THE EMERGENT SELF: RESONATING THEMES IN CONFUCIAN AND
MEADEAN CONCEPTS OF SELF

A thesis submitted
To Kent State University in partial
Fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts

by

Mary K. Riley

May, 2011
Thesis written by
Mary K. Riley
B.A., Kent State University, 2008
M.A., Kent State University, 2011

Approved by

Dr. Jung- Yeup Kim ____________, Advisor

Dr. David Odell-Scott ____________, Chair, Department of Philosophy

Dr. John R. D. Stavely ____________, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS...........................................................................................................iv  

CHAPTER  
  I.  Introduction.....................................................................................................................1  
  II. David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames’s Confucian Self.......................................................7  
  III. George Herbert Mead’s Social Self..............................................................................25  
  IV. Caveats for Consideration............................................................................................42  
  V.  Resonating Themes.........................................................................................................55  

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....................................................................................................................71
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to many individuals who have guided me through this challenging, yet rewarding process. Dr. Jung-Yeup Kim, my advisor, has been an invaluable asset in encouraging me to achieve the greatest product possible as well as instilling in me a deep admiration for Chinese philosophy. Additionally I would like to extend my thanks to Dr. Kwang-Sae Lee, Dr. David Odell-Scott, Dr. Michael Byron, Dr. Frank Ryan, Dr. Gina Zavota, Dr. Jeff Wattles and Mrs. Pat Stephens for their unwavering support, time, and attention, and invaluable advice throughout this endeavor. I am eternally grateful to Zac Purdue, Matthew Dargaj, Matthew Sandwisch, Andrew Magrath, Nate Radcliff, Dahlia Guzman, April Contway, Elaine Blum and Jacob Snyder for philosophical, emotional, and technical support. And of course, I would like to acknowledge my family and friends, Denise, Nicholas and Katie Riley, Kristin Clemente, Morgan Goldthwaite and Jason Sheets for motivating me to realize and to continue to work toward my goals.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

While the pragmatic notion of an emergent self is relatively new in the history of western philosophy, the Confucian notion of an emergent self has been around much longer. Yet when brought into conversation, these themes serve to mutually support and enrich one another. As such, my aim is to bring these two traditions in dialogue by highlighting mutually resonating themes in assessing similarities and differences among the Confucian and George Herbert Mead’s concepts of self. Amongst various contemporary interpretations of Confucianism, the works of David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames have elaborated the most on the theme of the emergent self in Confucianism. Reconstruction of an argument from the primary texts is beyond the scope of this paper. For that reason, I draw on Hall and Ames’s interpretation of Confucian thought in order to describe and compare the Confucian and Meadean selves.

A resonating theme of the Confucian and Meadean discussions of self is the dispensing with two underlying assumptions that are present in some western models of self. These models tacitly imply that particulars are fundamentally distinct and autonomous. That is, that they exist independently and are not contingent upon one another for their existence. Additionally, these models imply that there is an overarching guiding principle according to which entities are organized – these particulars are systematized under the authority of some transcendent standard. That the Confucian self
does not rest on these assumptions is apparent in approaching the Confucian self through the lens of Hall and Ames’s focus-field model. Instead, particulars are viewed as overlapping and self-organizing. Further, the overlapping or intrinsic nature of relations of entities indicates that there cannot be an external, overarching guiding principle according to which particulars are organized. The interrelated nature of entities does not permit for an external principle that stands over and above the system of particulars. By illuminating the similar concepts at play in the Confucian and Meadean notions of self, it can be shown that Mead’s social self also moves away from these two underlying assumptions and in turn makes use of intrinsic relations and self-organizing particulars.

In chapter two, I begin by describing what the self is from a Confucian perspective. In order to do this, I use David Hall and Roger Ames’s framework of considering various models of self and how they do or do not approximate the Confucian sense. Hall and Ames put forth several models through which the Confucian self has previously attempted to be understood: the self as independent, as purely mental or material, as a “biological organism,” and as a volitional center. I demonstrate that these models rely on two underlying assumptions: 1) that entities are related extrinsically (which leads to dualistic distinctions), and 2) the existence of transcendent principles that guide development. These assumptions are absent from Confucian thought, and as such, these models are ineffective in making clear the Confucian self. Hall and Ames suggest we view the Confucian self through the lens of the focus-field model, which assumes that entities are intrinsically related and self-organizing. In considering these various models of self I discuss important features of the Confucian self, such as the extension of oneself
to include others and the development of self as a function of one’s ability to integrate oneself into a context. Specifically I consider the roles of *li* and *yi*. *Li* are the traditionally prescribed ritual actions one ought to take into account when acting in a given situation. *Yi* is one’s capacity for personal disclosure of uniqueness; that is, *yi* is the ability to reappropriate the prescribed action in order to behave in the most appropriate manner – even if that means not adhering strictly to *li*.

In chapter three, I draw on Mead’s *Mind, Self, and Society* in order to sketch his concept of the social self. For Mead, the self develops as a result of an individual’s ability to extend herself to others by internalizing the attitude of the other. This occurs through a process of objectification. In interacting with others, the individual must be able to objectify herself – that is, she must be able to perceive herself “through the eyes” of the other. As the self develops, the individual must be able to abstract the attitude of the community and perceive herself “through the eyes” of the generalized other; that is the organized set of attitudes of the community or context. In taking up these attitudes an individual becomes aware of herself as an object to others as well as herself, since she is aware of how she fits into that community or context. In discussing the self, Mead notes two necessary components- the I and the Me. The Me represents the conventional and habitual attitudes of the community and guides the response of the I that is responsible for the action the individual takes. The I is spontaneous and creative in how it responds to a situation, but is nonetheless, to some extent, conditioned by the Me. The individual, via the I, alters the community insofar as it gives it a new attitude to take into account. In turn, the altered community influences the self, since the Me is a reflection of the always
changing community. Mead’s thought undercuts the two basic assumptions upon which previously discussed models of self rest in that it employs intrinsic (rather than extrinsic) relations and individuals are self-organizing (rather than organized according to an overarching, external principle).

In chapter four, I take into account the differences between the Confucian and Meadean selves. Mead’s thought was influenced by a Cartesian philosophic heritage. His conceiving of the self as a process was a response to a history of bifurcation that culminated in Cartesian dualism. Such a dualism entailed certain problems: If one is limited to subjective experience, then one is unable to “reach” the outside, objective world. Solipsism is a potential consequence of such thinking. In reconceptualizing the way in which subject and object interact, Mead nullifies the problem. Since subject and object interact in the self, there is no solipsistic problem of verifying the “external world.” In answering this problem by rethinking the nature of subject and object, Mead uses subject/object language. Confucian thought arose more organically in the sense that it was not a break with or response to a philosophic heritage but rather carried on some of the fundamental assumptions of the philosophical thinking that preceded it. These assumptions include the interrelated nature of parts, such that a distinction between subject and object had not theretofore been made. A potential problem in comparing the Meadean and Confucian concepts of self arises when applying the subject/object language of Mead to the Confucian self. Even though the concepts had been rethought by Mead, when referring to the Confucian self, such language can give the false impression that there are distinct realms that pertain to subject and object in Confucian
thought. Additionally, it should be noted that the most fundamental process in the
development of self is an individual’s capacity to objectify herself – to make herself an
object to herself. However, as mentioned, Confucianism lacks such language and thus
sees integration into a context as the most basic process. While Mead certainly appeals to
some sense of integration, such a process is contingent upon a more basic ability to
objectify. These caveats should be kept in mind when drawing parallels between the
Confucian and Meadean selves. Because of these divergences, one cannot wholly be
mapped onto the other. But despite these differences, similarities can be drawn.

