

**“The golden rule of our Saviour. . . had been
inculcated by Confucius, almost in the same words,
four centuries before”:**

**The Clash of the Christian and Confucian Golden
Rules in 17th- to 19th-Century England**

LEE Junghwan

Abstract

On what grounds did the terse precept in the *New Testament* rise to the “golden” rule in the sense of the supreme and universal moral principle in 17th-century England? What kind of impact did the discovery of its Confucian counterpart, *shu* 恕,—more specifically, the awareness of the fact that “the golden rule of our Saviour. . . had been inculcated by Confucius, almost in the same words, four centuries before,”—bring to the European Christian societies, and how did they respond to it?

The present study is to answer these questions by exploring the European history of the golden rule, especially, that of England, from its initial rise in the 17th century to the frustrations, controversies, and divisions that the discovery of its Confucian counterpart brought about in the 19th century, when the English commercial and missionary activities in China also sharply escalated. It argues that whereas the initial springboard for the rise of the golden rule consisted of its all-encompassing, universal nature, its authority and validity was significantly undermined, partially, by the challenge of modern philosophy and, partially, by the recognition of the precedency of Confucius’ formulations. Consequently, upon entering the 19th century, the dominant focus of discussion shifted from universality and supremacy on the grounds of the theory of the natural law to discrimination and superiority out of sectarian concerns. Additionally, a fresh light is thrown on

* LEE Junghwan is an associate professor in the Department of Aesthetics at Seoul National University (leejunghw@snu.ac.kr).

** This work was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2015S1A5A8017106).

the Christian missionary motives underlying the monumental works of James Legge, including his opinions on Confucianism. A plausible explanation is also provided for how his views on the Confucian golden rule contributed to alleviating the perplexity of the Christian societies of the time through, allegedly, proving the superiority of the Christian golden rule over its Confucian counterpart and thus defending the exclusive authority of Christianity.

Keywords: the golden rule, *shu* 恕, universality, superiority, Christianity, Confucianism, James Legge

1. Introduction

In early 17th-century England, the precept “all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” in *Matthew* 7.12 as well as *Luke* 6.31 arose as a supreme and universal moral principle. Before long, in the mid-17th century, this terse precept was bestowed the splendid titles of “the royal law” and “the golden rule.” Almost simultaneously in 1658, if not earlier, the West first recognized the parallelism between the Christian golden rule and the Confucian concept of *shu* 恕 (the Confucian golden rule). This discovery has gradually and eventually developed into an understanding of the cross-cultural and cross-temporal ubiquity of the golden rule. On this basis, in 1993, the Parliament of the World’s Religions identified the golden rule as “the irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life, for families and communities, for races, nations, and religions.”¹

Across the temporal gap between the 17th and 20th centuries, the main features of the golden rule that attracted special attention were its supremacy as a moral principle and its universality beyond the bounds of time and space. In the meantime, nonetheless, the history of the golden rule did not progress in a unilateral direction. Particularly, as European commercial and missionary activities in China led to the gradual increase of knowledge about Confucianism, an awareness of the parallelism between the Confucian and Christian golden rules, more specifically, the irrefutable fact that “the golden rule of our Saviour. . . had been inculcated by Confucius, almost in the same words, four centuries before,”² swirled European Christian society, especially in England, into frustrations, controversies, and divisions, which they had to deal with to defend the exclusive authority of Christianity. The monumental works of James Legge (1815-1897) were also born out of such desperate need. In this regard, the objective of the present study is to trace the history of the golden rule mainly from 17th- to 19th-century England, with a special focus on the changes in the understanding of the golden rule in correlation with the introduction of its Confucian counterpart to the West.

¹ Parliament of the World’s Religions, “The Declaration toward a Global Ethics,” 2-3 and 7.

² Thornton, “The Life, Times, and Doctrines of Confucius,” 376.

2. The Peaceful Encounter between the Christian and Confucian Golden Rules in the 17th Century

During the period from Stoicism to the Reformation, the precept “all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (*Matthew* 7.12), in conjunction with “as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise” (*Luke* 6.31), was consistently coupled with the idea of the Law of Nature. It thus provided leading theologians like Augustine (354-430), Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-1274), and Martin Luther (1483-1546) with a fundamental ground for integrating religious and philosophical ethics.³

The history of the precept, however, entered into a completely new phase during the period from the late 16th century through the 17th century. Two routes of exploration occurred in parallel without noticeable conflicts. In 17th-century England, unlike the previous general emphases, the terse precept emerged as the most universal and generalizable moral principle of Christianity. As British theologians elevated it to the status of the single supreme principle in both religious and secular dimensions, this precept was bestowed with the superlative titles of “the royal law” and “the golden rule.” Simultaneously, escalated attention to this rule led the West to discover its counterparts elsewhere than in Christian texts such as the *Old Testament*. Particularly, as the religious and intellectual interactions between the West and China gradually increased, mostly as the result of the activities of missionaries to China, the Confucian classics also began to be introduced to the West, which led them to eventually recognize that Confucius formulated an equivalent to the Christian golden rule centuries before Jesus. During this period, intriguingly, its elevation as the supreme principle in Christianity was hardly impeded by the discovery of its counterparts among “the heathens.” Rather, proponents of the golden rule took advantage of this discovery to support the claim for the universality of the golden rule, while critics cast doubt, instead, on the validity of the natural law as the foundation for claiming the genuine universality of the golden rule.

2.1. Constructing the Golden Rule in 17th-Century England

“The golden rule” was not so ‘golden’ at the initial stage of its emergence in post-Reformation England. In late 16th-century England, the terse precept

³ Wattles, *The Golden Rule*, 68-76.

in *Matthew* 7.12 began to be incorporated into the incipient reconstruction of secular Christian ethics. In his *A Catechisme, or Christian Doctrine*, published originally in 1567 and republished several times until the late 19th century, Laurence Vaux (1519-1585) provided readers with Christian lessons in the catechistical format. In the chapter for “instruct[ing] children and ignorant people,” he summarized the Ten Commandments into two categories. Three commandments “in the first table” were related to the worship of God. The other seven “in the second table” were associated with secular moral rules, “which command us to give reverence and honor to every man in his degree, to profit all, and hurt none.” In so doing, he encapsulated the second-table commandments into the precept “to do unto others, as we would be done to ourselves.”⁴ The fact that Vaux linked this aphorism to the lower-level instructions for “children and ignorant people” suggests the humble origins of the golden rule.

In early 17th-century England, the precept emerged as the aphorism of the supreme religious and moral principle, thus gaining the title “golden rule.” According to Harry J. Gensler, Charles Gibbon is the first author who called the precept “the golden rule” in 1604, and “at least 10 additional British authors before 1650 used *golden rule* to refer to” the precept.⁵ In the late 17th century, “the [four] seventeenth-century Englishmen”—Bishop William (active in 1679), George Boraston (active in 1683), John Goodman (1625 or 1626-1690), and Benjamin Camfield (1638-1793)—“wrote such books and gave the golden rule its name.”⁶ In the meantime, apart from the coinage and circulation of the title, the rise of the precept to its supreme status was truly accelerated by the influential works of Thomas Jackson (1579-1640), the preachings of Mathew Hale (1609-1676) and, more significantly, the controversies ignited by Thomas Hobbes’ (1588-1679) *Leviathan*.

In early 17th-century England, Jackson significantly contributed to the elevation of the simple precept in *Matthew* 7.12 to the status of the supreme ethical and religious principle.⁷ He did not coin or use the title “the golden

⁴ Vaux, *A Catechisme, or Christian Doctrine*, 48.

⁵ Gensler, *Ethics and the Golden Rule*, 83.

⁶ Wattles, *The Golden Rule*, 78 and 211n. 3.

⁷ In this paper, I use *The Works of Thomas Jackson, D.D.*, published by Oxford University Press in 1844. This collection contains a series of *Commentaries upon the Apostle's Creed*, which was originally published in eleven separate books during the period between the 1610s and 1630s, as well as some treatises and sermons. Because this collection very roughly records the year and publisher of each work, I use the volume numbers and page numbers in this collection for quotation instead of adding the original title of the work and its original year of publication.

rule” but consistently called it “the royal law,” “the fundamental rule,” “the royal rule,” and “the royalist rule” in the same sense.⁸ The fact that he was an influential and prolific English theologian as well as a president of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, also greatly stimulated its establishment.

Jackson offered an in-depth interpretation of *Matthew* 7.12 in three consecutive sermons. Although the exact date of its publication is unknown,⁹ his extolments of this terse precept are also detected in the other works published in the last years of his lifetime. He therein consistently promoted this precept as “the fundamental rule of justice and equity” and “the fundamental rule of our Saviour,”¹⁰ while lamenting that “the whole Christian world” had lost “the true meaning of it,” and thereby “the practices most contrary to it are so universal, and so violent.”¹¹

In contrast to Vaux who had confined the validity of this precept to the secular ethics (“the second table”), Jackson integrated the religious commandments (“the first table”) and the secular ethics (“the second table”) into this aphorism, thus substantiating its character as “the royalist rule.” He focused “the First Sermon” on explicating that this terse precept encapsulates all holy commandments in the second table with regard to human relationships. At “the Second Sermon,” contrastingly, he extended its applicability to all duties to God in the first table. At “the Third Sermon,” he furthered the best method to put the precept into practice, mostly in line of the second table.

The two pillars that support Jackson’s claim are “Nature” (or the nature law) and “Christianity.” He said, “it (i.e., the royalist rule) binds us by Nature . . . gathered by natural reason,” on the one hand, and “it binds us in Christianity. . . set down in holy scripture,” on the other. “Christianity” refers to the commandments and the doctrine of grace recorded specifically in the *Bible*. In contrast, under the motto “*Natura est optima magistra*” (Nature is the best teacher), “Nature,” which “ingrafted” “natural notions or seeds of truth and goodness” “in our souls,”¹² provided him with the grounds for

⁸ Jackson, *The Works of Thomas Jackson* 8:394 and 11:567; “The First Sermon (Upon *Mathew* Vii.12),” 22; “The Third Sermon (Upon *Mathew* Vii.12),” 74.

⁹ Jackson, *The Works of Thomas Jackson*, 11:1 The sermons were annexed deliberately by the publisher, Barnabas Oley, to Jackson’s *Ninth Book of Commentaries upon the Apostles’ Creed*, which was published posthumously in 1657. The sermons were reprinted in Jackson’s collected works, which were also published by Oley in 1673 and then by Oxford University Press in 1844.

¹⁰ Jackson, *The Works of Thomas Jackson* 7:394; 10:567-568.

¹¹ Jackson, *The Works of Thomas Jackson* 9:157.

¹² Jackson, “The First Sermon (Upon *Mathew* Vii.12),” 7-9.

universalizing it. In principle, therefore, each and every person is depicted as having the natural capacity for and sources to apprehend moral truths by oneself, without clinging to the predetermined particular commandments and doctrines prescribed in the *Bible*.

The universality of the royalist rule is grounded on the premise of “the actual equality of nature in all men.” The law of nature is not a dormant entity that one should intentionally introspect to comprehend but an active law that dictates the patterns of our feeling and thinking. The royalist law is an articulation of the law of nature into a form of the highest-order moral principle. Therefore, it is no surprise to detect the royalist law or its equivalents in all “natural men” including “the heathen.”¹³

Jackson thus conferred a supreme status on this terse precept on the grounds that this short aphorism encapsulated the sum of “the law and the prophets” presented in the *Bible*.

