

History of *Ti* 弟 / 悌

William Haines

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
The received view of <i>tì</i>	3
Tales of the creation of the word	6
Odes	10
Introduction	10
The seven Odes	13
<i>Máoshī</i> 252	13
<i>Máoshī</i> 251	18
<i>Máoshī</i> 239	20
<i>Máoshī</i> 219	24
<i>Máoshī</i> 174	25
<i>Máoshī</i> 173	26
<i>Máoshī</i> 105	30
Analects: Confucius	31
What was elder-respect?	31
<i>Analects</i> 14.43	35
<i>Analects</i> 1.6 and 13.20	37
Evidence from other texts	41
Analects: Youzi	47
Introduction	47
Why think children are not in view at <i>Analects</i> 1.2	52
First reason: The <i>Analects</i> does not have children in view.	52
Second reason: <i>xiào</i> 孝	54
Third reason: Youzian philosophy	56
Fourth reason: <i>běn</i> 本	57
Argument 1 for the subfraternity reading: Tradition	59
Argument 2 for the subfraternity reading: What is basic should be small.	63

Argument 1 for the elder-respect reading: Confucius	68
Alignment with Confucius' language	74
Alignment with Confucius' philosophy	76
Confucius on elder-respect as a root	77
Confucius on the moral priority of family	78
Confucius on the family as the model for political order	81
Confucius on being a man's good brother	88
Confucius on being a man's good younger brother	92
Argument 2 for the elder-respect reading: Why <i>xiào</i> 孝 needs a partner	96
Quantity of engagement	96
Quality of contributions	98
Why would the root need elder-respect?	98
Why would the root need subfraternity?	104
Modern views	105
Ancient views	114
Conclusion of Argument 2	127
Argument 3 for the elder-respect reading: Availability	128
Men who cannot practice subfraternity	128
How could the subfraternity reading have begun?	133
Three compromise proposals answered	135
Stories of Semantic Change	143
Changes hypothesized by the proposed view	144
The origin of <i>tì</i>	144
Comparable Chinese words?	148
Comparable English words	150
Accrual of a family role virtue meaning	156
How the English words came to mean a family virtue	156
How <i>tì</i> came to mean a family virtue	160
Changes hypothesized by the received view	163
The origin of <i>tì</i>	163
Conceptual possibilities and English patterns	164
The vanishing extra sign?	164
Nouns with normative import?	165
Verbs for virtues?	167
Adjectives for virtues?	177
Comparable Chinese words?	178
The construction “不__”	179
Combinations of Mirroring Fours	183
The extension of <i>tì</i> to mean elder-respect	192

<i>Zuǒzhuàn</i>	193
<i>Guóyǔ</i>	198
<i>Zhàn guó cè</i>	201
Guodian Bamboo Texts	202
<i>Táng Yú zhī dào</i>	202
<i>Liù dé</i>	206
<i>Yǔcóng 1</i>	207
<i>Mòzǐ</i>	208
<i>Mencius</i>	212
Passages with <i>tì</i>	212
Passages without <i>tì</i>	221
References	234

Introduction¹

By “*tì*” I mean the virtue term(s) currently represented in ancient texts by the graph 弟 or 悌 and familiar as one of two family role virtue terms in classical Chinese. This term is half of the influential account of the root of virtue in what is arguably the most influential and often-quoted brief passage in Chinese philosophy, where I think it has been misunderstood.

I am not sure whether the term should be classified as an adjective or an intransitive verb.² It seems never to take an object, even with *yú* 於, at least in pre-Qin and Han texts. In this it is like the general virtue term *xùn* 孫/遜 but unlike *xiào* 孝.

The received view, as I understand it, is that the primary or literal meaning of *tì* is being a good younger brother toward an older brother or brothers, or some emblematic part of that such as obedience, love, or respect for the older brother(s). For ugly convenience I shall call this virtue “subfraternity,” short for “subfraternal piety.”³ Subfraternity, like filial piety, is *defined* partly or mainly by the who-whom of it, not just by a quality of the attitude or activity. If I say that Smith is subfraternal toward one of her daughters and filial toward the other, I am misusing both terms, no matter what I think Smith is doing.

¹ References to passages in the *Liji* are to section numbers as at ctext.org. The paper is sprinkled with links.

² I believe that for early Chinese the concepts of adjective and verb remain controversial.

³ “Fraternal piety” is not an unknown term in Western languages. Google tells me that the Latin *fraterna pietas* is recorded at least as early as the 300s CE; that *piété fraternelle* was paired with *piété filiale* in nineteenth-century French Catholic thought; and that “fraternal piety” is used by Anglophone scholars today in discussing ancient Roman ideas.

The received view adds that in an extended or figurative sense, *tì* can mean respect for one's elders, perhaps mainly one's family elders; and sometimes respect for superiors.

I shall offer considerations in favor of the following rival proposal about the meanings of the term in pre-Qin texts. The virtue term *tì* first enters our records in seven of the *Odes*, apparently spanning several centuries, where it refers to the general virtue of humble respectfulness (or something like that). After the *Odes* the meaning narrows (though the early sense continues to be recognized in discussions of the *Odes*, at least into the Han). By the time of the *Analects* the word means respect for one's elders as such, a somewhat formalized practice associated especially with neighborhood-level public life and other non-family interactions; though in one *Analects* passage it might carry the earlier sense. After the *Analects* we also see *tì* used in a few places to mean respect for official superiors. By the late 300s BCE, the term has begun to accrue an additional and even narrower meaning: a younger brother's respect (or obedience or love) toward his older brother. This usage eventually comes to predominate.

I argue for this speculation in two ways. First, I trace the arc of meanings we find in the direct textual record, by presenting and discussing all the apparent instances of *tì* in a selection of pre-Qin texts,⁴ in very rough chronological order by text, offering reasons in each case for reading the term in one way or another. Second, as an intermission to that project, I argue that the course of linguistic events that would account for the arc I find is make up of the sort of thing that happens, while the course of events that would account for the origin of the term on the received view is less so.

⁴ The ancient texts I have been able to examine are those at ctext.org (and other editions), those on the former TLS website (now unavailable), and Scott Cook's edition of the Guodian bamboo texts (Cook 2012). I have focused on texts for which we can have some idea of date, and which are available in English translation (a help I need).

If the speculation is defensible, it might be one more clue by which we can try to assign times of origin to texts and passages.

It also has at least one noteworthy implication for the history of philosophy. As I shall argue, it would greatly improve the philosophical quality of a core statement in Confucianism, *Analects* 1.2 on *xiàotì* as the root of virtue. I believe there is widespread scholarly discontent with the idea that subfraternity is filial piety's partner in the root, and there are many good reasons for that discontent. The new historical proposal implies a reading of *xiàotì* at 1.2 as the same *xiào* and *tì* that we find whenever Confucius pairs *xiào* and *tì* in the *Analects*: filial piety in the family and elder-respect in the wider community. Thus the root at 1.2 is no more in the family than out of it. In support of the paper's overall historical thesis, I offer a variety of independent reasons to think the elder-respect reading at 1.2 is more historically plausible than the subfraternity reading, including reasons to think the elder-respect reading makes the statement at 1.2 a better and more interesting statement. The fact that the root has one foot in the family and one foot out is a key to the vision.

The received view of *tì*

I have tried to be attentive to the views of other scholars. But I have not found in print, with regard to any passage, any discussion of the question “In which sense should we understand *tì* in this passage? Subfraternity, elder-respect, or something else?”⁵ Hence my reports of scholars' views on that

⁵ There is some excellent discussion by Ben Hammer with regard to *Analects* 1.2 under my May 16, 2016 blog post on the topic at Warp, Weft, and Way: “[Is *Analects* 1.2 about family?](#)” The present paper is a distant descendant of that post.

question for any passage are based only on their translations, and I can only speculate about their reasons.

Other kinds of scholarly comment on *tì* are few.⁶ But my sense is that among scholars who have a view, the usual view is the following: The original and primary sense of the virtue term *tì*, or its only literal sense, is subfraternity: a man's being a good younger brother to his older brother(s), or some slice of that such as his obeying, respecting, loving or serving his elder brother(s). This is the only sense offered in Axel Schuessler's *ABC Etymological Dictionary of Old Chinese*.⁷ In an extended, secondary sense the word *tì* could mean respect for elders or (in a less common usage) superiors.

The one sustained scholarly discussion I have found is Keith Knapp's article "Ti 悌 (Fraternal)" in the *Encyclopedia of Confucianism*.⁸ Without commenting on the origin of the virtue term, Knapp writes,

⁶ While this term is agreed to be fundamental and ambiguous, and scholarly readings at 1.2 differ, there is no entry on this term in the *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy* (Cua ed. 2002), nor in the 900-page *Illustrated Encyclopedia of Confucianism* (Taylor 2005), nor in *History of Chinese Philosophy Through Its Key Terms* (Y. Wang et al eds. 2020), nor is there any mention of the term in *Keywords in Chinese Culture* (Li & Pines eds. 2020), nor any appearance of the term in *Chinese Philosophy A-Z* (Mou 2009), nor in the lexicon of 21 terms for the *Xiàojīng* in Rosemont & Ames 2009. With perhaps just one exception (C. Huang 1997, p. 29), the term is not discussed in any of the glossaries of key terms one finds appended to English translations of the *Analects* to help with ambiguities and other problems (e.g. the 27 terms discussed in Ames & Rosemont 1998, 49 terms in Chin 2014, 17 terms in Dawson 1993, 13 terms in Eno 2015, 28 terms in Ni 2017, 38 terms in Slingerland 2003, 19 terms in Soothill 1910, and 12 terms in Waley 1938).

Although *tì* is not one of the 92 terms with entries in *A Conceptual Lexicon for Classical Confucian Philosophy* (Ames 2022), there is an entry for *xiàotì* that simply points the reader to the whole entry on *xiào* (pp. 349-373), whose main information on *tì* is to gloss *tì* for *Analects* 1.2 as "fraternal deference" and a few lines later as "deferring appropriately to elders" without acknowledging the difference, and then in effect gloss *xiàotì* as *xiào* 孝 without acknowledging the discard, all on p. 351 (cf. p. 3f. where the same procedure straddles two pages).

⁷ Schuessler 2007, p. 210.

⁸ Knapp 2003, p. 604.

Ti is usually translated as ‘brotherly’ or ‘fraternal’ and is used interchangeably⁹ with the word *di* 弟, which literally means ‘younger brother’.

Looking mainly to a literature that is later and far more elaborate on the topic than the texts we shall consider here, Knapp writes,

What *ti* specifically designates is the respect and deference that a younger brother owes his older brother. ... As for the specific actions that embody this virtue, traditional illustrative stories posit three types. They are (1) yielding wealth or food to one’s brother, (2) taking his place when he is in danger, and (3) after his death, supporting his widow and orphans.

The illustrative list suggests a kind of arm’s-length altruism toward one or a few people for occasions one would hope to avoid altogether (though this “big-moment” focus may be a mere artifact of epitome). The list suggests that the virtue is not about respect, deference, communication or interaction, nor about the sharing of thinking, agency, activities, or experiences. Perhaps what really defined this word as Knapp understands it was not any particular flavor of attitude or conduct, but rather mainly the who-whom of it: a younger brother treating an older brother well in some way, putting him first in some way.

Knapp continues:

Nevertheless, brotherly conduct (*ti*) should not merely be confined to siblings; one should extend¹⁰ it to all of one’s seniors and superiors. ... The *Li ji* provides us with a sense of brotherly (*ti*) behaviour outside the home: ‘Upon the appearance of someone elderly, then carts and pedestrians avoid

⁹ I have not found a passage where we are free to take a term as either *ti* or the noun *di* (younger brother).

¹⁰ By “extend” here Knapp may simply mean give (as in “extend courtesy”), for presumably respect for elders is equally incumbent upon men who have no subfraternity to expand.

his or her path. Along the road, one who has white streaks in his or her hair is not allowed to shoulder his or her burden. ...' (*Li jī*, 25: 39).

Knapp does not say that the word was ambiguous as between subfraternity and elder-respect. If he means to define *tì* as a certain quality of attitude or conduct, the kind of respectful deference a man should give to his older brother (and elders and superiors), then his account would suggest that in passages (like *Analects* 1.2) where the word *tì* is not accompanied by a contextual cue specifying a party to whom that kind of respectful deference is given, it just means exercising that kind of respectful deference in general, being a respectful person.

But Knapp may mean rather that *tì* is a younger brother's respectful devotion to his older brother, so that it implies that the parties are brothers; and that the term was applied metaphorically to relations with elders and superiors. Metaphorical application would not have to imply the kinds of action on the list.

Tales of the creation of the word

The historical theses about the meanings of *tì* can be judged in two ways. One test is to scan the textual record for instances of the apparent use of the term, to see whether the pattern of its meanings over time is as claimed. The bulk of the present paper is given to that project, and the key finding is that apparently in the first half-millennium of its recorded usage (seven Odes and four passages in the *Analects*), *tì* never meant subfraternity, not even approximately.

Of course the textual record is not a simple set of data points. There is often room for argument about what the term meant in a given passage. The

term was not very common, surviving texts are few, and we have only the vaguest knowledge of the dates of many texts and passages. Apparent changes in meaning might instead reflect changes in topics addressed or views held in different eras. Further, the fact that early texts were long in danger of revision can undermine the assumption behind the question, “What did the term originally mean in this passage?” The passage may originally have been a different passage. And in more than one kind of case there might be reasonable disagreement about whether the term appears at all.

Another way of testing the received view and the speculative proposal is to focus on the “events” of semantic change that each view hypothesizes. Each view, the received and the speculative, tends to imply a series of specific semantic derivations and/or shifts in meaning, starting with the origin of *tì* itself. To test the plausibility of these hypotheses about events we can look for parallel derivations or changes involving other words, in Chinese and other languages. And we can look for forces and mechanisms that might have facilitated or opposed each change. Such inquiries are the project of pp. 143-192 below. Here I shall say just a little.

In connection with the received view we might hypothesize that the virtue term *tì* arose when the noun *dì* 弟 (younger brother) was borrowed to make a verb or adjective meaning to be a younger brother well, or some emblematic slice of that practice or disposition. We might seem to find a similar relation between the noun *wáng* 王 for king and the verb *wàng* 王 for serving well as king. Only a king can literally *wàng*, and only a younger brother can literally be *tì*. (The grammatical parallel seems imperfect.)

I shall argue (on pp. 178-192 below) that such an origin for *tì* would have been anomalous. Records suggest that despite significant Ru interest in six main family role virtues, no term for a family position other than *dì* 弟 was ever

established as a family virtue term, either in the natural language or among the makers of philosophical texts.

To suit the speculative proposal about the meanings of *tì* over time, I hypothesize instead that the virtue term *tì* originated as a metaphorical use of the noun *dì* 弟 as an adjective or verb, rather as the noun “vessel” is used as an adjective or verb at *Analects* 2.12 (*jūnzǐ bú qì* 君子不器, commonly translated “The gentleman is not a vessel”). To be *younger-brother-like*, or to act the younger brother, was to be humbly respectful. A possible parallel case is the term *xùn* 遜 (humbly respectful), whose early graph 孫 suggests a similar origin in a family-position metaphor, but which seems never to have meant being a good grandson or descendant.¹¹ Or we might compare the English simile adjectives “fraternal” and “brotherly,” and the related nouns “fraternity” and “brotherhood.” Normally, when any of these four English words is used as a virtue term for loyal care or strong community, it does not suggest that the parties are brothers, and it does not allude to the idea of being an excellent rather than an ordinary brother.¹² The English words are virtue terms *because* they are normally applied to non-brothers. Being brother-like is unremarkable among brothers, but it is a virtue among non-brothers. For similar reasons, when a king is praised as being *mín zhi fùmǔ* 民之父母, it is correct to translate the metaphorical phrase into English as “father and mother to the people,” not as “good father and good mother to the people.”

That the noun *dì* 弟 could also mean “young” or “younger” or perhaps “next below” could have assisted such a metaphorical derivation, as any of these positions might be taken as metaphors for humble respectfulness.

¹¹ For a dissent on this last point see p. 36 n. 41 below.

¹² See e.g. McWilliams 1973, *The Idea of Fraternity in America*, reissued in 2023. I discuss these English words at length on pp. 150-159 below.

The four English words listed above are not family role virtue terms. But among scholars of Confucianism who have wanted English terms for certain family role virtues, each of the four words has often been pressed into service to refer to a family role virtue, especially in translations. By regularity of usage the English words have actually acquired that narrower meaning within that linguistic subcommunity, though the difference in meaning has often escaped notice (so that the subcommunity assumes the special sense of the words in addressing the general reading public). Indeed my abbreviation “subfraternity” embodies such usage.

As I shall argue, there is reason to think that something very similar happened to the word *tì* in the decades around 300 BCE, for similar reasons and by a similar mechanism, though not under the influence of *Analects* 1.2.

Odes

Introduction

The term *tì* does not appear in the *Documents*, nor in the *Changes* proper.

If it appears in the *Odes*, as I maintain it does, it appears only in the compound *kǎitì* 豈弟, in seven Odes. In ancient quotations from these Odes the compound can also appear as 凱弟, 凱悌, or 愷悌. Outside of the *Odes* and quotations from them, the only pre-Qin or Han instances of *kǎitì* in texts at ctext.org are two appearances in the *Jiāoshì Yǐlín*, 46.59 and 56.30. I do not know how cautious we should be about whether the second half of *kǎitì* is the word *tì* with which we are concerned, rather than a different word with a different semantic trajectory.¹³

I am not aware of any reasons offered by scholars in support of any reading of the compound or of either of its components in the context of the compound.

The context of *kǎitì* in the seven Odes shows amply that its *tì* does not mean subfraternity (though Ode 173 suggests that it does allude somehow to the position of younger brother). Arthur Waley takes the compound to mean *happy*, while other scholarly translators take the compound to be also or entirely praise, as can be seen in the following table of translations of *kǎitì*.

¹³ Rune Svarverud says that *tì* in the *Odes* is a different word, meaning “happy” (Svarverud 1998, p. 214f.). Aside from its appearing only in the one compound, the only reason I have come across to think it might not be the same word is that in the *Zuōzhuàn* the term *kǎitì* is always quoted as 愷悌, while the one or two other instances of *tì* in the *Zuōzhuàn* (far from *kǎitì*) are each given as 弟; see pp. 194-197 below. Edward L. Shaughnessy, whose forthcoming translation of the *Odes* I have not seen, has previously translated *kǎitì* in *Máoshī* 239 as “how fraternal” (Shaughnessy 2018, p. 600).

Ode	滕志賢 2006	Legge 1871	Couvreux 1896	Waley 1938	Karlgren 1950
105	欢畅	delighted and complacent	Comble de la joie	all happiness to	joyous and (easy=) pleased
173	快乐平和	delighted and complacent	avec allégresse et cordialité	happy and at peace	joyous and pleased
174	快乐平和	happy and self-possessed	agréable et facile	blessed and happy	joyous and pleasant
219	温和平易	happy and courteous	amiable	blessed	joyous and pleasant
239	和乐平易	easy and self-possessed	gracieux et affable	happiness to	joyous and pleased
251	平和	happy and courteous	aimable et bon	all happiness to	joyous and pleasant
252	平和	happy and courteous	aimable et bon	all happiness to	joyous and pleasant

In rough order of chronology (following Dobson's dating hypothesis, which must be taken with much salt), the compound appears in the Odes listed below.

Major Court Hymns (900s-800s BCE):

- 252 in the recurring *kǎitì jūnzǐ* 豈弟君子, referring to the lord.
 251 in the recurring *kǎitì jūnzǐ* 豈弟君子, referring to the lord.
 239 mostly in the recurring *kǎitì jūnzǐ* 豈弟君子, referring to the lord.

Minor Court Hymns (800s-700s BCE):

- 219 once, in *kǎitì jūnzǐ* 豈弟君子, referring to the lord.
 174 once, in *kǎitì jūnzǐ* 豈弟君子, referring to banqueters.
 173 once, in *kǒng yàn kǎitì* 孔燕豈弟, applied to banqueters.

Airs of the States (700s-600s BCE):

- 105 once, in *Qí zǐ kǎitì* 齊子豈弟, referring to a young woman.

The above list might suggest an arc of semantic change, but perhaps it should only suggest an arc of genre change.

We shall review each of the seven Odes, and I shall quote in full all nine *prima facie* relevant¹⁴ discussions offered by other pre-Qin or Han texts in connection with the *Odes* lines containing *kǎitì*. Each seems to read the compound and especially *tì* within it as meaning something like “humbly respectful,” and perhaps to read *kǎi* within it as involving benevolence, or (in one case) both benevolence and happiness. Such discussions are no proof of original meanings, but I shall argue that the context of *kǎitì* in the *Odes* fits these readings well.

Kǎi 𢇛 (like *kǎi* 凱) is rare in early texts, and scholarship seems to be uncertain about its meaning. Outside of *kǎitì*, *kǎi* 𢇛 appears in two places in the *Odes*, at 173 and 221. At 173 James Legge translates it as “happy,” Arthur Waley “great,” and Bernhard Karlgren “joy.” At 221 Legge has “at ease,” Waley “content,” and Karlgren “joyful.”

But there is a reason internal to the *Odes* to think that *kǎi* in the context of the compound *kǎitì* may mean something like kind or benevolent. In ancient quotations from the *Odes*, the first half of *kǎitì* is often¹⁵ represented by the graph 凱. If *kǎi* 𢇛 and *kǎi* 凱 in the *Odes* may represent the same word, then it is relevant to *kǎitì* that in *Máoshī* 32, the only Ode with the character *kǎi* 凱, the *kǎi* 凱 wind is the warm and nourishing south wind, apparently figuring a mother’s loving care. For *kǎi* 凱 in this Ode, James Legge has “genial.” Arthur Waley and Paul R. Goldin¹⁶ have “gentle.” Bernhard Karlgren has “joyous,” perhaps finding an intentional contrast with the sadness of the mother in the song, whose

¹⁴ I do not include discussions focusing entirely on other aspects of the quoted lines, nor the discussion of 愷悌 that is presented in the *Lüshì Chūnqiū* for the express purpose of derogating the discussant: Knoblock & Riegel 2000 p. 463f, 18/6.4.

¹⁵ Twice in the *Lǐjì*: *Biāoji* and once each in the *Lǐjì*: *Kōngzǐ Xiánjū*, *Lüshì Chūnqiū*, *Shuōyuàn*, and *Báihūtōng*.

¹⁶ Mair, Steinhardt & Goldin eds. 2005, p. 36.

indefatigable care is unappreciated. As for the two places where *kǎi* 豈 appears outside of *kǎitì*, in *Máoshī* 221 I think it must mean “happy” (or “serene”), but in *Máoshī* 173 (an important case for our purposes) I shall present a case for reading it as “benevolent” and “benevolence.”

Perhaps *kǎi* can take both meanings, rather as in Bernhard Karlgren’s view *tì* can mean pleased or pleasant. The term *yì* 懌 in the *Odes* is translated by Legge thrice as meaning happy and twice as “friendly” or “kind.” Flourishing plants that could symbolize both being happy and being beneficial are mentioned in connection with *kǎitì* people in more than one Ode. And other early virtue terms may reflect a supposed connection between benevolence and happiness or success. The term *dé* 德 can mean kindness or strength. For Confucius the term *rén* 仁 at least implies serene contentment, for to be *rén* is to be so deeply attuned to one’s coherent tradition and fellows that one expresses them without inner conflict. And Aristotle defined happiness as virtuous activity.

Let us turn now to the seven Odes and the ancient discussions.

The seven Odes

Máoshī 252

With Legge’s translation:

- | | | |
|---|-------|------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | 有卷者阿、 | Into the recesses of the large mound, |
| | 飄風自南。 | Came the wind whirling from the south. ¹⁷ |
| | 豈弟君子、 | There was [our] <u>happy, courteous</u> sovereign, |

¹⁷ For the opening lines Waley has

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | 來游來歌、
以矢其音。 | Rambling and singing;
And I took occasion to give forth my notes. |
| 2 | 伴奂爾游矣、
優游爾休矣。
豈弟君子、
俾爾彌爾性、
似先公酋矣。 | 'Full of spirits you ramble;
Full of satisfaction you rest.
O <u>happy and courteous</u> sovereign,
May you fulfill your years,
And end them like your ancestors! |
| 3 | 爾土宇畷章、
亦孔之厚矣。
豈弟君子、
俾爾彌爾性、
百神爾主矣。 | 'Your territory is great and glorious,
And perfectly secure.
O <u>happy and courteous</u> sovereign,
May you fulfill your years,
As the host of all the Spirits! |
| 4 | 受命長矣、

弗祿爾康矣。
豈弟君子、
俾爾彌爾性、
純嘏爾常矣。 | 'You have received the appointment long-
acknowledged,
With peace around your happiness and dignity.
O <u>happy and courteous</u> sovereign,
May you fulfill your years,
With pure happiness your constant possession! |
| 5 | 有馮有翼、
有孝有德、
以引以翼。
豈弟君子、
四方為則。 | 'You have helpers and supporters,
Men of filial piety and of virtue,
To lead you on, and act as wings to you,
[So that], O <u>happy and courteous</u> sovereign,
You are a pattern to the four quarters [of the kingdom]. |

Through a bend in the hillside
A gust of wind came from the south
And Karlgren:

There is a curving slope; The whirlwind comes from the south.
Jennings takes the lines to describe the windy hillside on which the lord rambles. Perhaps the wind is meant to illustrate the lord on his progress through the realm. For other views see Ekström 2024, pp. 298-308.

- 6 顒顒卬卬、 'Full of dignity and majesty [are they],
如圭如璋、 Like a jade-mace [in its purity],
令聞令望。 The subject of praise, the contemplation of hope.
豈弟君子、 O happy and courteous sovereign,
四方為綱。 [Through them] the four quarters [of the kingdom] are
guided by you.
- 7 鳳凰于飛、 'The male and female phoenix fly about,
翩翩其羽、 Their wings rustling,
亦集爰止。 While they settle in their proper resting place.
藹藹王多吉士、 Many are your admirable officers, O king,
維君子使、 Ready to be employed by you,
媚于天子。 Loving you, the son of Heaven.
- 8 鳳凰于飛、 'The male and female phoenix fly about,
翩翩其羽、 Their wings rustling,
亦傳于天。 As they soar up to heaven.
藹藹王多吉人、 Many are your admirable officers, O king,
維君子命、 Waiting for your commands,
媚于庶人。 And loving the multitudes of the people.
- 9 鳳凰鳴矣、 'The male and female phoenix give out their notes,
于彼高岡。 On that lofty ridge.
梧桐生矣、 The dryandras grow,
于彼朝陽。 On those eastern slopes.
萋萋萋萋、 They grow luxuriantly;
離離喈喈。 And harmoniously the notes resound.
- 10 君子之車、 'Your carriages, O sovereign,
既庶且多。 Are many, many.
君子之馬、 Your horses, O sovereign,
既閑且馳。 Are well trained and fleet.
矢詩不多、 I have made my few verses,
維以遂歌。 In prolongation of your song.'

The contents of this Ode suggest that it might be an inaugural welcome for a new ruler after mourning has concluded, perhaps to be sung at the stops on a first royal progress around the realm.

If we read *kǎitì* here as “happy,” then the opening stanzas are conceptually simple and uniform; so the song might be a better one if the term means “kind and humble.” The underlying thought would be that the young ruler has no need to be anxious (and hence pushy or aggressive, heaven forbid) about his standing or the security of his position; rather he can trust in the excellence of his people and equipment. The song invites His Serene Highness to identify his satisfaction and standing, and his good influence, with an appreciation of and reliance on those around him.¹⁸

In other language, humble respectfulness is recognized as a virtue in the *Odes*. *Máoshī* 256 says,

溫溫恭人	The mild and the respectful man
維德之基	Possesses the foundation of virtue. ¹⁹

Because *kǎitì jūnzǐ* is a regularly recurring phrase in this and our other two Major Court Hymns, it seems likely to have been a standard epithet for a ruler, so that we might not expect to learn much about its meaning from a close examination of particular odes. It might be a congratulation, O Happy Lord. But a recurring epithet is more likely to be a term of praise, like Your Grace or Your Honor.

¹⁸ Waley and Karlgren have stanzas 5 and 6 praise the ruler rather than the men around him. But instead of seeing *kǎitì jūnzǐ* as praise, Waley sees it as wishing the lord happiness and Karlgren sees it as congratulating him on happiness.

¹⁹ Translation from Legge at ctext.org. Karlgren has “

The two ancient discussions that can suggest an understanding of *kǎitì* in *Máoshī* 252 suggest that in this Ode the compound implies humility or deference.

The discussion in *Xúnzǐ* 22 may intend to address distinctly each half of *kǎitì* in this Ode, in a series of “this and yet that” comments. The description could remind us of Confucius as portrayed in the *Analects*.

有兼聽之明，而無矜奮之容；有兼覆之厚，而無伐德之色。說行則天下正，說不行則白道而冥窮，是聖人之辨說也。《詩》曰：「顒顒卬卬，如珪如璋，令聞令望。豈弟君子，四方為綱。」此之謂也

One kind of person is brilliant enough to listen to all cases, but has no combative or arrogant countenance. He has generosity enough to extend to all sides, but does not make a display of his virtue in his appearance. If his persuasions are successful, then all under Heaven is set right. If his persuasions are not successful, then he makes clear his way but lives in obscurity—such are the persuasions and demonstrations of the sage. The *Odes* says:

Full of refinement and nobility,
Like a jade tablet or scepter is he,
So lovely to hear and lovely to see.
The contented and tranquil gentleman
Serves as a model universally.²⁰

Hánshī wàizhuàn 8.7 may associate *kǎitì* in *Máoshī* 252 with deference to state and family superiors:

可於君，不可於父，孝子弗為也。可於父，不可於君，君子亦弗為也。故君不可奪，親亦不可奪也。《詩》曰：“愷悌君子，四方為則。”

If a thing is approved by his prince but not approved by his father,

²⁰ Translation from Hutton 2014, p.241.

the filial son will not do it. If it is approved by his father but not by his prince, the superior man likewise will not do it. Thus it is not proper to do violence to either one's prince or one's parents. The Ode says,

O happy and courteous superior man,
You are a pattern to the four quarters.²¹

A reason for skepticism about these later discussions as evidence of our term's meaning in the Ode is that each of these late discussions takes the term *jūnzǐ* in the purely moral sense, which is clearly not the sense it bears in the Ode. But because Warring States and Han discussions of lines with *kǎitì* in the *Odes* seem fairly consistently to take the compound to imply humble respectfulness, and because we rarely seem to see *tì* used distinctly in that sense in other contexts in these later periods, it seems unlikely that the discussions are reading their own preferred sense of *tì* into the *Odes*. Either way, the discussions suggest that even into the Han, general humble respectfulness was seen as falling within the range of recognizable meanings of *tì*, at least among the makers and expected audience of texts.

Máoshī 251

Máoshī 251 celebrates a ruler, comparing him to water that is put to humble uses, as it were. Legge translates *kǎitì* here as “happy and courteous.” Here is the Ode with Karlgren's translation.

- | | | |
|---|--------|------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | 洞酌彼行潦、 | Far away we draw water from that running pool; |
| | 挹彼注兹、 | We ladle it there and pour it out here; |
| | 可以饘饎。 | With that one can steam the food; |
| | 豈弟君子、 | The <u>joyous and pleasant</u> lord |

²¹ The text is from (the former) TLS; the translation is from [Hightower 1952](#).

- 民之父母。 Is the father and mother of the people.
- 2 洞酌彼行潦、 Far away we draw water from that running pool;
挹彼注茲、 We ladle it there and pour it out here;
可以濯盥。 With that one can wash the *lei* vessels;
豈弟君子、 The joyous and pleasant lord
民之攸歸。 Is the one to whom the people (go =) turn.
- 3 洞酌彼行潦、 Far away we draw water from that running pool;
挹彼注茲、 We ladle it there and pour it out here;
可以濯漑。 With that one can wash and cleanse;
豈弟君子、 The joyous and pleasant lord
民之攸暨。 Is the one in whom the people find rest.²²

Several early texts quoting the first stanza's concluding couplet focus on the idea of being father and mother to the people rather than on *kǎiti*. But one early discussion, in *Lǐjī: Bǐāoji* 26, addresses separately each part of the compound *kǎiti* and then seems to riff on how its two parts complement one another.

子言之：「君子之所謂仁者其難乎！《詩》云：『豈弟君子，民之父母。』豈以強教之；弟以說安之。樂而毋荒，有禮而親，威莊而安，孝慈而敬。使民有父之尊，有母之親。如此而後可以為民父母矣，非至德其孰能如此乎？
These were the words of the Master - 'Difficult is it to attain to what is called the perfect humanity of the superior man! It is said in the Book of Poetry,

"The happy and courteous prince

Is the father and mother of his people."

Happy, he (yet) vigorously teaches them; courteous, he makes them pleased and restful. With all their happiness, there is no wild extravagance; with all their observance of ceremonial usages, there is the feeling of affection. Notwithstanding his awing gravity, they are restful; notwithstanding his son-like gentleness, they are respectful. Thus he

²² Karlgren 1950, p. 208.

causes them to honour him as their father, and love him as their mother. There must be all this before he is the father and mother of his people. Could any one who was not possessed of perfect virtue be able to accomplish this?²³

If *kǎi* could suggest benevolence, then Legge's "(yet)" is unnecessary. This contrastive "(yet)" has no parallel in the other half of the sentence, and it seems to undermine the *Biāoji* author's general approach to the interpretation of the line.

Máoshī 239

Máoshī 239 praises a lord. Five of the six stanzas include the line *kǎiti jūnzǐ*, and the first stanza has *kǎiti* twice. Here with Legge's translation (Waley and Karlgren speak of the lord in the present tense):

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | 瞻彼旱麓、
榛楛濟濟。
豈弟君子、
于祿豈弟。 | Look at the foot of the Han,
How abundantly grow the hazel and the arrow-thorn!
<u>Easy and self-possessed</u> was our prince,
In his pursuit of dignity [still] <u>easy and self-possessed</u> ! |
| 2 | 瑟彼玉瓚、
黃流在中。
豈弟君子、
福祿攸降。 | Massive is that libation-cup of jade,
With the yellow liquid [sparkling] in it.
<u>Easy and self-possessed</u> was our prince,
The fit recipient of blessing and dignity. |
| 3 | 鳶飛戾天、
魚躍于淵。
豈弟君子、
遐不作人。 | The hawk flies up to heaven;
The fishes leap in the deep.
<u>Easy and self-possessed</u> was our prince,
Did he not exert an influence upon men? |

²³ Text and Legge's translation taken from ctext.org.

- 4 清酒既載、 His clear spirits are in the vessel;
 騂牡既備。 His red bull is ready; -
 以享以祀、 To offer, to sacrifice,
 以介景福。 To increase his bright happiness.
- 5 瑟彼柞棫、 Thick grow the oaks and the yu,
 民所燎矣。 Which the people use for fuel.
 豈弟君子、 Easy and self-possessed was our prince,
 神所勞矣。 Cheered and encouraged by the Spirits.
- 6 莫莫葛藟、 Luxuriant are the dolichos and other creepers,
 施于條枚。 Clinging to the branches and stems,
 豈弟君子、 Easy and self-possessed was our prince,
 求福不回 Seeking for happiness by no crooked ways.

The general picture is that the lord is a man of faith. He pursues his ends by pious and trusting sacrifice. There is humility in faith.

A [reference in the *Zuōzhuan*](#) to stanza 5 seems to read *kǎitì* here as involving deference and humility.

王以上卿之禮饗管仲。管仲辭曰：「臣，賤有司也。有天子之二守國、高在，若節春秋來承王命，何以禮焉？陪臣敢辭。」

王曰：「舅氏！余嘉乃勳！應乃懿德，謂督不忘。往踐乃職，無逆朕命！管仲受下卿之禮而還。」

君子曰：「管氏之世祀也宜哉！讓不忘其上。詩曰：『愷悌君子，神所勞矣。』」

The king wanted to feast Guan Zhong with the ceremonies due to a minister of the highest grade. But Guan Zhong declined them, saying, "I am but an officer of mean condition. There are Guo and Gao, both holding their appointment from the son of Heaven. If they should come in spring or in autumn to receive your majesty's orders, with what ceremonies should they be entertained? A simple servant of my prince, I venture to refuse the honour you propose."

The king said, ‘Messenger of my uncle, I approve your merit. You maintain your excellent virtue, which I never can forget. Go and discharge the duties of your office, and do not disobey my commands.’ Guan Zhong finally accepted the ceremonies of a minister of the lower grade, and returned to Qi.

The superior man will say, “Guan well deserved that his sacrifices should be perpetuated from generation to generation. He was humbly courteous, and did not forget his superiors. As the ode says,

“Our amiable, courteous prince
Was rewarded by the Spirits.”²⁴

A [brief reference in the *Zuōzhuan*](#) to stanza 3 seems to understand its concluding line to mean “From afar he raises true talents” or “Why would he not raise true talents?”²⁵ (as might be suggested by the birds and fish, as ascending or as supported by their media). The occasion was that a ruler had followed the counsel of his advisers. The thought might be that a ruler with proper humility would value the help and not mind being advised and corrected.²⁶

A reference in [Lǐjì: *Biāoji* 23](#) to stanza 6 may reflect an understanding of *kǎiti* as involving courtesy and deference. Here with Legge’s translation:

子曰：「下之事上也，雖有庇民之大德，不敢有君民之心，仁之厚也。是故君子恭儉以求役仁，信讓以求役禮，不自尚其事，不自尊其身，儉於位而寡於欲，讓於賢，卑己尊而人，小心而畏義，求以事君，得之自是，不得自是，以聽天命。

《詩》云：『莫莫葛藟，施于條枚；凱弟君子，求福不回。』其舜、禹、文王、周公之謂與！有君民之大德，有事君之小心。

The Master said, 'In serving (the ruler) his superior, (an officer) from his position has great opportunity to protect the people; but when he does not allow himself to have any thought of acting as the ruler of them, this shows a high degree of humanity. Therefore, the superior man is courteous

²⁴ Legge 1872, p. 159, with updated Romanizations. Cf. Durrant, Li & Schaberg 2016, p. 307.

²⁵ Durrant, Li & Schaberg 2016, p. 770 n. 187, p. 771.

²⁶ (Karlgren 1950 renders the line, “Is he not a man indeed?” (p.191). Waley has “And a portion for his people,” noting that “portion” is a very doubtful reading.)

and economical, seeking to exercise his benevolence, and sincere and humble in order to practise his sense of propriety. He does not himself set a high value on his services; he does not himself assert the honour due to his person. He is not ambitious of (high) position, and is very moderate in his desires. He gives place willingly to men of ability and virtue. He abases himself and gives honour to others. He is careful and in fear of doing what is not right. His desire in all this is to serve his ruler. If he succeed in doing so (and obtaining his ruler's approbation), he feels that he has done right; if he do not so succeed, he still feels that he has done right - prepared to accept the will of Heaven concerning himself.

It is said in the Book of Poetry,

How the creepers close twine
Round the branches and stems!
Self-possession and ease
Robed our prince as with gems.
Happiness increased unsought,
Nor by crooked ways was bought.

Might not this have been said of Shun, Yu, king Wen, or the duke of Zhou,²⁷ who had the great virtues (necessary) to govern the people, and yet were (only) careful to serve their rulers?

Similarly, a reference to stanza 6 in the *Guóyǔ* (周語中 24) associates *kǎiti* with the idea that a prudent ruler will be overtly humble and deferential because people hate to be lorded over. As I am not competent to translate the passage reliably, I present it here without translation.²⁸

襄公曰：「人有言曰：『兵在其頸。』其卻至之謂乎！君子不自稱也，非以讓也，惡其蓋人也。夫人性，陵上者也，不可蓋也。求蓋人，其抑下滋甚，故聖人貴讓。且諺曰：『獸惡其網，民惡其上。』《書》曰：『民可近也，而不可上也。』《詩》曰：『愷悌君子，求福不回。』在禮，敵必三讓，是則聖人知民之不可加也。故王天下者必先諸民，然後庇焉，則能長利。」

²⁷ Two of these four heroes were no man's younger brother.

²⁸ The passage is translated into French at d'Hormon & Mathieu 1985, p. 257, rendering *kǎiti* as "débonnaire et doux."

A reference to stanza 6 in the *Huáinánzǐ: Tàizú 21* may associate the halves of *kǎitì* with *rén* and *yì* respectively, more than with happiness. Here with the translation by Major, Queen, Meyer & Roth:

《詩》曰：「愷悌君子，求福不回。」言以信²⁹義為準繩也。

The Odes states,

“Kind and gracious is the Superior Man,
in seeking prosperity he has no regrets.”

This refers to taking Humaneness and Rightness as his level and his marking cord.³⁰

Máoshī 219

Máoshī 219 urges the speaker’s lord not to heed certain slanderers. Our term appears in the first stanza:

營營青蠅、	They buzz about, the blue flies,
止于樊。	Lighting on the fences.
豈弟君子、	O <u>happy and courteous</u> sovereign,
無信讒言。	Do not believe slanderous speeches.

Here the term *kǎitì* should be or include praise, as it is used to preface a plea.

The Zuōzhuàn reports a use of this ode in a diplomatic exchange. Xuanzi had accused Juzhi of grave misdeeds. Juzhi then offered a different account of the same events, showing himself in a much better light, and concluded with our Ode as we join the story.

²⁹ Major, Queen, Meyer & Roth 2010 (p. 825 n. 75) reads *xìn* 信 here as *rén* 仁, following Lau 1992.

³⁰ Major, Queen, Meyer & Roth 2010, p. 824f., 22.27.

賦青蠅而退。宣子辭焉，使即事於會，成愷悌也。

He then sang the *Qingying* and withdrew. Xuanzi acknowledged his error, made the viscount be present at the business of the meeting, and proved himself "the gentle and harmonious superior" [of that ode].³¹

The narrator says the actions of Xuanzi demonstrate that he is *kǎitì*. Here the compound seems to import moral praise. In particular, the text here associates *kǎitì* with a lack of stubbornness, a willingness to listen to counsel and be corrected.

Máoshī 174

Máoshī 174 describes a banquet, and our term appears in the fourth stanza. With Legge's translation:

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | 湛湛露斯、
匪陽不晞。
厭厭夜飲、
不醉無歸。 | Heavy lies the dew;
Nothing but the sun can dry it.
Happy and long into the night we drink; --
Till all are drunk, there is no retiring. |
| 2 | 湛湛露斯、
在彼豐草。
厭厭夜飲、
在宗載考。 | Heavy lies the dew;
On that luxuriant grass.
Happy and long into the night we drink.
In the honored apartment we complete our carousal. |
| 3 | 湛湛露斯、
在彼杞棘。
顯允君子、
莫不令德。 | Heavy lies the dew;
On those willows and jujube trees.
Distinguished and true are my noble guests, -
Every one of excellent virtue. |

³¹ Legge 1872, p. 468, with updated Romanizations. Cf. Durrant, Li & Schaberg 2016, p. 1011.

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4 | 其桐其椅、
其實離離。
豈弟君子、
莫不令儀。 | From the Tong and the Yi,
Their fruit hangs down.
<u>Happy and self-possessed</u> are my noble guests,
Every one of them of excellent deportment. |
|---|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Here the compound *kǎitì* seems to be associated with the guests' good or ceremonious behavior. The translations of Legge, Waley and Karlgren agree in making plural the *jūnzǐ* to whom the epithet is applied; there is no reference to an individual lord unless we are to understand the speaker in that role (though Waley makes the speaker plural as well).

Máoshī 173

Our term appears in stanza 3. Karlgren's translation makes the Ode primarily about the lord; Waley agrees but reads the song as a wife's celebration of her new husband. My reading is close to [Legge's](#), so I give Karlgren's here.

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | 1 蓼彼蕭斯、
2 零露漙兮。
3 既見君子、
4 我心寫兮。
5 燕笑語兮、
6 是以有譽處兮。 | Tall is that southernwood,
The fallen dew is abundant;
I have seen my lord,
My heart is relieved;
Feasting, we laugh and talk,
And so there is joy and tranquility. |
| 2 | 7 蓼彼蕭斯、
8 零露瀼瀼。
9 既見君子、
10 為龍為光。
11 其德不爽、
12 壽考不忘。 | Tall is that southernwood,
The fallen dew is ample;
I have seen my lord,
He is full of grace and brightness;
His virtue is (not aberrant =) without fault;
May he have high old age and not be forgotten. |

- | | | | |
|---|----|-------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3 | 13 | 蓼彼蕭斯、 | Tall is that southernwood, |
| | 14 | 零露泥泥。 | The fallen dew is soaking; |
| | 15 | 既見君子、 | I have seen my lord, |
| | 16 | 孔燕豈弟。 | Grandly we feast and are <u>joyous and pleased</u> ; |
| | 17 | 宜兄宜弟、 | He (regulates =) sets an example to his brothers |
| | 18 | 令德壽豈。 | May he have good virtue, high age and joy. |
| | | | |
| 4 | 19 | 蓼彼蕭斯、 | Tall is that southernwood, |
| | 20 | 零露濃濃。 | The fallen dew is thick; |
| | 21 | 既見君子、 | I have seen my lord, |
| | 22 | 幃革沖沖。 | His metal-ornamented reins tinkle; |
| | 23 | 和鸞離離、 | the carriage bells and the bit-bells chime |
| | | | harmoniously; |
| | 24 | 萬福攸同。 | He is the one on whom a myriad blessings gather. ³² |

The English lines “Tall is that southernwood / the fallen dew is abundant” might suggest a tall tree shedding dew onto the ground, and hence a lord towering over his many men or raining benefits upon his subjects. But in fact southernwood, or rather Chinese mugwort (for southernwood is not native to China), is a kind of artemisia, a beneficial herb that can grow to half the height of a man. It is gathered in Odes 72 and 207. Hence in 173 the image in each stanza’s first two lines is of many similar beneficial plants bright with dew. In *Máoshī* 174, discussed just above, dewy grass stands for banqueters drinking; here in 173 the dewy artemisia may suggest valued banqueters enjoying abundance.