In chapter five, I compare the similarities of the Confucian and Meadean senses of
self. Instead of thinking of subject and object as distinct and autonomous realms, Mead
demonstrates how the two transact and come together in the self: The self takes into
account the objective by internalizing community attitudes and remains subjective insofar
as it acts spontaneously. This interplay of community and individual maps well onto the
Confucian sense of self, where community attitudes are embodied in traditionally
prescribed ritual actions and novel or spontaneous action is required to address unique
situations. For Mead, the self takes on the community attitude via the Me - similarly, the
Confucian self takes on community attitudes in the form of li. The traditionally
prescribed ritual actions, like Mead’s Me, set the stage for the spontaneous expression of
yi, which corresponds to Mead’s I. Both the I and yi introduce novel attitudes of
responding to situations into the community and thus alter the community, in the form of
the Me or li, respectively. These affinities highlight the use of the ideas of interrelated
parts and self-organizing particulars, which are opposed to the underlying principles of the previously discussed models of self.
CHAPTER II

DAVID L. HALL AND ROGER T. AMES’S CONFUCIAN SELF

The Confucian notion of self is underpinned by a framework that is very different from much of the dominant philosophical tradition. In attempting to find a western analog for the Confucian sense of self it is important that we recognize and address the tacit assumptions and how they influence the resultant concept of self so we can truly assess how close to or far from the Confucian model these western models come. Hall and Ames discuss the problems of several models commonly used to describe the Confucian sense of self. Firstly, I will discuss Hall and Ames’s argument against the independent and autonomous model of self, which entails distinctions that are not present in the Confucian self. Next, I will discuss their rejection of the mentalist and materialist models of self. Thirdly I will articulate why Hall and Ames disagree with the Aristotelian “biological organism” model of self, which assumes that the self develops according to some goal or plan. Fourth, I consider their argument against construing of the self as a volitional center. Lastly, I treat Hall and Ames’s notion of the self as focus and field. There are two underlying assumptions upon which the models of self as independent, mentalist or materialist, biological organism, and volitional center rest, which are not present in Confucian notion of self: 1) that entities are related extrinsically (which leads to dualistic distinctions), and 2) the existence of transcendent principles that guide development.
These will be treated in greater detail in a later chapter. For present purposes, it is important to note that the focus-field model of self avoids these two assumptions.

According to Hall and Ames, scholars such as Donald J. Munroe, perpetuate the model of self as independent entity in holding that

Selflessness…is one of the oldest values in China, present in various forms in Taoism and Buddhism, but especially in Confucianism. The selfless person is always willing to subordinate his own interests, or that of some small group (like a village) to which he belongs, to the interest of a larger social group.¹

Munroe views the Confucian concept of self as one of self-abnegation where one yields oneself to the society thereby abandoning individuality. In disputing this view of the self, Hall and Ames distinguish between two senses of individuality: the individual as autonomous and the individual as unique

Munroe and others who subscribe to this independent entity model construe the individual as an autonomous entity that relates to the world via extrinsic relations: “That is, ‘individual’… ref"ers to a single, unitary separate, and indivisible thing that, by some essential property or properties, qualifies as a member of a class.” This implies further, that “all individuals are equal before the law, loci of human rights, and entitled to equal opportunities; each is one of God’s children, and so on.”² Insofar as autonomous individuals are related extrinsically or externally, Thomas P. Kasulis provides an apt illustration:

² Ibid., 25.
“Sand and seawater certainly influence each other. Sandbars affect the formation of waves and, in turn, the waves scoop up the sand from the bottom, hurl it ashore, and then pull it back out to sea. Yet the water and sand each maintains its own integrity. Though related, the seawater remains seawater and the sand remains sand…the sand may be suspended in the water of the breaking wave, but it never changes its essential nature by becoming part of the water itself.”

Kasulis names this notion of external relations ‘Integrity’: “…integrity means being able to stand alone, having a self-contained identity without dependence on, or infringement by, the outside.”

Claiming that the Chinese individual is self-abnegating implies a distinction between the public and private realms: that there is a private autonomous self that must be surrendered for the public good. This kind of thinking is characterized by integrity, where “The principles, not the situation, dictate the behavior.” Additionally, by presupposing an autonomous self, subscribers to this model are also presupposing a self/other distinction that typifies the integrity orientation.

Rather than construing individuality as autonomy, individuality can also be understood as uniqueness. “A unique individual has the character of a single and unsubstitutable particular, such as a work of art, that might be formally comparable to other such works, but that remains, nonetheless, qualitatively unique. This sense of

---

4 Ibid., 53.
5 Hall and Ames, *Thinking From the Han*, 25.
6 Kasulis, 54.
individual does not entail assumptions about class membership.” The Confucian self is contextual insofar as “A person becomes recognized, distinguished, or renowned by virtue of communal deference to the quality of one’s character.” The nature of the unique individual is “expressed in terms of my roles and my relationship.”

Confucian distinctions, such as self and other, are not contrasting but rather are interdependent correlatives, for example yin is always becoming yang and vice versa. These concepts are intrinsically related. Again, Kasulis provides a fitting illustration of the intrinsic or internal relations that are characteristic of his notion of intimacy:

Where there is seawater, we find both water and salt, but only insofar as they are merged. The salt dissolves into the liquid water and the water itself becomes salty. Their independent identities as salt and water disappear into the single solution of seawater. The seawater is an intimate relationship between salt and water…this relation contrasts with the sand’s maintaining its crystalline wholeness however much it might be externally related to the seawater.

The self understood as an independent entity fails to capture the Confucian sense. In conceiving of the self as an autonomous individual it relies on extrinsic relations, where entities are autonomous and separate, which sets up public/private and self/other distinctions that are antithetical to the Confucian social self that relies on intrinsic relations.

---

7 Hall and Ames, Thinking From the Han, 25.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Kasulis, 54.
The mentalist model of self, where subjective autonomy is equated with “mind” or “spirit,” in often a result of the translations of the terms xin, li, and zhi. Translating the xin exclusively as “mind” will likely reinforce the mind/body distinction for the western reader. However, xin connotes not only “mind,” but also “feelings” and is more successfully translated as “heart-mind.” Li translated as “principle” implies an element of transcendence, which is a characteristic of extrinsic relations that, as discussed above, are not applicable to the Confucian concept of self. Li should not be understood as a process of discovering organizing principles, but rather as “an analogical activity that constructs categories analogically, then traces, again by analogical means, correlated details that manifest patterns of relationships immanent within things and events.” Sorting is carried out analogically, not logically, so that there are no overarching organizing principles. Lastly, a mentalist depiction is easy to arrive at when construing zhi (to know, to realize, to be wise, wisdom) as a primarily theoretical activity. Alternatively, zhi is a sociological notion (rather than psychological): “a communal achievement that emerges out of effective communication.” Zhi translated as “know” or “realize” means “getting the most out of any situation” which suggests that the “knower” is integrated in her context and not understanding it from an objective vantage point. Certain translations of concepts tend to read mind/body dualism into texts where

---

11 Hall and Ames, *Thinking From the Han*, 29.
12 Ibid.
13 Hall and Ames, *Thinking From the Han*, 30.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
none is intended; as a consequence the mentalist view of self arises. In Confucianism “mind” cannot be extracted from context.

Since it has already been established that mind/body dualism should not be read into the Confucian concept of self, a materialist model of self must also be rejected. Human realization is a configuration of the *entire* self such that mind cannot be separated from body. *Li* as ritual practices are prescriptions for action in a given context. As such, they facilitate harmonious relations with others in a person’s field and with past and future cultures.\(^\text{17}\) *Li* testify to the integral nature of mind and body for the Confucian. While the physical component (the acting accordingly) is visibly present, these rituals are sacred by virtue of an individual’s investing them with *yi*, the capacity to significate or make meaning.\(^\text{18}\) These ritual practices are not fixed standards but involve a creative element. Ritual action is “the creative product [that] is the consequence of the play between one’s personal uniqueness and some continuing historical structure…”\(^\text{19}\) The formalized ritual actions of previous generations are taken up by present generations and refined for the specific context of the present individual. Personalizing of these rituals by qualitatively achieved persons takes the form of commentary on a canonical text, or variation of accustomed calligraphy.\(^\text{20}\)

---

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 32.