Out of the practice of this principle or precept all the righteousness which the law and the prophets do teach will sooner spring, and flourish much better, than if we should turn over all the learned comments that have been written upon them, without the practice of this compendious rule.¹⁴

In this vein, Jackson compared “this most necessary and most worthy the practice” to ‘deductive reasoning’; “all doctrines of good life, of honest and upright conversations are derived” from this terse rule.¹⁵ In principle, he thus acknowledged that everyone is born with the capacity to derive from this precept all particular rules of action as well as specific foundations for morality and goodness. The range of particularities appears to be thus enlarged beyond the bounds of the *Bible* without venturing to defy its authority. Through “the royalist rule,” he embraced both the religious way of managing one’s life in accordance with the “commandments” given in the *Bible* and the secular dimension of one’s life outside the *Bible*, which demanded far broader and more diverse rules of action to be adapted to ever changing circumstances. To be brief, in Jackson’s scheme, the royalist rule is the principle that bridges the gap between Nature and Christianity in human ethics.

In this scheme, the royalist rule is explicitly associated with the “equality of all men” on the basis of “all things to have one Creator,” thus

¹³ Jackson, “The First Sermon (Upon *Mathew* Vii.12),” 9-10.

¹⁴ Jackson, “The First Sermon (Upon *Mathew* Vii.12),” 5.

¹⁵ Jackson, “The First Sermon (Upon *Mathew* Vii.12),” 5-6.

reconciling the royalist rule with “the precept of loving your enemy” and the doctrine of grace.¹⁶ To do so, Jackson transformed (rather than simply interpreted) the precept into a principle of altruism, thus making it compatible with “the doctrine of grace.”¹⁷

For the sake of comparison, especially with Legge, two points call for special attention. First, Jackson compromised equality of all with given religious and social discriminations. He limited the range of the golden rule’s application to the extent that it would not undermine “the public constitutions by which they live.”¹⁸ Jackson specified the inequalities lying in diverse asymmetrical relationships such as between master and servant, prince and subject, and father and son, and connected it with disparities in dignities, powers, and duties, which were, according to him, ultimately “ordained by God.” Therefore, the right practice of the royalist rule should not be extended to the degree that the principle of equality might bring about “the dissolving of order.”¹⁹ In this vein, he also disparaged an allegedly excessive emphasis on equality as something that is “tainted with” “inordinate self-love or sinful desires,” which should be eliminated to practice the royalist rule in a proper manner.²⁰

In addition, Jackson explicitly validated religious and nationalistic favoritism. Although the royalist rule proposes equality of all in principle, according to him, “our desire of doing good may be augmented according to particular respects of nearness, &c; as, to a Christian before a Turk, to an Englishman before another.”²¹ In his overview, a religious vision in association with the principle of equality is incorporated into the royalist rule, but it does not transcend or outweigh his secular concerns.

The second point that deserves special attention is that Jackson did not make a clear-cut distinction between the positive and negative formulations of the golden rule. He frequently juxtaposed the two formulations (“the affirmative precept” and “the negative precept” in his own terms) in parallelism and related the former with “doing good” to others, and the latter with “doing wrong to others.” According to him, both formulations stem from the natural dispositions of “sympathy or fellow feeling of others’ misery.” “In nature all men are equal, all alike subject to corruption and

¹⁶ Jackson, “The First Sermon (Upon *Mathew* Vii.12),” 23.

¹⁷ Jackson, “The First Sermon (Upon *Mathew* Vii.12),” 25.

¹⁸ Jackson, “The Third Sermon (Upon *Mathew* Vii.12),” 77.

¹⁹ Jackson, “The Second Sermon (Upon *Mathew* Vii.12),” 45-46.

²⁰ Jackson, “The Second Sermon (Upon *Mathew* Vii.12),” 45-48.

²¹ Jackson, “The Third Sermon (Upon *Mathew* Vii.12),” 74.

calamity.” Therefore, “Nature itself” guides us to have a “fear” that evil doings, which have been done to others, might be done to oneself, from which the negative precept arose in order to preclude the prevalence of such evil doings. Oppositely, but in the same vein, because all human beings are naturally inclined toward all good actions that have been done by others, they should also “be as desirous to do good to others in like case,” from which the positive formulation arose.²² In so doing, he consistently ascribed both formulations equally to the law of nature and “the law and the prophets” without asserting the superiority of one over the other.²³ He once uttered that the negative formulation is “somewhat more legible” than the positive formulation on the basis that the former was often mentioned by the heathens as well, whereas the latter was “seldom or never” mentioned by them. However, he immediately shifted emphasis to the equivalence between them within the scope of the law of nature.²⁴

Slightly after Jackson, Mathew Hale (1609-1676), who became Chief Justice of the Court of King’s Bench in 1671, also included an in-depth discussion of the golden rule in one of his treatises, entitled “Of Doing as We Would Be Done Unto.” By and large, his discussions overlapped those of Jackson. While he did not use the terms ‘the royalist law’ or ‘the golden rule,’ his approach is also based on the theory of the natural law. Additionally, his main emphasis was also on the point that the rule itself is “compendious” but the range of its applications are extraordinarily “comprehensive,” embracing both the first and second tables of laws and rules.²⁵

Hale’s work is still noteworthy in some respects. First, he substantiated the validity of the golden rule in a highly analytical manner instead of resorting to the authority of the *Bible*. As a lawyer and judge himself, he addressed possible objections to the golden rule by dealing with a variety of cases. Second, he reconciled the apparent conflicts between “our reason” and the exercise of the golden rule within the gamut of the natural law, by identifying “our reason” in particular association with the golden rule as “a moral and rational instinct connaturally implanted in the soul,” which “holds a clear, evident, plain congruity with our intellective faculty.” In this vein,

²² Jackson, “The First Sermon (Upon *Mathew* Vii.12),” 10-12.

²³ Jackson, *The Works of Thomas Jackson* 10:241-245.

²⁴ Jackson, *The Works of Thomas Jackson* 10:243.

²⁵ Hale, “Of Doing as We Would Be Done Unto,” 378-380. The date when “Of Doing as We Would Be Done Unto” was first published is unknown, but the fact that Hale did not mention anything about Hobbes suggests that it was probably written before 1651.

he described the exercise of the golden rule as something that “the soul assents to the things by a kind of immediate intuition. . . without the necessity or use of processive or inductive ratiocination.” Thus, he also made the validity of the golden rule compatible even with the idea of “*rasa tabula*” (not ‘*tabula rasa*’ in his own wording), which directly contradicts the central idea of the natural law.²⁶

Hale advocated the “excellence” of the Christian golden rule over its heathen counterparts, but he hardly let Christian sectarianism interfere with his arguments. Like Jackson, he also discussed the differences between the positive and negative formulations. Unlike Jackson, however, Hale placed far greater emphasis on the “comprehensive” nature of the positive formulation, which consisted in the genuine “excellency” of the Christian golden rule. According to his analysis, the positive formulation includes the negative formulation within it and thus embraces both the principles of justice and righteousness as well as those of love, benevolence, and charity, whereas the negative formulations of “the heathens,” including Jews, were limited to “the prohibitory part of this precept” and the principles of justice and righteousness.²⁷ When arguing for the “excellency” of the Christian golden rule on the basis of the positive-negative distinction, however, he aimed at rebuilding the morality and religiosity of Christian society internally rather than promoting Christian sectarianism against the heathens externally. Therefore, he did not utter anything more about the differences for the purpose of disparaging the heathen version of the golden rule, which, as seen below, makes a notable contrast to the attitudes of 19th-century Christian sinologists toward the Confucian golden rule.

After Hale’s treatise “Of Doing as We Would Be Done Unto,” this title was used to refer to the precept in *Matthew* 7.12 and *Luke* 6.31 before the neologism of “the golden rule” or “the royal law.” For example, Francis Atterbury (1663-1732) preached a sermon on *Matthew* 7.12 before Queen Anne at St. James’s Chappel in 1704, whose published title is *The Rule of Doing as We Would Be Done Unto*.²⁸

²⁶ Hale, “Of Doing as We Would Be Done Unto,” 382-385. Hale did not specify whom he referred to by those who “suppose the soul to be *rasa tabula*,” but note that Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* was first published in 1689, more than two decades after Hale’s death.

²⁷ Hale, “Of Doing as We Would Be Done Unto,” 379-380; 387-401.

²⁸ Atterbury, *The Rule of Doing as We Would Be Done Unto*. Also see Atwood, *The Rule of Doing as We Would Be Done Unto*; Mawson, *The Duty of Doing as We Would Be Done Unto*.

Arguably, it was Hobbes who triggered modern philosophical discussions about the golden rule. Similar to Jackson, he also presented it as “the law of nature,” which not only meets the requirements of rationality and universality but also satisfies the ends of Christianity and commonwealth of all. Although the name “the golden rule” was coined slightly later by his contemporary Englishmen, he argued that “the laws of nature to be taken notice of by all men” (that is, justice, equity, modesty, and mercy) can be “contracted into” the negative formulation of the golden rule — “Do not that to another, which thou wouldst not have done to thyself.” He highlighted its terseness as “one easy sum [of the universal laws of nature], intelligible even to the meanest capacity” by further saying that one “has no more to do in learning the laws of nature but. . . to put them into the other part of the balance, and his own into their place.”²⁹

Hobbes used the positive and negative formulations interchangeably. Only in the chapter “A Christian Commonwealth,” did he make a distinction by calling the former “the words of our Saviour” and the latter “the law of nature.”³⁰ Elsewhere in *Leviathan*, however, he also referred the positive formulation to “the law of nature” without any notice.³¹ In line with universality and rationality, he also reformulated it into “Do not that to another which thou thinkest unreasonable to be done by another to thyself.”³²

Hobbes’ reductionism immediately provoked objections. For example, Roberto Sharrock (1630-1684) attempted to disqualify the golden rule as a universal law by providing counterexamples; these included the judge-criminal case, which was proposed initially by Jackson and repeatedly quoted to test the (in)validity of the golden rule by later influential thinkers such as Samuel Pufendorf and Immanuel Kant.³³

It seems that, on the other hand, Hobbes’ reductionism also inspired 17th-century English Christian proponents of the golden rule to entitle the precept “the golden rule.” At a sermon addressed at St. Lawrence Church,

²⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan: With Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668*, ch. xv.35, 99. Note that the switch of places here means equity or equivalence between the duty to others and one’s self-interests in comprehending how one should treat others rather than imaginative role-reversibility in the form of “if I were in the place of others.”

³⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. xlii.11, 339.

³¹ For the, Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. xvii.2, 106.

³² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. xxvi.13, 177.

³³ Sharrock, *Hypothesis Ethikē*, ch. 2, N. 11, 63-65. For the later quotations of the judge-criminal case, see Pufendorf, *De Jure Naturae et Gentium* (1672), 181; Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* 4:429-430.

London, in 1683, Boraston also referred to Hobbes in a critical manner, labelling him as “a most shameful instance.”³⁴ Nonetheless, instead of discarding the precept, he organized the sermon along the lines of the arguments of Jackson in the format of a summary. The sermon was published in 1684 in London under the title *The Royal Law: or, The Golden Rule of Justice and Charity*.