Perhaps that is why in Legge’s rendering, each stanza’s third line is “Now that I have seen my noble men,”³³ and each stanza’s concluding couplet is about all the men. The lord appears only as the speaker. The concluding reference to

³² Karlgren 1950, p. 117.

³³ The same disagreement between Karlgren and Legge arises for *Máoshī* 172 and *Máoshī* 228.

travel equipment would thus refer to the equipment of those who have traveled to the banqueting place (or of everyone on the journey during which the group is encamped), and the whole piece would be a celebration of fellowship.

The fact that lines 17 and 18 echo the two halves of line 16's *kǎitì* makes these lines important clues about the meanings of the two parts of that compound. Indeed it is evidence that the term *tì* was felt to have something to do with younger brothers. This point in turn suggests that *tì* in the Odes is the same word as the *tì* we meet in later texts, not an unrelated word. But what exactly is happening in lines 17 and 18?

Let us first consider line 17. If Karlgren is right that the subject of lines 17 and 18 is the lord, then it would be strange to take line 17 as referring to literal brothers, older and younger. The lord's relationship with his brothers would seem extraneous to the scene; and a lord might be unlikely to have an older brother, or unlikely to have one he would like mentioned. If the line is about the lord, the idea is presumably his brotherly relationship with his men.

Legge takes lines 17 and 18 to be speaking not of the lord but of the men:

May their relations with their brothers be right!
May they be happy in their excellent virtue to old age!

If these lines are about the men (perhaps including the lord), then here too the idea would seem to be that they are all metaphorical brothers.³⁴

Especially if we think of *tì* as an essentially one-way virtue, the virtue of the younger toward the older and not vice versa, it is a bit puzzling to find the metaphorical younger *and older* brothers of line 17 associated with the *tì* of line

³⁴ Compare the metaphorical drinking brothers in the song reported at Shaughnessy 2023, p. 176.

16. But an association seems to be intended. There is less of a puzzle if we recall that unlike subfraternity or elder-respect, humble respectfulness can be seen as appropriate from each toward all. In that respect, reading *tì* as humble respectfulness named by allusion to the brother relation might harmonize with reading *yíxiōng yídì* 宜兄宜弟 in line 17 as celebrating the warm mutuality of metaphorical brothers, or what in English is called fraternity or brotherhood, especially if the *kǎi* part of the compound captures the benevolence that might be associated more specifically with older brothers.

In line 18, we might think that *kǎi* 豈 must mean “happy,” because it is associated with *shòu* 壽. But in [Máoshī 300](#) we find the line *lìng qī shòu mǔ* 令妻壽母, translated by Legge as “with his admirable wife and aged mother.” Perhaps there was a recurring phrase form 令 A 壽 B, in which A and B are to be comparable items (and perhaps the suggestion is that the adjectives each apply to both items). So if *kǎi* in *kǎitì* is “benevolent,” perhaps in line 18 it can be a virtue noun comparable to *dé* 德: 令德壽豈, good virtue and lasting benevolence. Thus each of the adjectives in *kǎitì* would be echoed by a noun at the ends of lines 17 and 18 respectively, and lines 17 and 18 would be roughly synonymous as together they elaborate line 16’s *kǎitì*. Line 18 would stress the enduring character of their mutual goodwill, their kin-like bond—again, what “brotherhood” normally means in English.

In later texts I have not found any quotation or discussion of this Ode’s line containing *kǎitì*. [Lǐjī: Dàxué 11](#) quotes line 17 in isolation, *yíxiōng yídì* 宜兄宜弟, taking the line to refer to the lord’s correct relations to his own brothers, and proposing that this correctness would teach such correct relating to the whole state. But the discussion there makes no mention of *kǎitì* or *tì*.

Máoshī 105

The last Ode on our list describes a lady traveling by carriage from Qi to Lu on an easy road. Our term appears in the second stanza, which I quote with Legge's translation:

- 2 四驥濟濟、 Her four black horses are beautiful,
 垂轡瀟瀟。 And soft look the reins as they hang.
 魯道有蕩、 The way from Lu is easy and plain,
 齊子豈弟。 And the daughter of Qi is delighted and complacent.

There would be nothing unusual in praising a lady for being kind and humble (sweet and modest, smiling and demure). But the poem hardly forces that interpretation.

In sum, it seems probable that *tì* in the *Odes* means humbly respectful, or something like that, as one should expect from a younger-brother metaphor.

Analects: Confucius

None of the four passages with the term *tì* in the *Analects* presents any obvious obstacle to reading *tì* as humble respectfulness or as respect for one's elders. Each of the four presents an obvious obstacle to reading *tì* as subfraternity, as we shall see.

I shall argue that throughout the *Analects*, the term *tì* means respect for one's elders, unless in one place it means humble respectfulness generally or something in between: humble respectfulness seen as especially befitting the young among men.

Before we consider the particular passages, it may be helpful to explore the nature of elder-respect as it may have been conceived around Confucius' time.

What was elder-respect?

In translating the *Analects*, scholars often render *tì* as “respect for elders.”³⁵ How should we picture that practice? Did it involve more than the occasional courteous accommodation of elderly infirmity on the roads that Knapp mentions (p. 5f. above)?

We might be inclined to assume that *tì* as elder-respect would be mainly respect for *family* elders, and not just because we think of Confucianism as prioritizing the family.

³⁵ For references, see my discussions of the particular passages: *Analects* 1.2, 1.6, 13.20, 14.43; except that for brevity my references for 1.6 are to scholars who do *not* translate the term that way.

In my American society at least, a typical adult's typical day plays out mainly in the context of non-family relating in which it is usually inappropriate to acknowledge age differences between adults. The main context where we feel we owe respect and deference to seniority is our family life and the family life of our friends—and only if the age difference is a matter of decades.

And if we think of *mentioning* respect for one's elders outside of a scholarly context, we may imagine a parent instructing a child. Hence when Knapp mentions kind courtesies toward elderly strangers on the roads, we may find ourselves assuming that such courtesies are merely the publicly visible fringe of a virtue seen as having its main exercise within the family.

But modern life is a poor guide to the interpretation of ancient Chinese texts; and the *Analects* was not concerned with children.³⁶

We might get a glimpse of how elder-respect was understood in early fifth-century Lu from the moments in the *Analects* where norms of respect based explicitly on age are mentioned (even if by being questioned or flouted). To illustrate a view of filial piety, *Analects* 2.8 speaks of serving elders first. At 5.26 Confucius speaks of giving rest to the aged, and is generally taken to mean the aged in general (his parents were long deceased). *Analects* 7.29 says that Confucius' disciples were concerned that a teen was too young to be given an audience; Confucius disagreed. *Analects* 9.10 remarks that Confucius would express formal respect for a stranger's mourning attire *even if* the stranger were younger than he. (The idea might have been that while anyone would bow to

³⁶ On the *Analects*' lack of concern with children, see pp. 52-54 below. Further, I submit, that someone who says to a child, "Respect your elders!", is likely not thinking mainly of respect for the child's parents or older siblings, but rather urging the child to stop being disrespectful to other relatives, or guests, or household employees, or adults encountered in public places. We think a child's relations with adults outside the family should take their greater age very much into account, while a child's (or anyone's) respect for her parents should be based on something more than the parents' being adults, or somewhat older than her.

seniority, Confucius would bow also to mourning.) *Analects* 10.13 says, “When attending the village drinking ceremonies, he would leave only after the elderly people had left.”³⁷ At 11.23, among close non-kin companions, the way Confucius encourages his disciples to speak their minds is by inviting them to disregard the fact that he is slightly older than they. (Here the reference to age is no doubt partly a modest way of alluding to other grounds of respectful restraint, but the remark is illuminating about elder-respect nonetheless.) If 14.43 is about elder-disrespect, it is disrespect for non-kin. At 14.44, Confucius criticizes a precocious young man for taking a place near his elders on a public occasion. In a late book, at 18.7, Zilu refers to proper relations between parents and offspring as the proper relations between old and young (長幼之節).

The text from which Knapp quotes to illustrate *tì* in the sense of elder-respect does not see elder-respect as mainly a family matter, nor as a minor matter; nor does it mention children. The quotation is excerpted from a long and idealized discussion of *tì* as meant in the compound term *xiàotì* 孝弟, in *Lǐjì: Jìyì* 30-34, here with Legge’s translation as at ctext.org, slightly modified.

<p>昔者，有虞氏貴德而尚齒， 夏后氏貴爵而尚齒，殷人貴 富而尚齒，周人貴親而尚 齒。虞夏殷周，天下之盛王 也，未有遺年者。年之貴乎 天下，久矣；次乎事親也。</p>	<p>Anciently, the sovereigns of the line of Yu honoured virtue, and highly esteemed age [齒]; the sovereigns of Xia honoured rank, and highly esteemed age; under Yin they honoured riches, and highly esteemed age; under Zhou, they honoured kinship [親], and highly esteemed age. Yu, Xia, Yin, and Zhou produced the greatest kings that have appeared under Heaven, and there was not one of them who neglected age. For long has honour been paid to years everywhere; to pay it is next to the service of parents [親].</p>
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³⁷ Slingerland 2003, p. 105, where the note says, “Waiting to leave until one’s elders have left is a basic dictate of ritual propriety.”

是故朝廷同爵則尚齒。七十杖於朝，君問則席。八十不俟朝，君問則就之，而弟達乎朝廷矣。

行，肩而不并，不錯則隨。見老者，則車徒辟；斑白者不以其任行乎道路，而弟達乎道路矣。

居鄉以齒，而老窮不遺，強不犯弱，眾不暴寡，而弟達乎州巷矣。

古之道，五十不為甸徒，頒禽隆諸長者，而弟達乎蒐狩矣。

軍旅什伍，同爵則尚齒，而弟達乎軍旅矣。

孝弟發諸朝廷，行乎道路，至乎州巷，放乎蒐狩，修乎軍旅，眾以義死之，而弗敢犯也。

Therefore, at court among parties of the same rank, the highest place was given to the oldest. Men of seventy years carried their staffs at the court. When the ruler questioned one of them, he made him sit on a mat. One of eighty years did not wait out the audience, and when the ruler would question him he went to his house. Thus 弟 was recognized at the court.

A junior walking with one older (than himself), if they were walking shoulder to shoulder, yet it was not on the same line. If he did not keep transversely (a little behind), he followed the other. When they saw an old man, people in carriages or walking got out of his way. Men, where the white were mingling with their black hairs, did not carry burdens on the roads. Thus 弟 was recognized on the public ways.

Residents in the country [鄉] took their places according to their age, and the old and poor were not neglected, nor did the strong come into collision with the weak, or members of a numerous clan do violence to those of a smaller. Thus 弟 was recognized in the country districts and hamlets.

According to the ancient rule, men of fifty years were not required to serve in hunting expeditions; and in the distribution of the game, a larger share was given to the more aged. Thus 弟 was recognized in the arrangements for the hunts.

In the tens and fives of the army and its detachments, where the rank was the same, places were given according to age. Thus 弟 was recognized in the army.

孝弟 were displayed in the court; practiced on the road; reaching to the districts and hamlets; applied in hunting; and cultivated in the army. Everyone would have died for

them under the constraint of righteousness, and not dared to violate them.³⁸

This passage suggests that the practice of elder-respect in the community was sometimes envisioned as a main structuring element of public life, and sometimes seen as a main support of social harmony and security for the weak because it was an even-handed rule. As envisioned here, it is both an individual and a collective practice, like *lǐ* 禮, with which it overlaps. It is respect for those senior to oneself, and especially for those very senior to oneself. The age-orderings described in the passage are sharply independent of personal relationships or kinship relations, and that is part of their point.³⁹

***Analects* 14.43**

A striking contrast between *tì* in the *Odes* and *tì* in later texts is that in the *Odes*, *tì* appears only in the compound *kǎitì* and is never associated with *xiào* 孝. In records from the centuries after the *Odes*, the term *tì* is usually in close association with *xiào*, and *kǎitì* has almost completely disappeared except in quotations from the *Odes*.

³⁸ This passage is a structured whole. Despite what its concluding passage might suggest, it is not accompanied by a similarly organized presentation of filial piety in the various arenas, though there are some bold claims earlier in the *Jiyi* about the non-family effects of filial piety. After this passage, some of its points about elder-respect are presented in greater detail.

³⁹ We might be reminded of Aristotle's proposal that the *just* division of labor among men in an independent town should be by age. Production and defense should belong to all the younger men, governance to all the older men, and the priesthood of the gods to the very oldest. In that way, Aristotle argues, each role is played by the men best suited to it; and the assignment of rule to some men will not seem unfair to any man, because each occupies all the main positions in succession. *Politics*, 1328b22-1329a38.

One of the few post-*Odes* passages with *tì* and without *xiào* is at *Analects* 14.43. The meaning of *tì* in this passage may be roughly the same as in the *Odes*. Here is the passage with Legge's translation.

原壤夷俟。子曰：「幼而不孫弟，長而無述焉，老而不死，是為賊！」以杖叩其脛。

Yuan Rang was squatting on his heels, and so waited the approach of the Master, who said to him, "In youth not humble as befits a junior; in manhood, doing nothing worthy of being handed down; and living on to old age – this is to be a pest." With this he hit him on the shank with his staff.

Most scholars take this Yuan Rang to be a young man whose squatting was seen by Confucius as disrespectful of Confucius. As he was not Confucius' younger brother, the passage does not invite a subfraternity reading of *tì*. Had Confucius been speaking of the man's subfraternity, the narrator might have mentioned that instead of the squatting.

Many scholars⁴⁰ seem to read *tì* here as a rough synonym for *xùn*.⁴¹ Others read it as respect for elders. For a young man, the distinction between being humbly respectful in general and being humbly respectful to elders would have

⁴⁰ Chai & Chai eds. 1965, p. 63; Chin 2014, p. 246; C. Huang 1997, p. 150; H. Kim 2023, p. 118; Lau 1979, p. 131; Legge 1971, p. 293; Soothill 1910, p. 713; Watson 2007, p. 103.

⁴¹ I have not found the compound *xùntì* in any other text, in any of the four possible combinations of graphs. Elsewhere in the *Analects*, *xùn* appears in a remark attributed to Zigong at 17.24, and in remarks attributed to Confucius at 7.36, 14.3, 15.18, and 17.25. Throughout, the reference is pretty clearly not to family relations. E. Bruce and Taeko Brooks read *xùn* at 14.43 and 15.18 (but not elsewhere in the *Analects*) as "lineal," by which they appear to mean the role virtue of a descendant as such (Brooks & Brooks 1998, p. 169). But they offer no reason, other scholars do not share the view, and I have not found another passage where that might be a plausible reading of *xùn*. The combination "lineal and subfraternal" would be interestingly parallel to the compound "filial and subfraternal," but would perhaps bring out the oddity of supplementing a broad kinship virtue with a very narrow one. Perhaps then the compound would suggest "not just lineal, but clannal."

been rather subtle; and the context here appears to be a man's display of lack of respect for one of his elders.

Analects 1.6 and 13.20

Confucius' other two statements with *tì* in the *Analects* present *xiào* and *tì* as partner virtues. Here with Legge's translations:

Analects 1.6

子曰：「弟子入則孝，出則弟，謹而信，汎愛眾，而親仁。行有餘力，則以學文。」
The Master said, "A youth, when at home, should be filial, and abroad, respectful to his elders. He should be earnest and truthful. He should overflow in love to all, and cultivate the friendship of the good. When he has time and opportunity, after the performance of these things, he should employ them in polite studies."

Analects 13.20

子貢問曰：「何如斯可謂之士矣？」

子曰：「行己有恥，使於四方，不辱君命，可謂士矣。」

曰：「敢問其次。」

曰：「宗族稱孝焉，鄉黨稱弟焉。」 ...

Zi Gong asked, saying, "What qualities must a man possess to entitle him to be called an officer?"

The Master said, "He who in his conduct of himself maintains a sense of shame, and when sent to any quarter will not disgrace his prince's commission, deserves to be called an officer."

Zi Gong pursued, "I venture to ask who may be placed in the next lower rank?"

And he was told, "He whom the circle of his relatives pronounce to be filial, whom his fellow villagers and neighbors pronounce to be fraternal." ...

At *Analects* 1.6, some scholars render *tì* simply as “deferential” or “respectful.”⁴² Most other translators render it as *tì* as respect for elders.⁴³

At *Analects* 13.20, *tì* is often read as subfraternity.⁴⁴ Others read it as elder-respect,⁴⁵ presumably because the reference to the village (*xiāngdǎng* 鄉黨) rules out subfraternity by indicating the main arena in which *tì* is expressed, just as does *chū* 出 at 1.6. Honkyung Kim has “respectful.”⁴⁶

D. C. Lau has “respectful young man” at 13.20.⁴⁷ Annping Chin has “fine young men.”⁴⁸ Again, we might expect *tì* to have had such a sense on its way from meaning humble respectfulness to meaning elder-respect, and it could have this sense at 14.43. But against this intermediate reading at 13.20 is the fact that an officer need not be young. Even a middle-aged officer would have occasion to respect his village elders.

⁴² “Deferential” at Ames & Rosemont 1998, p. 72; Rosemont & Ames 2009, p. 24, etc.; Irene Bloom has “respectful” at De Bary & Bloom eds. 1999, p. 45.

⁴³ Among the exceptions, James Ware has “fraternal duty” and omits to translate *chū* 出 (Ware 1955, p. 22). Chichung Huang has “obedient to their elder brothers abroad,” with a note: “‘Abroad’ here implies ‘at school’” (C. Huang 1997, p.48). E. Bruce and Taeko Brooks translate *tì* in this passage as “fraternal” and note an oddity: “Here *both* members of the *rù/chù* 入/出 home/away dichotomy are limited to the family virtues of 1:2, respect for parents and deference to older brothers”; but they do not suggest that there might be a doubt about whether the term here means subfraternity (Brooks & Brooks 1998, p. 146). Ch’u and Winberg Chai have “fraternal” (Chai & Chai eds. 1965, p. 44). In defense of the subfraternity reading at 1.6 one might cite a couplet from *Máoshī* 164.4, though to my knowledge the argument has not been made:

兄弟鬩于牆、 Brothers may quarrel inside the walls,
外禦其務。 But they will oppose insult from without.

⁴⁴ Brooks & Brooks 1998, p. 103 (reading “his county council esteems him as fraternal to them”); Hinton 1998, p. 145; C. Huang 1997, p. 137; Legge 1997, p. 271; Pines 2017, p. 170; Soothill 1910, p. 635; Ware 1955, p. 86; Watson 2007, p. 92.

⁴⁵ Ames & Rosemont 1998, p. 168; Chai & Chai eds. 1965, p. 34; Couvreur 1895, p. 217; Eno 2015, p. 70; Leys 1997, p. 64; Ni 2016, p. 109; Ni 2017, p. 313; Radice 2017, p. 191; Slingerland 2003, p. 148; Waley 1938, p. 176.

⁴⁶ H. Kim 2021, p. 209.

⁴⁷ Lau 1979, p. 121.

⁴⁸ Chin 2014, p. 210.

Whatever kind of village activity is *tì* in 13.20, it must be a common enough part of village life that a man's fellow villagers could be expected to have a view about whether he does it.

What considerations might help us choose between the humble respectfulness reading and the elder-respect reading of *tì* at 1.6 and 13.20?

One reason favoring humble respectfulness as a reading of *tì* at 1.6 and 13.20 is that by presenting *tì* as the partner virtue of *xiào*, these two passages can suggest that Confucius regarded *tì* as an important virtue. The rest of the Confucius material in the *Analects* appears to place a very high value on being humble or unassuming as opposed to anxiously asserting one's standing or pushing impatiently to raise it. One should always be glad to learn and be corrected,⁴⁹ and not be anxious to have one's qualities recognized⁵⁰ nor be upset at not being well paid.⁵¹ One should not be showy above one's status.⁵² One should not be contentious nor try to govern by force or command.⁵³ One should be respectful in demeanor⁵⁴ and frugal,⁵⁵ and focus on one's work.⁵⁶ A good official is humble,⁵⁷ and a good ruler is yielding.⁵⁸

By contrast, aside from our three Confucius passages with *tì*, only one Confucius passage in the *Analects* seems to stress the value of respectful behavior specifically toward one's living elders in the community. This passage

⁴⁹ *Analects* 1.1, 1.8, 1.14, 2.4, 2.17, 3.15, 4.10, 4.17, 5.15, 5.27, 7.2, 7.22, 9.24, 9.25, 11.4, 15.16, 15.30.

⁵⁰ *Analects* 1.1, 1.3, 1.16, 4.14, 4.25, 6.15, 7.1, 8.10, 9.8, 12.20, 14.30, 15.19.

⁵¹ *Analects* 1.15, 6.11, 8.10, 15.2, 15.32.

⁵² *Analects* 3.1, 3.2, 4.22, 5.5, 5.18, 5.25, 10.1, 14.20.

⁵³ *Analects* 2.3, 2.20, 3.7, 4.13, 6.30, 12.18, 12.19, 12.21, 13.1, 13.6, 13.13, 14.33, 14.41, 15.5, 15.21.

⁵⁴ *Analects* 1.10, 5.16, 5.17.

⁵⁵ *Analects* 1.5, 1.10, 3.4.

⁵⁶ *Analects* 1.5, 1.14, 6.22, 12.14, 12.21, 13.19, 15.38.

⁵⁷ *Analects* 11.26.

⁵⁸ *Analects* 4.13, 8.1.

has found a place at 14.44, adjacent to our passage with *xùntì*. Other passages may suggest obliquely that Confucius thought elder-respect or age-ranking could be overdone,⁵⁹ even as they show that elder-respect outside the family was an important part of his cultural milieu.

A second reason favoring humble respectfulness is that it may make sense to associate humble respectfulness more than elder-respect with the community outside the family. Humble respectfulness is simply a character trait; it is how one relates to people. But one's most important relations with elders (if not one's relations with most elders) are within the family. **On the other hand**, if we think of elder-respect as a general attitude or commitment, treating anyone senior to oneself with care and respect *because* they are at least somewhat older, then we may associate it more properly with public life than with family life. For when I act with care and respect toward my parents or other older members of my family, hopefully that is *not* because they are at least somewhat older than I am, as an expression of my policy of respecting seniority across the board. Rather, I should be acting well toward my mother and uncle because she is my mother and he is my uncle, or because she is Mom and he is Uncle Joe. My elder-respect should come to the fore mainly when I am relating to people with whom I do not have a close relationship. The thought here is kin to a popular saying Aristotle reports about justice. "If people are friends, they have no need of justice."⁶⁰ Here "justice" is *dikaiosyne*, the virtue that is a person's ingrained general practice of supporting whatever arrangement or outcome is just (*dikaion*). The thought is that people who love each other treat each other justly and better than justly, even in the absence of a general disposition to treat people justly.

⁵⁹ *Analects* 7.29, 9.10, 9.23, 11.26.

⁶⁰ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1155a27f

A further point in favor of the elder-respect reading as against general humility for *Analects* 1.6 and 13.20, is that the *pairing* of filial piety with respect for elders is arguably more natural than the pairing of filial piety with humble respectfulness, because elder-respect (like subfraternity) has four basic points of similarity to filial piety that humble respectfulness lacks. Elder-respect (1) picks out some people as distinctively meriting one's respectful treatment, and (2) each of them is older than oneself. Hence (3) the general duties can be (and are) more concretely specific than those of humble respectfulness generally, and (4) no two people can properly exercise the virtue toward each other, or not without error of fact.

Evidence from other texts

To find further evidence as to how we should read *tì* at *Analects* 1.6 and 13.20, we can look for other ancient passages with similar tags but more information.

That is, we can look for passages where the **rù/chū** 入/出 trope of 1.6 occurs with *xiào* and *tì* but with more clues about what is meant by *tì* than we find in 1.6, or passages where the *rù/chū* trope occurs with filial piety or something like it for the inside practice, and language other than *tì* for the outside practice.

And since **villages** are associated with *tì* at 13.20, we can look for passages where villages are distinctively associated with humble respectfulness, or with elder-respect—especially if one of these virtues in the village is cast as a partner of filial piety (or something like it) at home.

Let us begin with **villages**. In contrast with filial piety, *Analects* 13.20 associates *tì* specifically with villages and neighborhoods (*xiāngdāng* 鄉黨),

without otherwise telling us how it conceives *tì*. Similarly, the [Lüshìchūnqū 16/8.3](#) quotes the Mohist Yin Wen as associating village life (*jūxiāng* 居鄉) with *tì* as distinct from *xiào*, without otherwise characterizing *tì*.⁶¹ Is this village *tì* elder-respect? Humble respectfulness? Respect for superiors?

I have not found passages in early texts clearly associating villages with humble respectfulness in general (unless at *Analects* 10.1), or respect for superior officers. Annping Chin says that the conversation featuring *tì* at 14.43 takes place in Confucius' home village of Que, but gives no reason.⁶² The adjacent 14.44 discusses a lack of elder-respect by a young man from Que, perhaps adducing Confucius' observation of him on other occasions.

A number of passages in other early texts more distinctly associate villages with elder-respect, using terms other than *tì*.

- [Mencius 2B2](#) picks out villages (*xiāngdǎng* 鄉黨) as the arena where the greatest respect goes to age (*chǐ* 齒).⁶³
- [Xúnzǐ 6](#) picks out scrupulous respect for age difference (*xiū zhǎngyòu zhī yì* 脩長幼之義) as the salient personal virtue for encountering fellow villagers (*yùxiāng* 遇鄉).⁶⁴
- Both [Xúnzǐ 20](#)⁶⁵ and [Lǐjì:Yuèjì 48](#) pick out *xiānglǐ* 鄉里 and *zúzhǎng* 族長 as the contexts for harmony between old and young (*zhǎngshào ... héshùn* 長

⁶¹ 尹文曰：「今有人於此，事親則孝，事君則忠，交友則信，居鄉則悌，有此四行者，可謂士乎？」
Yin Wen continued, "Suppose there was a person who was filial to his parents, loyal in serving his lord, truthful to friends and acquaintances, and respectful to the elders of his community. Should a person who behaves in these four ways be called a "scholar-knight?" (Knoblock & Riegel 2000, p. 401)

⁶² Chin 2014, p. 245.

⁶³ 天下有達尊三：爵一，齒一，德一。朝廷莫如爵，鄉黨莫如齒...

In the kingdom there are three things universally acknowledged to be honourable. Nobility is one of them; age is one of them; virtue is one of them. In courts, nobility holds the first place of the three; in villages, age holds the first place. (Legge)

⁶⁴ Knoblock 1988, p. 227.

⁶⁵ 閨門之內，父子兄弟同聽之，則莫不和親；鄉里族長之中，長少同聽之，則莫不和順

少...和順), citing the home (*guīménzhīnèi* 閨門之內) as the arena for harmony between father and son and between older and younger brothers.

- *Lǐjì: Jīngjiě* 6 lists four arenas of interaction and their distinctive virtues, saying that the household is the arena for good relations between father and son and between brothers, while villages and districts (*xiānglǐ* 鄉里) are the arena for good order between old and young (*zhǎngyòu yǒu xù* 長幼有序).
- *Lǐjì: Jīngjiě* 7 and 8 make that point with specific reference to village drinking ceremonies (cf. *Lǐjì: Shèyì* 1).
- *Lǐjì: Guànyì* 2 says that a newly capped man will pay his respects to his mother and brothers, his ruler and high officers, and the elders of his village (*xiāng xiānshēng* 鄉先生).
- In *two passages in the Guóyǔ*, balanced phrases present respect for seniority (長悌) in villages and districts (*xiānglǐ* 鄉里) as the partner virtue of filial piety toward parents. The *Guānzǐ* has roughly the same pair of passages, but with “長弟” rather than “長悌.”

Let us turn next to **rù/chū**. The whole string in 1.6, “入則孝，出則弟”，whose *tì* most scholars read as elder-respect, appears also in *Mencius* 3B4, which does not claim to be quoting Confucius. The briefer “入孝出弟” appears in *Xúnzǐ* 29, in a context that suggests that this pair is the beginning of moral progress.⁶⁶

When it [music] is performed within the home and father and sons, elder and younger brothers listen to it together, none fail to become harmoniously affectionate. And when it is performed in the village, and old and young people listen to it together, none fail to become harmoniously cooperative. (Hutton 2014, p. 218)

⁶⁶ 入孝出弟，人之小行也

Inside the home to be filial toward one's parents and outside the home to be properly courteous toward one's elders constitute the minimal standard of human conduct.” (Knoblock 1994, p. 251)

Hutton 2014 reads *tì* here as subfraternity (p. 325).

The same brief string appears in the *Huáinánzǐ*⁶⁷ and *Yántiēlùn*.⁶⁸ Another passage in the latter speaks of *guīménzhīnèi* 閨門之內/ *guīménzhīwài* 閨門之外, inside the home and out, as the arenas for *xiào* and *tì* respectively.

But none of these many texts' pairings of *xiào* and *tì* is accompanied by a further signal as to what is meant by this *tì* whose main arena is outside the home or family and whose partner virtue is *xiào*. It is not subfraternity, but what is it? Apparently these texts' authors thought no explanation was needed. Hence the recurrence of the trope strongly suggest that there was a longstanding familiarity with the pairing of *xiào* with some *tì* that was not a family virtue. The fact that we also found many passages pairing family virtues at home with elder-respect in the villages, sometimes called *tì*, suggests that the understood *tì* in these *rù/chū* statements is elder-respect.

Indeed, echoing **both** the *rù/chū* of *Analects* 1.6 and the villages of *Analects* 13.20, each of *Mòzǐ* 9 and *Mòzǐ* 35 uses *rù/chū* to partner filial piety at home with elder-respect (長弟 or 弟長) abroad in the villages and districts.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ 孔子弟子七十，養徒三千人，皆入孝出悌

Confucius's disciples numbered seventy, and they supported three thousand followers. All were filial when inside their households and brotherly when outside their households. (20.22: Major, Queen, Meyer & Roth 2010, p. 818)

⁶⁸ 教之以德，齊之以禮，則民徙義而從善，莫不入孝出悌

Teach them with kindness [德], order them with ritual, and the people will be just and good; each of them filial at home and respectful of elders abroad (), my translation.

⁶⁹ In *Mòzǐ* 9 (尚賢中)

... 入則不慈孝父母，出則不長弟鄉里 ...

...at home not kind or filial to their parents, abroad not respecting age in the village or district....

In *Mòzǐ* 35 (非命上)

...入則孝慈於親戚，出則弟長於鄉里 ...

...at home filial and kind to their parents (or relatives), and abroad respectful of age in the village or district....

...入則不慈孝於親戚，出則不弟長於鄉里 ...

... at home not be filial to their parents (or relatives), and abroad respectful of age in the village or district. ... (My translations)

Similarly, a passage in *Lǐjì: Xiāngyǐnjǐu* 8 uses *rù/chū* to say that honoring elders and nourishing the old (*zūnzhǎng yǎnglǎo* 尊長養老) abroad (i.e. in the village drinking festival) teaches people to be filial and subfraternal (*xiàotì*) at home—and that this matched set of home and village virtues leads to complete education and thus puts the empire at peace.⁷⁰

On the other hand, within the *Analects* but without the terms *xiào* and *tì*, Confucius at 9.16 uses *chū/rù* to contrast serving family elders with serving the leaders of the state.

子曰：「出則事公卿，入則事父兄，喪事不敢不勉，不為酒困，何有於我哉？」

The Master said, “To serve the Duke and his ministers at court, and to serve my *fùxiōng* 父兄 at home, in funerary matters not to presume to give less than my best efforts, and not to be overcome by drink—how could such things give me any trouble at all?”⁷¹

This passage suggests that the *tì* of 1.6 could be respectful deference to official superiors. In later texts that is a possible if uncommon meaning of the term. But it is not an apt reading at 13.20, 14.43, or 1.2. And *chū* may mean something more specific at 9.6 than at 1.6. At 9.6 it can suggest “in my official life,” i.e. at

⁷⁰ 鄉飲酒之禮：六十者坐，五十者立侍，以聽政役，所以明尊長也。六十者三豆，七十者四豆，八十者五豆，九十者六豆，所以明養老也。民知尊長養老，而後乃能入孝弟。民入孝弟，出尊長養老，而後成教，成教而後國可安也。

At the ceremony of drinking in the country districts [鄉], those who were sixty years old sat, and those who were (only fifty) stood, and were in waiting to receive any orders and perform any services - thus illustrating the honour which should be paid to elders. Before those who were sixty, three dishes were placed; before those of seventy, four; before those of eighty, five; before those of ninety, six - thus illustrating how the aged should be cherished and nourished. When the people knew to honour their elders and nourish their aged, then at home they could practise filial piety and fraternal duty. When the people at home were filial and fraternal, and abroad honored elders and nourished the elderly, then their education was complete, and this led to the peace and tranquillity of the state. (based on Legge's translation)

⁷¹ Translation based on Ames & Rosemont 1998, p. 130.

court, while the focus on young men or students (*dìzǐ* 弟子) at 1.6 argues against that reading there.

In sum, there is good reason to read *tì* as elder-respect at *Analects* 1.6 and 13.20. This evidence thereby also lends support to the view that the *tì* that people were expected to recognize as the partner of *xiào* in passages in the *Mencius*, *Xúnzǐ*, *Huáinánzǐ* and *Yántiēlùn* was elder-respect rather than some other non-family *tì*.

Hence it would appear that among the early Ru from Confucius forward, the following two were *often seen as partner virtues*: (1) filial piety or a man's upward family virtues in the home, and (2) elder-respect outside the family and especially in the local community, i.e. in the first and most common kind of face-to-face public life that a man would have participated in, the public life anyone first encounters upon going out. Many of the passages cited above from outside the *Analects* focus on that pairing, and many present the pair as *xiào* and *tì*.

But above we looked only for passages with certain kinds of tag: *rù/chū* or a reference to villages. As we shall see, some pre-Qin passages without these tags regard filial piety (or family virtue) and elder-respect as partner virtues; and some of these further passages suggest that the pair grounds a person's complete virtue, or (like *Lǐjì: Xiāngyǐnjiūyì* 8, quoted above) that the collective practice of the two is sufficient for general peace.

Hence the preponderance of the evidence supports the view that in both places where Confucius pairs *xiào* and *tì*, the *tì* he has in mind is respect for elders in the community—and that this partnering was not an ephemeral accident special to those remarks, but was rather a standard idea in Warring States thought, surviving into the Han.

Analects: Youzi

Introduction

Analects 1.2

有子曰：「其為人也孝弟，而好犯上者，鮮矣；不好犯上，而好作亂者，未之有也。君子務本，本立而道生。孝弟也者，其為仁之本與！」

Youzi said, “One who in his personal life is filial and respectful of elders but likes to go against his superior is rare. One who does not like to go against his superior but likes to stir up trouble has never existed. The *jūnzǐ* works on the trunk. The trunk stands and the way grows. Being filial and respectful of elders is the trunk of one’s practice of *rén*, yes?”

Despite the statement’s surface emphasis on followership, I agree with Shirong Luo and others in supposing that this passage is not just about how to be a good follower. Rather, the intent is to speak of the root of the kind of comprehensive virtue that the early Confucian group thought of as the key to being (among other things) an ideal leader.⁷² (This appears to be what *Mencius* 6B2 has in mind much later, in saying that *xiàotì* is the way to be Yao and Shun.⁷³)

Most scholars take *tì* in the statement at *Analects* 1.2 to refer to subfraternity. This reading has been influential in Confucius scholarship. It puts the root within the family. The passage so read has been associated with the priority of family as such, and with a vision of the root as family virtue in general.

⁷² Luo 2012. See pp. 120-129 below.

⁷³ See pp. 213-215 below.

Like each of the other *Analects* passages with *tì*, *Analects* 1.2 offers no signal that by *tì* it means subfraternity and offers a surface obstacle to that reading. The surface obstacle in 1.2 is the claim that *xiàotì* is the root of virtue. The subfraternity reading would put the root of the way of the *jūnzǐ* out of the reach of many important men. We have also noted other facts that counsel caution about interpreting *tì* in 1.2 as subfraternity. First, although we seem to have other records of the word for centuries before Youzi’s time (the putative time of the statement at 1.2), these records show no use of *tì* to mean subfraternity. Second, in the rest of the *Analects*, as *tì* is repeatedly partnered with filial piety, the audience is expected to recognize *tì* as something other than subfraternity. Third, the brief partnering of filial piety with general elder-respect makes an appearance in a number of texts from the 300s and 200s BCE, and we find the same two virtues partnered in other terms in more texts from that period.

A respectable number of scholars hold that *tì* at 1.2 means elder-respect rather than subfraternity; or at least that is what their translations suggest:

William E. Soothill: “respect for elders”⁷⁴

D. C. Lau: “obedient as a young man”⁷⁵

Simon Leys: “respects his ... elders”⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Soothill 1910, p. 120f. However, Soothill’s note quotes with apparent approval Zhu Xi’s note, “善事兄長為弟.” Similarly, though Bryan Van Norden generally uses Slingerland’s elder-respect translation when quoting *Analects* 1.2, in his translation of Zhu Xi’s *Analects* commentary he translates *tì* in 1.2 by the more general term “respectful”—followed by Zhu Xi’s gloss, “to serve one’s elder siblings and other elders well is being ‘respectful’” (Tiwald & Van Norden eds. 2014, p. 195). I discuss the difference between Zhu Xi’s reading and the simpler “elder-respect” reading on p. 136f. below.

⁷⁵ Lau 1979, p. 59; but on p. 18 he presents *tì* in this way *and* as “the respect due to one’s elder brother” and as being a “good younger brother” without acknowledging the difference.

⁷⁶ Leys 1997, p. 83.

David Hinton:	“honoring ... elders” ⁷⁷
Kim-chong Chong:	“respectful of elders” ⁷⁸
Edward Slingerland:	“respectful of his elders” ⁷⁹
Annping Chin:	“respectful to his elders” ⁸⁰
Myeong-Seok Kim	“respectful [to the elders]” ⁸¹
Charlene Tan:	“respectful to his elders” ⁸²
Robert Eno:	“respectful of his elders” ⁸³
Hongkyung Kim	“compliant with their elders,” “respect for elders” ⁸⁴
Thomas Radice:	“respect for elders” ⁸⁵

Lau’s “obedient as a young man” for *tì* at *Analects* 1.2 is conceptually intermediate between general humble respectfulness and elder-respect. As noted earlier, we might expect to find *tì* used with such a meaning in the course of a transition from its meaning humble respectfulness to its meaning elder-respect.

It is worth keeping in mind that a common feature of filial piety and elder-respect, but not of subfraternity, is that for structural reasons each of these two virtues would have loomed much larger in practice for *young* men than for older

⁷⁷ Hinton 1998, p. 3.

⁷⁸ Chong 1999, pp. 299, 306f.; and Chong 2007, pp. 20, 29, 151 n.4.

⁷⁹ Slingerland 2003, p. 1.

⁸⁰ Chin 2014, p. 2.

⁸¹ M. Kim 2014, p. 273.

⁸² Tan 2014, p. 95

⁸³ Eno 2015, p. 1.

⁸⁴ Kim 2016, p. 38. Kim’s translation of the *Analects* in these volumes renders *tì* in 1.2 as “compliant with their elders” and “respect for elders.” But in Kim’s translation of Dasan’s commentary, on the same page, the picture seems to be that this virtue centers on or is symbolized by subfraternity: “In regard to serving one’s elders, being compliant with them corresponds to a form of humanity wherein an older brother and a younger brother become the two [in the graph ‘仁’]”

⁸⁵ Radice 2017, p. 201.

men. It is true of young men, but not older men, that at home they have living parents and in public life they have nothing but occasions to defer to their elders. By contrast, a man's older brother might easily last for the man's whole life.

Unfortunately for this study, I have found no discussion in print of the interpretive question whether to read *tì* in *Analects* 1.2 as subfraternity or elder-respect or something else, so I cannot report any scholar's reasons for their decision here. An exception perhaps, and the closest thing I have found to an acknowledgment in print that there might be an open question about which way to understand *tì* in *Analects* 1.2 (or any passage), is in Edward Slingerland's note under his translation of 1.2:

Although the literal meaning of the term is something like 'being a good younger brother,' *tì* often refers more generally to showing respect and being obedient to one's elders, and the more general reading will be used throughout [the present translation of the *Analects*] to maintain consistency.⁸⁶

The list of scholars who favor the elder-respect reading at *Analects* 1.2 could suggest that mainstream scholarly opinion has long been divided about whether the passage implies or denies that the root of virtue is in the family. But the absence of discussion of that question suggests otherwise. And at least some of the scholars who render *tì* as elder-respect at *Analects* 1.2 do take the statement to be asserting that family is fundamental. Perhaps it is usually assumed here that elder-respect in this context is primarily respect for family

⁸⁶ Slingerland 2003, p. 1. n. 1. Slingerland may be addressing translation as distinct from interpretation. There is good reason for a translator to render keywords in a uniform and simple way throughout a text, even where the meaning is known to vary.

elders.⁸⁷ But the *Analects* in general and 1.2 in particular do not invite that assumption; and it sits ill with *Analects* 1.6 and 13.20 and many other ancient texts, as we have seen.

The reading I shall defend for *Analects* 1.2 is that *tì* is elder-respect in general, a virtue especially associated with interactions outside the family. General elder-respect would have been most needed and best observable outside the family, because in the family a man's particular relations and relationships gave him other and stronger grounds for love and respect toward most of the people (males at least) who were older.

In what follows I shall present and rebut two arguments for the subfraternity reading at *Analects* 1.2. One argument is from the authority of the tradition, and the other is from charity's preference for simple and powerful explanation and hence a compact and uniform root.

Then I shall present three positive arguments for the elder-respect reading. Argument 1 is that on the elder-respect reading the statement at *Analects* 1.2 aligns better with the language and philosophy of the Confucius material in the *Analects*. Arguments 2 and 3 appeal mainly to interpretive charity, each offering a reason why reading *tì* as elder-respect rather than subfraternity makes the statement express a better theory in ways that would have been appreciated by early Ru.

But before we come to any of those arguments about *tì*, attention to another question about 1.2 may give us a better sense of our options—a better sense of what statement we are choosing to see at 1.2 if we choose a certain reading of *tì*. Is the statement at 1.2 thinking of the *xiàotì* of children?

⁸⁷ Slingerland makes this assumption clear in his comments on *Analects* 1.2 in Slingerland 2003, p. 1f.

Why think children are not in view at *Analects* 1.2

The statement at 1.2 is sometimes assumed to be focusing on childhood preparation for morally excellent adulthood, or at least to be speaking in very significant part of the *xiàotì* of children. But that focus is not explicit in the passage.

I shall offer four reasons in support of what I imagine to be the view of many scholars, that *Analects* 1.2 did not originally have childhood in view.

First reason: The *Analects* does not have children in view.

The first reason to think Youzi was probably not talking about children is that no interest in the habits, practices, training or education of anyone under 15 is displayed in any of the dozen or so remarks attributed to Youzi in pre-Qin texts,⁸⁸ nor any other statement by any speaker in the *Analects*⁸⁹ (except insofar

⁸⁸ One might wonder whether [Lǐjì: Tángōng II: 164](#) is an exception. But there Youzi is not complaining about a child; he is complaining about a mourner acting like a child; compare the parallel clause at [Lǐjì: Tángōng I: 67](#). Also the term *rúzi* 孺子 can simply mean “offspring,” as at [Lǐjì: Nèizé 11](#).

⁸⁹ There are just three passages in the *Analects* where Confucius touches on the parenting of living offspring.

At **13.4** he says that when a country is governed well people will immigrate, bringing their children “strapped to their backs.” People will choose physical and economic hardship for the sake of good government.

At **13.18** he says that a good father will cover up for a son who has committed a crime. The context does not suggest that the age of the person who needs shielding is relevant; and the one son mentioned in the passage is old enough to be boasted of by the ruler.

In a late Book, at **17.21**, Confucius mentions that parents hold their infants during the first years. But he does not suggest that this practice helps shape the child’s character, except as providing *grounds* for much later gratitude. In the case at hand his point is that the son is ungrateful though his parents presumably held him because all parents do that.

Erin Cline has argued that the *Analects* does display at least *some* interest in the education or moral development of young children or teens (Cline 2015, p. 44-47). The evidence offered, aside from 1.2, is in four passages:

At **7.29** Confucius recognizes that a teen has ritually purified himself toward an audience with Confucius. Confucius holds that the act adequately qualifies the youth for an audience with him. Cline infers that Confucius thinks a teen can already have made progress in virtue. **Reply:** The text does not mention virtue as distinct from mentioning the ritual act itself. A reason to think Confucius does not have virtue in mind is that he explicitly disavows confidence in the boy's future conduct. The passage is thus no indication that Confucius thinks the youth may have made progress in his habitual practices or reliable character.

At **9.23** Confucius says one's chance of impressive future achievement is negligible if one has done nothing impressive by age 40 or 50. Cline infers that Confucius thinks the youngest are capable of the quickest progress. **Reply:** His remark does not say that he thinks those who make significant progress make their least progress after 40 or 50. His account of his own progress at *Analects* 2.4 begins with his taking an interest in study at age 15, the second milestone is 15 years later, and the next four are at intervals of 10 years. Even if there is something right about Cline's inference, Confucius' remark is no indication that he drew it. His never discussing children is a powerful counter-indication. Also a parallel argument would conclude that it is as toddlers that we make our quickest progress in trigonometry. Even if we regard learning to count as major progress in that field, we do not infer that such progress in infancy and how to promote it are of interest to any given trigonometry tutor.

At **18.7** an aged recluse formally introduces his sons living with him to Zilu, and Zilu observes that since the old man values the relationship between elder and junior as he should, it is inconsistent of him not to value wider sociopolitical ties and duties. Cline takes this to show "that child-rearing practices were widely agreed upon and valued, even in the midst of political disagreement." **Reply:** First, a man's not abandoning minor children need not suggest his interest in, nor societywide agreement on, practices of childrearing for character. Second, this man's advanced age and the formal introduction suggest that the sons were well into their adulthood when Zilu met them. The man may not have been a recluse when his sons were born (we are not told whether a mother is present, or daughters), and the text does not suggest that his seclusion began before their adulthood. If the man took his sons away from their mother when they were children, his conception of childrearing may have been unrepresentative. Third, the story does not suggest that it was typical of philosophical hermits to live with their sons; it can be taken to suggest the reverse.