\(^{19}\) Hall and Ames, *Thinking From the Han*, 33.

\(^{20}\) Ibid.
predicated on the premise that people are unique, and that they must orchestrate themselves into relationships that permit expression of this uniqueness.\(^{21}\)

This orchestrating is both physical, insofar as it requires action, and mental in its requirement for personalization and investment. Separation of the physical and mental components leaves the notion of *li* meaningless, and so a strict materialist model of self will not suffice for a Confucian model of self. *Li* contribute to the development of a self insofar as a self arises as the result of effective integration into a context and *li* facilitate that integration. Since *li* are what they are by virtue of the personal investment of *yi*, the self that results from integration cannot be thought of as simply mental or material, but must be thought of as indistinct.

The Aristotelian “biological organism” model of self does not fit with the Confucian sense either. “Aristotle thought of an organism as a vital whole whose parts acted in accordance with an organizing telos or aim.”\(^{22}\) In this model, the organization of the investigation into a particular subject is guided by that subject’s purpose; for example, analysis of an acorn is guided by the notion that it will develop in accordance with the purpose of it becoming a tree. But, for the Confucian self, there is no power that compels it to develop in a particular way. Instead, formation of a person is spontaneous. The harmonizing of parts does not occur according to a monolithic principle but rather principles arise out of the spontaneous harmonizing of parts. Kwang-Sae Lee writes: “The East Asian sense of aesthetic order is not keen on an originative principle…or the

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 34.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 35.
notion of determinism. Rather, it is alive to the idea of self-organizing and self-renewing of particulars…”

Where the biological organism model moves from generality to particularity by organizing parts according to an overarching principle, in Confucianism, and other eastern philosophies, parts push from particularity toward generality: uncoerced parts organize themselves giving rise to patterns and principles. In comparing eastern and western notions of ordering, Hall and Ames write: “The concepts of aesthetic [broadly designating the east] and logical [designating the west] order are inversely related. Aesthetic order presses in the direction of particularity and uniqueness; logical order toward generality and absolute substitutability.”

In the biological organism model, the self or particular is the result of the transcendent, organizing principle. However, in a Confucian framework, a pattern or principle is the result of the self – particulars are self-organizing.

Lastly, Hall and Ames consider the unsuitability of the conceiving of the self as a volitional center. “Volition as an individuating principle leads to the construal of beings as agents characterized in terms of power relations.” “Willing,” thought of in terms of power relations means that harmony is impossible without recourse to a still greater power that compels organization. This, like the Aristotelian biological organicism, aligns thought with the above-mentioned idea of logical ordering which employs a monolithic organizing principle; organization moves from generality toward particularity, and as has already been said, the Confucian sense of ordering holds the inverse. Further, thinking of

25 Hall and Ames, *Thinking From the Han*, 37.
the self as a volitional center implicates a conviction about decision. “Freedom of the will is expressed through the ability to decide among alternatives.”

This means there is a distinction between idea and action and “the absence in the classical Chinese tradition of any individual faculty of will distinct from the act of willing suggests that, for Confucius at least, no distinction is drawn between intentionality and what is intended.” Again, Confucianism is largely marked by the lack of dualistic thinking. “What the self wills and how it wills are mutually determining. Thus, as an ongoing process specific to social, cultural, as well as natural conditions, human action is patterned by contingency.”

According to Hall and Ames, the term *de* most closely approximates the sense of “will.” *De* also connotes the outward extension of “favor” or “bounty” and the responses these notions evoke, reinforcing the notion that a person extends herself to others via deference to qualitatively achieved others. The self is bidirectional in that it is both shaped by its context and actively shapes its’ context.

Knitting the various strands of the philological data together, it would seem that *de* denotes the emergence of particularity as the determining focus of the field that contextualizes it…. there is an appropriate direction which the particular pursues, negotiated between its own agency and the flux of its context. The particular is a compositor, always composing its world. Its direction is appropriate to the extent that it enriches the particularity of the constituent elements of its context. This interplay is that of deference to recognized excellence.

---

26 Hall and Ames, *Thinking From the Han*, 38.
27 Ibid., 38.
28 Ibid., 38.
29 Ibid., 38.
30 Ibid., 38.
31 Ibid., 39.
Volition, for the Confucian self, must not be thought of in terms of “decision.” Rather, the path one pursues is the path that arises out the matrix of relationships formed by interplay of particular and context. The notion of a willing self implies the realization of some goal as well as a distinction between act and intention. However, the Confucian self does not realize a goal, as it emerges out of self-organizing particulars. Additionally, it does not entertain the separation between act and intention, since the path one pursues (as opposed to choosing) is the one that emerges out of individual and community interplay.

So, in what terms ought we think of the Confucian self? In contrast to the general ontology or universal principles that characterize the above-mentioned models of self, Hall and Ames propose the focus-field model in which the self must be construed of in terms of \textit{ars contextualis}:

The variety of specific contexts defined by particular family relations, or sociopolitical orders, constitute the fields focused by individuals who are in turn shaped by the field of influences they focus. \textit{Ars contextualis}, as a practical endeavor, names that peculiar art of contextualization that allows the focal individual to ally herself with those contexts that she will constitute and that in turn will constitute her… The art of contextualization involves the production of harmonious correlations of the myriad unique details… that make up the world.\textsuperscript{32}

There is no transcendent principle determining organization of the focus and field and so the world is conceived of as open ended – “There is no One behind the many; there are, rather many ones, many particular foci that organize the fields about them.”\textsuperscript{33} Patterns or principles are not discovered; rather, they emerge out of self-organizing particulars.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 40.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
Additionally, particulars in such a model overlap or are intrinsically related. The interrelated nature of particulars in combination with the capacity for self-organization makes for a dynamic, open-ended, process oriented model of self within a focus-field framework. These characteristics are compatible with the Confucian sense of self in terms of 1) the processual worldview, 2) emphasis on integration and the primacy of the relational person, and 3) the influence of community and individual on one another.

Hall and Ames apply the focus-field model to the classical Chinese language in translating the Zhongyong as means to avoid reading western notions into the text.34 This application helps illuminate the nature of the focus-field model. In contrast to the processual nature of Chinese thought, “Western thinkers have tended to privilege the intuition of being over that of becoming...That is, Being as ground is to be construed as unchanging and as at rest.”35 As a result of this preference, the Western ontological tradition emphasizes the notion of discreteness and western languages reflect that notion in their substantive nature and “a concern for the clarity of formally defined terms and the necessity of unchanging truths.”36 In contrast:

In the Chinese world, becoming takes precedence over being. “Being” is interpreted as a transitory state marked by further transition. This intuition is

---

34 “Our argument is simple and direct: The use of substance language to translate Chinese insights into a world of process and change has led to seriously inappropriate interpretations of the Chinese sensibility.” (Ames and Hall, Focusing the Familiar: A Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001, 7).
36 Ibid., 9.
illustrated in the formulations of *yin* and *yang* relationships in which *yin* is always becoming its correlative *yang*, and vice-versa.\(^{37}\)

This means a worldview that is fundamentally processual and continuous rather than permanent and distinct. Accordingly, “things are not *objects*, but *foci* within a continuous field of changing processes and events. A deobjectified, defactualized discourse is the language of process, and to speak and hear that language is to experience the flow of things.”\(^{38}\) Referential language names events, objects, or states of affairs to indicate a particular. The Chinese language, however, is deferential in that names are not employed simply as indicators of particulars or class members, but also allude to other “foci in a field of meaning.”\(^{39}\) As an example, Hall and Ames consider the word “Confucius.” The word names a particular, historical person in a context and additionally calls forth a number of other associations\(^{40}\): “Confucius say” jokes, the historical influence of the *Analects*, famous quotes, etc. It is from all of these associations that meaning of the term arises. The term invokes many other connotations and takes them on as part of what it signifies - meaning is *focused* from the *field* of associations.