The terms “the golden rule” and “the royal law” were soon adopted by John Goodman (1625 or 1626-1690) for the title of his book *The Golden Rule, or, The Royal Law of Equity Explained*, which also contributed considerably to the circulation and establishment of these terms. Like Jackson, Goodman was not disturbed by the historical fact that the precept was formulated by the heathens earlier than, and independently of, that of Jesus.³⁵ His overarching objective was to explain why the precept was “the golden rule” and “the royal law” “for the Improving of the State of Mankind, or for the Maintaining of Justice and Equity, Peace and Love in the World.”³⁶ Taking the natural law as a philosophical foundation, the alleged historically-proven universality of the golden rule beyond time, space, and religion mattered to him far more than the originality or superiority of Jesus’ formulation. He then turned the focus of his explications to providing a “remedy” for the previous misunderstandings, contradictions, and miscarriages of this “Common Rule.”³⁷

Like Jackson, Goodman also substantiated the necessity and practicability of the golden rule on the basis of the compatibility of the golden rule with the biblical idea that all human beings are equal before God. He said, “Now. . . to deal alike between those that are equal themselves, is a first principle of reason in all mankind, and therefore do deal by our neighbour as we would be dealt by our selves, is an universal and indispensable law of justice.”³⁸ From a different angle, however, the necessities of equality and impartiality are not directly inferred from the golden rule itself or from logical reasoning but from the Christian view on humanity from the perspective of God. In a similar vein, he proceeded to further that the necessary condition for properly applying the golden rule to particular cases consists not only in the authentic knowledge of the antecedently approved lawfulness of particular moral rules, which the *Bible* provided; he also added a requirement that one should think a particular

³⁴ Boraston, *The Royal Law: or, The Golden Rule of Justice and Charity*, 8.

³⁵ Goodman, *The Golden Rule, or, the Royal Law of Equity Explained*, 1-2.

³⁶ Goodman, *The Golden Rule, or, the Royal Law of Equity Explained*, 3.

³⁷ Goodman, *The Golden Rule, or, the Royal Law of Equity Explained*, 3-5.

³⁸ Goodman, *The Golden Rule, or, the Royal Law of Equity Explained*, 12-13.

“measure of that thing or action,” deduced from the golden rule, to be “due and of right” by oneself, “if the case was mine,” as if it were not others.³⁹

On these grounds, Goodman inferred the universality of the golden rule from equality and impartiality. From a different angle, although divine and religious duties toward God are not properly inferable from the golden rule, this rule can serve as a universal law in human communities on the biblical foundation of equality of all human beings before God and the requirement of impartiality.

In the fifth and last examination concerning the bounds and limits of the golden rule, Goodman associated the golden rule with Christian ethics through his claim that this rule is designed by our Saviour as a rule of “kindness and primary obligation” instead of “retribution or requital.” In this vein, he reinterpreted the golden rule into the formulation “*do that to others in the first place, which they would be glad to receive from others in the second place.*”⁴⁰ Then, he linked this reinterpretation in line with “an evangelical spirit of the gospel” with the biblical commandments such as “Love our enemies” and “Be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and the first movers in every good thing.”⁴¹

Goodman’s systematic explications show how the golden rule facilitated the great transition from the religious aspiration toward God to the formation of the secular Christian ethics in association with the biblical ideas of equity and impartiality. He simply acknowledged that the rule was not designed for a religious purpose and in this sense called it “the Second Table of the Law.”⁴² Like Jackson and Hale, nonetheless, his overall exploration aimed to demonstrate that the golden rule could provide a bridge to close the fundamental gap between the religious laws and secular Christian ethics.

2.2. The Initial Recognition of the Confucian Golden Rule

Simultaneously, but independently of the rise the golden rule, European missionaries to China began to translate the Confucian classics into Latin, which eventually led them to become aware of the existence of the Confucian version of the golden rule. Due to the universality-oriented viewpoint on the golden rule at the time, however, this discovery had the effect of reinforcing

³⁹ Goodman, *The Golden Rule, or, the Royal Law of Equity Explained*, 25.

⁴⁰ Goodman, *The Golden Rule, or, the Royal Law of Equity Explained*, 34-35 (Italics his).

⁴¹ Goodman, *The Golden Rule, or, the Royal Law of Equity Explained*, 35-36.

⁴² Goodman, *The Golden Rule, or, the Royal Law of Equity Explained*, 20.

the argument for its validity as a universal moral principle rather than of undermining the authority of the Christian golden rule.

In the last years of the 16th century, Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607), an Italian Jesuit missionary to China, reportedly translated three of *Sisu* 四書 (the Four Books)—*Daxue* 大學 (the Great Learning), *Zhongyong* 中庸 (the Doctrine of the Mean) and *Lunyu* 論語 (the Analects)—into Latin, but this first European translation of the Confucian classics was neither preserved nor published.⁴³

Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) quoted Confucius' *shu*—formulation twice in his *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 (The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven) in order to show its consistency with the Christian doctrines.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, he did not mention its similitude with the Christian golden rule at all, never mind the differences between them. Moreover, Ricci's work, written in Chinese and published in Beijing in the year 1603, had little impact on Western discussions of the golden rule. It is reported that at the end of the 16th century, Ricci made his own Latin translation of *Sisu*, which has been lost.⁴⁵

The probable first appearance of Confucius' *shu*-formulation in European writings is in a text by Martino Martini (1614-1661), an Italian Jesuit missionary. In his *Sinicae Historiae Decas Prima* (The First Decade of the History of China) published in 1658, he briefly discussed Confucian ethics with a high degree of respect. He quoted a Latin translation of *shu*—"Ne facias ulli, quod pati nolis" (Do not do to any man what you do not want to suffer)—together with the statement that the Chinese "measured the mind of others" (*qua alterius animum metimur*) by "the high virtues of justice and fidelity."⁴⁶ Although no direct reference is offered, it is highly probable that he quoted this phrase from a comment on *Matthew* 7.12 by Lactantius (c. 250-325), a Christian Roman apologist and advisor to the first Christian Roman emperor, Constantine I.⁴⁷

The first complete European translation of *Lunyu* appeared nearly a century after Ruggieri's first attempt. A body of Jesuit missionaries, including Phillippe Couplet (1623-1693), cooperatively translated the *Daxue*, *Zhongyong*, and *Lunyu* into Latin and published them in 1687 under the title *Confucius*

⁴³ Meynard, *The Jesuit Reading of Confucius*, 3-6.

⁴⁴ Ricci, *Tianzhu shiyi*, bk. 2, ch. 5, 9b-10a; ch. 6, 22a.

⁴⁵ Meynard, *The Jesuit Reading of Confucius*, 6-9.

⁴⁶ Martini, *Sinicae Historiae Decas Prima*, 130.

⁴⁷ For Lactantius' comment, see Stanley, *The Faith and Practice of a Church of England-Man*, 115-116.

Sinarum Philosophus (Confucius, the Philosopher of China). One year later, in 1688, this set of works was re-translated into French under the title *La Morale de Confucius, Philosophe de la Chine* (The Moral of Confucius, Chinese Philosopher) and was circulated quickly and widely in France.⁴⁸

It is noteworthy that, like the 17th century English advocates of the golden rule, the Jesuit translators also did not make any distinctions between the positive and negative formulations. They accordingly rendered the *shu* formulation, which Confucius himself put forward in the negative form in *Lunyu* 5.12, 12.2, and 15.24, into the negative formulations.⁴⁹ Contrastingly, they translated the word *shu* in the passage “My Way has one [thread] running through it” (*wudao yiyi guanzhi* 吾道一以貫之) in the *Lunyu* 4.15, into a positive formulation “*talem te esse erga alios, quales esse veils alios erga te*” (you should do unto others as you wish for them to do unto you), although this translation was directly associated with the negative formulation in 15.24.⁵⁰ This unintended ‘mistake’ suggests that no differences existed in their minds, not only between the positive and negative formulations but also between the Christian and Confucian versions of the golden rule.

This point is reaffirmed by Samuel Pufendorf’s (1632-1694) *De Jure Naturae et Gentium* (Of the Law of Nature and Nations). Its 1684 second-edition includes Confucius’ *shu*-formulation, which is not contained in its 1672 first-edition, together with the comparable passages by Hobbes, Aristotle, and Inca Manco Capac (the legendary founder of the Peruvian Empire). Pufendorf quoted the *shu* formulation from Martini’s *Sinicae Historiae Decas Prima*.⁵¹ Contrastingly, the French version of *De Jure Naturae et Gentium*, *Le Droit de la Nature et des Gens*, annotated by Jean Barbeyrac (1674-1744), relocated all quotations except those of Hobbes to a footnote, but this version instead straightforwardly mentioned that “this rule is confided in the wisest of Peagans, and what is more, by our Lord, which modern authors does not generally trump it.”⁵² This bold remark was modified once again in the 1729 English version, which again relocated the quotations but back into the main body of the texts, and interpolated the passage “And indeed this is no other than that great rule prescribed by our

⁴⁸ Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, 1681.

⁴⁹ Meynard, *The Jesuit Reading of Confucius*, 205-206, 364-364, and 475.

⁵⁰ Meynard, *The Jesuit Reading of Confucius*, 190.

⁵¹ Pufendorf, *De Jure Naturae et Gentium*(1672), 205; and also see, Pufendorf, *De Jure Naturae* e181.

⁵² Pufendorf, *Le Droit de la Nature et des Gens*, 1:175-176.

Saviour himself, of *Doing to Men as we would be done by*. Matthew. Vii.12” at its end.⁵³ Intriguingly, this passage or its equivalents did not show up in the Latin versions, which were published after the English version, although Barbeyrac’s name appears on the front cover.⁵⁴

By listing these quotations comparable to the Christian golden rule, however, Pufendorf intended to demonstrate the limits of this rule in the sense of the invalidity of the Law of Nature drawn from reason.

[T]his rule is not universal. . . . Yet we must confess that this precept cannot be esteemed a fundamental axiom of the Law of Nature; since it is only a corollary of that Law which obliges us to *hold all Men equal with our selves*; and therefore may be demonstrated a priori.⁵⁵

When listing the non-Christian quotations, Pufendorf did not directly connect them to the Christian golden rule by Jesus. His criticism was aimed primarily at the theory of the natural law rather than the golden rule itself. Whereas the proponents of the golden rule presented the universality of the precept as irrefutable evidence for the validity of its theoretical foundation, Pufendorf listed the quotations to show that the universality of the golden rule was not sufficient to substantiate the theory of the natural law. By also utilizing the counterexamples provided by Sharrock, he eventually drove a substantial wedge between the theory of the natural law and the golden rule.

Considering the exclusive nature of Christianity, it is an intriguing phenomenon that the discovery of the Confucian version of the golden rule did not noticeably dampen the 17th-century zeal for establishing the golden rule as the core of Christian ethics. Overall, the English advocates of the golden rule then concentrated on substantiating the terse precept in the *New Testament* as “the crowning principle of morality.”⁵⁶ In so doing, they were generally open-minded to its ubiquity beyond Christianity, which, as detailed in the next section, makes a striking contrast with later 18th- and 19th-century proponents, who sought to demonstrate the originality and superiority of the formulation of “our Saviour” out of sectarian motives. On the contrary, the 17th-century advocates defended its validity through comprehensively

⁵³ Pufendorf, *Le Droit de la Nature et des Gens*, 1:134 with modifications.

⁵⁴ For example, see its 1744 Latin version published in Germany. Pufendorf and Hertius, *De Jure Naturae et Gentium*, 1:200.

⁵⁵ Pufendorf, *De Jure Naturae et Gentium* (1672), 181. For English translation, Pufendorf, *Of the Law of Nature and Nations*, 135 with modifications.

⁵⁶ Wattles, *The Golden Rule*, 78.

addressing diverse objections. It is highly probable that the carefully selected counterexamples listed in the works of Goodman and Hale were the byproducts of intensive controversies at the time, which, as seen in the criticism of Sharrock, were triggered by Hobbes' incorporation of it into his provocative work.

