl, representing the rich, refers to mean, ill-natured persons or those who lack refinement. Thus, according to the proverb, even if “a person of humanity” does not live in a stone house, she still lives in a great house. It is she who makes a dwelling great.

The third proverb: *Ang maayong cagawian labaw sa bulawan* (Good manners are worth more than gold) (Boholano); *Ang matinlong ugali mayad pa sa bulawan* (Good manners are a chest of riches) (Palaweño) (Eugenio 1992: xviii, 316; Timbreza 2003: 78).<sup>29</sup> A related proverb is, *Ing mayap a lagyu, maiguitya king gintu* (Pampango) (A good name is better than gold), or *Ang malinig na pangaran sarung tunay na kayamanan* (A good name is true wealth) (Bicolano) (Timbreza 2008: 78; Eugenio 1992: 338).<sup>30</sup> While “name” and “habits” do not directly refer to good manners or proper conduct, “name” hints at behavioural propriety because it refers to *reputation*. A person's reputation (here, it is good, untainted reputation) is due to one's deeds. “Habits” hints at *proper behaviour*, because it is closely linked to “deeds.” “Good deeds” (*maayong cagawian* or *binuhatan*) is more valuable than gold because they show what kind of person one is. A Waray-waray version of the proverb expresses the point: “Bisan antawo pobre, Basta may pamatasan (“It matters not if a man is poor so long as he has good manners”)” (Eugenio 1992: 316).<sup>31</sup> More forceful versions are: “*Istung ing mayap a panugali ing mewala, mewala na nganing sabla* (If good manners are lost, everything is lost) (Pampango), and the one by the Ilocanos, *Ti napanglaw a kuna isu tayawan sursurona* (The really poor man is he who has no [good] manners)” (Eugenio 1992: 316–317). The link of this message to the Confucian terms, *li*, *ren* and *junzi* 君子, is noticeable. That is, good deeds tell what sort of person one is, which is one's name or reputation. This is even the message conveyed by the Waray saying, *Ang tawo na-a maila sa iyang pamatasan* (A person's character is revealed through her manners). (Eugenio 1992: 316). Accordingly, a person must choose between good manners and gold.

It seems that the Confucian debates on *li* and *ren* show that propriety in behaviour and humanity (*ren*) are inseparable. Furthermore, our discussion suggests that the notion of *li* extending beyond a “code of proper conduct” is also expressed in other traditions, such as those of the Filipino people. Hence, does this present lessons for, or perhaps challenges to, understanding of morality and philosophy of life in other traditions, and Confucianism more specifically? I explore this in the next section, together with the suggestion of what the Confucian understanding in *li* may offer for enriching Filipino understanding of behavioural propriety.

## CONFUCIAN UNDERSTANDING OF *LI* VIS-À-VIS FILIPINO UNDERSTANDING OF BEHAVIOURAL PROPRIETY

I now respond to the question of what each understanding offers for the enrichment of the other.

I suggest that Confucian understanding on behavioural propriety (*li*) shows that it has an important ennobling function. This function, which is a transformative function according to Confucian understanding, could enrich Filipino indigenous philosophy regarding behavioural propriety; for it is not apparent that the function is found in the Filipino understanding. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the Filipino understanding of this topic is purely contractarian. As discussed, Confucius would be a contractarian if *li* in the *Analects* is merely codes of proper behaviour. The ennobling function of behavioural propriety is not clear in the Filipino understanding in that there appears no articulation of the function. That a link exists between behavioural propriety and humanity in the Filipino understanding, as has been pointed out, suggests that the ennobling function is implied in the case of the Filipinos. It is only that the notion has not been articulated, or it has lied dormant in Filipino indigenous philosophy or in source proverbs.

Related to that point that Confucian understanding on *li* shows that it has the ennobling function is the suggestion that the understanding can offer Filipino philosophy a model or a conception of an ideal human individual. The important function of *ennobling* in Confucian understanding entails that Confucian thought has a view of paradigmatic human beings. A paradigmatic human is the ideal human person. These paradigmatic persons are human beings who have “become more human” (Tu Weiming 1972: 197). The term *junzi* in the *Analects* has been rendered as “paradigmatic person.” This model (*junzi*) may be the same as the “person with humanity” in the Filipino understanding, but it is in Confucian understanding where we find the conception of it as *paradigm*. It is inherently a paradigm in Confucian thought.

As for the offering of the Filipino understanding of behavioural propriety for the enrichment of Confucian understanding, I suggest that it provides a perspective on the debate about whether it is *ren* or *li* that is more fundamental in Confucius’s thought. It involves the view that behavioural propriety is a necessary condition for humanity (*ren*). That it is a necessary condition for *ren* means that in the formation of a paradigmatic person, behavioural propriety cannot be left out. It is an element that is needed in the process. It must be noted, however, that the view is shared by Xunzi 荀子, a Warring States Confucian thinker. This means that the Filipino understanding

in fact offers an affirmation of a position that is already within Confucian philosophy. Such an affirmation may be important in that it reinforces the fundamental role of *li* over the other Confucian concepts. In terms of gain in philosophical understanding, *li*'s fundamentality would bring to the fore both the aesthetic aspect and the edificative role of rules of proper conduct. The aesthetic aspect comes from the meaning of *li* as it is related to *ren* or emotion. *Li* “gives beautiful expression to emotion” (Dubs 1927: xv, 116–117). *Li*'s edificative role is its ennobling function.