The meaning of “Confucius” is focused from the field of associations in the same way the self is clarified by integrating into the field that is its community. The Confucian self is a focus in the field of relations – the context. Becoming the authoritative person (*ren*) is a process whereby one integrates oneself into a context. Becoming *ren* means disciplining the “small man” and his selfish interests, which are inherently disintegrative,

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 10.
\(^{38}\) Ibid.
\(^{39}\) Ibid.
\(^{40}\) Ibid.
and becoming a “profoundly relational person,” by incorporating others into oneself.\textsuperscript{41}

Thus, the authoritative person is only made possible in a communal context. Ren proceeds by using \textit{shu} as its methodology:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Shu} is the method of discovering what other people wish or do not wish done to them. The method consists in taking oneself – “what is near at hand” – as an analogy and asking oneself what one would like or dislike were one in the position of the person at the receiving end.\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

At a basic level, \textit{shu} means extending oneself by taking in the concerns of others. But in this taking of others into consideration (or extending oneself to the circumstances of another) one must retain one’s own judgment.\textsuperscript{43} Although the self is “standing in the shoes of another,” she does not dispense with her own unique sense of appropriateness or judgment. In taking on the concerns of others it is not as though the self is overcome. Instead the authoritative person discloses her uniqueness by acting in accordance with what she deems appropriate with respect to another’s concerns. The self is thus clarified in extending itself to others in that it refines its sense of appropriateness – it becomes focused. In the application of one’s personal judgment (\textit{yì}) one’s sense of appropriateness is continuously being developed and refined.\textsuperscript{44} That the taking in of other’s concerns plays such an important role in Confucian person making implies that there is a close relationship between advancement of interests of others and the cultivation of self.\textsuperscript{45}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{41} Hall and Ames, \textit{Thinking Through Confucius}, 115.
\textsuperscript{42} D.C. Lau, qtd. in Hall and Ames, \textit{Thinking Through Confucius}, 116.
\textsuperscript{43} Hall and Ames, \textit{Thinking Through Confucius}, 117.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 118.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 123.
\end{footnotes}
Rather that autonomous and independent, the Confucian self develops as a result of her capacity to take others into herself. She is intrinsically related to others around her.

_Yi_ is the concept that names the natural human condition; that is, the capacity to signify or to make meaning. This entails the ability to apply personal judgment in a situation, which is how one discloses oneself in the world. “Personal disclosure of significance is coextensive with the process of self-realization,”\(^{46}\) such that _yi_ has achieved high status for the person actively engaged in self-realization. “Yi can be readily identified with the exalted-self and the conduct of the exemplary person who pursues the broader good,”\(^{47}\) as contrasted with the “small” person who is limited by ego, which cuts her off from others; that is, ego makes for a fixed perspective which entails a self/other stance. Hall and Ames write:

> The process of becoming an exemplary person in Confucian thought entails both the dissolution of a delimiting and retarding distinction between self and other, and the active integration of this liberated self into the social field through the disclosure of _yi_.\(^{48}\)

The disclosing of _yi_ is a realizing of the self as contextual and dynamic, existing in a process of becoming. _Yi_, as the capacity to signify, is a unique particular that calls for creative judgment in response to situations. Because a person in context is dynamic and non-fixed, _yi_ cannot be a case of applying some externally determined principle. Instead, the concept reinforces the theme of personal contribution in judging appropriateness in a

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 93.
\(^{47}\) Ibid.
\(^{48}\) Ibid.
situation. Context and personal judgment dictate appropriateness in a given situation, such that yi entails a unique personal contribution and flexibility according to the context: Yi is a “personal investment of meaning in the world,” ever being redefined according to the demands of a situation or context. “Not only does yi distinguish certain actions as uniquely human, but a particular human action invested with and conditioned by yi is called li, ‘proper form, moral conventions, ritual actions.’”

Where yi is the concept that labels the capacity for signification, li are the expressions of personal disclosure of meaning such that today’s ritual actions are expression of past generations’ yi. As mentioned above, li tie together past, present, and future. Li serve a normative function insofar as these ritual actions are passed down from the previous generations as a guideline for appropriate conduct. But they are creative insofar as they require an individual’s unique judgment in application – they are revised with the unique contribution of yi and these refined ritual actions are passed on to the next generation. Li are a resource from which an individual draws on in making unique judgment. Ritual action lacks significance when yi are not invested. Li are means for disclosing yi, and as such are meaningless without that investment. This requirement of personal significance in ritual action implies that human beings are the ultimate source of meaning. This is what Confucius meant when he said, “It is the person who is able to

\[49 \text{Ibid., 97.}\]
\[50 \text{Ibid.}\]
\[51 \text{Ibid., 98.}\]
\[52 \text{Ibid., 99.}\]
\[53 \text{Ibid., 100.}\]
broaden the way, not the way that broadens the person."\(^{54}\) We are authors of our own reality in applying personal judgment and passing those guidelines (as \(li\)) down to future generations.

*Ren* is the “product and goal of this movement between ritual action (\(li\)) and signifying (\(yi\)), that is, the embodiment of the cultural tradition as authoritative person."\(^{55}\) However, according to Hall and Ames, the tendency to psychologize *ren* as a subjective feeling made manifest in objective social norms should be avoided.\(^{56}\) Such a model implies that the authoritative person submits to norms in order to come into accord with ritual conduct; however, this ignores the creative character of the authoritative person that has been indicated several times throughout this chapter. *Ren* denotes the qualitative transformation of a person, which embraces the achieved person as well as the process by which this quality is achieved.\(^{57}\) The concept of *ren* refers not only to the person, but also the becoming of such a person of which there is no end. It is a constant process of becoming through self-surpassing, much in the same way that *yi* and *li* are constantly being clarified and refined.

The authoritative person authors the context and the context authors the person in the way ritual action (\(li\)) affects a person and that person’s uniqueness influences \(li\). The sage is a master integrator who extends herself so that she embodies the context and at the same time influences it such that the context begins to look like the sage. Confucius, for example is described is cosmic terms in the *Analects*, that is, he takes on his context –

\(^{54}\) Confucius *Analects* 15.28  
\(^{56}\) Ibid., 112.  
\(^{57}\) Ibid., 114.
focus and field collapse into one and as one integrates oneself in the context, they become increasingly visible\textsuperscript{58}: “The excesses of the exemplary person are like an eclipse of the sun and moon. When he strays, everyone sees it, and when he corrects his course, everyone looks up to him.”\textsuperscript{59} Each focus constitutes its own alternative whole, which implies that there are no overarching wholes or one single context that contains all foci. Totality is merely the sum of all perspectives of alternative foci.\textsuperscript{60}

The most notable feature of the Confucian self is that it is constantly in flux; that is, it is always in a process of becoming by extending itself to and incorporating others into itself – at the same time authoring its context and being authored by its context. This theme is repeated over and over again in descriptions of ren, yi, and li that result as the product of response to a context and application of personal judgment. The Confucian self is best described using intrinsic (characterized by Kasulis’s notion of Intimacy) rather than extrinsic (Integrity) relations. Extrinsic relations imply some exertion of power over particulars such that they conform to some category. Intrinsic relations, however, denote a quality of transaction that is clearly present in the bidirectional nature in which person and world are authored (insofar as context affects person and person affects context). The focus-field model allows us to understand the Confucian self as an open-ended process governed by the interpenetration of particular individuals who are perpetually being

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 240.
\textsuperscript{59} Confucius Analects 19.21.
\textsuperscript{60} Hall and Ames, Thinking Through Confucius, 238.
focused and refined by virtue of one’s capacity to take in others and act according to one’s own sense of appropriateness.
Previously I have discussed the Confucian understanding of self within the framework of Hall and Ames’s focus-field model. I discussed Hall and Ames’s rejection of several western models of self as used to describe the Confucian self and claimed that they are poor descriptive models on the basis that they stand on two underlying assumptions about the distinctive or independent nature of entities and recourse to a transcendent guiding principle. The rejection of these assumptions is a theme that is also present in Mead’s notion of self. However, before elucidating these resonating themes, I will describe in detail Mead’s conception of the self. Mead’s self is a response to Cartesian models of self that hold subject and object as distinct substances. He reconceptualizes the way in which subject and object relate by considering them functionally, rather than metaphysically, distinct, and describes a self that arises out of social interaction.