At **19.12** in a conversation between two disciples of the deceased Confucius, Zizhang refers to all or some of Zixia's students as "門人小子," which one might take to mean "the children among your disciples." Zixia's reply may speak of the chronological order in which different kinds of thing should be taught, thus suggesting a concern about what kind of education is most appropriate for the beginners among the disciples—at least some of whom are children on the abovementioned reading of "門人小子." **Reply:** On this reading the Confucian Zizhang had child disciples and so had encouraged the practice of children's spending their days (and nights?) away from their parents. In fact "小子" was also a way of addressing one's own disciples familiarly without implying that they were children (e.g. at *Analects* 5.22, 8.3, 11.17, 17.9). But it was not always a vocative term; for example, disciples could refer to themselves in this way (17.19). So Zizhang's long phrase in all likelihood simply meant "your dear disciples," signaling a sense of camaraderie and shared responsibility with Zixia and perhaps a bit of passive-aggressive irony.

as we take general statements as generalizing about every person, including children). In the *Analects* the main concern about the cultivation of virtue is men's practical concern to cultivate their own virtue, in consultation with others.

Today we might be strongly inclined to read *Analects* 1.2 as speaking to the situation of children because we mainly think of children when we think of relations to parents, or relations to siblings, or the foundation of character. We take for granted that childhood experiences are crucial to moral development, and even that family relations in early childhood are at the root of the individual psyche more broadly. We think that these are universal lessons we have learned, not cultural forms localized in time and place, and we may be right.

But even if our vision of the importance of family is relevant to interpreting an ancient text, no reading of *tì* at 1.2 makes the statement suggest or reflect our modern vision about that. Much of our modern vision of how childhood family life shapes the individual psyche is about the formative impact of how a child's family elders treat her, and of how they model for her in relating to each other especially in the spousal relation. *Analects* 1.2 says nothing about the conduct of the *jūnzǐ*'s family elders.

Second reason: *xiào* 孝

The preponderance of the evidence is that Youzi would not have associated *xiào* with childhood; indeed there is reason to think that on his understanding of *xiào*, this virtue is less accessible to children than other virtues are.

No other ancient passage attributed to Youzi discusses *xiào*, so if we seek evidence on what he is likely to have thought about whether *xiào* is a practice for children, we must look to other sources. We have evidence of how the term was understood by three relevant parties: **(A)** old texts Youzi may have studied,

(B) Youzi's contemporaries in general, and **(C)** Confucius and therefore probably Confucius' students (and their students), with whom Youzi associated and who may have been part of the intended audience of the statement at 1.2.

(A) In earlier times, and hence in some old texts that Youzi may have known and revered, *xiào* referred to practices of sacrifice and the political loyalty implied and reinforced by those practices. So understood, *xiào* would have been a practice primarily of adults, not of children.

(B) Regarding contemporary general opinion or usage, Confucius reports in *Analects* 2.7 that most people in his day thought of *xiào* as material support of one's parents. If his report was true, most people in Youzi's day thought of *xiào* as a practice mainly of adults, not of children.

(C) When in the *Analects* Confucius discusses *xiào* as he understands it, most of the actions he mentions are not (or should not be) for children. He speaks of supporting parents (2.7, 2.8), remonstrating with restraint (4.18), refraining from long-distance travel (4.19), serving one's parents as informed by one's study of the *Odes* (17.9), acting with observable life-aspirations during one's father's lifetime (1.11), preserving the way of one's father for three years after his death (1.11, 4.20), continuing to employ one's father's aides after inheriting his office (19.18), and obedience in accord with ritual – specifically, service, mourning, and sacrifice (2.5). Confucius thinks of *xiào* as a desirable quality in a ruler (12.20) and a scholar-official (13.20). These points suggest, though they do not demonstrate, that the practice of *xiào* as Confucius saw it was far less available to children than were other good practices such as honesty, frugality and respectfulness. What the points do demonstrate is this: the fact that a remark by Confucius was about *xiào* does not lean in favor of any surmise that the remark had children in view.

It may be interesting to note in this connection that when [Lǐjì: Nèizé 76-80](#) lays out the practices and training appropriate for males of different ages (first the age when they can eat food, then the age when they can speak, then ages numbered 6, 7, 9, 10, 13, 20, 30, 40, 50, and 70), it introduces *xiàotì* at age 20.

In sum, our records suggest that because of the nature of *xiào*, when Youzi and his audience thought of *xiào* they would be thinking at least primarily of the *xiào* of adults, and likely not thinking of children at all.

Third reason: Youzian philosophy

In each of Youzi's two illustrative examples of the efficacy of *xiàotì* in blocking bad practices (and presumably supporting the opposite good ones), Youzi is speaking of the relation between two *concurrent* practices. For example, he says it is rare for someone to be *xiàotì* and to like going against his superior. His chain of two statistical assertions adds up to the claim that it is rare to be *xiàotì* and to want to stir up disorder in the state. It would seem to follow that the *xiàotì* that is thought to function as the root of the way of the *jūnzǐ* is the *xiàotì* of a *jūnzǐ* as he treads his path.

Granted, Youzi's illustrations of branch practices also suggest progress over time. A person is in a position to obey or disobey a superior before being in a position to stir up serious trouble.⁹⁰ Youzi may have had in mind such a succession of two levels (or possibly three levels, if he envisioned being in a position to be *xiàotì* but not yet in a position to go against a superior in officialdom). But one normally retains the earlier positions as one acquires the later kinds.

⁹⁰ But perhaps a person could have an attitude toward superiors in general before being in a position to be *xiào*.

Analects 1.2 is one of three statements attributed to Youzi in Book 1. These statements say, regarding each of four major good practices, that it is supported by one or two analogous but more modest practices. In each case the practical conclusion Youzi seems to draw is that to carry out the branch practice we must be practicing the root practice—not that we must have practiced it. In 1.2 he says that the *jūnzǐ* is scrupulous about the root. In 1.12 he says that attempting the branch practice (harmony) without regulating it by the root (ritual) will not work. In 1.13 he suggests the same point for two other root-branch pairs, by way of a concluding kinship metaphor.⁹¹

Fourth reason: *běn* 本

One might suppose that a metaphorical *běn* 本 (root, stem, trunk) would be a beginning, and the beginning of moral development must be in childhood. Further, the line “The root is established and the Way grows forth” (本立而道生) suggests a process over time, beginning with *xiàotì* and without the rest of the Way.

But while “beginning” may be one of the things that the term *běn* could suggest in ancient usage, that meaning is a poor fit with the botanical image. The more common metaphorical significance of a *běn* in ancient usage was a basis, source, support, core, or main part (as at *Analects* 3.4). Note that when we speak of the “source” of the Nile, we mean something acting as such today. My “source of income” is not where I earned my first dollar. The clear plant metaphor for a beginning, a first or prior stage, would be the seed or the sprout, not the rootstem.

⁹¹ These readings are defended in Haines 2008.

The conventional English translation of *běn* as “root” rather than “rootstem” could obscure these points. In English, the “roots” of the typical plant are not included in the plant one sees. They are hidden and below the plant one sees, whose growth we think of as upward. Thus they could symbolize an *antecedent cause*.

But the verb “stand” in *Analects* 1.2 (as well as the standard contrast elsewhere between *běn* and branch, *mò* 末) suggests that the image here is more stem or trunk than root.⁹² A stem or trunk is the visible core of the developed plant we see and envision. One never envisions the plant as something distinct from the stem or trunk. The trunk is the center, not something else underneath. What is distinct from the trunk is the branches. The most obvious supporting role of a trunk is visible in the architecture: it is to anchor the branches and make them parts of a living thing, as your trunk supports your arms. Deprived of the trunk, the boughs would fall.

A rootstem is an *ongoing* necessary support or core, like a trunk or a backbone or a main artery. That is how the metaphor of a *běn* is most often understood in early Chinese philosophical applications. Unlike a seed or sprout or the first step of a journey, a *běn* does not cease to exist once it has done an initiating job. And unlike the foundation of a house, the clay for a pot, or the canvas for a painting, a *běn* is not complete before the rest can be realized. Rather, the trunk you see today did not exist in the days of the sapling; only today’s big *běn* could be the *běn* of today’s branches.

⁹² If we are thinking of a tree, the great bulk of the rootstem is the trunk, while the roots are mostly branching. To look at the root of another kind of plant we would yank it out, in which case we might find mainly a single root, extending down like an extension of the stem, especially because the fine roots will be left in the ground. But in principle the *běn* 本/*mò* 末 contrast might make sense below ground as well as above.

Further, the one practical conclusion Youzi draws in 1.2 is that “the *jūnzǐ* works on the *běnn*”—presumably in his own activities today and tomorrow. The *jūnzǐ* is not a time traveler who can work on his own childhood, and Youzi is not making a practical argument too late.

Note also that this statement comes just *before* the comment, “The rootstem stands and the Way grows forth” (本立而道生). This sequence suggests that the “standing” in Youzi’s image is not only or primarily an act of standing up that had to precede the man’s becoming a *jūnzǐ*, but is rather primarily a state of standing there that the man ensures while he is a *jūnzǐ*, as he makes his way. Or if it is a standing up, it is a standing fully up, as in a mature plant, whose branches will by then be well underway.

In sum, the evidence suggests that Youzi’s primary vision of *xiàotì* as a *běnn* was a vision of the ongoing supportive or nourishing role of the *xiàotì* of a man, not the antecedent generative role of the *xiàotì* of a child.

For the above four reasons it would appear that the statement at *Analects* 1.2 has in mind the *xiàotì* of men, not the *xiàotì* of children. Toward deciding whether to read *tì* at 1.2 as subfraternity or as elder-respect, we should assume that the context is a statement about the *xiàotì* of men.

We can proceed now to the two arguments for the subfraternity reading and the three arguments for the elder-respect reading of *tì* at *Analects* 1.2.

Argument 1 for the subfraternity reading: Tradition

The argument. The long Ru tradition regards *Analects* 1.2 as saying that filial piety and subfraternity are the root. (I do not know how far this is true post-

Qin; but let's say it is true post-Qin.) The tradition's reading must carry great authority, to be weighed against any reasons we think of to favor another view.

First Reply. What is most relevant is the pre-Qin tradition. This tradition sometimes exalts filial piety and being a good younger brother. But one can exalt this pair of virtues without thinking they are the root of complete virtue. For there was a more obvious reason to exalt just this pair, and this reason *opposes* exalting the pair as the root of virtue. The social order of state and clan relied especially on two rank relations among men: sons obey fathers and younger brothers obey older brothers. A concern to bolster the social order, hence a concern to bolster men's adherence to these rank relations, would support exalting especially filial piety and subfraternity together; but the same concern would oppose saying or suggesting that excellence for leadership depends on being some man's younger brother.

Further, when filial piety and subfraternity are mentioned together in early texts, commonly they are not exalted as a pair. Rather they are included in a list of four or more virtues, including the downward virtues of parent and older brother. For example, *Shàngshū: Kàng Gào 9* is harsh about “the unfilial and the unbrotherly,” as Legge translates *búxiào bù yǒu* 不孝不友; but the text then explains that it means bad fathers, bad sons, bad older brothers, and bad younger brothers. In the elaboration, *yǒu* 友 is the virtue for older brothers, not younger. Younger brothers should be *gōng* 恭.

Further, as we have noted, the early tradition often paired filial piety with elder-respect, often calling them *xiào* and *tì* or even *xiàotì*, but also often using different language. And the early tradition sometimes suggested that in some sense filial piety and elder-respect are the foundational pair. An example is *Mencius 4A11*, here with Legge's translation:

孟子曰：「道在爾而求諸遠，事在易而求之難。人人親其親、長其長而天下平。」 Mencius said, “The path of duty lies in what is near, and men seek for it in what is remote. The work of duty lies in what is easy, and men seek for it in what is difficult. If each man would love his parents and show the due respect to his elders, the whole land would enjoy tranquillity.”

This passage’s hyperbole, that the Way is filial piety and elder-respect, should probably be read to mean instead that once we make that easy start the rest will then come easily, bit by bit. Roughly the same hyperbolic claim about the same two virtues appears more briefly at [Mencius 6B2](#) (calling them *xiàotì*) and [7A15](#). Granted, the latter passage as well as [4A27](#) arguably see the root as filial piety and subfraternity; but as we shall see, that reading is very problematic and is rejected by some respected scholars.⁹³

Further, when they do speak of the root of virtue, some early speak of *xiào* alone. For example, the Guodian text [Liù dé](#), not long after mentioning *xiào* and *tì* (in some sense) together, says that filial piety is the root (“孝，本也”), presumably of the virtues.⁹⁴ For another example, [Xiàojīng 1](#) includes, adjacent to each other, apparent descendants of Youzi’s statements at *Analects* 1.12⁹⁵ and 1.2, attributing them to a Confucius generally recognized as fictional. Here is the descendant of 1.2, with Legge’s translation:

孝，德之本也，教之所由生也。

⁹³ For discussion see below: at pp. 213ff. for 6B2, 222ff. for 4A27, and 226ff. for 7A15.

⁹⁴ Strip 40; Cook 2012, p. 795.

⁹⁵ Essential to recognizing the descendant of 1.12 as such is recognizing that (as I think) the line “*xiàodà yóuzhī* 小大由之” at 1.12 refers to people great and small following ritual and thereby harmonizing, and does not refer to following ritual in fine detail. This reading is defended in Haines 2008 and under Hagop Sarkissian’s February 6, 2010 blog post “[Translate This!](#)” at Warp, Weft, & Way. At [Liji: Yànyì 4](#), a similar descendant of 1.12 is juxtaposed with a descendant of Youzi’s statement at *Analects* 12.9.

Filial piety is the root of (all) virtue, and (the stem) out of which grows (all moral) teaching.

Elsewhere the *Xiàojīng* refers to the importance of *xiào* and of *tì* in supporting further virtues, and in at least one place where *tì* clearly means subfraternity the suggestion is that *xiào* and *tì* together are not a sufficient root.⁹⁶

In sum, pre-Qin texts display nothing like a consensus that would argue for reading *tì* at *Analects* 1.2 as subfraternity rather than elder-respect.

Second Reply. Misreading of the original intent of the statement could be explained as follows. The pairing of *xiào* and *tì* was likely familiar before the grand root theory arose, and circulated independently of that theory. As a philosophical turn to family and children brought a shift in the meaning of *tì*, the revered pair would have become ambiguous in a way that might have been appealing, as the pair of terms now invited use to mention or exalt the two family virtues basic to clan ranking. And the root theory can look like one more exaltation.

Hence once Youzi was long gone and the subfraternity sense of *tì* was established or predominant, scholars could have thought they found subfraternity mentioned as *tì* in a hallowed text (perhaps a rediscovered one⁹⁷) even in the face of plain obstacles to that reading, as some modern scholars do

⁹⁶ See pp. 116 and 119 below.

⁹⁷ E. Bruce and Taeko Brooks regard the absence of Youzi from most of the *Analects* as evidence that his record in the group was suppressed (Brooks & Brooks 1998, p. 212). Several passages in the *Mencius* and *Lǐjì* may suggest a divide between Youzi and Zengzi (*Mencius* 3A4; *Lǐjì*: *Tángōng* 75, 159). And while a concern for filial piety may have led Zengzi to keep his hands covered to protect them from damage (*Analects* 8.3), we are told that Youzi tried burning his own hand in order to stay awake to study (*Xúnzǐ* 21). But by the time of the *Xiàojīng*, we find a fictional Confucius beginning his instruction of a fictional Zengzi with two teachings that appear to be descendants—significantly altered—of the statements we have as Youzi’s first two contributions to the *Analects*. The descendant of *Analects* 1.2, altered by removing *tì* from the root, is directly associated with the protection of one’s body unto “hair and skin” (Rosemont & Ames 2009, p. 105).

even at *Analects* 1.6 and 13.20.⁹⁸ The early Ru tradition was also willing to read new meanings tendentiously into old texts or sayings despite big plain obstacles. For example, as we noted above, discussions of *Máoshī* 252 in the *Xúnzǐ* and the *Hánshī wàizhuàn* take the term *jūnzǐ* in that Ode to mean moral exemplar. The break in the tradition marked by the Qin Dynasty would have facilitated the reading of new meanings into old texts, but innocent or intentional reinterpretation of the statement we find at *Analects* 1.2 might not have needed such a break.

Argument 2 for the subfraternity reading: What is basic should be small.

The argument for the subfraternity reading. As compared to the elder-respect reading at *Analects* 1.2, interpretive charity favors the subfraternity reading, because this reading makes Youzi's root a more elegant (simple and powerful) explanation of virtue.

Today's ten-year-old tree can be explained by the seed it grew from, and can be explained in a similar way by the one-year-old sapling that came from that seed, and by the nine-year-old tree that it was last year (at least given ideal growing conditions). But the seed is the more simple and powerful explanation, as it is smaller and explains the other explanations.

In the same way, one might suppose, a small root like filial piety and subfraternity is a better explanation of complete virtue than is filial piety and elder-respect. After all, filial piety and subfraternity might explain elder-respect. The psychological idea behind *Analects* 1.2 is that a way of relating to *some*

⁹⁸ See above, p. 36 n. 43 and n. 44.

people supports relating in the same way to *more* people, by extension, so that the most basic explanation, the real root, involves the fewest key people. Indeed, the subfraternity reading of *tì* at 1.2 makes the root not only smaller in terms of the number of people and quantity of activity involved, but also *conceptually* more compact, as subfraternity is *more similar* to filial piety than elder-respect is. The root without elder-respect is the more elegant explanation, using less to explain more.

First Reply: dissimilarity. Insofar as interpretive charity wants to maximize explanatory elegance, and charity is presented with the brute fact that the root has been given two halves, charity will think better of the author and the text if the halves are *relevantly dissimilar*—or at least, not so similar that we would expect one half to be the root of the other. For if one half were the root of the other, then a concern for simplicity and power would have argued for dropping that other from the account of the root of virtue.

On the subfraternity reading, the halves of the root can be seen as relevantly dissimilar. For example, the picture might be that filial piety is *respect* for parents and subfraternity is *love* for older brothers—or perhaps just as easily vice versa. Thus one could think that each half of the root grounds half of complete virtue, and neither grounds the other.

On the elder-respect reading, the halves of the root are relevantly dissimilar. Filial piety draws us deeper into the family and its personal affections and bonds, while elder-respect draws us deeper into the wider community and its traditions. Each half is important and neither adequately grounds the other.

Second reply: conceptual unity. No matter which way we understand *tì* in the account of the root at *Analects* 1.2, there is a simple concept that pretty much picks out just the two partner virtues mentioned at 1.2. In each case, as

it happens, the simple concept is close kin to one of the two parts of the root it assembles.

A simple concept that would pretty much pick out filial piety and subfraternity is ***devotion to male family elders*** (if we do not think of mothers in connection with *xiào*) or the simpler ***devotion to family elders*** (if, more comprehensively, only males are on our radar at all, perhaps because our concern is the lineage rather than the family). This simple idea perhaps amounts to *xiào* on a broad reading of that term, as distinct from the narrower virtue *filial piety* that is just one part of the root. Or if we want the unifying concept to be silent on the *quality* of the relating as it picks out just the two relations, because the rooting power of filial piety and subfraternity is supposed to depend importantly on *qualitatively* dissimilar contributions from each (e.g. one of them is love and the other is obedience), then a more abstract concept might suffice to select the two virtues: ***putting closest lineage elders first***.

A simple concept that would come close to picking out filial piety and elder-respect is ***putting elders first*** (in the ways that are usually salient inside and outside the family).⁹⁹ This concept accommodates the relevant dissimilarity mentioned in the first reply.

Third reply: practical aptness. For interpreting *Analects* 1.2, the question whether a big or small root makes for a more elegant theoretical explanation is less relevant than the question whether a big or small root better suits the apparent purpose of the passage. The apparent purpose is a practical

⁹⁹ This unifying analysis may suggest that the filial half of the root should be taken in a broad sense to involve relating to family elders generally, not just parents or progenitors; but we would need stronger grounds for a view on that fine point. In seeking unifying concepts, we are seeking nothing explicit in the text; we have no reason to think the author articulated any unifying concept as such.

argument, closely analogous to the arguments of Youzi's other statements in Book 1.

When the *Mencius* is talking about extension, often the immediate practical concern of the discussion is better served by a small root than a big one. For often the purpose is to encourage someone to aim at great virtue by showing that it is accessible, or to encourage a king to have faith that the people will respond well to good treatment. Such purposes want to find beginnings that are small, because what is smaller is easier, and because what is small and easy is more plausibly thought to be universal. Such purposes are best served by roots that are easy and universal.

But the practical purpose of the Youzi statements in Book 1 is quite different. These three complex statements present four root-branch pairs¹⁰⁰ and say in effect, "Beware of skimping on the root to serve the branch; it won't work." The Youzi statements do not say, "The root supports the branch and the root is present, so the branch is within reach." Rather they say, "The root supports the branch, so if you want to be doing the branch, you had better be doing the root." Thus, for the practical purpose of these three statements, the roots should be practices worth taking time to argue for, in order to persuade morally ambitious men to be scrupulous about them. Roots that one could expect almost anyone to have would make any such argument pointless.

Fourth reply: not "same treatment, more people." Granted, on either of our two candidate readings of Youzi's root, the claim that its branches include disliking to disobey and disliking to make rebellion suggests a simple vision of the root-branch relation. As compared to the root, the branch gives the same treatment to *more people*. And granted, on this kind of picture, choosing one or

¹⁰⁰ 1.2 says *xiàotì* supports *rén*. 1.12 says a community's ritual practice supports its harmony. 1.13 says trustworthiness supports *yì* and respectfulness supports ritual propriety.

a few very close people to regard as the starter-recipients of good treatment is a very natural idea to try out (even if the *Mencius* is sometimes willing to point instead to a total stranger, be it an infant or a bull).

But it is worth noting that “same treatment, more people” is not the vision of the root-branch relation that we find in Youzi’s other contributions to Book 1. They are all more interesting than that. **At 1.12** he says that communal ritual supports communal harmony. Here the idea is not that something done to a few is later done to more or all. Rather, the idea is that ritual is a *symbolic* enactment of social harmony, of “small and great” doing something together. The parties to ritual are the same as the parties to the harmony it supports, and the operative similarity is *portrayal*. What is mimed symbolically at the festival or in the gestures of a courteous greeting is thereby better done in reality, among the same people, every day of the week. **At 1.13** he says that the practice of keeping one’s word supports rightness in general (*yi* 義). Granted, one might suppose that keeping one’s word does not involve many people; one need only keep one’s word to the people to whom one gives it. But it is in another sense a practice toward an indefinitely large number of people: everyone to whom one might speak, and everyone who might learn what one has said. If the intended audience of the statement at 1.13 was men in or aspiring to public life, then keeping their word would be a way of relating to very many people. Further, the idea in the passage cannot be that rightness is being honest to many people. Rather the idea would seem to be that a trustworthy person, in deciding on a saying, is deciding on behalf of their own future even should their future bring unexpected circumstances; and analogously a moral person, in deciding on a saying or principle, is deciding as though on behalf of people in all circumstances. The habits of imaginative thinking are similar. **Also at 1.13**, Youzi says humble respectfulness (*gong* 恭) supports ritual propriety. Respectfulness is in one sense

a practice toward an indefinitely large number of people, but only because it is a way of relating to anybody one comes into direct contact with. Here the focus is not on a difference between the people toward whom one bears oneself respectfully and the people toward (or in company with) whom one follows ritual propriety; rather the comparison is between vividly appreciable respectfulness and a more developed practice that enacts and supports respect more fully but in ways that are less naturally obvious.¹⁰¹

Thus on either reading of *tì*, the root at 1.2 need not be thought of as operating in a simple more-of-the-same kind of way.

Argument 1 for the elder-respect reading: Confucius

Toward answering a hard interpretive question about any statement attributed to an author, where evidence within the statement does not easily settle the matter, one should seek aid from the other statements attributed to the same author—in this case, the many other statements attributed to Youzi in pre-Qin texts. Unfortunately, none of those statements uses the word *tì* or addresses subfraternity or elder-respect, though Youzi does mention general demure respectfulness (*gōng* 恭) at *Analects* 1.13, holding in effect that it is the resembling root of ritual propriety (*lǐ* 禮).

Apart from early materials directly attributed to Youzi, the rest of the *Analects* is presumably closest to whatever milieu generated and initially preserved the statement at 1.2, so that the *Analects* in general, and especially the Confucius material in the first 15 Books, is our *prima facie* least bad source

¹⁰¹ These readings are defended in Haines 2008.

of clues both about the original meanings of words at 1.2 and about what philosophical views are likely to have informed the composition of that passage. Statements attributed to other parties in the *Analects* have a lesser likelihood of reflecting the background of the statement (though including them would make no difference to the argument here).

The present section argues that as against the subfraternity reading, the elder-respect reading aligns the statement at 1.2 far better with the Confucius material in the *Analects*, both in language and in philosophy.

One could give too much weight to such questions of alignment, toward interpreting *Analects* 1.2. A familiar project is to interpret the statements associated with Youzi and Confucius in the *Analects* on the hypothesis or conceit that these materials constitute the main authentic *oeuvre* of two close associates in general agreement, or of one imaginary author. Given such a hypothesis, if two rival interpretations of a passage in that material are equally plausible so far as can be seen from evidence within the passage, but one of the two interpretations makes the passage align far better than the other in philosophy and language with the rest of the work of the two associates (or one author), then the interpreter must prefer that far-better-aligned interpretation.

But the present paper's interpretive inquiry into *Analects* material is not rigid in that way, because the aim here is genuinely historical.

Still, interpreting the Confucius and Youzi materials on the assumption that they are the largely authentic work of two close associates in general agreement is a valuable or even an essential part of *historical* investigation, at least at a certain stage and insofar as we think there is a chance that the materials might be mostly roughly authentic.

For, first, it makes sense to give significant respect to the possibility of authenticity so long as we think authenticity is at least possible. For if the

materials collected in Books 1-15 (and 19) are mostly roughly authentic, then taken together they might put us in significant contact with a great mind or two.

And, second, a key part of investigating *whether* the materials are in fact the authentic work of two close associates in general agreement is investigating what the materials would say on that assumption, and whether the materials bear that kind of reading better than other kinds. This latter question requires that we also try interpreting the materials in other ways.

The naïve view, trusting the attributions in the text, is that the Youzi statements in Book 1 were composed somewhat later than the Confucius materials, because Youzi was younger and because the honorific used there for Youzi suggests that these statements came from a time when he was a master.

Thus the text itself suggests that (a) in reading e.g. *Analects* 1.6¹⁰² and 2.21¹⁰³ and other Confucius remarks mentioning *xiào* we should not assume that Confucius had Youzi's statement at 1.2 in the front of his mind, while (b) we should read 1.2 as though Youzi and his audience shared an awareness of the ideas and linguistic usage displayed in the Confucius materials. At least we should check to see what sort of interpretation the latter approach might support.

¹⁰² When *Analects* 1.6 is discussed or paraphrased in the recent scholarly literature, the purpose is often, perhaps usually, to offer it (without interpretive argument) as evidence that Confucius thought **virtue for public life grows from** (or is an extension of, or requires prior) **filial piety** (or family virtue, or affection for blood kin); e.g. at Ames 2011, p. 162; Ames 2016, p. 31; Ames 2018, p. 28; A. K. L. Chan 2004, p. 156; ; J. Chan 2007, p. 65; Cline 2012, p. 136f; Cline 2015, p. 16; Flanagan 2008, pp. 477, 485; Y. Huang 2014, pp. 136, 150; Y. Huang 2015, p. 169; Lai 2016, p. 111; Y. Li 2012, p. 40; Littlejohn 2016, pp. 113, 128; Liu 2003, p. 236; Ni 2017, p. 83; Sarkissian 2010, p. 727; Sarkissian 2020, p. 196; Q. Wang 2002, p. 244; R. Wang 2003, p. 128; Yu 2006, p. 344; Yu 2007, pp. 107, 125.

But the remark at 1.6 does not articulate such a view or invite such a reading. It lists three pairs of good practices (or two pairs flanking a single practice) and then study. Nothing is said about causal or chronological order. The order of the list is not “similar treatment of more and more people.” *Xiào* and *tì* here cannot echo the *xiàotì* of 1.2 unless *tì* at 1.2 is elder-respect. Finally, four points argue against reading the order of the list even as a chronological order. **(1) Between the six and study**, there is arguably a suggestion that study should come only in the latter part of each day, as it were; but no suggestion that doing it in the morning would be difficult. Students (called 弟子 also at 6.3, 7.32, 9.2 and 11.7) can be prone to overemphasize book learning as against humble morality, as Confucius was made painfully aware in Chen (see [my Dec. 12, 2018 post “Analects 5.22” at Warp, Weft & Way](#)). **(2) Among the three pairs** of practices, we may bring to the passage the reasonable view that the third pair would begin later than the other two in a man's life, but there is no such *prima facie* order between the first two pairs (note that 13.20 suggests that Confucius would have seen the first pair as a higher level of moral accomplishment than the second pair; see also p. 55. above). **(3) Within the second and third pairs**, I think it stands to reason that the second member is important training toward the first, more than vice versa. And **(4) within the first pair**, the addressees' *xiào* and *tì*, the passage makes no suggestion of a chronological order. On the contrary: the image is that one is going in and out, as one might do daily (cf. 9.16). One goes in from out.

¹⁰³ See p. 89 n. 134 below. Examples of how reading *Analects* 2.21 through 1.2 glasses can distort the text include John Makeham's claim that at 2.21 Confucius speaks of “filial piety and respect for elder brothers” (Makeham 2003, p. 307), and Roger T. Ames' claim that the passage includes the term *tì* 悌 (Ames 2022, p. 48). More generally, I submit, readings of 2.21 express a kind of desperation to find at least one *Analects* passage where Confucius endorses a view in the very broad neighborhood of 1.2 as the latter is usually understood.

There is something to be said in defense of the naïve view that the Youzi materials are authentic and somewhat later than the Confucius materials. A reason to think the four Youzi passages in the *Analects* are largely authentic is that both in style and in conceptual structure they are very similar to each other (and to the statement attributed to Youzi at *Mencius* 2A2), and very different from the rest of the *Analects*. At least they show strong signs of a single voice; if it is not Youzi's voice, presumably it is a later voice. And there may be reason to believe that the Confucius materials are earlier than the Youzi materials (a point that in turn suggests the general authenticity of the Confucius materials). This reason is analogous to an important argument Paul R. Goldin has laid out on the side of the general authenticity of the material in the *Analects*.

Goldin points out that although other schools' comparable collections tend to address the ideas and terms of their contemporaries and predecessors, there are many main philosophical ideas and terms from the 300s BCE and later that we do not find in the *Analects*. Hence "the weight of the evidence suggests that whoever was responsible for compiling this textbook included an overwhelming proportion of genuine material within it."¹⁰⁴

Similarly, while Youzi's contributions to Book 1 of the *Analects* could be described as focusing on the project of putting Confucius' keywords into a theoretical framework that relates them to each other, that framework itself is a general vision of moral psychology that is not in evidence in the Confucius materials. Youzi discusses virtue always and only in terms of the general idea that some recognized (named) excellences of individuals or communities are key ongoing organic supports for other but analogous recognized (named) excellences of the same parties (1.2, 1.12, 1.13), presumably because of the

¹⁰⁴ Goldin 2018, p. 109.

analogies. This general root-branch idea speaks directly to a core concern of the Confucius material in the collection: how to have great virtue. But the Confucius material does not display or address such a root-branch idea. This absence argues in favor of the authenticity of the Confucius and Youzi materials and the chronological priority of the Confucius materials.

These observations, like provisionally trusting the text's own attributions of authorship, should discourage us from simply assuming that the Youzi materials are central to the philosophical background taken for granted by the Confucius materials, front of mind when *xiào* is mentioned.

Conversely, the same observations or hope should encourage us to look to the Confucius materials in the *Analects* to get a possible picture of the philosophical and terminological background of the Youzi materials. Ideas and vocabulary that recur in the Confucius materials are likely to have been familiar to Youzi and his immediate audience, if only because probably some of these people were students of Confucius (and we have a report that Youzi inquired after Confucius' sayings¹⁰⁵). One should at least try reading the *Analects* on that hypothesis.

But independent of debatable fine points about likely authenticity and priority is the following blunt point. When we are inquiring into whether *tì* at *Analects* 1.2 means subfraternity or elder-respect, and we do not find our answer within the passage or in other statements attributed to Youzi, then our next best source of evidence is the rest of the *Analects*, as the mass of material most likely to reflect the same milieu that generated the statement at 1.2. We should favor

¹⁰⁵ *Lǐjì: Tángōng* 75.

the reading that makes 1.2 line up better in language and in philosophy with that mass of material.

Alignment with Confucius' language

We have seen that in the Confucius material in the *Analects* the word *tì* never refers to a family virtue. Rather, it seems, *tì* in the Confucius material means elder-respect seen as having its main arena of operation outside the family; unless in one passage it simply means humble respectfulness befitting especially a young man, as evidenced toward a non-kin elder.

Of course anyone can use the same word in different senses in different contexts, if the contexts are different enough to *signal* the different senses. But the context of *tì* in 1.2 is strikingly similar to the context of *tì* in its appearances in the Confucius material. The context shared with 1.6 and 13.20 is the recurring presentation of *xiào* and *tì* as partner virtues. And each of Confucius' three statements with *tì* has a further element of context in common with the statement at 1.2. At 13.20, the pair constitutes a certain modest level of moral accomplishment. At 1.6 the pair is foregrounded as among the highest priorities for a student, i.e. someone aspiring to a public career. And at 14.43 a young man's *tì* (perhaps elder-respect) is offered by itself as a necessary condition of other excellence in the remainder of his life.

If subfraternity was among the available meanings of the word *tì* at the time of the statement at *Analects* 1.2, then how might the statement's author have expected his audience to know in which sense the word was meant there?¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Of course an author can explain things to their associates, and some context now lost might have made things clear at the time; but the Youzi statements in Book 1 do not read like excerpts from conversations. They are intricately constructed little theoretical discourses. And if other statements attributed to him are any guide, Youzi was sensitive to the problem of

A disambiguating signal would have been needed. Is there such a signal in the statement?

On the one hand, for my part I cannot find in the passage anything that could have functioned as a signal that *tì* was to be understood in the sense of subfraternity.

On the other hand, two features of the statement might reasonably have been *expected* to function as positive signals that *tì* was to be understood as elder-respect rather than subfraternity, if disambiguation was needed. One is that it would be strange to suggest that first sons are congenitally handicapped from developing virtue, or the virtue a leader needs. At least it would be hard to be the first person to suggest this. The other is that the statement presents *xiào* and *tì* as partner virtues constituting a modest level of moral accomplishment and meriting an aspirant's special attention. *Analects* 1.6 and 13.20 suggest that in the milieu in which 1.2 arose, people were familiar with the idea that *xiào* (filial piety) and *tì* (elder-respect) are partner virtues. 1.6 foregrounds them as meriting an aspirant's special attention, and 13.20 says the pair constitutes a modest level of moral accomplishment.

Hence we have reason to think that if and only if *tì* in 1.2 meant subfraternity, the statement is poorly composed in that **(a)** it lacks a needed signal that *tì* is to be understood in that way, and perhaps also in that **(b)** it

misinterpretation out of context. For, first, [Liji: Tan Gong 75](#) reports that when Youzi was asking to be told of statements Confucius had made, Youzi rejected one report at first; and when Zengzi insisted that Confucius had said it, Youzi replied that there must have been a special context. And, second, his statement at *Analects* 1.13 associates trustworthiness and rightness with using words that can be *repeated*, a point that argues against the kind of practice reported at 11.22 and 2.5. Sticking to one's principles or sayings (unless one decides to change them) is a very important check on their content.

positively signals a different understanding of *tì*, inviting people to misunderstand.¹⁰⁷

Alignment with Confucius' philosophy

Regarding philosophical alignment between the statement at 1.2 and the Confucius materials in the *Analects*, I propose the following broad overview.

On the elder-respect reading of Youzi's *tì*, while the statement at *Analects* 1.2 shows real interest in filial piety, it does not display any interest in any other family relational practice. It shows more interest in respect for elders in the community as promoting further virtue.

Similarly, while the mass of Confucius material in the *Analects* shows real interest in filial piety (and some slight interest in how parents treat their offspring), it displays very little interest in any other family relational practice. It shows more interest in respect for elders in the community as promoting further virtue.

Hence Youzi's statement aligns better with the Confucius material, philosophically, if we suppose that Youzi's *tì* is elder-respect rather than subfraternity.

But let us test that broad argument by interrogating the Confucius material in detail.

We should not hold out for perfect philosophical agreement between the Confucius material and some version of the statement at *Analects* 1.2. On either version of the Youzi statement, the general root-branch vision of high moral progress that it shares with the other Youzi statements in Book 1 is at least not

¹⁰⁷ For a third way in which the statement is poorly composed if and only if its *tì* is subfraternity, see p. 134 below.

plainly in evidence in the Confucius material. But we can look for more specific agreements or disagreements. Did Confucius see elder respect and/or subfraternity as important supports for further virtue? Did he have views about family that fit one version of the statement at 1.2 better than the other version?

Confucius on elder-respect as a root

Offhand we might suppose that the Confucius of the *Analects* must think elder-respect is an important virtue and a main support for further virtue in general, because (a) he puts great stress on learning from the community's past and absorbing its traditions, and (b) he is sensitive to the related point that to find the full tradition one might need to look far and wide (and hence, at a minimum, not just to one's own father and older brothers), and (c) elder-respect is a kind of humble respect for one's fellows and one's community.

In four passages in the *Analects*, Confucius arguably suggests that elder-respect is a significant support for further virtue. At **1.6** he might mean that filial piety and elder-respect are among the main practices of self-cultivation for a man aspiring to contribute to public life, perhaps because they support other virtue for public life. Alternately, he might just be saying they are among the virtues that are more important than book learning. At **13.20** he says that a man's filial piety and elder-respect constitute his being a moderately good official, thus arguably suggesting that this pair of virtues supports some part of more directly governance-related excellence. At **14.43** he seems to say that a young man's elder-respect is a necessary support, or at least a necessary sign, of his amounting to something later in life. At **14.44** he says that a young man's lack of elder-respect is a sign that the man does not aim to make progress in virtue.

The latter two passages suggest more clearly than the former two that respect for elders supports further virtue.

Taken together, these four passages offer some support for the idea that the Confucius character in the book thinks elder-respect is a key support for further virtue.

Further, if the *Analects* ever shows Confucius suggesting that a man's filial piety is a key support for his further virtue,¹⁰⁸ then *a fortiori* it shows him suggesting that elder-respect is quite similarly a key support. That is because the four passages reviewed just above include the two *Analects* passages where Confucius comes closest to suggesting that a man's filial piety tends to support his own further virtue: 1.6 and 13.20. In these two passages, if he is suggesting that filial piety supports further virtue, he is making the same suggestion in the same breath about *tì* as elder-respect.

Confucius on the moral priority of family

The thesis of *Analects* 1.2 is that the *jūnzǐ* should be scrupulous about *xiàotì* rather than skimping on those practices to serve other concerns of a *jūnzǐ*. Such skimping would undercut the larger project.

¹⁰⁸ An alternate reason Confucius may have had for occasionally emphasizing filial piety to his students was his concern for his own relationship with their families. He occupied a potentially awkward position as a father figure to young men with living fathers. He was in some sense a rival to their real fathers. He took some of his trainees far from home, though he thought a filial son should hesitate to travel (4.19). He exposed some to potential death from starvation, though their parents may have been counting on their support (2.7). For the sake of his political project of training and influence, Confucius may have wanted to remind his students to continue to show respect to their fathers (2.7f.), be reverent in any remonstrance and obey (4.18) until the mourning was done (1.11, 4.20)—or at least wanted to remind the proud and flashy among them (5.22, 11.22).

Hence one might **object** to the elder-respect reading at 1.2 on grounds of philosophical alignment with the Confucius material in the *Analects*, as follows:

If and only if we read *tì* at 1.2 as **subfraternity**, then the statement at 1.2 argues that family virtue is a necessary condition for public achievement. The suggestion would be that serving public ends at the expense of one's family will not work.

Hence the statement at 1.2 is a round peg for a round hole in the Confucius material. For the Confucius material lacks an argument to support its view that in case of apparent conflict, the obligations of family trump concerns for the broader society in case of conflict.

The **reply** is, first, that the statement at *Analects* 1.2 on the subfraternity reading seems on its face to support the view that we should be especially punctilious about the claims, not of family in general, but of parents and older brothers. The claims of one's spouse, children, or younger sister would not be directly implicated.

Second and more importantly, it is common sense that like any significant source of moral claims, family and the wider community each make countless claims ranging from the compelling to the trivial. In real life there is no general question, "Which trumps which: family or state?" And the Confucius materials never suggest that the claims of family are stronger than, or in general override, those of the community or state. Granted, at *Analects* 13.18 Confucius rejects an ugly state-first radicalism; but he does so by taking instead a position in line with common opinion and practice in the West today. And in many places the *Analects* seems to show Confucius thinking that some claims of the state or a public career outweigh some claims we would categorize as claims of family.

- Confucius says the *jūnzǐ* does not side with any particular group (2.14, 4.10, 15.22);
- he denies his son a thick burial for the sake of a detail of state ritual (11.8);
- he praises the general character of a man who committed fratricide for political reasons (14.15ff.);
- he says it was wrong of a feudal governor to use a veiled threat in asking that a successor to him be appointed from his own kin (14.14);
- he sees nothing wrong with Great Yu's choice to live in hardship conditions for the sake of public works (8.21), a choice that would presumably have put Yu's family in hardship or deprived Yu and his family of each other's company;
- he is willing to put at risk his own and his students' ability to carry out their basic duties to their families, as he takes some students far from home and exposes some to potential death from starvation; and
- he suggests that filial adherence to one's father's way may yield to other considerations after the father's passing is addressed (1.11, 4.20), and that the extent to which his students should defer to their elder kin depends on considerations internal to training for a public career (11.22, cf. 2.5¹⁰⁹).

Indeed, while Confucius objected to his students' profaning the positions of lord and minister by acting like his ministers (9.12), he had no parallel scruples about the positions of father and son (11.8; cf. the question at 11.10).

¹⁰⁹ I take Confucius at 2.5 to be telling different people different things.

Confucius on the family as the model for political order

The argument at *Analects* 1.2 clearly supposes that it is by way of **similarity or analogy** that *xiàotì* supports broader virtue. The audience is expected to see that *xiàotì* is relevantly similar or analogous to obeying superiors gladly and refraining from rebellion.

Hence one might **object** to the elder-respect reading on grounds of philosophical alignment with the philosophy of the Confucius material in the *Analects*, on the following grounds:

If we read *tì* in 1.2 as **subfraternity**, rather than as elder-respect outside the family, then it says the root of broad social or political virtue is made up of family virtues, so the statement at 1.2 reflects the assumption that the broad sociopolitical order is analogous to **family** order, e.g. that the ruler is like a parent.

And that is precisely the vision we find in the Confucius material in the *Analects*. “The family metaphor pervades this text.”¹¹⁰ For Confucius, “the family serves as a model for the ideal state.”¹¹¹ His “moving and inspirational ideal community is ... roughly the family writ large.”¹¹² On Confucius’ view, “all relationships are modeled more or less directly on family relationships and all legitimate forms of rule will embody the pattern of the father-son relation,”¹¹³ for “a state is just a family writ large.”¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Ames & Rosemont 1998, p. 57; Ames & Hall 2001, p. 66; Ames 2003, p. 414.

¹¹¹ Cline 2015, p. 14.

¹¹² Ivanhoe 2013, p. 66.

¹¹³ Sim 2007, p. 20; cf. p. 41.

¹¹⁴ Sim 2019, p. 273.

The **reply** is, first, that it is a *non sequitur* to say that if two of the many virtues we would call family virtues are offered as the root of the whole of virtue by similarity, the suggested overall picture is that the general social order is analogous to the family. Filial piety and subfraternity are an unrepresentative sample of family virtues, so the pair does not distinctly point to the institution called “family” in English. And the two have other things in common than that we would locate each in the family. They are both relations of junior to senior, male to male, and blood rather than marriage. They might better be seen as pointing to the concept of the clan, as they are the closest *upward clan relations*. The clan is disanalogous to the family, as it is a large inter-household network mainly among men, while the family (as our readers understand this word) is led by partners in the spousal relation and centers on home life and child-rearing.¹¹⁵

Second, more importantly, Confucius as presented in the *Analects* does not see the family as the model for political order. Joseph Chan has argued that classical Confucianism does not,¹¹⁶ and I shall here argue specifically that the Confucius of the *Analects* does not.

No speaker in the *Analects* ever uses a kinship metaphor in connection with the relation between ruler and minister, ruler and subject, officer and subject, or between anyone and the state or the people. Occasionally Confucius

¹¹⁵ We may feel today that if clans and lineages are of any significance at all it is because they are a kind of “family” in a very extended sense, a peripheral and relatively insignificant kind of family; so that valuing the clan or lineage highly means valuing the family more. But the inference is mistaken; the two institutions are distinct and different. In fact it is hard for a society to value both highly. A lineage must count only one gender as carrying kinship, so lineages are conceivable only where the genders are radically unequal. But family is profoundly valuable, and hence reasonably valued, insofar as the spousal relation is egalitarian.

¹¹⁶ J. Chan 2004, *passim*.

uses a family metaphor in another context, as we all do.¹¹⁷ (Arguably *tì* is a main example.)

Confucius does not say that political order is or should be modeled on the family or other kin-group or on any dyadic kinship relations. Also he does not say that he uses the family or any of its relations as his model for conceiving the real or ideal state (and I do not see a place where he might be thought to be using it without saying so).