For the sake of comparison, it is particularly noteworthy that they paid less attention to the differences between the positive and negative formulations than 19th-century proponents would do, which James Legge particularly highlighted to argue for the superiority of the Christian formulation over its Confucian counterpart. Instead, they extracted from the *Bible* both the positive and negative rules. In this vein, for example, Goodman plainly stated, "My obligation from this rule principally lies in this, that I both do, or refrain from doing (respectively) toward him, all that which (turning the tables, and then consulting my own heart and conscience) I should think that neighbor of mine *bound* to do, or to refrain from doing towards me in the like case."⁵⁷ Thus, they focused on the universality and comprehensive applicability of this "compendious" precept, thus naming it "the golden rule" and "the royal law." Note that the negative formulation instead of the positive one is found in early post-biblical Christian writings of the first and second centuries like *Didache* (The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles) and *Apology of Aristides*, testifying to its practical importance in the early Christian Church of the second th century.⁵⁸

3. From Universality to Superiority: the 19th Century

The 17th-century concurrence of the establishment of the golden rule with the discovery of its Confucian counterpart eventually led to an inevitable conflict in the 19th century. The conflict occurred at the end of the 18th th century, intensified during the early 19th century, and culminated in the mid-19th century, when James Legge published his English translations of the Confucian Classics. In this and subsequent Sinologist works, Legge wished to end the parallelism thus far established between the Confucian and Christian golden rules by systematically demonstrating the superiority

⁵⁷ Goodman, *The Golden Rule, or, The Royal Law of Equity Explained*, 26.

⁵⁸ Spooner, "Golden Rule," 311.

of the golden rule of Jesus over its Confucian counterpart. Prior to Legge, however, Sinologists and Christian theologians were divided in dealing with the irrefutable fact that “the golden rule of our Saviour, . . . had been inculcated by Confucius, almost in the same words, four centuries before.”

From Pufendorf onward, critical re-examinations of the golden rule were undertaken by modern philosophers like John Locke (1632-1704), Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), Samuel Clarke (1675-1729), and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), thus bringing into focus the limitations of the golden rule as a moral principle as well as bringing into question the centuries-long bond between this rule and the natural law.⁵⁹ For example, Locke argued that the mind is originally “a blank slate,” in stark opposition to the theory of the natural law. From a different angle, the fact that the golden rule attracted attention from the most prominent philosophers then also attested to the firm establishment of its position in the institutional, political, and social realms at that time. In early 18th-century England, for example, the golden rule was extensively utilized in the political realm to resist against the tyrannical oppressions of the British church and the British political system.⁶⁰

Entering the 19th century, contrastingly, sectarian concerns quickly eclipsed philosophical inquiries. The ubiquity of the golden rule, which had been employed to support its legitimacy in the 17th century, surfaced as, arguably, the most critical issue. Especially, the indisputable fact that Confucius had formulated the golden rule centuries before “our Saviour” turned into a perplexing problem that Christian Sinologists and missionaries to China had to deal with, in order to defend the superiority and originality of Christianity. Rather than forming a consensus, however, they were widely divided on this problem, which was closely correlated with their views on, or attitudes toward, Confucianism as well as their characterization of the Chinese and the Chinese civilization in general. This perplexity and division continued until the mid-19th century, when Legge proposed a systematic, comprehensive, but sectarian solution from the Christian standpoint.

In 1809, Joshua Marshman (1768-1837), a British Christian missionary, published an English translation of the first half of the *Lunyu* together with Zhu Xi’s commentary. Concerning the *Lunyu* 4.15, he rendered *zhong* into “affection” and *shu* into “benevolence.” At an attached “comment,” he introduced Cheng Hao’s definition of *shu* as “*tui ji ji wu*” 推己及物, which

⁵⁹ For this, see Wattles, *The Golden Rule*, 81-89; Gensler, *Ethics and the Golden Rule*, 84-87.

⁶⁰ For example, see Gordon, *The Independent Whig*. Vol 3.

was translated into “a desire to seek the good of others equally with one’s own.”⁶¹ In the same vein, concerning Zigong’s self-made claim to the *shu* practice and Confucius’ rebuttal in the *Lunyu* 5.12, he contrasted “to act towards others as we wish them to act towards us, is complete virtue” with “to restrain ourselves from doing that to others which we dislike ourselves, is a degree of virtue.”⁶² Rather than making a formal distinction between the positive and negative formulations, however, he simply translated the comments of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi in this manner, in which they expounded “the difference between *ren* and *shu*” (*ren shu zhi bie* 仁恕之别). Nor did Marshman allude to the parallelism between the Confucian and Christian versions of the golden rule.

In 1828, David Collie (?-1828), a British Christian missionary, presented the first complete European translation of *Sisu*, published in English with his extensive notes. Unlike Marshman’s generally neutral stance, his work was strongly motivated by his sectarian interests, as is evident in his remark “In the whole compass of his writings, there does not appear to us to be a single idea above the reach of any plain man at all accustomed to reflection.”⁶³ Concerning *zhong-shu* in the *Zhongyong* and *Lunyu* 4.15, he translated the words into “faithfulness and benevolence.”⁶⁴ Whereas he was consistent in translating *shu* formulation in the *Lunyu* into the negative formulation, he interpreted *shu* in a note to the *Lunyu* 4.15 into a positive formulation as well—“to do to others as we wish them to do to us, is benevolence,”⁶⁵ which strongly suggests his awareness of the parallelism between Confucius and Christ on the golden rule.

Nonetheless, Collie did not utter the term “the golden rule” at all, to say nothing of the parallelism. On the other hand, he added the following note to the *Lunyu* 14.34.

How different is this from the mild precept of the Prince of peace. “Love your enemies, do good to them who hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you and persecute you.” Reader judge for yourself, whether the dictates of the Chinese sage, or the commandment of the Divine Saviour, appears most like the doctrine of the God of love.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Marshman, *The Works of Confucius*, 238-239.

⁶² Marshman, *The Works of Confucius*, 292-293.

⁶³ Collie, *The Chinese Classical Work Commonly Called the Four Books*, xii.

⁶⁴ Collie, *The Chinese Classical Work Commonly Called the Four Books*, 9 and 14.

⁶⁵ Collie, *The Chinese Classical Work Commonly Called the Four Books*, 14.

⁶⁶ Collie, *The Chinese Classical Work Commonly Called the Four Books*, 70.

While avoiding a direct comparison between the Confucian and Christian golden rules, Collie herein called attention to the superiority of Christianity over Confucianism in terms of “the doctrine of the God of love.” The original question “what may be said of rewarding hatred by kindness” (*yi de bao yuan* 以德報怨) in the *Lunyu* 14.34 is certainly reminiscent of Jesus’ commandment of “love your enemies.” As seen above, one of the central issues for the earlier advocates of the golden rule was how to resolve the logical and practical conflicts between the golden rule and the “love-your-enemies” commandment in the *New Testament*. Note that Confucius’s answer “Reward bad treatment with justice, and kindness with kindness” is distinct not only from this commandment but also from the retributive formulation of *lex talionis*.

It seems that Collie’s sectarian evaluation of the Confucian golden rule drastically transformed the attitude of John Francis Davis (1975-1890) toward Confucianism, who would later serve as the second Governor of Hong Kong from 1844 to 1848. In his 1824 article, he identified Confucius as a man who “was truly deserving of the title of Philosopher,” while characterizing Taoism and Buddhism as fictitious and fanatical. He further stated with veneration that “the purity and excellence of some of his precepts” “bear a comparison with even those of the gospel,” although he did not directly refer to the golden rule.⁶⁷ Contrastingly, in *The Chinese*, published in 1836, Davis defined the teachings of Confucius as “the moral doctrines,” thus refusing to treat it as a branch of religion. Again, he singled out Confucianism among “Oriental” moral doctrines to extol Confucius as the one who had “obtained the universal assent of mankind, and which cannot be surpassed in excellence as rules of conduct,” and, this time, referred directly to Confucius’ *shu*. Nonetheless, he immediately compared it with “the *lex talionis*” by quoting the statement “‘Not to live under the same heaven’ with the slayer of his father” (*fu zhi chou fu yu gong dai tian* 父之讎弗與共戴天) from the *Liji* 禮記 (the Book of Rites) so as to highlight that “there is much to condemn in the principles of the Chinese sage.”⁶⁸ Later, the sectarian comparisons of Collie and Davis were readily adopted by Legge to argue for the superiority of Christianity over Confucianism.⁶⁹

Nonetheless, the sectarian attitude was not predominant in the early- and mid-18th century. W. H. Medhurst (1796-1857), an English missionary to China,

⁶⁷ Davis, “Memoir Concerning the Chinese,” 5.

⁶⁸ Davis, *The Chinese*, 41.

⁶⁹ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), 135.

published *China: Its State and Prospects* in 1833, which inspired many would-be missionaries to China. He therein plainly uttered that Confucius “lays down the golden rule” without additional notes. From a perspective of comparative religion, he paid attention instead to “filial piety” as the most characteristic feature of Confucianism. He said, “he (that is, Confucius) should have overlooked the reverence due to the Father of our spirits.”⁷⁰ Besides, upon witnessing the rapid increase of opium import into China, he employed the golden rule to dissuade European, especially English merchants, from opium trade.⁷¹

The sectarian evaluations of Collie and Davis generated a strong reaction as well. Thomas Thornton (1786-1866), a member of the Royal Asiatic Society, publicly displayed his sympathetic attitude toward the moral and religious teachings of Confucius, which, he lamented, “has seldom been properly appreciated.”⁷² Despite his “slight and superficial” “acquaintance with the language of China,” his knowledge and appraisals were based on “much of Chinese literature. . . transferred to European tongues” by English, French, and German sinologists and missionaries, and particularly *Une grande collection: Mémoires concernant les Chinois* (A Grand Collection: Memoirs concerning the Chinese: 1776-1814).⁷³ This collection includes *Vie de Confucius* (Life of Confucius) by Joseph-Marie Amiot (1718-1793), a French Jesuit Missionary to Beijing, which Thornton quoted.

Thornton was hardly swayed by a sectarian motive. Whereas he estimated that “his (that is, Confucius’) metaphysics and psychology are obscure and contradictory” “by the test of modern knowledge,” Thornton tried to do justice to the religious aspects of Confucianism, which, according to him, “has been assailed by well-meaning persons in Europe.”⁷⁴ Concerning the golden rule, he consulted Abel Rémusat’s (1788-1832) French and Latin translation of the *Zhongyong* published in 1817, particularly the Latin renderings of *zhong* 中 (centrality) and *shu* in Chapter 13.⁷⁵ On this basis, Thornton attached the following statement right after quoting Davis’ sympathetic account from 1824, where he said that “the purity and excellence of some of his precepts. . . bear a comparison with even those of the gospel”:

⁷⁰ Medhurst, *China*, 155.

⁷¹ Medhurst, *China*, 156-157.

⁷² Thornton, “The Life, Times, and Doctrines of Confucius,” 375-376. This article was incorporated into his *A History of China*.

⁷³ Thornton, *A History of China*, vi-vii.

⁷⁴ Thornton, “The Life, Times, and Doctrines of Confucius,” 376-378.

⁷⁵ Rémusat, *L’Invariable Milieu*. . . , 49; Thornton, *A History of China*, 209-210.