Mead’s social self developed in reaction to an understanding of self that invoked Cartesian dualism. Mead believed the Cartesian model of self was based on the
phenomenological fallacy and would lead to solipsism.\textsuperscript{61} U.T. Place describes the phenomenological fallacy:

The mistake of supposing that when the subject describes his experience, when he describes how things look, sound, smell, taste, or feel to him, he is describing the literal properties of objects and events on a peculiar sort of internal cinema or television screen, usually referred to in the modern psychological literature as the ’phenomenal field.’\textsuperscript{62}

Descartes’ conceiving of subject and object as metaphysically distinct sets up the problem of the external world: How can I know that entities exist objectively and independently of me? If I cannot know the existence of the external world with certainty, I at least have access to my sense data. The fallacy comes into play when we imagine that our descriptions of sense data correspond to some entity in the mind and solipsism ensues.

Mead rectified this problem by conceiving of subject and object as functionally, rather than metaphysically, distinct. Instead of thinking of subject and object as two different substances, Mead viewed them as functionally different phases of experience. The self takes into account both subjectivity and objectivity in its development. Through social acts, the self gains an understanding of community attitudes which she incorporates into herself. These attitudes are the functionally objective component of self that guide the subjective responses of the self to her context. Context, as well as the


The interplay between subjective and objective functions of the self, is where I begin my discussion of Mead’s social self.

For Mead, “when the individual is a social object to itself, it is a self.” This requires an understanding of the self as developing in a social context. Realization of the self requires that an individual must move beyond her subjective standpoint and experience herself as an object. Further, “the apparatus of reason would not be complete unless it swept itself into its own analysis of the field of experience or unless the individual brought himself into the same experiential field as that of the other individual selves…” In order to reason, an individual must be able to treat herself as an object (i.e. an other). “Reason cannot become impersonal unless it takes an objective, non-affective attitude toward itself; otherwise we have just consciousness, not self-consciousness.” The self, then, originates against a linguistic background, which, at its most fundamental level, begins with a conversation of gestures.

Taking his cue from Wundt, Mead conceives of gestures as “that part of the social act which serves as a stimulus to other forms involved in the same social act.” Mead illustrates this concept by describing a dogfight:

The act of each dog becomes the stimulus to the other dog for his response. There is then a relationship between these two; and as the act is responded to by

---

63 Miller, 46.
65 Mead, 138.
66 Ibid., 42.
the other dog, it, in turn, undergoes change. The very fact that the dog is ready to attack another becomes a stimulus to the other dog to change his own position or his own attitude. He has no sooner done this than the change of attitude in the second dog in turn causes the first dog to change his attitude.\textsuperscript{67}

The act, or gesture, evokes a response from the participant whom the gesture was directed toward. So the gesture is a stimulus, which elicits a response that takes the form of an adjustment. In the above example, the first dog may growl and the second dog will change his attitude. Perhaps he was formerly sniffing a tree, but now, upon picking up on the act of the first dog, he may flatten his ears and bare his teeth. The subsequent response and attitude adjustment itself is another call for a response in the position or attitude of the original gesturer; such that the baring of teeth by the second dog draws out a response or attitude change in the first dog. ‘Gestures’ name the acts that evoke responses in a matrix of relationships in which participants are constantly attuning their positions or attitudes.\textsuperscript{68} “We have this interplay going on with the gestures serving their functions, calling out the responses of the others, these responses becoming themselves stimuli for readjustment, until the final social act itself can be carried out,”\textsuperscript{69} that is, the dogfight itself, for example.

If the gesture carries a meaning or behind it and communicates that meaning or to one on the receiving end of that gesture, it can be called a significant symbol:

…if somebody shakes his fist in your face you assume that he has not only a hostile attitude but that he has some idea behind it. You assume that it means not only a possible attack, but that the individual has an idea in his experience…in the present case we have a symbol which

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 42-43.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 43.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 44.
answers to a meaning in the experience of the first individual and which also calls out that meaning in the second individual. Where the gesture reaches that situation it has become what we call “language.”

Thus, the significant symbol meets two criteria: 1) the individual responds to her own stimulus as others do, and 2) the response within oneself serves as a stimulus in addition to it’s serving as a response. 71 In the case of the dogfight, there was a conversation of gestures, which calls forth appropriate responses. But in this case, there is a symbol that corresponds to an idea and it stimulates the same idea in another. Meaning is bestowed upon the gesture insofar as there is a response: “The meaning of a gesture by one organism, to repeat, is found in the response of another organism to what would be the completion of the act of the first organism which that gesture initiates and indicates.”

Thus, meaning has a triadic structure, which includes 1) the gesture of the first individual, 2) the responding gesture of the second individual, and 3) the resulting social act that is created between them. 72 Mead illustrates the relationship between meaning and symbol by giving the example of a bear’s footprint. The footprint is a symbol of the bear. It stimulates in its observer the meaning of “bear,” which, in turn, means, “getting out of the way or furthering the hunt.” 74 The individual is not scarred of the footprint but of the meaning it conveys (i.e. a bear, therefore, danger is nearby).

Further, an individual volunteering a significant symbol not only understands the meaning of that symbol but also anticipates the response from the individual on the

---

70 Ibid., 45-46.
72 Mead, 146.
73 Carreira da Silva, 44.
74 Mead, 121.
receiving end of the gesture. “The individual’s consciousness of the content and flow of meaning involved depends on his thus taking the attitude of the other toward his own gestures.”

Mead tells us that ‘thinking’ is the implicit conversation of significant gestures between an individual and herself: “The internalization in our experience of the external conversations of gestures which we carry on with other individuals in the social process is the essence of thinking.” In addition to social interaction, significant symbols allow for abstract and reflexive thinking. Thinking requires significant symbols insofar as they allow us to arouse and respond to meaning. In discussing my day with another I might tell them about a meeting I had. I arouse in myself and the other the meaning of this meeting, and the other is stimulated to respond by asking me a question about the nature of the meeting. Similarly, in thinking to myself I might consider my day in which I had a meeting. I arouse the meaning of this meeting in myself and respond by thinking of tasks I need to accomplish that pertain to those meetings. Discursive thought is a social act that relies on significant symbols arousing meaning and stimulating responses in the same way as social interaction between two individuals. Thought, as construed of by Mead, is dependent on social interaction. An isolated individual could not develop the capacity for discursive thought since she would have no social network to instruct her on how to organize those thoughts.

That the individual is able to internalize the meanings of gestures means that significant symbols have the same meaning for all individuals in a social group.

---

75 Mead, 47.
76 Ibid.
Symbols have a universal character or else they would not call out responses as they do; that is, communication could not take place unless the meaning of the symbol, which is found in the responses and adjustments, is universal. Communication via significant symbols is directed toward the calling out of a response from others, but such communication also serves to call out an implicit response from the individual conveying the symbol: “What is essential to communication is that the symbol should arouse in one’s self what it arouses in the other individual.”77 This is the kind of communication that introduces a self insofar as the individual becomes an object to herself when she tacitly responds to her gesture by apprehending the meaning of that symbol.