As discussed, the debate has seemingly found resolution in a number of papers, notably Kwong-loi Shun's. Shun's view can be cast as: humanity (*ren*) is a necessary and sufficient condition for *li* (cf. Lai 2006a: 72). Given that formulation, Shun's view contains the one offered by the Filipino understanding. But since the view that behavioural propriety is a necessary condition for *ren* is only a section of Shun's view, the resolution in the Filipino understanding takes issue with Shun's. According to the view offered by the Filipino understanding, it is not the case that *li* and *ren* are interdependent (in the sense that one is equal to or presupposes the other), because only one of them is dependent. It is *ren* that is the dependent concept. Essentially, the view is that behavioural propriety is necessary but *not* sufficient condition for *ren*. It might be added that the view may be correct, in that the process of formation of a paradigmatic person requires the other central Confucian concepts such as *yi*<sup>appropriateness</sup> and *zhi*<sup>knowledge; wisdom</sup> (智), among others. If this is the reason for the view, then it appears that favouring *li* over *ren* is a justified challenge to Shun's.

A conclusion that can be drawn from the attempt in this paper to engage Filipino understanding of behavioural propriety with that in Confucian philosophy is that the insights in both understandings are shareable. Their shareability is seen in the use of each of them to enrich the other. The Filipino understanding of behavioural propriety is enriched by the Confucian understanding through its insight about the important ennobling function of *li*, while the Confucian understanding is enriched through Filipino understanding's insight about a person with humanity. Is this shareability a hint of the possibility that behavioural propriety is a universal concept? Could behavioural propriety be a universal concept? Although it is well-defined and raised to the level of concepts in Confucian thought, the idea of behavioural propriety seems not absent in societies like in the Philippines. If it is universal, then its universality might be drawn as good reason for discussions of it in global philosophy or thinking, in which reciprocity or mutuality may be developed. *Li* in this part of the world would become a topic of discussion or in debate and, more importantly, a resource for morality.<sup>32</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have offered suggestions for how the Confucian and Filipino understanding of behavioural propriety can enrich each other. This is in response to the question of what each tradition can offer for the enrichment of the other. Part of the response to the question also involves the exploration of Confucian *li* and the Filipino understanding of behavioural propriety. In closing, I wish to point out a few questions that have come out from the interaction made between the two understandings here. These questions are raised for further research. They arise from the Philippine proverb's point that behavioural propriety is a necessary condition for humanity (*ren*): Might not the debates on the question of whether it is *ren* or *li* that is more fundamental instigate discussions in Filipino philosophy regarding the importance of being a person of humanity, which hitherto lies unnoticed? More generally, might *li* then be a framework that could be used to help articulate aspects in Philippine indigenous philosophy?

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Although the passage is also in the *Zhongyong* 《中庸》, Edward Slingerland's (2006: 18) translation of 6.29 hints it as does the passage's tone: "The Master said, 'Acquiring Virtue by applying the mean – is this not best? And yet among the common people few are able to practice this virtue for long.'" Cf. Leys' (1997: 28) translation.

- <sup>2</sup> Yü-tsai Tuan, *Shuo-wen chieh-tzu* (Shanghai: Shanghai ku-chi Publisher, 1980) quoted in Cua 2002: 474.
- <sup>3</sup> Bernhard Karlgren, *Grammata Serica Recensa*, 148, reprinted from *The Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*, Stockholm, Bulletin no. 29, 1957, by Elanders Boktryckeri Aktiebolag, Göteborg, 1964, cited in Skaja 1984: 3.
- <sup>4</sup> Lindqvist mentions Karlgren's guess and says that it is not the traditional explanation.
- <sup>5</sup> According to Eno (1982: 39), "Confucius was, if not the first, then among the first to pay attention to *li* as a universal category to which particular *li* belonged."
- <sup>6</sup> Cf. Ni 2002: 53.
- <sup>7</sup> In *Analects* 9.3, we see that Confucius appears to be against discarding *ren* (which is in tradition, because it is in culture or civilisation); he seems to suggest that while the "rites" (*li*) could be altered, *ren* (human-heartedness) must never be forsaken. The character 仁 is not in the passage, but the concept seems alluded to in Confucius's point that "bowing after ascending the stairs is display of arrogance (*tai* 泰)." The point alludes to *ren* because that that practice displays arrogance means that it is not expressive of *respect* which is tied up essentially with tradition. Respect is also that "human feeling" which Henry Skaja refers to in talking about *li*'s "relational definition," which is *ren*.
- <sup>8</sup> This is a term used by Tu Weiming (1968: 33), although Homer Dubs (1927: 111–112) referred to *li* and *ren* as "outer" and "inner morality". According to Dubs (1927: 118, 125), while *li* as external morality is "all the usages and acts that distinguish the moral [person]," *ren* is symbolisation of internal morality.
- <sup>9</sup> *Analects* 12.1 is a cited passage. The following is Simon Leys' translation (1997: 55):  
 "Yan Hui asked about humanity. The Master said: 'The practice of humanity comes down to this: tame the self and restore the rites. Tame the self and restore the rites for but one day, and the whole world will rally to your humanity. The practice of humanity comes from the self, not from anyone else.'  
 Yan Hui said: 'May I ask which steps to follow?' The Master said: 'Observe the rites in this way: don't look at anything improper; don't listen to anything improper; don't say anything improper; don't do anything improper.'  
 Yan Hui said: 'I may not be clever, but with your permission, I shall endeavor to do as you have said.'"
- <sup>10</sup> There are other scholars who regard the sayings and proverbs as substantive sources to the study of the indigenous thought. Camilo Villanueva Jr.'s (2009: 104–115) table of major proponents of Filipino philosophy has Manuel B. Dy and Roque Ferriols as among these scholars.
- <sup>11</sup> This is also pointed out in Demetrio 1991: x, 609.
- <sup>12</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting consideration of these other notions.
- <sup>13</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising other meanings of *hiya* for consideration. "Sense of propriety" is the meaning which Rogelia Pe-Pua and Elizabeth A. Protacio-Marcelino (2000: 55) have deemed to be the more appropriate translation of the term.
- <sup>14</sup> Quito's view is further corroborated by Chad Hansen's (1992: 51–52) interpretation of *dao* as a "guiding discourse." Hence, not acting in accordance with propriety means not following the *dao*.