It may excite surprise, and probably incredulity, to state, the golden rule of our Saviour, “Do unto others as you would they should do unto you,” which Mr. Locke designates as “the most unshaken rule of morality, and the foundation of all social virtue,” had been inculcated by Confucius, almost in the same words, four centuries before.⁷⁶

This bold, religiously neutral claim provoked Legge not merely to directly rebut it but also to delve into explicating the differences between the Confucian and Christian golden rules.⁷⁷

Thornton’s reaction did not cause an echo at the time. Joseph Edkins (1823-1905), a British Protestant missionary, also took a neutral stance and simply recognized the parallelism between the Confucian and Christian golden rules. The chapter on “Morality” in his 1859 text *The Religious Condition of the Chinese* begins with the sentence “All the world knows that the Chinese have a system of morality which, in theory, is remarkably pure.”⁷⁸ He took a critical stance with regard to its consequence, saying that “Thus the Confucian morality, though good in theory, has not been successful in bringing the nation to a good moral condition.”⁷⁹ Concerning the golden rule, however, he simply delivered the message that “[t]he Jesuit missionaries, when they arrived in China, in the reign of our Queen Elizabeth, were charmed with the excellent doctrines of Confucius. They found there the Golden Rule of our Saviour in a slightly different form.”⁸⁰

Some exceptional cases existed in the divide between the sectarian and sympathetic attitudes toward Confucianism. Charles Hardwick (1821-1859) simply ignored the parallelism, although his primary objective was “an historical inquiry into some of the chief parallelisms and contrasts between Christianity and the religious systems of the ancient world.”⁸¹ In contrast, Charles Bradlaugh (1833-1891), a political activist and atheist, enthusiastically welcomed the discovery of the parallelism. He contended “that which Jesus taught which was good was not new” by quoting the translations of *zhong* and *shu* in the *Lunyu* 4.15—“in possessing rectitude of heart, and in loving one’s neighbour as one’s self.” This “iconoclastic” claim provoked immediate repudiations among the Christian societies of the time.⁸²

⁷⁶ Thornton, “The Life, Times, and Doctrines of Confucius,” 376.

⁷⁷ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), 110.

⁷⁸ Edkins, *The Religious Condition of the Chinese*, 154.

⁷⁹ Edkins, *The Religious Condition of the Chinese*, 163-164.

⁸⁰ Edkins, *The Religious Condition of the Chinese*, 154-155.

⁸¹ Hardwick, *Christ and Other Masters*.

The other exceptional case was Richard Whately (1787-1863), an English theologian who endeavored to defend the moral validity of the golden rule philosophically at a far distance from the religious convulsion of the time. He responded to the 18th-century philosophical criticisms by providing a novel reinterpretation of the merits and demerits of the golden rule. According to him, the golden rule in the *Bible* “will serve to explain, if rightly understood, the true character of moral instruction.” He acknowledged its defects as “the first notions of right and wrong” or “[the] sole guide as to what you ought to do and to avoid in your dealings with your neighbor.”⁸³ In this vein, he cited a list of counterexamples, which former philosophers provided to argue against the golden rule. Nevertheless, he highlighted that this defect originated mostly from a misunderstanding of the golden rule as a principle for considering “what you might *wish* in each case” instead of “what you would regard as *fair, right, just, reasonable*, if you were in another person’s place.”⁸⁴ In line with this so-called reversibility-based reinterpretation, he argued that “the real design of it (that is, the golden rule) is to put us on our guard against the danger of being blinded by self-interest,” since “[a] good person who has a good general notion of what is just may often be tempted to act unfairly or unkindly towards his neighbors, when his own interest or gratification is concerned, and to overlook the rightful claims of others.”⁸⁵ Additionally, he substantiated the validity and necessity of the golden rule by pointing out that either conscience or reason alone is “far from being an infallible guide.”⁸⁶ His reinterpretation would later considerably inspire 20th-century proponents of the golden rule such as Marcus G. Singer (1926-2016), thus bridging the vast philosophical gap between the 18th-century criticism and the 20th-century revivalism.⁸⁷ Nonetheless, his philosophical approach produced almost no resonance among his religiously-oriented contemporaries, including Legge.

During this centuries-long transition, the focus of attention on the parallelism shifted from universality and supremacy to discrimination and superiority. Despite the criticisms of the 18th-century philosophers, for 19th-

⁸² In his debate with Bradlaugh, T. D. Matthias, a Welsh Baptist minister, still insisted on the originality of Jesus by vainly returning a question, “will my friend prove that that teaching of Confucius was not derived from bible sources?” (Matthias and Bradlaugh, *The Credibility and Morality of the Four Gospels*, 79-80 and 87-88).

⁸³ Whately, *Introductory Lessons on Morals, and Christian Evidences*, 25.

⁸⁴ Whately, *Introductory Lessons on Morals, and Christian Evidences*, 26.

⁸⁵ Whately, *Introductory Lessons on Morals, and Christian Evidences*, 27.

⁸⁶ Whately, *Introductory Lessons on Morals, and Christian Evidences*, 28.

⁸⁷ For example, see Singer, “The Golden Rule.”

century Christian Sinologists and missionaries to China, because the authority of the golden rule was already well established in Christian societies, it hardly mattered to them on what grounds they could buttress its status as the supreme moral principle. Instead, as knowledge of the world religions rapidly grew along with accelerated global interactions, one of their main concerns seems to have been placed on the matter of how they could substantiate the superiority of Christianity over other religions. In the same vein, they had to deal with the indisputable fact that “the golden rule of our Saviour had been inculcated by Confucius, almost in the same words, four centuries before.” This problem had more implications than historicity; if they had acknowledged the parallelism between the Confucian and Christian golden rules, it might have amounted to recognizing the equality between the two religions in terms of the overall ethical system at the most fundamental level. In addition, if they had accredited the originality of the formulation to Confucius, that of Jesus would have been demoted to the inferior status of a replica. Nonetheless, the awareness that the historical fact was irrefutable brought them into frustrations, controversies, and divisions. James Legge’s monumental works were undertaken against this background.

4. Legge and Christian Sectarianism

In 1861, Legge released the first edition of the first volume of *The Chinese Classics* out of a desire for “some Works on the Classics, more critical, more full and exact, than” the previous translations contemporaneously available.⁸⁸ For him, whose “directly missionary labours are the chief business of his life, and require of course his chief attention,”⁸⁹ the open-ended diversity in dealing with the parallelism between the Confucian and Christian golden rules, to say nothing of Confucianism in general, indicated a significant disorientation of the Christian society of the time. Especially, the advent of explicitly sympathetic attitudes toward Confucianism, promoted by a spreading recognition of the parallelism, was too great a threat to the authority, originality, and supremacy of Christianity to leave it as a matter of historical fact. He showed outwardly a strong confidence in the objectivity of “his views,” saying “He (that is, Legge himself) hopes also that the time

⁸⁸ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), vii-viii.

⁸⁹ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), ix-x.

is not very remote, when among the Chinese themselves there will be found many men of intelligence, able and willing to read without prejudice what he may say about the teachings of their sages.”⁹⁰ Nonetheless, as seen below, his sectarian standpoint is widely detected in his works, including his newly devised method of differentiating the Christian golden rule from its Confucian counterpart.

The “Prolegomena” to the 1861 edition of *The Chinese Classics* has a section entitled “His (that is, Confucius’) Influence and Opinions.” Legge therein concentrated on expounding his views on Confucius’ thought and its influences over the Chinese up until then. Evidently, his appraisals are consistently negative throughout the section. Its concluding paragraph deserves a careful reading:

But I must now leave the sage. I hope I have not done him injustice; but after long study of his character and opinions, I am unable to regard him as a great man. He was not before his age, though he was above the mass of the officers and scholars of his time. He threw no new light on any of the questions which have a world-wide interest. He gave no impulse to religion. He had no sympathy with progress. His influence has been wonderful, but it will henceforth wane. My opinion is, that the faith of the nation in him will speedily and extensively pass away.⁹¹

Each sentence herein amounts to a summary of his assessments of each subject discussed in the section. For example, the evaluation “He was not before his age” was drawn from his assessment of the roles that Confucius played in his lifetime as “the preserver,” “exemplifier,” and “expounder” of the legacies of antiquity, thus attributing retrospective and stagnant characteristics to Confucius’ teachings.⁹² In the same vein, he provided a negative answer to the question raised by Hardwick, that is, “whether he did not make changes in the ancient creed of China.” On the one hand, specifically by the statement “He threw no new light on any of the questions which have a world-wide interest,” Legge meant that Confucius could not be counted as a great original thinker.⁹³ According to him, Confucius “did not treat” “the great problems of the human condition and destiny,” such as “the creation of things or the end of them,” “the origin of man or his

⁹⁰ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), ix.

⁹¹ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), 113.

⁹² Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), 90-94.

⁹³ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), 98-99.

hereafter,” and “physics or metaphysics.”⁹⁴ On the other hand, in the same fashion, Legge depicted Confucius as a man who was “unreligious, unspiritual, and open to the charge of insincerity,” and these characteristics, according to Legge, had unfavorable influences on the Chinese up until then, for instance “the charge of atheism,” the denial of “the existence of any spirit,” and “a habit of deceitfulness.”⁹⁵ Concerning “Confucius’ views on government,” he stated that “Confucius’ idea then of a happy, well-governed State did not go beyond the flourishing of the five relations of society,” which made the Chinese “adapted to a primitive, unsophisticated state of society.”⁹⁶

Legge’s negative assessments culminated in a discussion of the golden rule, which is located at the end of “His Influence and Opinions.” His ultimate objective was to demonstrate the limitations of the Confucian version of the golden rule and the superiority of its Christian counterpart. Concerning the irrefutable fact that “the golden rule of our Saviour ... had been inculcated by Confucius, almost in the same words, four centuries before,” Legge began with laudatory comments. After directly quoting Thornton’s praiseful remark cited above, he reaffirmed the originality of the Confucian golden rule. He said, “I would be far from grudging a tribute of admiration to Confucius for it. . . . it is not found, in its condensed expression at least, in the older classics. The merit of it is Confucius’ own.”⁹⁷

The overall tone, however, changed sharply when it came to “a comparison” between the Confucian and Christian golden rules. In the translations of the *Lunyu* and *Zhongyong*, he consistently associated *shu* with the concepts of reciprocity and benevolence.⁹⁸ Especially, concerning the *zhong-shu* 忠恕 compound in the *Lunyu* 5.11 and *Zhongyong*, while rendering *zhong* into “the principles of our nature” in accordance with its etymological compound of *zhong* 中 as “middle” and *xin* 心 as “the heart,” he interpreted *shu* as “the benevolent exercise of them (i.e., the principles of our nature) to others,” “on the principle of reciprocity.”⁹⁹ Although this interpretation itself seems positive and objective, his ulterior intention was to show the “unreligious” aspect of Confucius’ teachings in a pejorative sense. At the note to the *Lunyu* 5.11, he states as follows:

⁹⁴ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), 98.

⁹⁵ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), 99-102.

⁹⁶ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), 102-109.

⁹⁷ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), 110.

⁹⁸ For example, Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), 165.

⁹⁹ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), 34 and 258.

The chapter is important, showing that Confucius only claimed to unfold and enforce duties indicated by man's mental constitution. He was simply a moral philosopher.¹⁰⁰

Returning to his "comparison," Legge approached it from three interrelated standpoints to show the "narrowness" of the Confucian golden rule. First of all, he came up with a distinction between the positive and negative formulations. He asserted that whereas the Confucian golden rule is enunciated mainly in its negative form,¹⁰¹ "the rule laid down by Christ" is in "the positive form."¹⁰² As seen above, although it was not unprecedented, a demarcation had never been drawn between the positive and negative formulations as clear-cut as Legge's. This distinction was to make a contrast. Whereas "[t]he lesson of the gospel commands men to do what they feel to be right and good," "[t]he lesson of Confucius only forbids men to do what they feel to be wrong and hurtful."¹⁰³ He thus also disputed the originality of Confucius' formulation of the golden rule by saying that the negative form "was to be found substantially in the earlier revelations of God," which refers to the maxim of Hillel in the *Old Testament*.¹⁰⁴

Second, Legge argued that the Confucian golden rule was qualified by the cardinal familial and social relations. He said, "Confucius, it seems to me, did not think of the reciprocity coming into action beyond the circle of his five relations of society."¹⁰⁵ He did not deny that a series of reformulations in the *Zhongyong*, which starts with the imperative that "What you would require of your son, use in serving your father," was "the rule virtually in its positive form."¹⁰⁶ He also commented in an approbatory tone that "Confucius recognizes the duty of taking the initiative,—of behaving himself to others in the first instance as he would that they should behave to him."¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, pointing to the fact that the reformulations are embedded in the so-called cardinal human relations in Confucianism, he immediately reversed this favorable notice, saying that "there is a certain narrowness, indeed, in that the sphere of its operations seems to be confined

¹⁰⁰ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), 34.