In the same way, an individual uses a vocal gesture, which calls out a response from another. The individual incorporates the meaning of the gesture, apprehended in its response, into her own experience bank and uses it as a guideline in responding to other gestures.78 We “take the role” of the other insofar as we internalize these responses and use them to guide future behavior. From this repertoire of possible responses, different responses or combinations of responses are called out according to the social and physical environment. Additionally, vocal gestures allow us to speak to ourselves insofar as an individual can say something and anticipate a response even when the other is not present. “The vocal gesture, then, has an importance which no other gesture has. We cannot see ourselves when our face assumes a certain expression.

77 Ibid., 149.
78 Ibid., 73.
If we hear ourselves speak we are more apt to pay attention.”79 Vocal gestures allow an individual to objectify herself as other. Mead writes:

The meaning of what we are saying is the tendency to respond to it. You ask somebody to bring a visitor a chair. You arouse the tendency to get the chair in the other, but if he is slow to act you get the chair yourself. The response to the vocal gesture is the doing of a certain thing, and you arouse that same tendency in yourself. You are always replying to yourself, just as other people reply.80

He writes further, “We are unconsciously putting ourselves in the place of others and acting as others act.”81 In engendering in ourselves the same response we call forth from others we are “taking the attitudes of the other persons in our own conduct.”82

Playing into a notion of the social self is the concept of the “generalized other,” or the “organized set of attitudes, and their corresponding responses which are common to the group.”83

Organizing these attitudes is done by a particular individual by taking the attitudes of others toward himself and toward particular problems that arise in the social process of which the individual is a part. When dealing with a particular problem that requires reflective thinking for its solution, we realize that the end for which we strive is represented only by a symbol. A symbolized end is our idea; it is what the individual believes all rational individuals would accept.84

Through language, the individual can “get outside of herself,” and take on the attitude or role of the other since she herself also understands the meaning of the symbols she

79 Ibid., 65.
80 Ibid., 67.
81 Ibid., 69.
82 Ibid.
83 Miller, 49.
84 Ibid.
uses. The generalized other is an abstraction of all those attitudes she understands and serves as a reflection of the community she is operating within.

Mead’s notion of “taking the role of the other,” has its roots in his conceiving of human beings as social objects. Social objects have the capacity for reflexivity or self-consciousness. Relating to others is done by taking on the other’s attitude toward oneself or, simplistically, seeing oneself through the eyes of the other. In this way, one becomes self-aware by taking oneself as an object (i.e. perceiving of oneself as the other does). Thus, the capacity for self-awareness (or self-consciousness) is developed in tandem with the capacity to relate to others; reflexivity is ascertained through social interaction. In taking the role of the other, “The self is thus simultaneously subject and object,” since it is the subject that is experiencing and at the same time an object to itself.\(^85\)

In “play” a child takes on the role of a doctor, teacher, parent, etc. The child performs the role of these “others,” and thus learns how to take the role of another in a simplistic manner: “By learning to play at being something other than they are, children begin to acquire a structured self, that is, they learn to become both subject and object.”\(^86\) However, in play, there is no unity of a community found in these individual instances of taking on these roles since roles are performed one at a time. The child cannot conceptualize an other that incorporates the attitudes of an entire community. “Play” takes place without respect to any guidelines or rules; the child takes on the roles sporadically according to her will and so this stage of development lacks the conceptual

\(^{85}\) Carreira da Silva, 30.

\(^{86}\) Ibid., 49.
organization of the community. Therefore, the self at this point is limited. There is no reflective thinking insofar as the child is unaware of how she is perceived or apprehended by others. However, “whenever games are played there are problems, ends to be achieved by methods (or rules) that confine behavior within prescribed limits.”

In game play the child’s role is defined by the rules and objective of the game. Rather than being able to sporadically change roles according to whim, the child must now take a definite role. In a baseball game, to use Mead’s example, the actions of a player are influenced by the player’s assumptions about the roles and actions of the other members of the team. He takes on the general attitude of the rest of the team (as opposed to the limited one role at a time taken on in play) by inferring their actions or at least how their actions will affect his own response: “We get an ‘other’ which is an organization of the attitudes of those involved in the same process.” Miller elucidates:

The pitcher must have the attitude of the catcher before throwing the ball; the response to the act of throwing, the oncoming act of catching the ball, controls the act of throwing it. But the pitcher must also take into account the attitudes of all of the other members of the team, and those attitudes are conditioned by their particular positions and how well they play. This is not all. The pitcher will certainly consider the record of the batter and also the attitudes of those who are watching the game, as well as those of the entire community of the league of players. His parents or his wife and children may be watching also, and their attitudes may well condition his performance.

In game play, the self becomes more unified insofar as the structure of the self begins to more fully reflect the structure of the community. The child takes on the attitude of the

---

87 Miller, 51.
88 Mead, 154.
89 Miller, 52.
community involved in the baseball game with respect to how she views herself, defining her role and determining responses to stimuli. As the child grows and encounters other social situations and contexts, the self will continue to develop and grow to incorporate those contexts. “And the more comprehensive the generalized other is, the more unified the self becomes.”90 Thus, the generalized other is the outcome of a broadened self-conscious.

This generalized other that is abstracted from a social context is present in any social act. “The club [religious group, political party, etc.] is a means of making explicit or of symbolizing the structure of the generalized other.”91 The generalized other is a representation of the community’s attitude. It guides the individual’s conduct insofar as an individual acts with respect to her context. For example, when attending church I do not tend to jeer or boo the pastor, since, taking into account the generalized other (in this case, the congregation and the lay people) I find that those actions would not be furthering the present social situation; rather, I attentively listen and contemplate the sermon. I will act and respond to “in terms of the organized attitudes of the party [in this case the congregation] as a whole.”92 The community influences the individual’s conduct via the generalized other, which is abstracted from the social context by the individual. Further, the generalized other must have a set of common responses whereby the individual can anticipate a response because she, as a member of the community, also has the same meaning in mind. Mead uses the example of property: when I lay claim to

---

90 Carreira da Silva, 50.
91 Miller, 53.
92 Mead, 156.
a piece of property I am invoking the generalized other insofar as I expect that my claim will be respected since as a member of the community I know the meaning of property. We all have the same attitude toward property and in laying claim to the property I arouse that attitude in myself. But the generalized other should not be thought of as a fixed or transcendent principle. Instead, it is open-ended and flexible, as the community undergoes changes, encounters new problems, realizes new technology, etc., so too does the generalized other, and with it the individual responses it helps formulate also change which in turn contribute to the changing nature of the community and generalized other. In this way, individual and community influence one another. According to Mead, the self reaches its full development when it organizes the individual community attitudes of others into a group attitude. Thus the self becomes a reflection of the “general systematic pattern of social or group behavior in which it and the others are all involved.” Filipe Carreira da Silva elucidates: “It refers to the fact that the way each individual self is structured mirrors the way society is organized…for instance, social membership in a plural and divers society entails a structure of the self that is also pluralistic.” Such a pattern enters an individual’s experience and she is able to “take on” that attitude and respond to it just as she would another individual in a conversation of gestures or symbols.

