**debt, human/人情(Rén Qíng)**

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| Final Remarks | WENG Naiqun, Gerald Cipriani | 17 Jun 2022 |

WENG Naiqun: First of all, I need to explain that as an important code of Confucian ethics, renqing did not begin to be given the meaning of gift-giving(馈赠) and return（报）during the Qing Dynasty. Perhaps this is due to a misunderstanding caused by my overly brief discussion. In my discussion, I mentioned that there are many descriptions of gift-giving and return in the Qing dynasty's literatures, just to emphasize that the tradition of closely linking renqing and gift-giving has lasted for more than two thousand years. To avoid misunderstandings and to limit the word count of the text, I have removed the above related content from the final text.

In the long historical evolution of the Chinese renqing tradition, it is true that there has never been a notion of the Western Judeo-Christian tradition of gift-giving that the reciprocal interaction must be premised on the principle of freedom of decision. Although the concept of gift in the Judeo-Christian tradition also contains the concept of reciprocity, but the receiver cannot accept it in the name of maintaining social cohesion, to be forced for making repayment. To this day, although the concept of Chinese renqing has undergone many changes under the impact of long historical social and cultural changes, the social pressure based on the Confucian ethics and morality of the "etiquette and exchange" obligation rule, and the closely related concept of face, continue to affect the socio-cultural rules of interpersonal communication. It is only due to the rapid intensification of population mobility, the weakening of the stability of the socio-cultural community, and the enhancement of pluralism that the impact of these social pressures on people's social life is weakening day by day in practice.

Gerald Cipriani: Just as the concept of “debt of gratitude” evolved throughout history and Western languages the concept of 人情 (renqing) underwent transformations in the Chinese speaking world. Interestingly it is during the Qing Dynasty that the meaning of renqing seemingly started to refer to gift-giving ethically endowed with the expectation of “return” or “repayment” (bao报) dictated by the rules of propriety (li 礼). Without falling into the excesses of any dichotomous appraisal, it is perhaps at this point that a comparison between “debt of gratitude” and 人情 can begin to show similarities from a human perspective for we are all under the same Heaven, as well as differences from a cultural perspective due to variations of emphases on ideas of individual right or social obligation. If understood in the sense of mode of relationship that entails 报 and in spite of its formal similarity with the debt of gratitude, the idea and practice of 人情 appears to follow a principle of self-interested reciprocities albeit as condition for social harmony – at least in the traditional sense and unlike the notion of guanxi 关系 that smacks of instrumental reciprocities for mere mutual self-interest in a more contemporary context. The reciprocity is also what makes the notion of “gift” (kuizeng馈赠) comprehended as mode of payment for which return is expected central to understanding 人情. The debt of gratitude in a Western context certainly equally involves a degree of reciprocity insofar as it is a response to what could be tacitly perceived as a gift. But, unlike in the Greco-Roman world which shares much similarities with the traditional Chinese conception of 馈赠 as far as reciprocity and the make-up of society are concerned, the Judeo-Christian tradition – which still colours much of Western cultures – tends to conceive the gift as self-disinterested in intention and this, regardless of its aporiatic dimension and the practical impossibility of any notion of “pure gift” that Mauss highlighted. Disinterestedness, anonymity, and unconditionality become the paradigmatic features of an idealized conception of the gift. In the case of interpersonal relationships, the giver withdraws in the act of giving with no expectation of return as a way of valuing other fellow human beings. As a result, the receiver is never coerced to pay back the giver in the name of social cohesion. This conception of the gift therefore shifts away from the notion of 馈赠 within the context of 人情. In a different way the disinterested gift does not fully apply either to the debt of gratitude, for the latter remains a response within a dynamic of reciprocity. However, far from being explicitly formalised and expected, the return crucially rests on a principle of freedom of decision that guaranties that the pledge for social harmony does not transform into social coercion. Perhaps, then, and bearing in mind the limits imposed by cultural and historical differences when comparing and translating the two terms, what brings together semantically and practically “debt of gratitude” and 人情 is the element of reciprocity that effects the fabric of society; what sets them apart is that the former is expressed as a free move of natural recognition of values where the latter rests on a ritualistic enaction of a constructed model of propriety.