¹⁰¹ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), 31, 34 and 110.

¹⁰² Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), 110.

¹⁰³ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), 110.

¹⁰⁴ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), 110.

¹⁰⁵ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), 111.

¹⁰⁶ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), 49.

¹⁰⁷ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), 49.

to the relations of society.”¹⁰⁸ For the sake of contrast, he described the correlation between reciprocity and the golden rule in Christian ethics by saying that “[t]he rule of Christ is for man as man, having to do with other men, all with himself on the same platform, as the children and subjects of the one God and Father in heaven.”¹⁰⁹

Lastly, Legge directly employed Davis’ comparison of the Confucian golden rule with “the *lex talionis*” in conjunction with Collie’s derogatory interpretation of “what may be said of rewarding hatred by kindness?” in the *Lunyu* 14.34.¹¹⁰ As mentioned above, even the negative formulation is substantially different from the retributive formulation of *lex talionis*. Nonetheless, by using this highly sectarian analogy, he attempted to demonstrate “[h]ow far short Confucius came of the standard of Christian benevolence.” In this vein, he also said, “His (i.e., Confucius’) morality was. . . not the gushings of a loving heart, responsive to the promptings of Heaven, and in sympathy with erring and feeble humanity.”¹¹¹ Rather, according to Legge, Confucius “affirmed the duty of blood-revenge in the strongest and most unrestricted terms,” and “The bad effects of it are evident even in the present day. . . . [W]hole districts are kept in a state of constant feud and warfare.”¹¹²

On the grounds of these strong sectarian interpretations, Legge concluded his appraisal of Confucius’ teachings with the prediction that “My opinion is, that the faith of the nation in him will speedily and extensively pass away.”¹¹³ As seen below, this harsh concluding “opinion” was replaced with a more honorific statement in the 1892 revised version, but only limitedly and rhetorically. To sum up, Legge desired to verify the limited scope of the Confucian golden rule, its lack of a genuine understanding of reciprocity, equality, and benevolence, and, ultimately, the superiority and originality of the Christian golden rule.

Legge’s appraisal was immediately echoed by the English Christian societies of the time. In 1862, one year after the publication of *The Chinese Classics*, the Evangelical Alliance of the UK published a summary of his

¹⁰⁸ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), 49.

¹⁰⁹ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), 111.

¹¹⁰ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), 111-112. Legge said, “The *lex talionis* is here (i.e., a passage at the Second Chapter, the *Book of Rituals*) laid down in its fullest extent.”

¹¹¹ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), 111.

¹¹² Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), 112-113.

¹¹³ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1861), 113.

arguments in its monthly journal, *Evangelical Christendom*.¹¹⁴ The anonymous author therein defended Legge's prolonged dedication to the study of Chinese classics by saying that it was not produced "at the cost of sacrificing other and higher duties and labours" such as "his directly missionary labours."¹¹⁵ Particularly, the author praised highly Legge's comparisons between the Christian-positive and Confucian-negative formulations. To recapitulate it, the author contended that "Dr. Legge's splendid publication" brought to light that the Confucian golden rule "is something to be disabused of certain erroneous or exaggerated fancies as to the real attainments of Confucius, which have ere now been assiduously circulated in desired disparagement of the unapproached morality of the New Testament."¹¹⁶ In short, Legge's work marked a textual, philosophical, and religious breakthrough for those who were desperate to defend the superiority of Christianity over Confucianism in the face of the indisputable fact that Confucius' teachings "are views and moral maxims of sound common sense, and often of a shrewd originality."¹¹⁷

In a similar vein, Frances Power Cobbe (1822-1904), a female Irish social reformer, recognized that "The same aphorism is used literally by Isocrates. . . and (what is most remarkable) in both its negative and positive form by Confucius." Nonetheless, this remark is added only as a note. Her main objective was to underline the novelty of Christian ethics. She said, "One of the most prominent features in the morality taught by Christ is the introduction of the idea of the positive character of duty. He transposes the Golden Rule just quoted from the Rabbi's negative to the affirmative form."¹¹⁸

In his later years, Legge's depreciative criticism of Confucianism seemed to be considerably toned down, but only in a rhetorical sense. In a talk at a missionary conference held at Shanghai in 1877, he esteemed Confucius' formulation of the golden rule as "the greatest service to his country." He then withdrew his earlier depreciation of it as the negative formulation only and admitted that the pairs of imperatives in the thirteenth chapter of the *Zhongyong* testified to Confucius' understanding of the positive formulation as well.¹¹⁹ This short talk was developed into a series of lengthy lectures in 1880, published in the same year as a voluminous

¹¹⁴ Evangelical Alliance, "The Chinese Classics," 13-19.

¹¹⁵ Evangelical Alliance, "The Chinese Classics," 14.

¹¹⁶ Evangelical Alliance, "The Chinese Classics," 17.

¹¹⁷ Evangelical Alliance, "The Chinese Classics," 17.

¹¹⁸ Cobbe, *Studies New and Old of Ethical and Social Subjects*, 12.

¹¹⁹ Legge, *Confucianism in Relation to Christianity*, 9.

monograph under the title of *The Religions of China: Confucianism and Taoism Described and Compared with Christianity*. Legge therein called special attention to the expression attributed to Confucius in the *Zhongyong* “The ways of a *junzi* 君子 (a man of morality) are four, and I [Confucius] have not yet mastered even one of them” to assert that although it sounded like “the language of humility,” it was, in truth, Confucius’ confession of his “infirmity” in carrying out this set of the positive formulations. He further contended that Confucius’ original formulation of the golden rule far before the Christ, which might frustrate most of Christians, was rather a sign of “the distinguishing endowment given to him by Heaven, or God.”¹²⁰ Instead of insisting on the self-deceptive disparagements from the 1860s, Legge tackled this historically indisputable, but religiously frustrating, fact by disguising his sectarian motivations with the rhetoric of the natural law.

Legge’s comparative studies had a strong impact on the English and Scottish Christian Societies, but his way of arguing for the superiority of Christianity seemed to fail in winning over sweeping approval; it could not completely preclude the spread of public interest directed towards Confucianism. In the late 19th century, Confucius himself, together with his *shu* formulation, began to appear in books for public audiences as well.¹²¹ Besides, George Matheson (1842-1906), a Scottish minister, gave a lecture on Confucianism in 1882 at St Giles’ lecture series on “the faiths of the world.” Like Legge, his overt objective was to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity over Confucianism. His lecture, however, began with a historical description of the continuity and prosperity of Confucianism in China, and ventured to answer the self-posed question “What has been the cause of its [i.e., Confucianism’s] success?”¹²²

In so doing, Matheson overtly and unequivocally affirmed “that Confucius is the author of this precept [i.e., the golden rule] is undisputed, and therefore it is indisputable that Christianity has incorporated an article of Chinese morality.”¹²³ The historical “evidence” that Confucius had formulated it centuries before Christ drove him to contend that the apprehension that “the originality of its Divine Founder were impaired by consenting to borrow a precept from a heathen source” “would destroy Christianity.” According to him, the glory and superiority of Christianity

¹²⁰ Legge, *The Religions of China*, 138-139.

¹²¹ For example, see Parton, *People’s Book of Biography*, 408-418.

¹²² Matheson, “Religion of China: Confucianism,” 73-82 and 87.

¹²³ Matheson, “Religion of China: Confucianism,” 83.

should be found elsewhere than the originality of the golden rule; for instance, the Christian theological explication of the immanence of the precept in human hearts, the limitations of Confucian morality to “the wellbeing of the state,” and Chinese collectivism in lack of “human individualism.”¹²⁴ He continued to argue that the success of Confucianism attested to “some truth of the doctrine,” which had made “a real contribution to the science of natural religion.”¹²⁵ He particularly accentuated the idea that in Confucian thought, “there is a moral order in the world as well as beyond it.”¹²⁶ It seems the ultimate goal of his lecture was to convince the audience that the genuine importance of religion lied in “the establishment of human civilization” on “the foundation of a kingdom of God” here and now rather than in the sectarian dispute for superiority and originality, especially in the age of pluralistic “faiths of the world.”¹²⁷

Legge immediately responded to Matheson’s compromising approach, saying “their advocacy is damaging rather than beneficial to Christianity.”¹²⁸ Apparently, he toned down the former sectarian disparagement to a certain degree and gave more credit to Confucianism. Nonetheless, the focus of comparison was still placed on corroborating the superiority of Christianity over Confucianism. For that purpose, Legge, first of all, employed the positive-negative distinction once again. According to his analysis, “the Confucian system is not a morality merely, but also a religion,” but it “was very defective in what it required of man to God.”¹²⁹ According to Legge, contrary to Matheson’s argument, “the general rule in which Confucius summed up all his inculcation of the duties of the human relations” “is negative, while Christ’s is positive.”¹³⁰ Whereas the negative formulation sprang out of a negative understanding of human nature, such as self-centeredness, “the secret” of Christ’s positive formulation was “the essence of the two commandments, to love God supremely, and to love our neighbours as ourselves.”¹³¹ Then, he reiterated his statements from 1861; from

¹²⁴ Matheson, “Religion of China: Confucianism,” 83-84 and 101.

¹²⁵ Matheson, “Religion of China: Confucianism,” 89 and 97.

¹²⁶ Matheson, “Religion of China: Confucianism,” 94-95.

¹²⁷ Matheson, “Religion of China: Confucianism,” 107-08.

¹²⁸ Legge, “Christianity and Confucianism Compared in Their Teaching of the Whole Duty of Man,” 23.

¹²⁹ Legge, “Christianity and Confucianism Compared in Their Teaching of the Whole Duty of Man,” 19 and 22.

¹³⁰ Legge, “Christianity and Confucianism Compared in Their Teaching of the Whole Duty of Man,” 19-20.

¹³¹ Legge, “Christianity and Confucianism Compared in Their Teaching of the Whole Duty of Man,” 20-21.

the viewpoint that “[a]ccording to Christianity, therefore, the whole duty of man is comprised in the one little word Love,” he epitomized the superiority of Christianity into a comparison that “it (i.e., the Christian positive formulation) is the outgushing demand of love, while the other (i.e., the Confucian negative formulation) is the constrained expression of justice.”¹³²

Additionally, Legge enumerated five more aspects to defend the superiority of Christianity over Confucianism. Apart from saying that “they deserve our esteem,” the Chinese were characterized to be “less enlightened” and “more conservative, thinking much of the past, and little of the future.”¹³³ The essay concluded with an emphasis on the significance of the golden rule in interacting with non-Christians “politically, commercially, and in other ways” in accordance with “the principles of love and righteousness, which blend in ‘the golden rule’” at the dawn of globalization in the late 19th century.¹³⁴

Legge published a revised second edition of the *Chinese classics* in 1892, where his sectarian views were not significantly changed. The harsh concluding “opinion” in the first edition was replaced with the moderate and respectful statement that “the more I have studied his character and opinions, the more highly have I come to regard him. He was a very great man, and his influence has been on the whole a great benefit to the Chinese, while his teachings suggest important lessons to ourselves who profess to belong to the school of Christ.”¹³⁵ Critical scholarly reviews of his first publication apparently compelled him to amend the serious “injustice” of his views.¹³⁶ Nonetheless, this change was rhetorical rather than substantial; it was limited to the concluding remarks only. His estimations, analysis, and comparisons as to the golden rule in the 1861 edition were reprinted with almost no changes in the 1892 revised edition. Instead, his revisions were focused on improving the accuracy of translations, typographs, transliterations, and proper names.¹³⁷ Legge was consistent in his view on the superiority of the Christian golden rule over its Confucian counterpart throughout his entire scholarly career without any noteworthy amendments.