Merely asserting a similarity between A and B would not begin to suggest that one takes A as one's model for B, or B for A. Confucius does *not* assert any similarity or analogy between family and state or any of their component relations, ideal or otherwise.

In a few places he mentions kinship relations *alongside* political relations, no doubt because kin-groups and the state were in his day the main forms of organization. To list the main forms or arenas of organized life was to juxtapose kinship organization with state organization. Being organized life, they each involve rank and morality, as anyone would agree. That is, they each involve authority, respect and care. Some of Confucius' juxtapositions bring out this point. But in connection with such juxtapositions Confucius never suggests that some lesson is to be drawn from that thin similarity.

One fact that might conceivably encourage a modern reader to read into mere juxtapositions the idea that Confucius envisioned the family as the model

¹¹⁷ I find three kinds of family metaphor in the *Analects* (aside from the terms *tì* and *xùn*). **First**, Confucius once speaks of the governments or governance of Lu and Wei as “brothers” (13.7). **Second**, he uses the existing term “Son of Heaven” once in repeating a lyric chosen by someone else (3.2) and once in a late Book (16.2). **Third**, he uses a father-son simile to describe his relationship with Yan Yuan (11.10); and phrases used by Confucius and others to refer to or address disciples include the term *zǐ* (*dìzǐ* 弟子, *èrsānzǐ* 二三子, *xiǎozǐ* 小子) and thereby arguably involve a “son” metaphor. Only this last and least political sort of case could be thought to pervade the collection. The *Analects* makes greater use of other kinds of imagery.

for the state or for the moral life of society in general, is that such a vision has been very ordinary. It is often prominently explicit elsewhere, both in the Chinese tradition¹¹⁸ and throughout Western thought and culture,¹¹⁹ at least through the

¹¹⁸ I find, however, that textbook surveys of Confucian philosophy tend to make very little mention of family after the earliest period.

¹¹⁹ For example, the Greek polis was self-consciously a literal kinship group and a metaphorical household family, a community with *members* (citizens and citizenesses) rather than merely residents, around a “common hearth” at which leading citizens would dine. Greek city names are best translated as e.g. “the Athenians,” like our “the Joneses.”

Aristotle held that “in the family (*oikia*) first are the origins and wellsprings of friendship, of political organization, and of justice” (*EE* 1242a40-b1), not only or mainly because families try to teach these things, but because the family contains models (*paradeigmata*) of the main forms of city (*EN* 1160b24). “All constitutions [forms of civic order] are found together in the household, both the true and [when things go wrong in the family] the corrupt forms” (*EE* 1241b26f.). The homologies between family dyads and political forms are Aristotle’s explicit main point whenever he discusses family relations at any length. Even historically, he foregrounds an account of how the state arose as a *natural radial extension* of the family, taking its form from the family (*Pol.* 1252b)—a view that dominated Western political thought for millennia afterward and was accepted even by Locke (*Second Treatise* §§107ff.).

For Aristotle, the ends of family and city are the same in kind. While the family and city each arose as a way to fill needs (cancel privations), the *guiding* end of each is happiness, the virtuous activity of their male and female members (*Pol.* 1259b18-22; cf. 1291a10-19). (Greek polis law generally required citizens to have citizen fathers and citizeness mothers. “Just as a household has a man and a woman as parts, a city-state, too, is clearly to be regarded as being divided about equally between men and women”: *Pol.* 1269b14-16.) He does not suggest that the household is a mere tool for the city, outside the life of the city. Rather, he says the city is made up of households as parts; and when he analyzes the city as an ethical community he finds that its “smallest parts” are the main three household dyadic communities of husband and wife, parent and child, master and slave (*Pol.* 1252a17-20, 1253b1-8; cf. 1259b28, *EN* 1160a9f.).

“Man is naturally spousal, more than political, as the household is prior and more necessary than the city” (*EE* 1242a23, *NE* 1162a16-19). This social aspect of our essence is profoundly atypical of substances as Aristotle understands them. His investigation of ethics seeks equilibrium among ethical judgments (narrow reflective equilibrium); it is informed rather than ruled by his broadest opinions about ontology and physics, which are themselves conflicted. The anomalous nature of the human being appears as internal tensions in his ethics. For example, while he says happiness is “self-sufficient” (a term from his metaphysics), he hastens to add,

Now what we call self-sufficient is not what suffices for a solitary person by himself, living an isolated life, but what suffices also for parents, children, wife, and in general for friends and fellow-citizens, since man is a naturally political animal. Here, however, we must impose some limit ...; but we must examine this another time. (*EN* 1097b8-13; cf. 1142a9f) Hence my actions even after my parent dies can make a difference to the parent’s happiness (*EN* 1100a10-1101a22). Even to understand the distinct virtues of family relational positions, he says,

end of robust European monarchy and especially in the Protestant Reformation. But we should let the Confucius of the *Analects* be the Confucius of the *Analects*.

Another fact that may lead us to overestimate the significance of such juxtapositions is that for us today kinship organization is not the main kind of organized life in society other than the state. We are exposed from childhood to a rich menu of other kinds, such as school, games, traffic, corporations (work and stores), and social media; and we choose ideas from these to help us think about political order (contract, rules of the road). So if the family or clan is juxtaposed with the state, that can look to us like a *selection* of family or clan to juxtapose with the state.

Yet another is that the state as Confucius knew it lacks certain features that family also lacks, and that for us today are practically the *main* features of the state: a legislative assembly, voting for leaders, a vast bureaucracy of specialists, judicial review, etc. Lacking those things, we may imagine, the state was simply a man in charge of everybody else, in a moral context, sharing this *whole* form with the patriarchal family.¹²⁰ (The feudal state, like the clan and lineage, iterated the form.) We may tend to see monarchy and the patriarchal

it is important to understand what kind of city the family lives in, because our families do not exist in isolation. Rather, the life of a family is *associated living* (Pol. 1260b8-15).

¹²⁰ If we take the family as our main example of an *institution*, it may suggest to us that institutions are made of *relations and their roles*, so that the thoughtful design of roles and relations suffices for the thoughtful design of institutions. But that is too simple an image of institutions. Following Rawls' definition of "practices" when he is saying that practices are the main topic of his moral and political philosophy, we might say that in addition to roles and relations, institutions also include "moves, penalties, defenses, and so on" (Rawls 1955, p. 3 n. 1). Well-defined moves allow for the kinds of practice or institution Rawls gives as his illustrative examples: "games and rituals, trials and parliaments, markets and systems of property" (Rawls 1970, p. 55). For us, familiar well-defined moves in connection with family (if they are well-defined for the institution rather than being idiosyncratic to this or that family) pertain mainly to people's entry or exit from family membership (marriage, divorce, adoption, disowning) rather than to the conduct of the internal life of families. Hence we can find it novel and interesting to propose family today as a model for the state, rather as we might find it novel and interesting were someone to propose a log cabin as a model for the concept of machines.

family only in that very broad outline, as we may have little practical experience with either. They each involve authority relations, as Confucius' juxtapositions suggest, and the relationships internal to each require care and respect (i.e. morality), as does life in general. So, we may think, the family and state as Confucius knew them have all their main features in common. But in fact these similarities are thin: rank and morality.

If we look at the Confucius material to see whether he saw the patriarchal family as a model for the feudal state, or at least saw them as more similar than others think they are, I think we mainly find profound differences. Consider three main kinds of difference.

(1) Peer bonds. Among men in a **family**, peer bonds are determined by birth. But peer bonds for **public** life, or among those with a political calling, should be assigned largely by achieved virtue. They would seem to be different kinds of bond, with different roles to play. Confucius emphasizes that his trainees for public life should be very selective about their friends and associates.¹²¹ One should have no friend inferior to oneself.¹²² If a friend will not listen to one's remonstrance, one should leave that friend.¹²³ Perhaps this is what Confucius means when he says approvingly that someone who hates un-*rén*-ness will not let the un-*rén* approach his person.¹²⁴

(2) Authority. Among men in a **family**, authority comes from birth. Confucius holds that a man who disagrees with his father should try gently to change his mind, but go along in any case, or almost any case. For the **state**, the main principles for governance are that a good ruler assigns offices to the worthy, and that a ruler needs general virtue to do his job. We even choose our

¹²¹ *Analects* 1.6, 1.14, 4.1, 9.30, 15.10.

¹²² *Analects* 1.8, 9.25.

¹²³ *Analects* 12.23.

¹²⁴ *Analects* 4.6.

rulers by virtue, in the sense that dissatisfied residents can move to another territory. A ruler should aim to rule well enough to induce even the subjects of other rulers to forsake them.¹²⁵ Similarly, a minister should not continue to serve a ruler who persists in acting wrongly.¹²⁶ Authority relations in family and state would seem to be different kinds of relation.

(3) Normative focus. For the **state**, Confucius' main normative focus is on the governing positions: how to govern, the character of the ruler, and the character of Confucius' trainees in view of their anticipated work in governance. His thought seems to be that the virtue of leaders is the key to political order¹²⁷ and to the good society. The people can be counted on to absorb the virtue of their good leaders by emulation¹²⁸ and reciprocation.¹²⁹ A ruler should therefore focus on his own conduct rather than focusing more directly on the conduct of the residents in his territory; and the ruler is the focus of a Ru apprentice's moral attention. But for the **family**, so far as can be seen from the text, Confucius' normative focus is almost exclusively on upward relating by sons. He never suggests that a father's virtue is wind to the son's grass, and he never mentions reciprocation between living family members. Indeed, although it should have gone without saying that (a) one of the most important tasks of a ruler was to make sure he has a good successor, presumably a son, and (b) an important current or imminent activity for Confucius' young men is to generate younger men, nevertheless (c) Confucius nowhere discusses how to parent a living boy or man beyond saying that a good father will cover up his son's crimes, and that

¹²⁵ *Analects* 13.4, 13.16.

¹²⁶ *Analects* 5.19, 11.24, 15.7; cf. 8.13, 14.37, 15.1, 15.8; but see 14.16, 14.17, 14.19.

¹²⁷ The main passage where Confucius seems to depart from this view is also the one passage where he can seem to assign family a fundamental role of some sort: *Analects* 2.21. On this passage see p. 89 n. 133 below.

¹²⁸ *Analects* 2.1, 8.2, 12.17, 12.18, 12.19, 13.1, 13.6.

¹²⁹ *Analects* 2.3, 2.20, 13.4.

parents do in fact hold their infants and bring them when emigrating. These points are not the presentation of a model for governance. If the historical Confucius said much about how to be a parent, he did not succeed in conveying to his followers that the topic was noteworthy, in itself or as relevant to the group's vocation.

Governance is perhaps the primary concern throughout the Confucius material. He seems to be trying to teach people how to think about it. Hence, insofar as his thought was led by some model for governance, such as successes on record or the family, we must see *some* attention to that model as such. If his model is the family, we do not.¹³⁰

Confucius on being a man's good brother

The Confucius of the *Analects* seems not to regard relations among brothers as an important topic or model in the context of the cultivation of virtue for public life.

Let us look now at what he says about brothers in general, i.e. without distinguishing ages. Later we shall look at what he says specifically about subfraternity. (He says nothing specifically about superfraternity.)

There are at most two passages where Confucius might display an interest in how brothers in general should relate to each other: 2.21 and 13.28.

At 2.21, in responding to a question, Confucius quotes with approval a brief passage from a revered text, and one of the ideas in the quotation is praise for someone as being “a friend to his brothers” (*yǒu yú xiōngdì* 友于兄弟).¹³¹ The

¹³⁰ We might see some attention to the model, with no suggestion that it is a model, if his model for good ruling of the people is filial piety toward one's parents.

¹³¹ Slingerland 2003 reads “兄弟” here as “elders and juniors” rather than brothers (p. 15).

suggestion could be that friendship is a good model for relations between brothers.

But we are not on solid ground in drawing from the remark any inferences about Confucius' view on brothers. For, first, brothers are mentioned only as a perhaps secondary element in a quotation, so it is possible that brothers are not part of his point.¹³² And second, Confucius' remark has challenged interpreters. For this and other reasons we should be skeptical about whether Confucius intended his remark to present a line of thought.¹³³ Regarding brothers, at most

¹³² This may be the view at Brindley 2009, p. 52; Cline 2012, p. 126; Cline 2015, p. 14; Foust 2008, pp. 151, 155; Littlejohn 2011, p. 25; Ni 2017, p. 81; Radice 2017, p. 202, Shun 2002, p. 795; Sim 2019 p. 273, Suddath 2006, p. 230.

¹³³ If the response were intended to communicate or articulate Confucius' line of thought, then finding a line of thought in the remark would probably not be too hard to do. But it has proved too hard to do. Scholars have long struggled in vain to find an intelligible line of thought that can seem to fit the words of the response and can also seem to address the question put to him. Some of the impetus behind the efforts may be recognition of the fact that this is the only remark attributed to Confucius in the *Analects* that suggests that his political outlook is in some sense family-centered, if it does suggest that. But that fact more properly argues against reading the passage as expressing a big bold family-centered view.

To see the remark as presenting a line of thought responsive to the interlocutor's question, we must take it as making at least the following skeletal argument: “**(A)** It is unimportant that someone like me hold office (a point made by way of a rhetorical question), because **(B)** a man's person's filial piety and friendship with brothers can make it unimportant that they hold office (perhaps because those activities are somehow like holding office), and **(C)** I am active in filial piety and friendship with a brother.” And then the interesting philosophy comes in when we try to find in the details of the passage (or elsewhere) some reason Confucius might have had to believe premise (B). Indeed if a view supports premise (B), that fact is a reason, of whatever strength, for attributing the view to Confucius on the basis of this remark, even if the reason is not very clearly articulated in the remark, so long as we can confidently attribute all three skeletal points to Confucius. But we cannot attribute any of the three to Confucius, because they are incompatible with, respectively, **(a)** Confucius' main life project for himself and his followers, **(b)** Confucius' main political vision (e.g. at 2.20, 8.2, and 12.19), and **(c)** Confucius' main family circumstances.

And where scholars might wish to point to a reason Confucius held to accept premise (B), i.e. a reason to believe in the unimportance of a good Ru's holding office, in fact what most scholars have offered as a sort of placeholder for such a reason is a belief in the importance of the general public's active concern for their families (citing perhaps that interpretation itself or *Analects* 1.2 as reason to think Confucius held that belief). But such a belief would forcefully oppose B, not support it, in Confucius' view. For he thought the way to *get* the public virtuous is for the rulers

the remark suggests that he thought a man should be a friend to his brothers. That is perhaps the usual view everywhere, so it is fair to attribute that minimal view to Confucius on slight evidence or none at all, if there is no evidence to the contrary.

But much in the Confucius material in the *Analects* is out of harmony with that minimal view about brothers. The only other passage where Confucius might display a view about how brothers in general should relate to each other is **13.28**, where Confucius says that a *shì* 士 “must be earnest and critical, but also affable—earnest and critical with his friends (*yǒu* 友), and affable with his brothers.”¹³⁴ The thought seems to be that unlike real friends, brothers should usually paper over potential disagreements. That is to say, normally a *shì* 士

to exemplify the virtues and put other exemplary men in high offices (Confucius mentions family virtue in this connection at 2.20 and perhaps 8.2). Further, the shared default assumption would surely have been that active concern for one’s family is not only compatible with holding office, it argues *for* holding office: because office is an honor for one’s family and puts one in a better position to serve them. (The expenses of Confucius’ office, or of his expansive conception of it, get in the way of a claim of family at *Analects* 11.8; but perhaps his budget would have been even tighter without the office.) Confucius’ remark makes no mention of any potential objection or obstacle to his serving in government; so if we take the remark as presenting his thinking, his not serving in government was *not* because he objects to the rulers or they to him, as scholars think it was.

I propose that Confucius’ remark at *Analects* 2.21 is not difficult or obscure. We should take it at face value, as not articulating a reason for his not serving in office. His remark is an intentionally transparent deflection (cf. 17.20). In our day the conventional formula for transparent deflection of the same question is similar to Confucius’ remark, but ours makes a more colorable argument. We say, “I want to spend more time with my family.” We say this to avoid criticizing the people who might have employed us, and to avoid a moment of quotable humiliation. These are concerns Confucius likely shared (1.10, 7.11, 7.15, 7.31, 8.13 8.14, 14.3, 15.1, 15.7, and 16.10). Confucius proceeded in this case by making dazzling use of a classic text; but that is how a counselor would assert his professional honor in those times.

One approach to rescuing the passage as an articulation of Confucius’ views is to read *xiōngdì* 兄弟 here with Slingerland as “elders and juniors” (Slingerland 2003, p. 15), and put the emphasis on these rather than on *xiào*, so that Confucius can be referring to the political importance of his work training his young comrades for office. On this reading the remark makes no real reference to brothers or family. But it is still very obscure.

¹³⁴ Slingerland 2003, p. 151.

should not be as deeply engaged with a brother as with a good colleague-friend. Why might he or anyone think this? One reason could have been that it is important not to risk a falling-out. A related reason could have been that a brother might not be a good partner in the pursuit of excellence, especially for a man going far in that pursuit. Every bit of progress raises the standard for an adequate partner,¹³⁵ and one should not have a friend (*yōu* 友) who is not up to one's own level.¹³⁶ A man cannot choose his brother, but can choose when and how to associate with him.

Of course these considerations do not suggest that Confucius thought there could not be virtuous brother friends. He repeatedly praises the legendary brothers and princes Boyi and Shuqi.¹³⁷ We learn from later sources that when their father the king chose the younger of them to succeed to the throne (as was the father's right, though normally the eldest son would succeed), the princes' mutual devotion was such that the younger brother refused to defer to his father's choice, and then the older brother refused his younger brother's subfraternal cession—so they both simply left, together. Long afterward they starved to death, refusing to eat because everything around them was morally tainted by belonging to another bad ruler. Their story suggests many questions about family values. But Confucius' comments on the princes do not appear to reflect any particular interest in the brother relation or other family relations or values. From the four passages about Boyi and Shuqi in the *Analects* one cannot learn that they were kin or knew each other (or whether either of them ever started a family).

¹³⁵ *Analects* 9.30.

¹³⁶ *Analects* 1.8, 9.25; 15.10, 16.4.

¹³⁷ *Analects* 5.23, 7.15, 18.8.

Even if it is not in general true that a man aspiring to a public career should be a true friend to all his brothers, we may reason that a man may influence his younger brother's priorities, and so might be able to make his younger brother into a good virtue-partner. But subfraternity could make it harder to redirect one's older brother toward one's own chosen vocation.

Hence the Confucius material in the *Analects* suggests the view that while a man should be friendly with his brothers, being true friends with one's brother cannot be recommended in general for men aspiring to the way of the *jūnzǐ*.

Confucius on being a man's good younger brother

The Confucius of the *Analects* arguably never mentions subfraternity. There are just two remarks by Confucius that might be taken to show him supposing that subfraternity matters somehow, at least for some men: 9.16 and 11.22. But in each case he is likely not talking about subfraternity at all.

At *Analects* 9.16, Confucius can seem to suppose that subfraternity matters, though he does not say why or how.

9.16

子曰：「出則事公卿，入則事父兄，喪事不敢不勉，不為酒困，何有於我哉？」

The Master said, "To serve the Duke and his ministers at court, and to serve my elders [父兄] at home, in funerary matters not to presume to give less than my best efforts, and not to be overcome by drink—how could such things give me any trouble at all?"¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Ames & Rosemont 1998, p. 130.

This is the one passage in which Confucius might mention subfraternity. If he mentions it here, he mentions it as a man's serving his older brother, given a certain reading of the term *fùxiōng* 父兄. In early texts this compound sometimes means "father and older brother(s)," but sometimes instead it means "sons of one's father's father" or "consanguineous males of roughly one's father's age." In the *Lǐjì* the term usually has the latter sense, as it must at e.g. *Mencius* 3A1; and there is no obstacle to this reading in either of the compound's two occurrences in the *Analects*.

The other place where Confucius speaks of action in connection with one's *fùxiōng* is at 11.22, where he says that a certain exceptional man should hesitate to act on new teachings while his *fùxiōng* are around. (It is not certain that Confucius is recommending that the exceptional man *consult* with these relatives.) We are not being told of a norm ordinarily attaching to the position(s) correlative to *fùxiōng*. On the contrary, Confucius gives a more ordinary man the opposite advice.

For 9.16 and 11.22, several considerations oppose reading *fùxiōng* as "father and older brother(s)." First, the fact that Confucius' father died in Confucius' infancy argues against that reading for 9.16, especially in light of the separate mention of mourning in the same sentence. Second, the repeated mention at 11.22 that someone's *fùxiōng* are around (*zài* 在) suggests a focus on the older generation. We might nevertheless favor the "father and older brothers" reading if the Confucius material paired father and older brother (or son and younger brother) elsewhere in other terms, or paired filial piety and subfraternity in any terms; but it never does.

Another two passages report that Confucius chose a husband for the daughter of his (perhaps deceased) older brother, and one of the passages says

that the groom was a safe choice¹³⁹ (unlike, apparently, Confucius' choice for his own daughter¹⁴⁰). No other passage in the *Analects* reports any activity of Confucius with or for his older brother, or his older brother's projects or ideals or fate or name.

That we find these few passages among the hundreds of Confucius statements in the *Analects* does not suggest that Confucius would pick out subfraternity as one of the most important virtues for supporting broader virtue, or one of the more important virtues at all. It suggests the opposite.

Another set of statements by Confucius suggests positively that he does not think subfraternity is important for one's other virtue.¹⁴¹ Duke Huan was a historical figure who helped bring peaceful order to much of China using the ducal position he seized from his older brother by having the man killed. Confucius says that Duke Huan was an upright or correct (*zhèng* 正) man.¹⁴² Confucius also says Duke Huan's great minister was right to serve him (greatly augmenting his power and prominence), against the objection brought separately

¹³⁹ *Analects* 5.2, 11.6.

¹⁴⁰ *Analects* 5.1.

¹⁴¹ Another statement, at *Analects* 12.4, might reflect Confucius' views on subfraternity, but we cannot know that it does, and charity prefers not to read it that way. With Slingerland's translation:

司馬牛問君子。子曰：「君子不憂不懼。」曰：「不憂不懼，斯謂之君子已乎？」子曰：「內省不疚，夫何憂何懼？」

Sima Niu asked about the gentleman.

The Master replied, "The gentleman is free of anxiety and fear."

"Free of anxiety and fear"—is that all there is to being a gentleman?"

"If you can look inside yourself and find no faults, what cause is there for anxiety or fear?"

Slingerland 2003 (p. 126f.) points out that this Sima Niu may have been a man whose older brother was a rebel causing trouble for Confucius and endangering the man's other older brothers. If this is that Sima Niu, and if the matter of the brothers was informing Confucius' remark, then the remark would seem to reflect a view on subfraternity, for the remark would be urging the man to be concerned about his own virtue rather than about his older brothers—as though the image of virtue that Confucius shared with his interlocutor did not integrally involve a concern for the good and goodness of any older brothers one has.

¹⁴² *Analects* 14.15. For this term see 12.17, 13.6, and 13.13.

by two disciples that the Duke was a fratricide.¹⁴³ Granted, in all these passages Confucius never directly denies that subfraternity is a key support for general virtue. But neither is he recorded as saying anything to his followers to try to dispel the impression that he did not hold that view. It is as though the idea that subfraternity stands out as a key support for great virtue was not a thought they had had.

Hence the Confucius material in the *Analects* presents Confucius as someone who would not put subfraternity high on a list of the important virtues because it is a key support for general virtue or for any other reason.

In sum, both in terminology and in philosophy, the Youzi statement at *Analects* 1.2 is much closer to the Confucius material in the *Analects* if the *tì* that Youzi pairs with filial piety at 1.2 is not subfraternity, but is rather the same as the *tì* that Confucius repeatedly pairs with filial piety: respect for one's elders, mainly outside the family.

This fact is not by itself dispositive against the subfraternity reading, except within the special project of interpreting the Youzi and Confucius materials in the *Analects* as if they constitute the *oeuvre* of two close associates in general agreement, or of one author. In other words, the Confucius material in the *Analects* is sufficient to show that *if* we can count on Youzi's statements to express Confucius' views, *tì* at 1.2 is not subfraternity.

¹⁴³ *Analects* 14.16, 14.17; cf. 11.24.

Argument 2 for the elder-respect reading: Why *xiào* 孝 needs a partner

Arguments 2 and 3 for the elder-respect reading try to show, in different ways, that the elder-respect reading of *tì* makes the statement at *Analects* 1.2 a better statement.

Argument 3 will weigh the interpretive significance of the fact that many men had no opportunity for subfraternity, as they did not have older brothers. Hence we shall suppose for the sake of Argument 2 that the statement at *Analects* 1.2 is addressing only the case of men who have older brothers.

The thesis of Argument 2 is that elder-respect is different from filial piety in ways that make it an apt complement to filial piety in the root and could account for the frequent ancient pairing of these two virtues. By contrast, despite the dominance of the subfraternity reading of the Youzi statement, ancient and modern efforts to say how subfraternity is an apt complement in the root have been rare and stumbling. Instead, most scholars translating or paraphrasing the statement in English have replaced subfraternity with something else, or swamped it with other things so that it is a small fraction of the root, or simply omitted it.

Let us first quantitatively and then qualitatively compare the contributions that may be expected from elder-respect and subfraternity as candidate complements for *xiào* in the root.

Quantity of engagement

We may assume that in Youzi's milieu, for a man who has at least one older brother, his felt or active tie to his older brother(s) is likely deeper than his

tie to any one of his non-kin elders (though we found reason to wonder whether Confucius approved of that state of affairs for public servants).

We cannot take that depth to be the main reason why subfraternity was chosen to be half the root, for we should expect a man to have a similarly deep tie to his younger brothers,¹⁴⁴ and to have deep ties also to his children, close friends, and wife or wives. The great paean to the depth of the brotherly bond is *Máoshī* 164, and it makes nothing of age differences.

We might distinguish two kinds of depth of engagement in a relationship or practice pursued well. One kind of depth is when the relevant actions are woven through daily life. Another kind of depth is when the commitment involved is great but hypothetical or far from daily practice. “I would die for you.”¹⁴⁵ The former kind of depth may do more to make a relationship nourishing for character. The exemplary subfraternal actions listed by Keith Knapp (quoted on p. 5 above) suggest the latter kind of depth; but that may be an accident of exposition by Knapp or the texts he has in mind.

For many men who had older brothers, and for most men in or aspiring to public careers, elder-respect might have been much more *regularly* engaging than subfraternity would be, and hence more influential in the men’s habits of practical thinking.

One important reason is that a man may have encountered many more (non-family) elders than older brothers. Even in early childhood a boy might have had significant relationships with household servants and non-kin children, and it is no strain to imagine that young children of a certain social class might first

¹⁴⁴ Unlike an infant boy, a random man is just as likely to have younger brothers as older brothers. (Granted, in Argument 2 we are talking only about men with older brothers, and they are less than 100% likely to have younger brothers. But the idea is to abstract away from that *kind* of consideration for Argument 2.)

¹⁴⁵ Or: I would be good to my older brother if I had one.

be instructed in respect for household servants by being told that they should respect their elders.

And perhaps the great majority of individuals a young man encountered would have been elders outside of his immediate family or household, at least if he had any involvement in public life such as village festivals, Ru apprenticeship, or frequent use of the streets. A man could have had significant collegial or personal relationships with many of his elders, thus engaging with them on core concerns of his life (such as public affairs). And while elder-respect can be a component of relationships, it is also about how one interacts with strangers. Occasions to express elder-respect might fill a young man's day, in his home town and on his travels; and they might fill the symbolic summary occasion that was communal ritual.

Official positions, and training for official positions, may commonly have had the effect that brothers lived in different places. (For example, Youzi seems to have spent time in the military.) Many of the men whose virtue would concern an early Ru might have lived apart from brothers for this reason.

Quality of contributions

Quantity of engagement aside, what special element might *tì* add to *xiào*? What would subfraternity add, and what would elder-respect add?

Why would the root need elder-respect?

Let us ask first what elder-respect would have to offer as a complement to filial piety in a proposed rootstem of the whole of virtue. We might take our cue from Confucius' explicit balancing of home and community life when he pairs

xiào and *tì*—a pattern we found in many later texts. For if it is proposed that the root of a man's general virtue is only his devotion to his parents, or to his parents and older brothers, we might wonder how well that root would continually support his virtue for public life. After all, our family concerns and obligations do pull somewhat against other concerns and obligations. Too narrow a focus on kinship ties might pull us all too far into separate warm hives whose members reward and reinforce each others' mutual commitment, undermining peaceful engagement and cooperation with other hives, and thus failing to nourish the broad and in some sense impartial social concern of the *jūnzǐ*. This was a known problem.

But if it is proposed that the root of virtue toward all is devotion to parents and respect for elders in the community, then there is no puzzle about how that dual root would continually nourish broad social concern. A man's general elder-respect prompts him to pay respectful attention to people outside his family, day in and day out, and thus could cue him to apply outside the family even the good ways of relating he may have developed within the family.

Let us look more closely at what might have been seen as special about elder-respect in the community, beyond the bare fact that it draws one's respectful attention to *some* people outside the family.

We have seen that elder-respect was especially associated with villages or neighborhoods. These would be the main contexts of most men's personal or face-to-face engagement with people outside the family, and for an official perhaps it would be the main context of his unofficial contact with the people.

But the recurring rhetorical emphasis on elder-respect toward white-haired people encountered on the roads suggests a kind of universality. No

special relation or relationship need be involved—whether of kinship, friendship, or professional life. Elder-respect is not respect for age *weighted* by closeness.

A passage about the village drinking ceremony that appears in relevantly similar form in the *Xúnzǐ* 20, in the *Lǐjì: Xiāngyǐnjiūyì* 13-15 and in the *Kōngzǐ jiāyǔ* 28 suggests that the age-ordering (弟長) it solemnized was valued partly for including *every* person (in the village or non-family group), because age-ordering has a definite place for every person. Here from the *Xúnzǐ*, with Knoblock's translation (emphasis added):

賓酬主人，主人酬介，介酬眾賓，少長以齒，終於沃洗者，焉知其能弟長而無遺也。...

貴賤明，隆殺辨，和樂而不流，弟長而無遺，安燕而不亂，此五行者，足以正身安國矣。

The chief guest pledges the wine cup to the host; the host pledges it to his attendant; and the attendant pledges it to the other guests. Young and old take a drink from it in order of age. At the conclusion the tankard is rinsed and washed. In this way we know that it is possible for junior and senior to drink together without anyone being left out [無遺].

Being clear about the distinction between noble and base; keeping distinct those to be exalted and those to be diminished; being congenial and enjoying oneself without dissipation; observing the distinctions between junior and senior without leaving anyone out [無遺]; and being content and at ease yet in no way becoming disorderly—these five patterns of conduct are sufficient to rectify the individual and to make the country tranquil.¹⁴⁶

Like a checklist of people, such a ritual would encourage a comprehensive view. It would also facilitate elder-respect outside of the ceremony, by regularly ensuring that all the attendees know precisely who is senior to whom.

¹⁴⁶ Knoblock 1994, p. 86.

Universality protects the least advantaged. The lengthy passage quoted earlier from the *Lǐjī: Jiyì* says that elder-respect supports harmony by protecting the less advantaged, even against the power of kinship.

居鄉以齒，而老窮不遺，強不犯弱，眾不暴寡，而弟達乎州巷矣。

Residents in the country [鄉] took their places according to their age, and the old and poor were not neglected [不遺], nor did the strong come into collision with the weak, or members of a numerous clan do violence to those of a smaller.

In this way elder-respect supports caring for people in general. If a man respects his elders as such, then he respects his elders from other families and clans, and he will hesitate to act against the interest of other people who are dear to or represented by those elders, even if their kinship groups are weaker or less fortunate than his own.

We might add that a dramatic fact at the heart of life is that each of us occupies all the stations of age, rising steadily and inexorably through all the age-ranks in the community (unless we die young). We all share this path and its promise. It is well suited to be a model of orderliness, in that none of us can race ahead or fall behind. Public displays of age-ordering would paint a picture of the long path of our lives. In thus helping us be mindful of our shared path, they would help us to understand others and ourselves better by helping us to see our own future and past in the people around us. By contrast, a man's age-rank among his brothers (if any) is largely static; and at any given time the age range of any one set of sons displays a short path with few people.

Public visual displays of objective age-ordering would make community among multiple kin groups more thinkable, by giving people a dynamic visual image of natural ascriptive order, of cooperation and fellowship that transcends

the bonds of blood kinship and optional friendship or alliance. In this way too a shared discipline of respect for objective seniority would work against oppression and violence, helping society be more civilized and fair.

Perhaps some such sensibility informed the discussions of internal and external in *Mencius* 6A, where elder-respect, representing *yì*, is contrasted with the virtues of the brother relation, representing *rén* (in a narrower sense than this term has at *Analects* 1.2). Here with Legge's translation, from 6A4 and 6A5:

孟子曰：「何以謂仁內義外也？」...

告子曰：...「吾弟則愛之，秦人之弟則不愛也，是以我為悅者也，故謂之內。長楚人之長，亦長吾之長，是以長為悅者也，故謂之外也。」

Mencius asked him, "What is the ground of your saying that benevolence is internal and righteousness external?" ...

Gaozi said ... "There is my younger brother; I love him. But the younger brother of a man of Qin I do not love: that is, the feeling is determined by myself, and therefore I say that benevolence is internal. On the other hand, I give honour to an old man of Chu, and I also give honour to an old man of my own people: that is, the feeling is determined by the age, and therefore I say that righteousness is external."

「鄉人長於伯兄一歲，則誰敬？」

曰：「敬兄。」

「酌則誰先？」

曰：「先酌鄉人。」

"Suppose the case of a villager older than your elder brother by one year, to which of them would you show the greater respect?"

"To my brother," was the reply.

"But for which of them would you first pour out wine at a feast?"

"For the villager."

The Gaozian view seems to reflect a sense of the value of elder-respect as a principled or objective counterweight to the warm attraction of the hive. Mencius wants to avoid the idea that elder-respect is inauthentic.

Gaozi's terms or images "internal" and "external" are of course so simple as to be muddled, as Mencius points out.¹⁴⁷ But these terms likely had some intuitive resonance with the image of going in (*rù* 入) to family and going out (*chū* 出) to others, as the *rù/chū* pairing of *xiào* (filial piety) with *tì* (elder-respect) in the *Analects*, *Mencius*, *Xúnzǐ*, *Huáinánzǐ*, and *Yántiēlùn* presumably resonated with the pairing of *rén* in family life with *yì* in public life (again, taking *rén* in the narrow sense in which it represents only part of virtue). Discussing the cluster of contrasts between inner and outer, feely and rigid, and *rén* 仁 and *yì* 義 as it appears especially in the Guodian texts, Scott Cook points out that the following line appears both in *Lǐjì: Sāngfú sìzhì* 5 and *Dà Dài Lǐjì: Běn mìng* 5:¹⁴⁸

門內之治恩揜義，門外之治義斷恩

In the order within the [family] gates, goodwill holds check over propriety;
in the order beyond the [family] gates, propriety cuts short goodwill.

Without *rù/chū* imagery, the conclusion of *Mencius* 7A15 hyperbolically identifies filial piety with *rén* 仁 and elder-respect with *yì* 義, thus suggesting that the combination of filial piety and elder-respect is the root of the whole of virtue.

孟子曰：「... 親親，仁也；敬長，義也。無他，達之天下也。」

¹⁴⁷ Gaozi may be moved in some part by the fact that being *my younger brother* is person-relative in a way that *being old* is not. But insofar as elder respect is respect for those who are *older than me*, it too is person-relative.

¹⁴⁸ Cook 2012, pp. 99ff.; the quoted line is on p. 102.

Mencius said, "... Loving one's parents is benevolence; respecting one's elders is rightness. What is left to be done is simply the extension of these to the whole Empire."¹⁴⁹

But there are problems for the interpretation of *Mencius* 7A15 (not mentioned in the literature I think), which I discuss on pp. 226-232 below.

In sum, general elder-respect would be an apt complement for filial piety in a root or trunk of virtue, because it makes an important distinct contribution. Elder-respect is not just a loose analog of filial piety. It is also a counterweight, and perhaps a necessary one. A principled respect for seniority helps direct my attention to people outside my family, ensuring that I do not exclude the most vulnerable. It makes broad community more thinkable and more harmonious, and gives me a clearer view of myself and others.

Why would the root need subfraternity?

Now let us consider what important and distinctive contribution would be made by subfraternity as a partner to filial piety, so that subfraternity would have been worth citing alongside filial piety as a comparably important part of the root of the way of the *jūnzǐ*.

One might suppose that the thought is that alongside parents, one's next most important kin are siblings; and only males count, and necessarily a boy's earliest brothers are older brothers. But this line of thinking depends on the premise that *Analects* 1.2 is mainly about the very youngest children, and we have rejected that view.

¹⁴⁹ Lau 2003, p. 148.

One might suppose that the thought is that a man's older brother must be important to him, and if a man is bad to someone important to him his whole character will suffer. But that thought cannot have been the reason to choose subfraternity for filial piety's partner. A man's younger siblings, friends, wife (or wives), children, and others would have been important to him too.

One might suppose offhand that subfraternity is filial piety lite. It is everything that filial piety is, but less so. So as a companion to filial piety it has nothing unique to contribute to the root, unless that a man's older brother may still be alive when his parents are not.

Let us look for other ideas about subfraternity's contribution, first in the modern literature and then in the ancient.

Modern views

It may sometimes be thought that the word *xiào* in *Analects* 1.2 and other early texts is sufficiently broad in meaning that it *encompasses* all the family role virtues, or all the upward ones.¹⁵⁰ If this reading of *xiào* at 1.2 is historically correct, then it made little sense to include subfraternity alongside *xiào* in the account of the root. Not only was it unnecessary, it was misleading if there was also the *possibility* of understanding *xiào* more narrowly as the virtue of sons (or offspring) toward fathers (or parents). For if *xiào* could also be meant in this narrower way, then including subfraternity in the root would be a clear signal that *xiào* here is to be understood in the narrower way, not the broader. Hence the broad reading of *xiào* at 1.2 argues that *tì* did not originally mean subfraternity here.

¹⁵⁰ If this view is true of *xiào* in general, then the word *tì* for subfraternity would be the only early Chinese word for the role virtue of a kinship position.

Even scholars who do not assert that broad reading of *xiào* often say that the statement at *Analects* 1.2 proposes *family* in general as the root—as though the statement had *not* selected two virtues for mention, and as though it had mentioned the community we call the family.

Whatever they think of *xiào*, scholars do quite widely suppose that subfraternity is not worth mentioning alongside *xiào* in the statement at *Analects* 1.2. Over 70 scholars, almost all of whom read *tì* as subfraternity, are sufficiently confident that subfraternity is not worth mentioning that they sometimes omit it in translating or paraphrasing the statement at *Analects* 1.2.¹⁵¹ They are

¹⁵¹ **(A)** At least three of us independently, in discussing 1.2, have explicitly introduced abbreviations of convenience for *xiàotì*, always choosing abbreviations that invite the reader to forget that the root has a second half. The abbreviation “filial love” is introduced by Kim-chong Chong, *Early Confucian Ethics* (Open Court 2007), p. 151 n. 4. “Filiality” is introduced by William Haines, “The Purloined Philosopher,” *Philosophy East & West* 58:4 (2008), p. 75. The same abbreviation is introduced by Sungmoon Kim in “Filiality, Compassion, and Confucian Democracy,” *Asian Philosophy* 18:3 (2008), p. 279, and in “Beyond Liberal Civil Society: Confucian Familism and Relational Strangership,” *Philosophy East & West* 60:4 (2010), p. 481, and in *Democracy after Virtue: Toward Pragmatic Confucian Democracy* (Oxford, 2018), p. 124 with n. 37.

(B) Many scholars in translating or paraphrasing the claims of 1.2 have in doing so dropped the second half of the root—sometimes offering their abbreviated account of Youzi’s proposal right alongside a quotation and/or paraphrase of 1.2 that includes both halves. Here are the clearest examples I have found. These are specific references to *Analects* 1.2, not to the statement in *Xiaojing* 1.

Joseph A. Adler, *Reconstructing the Confucian Dao: Zhu Xi’s Appropriation of Zhou Dunyi* (SUNY 2014), p. 18.

Roger T. Ames, “Thinking Through ‘Practice’ in Classical Chinese Philosophy,” in R. Ames, M. Ishida, T. Najima and S. Katani eds. *Papers from the 2013 University of Tokyo-University of Hawai’i Summer Residential Institute in Comparative Philosophy*, 2013, p. 23

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willing to decide for the reader that subfraternity is best ignored in this context, or can be safely ignored. Granted, three of these scholars translate *tì* as respect for elders when they do include it; but these three seem to assume that in this context respect for elders mainly means respect for *family* elders,¹⁵² a virtue regarding which the grounds for the permissibility of omission are similar to those that could be offered regarding subfraternity. Whatever the 70 scholars' reasons for omitting the second half of the root, to regard the omission as permissible one must be confident that in the vision expressed at 1.2, *tì* is not an important part of the root.

When scholars translating or paraphrasing *Analects* 1.2 do give a two-part root, we have seen that a number of respected scholars replace subfraternity with elder-respect, though what they understand by this is not always clear.

Also, as my readers may have observed, when scholars give a two-part account of the root at *Analects* 1.2, they often or usually replace subfraternity with a different family virtue: being a good *brother*. Some might do this to improve the flow of the English at the expense of a point seen as unimportant. Others might do it to make the text more attractive or edifying for modern minds at the expense of a point seen as unimportant. Sometimes a bit of discussion seems to show that the scholar does intend to correct Youzi's theory. For example, Chenyang Li writes, "Kongzi's disciple Youzi places brotherliness at the roots of *ren* (*Analects* 1.2). Brotherliness is characterized by reciprocal care."¹⁵³

Decision-Making, and Biotechnology: Critical Reflections on Asian Moral Perspectives (Springer 2007), p. 199.

Jiyuan Yu, *The Ethics of Confucius and Aristotle: Mirrors of Virtue* (Routledge 2007), p. 125.

L. Y. Y. Yung, "The East Asian Family-Oriented Principle and the Concept of Autonomy" in R. Fan ed. *Family-Oriented Informed Consent: East-Asian and American Perspectives* (Springer 2015), p. 116.

¹⁵² Chong 2007, p. 59; Slingerland 2003, p. 1f; Tan 2014, pp. 41, 95.

¹⁵³ C. Li 2023, p. 65, referring literally to sibling relations (cf. pp. 68, 97f.).

But if the aim is to improve the theory, why do so scholars more often erase the age asymmetry and keep the gender-specificity, than the other way around? Perhaps the thought has been that while gender-specificity is something one reads past anyway,¹⁵⁴ dropping the age asymmetry **creates** a way to see the second half of the root as a meaningful complement for filial piety rather than a superfluous pale copy. There are several ways in which replacing “good younger brother” with “good brother” might be thought to create for filial piety a meaningful helpmeet in the root, by replacing the virtue for one side of a rank relation with the virtue for both sides of horizontal relation.

One way is to suppose that while filial piety prepares men for other vertical relations, such as the ruler-ruled and boss-worker relations, being a good brother prepares men for other horizontal relations, such as friend and colleague

¹⁵⁴ The idea that we can simply read past gender-specificity is problematic *especially* in connection with *Analects* 1.2 as this passage is usually understood. The idea that we can read past gender-specificity here assumes (among other things) that the relevant forms of social order among *men* in a patriarchal society can be roughly the same as the relevant forms of social order among *people* in a society with gender equality.

Errors intrinsic to this isomorphism assumption are especially relevant at *Analects* 1.2, if we think this passage sees either the nuclear family or the longstanding family line as an important *part* of the overall form of society and its virtue, and especially if we also think the passage sees one of those institutions as an important *model* for overall social order and its virtue. For neither the nuclear nor the lineal family can be a significant institution on both sides of the supposed isomorphism, i.e. *both* among the men in patriarchy and among the people of moderately gender-equal society. A leading part of the nuclear family order is the spousal relation, which is largely absent among men in patriarchy. And the long family line as a significant institution is largely absent from moderately gender-equal society, because it depends on deep and widespread agreement about which gender of people are naturally the main people, the channels of kinship, the people who get to have real kin. Hence the idea that we can read through and past sexist language in connection with *Analects* 1.2 (on the subfraternity reading of that passage) may be bound as cause or effect either with overlooking the evils inherent to the family line as an institution, or with overlooking the spousal relation or its importance, or both. (Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill argued plausibly that the effect of patriarchy on the spousal relation makes the patriarchal nuclear family a powerful seedbed for a wide variety of vices, for all participants.) Neither issue should be overlooked in our consultation of philosophers on the general topic of the effect of family relationships on virtue.

and neighbor and husband. On this view, however, filial piety would seem to prepare men only to be ruled and bossed, not to be rulers and bosses.¹⁵⁵

Another way is to suppose that reading *tì* as being a good *brother* makes it easier to think that while filial piety grounds *respect* for all, the brother half of the root grounds *love* for all—thus capturing the two main parts of morality. Filial piety is honoring and obeying parents with visible respect, and a father may be distant from his son; but (one might suppose) love is best understood from love between equals, and brothers are approximate equals.

Whatever the merits of these two visions of moral psychology, neither can be a candidate account of the original thought at *Analects* 1.2. If *tì* at 1.2 was about the brother relation at all, then the author chose to emphasize the relation's ranking aspect, and chose the lower side of the relation rather than the upper. An interpreter should try to respect the fact that both halves of the proposed root of virtue are virtues of lower positions relating upward, on either reading of *tì*. The statement's illustrative examples seem designed with that feature of the root in mind. If there is a general idea behind the selection of two

¹⁵⁵ A variant of this approach is proposed by the historian Qian Mu, no doubt inspired by the *Mencius*. In Joseph Chan's paraphrase:

Filial piety (*xiao*) connects people vertically: it refers to a deep respect for the parents and all ancestors of a family, and by extension, to other people's parents and ancestors as well. Brotherhood (*tì*) connects people horizontally, which can be extended to anyone in the world, for as Confucius says, all within the Four Seas are one's brother. (J. Chan 2007, p. 65)

(The mention of Confucius is likely a reference to *Analects* 12.5, in which the speaker is Zixia rather than Confucius, and the claim is rather that everyone is a "brother" to any *jūnzǐ* who meets a very high standard. The original thought may be that everyone *responds* like a brother to the kind and humble *jūnzǐ*.)