Two phases of the self are the “I” and “Me.” Where the I is the actor, the aspect of the self that actually responds to stimuli, the Me is the aspect of the self that

---

93 Ibid., 162.
94 Ibid., 158.
95 Carreira da Silva, 47.
recognizes the self. For example, “Imagine a situation in which someone is remembering what he said a few minutes ago. The phase of the self which remembers is the ‘I’, and the phase of the self which is remembered is the ‘me.’”\textsuperscript{96} The I carries out the action, the doing, the responding. When that action passes into history along with the I that carried out that action, it becomes an objective Me. As soon as the action is performed the I passes into the Me. So, there is a constant conversation between the I and Me such that the I is continually passing into the Me with each action. It should be noted that the I and Me are not two distinguishable substances. Mead is not making a metaphysical point. Rather they are “different aspects of the social process called ‘the self.’” At certain moments, the self can best be described as an ‘I’, at other a ‘me.’”\textsuperscript{97}

The I is the immediate response of an individual to the attitudes of others and is only known as an object when it passes into experience as the Me. The attitudes of others constitute the Me, to which the I is responding. Remember that the individual arouses in herself the meaning or attitude she wishes to arouse in others. Along with this, the individual also arouses an organized set of responses determined by the context. The capacity to organize these attitudes and responses is what gives rise to an individual’s self-consciousness. The Me, the “self that I am aware of,” is the taking up of all these organized attitudes.\textsuperscript{98} In taking up these attitudes an individual becomes aware of herself as an object to others as well as herself, since she is aware of how she fits into that community or context. “The ‘me’ is the conventional, habitual individual.

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 51.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{98} Mead, 175.
It is always there. It has to have those habits, those responses, which everybody has.”

The Me is the self that exists in consciousness for an individual as an object conditioned by the community insofar as the individual takes on the attitude of the community.

Recalling the baseball game example, the player knows his role with respect to the community of players. The rules of the game and the entire setting guide the player’s conduct, instilling some expectation in him as to how he ought to act. Game playing is an exercise in internalizing the guidelines of a social context by abstracting a concept of the generalized other. The player sees himself from the perspective of others, which carries with it an understanding of how he ought to conduct himself. That is, he will not play the role of pitcher because he is aware (by seeing himself from the perspective of the community) that his position in this context is shortstop. Mead writes, “To have self-consciousness one must have the attitude of the other in one’s own organism as controlling the thing that he is going to do. What appears in the immediate experience of one’s self in taking that attitude is what we term the ‘me.’”

It is the Me that sets the stage, so to speak, for the I to respond.

The I, as mentioned above, is that portion of the self that is accountable for the immediate response to the stimuli of a social setting. The I slips away as soon as the act is performed and becomes only observable in the historical record of experience as the Me. Therefore, the I, qua subjective experience, is unknowable. While the Me sets the stage for the I to act, the I is still uncertain. The I responds on the basis of past experience, but because it is immediate it is also unknowable and unpredictable. Even

---

99 Ibid., 197.
100 Ibid., 196.
the individual to which the I belongs cannot know for certain how the I will respond. Consider the common example of saying something which one did not mean to say: A friend asks me how my day is going and I might respond, “My aunt visited last year.” I am not sure why I said it, perhaps I had just talked to my aunt before my friend arrived, or I had recently sent her a card. But the social context is not as such that it would warrant that kind of a response. Take the baseball game as another example: Perhaps there is a fly ball headed not particularly in my direction. Even though I am playing shortstop (which according to this context means I ought to cover the area between second and third base) and not third base, I dash for the ball and catch it in the third baseman’s territory. The context is set up for me to cover a specific area of the field, and so the Me dictates that I should cover it. But the response of the I is to go beyond that space and catch the ball in different area. Typically it would seem as though the I conforms to the standards set by the Me. We do not generally see shortstops fielding all positions or find ourselves responding nonsense to questions that our answers have nothing with which to do. But the ability to view ourselves from the perspective of others does not guarantee predictable action on the part of the I. Mead explains: “The general conditions under which one is going to act may be present in one’s experience, but he is as ignorant of just how he is going to respond as is the scientist of the particular hypothesis he will evolve out of the consideration of a problem.”

To his end, the I makes room for creativity. Were the I to act always within the bounds of the Me, novelty and spontaneity could not be accounted for. “Such a novel

---

101 Ibid., 197.
reply to the social situation involved in the organized set of attitudes constitutes the ‘I’ as over against the ‘me.’”¹⁰² The Me is conventional dealing with the responses that everyone has. But the individual is always responding to the community such that she is expressing herself, and the I is the origin of that self-expression.¹⁰³ Mead gives the following example of the relationship between the I and Me:

A person asserting his rights on a certain occasion has rehearsed the situation in his own mind; he has reacted toward the community and when the situation arises he arouses himself and says something already in his mind. But when he said it to himself in the first place he did not know what he was going to say. He then said something that was novel to himself, just as the scientist’s hypothesis is a novelty when it flashes upon him.¹⁰⁴

The I is spontaneous insofar as the response cannot be predicted with certainty. The community has guided the development of the utterance in above example, but the first formulation of that utterance is completely novel. The Me serves as a record of experience from which the I draws on in contributing a novel expression, but “there is always an uncertainty about the completion of the act, as the self, through the I, reaches into the future.”¹⁰⁵ The convention of the Me stands in opposition to the spontaneity of the I. Each individual demonstrates a different measure of these two phases. Some are more guided by the habit of the community represented by the Me and others indicate a greater degree of the I.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Ibid.
¹⁰³ Ibid.
¹⁰⁴ Ibid.
¹⁰⁵ Miller, 60.
¹⁰⁶ Mead, 200.
Mead’s social concept of the self stands opposed to Cartesian dualism where the self is opposed to the world. Instead, the self is part of in the world insofar as it internalizes the attitudes of others and uses the community in as a basis for novel expression and further self-development. The self is necessarily integrated in the world, since the attitude of the world or community is taken up in the form of the Me. In turn the self contributes to the community by disclosing its personal expression of creativity through the responses of the I. However, “Mead is not claiming that there is a subjective self that sees itself as the others do, as if there were two discrete levels of perception – the subjective inner life of the self and the objective existence of the world of things.”

Rather, the subjective and objective phases of the self (respectively the I and Me) are in dialectical relation insofar as the Me, as the set of organized attitudes of others, sets the stage for the I, which creatively expresses itself thereby asserting itself in the community. The self and world are therefore inseparable.

107 Carreira da Silva, 54.
CHAPTER IV
CAVEATS FOR CONSIDERATION

In chapters two and three, I sketched a picture of what it means to be a self in the Confucian and Meadean frameworks. The function of chapter four is to state some caveats before proceeding to compare the similarities of these notions of self. Though the Meadean and Confucian concepts share a common framework, Mead’s self diverges from the Confucian self in two important ways: 1) Mead’s social self was a response to the problems of Cartesian dualism that have influenced ideas of self, and 2) Mead’s self develops against a background of communication. The Confucian self did not have to contend with a history of dualism that informed the Meadean self. Additionally, the Confucian self arises out of a desire to enact situational appropriateness rather than against a background of communication.

The dominant western tradition inherited dualism from Greek thinkers with the development of self-conscious concepts of “personality.” Hall and Ames claim that as a consequence of these concepts, “we begin to encounter a basic sort of ethical or religious problem focused upon the tensions between mind and materiality.”108 As reason came to be identified with “the guiding and directing agency of the world, a distinction between

---


42
‘that which orders’ and ‘that which requires ordering’ was needed.”

Pythagorean dualism is demonstrated in the contrast of “limit” and “unlimited,” which, according to Hall and Ames, “suggests the sort of form/matter distinction that will later become central to Aristotle’s thinking.”

Greek dualism makes manifest this division between stable guiding principles and the realm of flux and change. Pythagoras’ mind and body dualism can be interpreted in terms of the numerical nature of things. Aristotle writes:

The so-called Pythagoreans...thought that the principles of mathematics were the principles of all things. Since of these principles numbers are by nature first, they thought they saw many similarities to things which exist and come into being in numbers rather than in fire and earth and water – justice being such and such a modification of numbers, soul and reason being another, opportunity still another, and so with the rest, each being expressible numerically. Seeing, further, that the properties and ratios of the musical consonances were expressible in numbers, and indeed that all other things seemed to be wholly modeled in their nature upon numbers, they took numbers to be the whole of reality.

For the Pythagoreans, all things were numerically expressible and the relations among them were akin to the relations among numbers. Hall and Ames summarize: “Materiality is ultimately dissolved into the formal structure of patterns established by numerical order. Still, quantitative exactness is assured. Even, and especially, musical harmonies are consequences of reliably exact ratios.”

