The Golden Rule, Humanity, and Equality

Confucius’s Shu 慈-Formula and its Later Reformulation

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Abstract

Based on his published papers on this subject, Lee will explore, first, the correlation between shu(恕) and ren(仁) in Confucius’ teachings, particularly showing that whereas the golden rule is premised on equality between agent and recipient, Confucius’ correlation of shu with ren might conflict with the given asymmetrical social condition. He will address it by demonstrating that the golden rule can effectively induce an agent’s viewpoint to shift from existing sociopolitical asymmetry to one-to-one human equality.

Next, Lee will move to revealing the relation and differences between Confucius’ original shu and a series of post-Confucius reformulations, especially, showing that Confucius’ followers had to reformulate Confucius’ original shu in order to adapt the quality-based structure of shu to specified asymmetrical relationships, which led to the advent of the post-Confucius formula, especially “the measuring square” in the Great Learning, which was devised to guide one to infer universalizable rules of conduct for various roles in diverse relationships.

About the Speaker

Junghwan Lee is Associate Professor of the Department of Aesthetics at Seoul National University. He obtained his B.A. and M.A. from the same institution and received his Ph.D. from the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University. His research primarily focuses on Korean History, Chinese History, and East Asian Buddhism. His work has been published in reputable journals, including Dao, Contemporary Aesthetics, and Acta Koreana. His most recent publication, titled “Recharacterizing the Confucian Golden Rule: The Advent of the Post-Confucius Formula and a Shift of Focus from Ren to Li,” appeared in Dao.