But if with Qian Mu we see filial piety as extendable mainly to others' *parents and ancestors*, then why would we not see fraternity as extendable mainly to others' *brothers* or siblings rather than to everyone? Or why not see filial piety as extendable to everyone? When my friend and age-mate has a grandchild, should my relation to the child's parent (my friend's child) become vertical and upward, because that child is now a parent? Does filial piety ground nothing in me toward my childless elders, in or out of my family?

virtues for the root, that common upwardness is presumably a main clue, not to be jettisoned (and *a fortiori* not to be jettisoned without offering a reason).

In sum, if we look to the modern literature to get ideas about *how* subfraternity (more than e.g. elder-respect or trustworthiness or being a good older brother, husband or parent) might have been seen as a helpful complement to filial piety in a proposed root of virtue in men who have older brothers, then what we mainly find is evidence of widespread agreement that the theory at 1.2 would be improved or at least unharmed by removing subfraternity from the root, and perhaps by replacing it with something else. I agree with that view.

Ancient views

Do ancient texts tell us *how* subfraternity might have been thought to be the apt complement for *xiào* in the root by the author at *Analects* 1.2?

I have found nothing on point in the *Analects* or the *Xúnzǐ*.

The *Mencius* seems sometimes to see filial piety as the root of *rén* 仁 and subfraternity as the root of *yì* 義, e.g. at 4A27 and 7A15 on the usual reading of these passages. But no explanation is offered, and it is problematic to read the passages as referring to subfraternity at all.¹⁵⁶

As we have seen, the *Liù dé* and the first chapter of the *Xiàojīng* offer filial piety alone as the root.

But two other *Xiàojīng* chapters give accounts of the special contribution of *tì* as distinct from *xiào* in supporting other virtue. In at least one of these chapters, *tì* is subfraternity.

¹⁵⁶ See pp. 222-232 below.

Xiàojīng 12 proposes an account of the distinct powers of *xiào* and *tì* in supporting broader virtue.

子曰：「教民親愛，莫善於孝。教民禮順，莫善於悌。移風易俗，莫善於樂。安上治民，莫善於禮。

禮者、敬而已矣。故敬其父則子悅，敬其兄則弟悅，敬其君則臣悅。敬一人而千萬人悅。所敬者寡，而悅者眾，此之謂要道也。」

The Master said, “There is nothing more effective than family reverence for teaching (*jiao*) the people about love and affection; there is nothing more effective than deference for elders (*ti*) for teaching the people about ritual propriety (*li*) and compliance (*shun*); there is nothing more effective than music (*yue*) for changing the ways and customs of the people; and there is nothing more effective for safeguarding the lord and bringing proper order to the people than observing ritual propriety.

“Ritual propriety is simply a matter of respect (*jing*). Thus, the son finds pleasure in respecting his father; the younger brother finds pleasure in respecting his older brother; the minister finds pleasure in respecting his lord; and all of the people find pleasure in respecting the Emperor. Those who are respected [敬] are few, but those who find pleasure in showing this respect are legion. This is what is called the vital way (*dao*).”¹⁵⁷

It is hard to know what to make of this chapter. Is it possible that the two paragraphs were originally composed together? Does the opening claim about filial piety belong with the rest? Why would *tì* be a better support than *xiào* for ritual and compliance? In connection with the idea that *xiàotì* trains great virtue by training respect (*jìng* 敬), is respect for the people no part of virtuous leadership? I submit that the first paragraph is not talking about how to support various qualities in oneself; rather it is talking about which practices by a ruler engender which qualities in the people.

¹⁵⁷ Rosemont & Ames 2009, p. 112.

Just a few lines later, [Xiàojīng 14](#) gives an account of what subfraternity has to offer to complement filial piety. Here is the chapter, with Legge's translation from ctext.org:

子曰：「君子之事親孝，故忠可移於君。事兄悌，故順可移於長。居家理，故治可移於官。是以行成於內，而名立於後世矣。」

The Master said, "The filial piety with which the superior man serves his parents may be transferred as loyalty to the ruler. The fraternal duty with which he serves his elder brother may be transferred as submissive deference to elders. His regulation of his family may be transferred as good government in any official position. Therefore, when his conduct is thus successful in his inner (private) circle, his name will be established (and transmitted) to future generations."

We might find it strange that a man's subfraternity is seen as better suited than his filial piety to ground his submissive deference to seniors in general. One might have thought that filial piety is better suited to do that, because parents are more senior and command more submissive deference.

The opening of [Lǐjì: Fángjì 31](#) may be in broad agreement with *Xiàojīng* 14 about the difference between filial piety and subfraternity. Here with Legge's translation:

子云：「孝以事君，弟以事長」，示民不貳也，故君子有君不謀仕...

The Master said, "Filial duty may be transferred to the service of the ruler, and brotherly submission to the service of elders" - showing the people that they ought not to be double-minded. Hence a superior man, while his ruler is alive, should not take counsel about taking office (in another state). ...

Toward deciding whether *Xiàojīng* 14 and *Fángjì* 31 might capture what the statement at *Analects* 1.2 has in mind about subfraternity, we might ask ourselves two main questions. (1) Can it really have seemed that subfraternity is the root of elder-respect? (2) Supposing that it could, is the above vision of the separate roles of filial piety and subfraternity a good fit with the idea that filial piety and subfraternity are the root of the way of the *jūnzǐ*?

(1) Could it have seemed that subfraternity is the root of elder-respect?

Here we might want to distinguish two views to find in the texts: that a young boy's subfraternity is the psychological foundation of his coming to respect his elders in general, and that a man's subfraternity is the psychological foundation of his continuing elder-respect.

Regarding a boy, the view would be that he is naturally shaped toward respect for seniority as such, the kind of virtue that would have the boy polite to his grown-up neighbors and solicitous of the elderly on the roads, and in general *anyone* older than himself, mainly by practicing respect for one or more of the youngest people in his family or household: his own older brother(s)—more than he would be would be shaped for elder-respect by his relations with his parents and other family elders.

Regarding a man, the view would be that the core continuing support for his daily honoring of seniority in his relations with colleagues and neighbors is his apt way of relating now to one or a few of the people he grew up with, whom he might or might not often see.

Toward having an opinion about that, one would first ask oneself, "Would a boy or man have great difficulty with elder-respect if he did not have an older brother (in a society where elder-respect is standard practice outside the family)? Would he have *any* difficulty?" But asking that here is only partly fair. For the sake of Argument 2 we are closing our eyes to the possibility that a man might

lack an older brother. Still that question can draw our minds to the fair question whether, beyond treating an older brother well, there are *other* significant psychological supports available for elder-respect: tools to conceive it, cues to do it, reasons to do it, rewards it brings, problems it avoids,—enough that subfraternity would not stand out as the main basis of elder-respect. For example, I might respect my parents, who are saliently my elders. Or, my parents might get me started by telling me to respect my elders and to watch how others respect their elders. Or I might have noticed from early childhood that my elders understand things better than I do, and are the gatekeepers of what I want. Or I might have noticed from early childhood that my elder neighbors expect my respect and react badly when they do not receive it. Or I might just notice that other people respect their elders. The idea that I must first respect an older brother implies a very dim view of human nature, or very sheltered family life.

Another point one would consider is that being a particular man's good younger brother is *different* from mere elder-respect toward that same man, and not just because subfraternity is more demanding than elder-respect. Jack's relationship with his older brother Jim likely feels unique to that relationship, reflecting Jim's (perhaps very) distinctive personality and character, how he treats Jack now and how he used to, the circumstances and secrets and adventures they have shared, and the simple fact that they know each other well. Jack might feel that these specifics, more than Jim's being two years older, are what shape and ground the way to relate to Jim. It might be quite unnatural for Jack as a boy or as a man to feel the slightly older Jim as *the representative elder*. All boys' and most men's days are full of other people who are more saliently their seniors than their older brothers are.

On the other hand, childhood experiences *are* formative and will have shaped any grown man's sense of his older brother. A little boy's older brothers

might have been *his representative elders* in this sense: of all the elders around, his big brothers was the elder most comparable to himself. The boy might feel that the grownups are in another league, and the neighbor children are just neighbors.¹⁵⁸ And **if** the relationship with the brothers arises in the matrix of a culture that is verbal about age rank among brothers and uses similar language for elder-respect in the neighborhood, and if he has at least two brothers (and far less contact with other near peers) so that the group of brothers can feel like a *whole* community, **then** taking that brotherly age-ranking as the model for neighborhood life might conceivably feel natural, at least for a boy, or for a young man whose older brothers remain in his daily life.

Whether a grown man's being a better-than-average younger brother to his older brother(s) would remain an essential or the primary psychological *support* for his elder-respect is another question.

(2) Does the *Xiàojīng* 14/*Fángjì* 31 vision fit *Analects* 1.2?

One reason to think the *Xiàojīng* and *Fángjì* chapters are not a good guide to the vision at *Analects* 1.2 is that these chapters would suggest that the two branch practices mentioned in 1.2 (not liking to disobey superior officers and not rebelling) are both rooted in filial piety, *not* subfraternity.

Further, neither of the chapters suggests that *xiàotì* grounds the whole of virtue. *Fángjì* 31 does not mention grounding anything beyond obedience to rulers and respect for elders. *Xiàojīng* 14 says that *xiào* and *tì* are *two of three* practices that together ground at least enough virtue to give one a lasting good name.

This latter vision seems to reflect a **(nuclear) family model** of public order. The virtue for any given family relational role supports the virtue for the

¹⁵⁸ Would a good Confucian son feel this way? I am asking.

specifically analogous public relational role. Hence *Xiàojīng* 14 proposes a third and downward family virtue to ground a man's excellence in governing the people: governing his family well.¹⁵⁹

Like *Xiàojīng* 14, *Analects* 1.2 can seem at least at first glance to suppose that upward roots support only upward branches, because both examples of branches it offers are upward. But unlike *Xiàojīng* 14, *Analects* 1.2 says that just the two upward root virtues ground the whole way of the *jūnzǐ*. Hence it has been said in commenting on the overall vision at 1.2, "A filial citizenry is one schooled in docility, the Way at which 1.2 aims."¹⁶⁰ The comment is quite apt in connection with the *Xiàojīng* 14 and *Fángǐ* 31 vision of the effect of the two virtues filial piety and subfraternity. If we take these chapters as our guide to how 1.2 thinks of *xiàotì* as supporting *rén* and the way of the *jūnzǐ*, our guide tells us that 1.2 does not think of the *jūnzǐ* as a leader and does not think of *rén* as a virtue for leadership. In these ways the statement at 1.2 would then be disagreeing with the Confucius material in the *Analects*.

How might *Analects* 1.2 imagine that virtues of *upward* roles would support the virtue of a *leader*, without undue complexity?

One way is to set aside the nuclear family model described above, and appeal to what I shall call the **transmission model**. The nuclear family model sees upward respect as the activity of one pole of a dyadic relation, and a root because it is a little blueprint of the right relating to non-family superiors. By contrast, the transmission model sees upward reverence as the root because it is a studied receptivity to the blueprint embodied by the higher party and/or

¹⁵⁹ Similarly, a passage in the *Lǐjì: Dàxué* 11 lists filial piety, subfraternity, and parenthood as grounding further virtues; but the assembled passage may be a tangle of two different ideas: that a person's three family virtues support three further qualities in the person, and that a ruler's three family virtues support three qualities in the people.

¹⁶⁰ Brooks & Brooks 1998, p. 297.

recorded in any instructions they may have given. Thus each person is an upward-looking link in a hanging chain, as it were. Society may be woven from different kinds of hanging chain, such as descent, age, precedence in office, and official rank. There is a presumption that the higher parties embody general virtue, and a higher party who happens to exemplify general virtue is thereby a good model for the virtue of anyone below. (If one's immediate superior in a chain is unsatisfactory, his superior may have been better.) In that way, *upward* reverence brings *general* virtue. And being a model for those below is benefitting them; or it is one way of benefitting them. We may find the picture in e.g. [Máooshī 240](#) and [243](#). This picture would seem to fit an image of kinship organization focusing on the lineage rather than the nuclear family.

This view would seem out of harmony with *Xiàojīng* 14 and the view of moral psychology common to the Youzi statements in *Analects* 1, for all these statements seem to see the root virtues as similar to the branch virtues, and supporting the branches by way of that similarity, not by being receptiveness to whatever model may be offered. Similarly, when [Mencius 2A2](#) attributes to Youzi an argument that (there can be a second sage because) sages are similar in kind to other men, the picture seems to be one of growth, with greater men described as being more fully grown.

Within the transmission model we might ask: is general virtue *more* than reverence for those higher up in the chain? For example, care for inferiors would seem distinct from reverence for superiors. Does it come into the picture independently of reverence, as something that just happens to be modeled higher up in the chains, so that it is (as we may say) only accidentally or extrinsically connected to upward virtue?

Care might come into the picture as an explanation of the reverence, by way of the idea that reverence should arise from gratitude for a superior's care

or beneficence. This view helps bind care and reverence into a single story, but it does not suggest how Smith's reverence for superiors would prompt Smith to care for inferiors other than by the accident of the available models. So we might ask: Why does Smith's superior Jones care about inferiors? To get their reverence? Or because Jones' superior happened to model care for immediate inferiors (or wanted a long chain below)? Or from the goodness of Jones' heart, not explained by upward reverence?

And if a man's reverence is from gratitude, is it genuine reverence? Perhaps loosely so, if we can loosely identify gratitude for care with an appreciation of goodness, and loosely identify goodness with caring (about one person).

Whatever the details, on the transmission picture it is hard to see reverence for older brothers as a key supplement for filial piety in the root. A man *could* see his older brother as a link to his father, but in fact each man is *directly* descended from his father, and more directly kin to his father than to his brother. Filial piety links a man to the whole chain of his patrilineal progenitors, while within the family subfraternity adds a few brothers at most, each of them barely senior to the man and looking up to that same chain.

By contrast, adding elder-respect to filial piety would add the whole community, or the whole community of seniority chains.

We have looked at the **nuclear family model** and the **transmission model** of public order to try to see how *Xiàojīng* 14 and/or *Fángjì* 31 might describe the importance of subfraternity for general and leadership virtue as originally envisioned at *Analects* 1.2. Neither model seems to succeed.

A third option is the **universality model**. This view takes *xiàotì* as a kind of blueprint for all relating. That is, the great virtue of a ruler and other men is to relate to many or all as a *xiàotì* man relates to his parents and elders or older

brother. Something akin to this idea is explicit at the beginning of *Mòzǐ* 25 (節葬下): “The *rén* person’s tending to the world is no different from the filial son’s tending to his parents,” for the *rén* person enriches the world, multiplies its people, and orders its affairs. Upward virtues can be models for good rulership. This universality model is not the vision at *Xiàojīng* 14 and *Fángjì* 31. So if we can regard the universality model as Youzi’s vision, we cannot regard those texts as telling us how Youzi saw the distinct value of subfraternity.

The idea of the universality model would be that great virtue is respect and/or care for all, and the two upward virtues *xiào* and *tì* (on either reading of *tì*) are miniatures of that, essential grounding exercises in respect and/or care (depending on how we conceive good relating to parents and elders or elder brothers). For example, one might see *xiào* and *tì* as kinds of service (*shì* 事), and think that every public career is best regarded as a career in public service.¹⁶¹ The Confucius material in the *Analects* does associate governance with public service,¹⁶² and with ritual and yielding (*ràng* 讓),¹⁶³ and with *rén*¹⁶⁴ (which in turn is associated with care for all¹⁶⁵).

Digging ditches is a kind of public service; but it may feel more like labor than service, because it benefits people one is not close to. Supervising the digging of ditches, setting standards and battling barbarism are public service, but they may not feel like service. As compared with these, *xiào* and *tì* are vividly

¹⁶¹ We might compare Gregory Vlastos’ proposal that *noble rank* can be an illuminating picture of a modern conception of how the people should be treated by their political system:

The fact that ... citizenship, having been made common, is no longer a mark of distinction does not trivialize the privileges it entails. It is the simple truth ... to speak of it, as I have done, as a “rank of dignity” in some ways comparable to that enjoyed by hereditary nobilities of the past. (Vlastos 1962, p. 47)

¹⁶² *Analects* 8.21, 13.1.

¹⁶³ *Analects* 4.13, 8.1, 11.26.

¹⁶⁴ *Analects* 12.1, 14.16f.

¹⁶⁵ *Analects* 1.6, 12.22.

service, and are directly compelling kinds of service, and are thus well suited perhaps to ground and orient us in the proper valuation of the more advanced kinds of service (except perhaps for men who do not know their parents, as Confucius did not know his father). Or the picture could be a little more fine-grained, distinguishing the powers of the halves of the root: service to parents grounds the caring or *rén* side of public service, while subfraternity or elder-respect grounds the respecting or *yì* side of public service.

In line with the universality model, the statements attributed to Youzi in the *Analects* outside of 1.2 suggest that he saw virtue as respectful concern for all, including respectfulness by the great *toward* the small. *Analects* 1.13 says that respectful conduct (*gōng* 恭) is close to ritual propriety, not just that it is close to the ritual propriety of lower parties relating upward. And regarding ritual propriety in turn, *Analects* 1.12 says that the beauty of ritual is harmony because “great and small follow it,” likely alluding to the banquet in [Máoshī 209](#), whose humble climactic moment is when “great and small bow their heads.”¹⁶⁶ Ritual and harmony would thus be well-developed mutual respectfulness. Anticipating Kant in another way, *Analects* 1.13 says that honesty is close to uprightness or justice because one’s words can be repeated. I submit that this means that a trustworthy person and an upright person can each be counted on to stick to their words through changing circumstances, because they choose their words (intentions and values) in awareness of the fact that life might turn the tables. A trustworthy person has tested in imagination any promise or policy she announces, asking herself whether she would be willing to stick to it should things change: testing it from her own possible future points of view. Very similarly, a just person has tested her values (her sayings) by imaginatively

¹⁶⁶ I defend this reading of *Analects* 1.12 under Hagop Sarkissian’s February 6, 2010 blog post “[Translate This!](#)” at Warp, Weft, & Way.

considering that kind of maxim from other people's points of view, e.g. those of different kinds of advisee, or one's own superiors or inferiors. That way neither the trustworthy nor the just person will be caught out by their own sayings. Objective moral language has purchase on such people; it has meaning in their mouths. Their words bear repeating. In this way honesty is the root of *yì* as rightness and as meaningfulness.

Now, on the universality model there is no obvious reason why the root has to be located wholly within the family. It is not obviously easier to be subfraternal than to exercise objective elder-respect. Elder-respect is easy to do, partly because it is not about relationships. It is in the first instance about where you sit and where you walk, when you drink and when you talk.

One objection to the universality model as a reading of the statement at *Analects* 1.2 is that as compared to any upward virtues, a much more vivid and immediately compelling kind of caring is a parent's care for a child. Perhaps the best **reply** is that Youzi's other statements in Book 1 suggest that his vision of great virtue toward all was more about respect than care, thus favoring upward relating as paradigmatic.

Another objection to the universality model as a reading of the statement at *Analects* 1.2, is that the two illustrations of *branches* in that statement suggests that Youzi was not envisioning *xiàotì* as the root of a ruler's good ruling.

My **reply** is that while the statement might seem not to articulate this vision well enough to support this reading, that seeming may not be right, for two main reasons.

First, that seeming *could* be an artifact of distance. In the context in which the statement was first composed and issued, the shared understanding of *rén* and of the *jūnzǐ* was likely to have been clearer than it is to us now, as we look

both from a great distance and under some influence from later brands of Confucianism that were less optimistic about the political prospects of individual Ru.

Second, we should see that the sequence of concrete examples paints its picture only indirectly—perhaps because the examples are offered as *evidence* and so must be manifestly plausible. The statement sets out three levels of good practice (or omission). To simplify: (a) *xiàotì* supports (b) non-disobedience, which in turn supports (c) non-rebellion. We are probably meant to associate these three good practices with three levels of status or power: private life, the life of an official (or a private person bumping up against the state), and the life of a powerful official—a sequence that could suggest rulership as the ideal culmination. But **(1)** the sequence of good practices seems not to be ordered from the less challenging to the more challenging, elementary to advanced. On the contrary: non-rebellion is simple and easy, while non-disobedience is more complex and demanding. And **(2)** although Youzi's examples (or evidence) and his metaphor use the idea of high-probability guarantees, surely in saying that *xiàotì* is the root of great virtue he does not mean that it *guarantees* great virtue with a high probability. For what he actually says is only that *xiàotì* guarantees with high probability the avoidance of vice and destruction.

Hence we should not read the two concrete examples of practices (omissions) supported by *xiàotì* as descriptions of the sequence of ever greater moral accomplishments supported by *xiàotì*. From the point of view of that reading, the two specified accomplishments would be too low and moving in the wrong direction. Rather, the examples should suggest a series of ever greater positions from which to make a difference, or ever greater scopes of activity, naming bare acceptability within each (not liking disobedience, not liking to sow chaos). The explicit observation is that *xiàotì* is sufficient to ward off the minima;

the implicit lesson is that it is a necessary help toward the maxima. And where the minimum is *not liking to make chaos*, then the maximum could be liking to make peace and good order. *Xiàotì* does not guarantee that liking, but it aims us in that direction, away from the opposite.

We saw that the early texts that suggest accounts of the special contribution of subfraternity stress that its contribution is to support elder-respect (at least for men who have older brothers). But the idea that subfraternity is the foundation of elder-respect, and an apter foundation than filial piety, is so implausible on its face as to suggest that this was not so much a serious idea as a symptom of a historical accident. Nobody ever decided to propose that the root of virtue is filial piety and subfraternity; rather that idea was found in hallowed literature because of changing philosophical interests and a shift in the meaning of a key term, so that the practice of subfraternity accrued some of the associations that had previously and more reasonably belonged to the practice of elder-respect.

Conclusion of Argument 2

On the one hand, I have argued that elder-respect makes an invaluable partner for filial piety in a proposed root of general virtue.

On the other hand, as we have seen, scholars of early Chinese philosophy today seem to see subfraternity as not worth mentioning alongside filial piety in a proposed root of general virtue. There were some ancient attempts to describe the distinctive contribution of subfraternity as a partner of filial piety in supporting some broader virtue, but these accounts see the contributions of each in too limited (and perhaps implausible) a way to fit the idea that filial piety and

subfraternity are the root of the whole of virtue. If the author of the statement at *Analects* 1.2 had a clear good reason to make subfraternity the partner of filial piety in the root of complete virtue, the vision would seem to have been lost to the tradition early on.

For these reasons the elder-respect version of Youzi's statement at *Analects* 1.2 is a better statement than the subfraternity version. It is likely more illuminating about the right way to live, more likely to be true of Youzi's milieu, and more likely to have felt true in his milieu. For these reasons charity prefers the elder-respect reading of *tì* at 1.2.

Argument 3 for the elder-respect reading: Availability

Men who cannot practice subfraternity

Every man has occasion to try to be filial and respect his elders. But only a man's younger brother can be a man's good younger brother. The subfraternity reading makes the root of virtue unavailable to first sons and only sons.

In my society and perhaps yours, the vast majority of men are like me in having no opportunity for subfraternity. But we may underestimate the magnitude of this kind of obstacle to the subfraternity reading at 1.2, because of reverence for traditional readings, or a focus on texts or metaethics or metaphysical styles rather than practical life, or the common translation of *tì* as being a good brother, or optimism about reading past gender discrimination. For example, suppose we think *tì* is being a good brother. Then we may think *tì* is open to the great majority of men. For in all families with more than one child, 100% of the sons are brothers. And among complete sets of 6 siblings who live

full lives, about 97% of the men have brothers—by simple math, absent special conditions or practices.¹⁶⁷

What proportion of men in Warring States China were no man's younger brother? On the one hand, agrarian societies favor large families at least when land is plentiful,¹⁶⁸ and a well-off man might have several wives. On the other hand, successful childbirth was difficult; and especially in warring states a father might early suffer conscription or death, as Confucius' father did. Indeed Confucius and his disciples knew hunger. We are told that Confucius had one brother and one son, and that Mencius had no brother. I do not know if we have reports about other early Ru. It is tempting to speculate that Ru might have come mostly from relatively poor branches of otherwise landed lineages.

By simple math, among all complete sets of 6 offspring who live full lives, 32.8% of the men are no man's younger brother.¹⁶⁹ More comprehensively:

# of offspring	% of men who are no man's younger brother
1	100%
2	75%
3	58%
4	47%
5	39%
6	33%

¹⁶⁷ In the 64 possible gender-combinations of 6 offspring, there are $64 \times 3 = 192$ sons, among whom 6 have no brother.

¹⁶⁸ Thanks to Ben Hammer for this point.

¹⁶⁹ In the 64 possible gender-combinations of 6 offspring, there are $64 \times 3 = 192$ sons (reflecting an average of 3 sons per combination), among whom 63 sons (one from each combination) have no older brother.

7	28%
8	25%
9	22%
10	20%

Significant male child mortality might have increased greatly the percentages of freshly capped men who had no living older brother, because it would have increased the number of actual childbirths required to generate a given number of men. In the land-rich United States, 46% of children born in the year 1800 did not live past age 4.¹⁷⁰ If in fifth-century Lu half of all males died before adulthood, then among new-capped men from families with 10 childbirths, at least 39% would lack living older brothers. One has duties to the deceased, but they may not be very engaging.

Hence it would seem that men who were not younger brothers were far too many to be dismissed as odd or outlier cases that a rough-and-ready generalization can ignore.

Furthermore, high as these percentages are, they greatly understate the problem posed for the subfraternity reading at *Analects* 1.2. Far from being outlier cases, men without older brothers would have been focal cases for early Ru interest in the great virtue. Perhaps most of the men whose virtue was of most interest to a Ru in Confucius' wake were first or only sons. Here's why.

¹⁷⁰ For children born in 1880 the figure was 34%; and for 1920 it was 18%. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1041693/united-states-all-time-child-mortality-rate/> In the United States, "the census of 1850 reported average ages of 21.4 for Negroes and 25.3 for whites at the time of death" (Stampp 1956, p. 318).

- Probably most states and important clans were headed by first or only sons, as primogeniture was the default rule of succession.¹⁷¹ Confucius and presumably the early Ru around him saw the virtue of rulers as the key to the good society.
- Every Ru and indeed every man was either a first or only son, or (where subfraternity was honored) under the personal direction of a first son.¹⁷² Subfraternity strives to respect, obey, aid and/or emulate a first son, and perhaps to be concerned about his character.
- The first (or only) son of each Ru was likely to be the son of greatest concern to him. And for a time, a man's first son is the only son of concern to him.
- Emperor Shun and King Wen were first sons.

Further, even to *seem* to say that being a man's good younger brother is a main part of the foundation of virtue would have been problematic for the early Ru, not just theoretically but politically and practically. David Schaberg reports that in Warring States historical texts about the Spring and Autumn period,

speeches and their political principles cluster around a few problems that were likely sites of real political tension in the states of the Spring and Autumn period and that also made for especially strong literary tests and demonstrations of received values. One such problem is the choice of a successor, whether as head of the ruling line (and hence of the state) or as head of another leading family. The guiding principle, departures from which generally bring trouble, is that the heir should be selected on the basis of primogeniture and moral excellence. Instances of conflict between

¹⁷¹ A rich or powerful man might have had several wives and thus many sons. What would their family life have been like? Is that the circumstance envisioned at *Analects* 1.2?

¹⁷² Or if the first son died in childhood, the head among the adult sons was one who could do little to practice subfraternity, and who may never have met his deceased brother.

the two criteria do exist, of course, but it is the ruler's misguided selection of a younger and worse son as his heir that gives rise to speeches.¹⁷³

The rival ambitions of the sons of a deceased ruler quite often threatened political violence (or even war), as we are reminded in *Analects* 14.16f. The myths of Shun and of Boyi and Shuqi may reflect the depth and pervasiveness of concern about this matter. Hence any proclamation that seemed to say that a man must be some man's younger brother to have a leader's excellence would have seemed to challenge a main traditional rule protecting political order. To seem to denigrate first sons in that way could have made it harder to find work in government. Savvy aspiring counsellors would not repeat such a saying to the typical ruler or clan head, and might worry about the impression it could give to their prospective or current trainees.

The subfraternity reading at *Analects* 1.2 implies that there was an early Ru who contemplated *introducing* the idea that being some man's good younger brother is a big part of the foundation of virtue.¹⁷⁴ This Ru must have been someone who had thought quite a bit about subfraternity, as we almost never do today. Such a man could not have overlooked the point that a large portion of men can never be any man's good younger brother, and that this portion includes himself or his oldest brother, his own oldest son (if he had a son), some of his friends, their oldest sons, most heads of states, most heads of clans, most heads of brothers, and two main Ru virtue heroes. He would not have been blind to the practical drawbacks of seeming to announce that the root of virtue is out of all these men's reach. If he nevertheless actually or seemingly proposed to his fellows that being a man's good younger brother is a crucial support for general

¹⁷³ Schaberg 2002, p. 151.

¹⁷⁴ The idea of a root-branch relation between virtues seems to enter the tradition with the statements attributed to Youzi in *Analects* 1.

virtue, then as they heard this idea for the first time, the first sons and thoughtful men among them, and any who had an oldest brother they deeply respected or a first son for whom they had dreams, would likely have pushed back, inspiring the author to change his view or clarify the statement.

How could the subfraternity reading have begun?

But if the statement at *Analects* 1.2 originally spoke of filial piety and elder-respect, and 100 or 150 years later the term *tì* began sometimes to mean subfraternity, and by 200 years later this new meaning had become predominant alongside a shift in philosophical interest toward the family and children, then when a Ru came across the statement in a collection or two, he may have assumed that it was talking about subfraternity (see p. 62f. above).

Some may then have noticed the problem of first sons and so been moved to drop *tì* from their idea of the root, putting forth instead the account we find in the *Liù dé* and *Xiàojīng* 1.

Others may have been loyal to the revered text. Reading a text as scripture can mean overlooking problems such as unwelcome practical implications,¹⁷⁵ or accepting weak solutions,¹⁷⁶ or too readily supposing that the problems must be

¹⁷⁵ For countless startling examples, see *The Age of Reason*, by the American revolutionary Thomas Paine.

¹⁷⁶ It may be tempting to imagine that the exchange at *Analects* 12.5 raises and answers the problem that the doctrine recorded at 1.2 seems to impugn the virtue of men who have no older brothers; and that in doing so the exchange at 12.5 heads off any future concern about the problem. Specifically, one could imagine that the reason why Sima Niu found his lack of brothers upsetting is that he was concerned for his root in light of the doctrine that subfraternity is half of it. If that was (or even if it wasn't) the concern behind Sima Niu's lament, one could imagine that Zixia's reply gives the party line on that problem. Zixia's reply is that if you are reverential and respectful and ceremonious, everyone will be your "brother." It would follow that respecting your elders would count as respecting your older "brothers." This reply might seem to defend the doctrine that subfraternity is half the root (and rescue Sima Niu's moral prospects) by

soluble somehow, or just refraining from pointing the problems out. These things can happen throughout an intellectual community.

I do not know whether the apparently universal absence of any mention of the problem of men without older brothers in Anglophone publications presenting *Analects* 1.2 for general or scholarly readers is due to scholars' having a solution; but if it is, the solution should be presented in a note when the scholar translates or explains *tì* in this passage as being a good younger brother or good brother.¹⁷⁷

The subfraternity interpretation of the original meaning of *tì* at *Analects* 1.2 presents us with a choice. Are we to think that (a) the originally intended view did in fact imply that first and only sons are congenitally handicapped for virtue? The alternative is to think that (b) the statement was poorly and riskily composed in that it says nothing to discourage that inference.¹⁷⁸ Interpretive charity is not happy with (a) or (b).

maintaining that what had looked like a doctrine about subfraternity is better understood as a doctrine about elder-respect cast in a brother metaphor. But so conceived, Zixia's defense of the doctrine is a questionable defense, at least as stated. It says a man can get occasion to practice the root of wide virtue if he first practices wide virtue. My own view is that 12.5 does not speak to Youzi's doctrine, intentionally or otherwise. (See also above, p. 113, n. 155.)

¹⁷⁷ One way in which *Analects* 1.2 is sometimes presented is to give in close proximity two conflicting definitions of *tì* for the passage without acknowledging the difference—thus perhaps disarming the interpretive concern without addressing it. For example, in a discussion D. C. Lau offers both “obedient as a young man” and “a good younger brother” (Lau 1979, p. 18). Roger T. Ames does the same with “fraternal deference” and “deference to elders” at Ames 2011, p. 88f.; Ames & Rosemont 2013, p. 125; Ames 2020, p. 79; Ames 2022, pp. 3f. and 351; Ames 2023, §III.6; and Ames 2024).

It might be thought that using the word “brotherly” or “fraternal” in translating *tì* solves or at least obscures the interpretive problem, on the grounds that these words suggest without implying that the parties are brothers. But in fact these English words in their standard virtue use do *not* suggest that the parties are brothers. To make them imply or at least suggest that the parties are brothers, one must be using them in another sense (see pp. 150-159 below).

¹⁷⁸ This concern is distinct from the concern raised on pp. 74ff. above, that if and only if *tì* at 1.2 originally meant subfraternity, the statement was poorly composed because it does not signal that *tì* is meant in that sense.

Under heading (b) we might hypothesize that the author was trying to say only that for *men who have older brothers*, the root is filial piety and subfraternity, without addressing the case of other men, who might have workable substitutes for subfraternity. But again, given the bold wording of the statement, this reading is a serious option only if the author regarded those other men as very few or unimportant—which would have been an error on his part.

Or under heading (b) we might hypothesize that the author thought it was enough that a son have the practice of *not disrespecting* an older brother. Younger brothers can hardly do that as well as the worst of the first sons. But can we see the supporting effect of *that* empty practice as comparable to the effect of active filial piety or elder-respect?

Hence interpretive charity rejects the idea that *tì* at *Analects* 1.2 originally meant being a good younger brother to one's older brother(s), and should probably reject that reading even if we did not have a ready alternative.

Three compromise proposals answered

Here I shall present and discuss three proposals that try to preserve the idea that *tì* at 1.2 is something like subfraternity, while allowing the passage to say something sensible about first sons.

One might test any proposal of this sort as an interpretation of how the term might have been understood in a given period, by checking any literature from that period about exemplary cases of “*tì*” as (at least approximately) subfraternity, to see if a few cases are not quite brothers. Finding and checking such literature are both beyond me now.

Proposal 1: Trunk and branch

One might propose that perhaps *tì* was not exactly ambiguous as between subfraternity and elder-respect. Instead, elder-respect was regarded as a *growth* from subfraternity, so when one saw elder-respect one could *call* it ‘subfraternity,’ just as we might point to Mary’s hand or hat sticking up from behind her wall and say, “That’s Mary.” So when *Analects* 1.2 speaks of subfraternity, elder-respect can *count* as “subfraternity.” Hence first sons can have something *called* “subfraternity”: their elder-respect.

First reply. Two key parts of this proposal are that (a) people thought elder-respect has to come from subfraternity, and that (b) they didn’t.

Second reply. Probably no word available to Youzi would have been shaped by the relevant linguistic community’s broad acceptance of the idea of virtues being related as root and branch, because probably that idea was introduced by Youzi. Though it appears in each of Youzi’s discussions of virtues in the *Analects*, so far as I can tell it appears nowhere else in the *Analects*, and I have not noticed it in any earlier text. Others may have looked more thoroughly than I and found something.

Proposal 2: Core and fringe

One might propose that rather than being ambiguous, *tì* was the name for a complex virtue with subfraternity as its core part, and with respect for other elders as a peripheral part. That would be possible because subfraternity and elder-respect are similar. Perhaps this is how Zhu Xi understood the term at *Analects* 1.2 (see p. 49 n. 74 above).

Hence for men who had older brothers, *tì* would be mainly subfraternity, but for men who had no occasion for subfraternity, *tì* could be realized in respect for elders among one’s close kin, or in general. One might hold that this complex

virtue is the one and only *tì*, mentioned at *Analects* 1.2 and at 1.6, 13.20, 14.43, and the passages in many other early texts that refer specifically to *tì* outside the family.

First reply. Such a tricky proposal is a bit much to accept without direct discussion in ancient texts, which I think we do not have. Absent such discussion, this interpretation of *tì* does not harmonize with the wording at *Analects* 1.6 and 13.20, and in many other early texts, as we have seen. If the core of *tì* were in the home, the neighbors would not be its proper judges. And if the core of *tì* were in the home, it would be strange to say “When you go out, *then* (zé 則) be *tì*.”

Second reply. This core-fringe proposal about the meaning of *tì* may be attractive because it suggests the idea that *tì* is respect for age *weighted* by closeness, and we associate Confucianism with *graded* concern or graded ultimate concern. But the subfraternity-as-core, elder-respect-as-fringe proposal is out of harmony with the idea of respect for age weighted by closeness, in two main ways. First, for men with older brothers, the **core** of a virtue of respect for age weighted by closeness would not be subfraternity. Parents outrank older brothers both in age and closeness. Grandparents are much older than older brothers, but arguably just as close in kinship. Aunts and uncles tend to be much older than older brothers but are fairly close; cf. *Mencius* 6A5. Second, what might be taken for the **fringe**, the elder-respect mentioned elsewhere in the *Analects*, was in a number of ancient passages and practices distinctly recognized as respect for age *not* weighted by closeness; it was valued partly because it overrode kinship bonds.

Proposal 3: Cousins

A third compromise proposal is that *tì* at *Analects* 1.2 meant respect for one's male paternal cousins (one's father's father's sons' sons), or some similar group. After all, the term *xiōngdì* 兄弟 was sometimes used in a broad sense to include paternal cousins.

To my knowledge this understanding of *tì* has been suggested just once, obliquely and in connection with *Lǐjì: Jìyì* 13 rather than *Analects* 1.2. Here is the key passage, with Legge's translation and interpretive suggestion.

至孝近乎王，雖天子，必有父；至弟近乎霸，雖諸侯，必有兄。

He who is perfectly filial approximates to being king, for even the son of Heaven had the father (whom he must revere); and he who is perfectly fraternal approximates to being presiding chieftain, for even a feudal lord had his older brothers (or cousins), (whom he must obey).

If we read *xiōng* 兄 here as older brother, the text says that every feudal lord *must* have an older brother. Hence Couvreur takes *xiōng* here simply to mean “elders.”¹⁷⁹ That reading removes what appears to be an absurd falsehood from the passage.¹⁸⁰

Legge's reading of *xiōng* as “older brothers (or cousins)”—presumably he means male paternal cousins—takes a different approach to removing the absurd assertion from the passage, replacing it with the assertion that every

¹⁷⁹ Couvreur 1899, vol. 2 p. 284.

¹⁸⁰ One might **object** to Couvreur's “elders” reading on the grounds that *Jìyì* 13 begins with “Therefore” (*shìgù* 是故) and *Jìyì* 12 had very recently used *xiōng* clearly not in the sense of elders. A **reply** to the objection is that the two chapters were probably not composed as part of a continuous discussion, for **(a)** though *Jìyì* 12 repeatedly uses 近於, *Jìyì* 13 uses 近乎 instead; **(b)** the chapters apply that metaphor of nearness in two very different ways; and **(c)** any supposed connection between the claims of the two chapters would make the inference to the claims in the latter chapter a plain non sequitur on any reasonable reading of *xiōng*. The chapters would seem to have different origins, and to have been juxtaposed (and linked by “therefore”) for very superficial reasons.

feudal lord must have an older male paternal cousin. This reinterpretation of the passage's assertion about *xiōngdì* helps make sense of the passage only if we take it to suggest that by *tì* the passage meant, not being a good younger “my father’s son” to the older people who fit that description, but rather being a good younger “my father’s father’s son’s son” to the older ones. Hence Legge can be read as putting his considerable authority behind the proposal that *tì* could at least sometimes be understood in that way (though I have not seen that proposal in connection with any other instance of *tì*).¹⁸¹

A problem with Legge’s proposal about *Jiyì* 13 is that it is unlikely to have been true that the *typical* feudal lord had an older paternal cousin, because probably in most cases the head of a state was an oldest son’s oldest son.¹⁸² In a society quite familiar with both paternal cousinhood and primogeniture, a Ru would not have supposed that hegemons *usually* have older male paternal cousins, much less that they “must.”¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Legge makes a similar proposal about *xiōng* (without such a close association with *tì*) but with more confidence, at *Xiàojīng* 16. (For the Emperor’s *xiōng* in that passage, Rosemont & Ames 2009 has “his elder brothers’ generation” (p. 114), language that (a) is on its face equivalent to “his generation” but (b) takes for granted that the Emperor has older brothers and so does not serve the most obvious reason to depart from the more straightforward reading “older brothers” (p. 114).) It seems likely that *Xiàojīng* 16’s discussion of *xiào* and *tì* is descended from or influenced by the kind of passage I quote below on pp. 202-205, in which the practice at issue is elder-respect rather than subfraternity. Whether the last hand that prepared *Xiàojīng* 16 understood *tì* in that way is a separate question.

¹⁸² Also, as compared to his paternal cousins’ fathers, *his* father (when heir apparent or heir) would have had more reason than most to have a son early and more resources to have sons at short intervals.

¹⁸³ On the other hand, small children might not have known to doubt the claim that every feudal lord must have an older paternal cousin, and the thesis of the passage strongly suggests that children might have been the original intended audience of the material recorded there. The little falsehood about cousins might serve the temporary purpose of helping little boys come to terms with having to be respectfully deferential to their older brothers or cousins. For that purpose, Legge’s interpretive device might sufficiently rescue the passage from the problem it means to address.

An alternative to Legge's proposal might do a better job of addressing the problem that feudal lords need not have older brothers, and also address another of the big problems about the passage, a question that Legge's and Cuvreur's proposals do not address: What *difference* between the personal situations of a king and a presiding chieftain could the text have in mind, in choosing which personal virtue to map to which high office? We can address both problems by reading the passage's proposed reason why being *tì* is like being a presiding chieftain—*suī zhūhóu, bìyǒuxiōng* 雖諸侯,必有兄—as follows: “Even among the feudal lords [notional brothers], some must be older.” Hence necessarily the typical feudal lord would have an elder in that group. Thus the typical feudal lord had a notional older brother in a way that the Son of Heaven did not, while the Son of Heaven had a notional father in a way that the feudal lords did not.

But even though Legge's proposal probably fails for this passage, still it draws our attention to the flexibility of the term *xiōngdì*, and can inspire us to explore the idea that the original meaning of *tì* at *Analects* 1.2 was a being a good *dì* 弟 where a *dì* 弟 is taken to be a younger male paternal cousin, toward one's older paternal cousin(s). In other words, the proposal is that *tì* in the statement at 1.2 originally meant the specific virtue of a junior toward a senior within the brotherhood of male paternal cousins, the sons of the sons of my father's father.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ We should not confuse this proposed interpretation of *tì* at 1.2 with the Asterisk proposal: that *tì* at 1.2 meant *be a good younger brother to your older brother** (*but if you have none, then cousins can count). If that were the idea, then in any set of brothers the *tì* of all but the oldest brother would only be toward brothers, while the *tì* of the oldest of those would only be toward cousins, or nobody. The picture does not harmonize well with the idea of a brotherhood of cousins.

Rather, the proposal is that *instead* of referencing the age-ranking of sets of brothers, *tì* at 1.2 (and so presumably in many other places) referenced the age ranking of whole sets of male paternal cousins. As between a man's brother and his cousin, a *tì* man gives the greater respect to whichever is older, because *tì* is understood as the virtue for the role *dì* 弟 in the sense of “younger one of Grandfather's grandsons.”

This picture might be attractive if we are thinking of the cousins as a distinct community of boys who spend their days together in the same large household or small neighborhood. But the statement at 1.2, like the claim about presiding chieftains at *Jiyi* 13, is at least primarily about adults.

In physical proximity and the depth and engagement of relationships, mere cousins would fall short of brothers individually, thus making for a weaker root (other things equal). But normally a man would have more cousins than brothers, thus making for a stronger root (other things equal).

This cousin reading of *tì* at *Analects* 1.2 would significantly reduce the overall percentage of men who had no occasion to practice *tì*, since only one of a man's patrilineal grandsons would have lacked an older paternal cousin. But as we noted in discussing *Jiyi* 13, it seems a good bet that something like a majority of rulers and clan heads did not have older paternal cousins. And on the cousin reading, the statement at 1.2 sees each group of cousins as an important group under the leadership of someone who cannot have the second half of the root of virtue.

The cousin reading has at least one arguable problem that the subfraternity reading does not have. Suppose part of a scholar's reason for liking the subfraternity reading at *Analects* 1.2 is that normal lines of state and clan authority were built from the two vertical dyadic relations *father-son* and *older-younger brother*. On the subfraternity reading, the two virtues exalted at *Analects* 1.2 are virtues worth exalting as a pair, because they amount to respect for the two essential lines of authority. But on the cousins reading, the second virtue picked out at 1.2 would muddy one of those lines.

We have seen that in all probability, *tì* at *Analects* 1.2 did not originally mean subfraternity, but rather meant elder-respect, a practice whose salient arena was in the community outside the family.

Before we proceed with our survey of *tì* in early texts, let us pause to test the paper's broad thesis in another way.

Stories of Semantic Change

The received view and the proposed view of the meanings of *tì* each imply underlying events—derivations or semantic shifts—to account for those meanings. Hence the two views can be judged not only by noting what senses of the term show up at what times in the textual record. The two views can also be judged on the plausibility of each of the kinds of semantic derivation or change they hypothesize for *tì*. We can judge this plausibility by looking for relevant mechanisms or forces that could have facilitated such changes or derivations, and looking for parallel changes or derivations involving comparable words.¹⁸⁵

I shall focus on the **generations** and **accruals** in the chronological lists just below.