<sup>15</sup> I am also afraid that Timbreza has misunderstood the relation between *world-view* and *philosophy of life* that Halverson draws. Halverson points out that while the two are related, it is not the case that their scopes are similar: two people who have the same *world-view* could have different *philosophies of life* (1979: 414–415). Moreover, Halverson clearly refers to philosophy of life as *a person's* philosophy of life. Timbreza, I am afraid, has failed to provide justification for thinking that there can be *a people's* philosophy of life.

<sup>16</sup> My translation.

<sup>17</sup> A picture of a painting on this by Joselito E. Barcelona can be seen at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies of Northern Illinois University website for Philippines, <http://www.seasite.niu.edu/Tagalog/> (accessed 7 November 2016).

<sup>18</sup> The Chinese texts are from *The Chinese Text Project*, available from <https://ctext.org/analects/wei-ling-gong> (accessed 3 August 2019).

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Legge (1870): 86 (passage XXIII); Allinson (2003): 29.

<sup>20</sup> Tagalog is one of the major languages in the country. It is the basis for “Filipino,” the national language. In the three major geographic regions of the country, Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao, there are eight major languages.

<sup>21</sup> A translation in *Philippine Folk Literature: The Proverbs* (Eugenio 1992: 295) goes: “He who does not look back whence he came, will not reach his destination.”

<sup>22</sup> See A. T. Nuyen 2004: 204–208, for a discussion on the doctrine.

<sup>23</sup> Hiligaynon is language spoken mainly in Negros island in the Visayas.

<sup>24</sup> Ilocano (Iloko) is spoken in (central) Luzon.

<sup>25</sup> Bicolano is spoken in Bicol region, eastern Luzon; Kapampangan or Pampango in the north of Manila region (Luzon); and Tausug in Jolo, Sulu, in (southwestern) Mindanao. I thank Orlando Ali Mandane Jr. for help in understanding the meaning of the Bicolano proverb.

<sup>26</sup> The translation is my own.

<sup>27</sup> The translation is my own. Two versions of the proverb (Eugenio 1992: 247) indicate though that it is influenced by christian-western thinking. The Aklan version is:

“Balay man nga bato,  
con ragaestar hay demonyo,  
mas mayad pa rokubo,  
con ragaestar hay tawo.”

While the Gaddang version goes:

Nasquipinader na balay  
Nu yonattum ay deminio,  
Mapiaque pay no bisang a balay  
Nu yonattun nu ay fustutolay.

The terms *demonyo* or *deminio* (demon) and *estar* (stay) are Spanish words or at least enunciate the Spanish or Latin word equivalents.

<sup>28</sup> Timbreza (2003: 104–105) conjectures that the choice of “owl” is due to the bird’s seemingly treacherous nature. It is a nocturnal creature; it “plies its trade at night.”

<sup>29</sup> Boholano is spoken in Bohol island, in the Visayas, and Palaweño in Palawan Island, (eastern) Luzon.

- <sup>30</sup> Eugenio (1992: 338) points out that this is equivalent to the Irish “A good name is more precious than gold.” There is also a Chinese (Amoy) proverb that conveys a message not unlike this one: *Tuik-chi lai chai-ianchhiu, tuikang-hulai chai iansai-hu* (The tree is known by its fruit; the artisan by his work), Verzosa 1950: 78.
- <sup>31</sup> Waray is spoken in eastern Visayas, mainly in the northern part of Leyte island and parts of Samar.
- <sup>32</sup> I thank Peter Wong for raising the point about having the concept as morality resource.

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