¹³² Legge, “Christianity and Confucianism Compared in Their Teaching of the Whole Duty of Man,” 6, 21, and 26.

¹³³ Legge, “Christianity and Confucianism Compared in Their Teaching of the Whole Duty of Man,” 24-35.

¹³⁴ Legge, “Christianity and Confucianism Compared in Their Teaching of the Whole Duty of Man,” 35-36.

¹³⁵ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1893), 111.

¹³⁶ Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China*, 60.

¹³⁷ Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (1893), x-xi.

Legge's framework shaped subsequent discourses on the golden rule to a large degree. It was then disseminated widely through influential reference books such as *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1892).¹³⁸ Especially, the entry for "Golden Rule" in the *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels* (1906) and the *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics* (1914), both of which were edited by James Hastings (1852-1922), a Scottish United Free Church minister and biblical scholar, adopted the positive-negative distinction as the main theme and strategy to attest the superiority of Christian ethics.¹³⁹ Nonetheless, apart from his monumental translations of the Confucian Classics, Legge's "opinion" of Confucianism and the Confucian golden rule eventually failed to bring an end to century-long debates. It seems Legge's perspective has not been seriously challenged until now, not because its philosophical legitimacy has maintained a strong endorsement, but rather mainly because the authority and significance of his translations have continued to enjoy a strong reputation and great popularity, while his strongly sectarian motives have remained submerged below the surface of modern philosophy.

5. Concluding Remarks

In the 17th century, the theory of the natural law was the principal springboard for the initial rise of the golden rule. On this basis, the advocates of this terse precept then concentrated on constructing its universality and supremacy, which cannot be restricted in terms of time and space. In this milieu, the discovery of equivalents to the golden rule in non-Christian traditions was regarded as positive evidence to support its universality. Therefore, they were ready not only to recognize but also to welcome its existence elsewhere than in the *New Testament*. The authority of the golden rule in Christianity was gradually undermined, first internally by the rise of modern philosophy, and then externally by recognition of the preceding formulations by Confucius and his followers. Chronologically, 18th-century philosophical critics like Locke made the golden rule largely (albeit not perfectly or permanently) dissociated from the idea of the natural law.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 9th ed. (1892), s.v. "Confucius," 264.

¹³⁹ Tasker, "Golden Rule," 653-654; Spooner, "Golden Rule," 310-312.

¹⁴⁰ In late 18th century England, Granville Sharp (1735-1813) still recognized the counterparts of the Christian golden rule in Confucianism and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, and used them to argue for the accordance between the Law of Nature and this precept in the *Bible*

Entering the 19th century, consequently, the bond between them came to barely subsist in rhetorical contexts even within Christian discourses of the golden rule. The vacancy of the theoretical foundation was filled instead with strong Christian sectarianism at the time.

The 19th-century discussion of the golden rule was neither monotonous nor unanimous, but its dominant focus shifted from universality and supremacy to discrimination and superiority. Although it is highly exceptional, Whately's novel reinterpretation of its merits and demerits bridged the vast philosophical gap between the 18th-century critics and the 20th-century revisionists. On the other hand, those who took a neutral stance on Confucianism, like Marshman, Medhurst, and Hardwick, avoided directly comparing Confucius' *shu* to the Christian golden rule. Some who had a sympathetic attitude instead separated the ethical aspects of Confucianism and reduced its merits to "the moral doctrines," thus indirectly pointing to its deficiency in comparison to Christianity. Most conspicuously, strong sectarianism drove Collie to characterize Confucius' *shu* as an inferior formulation that is incompatible with "the doctrine of the God of love," while Davis derogatorily compared it with the retributive formulation of *lex talionis*. These sectarian interpretations were immediately adopted by Legge. For them, Thorton's overtly sympathetic evaluation of *shu* and Confucianism was not only exceptional but also as provocative as the iconoclastic view of Bradlaugh.

In response to the previous vacillating views toward the originality of the Confucian golden rule, Legge placed an unprecedented emphasis on the differences between the positive and negative formulations of the golden rule. He thus provided a novel method of distinguishing the Christian golden rule from its Confucian counterpart, in a way that was anticipated to bring an end to the perplexity and division up till then, and, ultimately, to defend the superiority and originality of Christianity.

Nonetheless, Legge's works ignited new theoretical controversies rather than bring an end to them. Especially, the positive-negative distinction in conjunction with the superiority-inferiority dichotomy grew as one of the central issues in 20th-century studies of the golden rule.¹⁴¹ Most recently, however, Gensler has argued, "logically, that both forms are equivalent, and historically, that the Confucian and Jewish traditions don't have a negative

(Sharp, *A Tract on the Law of Nature, and Principles of Action in Man*, 73-75).

¹⁴¹ For a summary of the century-long debate on the differences and superiority between the positive and negative formulations of the golden rule, see Gensler, *Ethics and the Golden Rule*, 163-171.

ethics,” although the difference may be psychological.¹⁴²

Within the field of Confucian studies, Legge's influence remains especially strong. In response to Legge's sectarian assessment, Feng Youlan implicitly intended to verify that ancient Confucianism had independently formulated the full-fledged theory of the golden rule on the grounds of humanity or *ren* 仁. He cited several passages from *Sisu* as the Confucian variants of the golden rule, but did not refer to the term “golden rule” at all. Instead, he used the term “measuring square” (*xiejü* 矩) in the *Daxue* and thus implicitly argued that ancient Confucianism also had a concept equivalent to the golden rule. In addition, taking advantage of Legge's explications, Feng employed the positive-negative distinction as the main criterion for categorizing the Confucian variants. Like Legge, he also included the imperative in the *Lunyu* 12.2 and the measuring square in the *Daxue* in the category of the negative formulation, while including a series of specified prescriptions in the *Lunyu* 6.28 and another set of specified prescriptions in Chapter 13 of the *Zhongyong* in the category of the positive formulation.¹⁴³ Then, he correlated the positive and specified formulations with *zhong* and the negative formulations with *shu*, respectively, and integrated them into “the principle of *ren*”¹⁴⁴ Likewise, Wing-tsit Chan presented an extended list of the positive and negative formulations of the Confucian golden rule.¹⁴⁵ On the contrary, David Nivison and P. J. Ivanhoe focused on revealing the significance of the negative formulation in Confucianism.¹⁴⁶

Besides, as it turned out to be a historically indisputable fact, the ubiquity and universality of the golden rule rather became a pressing ‘problem’ that sectarian Christian scholars had to tackle in order to defend the superiority of their religion. Concurrently, the commercial trade between China and the West rapidly turned into a full-scale commercial and military invasion of China by the Western powers. Specifically, a historically significant question remains unexplored: What does it mean that in the beginning of the 19th century, this intellectual shift with regard to the golden rule coincided exactly with the sharp and constant increase of the English export of opium to China? As Medhurst testified, the opium export was

¹⁴² Gensler, *Ethics and the Golden Rule*, 163 and 168.

¹⁴³ Ames and Hall, *Focusing the Familiar*, 94.

¹⁴⁴ Feng and Bodde, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, 43-44.

¹⁴⁵ Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 27-28.

¹⁴⁶ Nivison, “Golden Rule Arguments in Chinese Moral Philosophy,” 62-63; Ivanhoe, “Reweaving the ‘One Thread’ of the Analects,” 26.

absolutely contradictory to the golden rule, if the English had viewed the Chinese with the lens of brotherhood, equity, and love.

Around the beginning of the 20th-century the main focus of discussions of the golden rule reversed to universality and supremacy. The first World's Parliament of Religions was held in 1893 at Chicago in conjunction with the World's Congress of Religions at the World's Columbian Exposition. The awareness of the universal feature of the golden rule facilitated its organization to a large degree. According to Charles C. Bonney (1831-1903), the president of the 1893 World's Congress of Religions, the parliament not only embraced the diverse branches of Christianity but also claimed to have represented all leading religions including Buddhism, Shintoism, Taoism, and Confucianism.¹⁴⁷ The principal objective of the allegedly all-inclusive gathering was to "to unite all religion against all irreligion; to make the golden rule the basis of this union."¹⁴⁸ Bonney explicated it as follows:

The Parliament of Religions was an exemplification of monism in religions. For it showed that with all differences in the forms of religion, there is, nevertheless, something underlying them all, which constitutes an incorruptible and indestructible bond of brotherhood, which, like a golden cord, binds all the races of men in one grand fraternity of love and service.¹⁴⁹

Here, the golden rule was presented as the principle of "brotherhood" for binding all religions. Nonetheless, by "the golden rule," the parliament referred exclusively to that "of Christ."¹⁵⁰ Pung Kwang Yu (Peng Guangyu 彭光譽: 1844-?), the first secretary of the Chinese Legation in Washington D.C., made a speech at the parliament as the representative of Confucianism. In the speech, he specified Confucius' *shu* as well as its reformulations in the *Zhongyong* as the precept that "puts in a nutshell all the requirements of sincerity, charity, devotion and honor; in other words, of humanity itself."¹⁵¹ Nonetheless, the parliament completely brushed its ubiquitous presence in other religious traditions aside. Instead, it obscured this irrefutable fact by mingling the sectarian motivation with the rhetoric of the natural law: "[T]here is an influx from God into the mind of every man," but "the light

¹⁴⁷ Bonney, "The World's Parliament of Religions," 330 and 335.

¹⁴⁸ Bonney, "The World's Parliament of Religions," 325, 334 and 343.

¹⁴⁹ Bonney, "The World's Parliament of Religions," 323.

¹⁵⁰ Bonney, "The World's Parliament of Religions," 324-325.

¹⁵¹ Hanson, *The World's Congress of Religions*, 481.

of divine revelation is differently received by different minds, and hence arise varieties in the forms of religion.”¹⁵²

A sense of impending crisis of religion as a whole “against irreligion” compelled the organizers of the parliament to embrace all religious traditions, most of which they used to denounce and attack the heathens and heretics. Against this background, the organizers convened the parliament to “unite and strengthen the forces” of “theism,” which was rapidly encroached by the rise of modern, atheistic science and philosophy, which Bonney called “a material philosophy of the universe.”¹⁵³ Although they did not bring it to the fore, it is unquestionable that the growing knowledge of the ubiquity of the golden rule provided them with a foundational rationale for uniting all religions under the motto of brotherhood.

Entering the 20th century, the general line of the golden-rule discussions was redirected more directly toward universality and supremacy. The 1993 Parliament of the World’s Religions, as mentioned in Introduction, declared a global ethics principally on the basis of the golden rule by way of unambiguously and publicly announcing its ubiquity across various religions. Apart from the religious and philosophical fields, cultural anthropologists have recently confirmed that this terse precept, or similar forms, have been formulated and used not only in most world religions but also in primitive cultures like African tribes.¹⁵⁴ More recently, neuroscientists claim to have proven that the golden rule stems from the brain structure common to humankind.¹⁵⁵ On the other hand, the golden rule itself has lost the glory that it enjoyed in the 17th to 19th century as result of its overshadowing by modern ethics and the spread of pluralistic views.

■ Submitted: 2018.10.25 / Reviewed: 2018.10.25-2018.11.16 / Confirmed for publication: 2018.11.16

¹⁵² Bonney, “The World’s Parliament of Religions,” 326.

¹⁵³ Bonney, “The World’s Parliament of Religions,” 330.