Received view

1. *Dì* 弟 **generates** a verb or adjective: to respect one's older brother.
2. An extended meaning **accrues**: to respect one's elders.

¹⁸⁵ In each case we might hypothesize the *first* step as an event far older than Old Chinese, or even as a felt derivation that might not reflect actual origins. For example, Goldin 2024 reports on p. 86 that while the words *rén* 人 and *rén* 仁 were long felt by Chinese philosophers to be related as what we might call a position and its virtue, in fact the two words are not cognates. Similarly the received view of the meaning of *tì* can afford to see both of its derivations as faux derivations, merely felt derivations, if the feelings arose early enough. A main argument for the proposed view is the appearance that we can identify roughly when some of its changes took place, but the proposed view of the semantic arc of *tì* would be little weakened by a discovery that, say, *tì* was originally a metaphor based on a word for “low” not cognate with “younger brother.” Because felt derivations presumably tend to track patterns of actual derivations, the derivations hypothesized by the received and proposed view can perhaps be judged for plausibility as though they were events even though they may not have been.

Proposed view

1. *Dì* 弟 **generates** an adjective or verb: be younger-brother-like (respectful).
2. (Possibly) The meaning narrows to: respectful as befits younger men.¹⁸⁶
3. The meaning narrows to: respectful of one's elders.
4. A narrower meaning **accrues**: respectful of one's older brother(s).
5. That meaning becomes predominant in texts.

For steps 2 and 3 we have only slight evidence that the earlier meanings long survived as options: the compound *xùntì* at *Analects* 14.43 suggests that *tì* there may mean respectful as befits younger men, and discussions of the *Odes* in the 300s and 200s BCE seem to recognize general humble respectfulness as a possible meaning of *tì*.

Changes hypothesized by the proposed view

The origin of *tì*

I have proposed that the virtue term *tì* originated when the noun *dì* 弟 for younger brother was used as an adjective or intransitive verb to speak of being like a younger brother, i.e. being humbly respectful—perhaps with some admixture of caring, since we do not know that a sharp distinction between care and respect was an early influence on the Chinese language.

¹⁸⁶ Steps 2 and 3 might be divided into accruals and predominations, like steps 4 and 5; but our lack of relevant evidence makes it unhelpful to distinguish such specific views for these points in the arc.

We might compare Confucius' use of a noun as an adjectival verb at *Analects* 2.12: "The *jūnzǐ* is not [like] a vessel" (*jūnzǐ bú qì* 君子不器).¹⁸⁷ Confucius' figure here might be called metaphor or simile. If we translate this remark as "The gentleman is not a vessel," we thereby represent the figure as a metaphor; but that translation would be more apt if the original were "君子非器也." If instead we translate the *qì* 器 with an ad hoc adjective or adjective phrase, "vessely" or "like a vessel," we represent the figure as a simile, but with perhaps the same import. Another option is to translate with a verb phrase—"act like a vessel" or "play the vessel"—using simile or metaphor to evoke some salient and *prima facie* relevant aspects of what a vessel does or how it is used.

It must be quite ordinary in every language to use a wide range of nouns as fresh or conventional metaphors or similes. I can use a fresh figure such as "This job is [like] whitewater rapids," meaning that it has some of the qualities that we think of as distinctively characteristic of whitewater rapids, and reasonably expect the application to "this job" to help my interlocutor know which of those features I intend.

The understood features need not be features that make a stretch of rapids a good one. If I call someone a hog or say that they are hogging something, I am not therefore applying an idea of what it is to be a good hog. Indeed a kind need not have a function to be used as an image in a metaphor. "Smith is dead weight; Jones is a rock." And kinds that do have functions can serve in metaphors or

¹⁸⁷ The term *qì* 器 does seem to have had a standard use as a transitive verb, e.g. at *Analects* 13.25, though not in the sense it bears in 2.12. That the term's status as an adjectival verb in 2.12 was a mere grammatical formality is suggested by the way the term is used as a noun in *Analects* 5.4, and the related put-down at 2.13 (as I read it): When Zigong asks about the *jūnzǐ* with a view to becoming one, Confucius answers, "Follow his *words* before you follow *him*." But I am not sure I understand the image at 2.12 and 5.4, if it is the same image. At 2.12 one might think the thought is that a proper *jūnzǐ* does not let himself be used as a mere tool, or as an inert legitimizing trophy; but a tendency toward that particular error is not obvious to me in the statements attributed to Zigong in the *Analects*.

similes to predicate features that are nonfunctional in things of that kind (“couch potato”), or are part of the function (as when a boxer is nicknamed “The Mechanic”), or even counterfunctional (“This place is a zoo!”).

Thus if we find that in a certain community the term “younger brother” has acquired a conventional use in metaphor or simile to mean a certain quality of relating, that fact does not tell us that the community sees that quality as the role virtue for younger brothers, or as the heart of that virtue. It more directly tells us what features applicable to the usual subjects of the metaphorical predicate are seen as distinctively typical of younger brothers.

Commonly the signaled features are matters of degree. How do we know what degree is intended? When you call me a couch potato, I think you do not mean that I am more inactive than the typical potato on the shelf. On the contrary, you are appealing to the image of a typical potato to articulate your point about me. And yet you are not saying I am as inactive as a typical potato. In general, when I say of A that it is “[like] a B” to signal that it has scalar feature F, I am comparing A to other things of some kind of which A is a member, saying that it has F to a higher degree than other things of that kind. Hence, if I use the familiar English term and say “Citizens should be brotherly toward each other,” I am not suggesting that citizens should be more loyal and caring to each other than mediocre *brothers* are. That might be an unattainably high standard among fellow citizens in general. Or rather, we would not know how to compare the cases. But if I manage to be understood when I say that brothers should be brotherlike toward each other, the comparison class is brothers. (Of course, you may not know what features of brothers I have in mind unless the simile has acquired a conventional meaning in another context.)

An interesting point about metaphors is that they are more easily understood when the words are obviously literally false. “Oscar is Bill’s father”

is hard to hear metaphorically unless the hearer knows it is literally false. But when we read, “The king is the people’s father,” we know it is meant metaphorically because we know it is literally false. Hence we more easily recognize the metaphorical character of a negative application of a term when the positive application is obviously literally true. If I say of a farm animal of an obvious kind, “It’s not a hog,” I have sufficiently indicated that I am using the term in a metaphorical sense.¹⁸⁸

We can recognize similes without that clue, because similes use another signal: the word “like” or an equivalent. But like metaphors, similes benefit from a subtly different kind of clue. Big plain differences between the subject of the comparison and the kind with which it is being compared can help signal what features of the comparison kind are intended. If I say “This job is (like) whitewater rapids,” the differences between a job and whitewater rapids help you pin down which features of whitewater rapids I mean to be attributing to the job. But if I point to my cat and say “Deevy is catlike,” you may be puzzled as to what I might have in mind, even though you could come up with a list of features that are generally associated with cats.

We can sometimes do without those two kinds of clue. They may not be needed when the metaphor or simile in question is already a well-established conventional figure of speech. “This hog is a hog!”

Those last three paragraphs together suggest the following: As a *fresh* metaphor or simile, “be (like) a younger brother” would more easily arise as a tool for saying that a man is deferential toward *non*-kin, or for saying that a man

¹⁸⁸ Among metaphors that are obviously literally true, those that are *too* obviously literally true may be easier to recognize as metaphors, such as “The gentleman is not a vessel.” There is no question as to whether a gentleman’s is literally a vessel.

is *not* deferential toward his older brothers, than as a tool for saying that a man is deferential toward his older brothers.

If indeed the term *tì* used the stereotypical image of a younger brother to mean “humbly respectful” and later “respectful of elders” in general, the term might have felt out of place in a family context. It’s one thing to “act the younger brother” among the neighbors; it’s another thing to “act the younger brother” with one’s uncles or parents.

Comparable Chinese words?

The kind of origin story I am proposing for *tì* would seem to be the obvious guess as to the origin of another virtue term from the same time or slightly later, the intransitive *xùn* (humbly respectful), whose early graph suggests that it may derive from the noun *sūn* 孫 (grandson, descendant).¹⁸⁹ The fact that (as I think) we have no record of *xùn* being used to mean being a good grandson or good descendant suggests that if the virtue term *xùn* was derived from the noun *sūn*, it was derived from the noun directly, not by way of an intermediate stage in which it meant the role virtue of a grandson or descendant. (Perhaps the derivation would have happened toward the end of the Spring and Autumn period, as I have not found *xùn* used earlier.)

Family relational positions are often used as metaphors or similes. English has many conventional instances. But not every family position is suitable for use as an image for a general virtue. To be suitable for such use, a family position

¹⁸⁹ Schuessler 2007 finds another origin for *xùn* (p. 486), for reasons that he has no space to give and I would have no capacity to evaluate. I wonder whether a potential semantic connection between *xùn* and *sūn* has been considered. E. Bruce and Taeko Brooks’ understanding of *xùn* suggests that they would disagree with Schuessler’s account of its derivation; see p. 36 n. 41 above.

must be such that its stereotypical practices and attitudes are practices and attitudes we would like people in general to display toward each other and toward us.

Upper positions with brief Chinese names, such as father, mother, husband or older brother, involved caring for the correlative party and expecting obedient service from the correlative party. People do not like to be treated that way by all their neighbors, or by people in general. (We might like our king to treat us that way, since a king is going to expect obedient service anyway.) Even in English the simile words “maternal,” “motherly,” “paternal” and “fatherly” are not general virtue terms. Indeed, “paternalistic” is a negative value term.

Lower family relational positions with brief Chinese names, such as son, wife, younger brother, younger sister, or grandson, presumably involved mainly respectful deference and care, which most people are happy to receive from anyone and everyone. We think well of people who treat us and others that way. The briefly-named lower *male* positions are son, younger brother, and grandson/descendant; so these would be the main candidates for metaphorical use in early texts to indicate men’s general virtues. And as we have seen, circumstantial evidence suggests that of these three nouns the latter two may indeed have generated metaphors for general virtues—roughly the same general virtue. Regarding the third noun, *zǐ* 子 (son), the linguistic situation is rather complicated. Perhaps that term was already overextended in other directions.

Hence, on the proposed view of the origin of the virtue term *tì*, it would seem that the origin was not anomalous.

Even if I am wrong to speculate that *sūn* generated a general virtue term, *tì*’s doing so might not be an unaccountable anomaly. Perhaps to be a good image for a general virtue, a family position should not be a *very* subordinate one.

Comparable English words

The speculative proposal's story about the original derivation of the virtue term *tì* matches the apparent derivation of a number of English words: the adjectives "brotherly" and "fraternal" and the nouns "brotherhood" and "fraternity" and the metaphorical sense of "brothers" in their use as virtue or normative terms. The historical derivations of these words, Germanic or Latinate, occurred long before the origin of English. The derivations are perhaps best seen as self-sustaining transparent logic.

These English virtue terms do not imply or suggest that the parties to the relating are brothers. They sometimes refer to a general virtue of individuals, and perhaps more often to a virtue of a plurality of people in relation to each other, usually the members of a distinct community such as teammates or fellow citizens in relating to each other.¹⁹⁰ Fraternity is *mutual* loyal care, as in the French slogan.

But in very special contexts, such as scholarly discussions of early Confucianism, four of these five English words have been used to refer specifically to the role virtue of a brother regularly enough that we may say that they *do* objectively bear that meaning as one distinct meaning, or as the primary meaning *within* the specialist discourse.¹⁹¹ That is to say, what nonspecialists might call "fraternity toward one's brother(s)," using the term in its main sense, the specialists among themselves can call simply "fraternity" without error,

¹⁹⁰ We might say that fraternity toward the other members of a group, such as a team or a labor union or a city-state, is *a* role virtue for the role of *member* of that group. But that fraternity would likely not be *the* role virtue of members as such, which would have more to do with the specific purpose of the group. Other norms too may apply to the members because they are members.

¹⁹¹ Or three of them have genuinely acquired the meaning. I want to say that "brotherhood" has not, though a scholar or two has used it in that sense.

because among them “toward one’s brother(s)” has become part of the meaning of the term, not something that must be separately signaled in order to use the word in that application.

We shall discuss this arcane meaning in more detail later. Let us first review the standard meanings of these terms in more detail and with some evidence supplied by lexicographers.

“Brotherly” and **“fraternal”** in common usage have two main senses, because the suffix in each adjective is ambiguous.

To simplify a bit, on the one hand the suffixes can mean **(1)** “of or pertaining to,” so that the adjectives mean “of or pertaining to brothers.” Thus we can speak of fraternal rivalry, fraternal hatred, fraternal duty, the fraternal bond, and fraternal piety.

And on the other hand the suffixes can mean **(2)** “-like, characteristic of,” so that the adjectives mean “brotherlike” or “characteristic of brothers.”¹⁹² Thus we speak of a fraternal atmosphere, a fraternal bond among teammates, a brotherly neighbor, and brotherly love. (These are similes rather than metaphors, if we care to distinguish; but of course we also often use the noun “brothers” metaphorically to capture the same sort of idea.¹⁹³ This metaphorical noun is usually applied to all the members of a group, usually to indicate their confident expectation of mutual loyal care.) This second sense of the suffix shades into

¹⁹² Many other words with those suffixes are at least potentially ambiguous in a similar way: “fatherly”, “paternal”, “motherly”, “maternal”, “filial”, etc.; and similarly “divine” and “feline”. But we do not use “godly” in sense (1); and rather than “catly” we would use “catlike.”

¹⁹³ The metaphorical use of the noun “brother” is so common that I think we sometimes use the adjective “fraternal” to mean “of or pertaining to, or characteristic of, metaphorical brothers,” in the names of organizations, e.g. The Fraternal Order of Police.

“befitting,” and insofar as “brotherly” means “befitting brothers” it does allude to being a good brother, but does not imply that the parties are brothers.

“Brotherly love” in sense (1) is love between brothers. One hardly ever encounters the phrase in this sense. In sense (2), “brotherly love” is love characteristic of brothers, or stereotypical of brothers. This compound term does not suggest that the parties are brothers.

In sense (1) we almost never apply the adjectives “brotherly” or “fraternal” to *people* (though, stretching things a little, we do speak of fraternal twins, and I suppose we could speak of a fraternal sister-in-law, meaning a brother’s wife or a brother’s spouse’s sister).

In sense (2), when the adjectives are applied to people, “brotherly” is more naturally applied to individuals, while today “fraternal” is usually applied to groups rather than individuals.

Mutual loyal care is taken as typical of brothers; it is stereotypical of brothers. Hence commonly the import of “brotherly” or “fraternal” in sense (2) is loyal caring, such as we take to be ordinary in brothers—because we take it to be ordinary, not because we take it to be good. There is no suggestion that the parties to fraternity in sense (2) are in fact brothers. When we call Philadelphia the “City of Brotherly Love,” we are not talking about the quality of its male sibling relationships.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (Simpson 1997) cites six instances of the use of “fraternal” in published works.

- 1494 “His vnclē Chilperich bare towarde the sayd Guthranus not very fraternall loue.”
- 1526 “Ye prayer that fraternall charite or brotherly loue commendeth before god.”
- 1636 “Those kind pious glories do deface

- The old Fraternal quarrel of thy Race.”
- 1738 “Sorrows, which fraternal love in vain
Hath strove to soothe.”
- 1850 “The great new world—new Church I should have said—of
enfranchised and fraternal labour.”
- 1874 “More than one writer has expressed a fraternal affection for
Addison.”

If we look at the original context of these six examples, we find that only the first involves literal brothers (Chilperich and Guthranus). In the 1636 example the suffix means “of or pertaining to,” but the brothers at issue are metaphorical brothers.

The entry for the adverbial form, “fraternally,” gives the following citations:

- 1611 “*Fraternellement*, fraternally, brotherly.”
- 1812 “The logic of Shakspeare was frequently as potent as his fancy; so
fraternally gigantick were his imagination and his intellect.”
- 1873 “Children of the earth...the Greeks loved all fair and fresh things
of the open world fraternally.”
- 1882 “The sitting Director...entreated us...to think kindly, even
fraternally, regarding the Natives of India.”

The same dictionary defines “brotherly” first as “Of or pertaining to a brother; also, characteristic of a brother, fraternal, kind, affectionate.” It quotes five instances fitting this definition:

- c.1000 “*Fraternus*, broðorlic”
- 1535 “They have not remembred the brotherly couenant.”
- 1555 “A brotherly league.”
- 1656 “A brotherly Saviour, and Redeemer.”
- 1835 “The freest, brotherliest, bravest human soul.”

None of these five is speaking of actual brothers. The first simply offers an Old English synonym for a Latin word that has the same range of meaning as the modern English word. The next two refer to treaties between unrelated kings, perhaps as creating metaphorical brothers.

The dictionary then cites five examples of the use of the special phrases “brotherly kindness” and “brotherly love”:

- 1526 “Fraternal charite or brotherly loue.”
- 1611 “Adde to godlinesse, brotherly love.”
“Let brotherly loue continue.”
- 1667 “The exercise of ... Brotherly-kindness.”
- 1856 “To displace this pride by brotherly-kindness.”

None of these is speaking of relations among literal brothers.

Next, under the definition “Of things: Acting in harmonious conjunction,” the dictionary cites one example:

- 1638 “Two brotherly muscles, appoynted for sundry motions of the same part.”

Finally, the dictionary notes that “brotherly” has been used with “-ly” as an adverb marker: “In the manner or spirit of a brother: fraternally.” The cited examples are these:

- 1526 “To love brotherly withouten fayninge.”
- 1590 “To confer brotherly and christianly with me.”
- 1593 “How should you gouerne any Kingdome, that know not ... how to vse your Brothers Brotherly.”
- 1650 “He exhorted them lovingly and brotherly to lay down their arms.”

1805 “The man he had loved so brotherly.”

In this set, only the 1593 example applies the term to literal brothers. This quotation is from Shakespeare’s *Henry VI Part 3*, referring to Edward’s treatment of George and Richard.

Note that in all the dictionary’s cited examples for the various words shown above, the only instances where the parties are actual brothers are instances where brotherliness is *denied*. That is exactly what we should expect from a simile, i.e. on the premise that “brotherly” and “fraternal” mean having the qualities of an ordinary brother. When a brother acts like a brother to his brother, that is neither excellent nor noteworthy. But when he does not, that is noteworthy.

“Brotherhood” and **“fraternity”** can be countable or uncountable nouns. Native speakers recognize both words as alluding somehow to the brother relation.

The **countable** nouns tend to refer to well-defined groups whose members are regarded as metaphorical brothers (or siblings), i.e. as bound by duties of mutual care and loyalty—though we also speak of “the brotherhood of man,” meaning all of humanity. We never speak of a set of actual brothers as a brotherhood or a fraternity. If we ever did, we would be using the terms in an extended sense: a metaphorical sense, if you will, alluding to the image of a brotherhood of non-kin.

The **uncountable** nouns refer to loyal caring—and most commonly to *mutual* loyal caring. We speak of brotherhood or fraternity as a quality of a group or community, rarely as a quality of an individual. Brotherhood or fraternity is mutual loyal care. These words carry no suggestion that the parties are literally

siblings, and my sense is that “brotherhood” is virtually never used to characterize the quality of relations specifically among a group of brothers. Also these words strongly connote that the parties regard each other as equals in some strong sense. The terms as normally used do not evoke a vision of the brother relation as a paradigm of ranking, or as essentially asymmetrical.

Accrual of a family role virtue meaning

Toward considering how *tì* may have accrued a family virtue meaning consistent with the proposed view, let us consider an occasion where something quite similar happened to the English words we have been discussing.

How the English words came to mean a family virtue

The four English words have very well-established conventional uses to refer to mutual loyal care. Hence they can be and sometimes are applied to the case of mutual loyal care between brothers, when we are interested in that topic, rather as we can point to a hog, say “It’s a hog,” and mean that it is greedy. That sort of application of the terms is not incorrect.

But note that when I say of a hog, “It’s a hog,” and mean that it is greedy, I am using “a hog” to mean greedy. I am not using it to mean *greedy (literal) hog*. To see this last point, note that if I pointed to a small hog named Wilbur engaged in a shoving match at the trough with a big dog named Bruno, and I said, “Wilbur is such a hog! But so is Bruno,” I would not be saying that Bruno is a greedy hog.

Similarly, I can say that brothers Jim and Jack are “fraternal” with each other, meaning that they are loyal and caring, without implying that they are

brothers. If I know and you do not know that Jim and Jack are brothers, and you believe me that they are “fraternal with each other,” you cannot *infer* that they are brothers.

But under certain conditions, *applying* the term to brothers could cause it to come to *mean* mutual care between brothers, so that it would indeed imply that that parties are brothers. A metaphorical term or simile term for a quality of relating, based on the image of a family relational position, can and likely will accrue the meaning *exercising that quality in that relation* and thus being *a good occupant of that relational position* once the following conditions obtain.

- A. The word recognizably alludes to a certain family relational position.
- B. Its use to refer to a certain general quality of relating is a well-established convention (which is not to say that the word is very common).
- C. The linguistic community or subcommunity comes to want to speak of the role virtue of that position.
- D. The quality mentioned in B can seem emblematic of that virtue.
- E. In the community, people often use the word to point to the proper conduct of that position.
- F. They do this alongside the similar use of another word that already *means* carrying out a family role well, in such a way as to suggest a conceptual parallel.

For under conditions B through E, the example of the neighboring term (condition F) combined with the fact that our word bears on its face an allusion to a certain family relational position (condition A), invites the view that our word *means* carrying out the role of that position well.

A case in point is the specialist linguistic community that is English-speaking scholars of early Chinese philosophy, and how this community has come to use “fraternal” and “fraternity.”

Part of the job of this community is to speak of (refer to) the role virtue of a younger brother, or being a good younger brother, insofar as the philosophy they study speaks of that. In particular, the community wants to refer to that role virtue alongside the role virtue of a son or offspring, in such phrases as “filial piety and ____” or “filial and ____” or “filiality and ____”.¹⁹⁴

Now, English has no word for being a good younger brother (even the phrase “good little brother” would invite a different parsing), nor does the language’s bag of tricks include a root that means younger brother. But if we are willing to make do with a word for being a good *brother*, then we have several

¹⁹⁴ The word “filial” is rarely used outside of the academy; most English-speakers with college degrees do not recognize its Latin root. The word is used to mean “pertaining to offspring” by geneticists (“filial generation”), therapists (“filial therapy,” “filial maturity”) anthropologists (“filial widow inheritance”), some moral thinkers and historians of moral thought (“filial piety”), and other specialists.

(The term “filial piety” has the ring of a dry technical term, because each of its components is a fairly uncommon English word; hence it invites the reader not to bring to the term any prior associations with its parts. The word “piety” as it is meant within the compound term “filial piety” makes no reference to gods. The term “piety” in this sense, common to many Western languages, is not similar in meaning to the Greek term *to hosion* (τὸ ὅσιον) that is a focus in Plato’s *Euthyphro* and is sometimes translated “piety.” Rather, the original meaning of “piety” (Latin *pietas*) was about personal and tribal progenitors, and the occasional *extension* of the term (from Cicero’s day) was to *add gods* as possible recipients of some of one’s piety (through the Western conception of gods as parents or community ancestors), not to *add humans* as channels for some of one’s worship of transcendent gods. My sense is that today the two main popular meanings of the English “piety” outside the phrase “filial piety” are (a) “conventional norms,” especially those used as emblems of people’s acceptability (usually in the plural: “the pieties” of this or that community) and “good behavior by the standards of one’s religion” (usually as the adjective “pious”). Neither of these meanings sees piety as a manner of relating to god or gods. Insofar as these meanings may influence how one hears the technical-sounding term “filial piety,” they may suggest the idea that filial piety means respecting and loving one’s parents because one is *supposed to*. Philosophy majors, however, may be influenced by recent encounters with “piety” in a translated *Euthyphro*.)

words that can easily seem as though they were made to order for that meaning, though they are not especially common words. They wear on their face an allusion to the brother relation, and they *thereby* refer to a kind of admirable relating that is also a kind of relating we take to be distinctively characteristic of brothers relating to brothers. And because that meaning is not a fresh simile but is an established convention, we can apply these terms to relating between brothers to refer to that quality of relating between brothers (i.e. to imply that the parties are brothers), without giving ourselves occasion to notice that such an application is unusual. Further, “fraternal” and “fraternity” seem on their face to be linguistically parallel to “filial” and “filiality.” Hence it can feel natural to fill in the blanks displayed above with “fraternal” and “fraternity” (or “brotherly” and “brotherliness”) and assume that these words are in fact semantically parallel to “filial” and “filiality” and therefore *mean* being a good brother in the same way that *xiào* means being a good son (or offspring).

Once such usage becomes well established in the linguistic subcommunity, as it certainly is now, the words actually do have that meaning within the subcommunity, and this meaning can even drive out other meanings of those words within the subcommunity. Members might be led to suppose incorrectly that the terms “fraternal” and “fraternity” normally *mean* being a good brother, and hence members may use the terms in that sense in addressing a general audience, without explaining. (A semantic change is more likely if it can go unnoticed.) Since the terms are not terribly common anyway, the general audience might not take long to pick up on what is meant.

Something analogous likely happened, I propose, in the decades around 300 BCE.

How *tì* came to mean a family virtue

I proposed above that a metaphorical term or simile term for a general virtue based on the image of a family relational position can and likely will *come to mean* that virtue exercised in that family relation—hence roughly being a good brother or whatever—if the following conditions obtain.

- A. The word recognizably alludes to a certain family relational position.
- B. Its use to refer to a certain general quality of relating is a well-established convention (which is not to say that the word is very common).
- C. The linguistic community or subcommunity comes to want to speak of the role virtue of that position.
- D. The quality mentioned in B can seem emblematic of that virtue.
- E. In the community, people often use the word to point to the proper conduct of that position.
- F. They do this alongside the similar use of another word that already *means* carrying out another family role well, in such a way as could suggest a parallel.

By the 300s BCE, conditions **A** and **B** had been in place for many centuries.¹⁹⁵

As for condition **C**, we have noted that the *Analects* does not show an interest in subfraternity, nor in family role virtues as a category. But by the late 300s there seems to be considerable interest in the schematic idea of the roles and virtues of relational positions, including the positions in some nuclear family

¹⁹⁵ Or at least, that condition **A** obtained is suggested by line 17 of *Máoshī* 173 (see p. 28f. above) and by an instance in the *Zuōzhuàn* (p. 196f. below).

relations (if not usually distinguishing nuclear family relations as a category or including all the main ones). This interest is evidenced especially by *lists* of positions and their jobs or virtues, and the lists often mention younger brothers.

As for condition **D**, while the lists that mention younger brothers in relatively early texts (the *Shàngshū* and the *Zuǒzhuàn*¹⁹⁶) never use the word *tì* when speaking of the virtue of younger brothers, they do use *gōng* 共/恭 and *jìng* 敬, which mean something like humble respectfulness.

As for condition **E**, we start to see *tì* used for the virtue of younger brothers in lists in essays on three topics in the *Mòzǐ*, and in the *Lǐjì*. Condition **F** is fulfilled because *xiào* appears on these lists shortly before *tì* and in constructions analogous to the constructions with *tì*.

These texts can help us see the difference between using the word to point to subfraternity and using the word to *mean* subfraternity. An example is the following list from *Lǐjì: Lǐyùn* 18, with Legge's translation:

何謂人義？父慈、子孝、兄良、弟弟、夫義、婦聽、長惠、幼順、君仁、臣忠十者，謂之人義。

What are 'the things which men consider right?' Kindness on the part of the father, and filial duty on that of the son; gentleness on the part of the elder brother, and obedience on that of the younger; righteousness on the part of the husband, and submission on that of the wife; kindness on the part of elders, and deference on that of juniors; with benevolence on the part of the ruler, and loyalty on that of the minister - these ten are the things which men consider to be right.

Note that Legge renders *tì* here not as “obedience to one's older brother,” but rather simply as “obedience,” as though *tì* here is not a family role virtue term. Indeed eight or nine of the ten Chinese verbs or adjectives in this sentence are

¹⁹⁶ See p. 60 above and p. 193f. below.

not role virtue terms, and nine of the ten English nouns Legge uses to translate them are not family role virtue terms. But each of the ten Chinese verbs (and English nouns) is being used here to *point* to the role virtues of specific positions. That the conduct being referred to in each case is only conduct within a certain kind of relational dyad is signaled by the immediate context of each Chinese verb or adjective, and is not (in most cases) carried in the meaning of the word itself.

Thus this long list would be saying the same thing about younger brothers no matter whether *tì* here meant being humbly respectful, or being humbly respectful of one's elders, or being subfraternal. So even if the word *never* meant being subfraternal, this sentence would succeed in making its point about younger brothers; and the list itself is not evidence that being *tì* ever specifically *meant* being respectful of older brothers. But such a list could have encouraged the idea that *tì* ("like a younger brother") can be used to *mean* subfraternal ("being a good younger brother"). Lists like this, and the application of *tì* in a general sense to brothers outside of such lists, could thus have facilitated the term's adding the subfraternity meaning to its repertoire, even without people's noticing the semantic accrual as a change.

Such an accrual would be more likely for *tì* than for the other predicate words in the above list such as *huì* 惠, if the term *tì* was felt as wearing on its face an allusion to the younger-brother position. For literati, the graph could have contributed to such a feeling.

As we shall see, in the *Mòzǐ*, which may be one of the earliest texts in the period when *tì* can mean subfraternal, all the instances of *tì* are in sentences whose meaning is insensitive to which way *tì* is meant, and almost all the instances of *tì* are within lists that use *tì* to specify the role virtue of a younger brother, and use *xiào* in the same construction shortly before to specify the role

virtue of a son, and use other general virtue terms in the same construction to specify the role virtues of other positions.

Such uses could have functioned as *bridging* uses, adding a new meaning to the repertoire of *tì* without anyone's necessarily noticing that there has been a change.

This sort of picture of the semantic change has the capacity to explain why *tì* did and *xùn* did not come to mean a kinship role virtue. There was not the same interest in a virtue specific to the position(s) called *sūn* 孫. I have found no list with *sūn* as one of its named positions.

I have argued that on my proposed view of how the meanings of *tì* varied over time, that variation can be accounted for by familiar and rather well-evidenced kinds of semantic derivation and change.

Let us now investigate whether the same can be said for the received view of the meanings of *tì*.

Changes hypothesized by the received view

The origin of *tì*

The received view is that subfraternity was the primary (or sole literal) meaning of *tì* at the time of any texts in which we might encounter the term. And it must be granted that even if we see *tì* used only in other senses in the first half-millennium of the textual record of the term, that fact would not disprove the received view, because the textual record is sparse. Other things equal, the received view is more plausible if we have good reason to think it would have been natural for such a verb to arise *directly* from the noun *dì* 弟 for younger

brother. Let us canvas some ideas about how such a direct generation could have happened. Would it fit a common pattern, or would it have been anomalous?

Conceptual possibilities and English patterns

Let us first sketch some general ideas about how a noun for a family position might generate a term for the virtue of that position, thinking in English and with English examples. I wish I were equipped to explore the conceptual territory better with Chinese examples. Later we shall look at the pre-Qin usage of a few relevant Chinese words.

The vanishing extra sign?

Quite generally, when we want to say that something is very good of its kind, we can do this by adding to the kind-noun “N” an extra sign that marks that intention while striving for a certain kind of invisibility:

“That is an N indeed!”

“That’s a *real* N!”

“Now *that’s* what I call an N!”

“That’s not a knife! *This* is a *knife*!”

The sign might even be a switch to another language, as when we say that someone is a *Mensch*. Note that when we speak this way, what means being an excellent N is not the word “N,” but rather the whole comprising that term plus the extra sign. Still one might imagine that this tool could seed a conventional second sense of some noun N, such that to be an N₂ is to be a good N₁.

I cannot think of an example of the tool’s having generated a second sense of any noun in English, though I do not know how to check systematically. Nor

can I think of a reason why such a tool would generate a second sense of a noun for younger brother but not for other nouns.

Nouns with normative import?

Another idea is proposed by Antonio S. Cua, if I understand him. “For the Confucian philosopher,” he writes, “such terms as ‘father,’ ‘son,’ ‘brother,’ ‘ruler,’ or ‘friends’ do not merely describe natural and social relationships. They also have normative import.”¹⁹⁷

That Confucian view is surely correct, though it is not special to Confucianism.¹⁹⁸ To call someone a “sister” is not just to say that she bears certain objective relations (factual or descriptive import); it is also at least to suggest some ideas about how she *should* act and feel and think (normative or

¹⁹⁷ Cua 2005, p. 64.

¹⁹⁸ See e.g. Plato, *Republic* 352d-353d; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1097b24-28; Rawls 1971, p. 399. Of course the normative import of such nouns must be weighed against other norms, if only because we are all many things. For example, when Epictetus classifies the training of the good man into three branches: (1) desires and aversions, (2) actions and avoidances, (3) reason and proper care in thought, his whole summary of (2) is the following: “The second has to do with proper function; for I ought not to be impassive like a statue, but maintain my natural and acquired relationships, as a religious man, a son, a brother, a father, and a citizen” (Long & Sedley 1987, p. 344, 56C). And he writes in another place, aiming at everyday practical guidance, How is it proper to discover proper functions from titles? Consider who you are: in the first place, a human being, that is, someone who has nothing more authoritative than moral purpose, but subordinates everything else to this and keeps it free from slavery and subordination Furthermore, you are a citizen of the world and a part of it, not one of the underlings but one of the foremost constituents. For you are capable of attending to the divine government and of calculating its consequences. What then is a citizen’s profession? To regard nothing as of private interest, to deliberate about nothing as though one were cut off [i.e. from the whole] ... Next keep in mind that you are a son ... next know that you are also a brother ... next if you are a town councilor, remember that you are a councilor; if young, that you are young, if old, that you are old; if a father, that you are a father. For each of these titles, when rationally considered, always suggests the actions appropriate to it. (Long & Sedley 1987, p. 364, 59Q)

moral import).¹⁹⁹ For very many nouns “N”, English speakers share at least a rough sense of what it is to be a “good N,” so that we know that what makes a mother a good one is different from what makes a mathematician or a motherboard a good one (though we also recognize that it can be wrong for someone to take the trouble to be a good mathematician).

But Cua may then confuse the idea that the words have normative import (they carry ideas about how the people *should* act) with the idea that these words have a certain kind of additional factual or descriptive import (they say the people *do* act in that way).

“Father” and “brother” are for the Confucian not mere descriptive notions like “table” and “chair.” If a father or a brother does not live up to the normative expectations implied in the uses of these terms, then he no longer deserves the name “father” or “brother.” “Father” and “son,” and so forth, are terms invested with moral import.²⁰⁰

I submit that the linguistic practice of e.g. denying a man the name of “father” or “brother” if he does not live up to the associated norms is unworkable. Or if it could be put into practice by a strenuous program of rectification of names, it would be inimical to family role ethics discourse and practice.²⁰¹ If I refused to call someone a “father” who does not live up to certain norms, I could not say or think that he should shape up because he is a “father.” Adultery might be logically impossible. Or if by “father” we came to mean what we now mean by “good father,” then being someone’s “father” would inevitably be a matter of

¹⁹⁹ It suggests the normative ideas because those normative ideas have become associated with the noun by custom, or with the kind by reason, or some combination of the above.

²⁰⁰ Cua 2005, p. 64.

²⁰¹ If the nouns (subjects) in Confucius’ remark at *Analects* 12.11 were understood in this way, Confucius’ statement would be empty and the Duke’s reply would describe an impossible scenario.

degree. Such language might undermine one of the main purposes of family role norms: to give us something firm to count on, something we feel we can count on in each other and in ourselves. To the question, “Are you my mother?” a decent humility might have to answer, “Somewhat.” An officiant at a straight wedding would have to say, “I now pronounce that each of you has occasion to be more or less husband or wife.” And the term “spouse” could no longer be used in the tax code. Hence we would have to introduce new terms to do the work of the ones that our linguistic rectification had surrendered to the meanings that were already being served more clearly by such language as “good mother” and “good husband.”

Verbs for virtues?

In any case, what the received view needs is a way for the noun for younger brother to generate not a noun but rather an adjective or verb for being an excellent younger brother. Roger T. Ames has said interestingly,

Confucian role ethics would contend that ... the roles of father, mother, son, daughter, teacher, friend, and neighbor, for example ... are themselves a normative vocabulary more compelling than abstract injunctions. ... In Confucian role ethics, “to mother” and “to neighbor” are not merely descriptive; they serve as ethical injunctions, and unlike abstract principles, they serve as concrete guidelines that help us to determine what to do next.

Duke Jing of Qi asked Confucius about governing effectively. Confucius replied, “The ruler must rule, the minister minister, the father father, and the son son.”²⁰²

²⁰² Ames 2011, p. 168.

Ames' main point here need not be about verbs;²⁰³ perhaps the thought could be expressed using nouns instead: "As compared to e.g. the Principle of Utility,²⁰⁴ a

²⁰³ We bear the family relations we bear, no matter what our language is. But we might wonder how well a verb or adjective (such as *tì* for subfraternity) would succeed in giving us guidelines.

For, first, granted, a simple term or a noun phrase such as "father" or "good father" may be associated with a rich image or ideal for filling the position well, so that the term evokes the *popular* image (if there is a dominant image) or else an image that the conversants of the moment happen to know they share. But such guidance could lead us astray in ways that mindfulness of our family position might tend not to remedy. Bad family ideals have been among the stablest of history's grand rolling disasters, because people try hard to live up to them. Hence one wants a basis for evaluating family norms. And theory helps us deliberate responsibly together for unprecedented circumstances, as the framework conditions of human life are changing ever faster.

Second, while a term like *tì* can by convention name a kind of activity or disposition, it does not have separably significant parts, and in that sense it cannot articulate any guidance as to what constitutes carrying out the role well.

The degree of clarity in these ... guidelines is evident in the fact that one is literally encouraged to "family reverence" (*xiao* 孝) one's elders and to "younger-brother" (*ti* 悌) one's older brothers without further stipulation. The expectation is that a person who participates in the life of a family knows intuitively and without further elaboration what it means to behave in a way consistent with such dictates. (Rosemont & Ames 2009, p. 45)

Such an expectation may not be reasonable in a society open to diverse views or families. For example, in ancient texts *tì* may be understood as pointing mainly to obeying, or mainly to loving, or respecting, or benefitting, or perhaps being a friend (e.g. conversing and sharing activities).

Third, linguistic practice around those terms might tolerate or deploy great *ambiguity* even on the questions **(1)** *which relation* is adduced by *xiào*? Son toward father? Offspring toward parent? Family junior toward family elder? Family member toward family line? Territorial resident toward ruler? Some of the above?—and **(2)** *which relation* is adduced by *tì*? Younger brother toward all his older brothers, or toward each separately? Younger sibling toward older sibling? Family junior toward family senior? Junior toward senior? Non-elderly toward elderly? State resident or employee toward officials?

Fourth, if the term *tì* or the discourse around it led someone to think that respecting (or else obeying, or loving, or benefitting) one's older brother is the *whole* of being a good younger brother, **or** is *distinctive* of being a good younger brother as against other family or non-family roles or virtue in general, it would be misleading them.

²⁰⁴ While one might be glad of an abstract proof of any overview of ethics, utilitarianism was developed before Kantianism by the leading ethical sentimentalists (Rawls 1971, p. vii) as an interpretive analysis of our everyday moral feelings—though trying to articulate what our feelings perceive or help us perceive can [sound like piling up rules](#). Early utilitarians were skeptical of metaphysical conceptions of the "self," utilitarianism characteristically sees no basic difference between the happiness of humans and the happiness of chickens, and perhaps the most famous capsule criticism of utilitarianism is that it "does not take seriously the distinction between

better practical guide to living well is to be mindful of the main relational positions one occupies: to be ever mindful of the fact that one is A's mother, B's mother, C's wife, D's neighbor, and E's Prime Minister." But other questions that Ames' remarks might suggest matter more for the narrow historical project of the present paper.

One question is whether perhaps classical Chinese, even before Confucius and Youzi, did include verbs made directly from family position nouns other than *dì* 弟 and meaning doing the basic jobs of those roles or emblematic parts of those jobs, or doing those jobs well.

Another question is whether in the absence of established verbs of those kinds, it might have been possible to verb-ize the family position nouns as a fresh and striking but ephemeral figure of speech—as Ames may intend the two English verbs he puts in scare quotes, “to mother” and “to neighbor,” and as he intends the latter three of the four English verbs in his translation of Confucius' remark at 12.11. Ames can use, and the reader can understand, these five English verbs in what I have quoted from him, without their being established in the English language (before or after) in the senses they have here. The immediate context may give the reader sufficient help.

A third question is how likely it would be that such fresh uses, once made, would seed the establishment of conventional terms for the role virtues of the respective family relational positions, either in specialist discourse or even, eventually, in the language at large.

persons” (Rawls 1971, p. 27). Utilitarians have been prolific about family norms. One of John Stuart Mill's three most famous and influential books is in large part on the spousal relation (Mill 1869), arguing e.g. from the power of family relationships to shape general character. And while Jeremy Bentham was a legal rather than a moral philosopher, his classic work on utilitarianism includes a 10,000-word analysis of “domestic relations” and their proper legal implications (Bentham 1960, pp. 360-388). Most of his many hundreds of pages on sex and marriage were rejected by publishers for their shocking liberalism (Bentham 2014, Sokol 2011).

In the following section I shall offer some reasons to think that at least before the Qin, no family position noun other than *dì* 弟 was re-used in the natural language or the technical language of specialists as a conventional verb or adjective for the specific activities or role of the position. There may or may not have been *ad hoc* uses of family position nouns as verbs or adjectives in senses analogous to filial piety and subfraternity, and we shall examine the recorded candidate instances; but they did not generate conventional words. The received view of *tì* would make it an anomaly.

But the task of the present section is to use English verbs as hints toward sketching a map of some kinds of conceptual relation that *might* be likely to obtain between a noun for a family (or other) position and a very closely related verb (as when we speak of rulers ruling, fathers fathering or mothers mothering), ultimately toward thinking about how *natural* it might have been for e.g. the noun *dì* 弟 to have generated directly a verb for being a good younger brother.

If we look quite generally at English nouns that are also used as verbs, aside from metaphors we find a great variety of conceptual relations between the nouns and their verbs. A noun “N” used as a verb may mean, literally or metaphorically, to **put on or into** N (corral, floor, group, house, table), to **mark or measure by** N (name, number, time), to **supply with** N (man, number, people, power, water), to **use** N (eye, face, hammer, question), to **engage in** activity N or something similar (game, party, school, war), to **become or be** an N (father, friend, neighbor, result), to **act like** an N (hog, mother), **etc.** (back, head, hand, home, parent).

Existing English verbs made from nouns for **family positions** bear a variety of conceptual relations to the positions. As a group they do not readily

suggest that a fresh verb made from a family position noun F would automatically tend to mean “being a good F, carrying out that relational role well.”

For example, fathering someone is a *becoming*, i.e. a coming to be. Hence it defines being their father and is not something their father can do. It is something he has done.

To wive someone is to take her to wife.

(Husbanding is not about being a husband, nor does it derive from that noun.)

Mothering is engaging in a certain kind of activity that is emblematic of being a mother or perhaps a good mother. But there are three salient differences between mothering and being a good mother. **First**, mothering is an activity rather than a disposition or pattern of action and attitude. Mothering is done at particular times (and it is not always appropriate even from a mother). **Second**, mothering one’s child when appropriate is only one of the many jobs of a mother, and there is such a thing as a mother’s mothering to excess. **Third**, one need not be someone’s mother to mother them.

Fraternizing differs even more in the same three ways from being a good brother.

Parenting differs in at least the first two ways from being a good parent,²⁰⁵ though perhaps slightly less than mothering differs from being a good mother. First, “parenting” is an activity rather than being by definition a disposition or habitual pattern, though the activity of parenting is less specific to particular times or occasions, than are mothering and fraternizing. Second, part of being a

²⁰⁵ **(1)** “Parenting” is an activity rather than being by definition a disposition or habitual pattern, though the activity of parenting is less specific to particular times or occasions, than are mothering and fraternizing. **(2)** A very important part of being a good parent is providing e.g. food and financial security for one’s children, but I think the casual use of the verb focuses more on the direct activities of moral nurturance and education.

good parent is providing e.g. food and financial security for one's children, but I think the usual use of the verb refers rather to the direct activities of moral nurturance and education. We do distinguish parenting from parenting adequately or well, and we distinguishing parenting *better* from parenting *more*.

Finally, as Ames may mean to point out above, the English verb “to neighbor” has no value connotation. This verb does not refer to an activity. Nor does it mean “to *be* a neighbor” (a person residing near another person). Rather it means “to be among the nearest in an array” and is commonly applied to inanimate objects. Perhaps the verb is a metaphor; or perhaps it alludes to the noun in the sense in which the noun means the nearest in an array (e.g. an array of squares on a chessboard, or an array of people in a classroom or dance line), not the sense in which it means a person who resides near another.²⁰⁶

Interestingly, the example Ames offers from *Analects* 12.11, and in particular his comment on the English of the translation, suggests that he has in mind a fairly specific vision of the conceptual relation that obtains between the family nouns (or positions) and the verbs (or activities) he envisions for Confucianism: that this relation matches the general pattern in English of how we use nominalizing suffixes such as “-er” to make nouns for *positions* from verbs for activities.²⁰⁷ Ames & Rosemont 1998 comments,

If we translate the relevant *Analects* passages²⁰⁸ as “Let rulers rule, let ministers minister,” then we may proceed—without obfuscation, we hope—to “let fathers father, let sons son.”²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ As for neighbors in this latter sense, English has other words that carry images of how to be a good neighbor: the noun “good neighbor” and the adjective “neighborly.” In an extended sense the noun “neighbor” stands for a vision of how to treat people in general, as laid out in the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

²⁰⁷ Note that this suffix does not appear in the nouns “minister” and “father.”

²⁰⁸ There is just the one passage.

²⁰⁹ Ames & Rosemont 1998, p. 44; and similarly in Rosemont 2007, p. 50.

The thought makes sense; but perhaps we do not need both of the first two clauses as models for the rest. For even the verb “minister” here is not used in its standard sense. If a model is needed, only the first clause is functioning as the model, and it functions so naturally as a model that its work in overriding the standard meaning of “to minister” can go unnoticed.

And even if all four clauses were family clauses, such as “Let fathers father, let mothers mother, let sons son and let daughters daughter,” we would understand all four verbs in senses they do not conventionally have. The list itself would cue us to do that, because there is no other way to make sense of it. I submit that the predicates would be no more obscure for lacking “Let rulers rule” as an initiating model. Perhaps we would take the verbs to refer to something like the basic jobs (if any) of those positions, even if we are unclear on what those jobs might be.

But suppose the opening clause, “Let rulers rule,” is importantly functioning as a model in our reading of the translation of 12.11. This clause uses a noun and a verb, each in their established senses; and these established senses of “ruler” and “rule” are related by way of the established nominalizing “-er” suffix that creates nouns from verbs. The suggestion would be that we are to understand the verbs of the other clauses as though they bore the conceptual relation to the nouns that “to rule” bears to “ruler.” What conceptual relation is that?

English has very many nouns derived from verbs by way of a nominalizing suffix such as “-er” or “-ant” or “-ist” (and, conversely, suffixes for making verbs from nouns, as we find in “fraternize,” “liquify,” and “pontificate.”) For perhaps almost any verb V, a V-er is a person or thing that Vs. Within that broad idea we might distinguish categories. Sometimes a V-er is simply a person or thing that Vs *at the moment*, as in “straggler,” “floater,” or “speeder.” Or a V-er can be

someone who Vs *repeatedly* or regularly, as in “procrastinator,” “user,” and perhaps “robber.” Or a V-er can be a person or thing whose *job* (position, function) it is to V.

Our nouns for many functional objects, occupations and institutional positions are constructed using such a suffix. A ruler is one whose job or position it is to rule; and similarly an assistant assists, a farmer farms, a tax collector collects taxes, a screwdriver drives screws, a radiator radiates heat. The pattern is familiar, and we have other noun-verb pairs that we understand in the same way even though they do not strictly follow the “V and V-er” pattern: a cobbler makes and repairs shoes, a wainwright makes wagons, a cook cooks, and a quarterback quarterbacks.

As example “quarterbacking” suggests, we can allude to the general pattern in order to derive a fresh verb from a noun for a functional person or thing, on the assumption that the point of the person or thing is to do a certain kind of work. Even if we have little idea what that work might be, we can generate a fresh verb from the noun by alluding to the general pattern, the general idea of the job or valued activity of a thing or a position. A mother might say on the phone, “So you just provost all day now? What is that?” and “They said my spleen isn’t working right, but they gave me some pills that are supposed to get it spleening properly again in a month.” And the usage might catch on.

But this general pattern is such as would tend *not* to yield role-virtue terms. That is to say, the conceptual relation that typically obtains (in English) between V-ing and V-ers when V-ers are people or things whose job or function it is to V, is **different** from the relation that *xiào* and *tì* bear to their respective family positions, if we take these Chinese terms to stand for being a good son or daughter and being a good younger brother. There are three salient differences.

The first difference is that it is not true in general that logically only a baker can bake, and only an assistant can assist, etc. (It is true that only a straggler is straggling, but that is because a straggler is simply one who is straggling, not one who regularly straggles or whose job it is to straggle.)

On the other hand, there are exceptions. It may be more or less true that only a quarterback can literally quarterback and only a parent can parent. Would the same be true of provosting and spleening? Perhaps when our lack of a clear conception of an activity is what inspires us to coin a verb freshly from a noun for a functional position or object, the verb implies that the noun applies. But once the verb becomes conventional and develops a life of its own, that implication might wither away, so that “quarterbacking” or even “parenting” can become, say, part of office management lingo.²¹⁰

The second difference, related to the first, is that most of the English verbs that have by suffixes generated nouns refer to activities rather than dispositions or regular practices. A baker is sometimes baking and sometimes not. Indeed, insofar as a virtue (e.g. a role virtue) is a disposition or habitual practice rather than an activity, it might be more proper to a virtue terms to be adjectives rather than verbs. And adjective forms of e.g. the verbs “bake” and “rule” usually do not attribute any quality, disposition or habitual practice to the person. A baking person might be someone who is (currently) baking. A ruling person is someone occupying the position. Neither is a person with any particular quality or habit.

The third difference is between doing something and doing it well. Ruling is not what distinguishes a good ruler from a mediocre or a bad one. And baking

²¹⁰ If “she bakes” is to imply that she is a baker, we have to understand “bakes” to mean “bakes as one’s job,” or “has and carries out the job of baker.” And then it would be true that only a baker bakes. The verb *could* be used in that way, e.g. in an introduction at a reunion; but it normally is not.

is not what mainly distinguishes good bakers poor bakers. Baking is not the virtue or excellence of a baker. Among bakers, what distinguishes the good ones is not that they bake, nor that they bake more, but that their baking is good baking. It seems to be a fact at least about the natural language English that where a nominalizing suffix gives us a noun such that the verb expresses the function of that which is named by the noun, normally the verb does *not* express the excellent practice or disposition that distinguishes good from other things or people of that kind. Aristotle's comment is apt: "The work of a harpist is to (play the) harp, and the work of a good harpist is to do it well."²¹¹

This third disanalogy is perhaps very great in magnitude for "to rule," less great for "to bake," even less for "to lead," and minimal for "to assist." For it is not very far off to say that an assistant is a good assistant insofar as she assists *more*, or more *fully*, or is, as we say, "more help." But it is very far off to say that a ruler or a baker is a better one insofar as she rules or bakes more, or more fully.²¹² Thus in perhaps most cases we distinguish between **(a)** the functional activity such as governing or baking), **(b)** the manner of performing it that makes it *good* governing or baking, and **(c)** the regularity of doing it that way that constitutes one's being a good governor or baker—not to mention **(d)** the quality in virtue of which one reliably governs or bakes in that way.

(We might wonder to what degree the word *tì*, in the sense of a man's love or respectful deference toward an older brother, expressed not so much a vision of the *what* a younger brother is supposed to do (the job) as a vision of *how* he

²¹¹ *Nicomachean Ethics* 1098a12.

²¹² Here a tricky bit is that in normal usage "a better baker" is not parsed so that "baker" within it refers to someone who has that job or position. Rather, by "a better baker" we mean someone can bake well, even if they are a quarterback rather than a baker, and independently of how often they bake or even whether they usually use the skill to make bad bread on purpose. But in the text above, one can read "better baker" to mean better occupant of the position. And then the regularity of someone's baking is *part* of how good a baker they are.

is supposed to do it—fraternizing *respectfully*, as it were. After all, respect does not itself imply fraternizing.)

There is much more to be said about these English words. I hope at least to have challenged the idea that it is natural or easy for a noun “F” for a family position to generate a verb “to F” that means to be a good F. But we do have a very neat and handy way of making a verb or adjective *phrase* with that meaning for any family position noun (and indeed for any noun). For a verb, we have the phrase “be a good F”; and for an adjective, “good” before “F.” The general idea of excellence in a functional role is in that way built into the English language, in the word “good.”

The phrases “good father” and “be a good mother” may evoke images of certain kinds of activity, but strictly speaking they refer to what Aristotle would call *hexeis* rather than activities, because (a) being a good father or mother is a *disposition* or *pattern* of acting and feeling in a certain position, rather than an action or an activity (parenting) or a feeling (family feeling); and because (b) English-speakers may not clearly conceive the whole that is the activity and feeling of a good father or mother as such, as we clearly conceive activities for which we have independently arising verbs, such as “to bake.”

Adjectives for virtues?

The adjectives “brotherly,” “sisterly,” “motherly,” and “fatherly” are terms for qualities or patterns of action rather than for who is doing them. The terms allude to stereotypical images of the respective family positions—usually nice

images.²¹³ As terms for qualities or patterns of action, these terms mean acting like a brother (etc.), but not acting *as* a brother. “Brotherly” does not imply “brother”—or more precisely, a man’s being “brotherly” does not normally *mean* his being so toward his brother.

But being “neighborly” does normally mean being a good neighbor to one’s neighbor (a loosely defined position). Being “grandmotherly” or “grandfatherly” too may normally mean being so toward one’s grandchild. We might speculate that it is only by some shallow accident of history or culture that the general usage of “brotherly” and “motherly” do not follow the pattern of “neighborly.” So in ancient China, which was free of many of the historical and cultural accidents that shaped English, perhaps nouns for family positions, if and when they were used as adjectives, would tend to mean doing the job of the position well.

On the other hand, it may be no accident that in English it is the more distant relations – neighbor, grandfather, grandmother – whose adjectives may normally refer to the role virtues of the positions or something very like. Could that be because stereotypically these parties are active as such only intermittently, relating to their relatees only intermittently? I do not know.

Comparable Chinese words?

To test the hypothesis about the origin of *tì* that fits the received view, I researched the extent to which the names of *other* family positions had actually generated such cognate terms for the associated role virtues. I looked at all

²¹³ We think it is good to have a brother, sister, etc. Since traditionally we do not think it is good to have a lord, “lordly” does not allude to a very nice image. That is one reason why being lordly is not being a good lord; another being that “lordly” does not imply being a lord.

instances of the characters *fù* 父, *mǔ* 母, *fū* 夫, *fù* 婦, *qī* 妻, *xiōng* 兄, *kūn* 昆, and *sūn/xùn* 孫 in pre-Qin texts accessible to me. I did not look at all instances of *zǐ* 子.

What I seem to have found is that probably none of these names ever generated (directly or indirectly) a freely usable word for the associated job or virtue, not even in the construction “__者”. While there were two specific constructions within which *any* name of a position could function *ad hoc* as a verb or adjective for the basic job or else the virtue of the position, I found no case where one of these names (other than 弟) was used to point to that role virtue *outside* of such a construction. None of the *ad hoc* instances of the use of nouns as verbs seems to have gained any currency as an established, freely usable word analogous to the subfraternity sense of *tì*, though family role virtues were a topic of some interest. It would seem to follow that on the received view of *tì*, the term was a linguistic anomaly. One should not expect a noun for a family relational position to have generated a verb for the excellent conduct of that position.

One of the two syntactic constructions is complex and peculiar; I call it a “Combination of Mirroring Fours” and shall define it shortly; I have found it in five pre-Qin texts. The other construction is extremely simple and common, though I have found only two relevant instances of family position words in the construction. Let us begin with the simple construction.

The construction “不__”

Outside of Combinations of Mirroring Fours, I have found **two pre-Qin instances** of a term “F” for a family position other than 弟 or 孫 being used as a verb or adjective for conduct in that position. I did not check thoroughly for 子.

Each instance is within a predicate of the form “不 F.” (I did check thoroughly for instances of “不子.”²¹⁴)

One instance is in the *Zuǒzhuan*, where the text speaks of a ruler who had debauched his son’s wife. Here with the translation from Durant, Li & Schaberg 2016:

其為君也，淫而不父。僑聞之：如是者，恆有子禍。

As a ruler, he is licentious, and he has not acted like a father. I have heard that a man like this is always plagued by disasters instigated by his son.²¹⁵

Here the phrase “不父” criticizes someone *not* for lacking excellence in the role, but rather for falling distinctly below normal in the position. Hence, here, the term *fù* 父 can mean simply “fatherly” or “act like a father,” i.e. have the qualities of an ordinary or stereotypical father. Having those qualities is unremarkable in a father. But lacking them is remarkable. This is what one should expect “不父” to mean if the author were using *fù* 父 here as an *ad hoc* verb or adjective as one might do with any noun, rather than in an adjectival sense already conventionally established for *fù* 父. From the fact that the sentence “He was no father to me!” makes sense to us, we do not conclude that “be a father to me” means “be a good father to me,” though “he is a father to me” or “he is like a father to me” can be praise if the man is not in fact my father.

²¹⁴ On the former (now nonfunctional) TLS website, an instance of “*bùzǐ* 不子” in the *Zhan guo ce* was translated as referring to conduct in the position of son; I did not record by whom. But I believe the reading is mistaken. This instance is in red in the **second** of the two passages at [this link](#) (趙策/趙策/趙二/趙燕後胡服).

The instance (also red) in the **first** of the two passages at that link (秦策/秦策/秦/蘇秦始將連橫) suggests that the proper reading in each case is “not regard as a son.” This is the reading chosen for each by Bramwell Seaton Bonsall in his unpublished translation, viewable in images 18 and 150 at [this link](#).

²¹⁵ Durrant, Li & Schaberg 2016, p. 1213.

If we read *fù* 父 here as “be an excellent father,” we must read the *bù* 不 in *búfù* 不父 not as *not*, but as *opposite*. (The claim in the text is surely not that failing to be excellent as a father brings disaster.) That is certainly a possible reading of *bù* 不 in connection with virtue terms. But on principle we should prefer the simpler and less contrived understanding of the conceptual machinery involved in this passage.

On the simpler reading, the use of *fù* as an adjective in this passage is similar to the use of *dì* 弟 that I hypothesize as the origin of the virtue term *tì*. My proposal about *tì* is that it originated in the (once fresh) use of *dì* 弟 as an adjectival verb to mean simply “act like a younger brother,” rather than to be a younger brother well. (Although *fù* in this passage, unlike the characteristic instance of the early *tì* of my proposal, is applied to a literal occupant of the family position, it is applied negatively to that occupant, as befits a term parallel to the early *tì* in my proposal.)

The other instance is in *Xúnzǐ* 29, where the text speaks in the abstract of a son’s disobeying his father (explicitly excepting cases where obedience would bring danger or disgrace to his family or would involve the son in savage behavior):

故可以從而不從，是不子也

Hence disobeying when obeying is permissible—that is not acting like a son.²¹⁶

One reason to think that *zǐ* 子 here refers to excellent conduct in the position is that the sentence appears in Book 29: “On the Way of Sons.” That context is not conclusive, but it is suggestive.

²¹⁶ My translation.

On the other hand, nowhere else in Book 29 is *zǐ* 子 used as a term for conduct, and I have not found “不子” used for the conduct of a son in any other pre-Qin passage. Thus it seems likely that we have here a garden variety ad hoc adjectival or verbal use of a noun, so that *zǐ* here simply means acting like a son.

In support of the idea that *zǐ* 子 here refers to *excellent* conduct in the position, one might argue as follows. An act of gratuitous disobedience is not bad enough to constitute the man’s being distinctly abnormal, but it is bad enough to constitute his being not an excellent son. Therefore *bùzǐ* 不子 here doesn’t mean failing to be *ordinary*, it means failing to be *excellent*.

Note that this reason relies on our reading *bù* 不 as a simple negation—a reading that would block the excellence reading in the *Zuǒzhuàn* passage just above.

Further, I submit that it is a misreading of the *Xúnzǐ* passage to associate the judgment “*bùzǐ* 不子” with any *degree* of badness. Whereas the *Zuǒzhuàn* passage with “不父” applied the predicate to a particular individual as an overall judgment of him, the *Xúnzǐ* passage applies “不子” to a *kind* of action. It is expressing neither a judgment of the quality of a person who disobeys once, nor a judgment of the quality of someone who disobeys regularly. Hence there is no fact of the matter about whether what is here called *bùzǐ* 不子 is a one-time lapse or a vicious pattern or something in between. It is none of those things; it is a kind of action.

In sum, I submit that the two pre-Qin instances of “不 F” where F is normally a family position noun other than 弟 or 孫, are best seen as ad hoc uses of the noun, semantically parallel to the use of *dì/tì* as a general virtue adjective, and *not* best seen as referring specifically to excellence in the respective positions. We saw earlier that among all the usage examples of “fraternal” and “brotherly”

cited by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the only instances where the words referred to conduct of actual brothers as such were instances where fraternity or brotherliness was being denied; and we saw why that was to be expected.

If that is correct, so that *fù* 父 and *zǐ* 子 in these two passages do not mean excellence in those positions, then it is *only* in Combinations of Mirroring Fours that we might find the name of any family position other than 弟 used to refer to excellence in that position.

Combinations of Mirroring Fours

Let us define a **Pair** as a subject-predicate string of the form “AA” or “A 不 A,” such as *jūn jūn* 君君, where the first A is the name of a functional position such as ruler or father. Let us define a **Mirroring Four** as a string of two Pairs in immediate sequence or linked by *zé* 則, where A and Z are names of more or less correlative positions. And let us define a **Combination of Mirroring Fours** as two or more Mirroring Fours in immediate sequence.²¹⁷

At least in pre-Qin and Han texts, no family-position Pair ever occurs outside a Combination of Mirroring Fours, except for “弟弟.”

Let us now examine all the surviving pre-Qin Combinations of Mirroring Fours. Here we likely have any and all surviving pre-Qin instances of family position names used as adjectives or verbs for the role virtues of the respective positions. The first is in *Analects* 12.11.

²¹⁷ My sentence above ““Let fathers father, let mothers mother, let sons son and let daughters daughter” does not use *mirroring* fours. Because common English family position terms tend to be gender-specific about the occupant but not about the correlative party, mirroring fours tend to require the neglect of one gender or the use of less common terms, such as “parent” and “child” (or “offspring” to avoid the suggestion of minority). It would once have been thought that the spousal relation was an exception to this generalization.

齊景公問政於孔子。孔子對曰：「君君，臣臣，父父，子子。」公曰：「善哉！信如君不君，臣不臣，父不父，子不子，雖有粟，吾得而食諸？」

The duke Jing, of Qi, asked Confucius about government. Confucius replied, "There is government, when the prince is prince, and the minister is minister; when the father is father, and the son is son." "Good!" said the duke; "if, indeed, the prince be not prince, the minister not minister, the father not father, and the son not son, although I have my revenue, can I enjoy it?" (Legge)

Another is in the *Liù dé*, strips 21 and 23 (following Cook in regarding 22 as out of place) and 35ff:

古（故）夫夫，婦婦，父父，子子，君君，臣臣，六者客（各）（23）行其戡（職），而讎（訕）譽（誇）⁷⁴亡繇（由）迄（作）也。

Thus [when] each of the six carries out his/her duties—[when] the husband acts as husband, the wife as wife, the father as father, the son as son, the ruler as ruler, and the minister as minister—then slander and conceit have no source from which to arise. (tr. Cook)²¹⁸

古（故）夫夫，婦婦，父父，子子，君君，臣臣，此六者客（各）（35）行其戡（職）而讎（訕）譽（誇）¹²⁵蔑¹²⁶繇（由）亡（乍（作））也。

其返（反），夫不夫，婦不婦，父不父，子不子，君不君，（37）臣不臣，緡（昏）所繇（由）迄（作）也。

Thus [when] each of the six carries out his/her duties—[when] the husband acts as husband, the wife as wife, the father as father, the son as son, the ruler as ruler, and the minister as minister—then slander and conceit have no source from which to arise. ...

The opposite—the husband not acting as husband, the wife not as wife, the father not as father, the son not as son, the ruler not as ruler, and the

²¹⁸ Cook 2012, p. 783ff.

minister not as minister—is the source from which turmoil arises. (tr. Cook)²¹⁹

From *Xúnzǐ* 9, “The Rule of a True King,” in a section Knoblock regards as a possible interpolation:

君君、臣臣、父父、子子、兄兄、弟弟一也；農農、士士、工工、商商一也。
In the lord acting as a lord, the minister as minister, the father as father, son as son, the older brother as older brother, the younger brother as younger brother, there is a unitary principle. In the farmer functioning as a farmer, the knight as a knight, the artisan as an artisan, and the merchant as merchant, there is a unitary principle.²²⁰

From *Guānzǐ* 2:

君不君，則臣不臣。父不父，則子不子。
If the prince is not a prince, his ministers will not be ministers. If the father does not act as a father, his sons will not act as sons.²²¹

From the *Tuànzhuàn* commentary on *Yijing* #37, *Jiā Rén*, dating probably to the Warring States period:

家人，女正位乎內，男正位乎外，男女正，天地之大義也。家人有嚴君焉，父母之謂也。父父，子子，兄兄，弟弟，夫夫，婦婦，而家道正；正家而天下定矣。
In Jia Ren the wife has her correct place in the inner (trigram), and the man his correct place in the outer. That man and woman occupy their correct places is the great righteousness shown (in the relation and positions of) heaven and earth. In Jia Ren we have the idea of an authoritative ruler; - that, namely, represented by the parental authority.

²¹⁹ Strips 34-37, Cook 792ff

²²⁰ Knoblock 1990, p. 103.

²²¹ Rickett 2001, p. 78f.

Let the father be indeed father, and the son son; let the elder brother be indeed elder brother, and the younger brother younger brother, let the husband be indeed husband, and the wife wife: - then will the family be in its normal state. Bring the family to that state, and all under heaven will be established.²²²

For the purposes of the present paper we have two questions to consider about this meme, as I think we may call it.

First, are these instances of Combinations of Mirroring Fours significant evidence that the family verbs within them were, like *tì*, established conventional verbs in the natural language or at least in specialists' specialized language, freely available for use in other contexts?

Evidence that these verbs were *not* available for use in other contexts is that they do not appear anywhere else even in the texts in which we find the Combinations, unless we count the one instance of “不子” in a different chapter of the *Xúnzǐ*. On the other hand, the very existence of the Combinations would seem to be evidence that the verbs *were* established verbs, *unless* we think the meme itself could suffice to give them local meaning within the meme—a possibility that might be suggested by the fact that it seems to suffice in English, and separately by the fact (if it is a fact) that scholars can look at these Combinations and, from them, have a view about what the verbs mean here.

Second, what does a family predicate like *fù* 父 mean in these Combinations—and how would someone know? Does the predicate mean being a good father, so that its use within Combinations might be evidence of (or a seed of) the use of *fù* 父 as a role virtue term outside of Combinations of Mirroring Fours? Or does the predicate just mean doing the basic job of a father (regularly)—hence being at least a passable father, if one is a father?

²²² Text and Legge's translation at ctext.org.

For at least three of the five texts with Combinations of Mirroring Fours, there are considerations in favor of the view that the predicates in the Combinations refer to the basic jobs rather than the virtues of the respective positions. That is, if you like, their predicates are more like verbs than adjectives.

For the Combinations in the *Liù dé*, the main consideration is that the manuscript had begun by distinguishing six positions (*wèi* 位), their six jobs (*zhí* 職), and their six virtues (*dé* 德). In the passage quoted above, the text briefly sums up its trio of Mirroring Fours as “六者各行其職” (“Each of the six does its job”). On the other hand, the virtue of a son is given as *rén* 仁, not *xiào* 孝. The text’s conception of the distinction between the jobs and virtues of the positions may not be the conception I presented above.

For the Combination in the *Xúnzǐ*, the basic-jobs reading is suggested by the adjacent series of Pairs: “農農、士士、工工、商商” (“The farmer farms ...”).²²³ Here the text may be alluding to an earlier point in the same discussion, before the Combination, where the emphasis is on the fact that roles differ and that each party does *not* do the job of the others: “Farmers need not carve or chisel, nor fire or forge; yet they have sufficient utensils and implements. Artisans and traders need not till the fields; yet they have enough beans and grains.”²²⁴ It might be interesting to compare this discussion with Plato’s likening of the division of economic labor to the division of activity that is the justice of a person or a city (e.g. *Republic* 369e-70b, 406e, 433af., 441df., 443b). One of Plato’s points is that the specialization permitted by the division of labor makes farming

²²³ Hutton reads the passage differently: “To treat the lord as lord, the minister as minister, the father as father, the son as son, the elder brother as elder brother, and the younger brother as younger brother all proceed by this one standard. To treat the farmer as farmer, the officer as officer, the craftsman as craftsman, and the merchant as merchant all proceed by this one standard” (Hutton 2014, p. 75f.). On this reading none of the terms would refer to anything like a family virtue.

²²⁴ Knoblock 1990, p. 102.

be better farming. The author in the *Xúnzǐ* passages seems to have the same thought in mind. But I submit that the *Xúnzǐ*'s series of Pairs about the professions is more naturally read as stating the fact of specialization than as itemizing its consequences for the quality of the work.

A list of the specific *virtues* of the several family positions, including the virtues *xiào* and *tì*, comes a little later in the discussion.²²⁵

Another consideration in support of the basic-jobs reading of the Combination in the *Xúnzǐ* is that the predicate in the Combination's first clause, the familiar verb *jūn* 君, normally meant simply to be ruler or lord, not to do it *well*. The presence or foregrounding of this verb would thus tend to conflict with the virtues reading of the Combination. And as noted earlier, in Ames' English translation of *Analects* 12.11, the opening "Let rulers rule" arguably serves as the model determining how the reader understands the remaining three English verbs in the context of the sentence. If that is right, then the Combination in the *Xúnzǐ* could have worked in just the same way, if the other verbs were not established in the natural language, or were established in other senses (like the English "to minister" and "to father"). Granted, the verb in the second clause, the familiar verb *chén* 臣, was often used to mean assist *well*; but perhaps the *jūn* clause would have served to disambiguate the *chén* clause. And I imagine neither of these two Chinese verbs could plausibly be read as an adjective.

The same consideration about *jūn* 君 is a reason to read Confucius' Combination at 12.11 as referring modestly to basic jobs rather than full role virtues. There are at least three other reasons. **(1)** The Duke's reply at 12.11 suggests that he heard the predicates that way. For his sons' and ministers' not being *excellent* ones would not keep him from eating. What would keep him from

²²⁵ Knoblock 1990, p. 104.

eating would be their failure to act like sons and ministers at all, i.e. their failure to do their basic jobs. **(2)** Confucius is very terse at 12.11. He seems here to aim to present the requirements of government as minimal, as being within the Duke's grasp, hence worth trying to aim at. In the *Analects* it is very often Confucius' practice, when asked about something very big, to give a reply that on its face speaks of something minimal, presumably to encourage optimistic interest (e.g. 12.3, 12.4, 12.6, 12.14, and 12.18). **(3)** If Confucius had meant the predicates at 12.11 to be understood as referring to the excellent conduct of the roles in question, then arguably his opening clause "*jūn jūn* 君君" would raise the Duke's question. Or rather, the suggestion might be that the Duke had asked the wrong question; for the Duke should be concerned about more than good governing. It is *not enough* to be an excellent governor; the excellence of three other kinds of party are needed too. Such a thought would seem to reject a key view attributed to Confucius elsewhere in the *Analects*, that if the ruler does what a ruler should, good everyone else will follow (e.g. 12.1, 12.17, 12.18, and 12.19).

If Confucius' verbs only meant doing the basic jobs of the respective roles, the thought of the whole would be kin to the thought in a couplet from the tongue-in-cheek reactionary theme song to the 1970s American television program, *All in the Family*:

And you knew where you were then;
Girls were girls and men were men.

The idea in the song is not that people are only recently failing to be exemplary in their supposed gender roles. Rather the idea is that the world has lost its way; the basics of the gender roles are no longer widely assumed and practiced. The

rhetorical trope is to present current practice not just as mediocre, falling short of the ideal; but rather as a kind of logical absurdity. The use of the same terms for subject and predicate can have the effect of presenting a certain state of affairs as *normal* or *minimal*. That might be how the Combinations signal a meaning for their predicates. And perhaps that is why, near the end of the passage quoted from the *Tuànzhuàn* above, Legge reads *zhèng* 正 as “normal,” despite the emphasis on *yì* at the beginning of the passage.

Another interpretive question about the Combination at *Analects* 12.11 is whether the predicates are meant to be referring only to the parties’ relating to the other parties in the respective dyadic relations. If they are, then there is a problem with most scholars’ view that *chén* 臣 here means ministers, not subjects. For most of a ruler’s ruling or good ruling is not a way of relating to the ministers. A ruler’s ruling is a relation to the *ruled*, individually and collectively; not mainly a relation to the ruler’s officials.²²⁶ If what is meant by *chén* here is subjects rather than ministers, then the vision might be that the job of the ruled as such is to serve or assist the ruler.

There is a way to read Confucius’ sentence so that its recommendation is even more modest than each party’s doing their proper dyadic job in relation to the opposite party in the dyad, and on this more modest reading there is no problem with reading *chén* as minister. The point may simply be that the one position outranks the other. The thought would be kin to a thought we might express as follows, perhaps with exasperation: “I’m the manager and you’re the *assistant* manager,” or “I’m the master and you’re the apprentice,” or “She’s the

²²⁶ One might say similarly that sonning is not just about a man’s relating to his father, it is also necessarily about a man’s relating to his mother. But this is a subtler matter, especially in those times.

captain and you're the mate." In other words, the main point may be quite simple: that lower-ranking parties should obey or serve the higher-ranking parties, *not vice versa*. To borrow the words of Humpty-Dumpty, "The question is which is to be master—that's all." As a remark addressed to the Duke, who had trouble with his sons and ministers, the indirect point might be that he should stand firm.

We cannot assume that in all five texts the predicates in the Combinations carry the same kind of meaning. Perhaps in one text they mean doing the jobs, in another text they mean doing them well, and in another text they mean something else. Such diversity, if it is established, would be some reason not to take the Combinations as good evidence that the family predicate terms within them were established conventional terms that carried the same meaning outside of that special construction.

Hence it would appear that if subfraternity were the original and primary meaning of the virtue term *tī*, and the virtue term in this sense arose directly from the noun for younger brother, then this virtue term would be a linguistic anomaly. From the evidence available to us, it seems that a noun for younger brother should not be expected to have generated such a family-role-virtue term directly.

One might propose to explain away the apparent anomaly on the grounds of the perceived special importance of the position of younger brother, either as one of the two positions on whose proper deferentiality the main lines of state and clan authority depend, or as one of the two halves of the root of great virtue (an idea that does not comport well with the idea that subfraternity was understood as a very unequal partner in the root, a little tail on the pig). But the virtue term *tī* seems to antedate such perceived special importance of that

position. We do not see that family position singled out for attention as early as the *Analects* (at least outside of 1.2). Even among the pre-Qin Combinations of Mirroring Fours, only two mention younger brothers at all, and those two are some of the Combinations that list six rather than four positions.

The extension of *tì* to mean elder-respect

On the received view, once the primary meaning of *tì* was in place, it underwent a kind of extension, so that respectful treatment of elders in general could be called metaphorically “being a good younger brother.” One might similarly use a term like “quarterbacking” in an extended sense as a term for managing any sort of project team.

That addition story is rather like my proposed origin story for *tì*, except that (a) since my story is an origin story, it starts with a noun, and (b) on my story the material for the metaphor is a simpler and more familiar idea: “be a younger brother,” rather than “be a good younger brother”; and (c) on my story the directly resulting term is a simpler one: humble respectfulness, rather than humble respectfulness toward one’s elders.

As a test of the received view on this point, we might wish to look to other family virtue terms to see whether they too accrued wider, non-family meanings in the period in which the received view would see *tì* extending. That period would be some time before the *Analects*. The only other family role virtue term I know of is *xiào* 孝. In the time leading up to the *Analects*, this term seems to have shifted toward a narrow family meaning.

Let us return to our survey of texts.

Zuǒzhuàn

We shall begin by noting some passages in the *Zuǒzhuàn* where *tì* does *not* appear. The text sometimes lists the role virtues of several family positions and other positions, including the position of younger brother. None of the lists uses the word *tì*, though four lists each use just one word for the virtue of each position.²²⁷ To specify the virtue of a younger brother toward an older brother, two of the four lists use *gōng* 共 and two use *jìng* 敬. One of the two passages with *jìng* 敬 later elaborates with *jìng ér shùn* 敬而順: respects and obeys.

²²⁷ (1) 君義，臣行，父慈，子孝，兄愛，弟敬，所謂六順也

The ruler righteous and the minister acting accordingly; the father kind and the son dutiful; the elder brother loving and the younger respectful:—these are what are called the six instances of what should be. (Legge 1872, p. 14; cf. Durrant, Li & Schaberg 2016, p. 27.)

(2) 〈康誥〉曰：『父不慈，子不祗，兄不友，弟不共，不相及也。』

In the Announcement to the prince of Kang it is said, “The father who is devoid of affection, and the son who is devoid of reverence; the elder brother who is unkind, and the younger who is disrespectful,” are all to be punished, but not one for the offence of the other. (Legge 1872, p. 226; cf. Durrant, Li & Schaberg 2016, p. 453.)

(3) 父義、母慈、兄友、弟共、子孝，內平外成

Fathers became just and mothers gentle; elder brothers kindly, and younger ones respectful; and sons became filial:—in the empire there was order, and beyond it submission. (Legge 1872, p. 283; cf. Durrant, Li & Schaberg 2016, p. 573.)

(4) 對曰：「... 君令、臣共，父慈、子孝，兄愛、弟敬，夫和、妻柔，姑慈、婦聽，禮也。君令而不違，臣共而不貳；父慈而教，子孝而箴；兄愛而友，弟敬而順；夫和而義，妻柔而正；姑慈而從，婦聽而婉：禮之善物也。」

Yan Ying said, “... That the ruler order and the subject obey, the father be kind and the son dutiful, the elder brother loving and the younger respectful, the husband be harmonious and the wife gentle, the mother-in-law be kind and the daughter-in-law obedient; —these are things in propriety. That the ruler in ordering order nothing against the right, and the subject obey without any duplicity; that the father be kind and at the same time reverent, and the son be dutiful and at the same time able to remonstrate; that the elder brother, while loving, be friendly, and the younger docile, while respectful; that the husband be righteous, while harmonious, and the wife correct, while gentle; that the mother-in-law be condescending, while kind, and the daughter-in-law be winning, while obedient;—these are excellent things in propriety.” (Legge 1872, p. 718f; cf. Durrant, Li & Schaberg 2016, p. 1671.)

One might object that absence of *tì* from these lists is just what we should expect if *tì* meant only subfraternity, because if *tì* meant precisely being a good younger brother, saying that a younger brother should be *tì* would be precisely empty. The reply is that such a term would be tautological and hence uninformative only in a passage whose sole purpose is to describe what counts as filling the positions well; but that is not the sole purpose of any of these four lists. The first list claims to be saying which six practices are especially important to the success of a government. The second says, “Granted, these family positions involve their duties to the people in the correlative family positions; but that does not extend to other people.” The third recounts a golden age; and the fourth lists the components of ritual propriety and some of their valuable effects, toward recommending ritual propriety as useful in government.

Of the five apparent instances of *tì* in the *Zuǒzhuan*, three are in the compound *kǎitì* 愷悌 in a quotation from the *Odes*. As we have seen,²²⁸ the discussions accompanying these three quotations suggests that the authors understand *kǎitì* in the quotation to imply general humble respectfulness. Brothers are not involved. Perhaps *tì* sometimes still carried that sense at the time those discussions were written.

The *Zuǒzhuan* features just two other instances of *tì* 弟, neither of them near a quotation of *kǎitì* from the *Odes*.

The less interesting of the two instances is in the compound *xiàotì* 孝弟 in [a passage](#) that gives us no compelling reason to favor any particular reading of *tì*. Here with the translation by Durrant, Li and Schaberg:

²²⁸ See pp. 21, 22 and 24f. above.

使魏相、士魴、魏頡、趙武為卿；荀家、荀會、樂驥、韓無忌為公族大夫，使訓卿之子弟共儉孝弟。

He appointed Lü Xiang, Shi Fang, Wei Jie, and Zhao Wu as ministers. He made Xun Jia, Xun Hui, Luan Yan, and Han Wuji high officers of ruling lineages: he had them instruct the sons of ministers in the virtues of respect, frugality, filial piety, and fraternity.²²⁹

There is no reason to suppose that *tì* here means subfraternity. There might be a presumption against that reading, on the grounds that if it does mean subfraternity, it might be our earliest recorded instance of the term in that sense.

Legge reads *tì* here as subfraternity and reads *qīngzhizīdì* 卿之子弟 as “the sons and younger brothers of the ministers.” If this reference to sons and younger brothers is supposed to link to *xiàotì* as the role virtues of sons and younger brothers, the suggestion would be approximately that in addition to a couple of general virtues, the ministers’ young kin were taught devotion *to the ministers*—a strange idea perhaps. Probably we should read *zīdì* 子弟 here simply as the young men in the ministers’ families or extended families, and we can avoid the strange idea by reading *tì* here as elder-respect, a virtue that (like filial piety and unlike subfraternity) is inherently of concern more for the young than for the old among men.

(If *tì* here means humble respectfulness generally, it is a little redundant with *gōng* 共 a few characters before.)

In sum, the preponderance of the evidence seems to lean slightly in favor of the elder-respect reading.

²²⁹ Durrant, Li & Schaberg 2016, p. 871; cf. Legge 1872, p. 409.

The one remaining arguable instance of *tì* in the *Zuǒzhuàn* appears in an explanation of a choice of words in the *Chūnqīū*. Here with the translation by Durrant, Li and Schaberg:

書曰：「鄭伯克段于鄆。」段不弟，故不言弟

The text says, “The Liege of Zheng overcame Duan at Yan.” Gongshu Duan did not behave like a younger brother, so it does not speak of a younger brother.²³⁰

I have hypothesized that the virtue term *tì* originated as a metaphor, equivalent to the simile “act like a younger brother.” That is, the relation the word *tì* bears to the noun *dì* for younger brother is about the same as the relation the simile words “fraternal” and “brotherly” (and “brotherlike”) bear to the noun “brother.” I do not mean to suggest that the derivation was obscure to its users, any more than the allusions to brothers in the phrases “City of Brotherly Love” and “Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity” and “the brotherhood of man” are obscure to English-speakers today. On the contrary, we saw that the transparency of the Chinese figure helps make sense of *Máoshī* 173, and presumably it would have helped *tì* add subfraternity to its list of meanings. I do not know if we have a way to surmise when the pronunciations of *dì* and *tì* diverged (or if they were ever the same²³¹), or how early the syllable was such a small set of sounds.

The *Zuǒzhuàn* passage works well if we take “段不弟” as a transparent or fresh simile, *Duàn bú dì*, wherein the import of the adjectival verb is “(act) like a younger brother.” On this reading the author’s explanation of the *Chūnqīū* language, though perhaps not persuasive, is at least clear and straightforward.

²³⁰ Durrant, Li & Schaberg 2016, p. 11; cf. Legge 1872, p. 6: “Duan is not called the earl’s younger brother, because he did not show himself to be such.”

²³¹ Is it possible that the phonetic differences between *dì* and *tì* and between *sūn* and *xùn* reflect a particle or prefix making for a verb or adjective phrase?

“Why did the text not call him ‘younger brother’? Because he didn’t act like one.” That is, he was distinctly below the *ordinary* range of conduct for younger brothers. The author’s explanation is clear and straightforward *because* the predicate has the simple modest meaning “like a younger brother” rather than “excellent as a younger brother.”

One might object that in phrases “不 V” where V is a virtue term, commonly 不 is taken to mean *opposite* rather than merely *not*. And we can read the sentence about Duan in that way: “Why did the text not call him ‘younger brother’? Because he was the opposite of an excellent one,” or “because he was a bad one.” The author’s evaluation of the man is the same on both readings, but on the latter reading his explanation of the language is not as conceptually neat or as transparent as on the former reading. The connection between *explanans* and *explanandum* is more strained.

Guóyǔ

The term *tì* appears at least once in the *Guóyǔ*, meaning elder-respect. Two other passages (really one passage repeated) feature the character 悌 in the course of referring to elder-respect, but there is reason to think the character does not represent the word *tì*. Let us examine the passages.

Qíyǔ (齊語) 1

「令夫士群萃而州處，閒燕則父與父言義，子與子言孝，其事君者言敬，其幼者言弟。少而習焉，其心安焉，不見異物而遷焉。是故其父兄之教不肅而成，其子弟之學不勞而能。夫是，故士之子恒為士。」

Since the gentry were made to assemble and dwell together, when people were at leisure fathers spoke together about the right, sons spoke together about filial piety, those serving the ruler spoke of reverence, and the young spoke of respect for elders. From an early age people became accustomed to these, and their hearts were at peace. They did not see something new and turn to it. Hence the elders in their families could teach without severity, and the young could learn without labor. Thus it was that the sons of the gentry always became gentry.²³²

It is strange to read *tì* here as subfraternity if one does not bring to the passage the assumption that subfraternity is the primary meaning of the term. It appears rather that by the time we get to *tì* here we have left the topic of family roles and turned to the topic of roles in the broader community. Elder-respect is a virtue especially of the young, because they are young; and it is for all the young. Subfraternity is not.

²³² My translation is based on the translation of the parallel passage in the *Guānzǐ* in Rickett 2001, p. 325.

The other two candidate appearances of *tì* are in the string *zhǎngtì* 長悌.

Qíyǔ (齊語) 2f.

桓公又問焉，曰：「于子之鄉，有不慈孝于父母、不長悌于鄉里、驕躁淫暴、不用上令者，有則以告。有而不以告，謂之下比，其罪五。」

Duke Huan again questioned them, saying, "Is there anyone in your districts who is not compassionate and filial toward his parents and does not provide leadership for the young in the districts and villages, but is arrogant and quick-tempered, licentious and cruel, and does not carry out the orders of his superiors? If there is, report it. Not reporting it is called siding with inferiors, a crime subject to the five [punishments]."²³³

The same passage appears in *Qiyu* 3, as the duke is doing a lot of asking.

The string 長悌 appears in no other ancient text; the similar passages in the *Guānzǐ* and elsewhere have 長弟 instead. I suppose we should understand the string as *zhǎngdì* 長弟, meaning older and younger, i.e. to take proper account of relative age (and similarly for the less common 弟長, used in similar contexts). I take this *zhǎngdì* to amount mainly to elder-respect because the main work would fall on the juniors.²³⁴

A different parsing might take this string to represent a list of two virtues, one for elders and one for juniors, the latter being *tì* in the sense of elder-respect. (Some contexts in the *Mòzǐ* may suggest this parsing; see p. 44 n. 69 above.) But I have found no apparent instance of *zhǎng* used alone in that sense. Rather, when *zhǎng* is a verb in the context of mentions of elder-respect, it needs a direct

²³³ My translation is based on the translation of the parallel passage in the *Guānzǐ* in Rickett 2001, p. 331.

²³⁴ Rickett translates 長弟 in the similar passages in the *Guānzǐ* as "provide leadership for the young" (Rickett 2001, pp. 331, 333). But this sense of the verb *zhǎng* associates it with the noun *zhāng* in the sense of leader rather than elder, and would not have invited a Guóyǔ scribe to use 悌.

object and it means “to treat __ as older,” i.e. to respect __ as one’s elder (as in *zhǎng qí zhǎng* 長其長 at *Mencius* 4A11).²³⁵

²³⁵ An instance of *dì* 弟 used in the analogous sense, “treat __ as younger,” appears in the *Zhuangzi*.

Zhàn guó cè

I think the term *tì* does not appear at all in the *Zhàn guó cè*. The nearest thing to a candidate passage is from 趙二, 武靈王平晝間居. Here with Bramwell Seaton Bonsall's translation:

為人臣者，窮有弟長辭讓之節。

He who is a minister, whenever he is in straits, has the rules of conduct for a younger brother to his older brother, of a junior towards his seniors, and of humility.²³⁶

Perhaps Bonsall is here translating 弟長 twice, to capture its range or ambiguity as he reads it; or perhaps he is reading *zhǎng* 長 as short for *zhǎng qí zhǎng* 長其長.

Nothing in the broader context would suggest that the reference here is to subfraternity. In any case, for the reasons given above in discussing the *Guóyǔ*, it seems unlikely that 弟 in this passage represents *tì*.

²³⁶ Image 144 here:

<https://digitalrepository.lib.hku.hk/catalog/jq085n414#?c=&m=&s=&cv=143&xywh=-324%2C125%2C2985%2C843>

Guodian Bamboo Texts

Our term appears in three of the bamboo manuscripts excavated at Guodian.²³⁷

Táng Yú zhī dào

Strips 4-6

夫聖人上事天，效（教）民又（有）尊也；下事隍（地），效（教）民又（有）新（親）也。皆（時）事山川，效（教）民（4）又（有）敬也；²²新（親）事且（祖）禋（廟），效（教）民孝也。大（太）教（學）²³之中，天子罩（親）齒，效（教）民弟（悌）也。²⁴先聖（5）牙（與）²⁵後耶（聖）²⁶，考²⁷後而遘（歸）²⁸先²⁹，效（教）民大川（順）³⁰之道也。

For the sages, above, served Heaven, so as to teach the people to hold reverence, and below, they served Earth, so as to teach the people to hold affinity. They seasonally served the mountains and rivers, so as to teach the people to hold respect, and they personally served the ancestral temple, so as to teach the people to be filial. In the academies of higher learning, the Son of Heaven [honored] close relations and elders, so as to teach the people to be brotherly; and toward the former and latter sages, he examined [the practices of] the latter but paid allegiance to the former, so as to teach the people the way of great accord.²³⁸

²³⁷ With Scott Cook's permission I have pasted his texts directly into my paper. Footnote numbers in the Chinese text refer to Cook's footnotes, not reproduced here.

²³⁸ Cook 2012, pp. 548 ff. With Scott Cook's permission I am pasting his texts directly into my paper. Footnote numbers in the Chinese text refer to Cook's footnotes, not mine.

I propose amending Cook’s translation of “太學之中，天子親齒，教民悌也，” describing the fifth item on this list of six activities that edify the people. The first four activities are services by the “sages,” i.e. the sage emperors, described in tightly parallel syntax. The fifth and sixth are activities by the “Son of Heaven.” Cook punctuates the fifth and sixth as belonging with each other and apart from the other four, and (by inserting “honored” in the fifth) makes the fifth and sixth each mention looking up to two kinds of person. I propose that we should not see such a sharp break between the fourth and fifth items. I would read the fifth item’s “天子親齒” not as “the Son of Heaven [honored] close relations and elders,” but rather as “the Son of Heaven personally [served] the elderly” or “the Son of Heaven familial the elderly” (treated them like family).²³⁹ This reading brings the description of the activity into closer parallel with the previous four descriptions, especially the immediately preceding one.