¹⁵⁴ Neusner and Bruce, *The Golden Rule*.

¹⁵⁵ For example, see Field, *Altruistically Inclined?*; Pfaff and Wilson, *The Neuroscience of Fair Play*.

REFERENCES

- Ames, Roger T., and David L. Hall. 2001. *Focusing the Familiar: A Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Atterbury, Francis. 1704. *The Rule of Doing as We Would Be Done Unto*. London: printed for Tho. Bennet.
- Atwood, George. 1723. *The Rule of Doing as We Would Be Done Unto*. London: printed for W. and J. Innys.
- Bonney, Charles C. 1895. "The World's Parliament of Religions." *The Monist* 5.3: 321-344.
- Boraston, George. 1684. *The Royal Law: or, The Golden Rule of Justice and Charity*. A sermon at the anniversary meeting of the gentlemen, inhabitants of London, and others, born within the county of Worcester, at St. Lawrence Church, Nov. 29, 1683. London: printed by Walter Kettilby.
- Chan, Wing-tsit. 1963. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Cobbe, Frances Power. 1865. *Studies New and Old of Ethical and Social Subjects*. London: Trübner & Co.
- Collie, David, trans. 1828. *The Chinese Classical Work Commonly Called the Four Books*. With Notes by David Collie. Malacca: Mission Press.
- Davis, John Francis. 1827. "Memoir Concerning the Chinese." *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 1 (January): 1-18.
- _____. 1836. *The Chinese: A General Description of the Empire of China and Its Inhabitants*. Vol. II. London: Charles Knight.
- Edkins, Joseph. 1859. *The Religious Condition of the Chinese*. London; New York: Routledge, Warnes & Routledge.
- Evangelical Alliance. 1862. "The Chinese Classics." *Evangelical Christendom: Its State and Prospects*, vol. 3, 13-19.
- Feng, Youlan, and Derk Bodde. [1948] 1966. *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*. Repr. New York: Free Press.
- Field, Alexander J. 2001. *Altruistically Inclined?: The Behavioral Sciences, Evolutionary Theory, and the Origins of Reciprocity*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Gensler, Harry J. 2013. *Ethics and the Golden Rule*. New York: Routledge.
- Girardot, N. J. 2002. *The Victorian Translation of China: James Legge's Oriental Pilgrimage*. Berkeley; London: University of California Press.
- Goodman, John. 1688. *The Golden Rule, or, The Royal Law of Equity Explained*. London: printed by Samuel Roycroft, for Robert Clavell.
- Gordon, Thomas. 1735. *The Independent Whig; or, A Defence of Primitive Christianity*,

- and of Our Ecclesiastical Establishment, Against the Exorbitant Claims and Encroachments of Fanatical and Disaffected Clergymen*. Vol. 3. The Second Edition (London: printed for J. Peele, 1741; reprinted from 1743 edition).
- Hale, Matthew. 1805. "Of Doing as We Would Be Done Unto." In *The Works, Moral and Religious, of Sir Matthew Hale, Knt*, edited by T. Thirlwall. London: R. Wilks.
- Hanson, J. W. 1894. *The World's Congress of Religions; The Addresses and Papers Delivered before the Parliament, and an Abstract of the Congresses Held in the Art Institute, Chicago. . . August 25 to October 15, 1893*. Chicago: W. B. Conkey Company.
- Hardwick, Charles. 1858. *Christ and Other Masters: An Historical Inquiry Into Some of the Chief Parallelisms and Contrasts Between Christianity and the Religious Systems of the Ancient World*. Part III. Cambridge: Macmillan and Co.
- Hobbes, Thomas, and E. M. Curley. 1994. *Leviathan: With Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668*. Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett.
- Ivanhoe, Philip J. 1990. "Reweaving the 'One Thread' of the Analects." *Philosophy East and West* 40.1: 17-33.
- Jackson, Thomas. 1844. *The Works of Thomas Jackson, D.D.* 12 vols. Vol. 11. Oxford: University Press.
- Kant, Immanuel, and Mary J. Gregor. 1998. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lach, Donald F., and Edwin J. Van Kley. 1993. *Asia in the Making of Europe, Volume III: A Century of Advance*. Book Four: East Asia. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Legge, James. 1861. *The Chinese Classics: With a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena, and Copious Indexes*. Vol. I. Hongkong: At the Authors; London: Trübner & Co.
- _____. 1877. *Confucianism in Relation to Christianity: A Paper Read before the Missionary Conference in Shanghai on May 11th, 1877*. Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh; London: Trübner & Co.
- _____. 1880. *The Religions of China: Confucianism and Tàoism Described and Compared with Christianity*. Rev. ed. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- _____. 1890. "Christianity and Confucianism Compared in Their Teaching of the Whole Duty of Man." In *Non-Christian Religions of the World*, edited by William Muir. New York: Fleming H. Revell Company. First published 1883 by Religious Tract Society (London).
- _____. 1893. *The Chinese Classics*. 2d ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Marshman, Joshua, trans. 1809. *The Works of Confucius: Containing the Original Text, with a Translation*. Vol. I. Serampore, India: Mission Press.
- Martini, Martino. 1658. *Sinicae Historiae Decas Prima*. Monachii: Typis Lucae Straubii.

- Matheson, George. 1882. "Religion of China: Confucianism." In *The Faiths of the World: A Concise History of the Great Religious Systems of the World*, edited by John Caird. Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons.
- Matthias, T. D., and Charles Bradlaugh. 1860. *The Credibility and Morality of the Four Gospels: The Only Authorized and Verbatim Report of the Five Nights' Discussion, at Halifax; Between the Rev. T. D. Matthias, Baptist Minister and Iconoclast*. London: Farrah, Wilks, and Dunbar.
- Mawson, Matthias. 1723. *The Duty of Doing as We Would Be Done Unto*. London: printed for John Wyat.
- Medhurst, Walter Henry. 1838. *China: Its State and Prospects, with Special Reference to the Spread of the Gospel: Containing Allusions to the Antiquity, Extent, Population, Civilization, Literature, and Religion of the Chinese*. Boston: Crocker & Brewster.
- Meynard, Thierry. 2015. *The Jesuit Reading of Confucius: The First Complete Translation of the Lunyu (1687) Published in the West* [in Chinese text with the Latin translation of the Lunyu and its commentaries, and their rendition in modern English, with notes]. Jesuit Studies 3. Leiden; Boston: Brill.
- Neusner, Jacob, and Bruce Chilton, ed. 2008. *The Golden Rule: The Ethics of Reciprocity in World Religions*. London; New York: Continuum.
- Nivison, David. 1996. "Golden Rule Arguments in Chinese Moral Philosophy." In *The Ways of Confucianism: Investigations in Chinese Philosophy*, edited by Bryan W. Van Norden. Chicago and La Salle: Open Court.
- Parliament of the World's Religions. 1993. "The Declaration toward a Global Ethics." London: SCM press.
- Parton, James. 1868. *People's Book of Biography; or, Short Lives of the Most Interesting Persons of All Ages and Countries*. Hartford, CT: A. S. Hale.
- Pfaff, Donald W., and Edward O. Wilson. 2007. *The Neuroscience of Fair Play: Why We (Usually) Follow the Golden Rule*. New York: Dana Press.
- Pufendorf, Samuel. 1672. *De Jure Naturae et Gentium*. Londini Scanorum: Sumtibus Adami Junghans iprimebat Vitus Haberegger.
- _____. 1712. *Le Droit de la Nature et des Gens*. Translated by Jean Barbeyrac. 2nd ed. 2 vols. Vol. 1, Amsterdam: Chez Pierre de Coup.
- _____. 1729. *Of the Law of Nature and Nations*. Translated by Basil Kennett. 4th ed. London: printed by S. Aris.
- _____. 1864. *De Jure Naturae et Gentium*. Editio ultima, auctior multo, & emendatio. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Pufendorf, Samuel, and Johann Nikolaus Hertius. 1744. *De Jure Naturae et Gentium*. 2 vols. Vol. 1, Frankfurt and Leipzig: Ex officina Knochiana.
- Rémusat, Jean Pierre Abel. 1787. *L'Invariable Milieu, Ouvrage Moral De Tsèu-Ssé en Chinois et en Mandchou, avec une Version littérale Latine, une Traduction Française, et de Notes*. Paris: De L'Imprimerie Royale.

- Ricci, Matteo (Li Madou 利瑪竇). 1607. *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 (The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven). Repr. Hangzhou: Yanyitang 燕貽堂.
- Sharp, Granville. 1777. *A Tract on the Law of Nature, and Principles of Action in Man*. Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive. London: printed for B. White and E. and C. Dilly.
- Sharrock, Robert. 1660. *Hypothesis Æthikē: De Officiis Secundum Naturæ Jus*,. . . Oxoniæ: Typis Lichfieldianis.
- Singer, Marcus G. 1963. "The Golden Rule." *Philosophy* (The Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy) 38.146: 293-314.
- Spooner, W. A. 1914. "Golden Rule." In *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, edited by James Hastings, vol. 6, 310-312. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark.
- Stanley, William. 1807. *The Faith and Practice of a Church of England-Man*. London: Churchman's Remembrances.
- Tasker, J. G. 1906. "Golden Rule." In *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, edited by James Hastings, John A. Selbie and John C. Lambert, 653-655. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Thornton, Thomas. 1843. "The Life, Times, and Doctrines of Confucius." *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Miscellany*, 3rd ser., vol. 1: 368-380.
- . 1844. *A History of China, from the Earliest Records to the Treaty with Great Britain in 1842*. 2 vols. Vol. I, London: Wm. H. Allen and Co.
- Vaux, Laurence. 1885. *A Catechisme, or Christian Doctrine*. Reprinted from an edition of 1583, with an introductory memoir of the author by Thomas Graves Law. Manchester: Printed for the Chetham Society.
- Wattles, Jeffrey. 1996. *The Golden Rule*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Whately, Richard. 1857. *Introductory Lessons on Morals, and Christian Evidences*. Cambridge, MA: John Bartlett.

**“我們的救主的黃金律… 四個世紀之前，
幾乎在同一個詞中，已被孔子諄諄教誨了”
——在17-19世紀英國基督教與儒家黃金律的衝突**

李定桓

中文摘要

在17世紀英格蘭，基於什麼理由將新約中的簡潔規則昇格為最高和普遍的道德原則意義上的“黃金律”？儒家對手一怨一的發現—更具體地說，歐洲基督教社會意識到“我們的救主的黃金律…，四個世紀之前，幾乎在同一個詞中，已被孔子諄諄教誨了”這般命題—給他們帶來了什麼樣的影響？他們是如何回應的？

本研究旨在通過探索歐洲（尤其是英格蘭）黃金律的歷史來回答這些問題，從17世紀的最初興起到19世紀英國商業和傳教活動急劇升級時，儒家對手的發現所帶來的挫折、爭議和分歧。本研究表明的是雖然黃金律興起的最初跳板包括其無所不包的普遍性，但其權威性和有效性部分地受到現代哲學的挑戰，部分地從孔子表述先例的認識受到嚴重破壞。因此，進入19世紀討論的主要焦點從自然法理論的普遍性和至上性轉向教派關注的歧視和優越性。此外，本研究也對詹姆斯·萊格（James Legge）的紀念性作品所包含的基督教傳教動機和他對儒學的看法表明了新的亮點。本研究還關於萊格對儒家黃金律的看法如何有助於減輕當時基督教社會的困惑，由此證明了據稱基督教黃金律而克服儒家怨的優越性，以及他通過捍衛基督教的專屬權威來提供一個說明的原委。

關鍵詞：黃金律，怨，普遍性，優越性，基督教，儒學，詹姆斯·萊格（James Legge）