On this reading, it becomes natural to read *tì* as elder-respect, a virtue the two title sages could practice, rather than subfraternity, which one of the title sages could not practice. On this reading the sovereign teaches filial piety by displaying filial piety in the ancestral hall, and teaches elder-respect by displaying elder-respect in the great college.

Cook points out that there are apparently related passages in other texts. He quotes from two, each of which seems to describe a ruler’s didactic display of filial piety and elder-respect (called *xiào* and *tì* in the first of these passages).²⁴⁰ One is in *Lǐjì: Jìyì* 35f., from just after the long account of *tì* as elder-respect quoted on p. 34f. above, here with Legge’s translation at ctext.org.

²³⁹ Schimmelpfennig 2019 takes a different approach to *tiānzǐ qīn chǐ* 天子親齒, translating it as “they treat the son of heaven’s immediate family members according to their age” (p. 98). This reading departs from the otherwise regular verb+object syntax of the phrases in analogous positions elsewhere in the passage.

²⁴⁰ Cook 2012, p. 548f. n. 24.

祀乎明堂，所以教諸侯之孝也；食三老五更於大學，所以教諸侯之弟也。...

食三老五更於大學，天子袒而割牲，執醬而饋，執爵而醕，冕而總干，所以教諸侯之弟也。是故，鄉里有齒，而老窮不遺，強不犯弱，眾不暴寡，此由大學來者也。

The sacrifice in the Hall of Distinction served to inculcate filial duty on the feudal lords; the feasting of the three classes of the old and five classes of the experienced in the Great college served to inculcate brotherly submission on those princes; ...

When feasting the three classes of the old and five classes of the experienced, the son of Heaven bared his arm, cut up the bodies of the victims, and handed round the condiments; he also presented the cup with which they rinsed their mouths, wearing the square-topped cap, and carrying a shield. It was thus he inculcated brotherly submission on the princes. It was thus that in the country and villages [鄉里] regard was paid to age, that the old and poor were not neglected, that the strong did not attack the weak, and that the members of a numerous clan did not oppress those of a smaller - these things came from the Great college.

The conclusion of *Lǐjì:Yuèjì* 44 is very similar. In these passages *tì* is more naturally read as elder-respect than as subfraternity. In the *Jìyì* and *Yuèjì* the filial sacrifice that teaches filial piety is in the main audience hall rather than the ancestral hall as in the *Táng Yú zhī dào*; but in all three passages the site for the edifying display of *tì* is the great college. Hence these *Lǐjì* passages argue that *tì* is elder-respect in our *Táng Yú zhī dào* passage.

The display of personal intimacy in the account of the emperor's service in the great college harmonizes with my proposal above to read the string “天子親齒” in the *Táng Yú zhī dào* as “the Son of Heaven personally [served] the elderly” or “... treated the elderly like family.”

The other passage quoted by Cook is from *Dà Dài Lǐjì: Bǎofù* (保傅), here with Cook's translation.

帝入東學，上親而貴仁，則親疏有序，如恩相及矣。帝入南學，上齒而貴信，則長幼有差，如民不誣矣．．．

When the [young] sovereign enters the eastern academy and [learns to] honor his parents and value humanity, there will be order between close and distant relations and they will treat each other with kindness; when the sovereign enters the southern academy and [learns to] honor elders and value trust, there will be differentiation between young and old and the people will not be dishonest . . .²⁴¹

This passage too pairs filial piety and family virtue on the one hand with elder-respect on the other, though not by the names *xiào* and *tì*.

Thus it would appear that in our first passage from the *Táng Yú zhī dào*, the term *tì* means elder-respect and not subfraternity.

Strips 22-28

古者堯之與（舉）⁶²舜也：昏（聞）舜孝，智（知）其能養（養）天下（22）之老也；昏（聞）舜弟（悌），智（知）其能幻（事）⁶³天下之長也；昏（聞）舜纘（慈）⁶⁴庠（乎）弟，【智（知）其能王天下而】⁶⁵（23）為民室（主）也。古（故）其為宬（瞽）寔（盲）⁶⁶子也，甚孝⁶⁷；及⁶⁸其為堯臣也，甚忠；堯僇（禪）天下（24）而受（授）之，南面而王而〈天〉下而甚君。古（故）⁶⁹堯之僇（禪）庠（乎）舜也，女（如）此也。

In ancient times, Yao's promotion of Shun was thus: he heard of Shun's filial piety, and knew he would be able to nurture the elderly of the world; he heard of Shun's brotherliness, and knew he would be able to serve the elders of the world; he heard of Shun's affection for his younger brother, [and knew he would be able to rule the world (?) and] serve as sovereign to the people. Thus as son of the Blinded One, [Shun] was exceedingly filial; when he became minister to Yao, he was exceedingly loyal; and when Yao

²⁴¹ Cook 2012, p. 548f. n. 24.

abdicated the world and invested him with it, he faced south as king and was exceedingly [accomplished as] ruler. This, then, was how it was with Yao's abdication to Shun.²⁴²

Cook's "brotherliness" here represents *tì*. But this *tì* is not subfraternity (unless in some variant of the myth of Shun he has an older brother). It could be elder-respect, though the passage's distinction between the old (associated with Shun's filial piety) and the merely older (associated with his *tì*) might give us pause. The text may conceivably be distinguishing between respect for seniority and respect for the elderly. The juxtaposition of the two halves of the passage suggests that *tì* here involves respectful deference to official superiors.

Liù dé

Strips 39,40

男女不卡（卞〔辨〕）¹³⁸，父子不新（親）；父子不新（親），君臣亡宜（義）。¹³⁹是古（故）先王¹⁴⁰之（39）耆（教）民也，司（始）於孝弟。君子於此戎（一），黷（偏）¹⁴¹者亡所灋（廢）¹⁴²。

If there is no distinction between male and female, there will be no affinity between father and son, and if there is no affinity between father and son, there will be no propriety between ruler and minister. Thus in their instruction of the people, the former kings began with filial piety and brotherly love. [When] the noble man unifies through this, none of the particular [virtues/duties] will be abandoned.²⁴³

For my part I do not see how, on any reading of *tì*, to make *prima facie* sense of the reason the passage gives for the former kings' beginning with *xiàotì*

²⁴² Cook 2012, p. 555f.

²⁴³ Cook 2012, p. 794f.

孝弟. The rest of the work rarely mentions brothers, and never mentions younger brothers as agents or older brothers as to be respected. The brother relation is not among the three relations that give the work its title. Where the work proposes a “root,” the root is simply *xiào*.

In sum, I find no clue as to how *tì* is meant in its one appearance in this work.

Yǔcóng 1

The term *tì* appears in one remark in *Yǔcóng 1*, and nowhere else in the four *Yǔcóng* collections. It appears in the following context, on strips 55f.

為孝，此非孝也；為弟（悌），（55）此非弟（悌）也。

Filial actions performed for a purpose are not filial;
brotherly actions performed for a purpose are not brotherly.²⁴⁴

A weak argument for reading *tì* here as subfraternity appeals to the fact that the brief *Yǔcóng 1* regards the older-younger brother relation as important enough to mention in two other places, each time adjacent to the father-son relation.

²⁴⁴ Cook 2012, p. 827f.

Mòzǐ

In the *Mòzǐ*'s Core Chapters broadly construed (Books 1-39), the term *tì* appears in four essays (six if we parse 弟長 and 長弟 as including *tì*; as the *Guóyǔ* suggests we should). Here are the passages from the four essays, with translations by W. P. Mei from ctext.org:

Mòzǐ 16 (兼愛下)

故君子莫若審兼而務行之，為人君必惠，為人臣必忠，為人父必慈，為人子必孝，為人兄必友，為人弟必悌。故君子莫若欲為惠君、忠臣、慈父、孝子、友兄、悌弟，當若兼之不可不行也，此聖王之道而萬民之大利也。

... The gentleman would do well to understand and practise universal love; then he would be gracious as a ruler, loyal as a minister, affectionate as a father, filial as a son, courteous as an older brother, and respectful as a younger brother. So, if the gentleman desires to be a gracious ruler, a loyal minister, an affectionate father, a filial son, a courteous older brother, and a respectful younger brother, universal love must be practised. It is the way of the sage-kings and the great blessing of the people.

Mòzǐ 25 (節葬下)

... 若苟不足，為人弟者，求其兄而不得不弟必將怨其兄矣 ...

... When there is insufficiency, the undutiful younger brother will ask his older brother for help, and when he does not receive it he will hate the older brother. ...

Mòzǐ 35 (非命上)

... 為父則不慈，為子則不孝，為兄則不良，為弟則不弟 ...

... the father would not be affectionate, the son would not be filial, the older brother would not be brotherly, and the younger brother would not be respectful. ...

Mòzǐ 39 (非儒下)

以是為人臣不忠，為子不孝，事兄不弟，交，遇人不貞良。

Such a man will not be loyal as a minister, filial as a son, respectful in serving an older brother or gentle in treating the people.

The term appears in four places, and it is used each time to point to the role virtue of a younger brother. But it need not be read as *meaning* the role virtue, as we can see by noting that the term is translated with a general virtue term by W. P. Mei above. In all but Chapter 25, it is translated with a general virtue term in Knoblock & Riegel 2013²⁴⁵ and Johnston 2010.²⁴⁶ Fraser 2020 has “fraternal” throughout.

Since each of the *Mòzǐ*’s clauses with *tì* employs tools other than *tì* to indicate that it is talking about a younger brother’s relating to an older, the phrasing of the *Mòzǐ* clauses with *tì* is always such that one could replace *tì* with *gōng* 恭, *jìng* 敬, *shùn* 順, or *xùn* 孫/遜 without obscuring or much altering the meaning. And in the three lists with *tì*, general virtue terms such as *huì* 惠 and *yǒu* 友 are used in the same sentences in the same syntactic forms as *tì*, to point to the conduct proper to other specific positions. Thus the fact that we find *tì* in such a form with such a purpose in these four passages is not, by itself, evidence that *tì* in these places means subfraternity rather than elder-respect or humble respectfulness.

Thus if our records of the use of the term had been limited to the *Analects* and the *Mòzǐ*, it would probably never have crossed anyone’s mind that *tì* might sometimes mean subfraternity.

²⁴⁵ In Chapter 25, Knoblock and Riegel translate *tì* as “filial” (p. 209).

²⁴⁶ In Chapter 25, Johnston has “behave like a younger brother” (p. 219), which would agree with my analysis of *tì* as a general virtue term.

The main reason to read *tì* as subfraternity in the *Mòzǐ* is the negative fact that in the *Mòzǐ* we do *not* find the word being used for any *other* purpose than to point to subfraternity. But that is evidence only because it suggests the hypothesis that subfraternity was the term's *main* meaning for the *Mòzǐ* authors. A consideration against that hypothesis is that in arguably roughly contemporary texts such as the Guodian bamboos and the *Mencius*, the term *tì* does not predominantly mean subfraternity.

When the *Mòzǐ* points distinctly to elder-respect it does so by the term 弟長 or 長弟, respect for seniority, usually in sentences that use *chū/rù* to make this practice the partner of filial piety or of the virtues of parent and son (quoted above, p. 44 n. 69). If we found that we should parse this compound term in such a way that it includes *tì* as a part, as the *Guóyǔ* suggests by using 長悌,²⁴⁷ that finding would weaken the force of our negative reason for thinking that *tì* means subfraternity in the sentences quoted above—especially in Essay 35, where the compound term is used for elder-respect twice in the same paragraph as the essay's sentence with *tì* quoted above.

Against my proposal that *tì* need not be understood to *mean* subfraternity in the quoted sentences, one might **object** as follows.

If *tì* did not mean subfraternity in these sentences, then it would have to mean humble respectfulness rather than elder-respect, for the latter is a virtue with a specific object group *other* than older brothers. But by the time of the *Mòzǐ*, using *tì* in the sense of humble respectfulness, or humble respectfulness as befits younger men, would likely have been quite old-fashioned. Therefore, in these sentences, *tì* means subfraternity.

²⁴⁷ See p. 199 above.

The **first reply** to this abstract argument is that we do not know that using *tì* to refer to humble respectfulness (as a virtue for all or mainly for younger men) would have been old-fashioned by the time of the *Mòzǐ*. As we saw above, the most general sense of the term was at least *recognized* in lines quoted from the *Odes* in many later texts—or else it was imposed on those lines by the later texts.

The **second reply** is that while elder-respect was seen as having its main application outside the family, it does not follow that respect for an older brother would not have been seen as required by the norm of respect for one's elders. My historical thesis about *tì* is that its meaning *narrowed* from elder-respect to subfraternity. When we call Philadelphia the City of Brotherly Love, the term does not *exclude* actual brothers.

Furthermore, a sentence in *Mòzǐ* 31 (明鬼下) seems to do what the objector supposes would not be done. It uses a term *meaning* elder-respect to *point* to respect for older brothers.

... 父子弟兄之不慈孝弟長貞良也 ...

... father and son, elder and younger brother are no longer affectionate and filial, brotherly and respectful, virtuous and kind. ...

The fact that *liáng* 良 is used for the virtue of an older brother in the sentence quoted just above from Chapter 35 (and at *Lǐjī: Lǐyùn* 18) argues for parsing this sentence from Chapter 31 as associating *zhēnliáng* 貞良 with older brothers and *dìzhǎng* 弟長 with younger brothers.

Mencius

In the *Mencius*, I shall argue, *tì* means elder-respect in at least half the passages in which it appears, including some where it appears in the compound *xiàotì*. I think the light preponderance of the evidence is that it means elder-respect in most of the rest as well, including two more passages where it appears in the compound *xiàotì*. Elder-respect is not an impossible reading in any passage.

After we look at the passages with *tì*, we shall review the other passages that seem to take a position on whether virtue or its root amounts to **(a)** filial piety and subfraternity, or **(b)** filial piety and elder-respect.

Passages with *tì*

Just one passage in the *Mencius* includes the term *tì* without also including the compound *xiàotì*:

Mencius 3B4

... 於此有人焉，入則孝，出則悌 ...

...Here now is a man, who, at home, is filial, and abroad, respectful to his elders ... ²⁴⁸

This passage uses the same six-character string we find at *Analects* 1.6. In this context, *tì* refers to a companion virtue of filial piety, a companion whose

²⁴⁸ Legge 1970, p. 270.

main arena is relations with non-kin. Presumably *tì* here is elder-respect, as in *Analects* 1.6. It cannot be subfraternity.

Elsewhere in the *Mencius*, wherever *tì* appears, it is part of the compound *xiàotì* at least once in the passage. *Xiàotì* appears in five passages in the *Mencius* (six if we count identical paragraphs in two places). Let us review each passage.

***Mencius* 6B2**

夫人豈以不勝為患哉？弗為耳。徐行後長者謂之弟，疾行先長者謂之不弟。夫徐行者，豈人所不能哉？所不為也。堯舜之道，孝弟而已矣。

Now, why should people be worried about being unable (to be like Yao or Shun)? They simply do not do it. To walk slowly behind one's elders is called being 'filial' [弟]. To walk quickly ahead of one's elders is called being 'unfilial'. Is walking slowly something that people are incapable of? It is merely that they do not do it. The Way of Yao and Shun is nothing other than filiality and brotherliness.²⁴⁹

Here Mencius' task is to persuade a shallow and literal-minded interlocutor of an affirmative answer to his question whether "everyone can be like Yao and Shun" (人皆可以為堯舜). To do this, Mencius speaks of walking behind one's elders. His presentation takes walking slowly behind one's elders to stand for *tì*, takes *tì* to stand for *xiàotì*, and takes *xiàotì* to stand for the Way of Yao and Shun.

In this passage we should read *tì* as elder-respect and not subfraternity, for five or six reasons. First, the action offered here as emblematic of *tì* is said to be in relation to one's elders (*zhǎng* 長). The context offers nothing to invite us to read this term creatively as "one's older brother(s)" or "one's elder kin."

²⁴⁹ Van Norden 2008, p. 159. Couvreur 1895 reads this *tì* as elder-respect (p. 584); Ames 2022 reads it as elder-respect (p. 219) and as subfraternity (p. 310).

Second, walking slowly behind someone suggests walking behind the elderly. It is typical of the elderly to be slower than most, but it is not typical of older brothers to be slower than their younger brothers.



Third, a similar argument is made in 1A7, in connection with elders, though scholars disagree about whether it is about bowing to them, breaking sticks for them, cracking their joints, or something else.

為長者折枝，語人曰『我不能』，是不為也，非不能也。

‘Collect kindling for an elderly person.’ If you tell others, ‘I am unable,’ you are simply not acting, not genuinely unable.²⁵⁰

The similarity to “walking slowly behind” is especially close if D. C. Lau and Irene Bloom are right to read *zhézhī* 折枝 here as bowing.²⁵¹

Fourth, at 6B2 the observation that every man can walk behind his elders was chosen to persuade a shallow and literal-minded person that the Way of Yao and Shun, encapsulated as *xiàotì*, is possible for every man. But if *tì* here means subfraternity, then the reference is to walking behind one’s elder brother, which is *obviously not* possible for every man. A literal-minded person would be especially likely to notice this and object that the example proves the falsehood of Mencius’ claim that *xiàotì* is possible for every man. On the subfraternity reading, this obvious objection to Mencius’ argument would be correct and apt.

²⁵⁰ Van Norden 2008, p. 11.

²⁵¹ Lau 2003, p. 11; Bloom 2009, p. 9.

A competent rhetorician would not have offered an argument that even a fool could be expected to reject on apt grounds.

Fifth, Mencius and his followers could not have regarded walking behind one's older brother as emblematic of the way of Shun, for whom such a practice was impossible.

Sixth perhaps, if the tradition about Mencius' childhood is true and if the passage was written among people aware of the basics of his biography, the author would not have represented Mencius as summing up the Way in a kind of action that he could never perform.

Mencius 1A3 and 1A7

謹庠序之教，申之以孝悌之義，頒白者不負戴於道路矣。

... Let careful attention be paid to education in schools,²⁵² inculcating in it especially the filial and fraternal duties, and grey-haired men will not be seen upon the roads, carrying burdens on their backs or on their heads. ...²⁵³

Subfraternity typically cannot be exercised toward the elderly except by men who might have trouble carrying burdens. The emphasis here on conspicuously elderly people in maximally public contexts, people who might easily be identified by strangers as “older than me,” strongly suggests that elder-respect outside the family is a leading part of what is meant by *xiàotì* here, so that presumably *tì* here is elder-respect.

It could be proposed that at 1A3 and 1A7, Mencius is using *tì* to mean subfraternity and is relying on a tacit premise that a man's good conduct within

²⁵² Cf. 7A15.

²⁵³ Legge 1970, pp. 131f., p. 149.

his nuclear family will almost certainly give him, eventually, the analogous practices in public life, hence arguably elder-respect, at least if conditions are good. But we should prefer the simple and straightforward reading, both on general principle and because the speculative reading does not fit the context. In each of 1A3 and 1A7, Mencius' claim that inculcating *xiàotì* in the schools would benefit the old on the roads appears within a speech aiming to persuade a king who is presumably not familiar with Ru doctrine. In this speech, the statement with *tì* is the concluding item on a list of claims about the effects to be expected from Mencius' proposed policies, and each of the other claimed cause-effect connections is perfectly transparent.

We have now seen that *tì* means elder-respect rather than subfraternity in

- at least half the distinct passages where it appears in the *Mencius*, and hence half of the distinct passages where it is partnered with *xiào* in the *Mencius*;
- at least one passage in three of the four Books that use the term; and
- at least two of the five distinct passages where *tì* is part of *xiàotì*.

Mencius 1A5

In this passage Mencius assures a king that benevolent governance by gentle tax and penal policies will so benefit agriculture that

壯者以暇日修其孝悌忠信，入以事其父兄，出以事其長上

... the strong-bodied, during their days of leisure, shall cultivate their filial piety, fraternal respectfulness, sincerity and truthfulness, serving thereby, at home, their fathers and older brothers, and, abroad, their elders and superiors, ...

By contrast, the rulers of other states

奪其民時，使不得耕耨以養其父母，父母凍餓，兄弟妻子離散。

rob their people of their time, so that they cannot plough and weed their fields, in order to support their parents. Their parents suffer from cold and hunger. Brothers, wives, and children are separated and scattered abroad.²⁵⁴

Couvreur reads *tì* here as respect for one's elders or betters;²⁵⁵ Eno and Slingerland read it as elder-respect.²⁵⁶

The context of the mention of *xiàotì* here in 1A5 is very similar to the context in 1A3 and 1A7, reviewed just above, where *tì* is elder-respect. This similarity is a significant reason to expect key words to be used in the same sense in 1A5 that they have in 1A3 and 1A7 in making similar points. Other similarities between the larger passages are great enough to have led E. Bruce Brooks to conclude that 1A5 (at least the part of it with *tì*) and the passage quoted above from 1A3 and 1A7 are among the very few passages in the *Mencius* that are “probably genuine.”²⁵⁷ This too may be a reason to expect key words to be used in the same sense in 1A5 as in 1A3 and 1A7.

Another clue to the meaning of *tì* in this passage is more ambiguous. It is that the string *xiàotì zhōngxìn* 孝悌忠信 appears to be followed by a longer rough paraphrase. Of course it is possible that the paraphrase does not divide neatly into elements each corresponding to an element of *xiàotì zhōngxìn* 孝悌忠信, and it is possible that the paraphrase is not mere paraphrase but also mentions some consequences. But as the longer string may be a clue to the meaning of *tì* in this

²⁵⁴ Legge 1970, p. 135f.

²⁵⁵ Couvreur 1895, p. 309.

²⁵⁶ Eno 2016, p. 21; Slingerland 2003, p. 152.

²⁵⁷ Brooks 2010, p. 150.

passage, we should look to see whether we can plausibly map parts of the paraphrase to parts of the string with *tì* that it paraphrases. In fact there are two kinds of mapping that each have some plausibility.

First mapping: *tì* is subfraternity.

Items on the brief list	Corresponding items in the paraphrase
孝悌	入以事其父兄 serving father and older brothers
忠信	出以事其長上 serving non-kin elders and superiors

Second mapping: *tì* is respect for elders.

Items on the brief list	Corresponding items in the paraphrase	
孝	入以事其父兄 serving father and paternal uncles	
悌	出以事其長上 serving	出以事其長 serving
	non-kin elders & superiors	non-kin elders
忠信	(well and faithfully)	上 and superiors

One might favor the first mapping on the grounds that the term *fùxiōng* 父兄 means fathers and older brothers. But as we noted earlier, this term need not be read in that way. It often means the sons of one's paternal grandfather, and in that sense it might be associated with filial piety as distinct from elder-respect, as in the second mapping.

Also as noted earlier, the *rù/chū* format that marks the two halves of Mencius' paraphrase was associated for centuries before and after with the

partnering of *xiào* inside and *tì* outside. We have found this association in the *Mencius*, at 3B4; and also in the *Analects*, the *Xúnzǐ*, the *Huáinánzǐ*, and the *Yántiēlùn*. We have also found *rù/chū* used to partner family virtue with elder-respect in the *Lǐjì* and in essays on two topics in the *Mòzǐ*. Only on the second mapping above do the two halves of the *rù/chū* format line up with *xiào* and *tì* in the standard way.

After the paraphrase, Mencius goes on to describe the effects of the rival policies, speaking first of parents and then of brothers, spouses and children, without mentioning elders in general. This point may seem to suggest the subfraternity reading of *tì* here, but it would be more significant evidence had spouses and children not been mentioned in the same breath as brothers, and had the speaker not connected these consequences so directly with tax policies and penal policies.

Mencius 7A32

孟子曰：君子居是國也，其君用之，則安富尊榮；其子弟從之，則孝弟忠信。

... Mencius replied, “When a superior man resides in a country, if its sovereign employ his counsels, he comes to tranquility, wealth and glory. If the young in it follow his instructions, they become filial, obedient to their elders, true-hearted, and faithful. ...”²⁵⁸

Several other scholars²⁵⁹ agree with Legge in rendering *tì* here as respect for elders, perhaps because it is attributed to the young in general. It is not true in general that the young men in a state could be subfraternal. Many of the most important ones could not.

²⁵⁸ Legge 1970, p. 467f.

²⁵⁹ Cuvreur 1895, p. 623; Eno 2016, p. 129; Hinton 1998b, p. 247; Lau 2003, p. 152.

Here *tì* appears in the phrase *xiàotì zhōngxìn* 孝弟忠信, the same phrase we found in 1A5 above. That fact is some reason to think the term is used in the same sense in both passages.

Mencius 7A39

... 孟子曰：「是猶或紆其兄之臂，子謂之姑徐徐云爾，亦教之孝弟而已矣。」 ...
... Mencius said, “That is just as if there were one twisting the arm of his older brother, and you were merely to say to him ‘Gently, gently, if you please.’ Your only course should be to teach such an one filial piety and fraternal duty” ...²⁶⁰

In 7A39 it is natural to take the example to suggest that “弟” is meant in the sense of subfraternity. But the elder-respect reading is not impossible. For twisting one’s older brother’s arm would be a vivid sign of a lack of *filial-piety-and-elder-respect*, as pertaining somewhat to each. The passage does not explicitly associate the arm-twisting with *tì* as distinct from *xiàotì*.

Hence in the *Mencius*, though *tì* is always closely paired with *xiào*, the term does not usually mean subfraternity. At most it means subfraternity half the time. It might never mean subfraternity. If and insofar as we have significant reason to regard the book as the authentic report of the words of one man or of a coherent school writing in a narrow range of time, we have reason to read the uncertain cases in line with the certain cases. Or to put the point another way: from the *Mencius* one can prove that *tì* often meant elder-respect, but one cannot prove that *tì* ever meant subfraternity.

²⁶⁰ Legge 1970, p. 472.

	In “ <i>xiàotì</i> ”	Elder-Respect	Subfraternity
1A3,7	Yes	Yes	No
1A5	Yes	More likely?	Less likely?
3B4	No	Yes	No
6B2	Yes	Yes	No
7A32	Yes	More likely?	Less likely?
7A39	Yes	Unlikely	Likely

Passages without *tì*

As a side-inquiry that may help us understand the history of *tì*, this final section of the paper looks at the *Mencius* passages without *tì* that seem to take a position fairly directly on whether the root of virtue is **(a)** filial piety and subfraternity or **(b)** filial piety and elder-respect.

There are three such passages: 4A11, suggesting elder-respect; 4A27, suggesting subfraternity; and 7A15, seemingly of two minds on the point. A few scholars read all three passages as speaking of elder-respect and not subfraternity; none reads them all the other way. (No passage in the *Mencius* proposes that subfraternity is the root of elder-respect.)

***Mencius* 4A11** puts forth elder-respect as filial piety’s partner with no apparent mention of subfraternity.

孟子曰：「道在爾而求諸遠，事在易而求之難。人人親其親、長其長而天下平。」
Mencius said, “The path of duty lies in what is near, and men seek for it in what is remote. The work of duty lies in what is easy, and men seek for

it in what is difficult. If each man would love his parents and show the due respect to his elders, the whole land would enjoy tranquillity.”²⁶¹

The passage does not unambiguously offer the two virtues as the root of further virtue. But it can be taken to suggest that once we make that easy start, the rest of the Way comes easily, step by step.

Mencius 4A27 seems to paint a different picture. Here is the relevant part, with Van Norden’s translation:

孟子曰：「仁之實，事親是也；義之實，從兄是也。...」

Mengzi said, “The core of benevolence is serving one’s parents. The core of righteousness is obeying one’s elder brother. ...”²⁶²

Robert Eno,²⁶³ David Hinton,²⁶⁴ Hongkyung Kim,²⁶⁵ Maija Bell Samei²⁶⁶ and Edward Slingerland²⁶⁷ read *xiōng* 兄 in 4A27 as elders rather than older brothers. David Nivison²⁶⁸ suggests the same understanding.

If the “elders” reading of *xiōng* is too bold, perhaps instead *xiōng* might be read here in line with a familiar metaphor to mean one’s elder colleagues or companions. Deferring to these people is perhaps an approximation of elder-respect. As compared to following one’s older brother, following one’s elder

²⁶¹ Legge 1970, p. 302.

²⁶² Van Norden 2008, p. 101.

²⁶³ Eno 2016, p. 79.

²⁶⁴ Hinton 1998b, p. 138.

²⁶⁵ Kim 2016, p. 157 n. 42.

²⁶⁶ Z. Li 2010, p. 61.

²⁶⁷ Slingerland 2003, p. 81.

²⁶⁸ David Nivison writes,

In book 4 (4A27) we read that caring for parents is the core activity (*shih*), so to speak, of what Mencius calls *jen* (benevolence, kindness) and obeying elders (literally, elder brothers) the core of *i* (rightness or dutifulness). (Nivison 1979, p. 427)

colleagues and companions in general would be a more reasonable proxy for doing one's best to act rightly and wisely. But following one's elders in general would be an even more reasonable proxy. Following one's elder colleagues and companions would lack the universality by which true elder-respect protects our weakest neighbors, and would be a poor fit with elder-respect's emblematic care for elderly strangers on the roads.

Aside from the scholars named just above, to my knowledge all scholars translating this passage, or quoting it in some translation, present *xiōng* here as *older brothers*, without comment on any potential ambiguity or problem. But on that reading, to understand the passage's thinking about *yì* in broad strokes one would have to think through several big questions that I have not seen raised—unless perhaps one's interest is only in abstract parts of metaethics.

Suppose we read *xiōng* here as older brothers, and we read *shí* 實 with most scholars as “core” or “substance,” or with Zhu Xi as “seed.”²⁶⁹

Now, we may disagree about whether *yì* means something like the right, or justice, or duty, or fulfilling one's relational roles well. But a modest practical grasp of any of those things would seem to block the view that its **substance**—its main bulk or main point—is a man's obedience to his older brother(s).

What about the idea that obedience to older brothers is the **seed** or **psychological core** of *yì*? If we read it this way, we are taking the statement to imply that *yì* is largely unavailable to people who are not younger brothers, such as Mencius according to the tradition about him,²⁷⁰ Emperor Shun (whose *yì*

²⁶⁹ Quoted in A. K. L. Chan 2004, p. 169f.

²⁷⁰ If the long commentarial tradition accepted the view that Mencius had no older brother, we should expect some commentarial attention to the implications of this view for the interpretation of e.g. 4A27 and 7A15.

was especially well grounded according to *Mencius* 4B19²⁷¹), King Wen, most rulers a counsellor might hope to counsel, most heads of clans, and the men whom subfraternity obeys (*cóng 從*).²⁷² The remainder of the passage would then imply that these people have limited access to wisdom and the benefits of ritual and music.

If, instead, with Legge and some others we read *shí* 實 as **richest fruit**, the passage does not exactly say that filial piety and subfraternity are the root of *rén* and *yì*. But on that reading the passage implies that people without older brothers have no access to the best attractions of *yì*. On average, then, these people would presumably do a worse job of practicing *yì* than other people would. All translators who use “fruit” here insert a modifier: “richest” or “greatest” or “principal,” perhaps because such a modifier would reduce the magnitude of the problem, making the passage not say on the surface that the entirety of the fruits of *yì* depend on having an older brother. Such an added modifier can shrink the problem slightly (“principal”) or greatly (“richest”). But the text seems happy to put the point more boldly.

If Mencius or his group did think that the seed or psychological core of *yì* or the main or best attractions of *yì* are available only to men who have older brothers, one might expect to find in the collection some comment on this

²⁷¹ 4B19 says that the sage emperor Shun “由仁義行，非行仁義也”—or as Irene Bloom translates, “Humaneness and rightness were the source of his actions; he did not just perform acts of humaneness and rightness” (Bloom 2009, p. 89). Shun’s filial piety is a model, and a recurring topic is the ways his family fails to support his virtue; but no passage comments on his lack of an older brother as a potential problem for his pursuit of *yì*. Shun is exalted at *Mencius* 2A8, 2B21 3A1, 3A4, 3B9, 4A1, 4A2, 4A26, 4A28, 4B1, 4B19, 4B28, 5A1, 5A2, 5A3, 5A4, 5A5, 5A6, 5A7, 5B1, 5B3, 5B6, 6B2, 6B3, 6B10, 6B15, 7A16, 7A25, 7A30, 7A35, 7A46, 7B6, 7B33, 7B37, and 7B38.

²⁷² This last point is a simplification. If a third son is obeying a second son who is, unbeknownst to the third son, disobeying the first son, then the third son is subfraternal and obeying someone who *can* be but is not being *yì*.

proposition's major implications, factual and practical. The entire absence of any comment on obvious major implications would be a strong argument against understanding *xiōng* in 4A27 as "older brothers," or rather against *both* reading the term that way and regarding the passage as indicative of the views that generated the rest of the collection, and thus against citing the passage toward characterizing the general philosophy of the collection.

What major implications should we look to find discussed, to find that *xiōng* in this passage means older brother?

The most obvious *prima facie* **factual** implications include that **(a)** for as long as subfraternity has been a popular virtue, younger sons would generally have been more successful at *yì* than first or only sons (unless subfraternity is rare); and that **(b)** a good grasp of *yì* (understanding its dependence on subfraternity) would impede respect for oldest brothers (among those inclined to respect *yì*), and thus impedes the development of *yì*; and that **(c)** rightness, which involves obeying one's older brothers, would put every man capable of rightness under the enduring practical direction of a man congenitally hampered from reliably choosing the right. There is no comment on any of these factual implications in the *Mencius*, as implications or as propositions.

One of the obvious **practical** implications is **(d)** to challenge primogeniture as the default principle for selecting the heads of clans. There is no comment on this matter in the *Mencius*.

Another obvious practical implication is **(e)** to challenge primogeniture as the default principle for selecting state leaders. But this concern may not have lay behind the *Mencius*' ideas on succession. In defending a non-automatic approach the *Mencius* foregrounds the example of Shun, who was not subfraternal.

To allow charity to read *xiōng* as “older brothers” at *Mencius* 4A27, we might propose that the claim about *yì* and subfraternity at the beginning of 4A27 was mere rhetorical looseness for some purpose. But I find it hard to think of a context in which misleading one’s hearer into thinking one holds such a profusely problematic view would have been an attractive move.

Mencius 7A15 is the third passage without *tì* that can seem to take a position on whether filial piety’s comparable partner in the root of complete virtue is subfraternity or elder-respect. But it may be of two minds on the point.

孟子曰：「人之所不學而能者，其良能也；所不慮而知者，其良知也。孩提之童，無不知愛其親者；及其長也，無不知敬其兄也。親親，仁也；敬長，義也。無他，達之天下也。」

Mengzi said, “That which people are capable of without learning is their genuine capability. That which they know without pondering is their genuine knowledge. Among babes in arms there are none that do not know to love their parents. When they grow older, there are none that do not know to revere their elder brothers. Treating one’s parents as parents is benevolence. Revering one’s elders is righteousness. There is nothing else to do but extend these to the world.”²⁷³

Roger T. Ames,²⁷⁴ Robert Eno,²⁷⁵ David Hinton²⁷⁶ and James Ware²⁷⁷ render *xiōng* 兄 here as *elders* rather than *older brothers*. On this reading, the two arguments of the passage are precisely parallel, so that the argument about *yì* is just as simple, clear and straightforward as the argument about *rén*. The

²⁷³ Van Norden 2008, p. 175.

²⁷⁴ Ames 2011, p. 152.

²⁷⁵ Eno 2016, p. 126.

²⁷⁶ Hinton 1998b, p. 240.

²⁷⁷ Ware 1960, p. 151. But at 4A27, Ware takes *xiōng* to be older brothers (p. 105).

overall idea of the passage can then be that none of us has been blocked by lack of understanding from practicing *rén* and *yì*. We have all had the necessary understanding early on, perhaps at least from the beginning of adulthood. Here are paraphrases of the two arguments so understood, giving in bold the parts that are explicit in the passage.

1. Each person has known (or knows) to love their parents.

2. Loving one's parents \approx *rén*

(to complete it, just extend the love to all).

3. So *rén* is somehow open to each person. (1,2)

1. Each adult has known (or knows) to respect their elders.

2. Respecting one's elders \approx *yì*

(to complete it, just extend the respect to all).

3. So *yì* is somehow open to each person. (1,2)

Here are six reasons to suppose that the argument about *yì* was meant to support the view that *yì* is somehow open to every person.

- The view that great virtue is somehow open to everyone is a prominent Mencian theme in general.
- The argument about *rén* supports the view that *rén* is somehow open to everyone, and the way the two arguments are presented (in parallel rather than one after the other) strongly suggests they are to be seen as parallel.
- The language of the arguments foregrounds the idea of *everyone*.
- The passage stresses that learning and cogitation are not necessary.

- *Mencius* 4A11 suggests that elder-respect is easy for everyone.
- If the conclusion is not that *yì* is open to all, but only that it is open to all who have older brothers, then the people not covered by the argument would include many or most of the men whose practicing *yì* was of most concern to the early Ru.

(The concluding sentence of 7A15 might give us a reason on either side or neither, depending on how we interpret it.)

One can perhaps understand why, if the author of the remark at 7A15 meant that people know respect for *their elders*, he might nevertheless not have wanted to use the phrase *qí zhǎng* 其長 for “their elders” at that point. For in introducing that very clause he had used *qí zhǎng* 其長 in a completely different sense. And for two reasons the author should still have expected their hearers or readers *at least to think of* the idea that *xiōng* here might stand for elders, if that was linguistically possible. First, the arguments about *rén* and *yì* are presented in parallel. Hence the reader can be counted on to try to think of a way to read the two arguments as parallel (and I suppose we all do try, at first). Second, the reader can be counted on to notice that by its surface syntax the sentence with *xiōng* implies that everyone has *xiōng*—an implication that is unproblematic if *xiōng* means elders and absurd if *xiōng* means older brothers. (Every English translation I have seen preserves this surface commitment of the syntax.)

Aside from Ames, Eno, Hinton and Ware, to my knowledge all scholars translating this passage, or quoting it in English for discussion, present *xiōng* here as *older brothers*, without mentioning that the passage (so understood) might be problematic or require hard interpretive choices.

What attractive readings are available, consistent with taking *xiōng* as *older brothers*? The first choice an interpreter must make, perhaps an easy one, is whether to read the passage straightforwardly as saying that **(1) all people** at some point know something we can call respecting their older brothers, or instead as an abbreviated way of saying that **(2) all people who have older brothers** at some point know respecting their older brothers.

Reading (1) would place strong constraints on how we can understand *liángzhī* 良知. In connection with respecting older brothers. This knowing would have to (a) not require ever practicing the known activity,²⁷⁸ but (b) take significant time to develop.

²⁷⁸ **Acquaintance** logically requires actual experience. Wang Yangming likely was thinking of a kind of acquaintance when he said, “If you say that someone knows *xiào* and knows *tì*, it must be someone who has actually practiced *xiào* and practiced *tì*. Only then can you say the person knows *xiào* and knows *tì*” (“就如稱某人知孝、某人知弟，必是其人已曾行孝行弟，方可稱他知孝知弟，不成只是曉得說些孝弟的話，便可稱為知孝弟，” quoted in Fung 2012, pp. 283, 297f.).

Instinct. We might imagine that people have a congenital instinct that is functionally equivalent to acquaintance with respect for older brothers, rather as, in the film *The Matrix*, Neo’s knowing kung fu was loaded into his brain through a cable. But the claim at *Mencius* 7A15 seems to be offered as a premise the audience is expected to accept, so the claim should not be outlandish.

Knowing how. A brotherless person might know how to respect an older brother, at least in broad strokes. But such knowing would take some thought, and it would not go as far as the ordinary virtuosity of a practiced feel for interacting with an actual older brother. The person would not know how it feels to respect an older brother, or how to navigate the hard parts—unless the assumption is that everyone can know this by interacting with *other* elders, in which case we might capture Mencius’ line of thought about *yì* more clearly by translating *xiōng* as *elders* rather than *older brothers*.

Knowing to. A person cannot correctly be said to “know to do X” when they are unable to consider doing X, unable to think or suspect that they should do X, and unable to believe they ever did or ever will have occasion or reason to do X—especially when these inabilities express the person’s easy firm practical knowledge of a main simple permanent framework condition of their life and identity.

Conditional knowing-to. Like millions of other people my age, I know to eat my bowl of live serpent worms by hand and with apparent enjoyment of their deaths, should I find myself at table with Klingons (warlike humanoids native to the planet Qo’noS), though that conditional knowing what to do does not amount to my ever knowing what to do. Similarly, a brotherless person might know what to do in the imaginary scenario that they have an older brother. But such conditional knowing-to by a brotherless person would not come easily or go deep.

Reading (1) leaves obscure how the premise about knowing would connect recognizably with anything later in the argument about *yì*, which speaks of a different practice: elder-respect rather than subfraternity. So on this reading, the interpreter's task of developing any broad-strokes line of thinking about *yì* that an author might have expected the passage to communicate is a salient and substantial task, and I have not seen an attempt.

Reading (2). If the claim is only that all people *who have older brothers* come to know (in some sense) respect for their older brothers, then the reader's basic task of imagining at least one broad-strokes line of thinking about *yì* that the author might have expected the passage to communicate is a difficult task, and I have not seen an attempt.

Within reading (2), we might divide the interpreter's basic task into two distinct questions she must try to answer, each inspired by comparison with the argument about *rén*.

(A) How would people who have known respecting their elder brothers all come to know the second activity (elder-respect), the one that is hyperbolically *yì*? What could the author of the passage have been supposing about that?

(B) A good answer to question (A) would explain only how the author might have arrived at the conclusion that *yì* is available to everyone who has an older brother. **How** would the author then get to the conclusion that *yì* is available to the rest of us, e.g. most leaders of states and clans, all leaders of sets of brothers, and Shun and Wen?

Knowing that people should respect any older brothers they might have can come only with much thought. And there would be no plausibility to a parallel claim that infants know that people should love their parents.

To (A) I can offer no serious answer,²⁷⁹ and hence no serious answer that the author might have thought would go without saying for the intended audience of the spoken remark or written passage. Further, we cannot attribute a tacit answer to the author on the strength of its fixing the argument unless it fixes the argument; and to fix the argument we would also need an answer to (B).

To (B) I have no answer.

We can sidestep both questions (A) and (B), *and* see the arguments about *rén* and *yì* as genuinely parallel and equally well articulated, by jettisoning the idea that the passage aims to show that *yì* is open to everyone, in favor of the idea that the argument about *yì* aims to show only that it is available to men with older brothers. We can do this by creatively reading the hyperbolic claim “敬長，義也” as the hyperbolic claim that “respecting one’s older **brothers** is *yì*.” Indeed the reader can be expected to think of that interpretive option, for precisely the same two reasons that she can be expected to think of the option of reading *xiōng* as “elders”: only by one of those moves is the argument *intelligible* as an argument or *parallel* to the argument about *rén*. If we thus take the conclusion to be the hyperbolic claim that “respecting one’s older brothers is *yì*,” then the arguments about *rén* and *yì* are not only parallel, they are also equally simple, equally straightforward, and equally articulated. No tacit assumption is needed to link subfraternity to elder-respect, because elder-respect is never mentioned.

²⁷⁹ Some years of experience with my brother might acquaint me with *what it is like* for me to respect or love him, with all his idiosyncrasies and in the context of our shared experience and expectations of each other. But if family counts for anything and has any distinctive flavor, that acquaintance (shaped perhaps as acquaintance with respect or love by a child for a child) will not acquaint me with what it is like to defer in loosely analogous ways to indefinite numbers of adult strangers and differently specific colleagues, many of whom are not 2 but rather 20 years older than me.

But I have not seen this reading proposed. This reading makes the argument conclude that “respecting one’s older brothers is *yì*.” Not that these two practices are exactly the same thing, of course; as with filial piety and *rén*, some extending would remain to be done. Still, the hyperbolic identity statement would have to be read as saying at least that respecting one’s older brothers is a big part and the root of *yì* or something like that. A plain implication would be that *yì* is largely unavailable to people without older brothers, such men as Emperor Shun, King Wen (*Mencius* 4A13 and 7A22 endorse the report that Wen was “good at caring for the old”),²⁸⁰ most rulers a counsellor might hope to counsel, most heads of clans, and the men whom subfraternity most respects.

In sum, the “elders” reading of *xiōng* at *Mencius* 7A15 and 4A27 may be a linguistic strain, but the “older brothers” reading seems less acceptable.

I cannot defend *any* interpretation of *Mencius* 4A27 or 7A15 as definitive, or even as certainly possible, without knowing whether *xiōng* can sometimes simply mean elders. We have seen that some scholars seem to think it can: Roger T. Ames, Séraphin Couvreur, Robert Eno, David Hinton, Hongkyung Kim, David Nivison, Maija Samei, Edward Slingerland and James Ware. And if it is possible, I should think that it is mandatory in these two passages. Hence the fact that most scholars reject out of hand the “elders” reading of *xiōng* at 4A27 and 7A15 must leave me uncertain as to whether it is a possible reading.

I hope at least to have established that if we are not ready with further arguments, we are not yet in a position to think the view of any of these passages (or of the *Mencius*) is that the root of virtue is filial piety and subfraternity rather than filial piety and elder-respect.

²⁸⁰ King Wen is exalted also at *Mencius* 1A2, 1B2, 1B3, 1B5, 1B10, 2A1, 2A3, 3A1, 3A3, 3B9, 4A7, 4A13, 4B1, 4B20, 6B2, 7A10, 7A22, 7B19, and 7B38.

The formulaic pairing of *xiào* and *tì*, apparently antedating the idea that the pair is the root of complete virtue, seems originally to have reflected an interest in balancing men's lineage ties with their more public involvement. In the centuries after Youzi's time, the claim that the pair is the root of virtue or of some virtue was restated and interpreted in various ways, reflecting various associations with the terms and various philosophical and factual considerations. The ambiguity of *tì* and of related terms such as such as *xiōngdì* 兄弟 (brothers, cousins, colleagues, compadres) may have encouraged people not to decide on a definite conception of the root in the face of considerations and texts pushing in different directions. Thus the intelligible association of respect for elders with *yì* as against *rén* may have generated a less intelligible association of respect for older brothers with *yì* as against *rén*.

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