Parmenides reinforced dualistic thinking (that is, seeing opposites as contrasting, mutually exclusive pairs) in his ontology. He expresses the distinction between reality and appearance in “The Way of Truth” and “The Way of Opinion.” Where the way of

---

109 Ibid., 19.
110 Hall and Ames, *Thinking From the Han*, 83.
111 Aristotle *Metaphysics*, 985b23-34.
truth pertains to the eternal and permanent Being, the way of opinion deals with the phenomenal world of flux and becoming.

Zeno contributed to dualistic thinking in the dominant western tradition by driving a wedge between rationality and sense experience in his paradoxes. In considering the infinite divisibility of space, we find that motion is impossible since in order to traverse a distance one must be able to travel half that distance, and half of that distance, and half of that distance, ad infinitum. At this rate, one cannot move from point A to point B. Experience tells me that I can move from the table to the desk, but rationality informs me that if space or distance is infinite and I attempt to reach the desk by traversing half the distance between the two points and then half the distance of where I am with respect to the desk, so on and so forth, I will never arrive at the intended point, thus motion is impossible. Zeno sets the stage for dualistic thinking insofar as he points out the problems in reconciling sense experience and reason.

This tendency toward distinctions was picked up by Descartes in claiming “that thought and extension form distinct substances.” Descartes conceived of subject and object as distinct and autonomous, where object is characterized by otherness - It is not dependent upon the subject for its existence and therefore is not conditional on “deceiving effects of the senses and other subjective impurities”, and the subject is grounded in its capacity to think. “Descartes shifts reason from an objective position outside the thinker, where it is subject to external criteria of validity and to public

---

114 Hall and Ames, Thinking From the Han, 124.  
115 Sharon Warner, Experiencing the Knowing of Faith: An Epistemology of Religious Formation” (University Press of America, 2000), 32.
confirmation of veracity, to an internal position inside the thinker, where it is subject to
inner criteria of clarity and distinctness.”¹¹⁶ Reason moves from transcendent to internal
with Descartes’ conception of subject. Thinking is so essentially the mark of the subject
that even the body becomes other and therefore an object to the subject. Descartes move
from his own private experiences and the knowledge that he himself exists, toward
knowledge of the other (conceived of as God):

For how could I understand that I doubted or desired – that is, lacked something –
and that I was not wholly perfect, unless there were in me some idea of a more
perfect being which enabled me to recognize my own defects by comparison?¹¹⁷

He recognizes the idea of infinity as other than and opposed to himself, which is
decidedly finite in its imperfection. Descartes builds his metaphysics on the recognition
of that which he is not, thus setting the stage for the problem of the external world and
solipsism. If knowledge is composed of images in the mind of the subject and is limited
to the subject, then publicly verifiable knowledge of the object becomes troublesome.

According to Miller, this separation has influenced western philosophy in “that
the individual begins with a knowledge of his own self and a knowledge of what is
immediate in his experience, such as sense data stripped of all interpretation, or the
contents of mind that supposedly exist on a sort of internal cinema…”¹¹⁸ He notes
further,

¹¹⁶ Warner, 33.
¹¹⁷ René Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, (“Third Meditation”) in The
Philosophical Writings of Descartes, vol II, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff,
¹¹⁸ Miller, 7.
In short, they [the western philosophers influenced by Descartes] begin with ‘subjective contents’ and assume that of these alone we are absolutely certain, and they try to work toward a knowledge of the nature of their causes and a knowledge of an objective order.\(^{119}\)

Knowledge of the objective world requires some kind of epistemological leap to get from the internal realm of the subject to the public domain of the object. This kind of thinking influences Sartre and other existentialist thinking in their claim that the individual is alone in the world and responsible for making decisions as well as Buber’s Ich-Du relationship, where God exists apart from and prior to humanity.\(^{120}\)

Behaviorism, especially the Watson-Skinner brand, attempted to overcome Cartesian dualism by denying the existence of the mind, mental images, etc. and reducing them to a set of observable behaviors. B.F. Skinner summarized:

The position can be stated as follows: what is felt or introspectively observed is not some nonphysical world of consciousness, mind, or mental life but the observer’s own body. This does not mean that introspection is a kind of psychological research, nor does it mean that what are felt or introspectively observed are the causes of behavior. An organism behaves as it does because of its current structure, but most of this is out of reach of introspection. At the moment we must content ourselves, as the moment we must content ourselves as the methodological behaviorist insists, with a person’s genetic and environment histories. What are introspectively observed are certain collateral products of those histories.\(^{121}\)

For Skinner, the subject matter of psychology is behavior; the nonphysical, mental world does not exist. As such, mental processes are unimportant in evaluating the development of the self and the subject/object distinction becomes unimportant. This brand of behaviorism addresses the problem of solipsism inherent in Cartesian dualism by

\(^{119}\) Ibid., 7-8.
\(^{120}\) Ibid., 8.
objectifying mental states. Mead claims that behaviorism of this sort has its roots in animal psychology, where introspection cannot be taken into account; as such, animal conduct must be studied in terms of obectifiable, external conduct. This method was then carried over into human analysis. Watson-Skinner behaviorism addressed the problems of dualism by dispensing with subjective analysis and focusing analysis on quantifiable and objective responses to stimuli. Watson rejected the notion of a mental realm of reality, believing that consciousness could not cause behavior. Rather, consciousness was simply a phenomenon that accompanied physiological reactions to stimuli. Subjective consciousness was explained away in terms of physical and observable sets of behaviors.

Mead criticizes this type of Behaviorism:

John B. Watson’s attitude was that of the Queen in *Alice in Wonderland* – “Off with their heads!” – there were no such things. There was no imagery, and no consciousness. The field of so-called introspection Watson explained by the use of language symbols. These symbols were not necessarily uttered loudly enough to be heard by others, and often only involved the muscles of the throat without leading to audible speech. That was all there was to thought.

Mead wished to respond to the problems of Cartesian dualism using a behavioral framework that, in contrast to Watson, took into account consciousness:

Mead’s behaviorism not only accepts the existence of an inner psychic life but proposes to study it as an integral part of the natural world: as such, thought processes (imagination, reflection, etc.) are no less amenable to scientific scrutiny than any other kind of human activity.

122 Mead, 2.
123 Ibid., 3.
124 Carreira da Silva, 12.
Mead accepted the possibility of subjective consciousness and at the same time retained the behavioral emphasis on stimuli and response. Miller writes:

Mead was a behaviorist, but not of the Watson-Skinner type. There is a difference between reducing mind to overt, observable behavior (or if it is not so reducible, denying its existence) and explaining thinking, hoping, attitudes, expectancies, and so on, in terms of or in relation to overt behavior. On the one hand, behaviorism is a revolt against Cartesian dualism; on the other, when pushed to the extreme, it does not show how mind and body are functionally related but simply denies the existence of mind, ideas, images, and reflective thinking and accepts a sort of naive materialism for the sake of its limited methodology.\(^{125}\)

In taking up a behavioral framework in an attempt to resolve the tensions of dualistic thinking, Mead employs the idea of stimulus and response: the individual responds to a gesture by adjusting her attitude – an act which serves as a gesture to be taken up by the other individual as a cue to adjust her attitude, and so on. Human beings are capable of conveying significant symbols, which means that in conveying a gesture, the individual also conveys the meaning of that gesture. The meaning can be conveyed since it is universal. In conveying the symbol, the individual arouses the meaning of the symbol not only in the other, but also in herself. Consciousness is brought into the behaviorist framework insofar meaning is present as a triangulation of 1) the gesture of the first individual, 2) the responding gesture of the second individual, and 3) the resulting social act that is created between them.\(^{126}\) A consequence of bringing consciousness into this framework is the ability to conceive of the self as composed of both subject and object. Just as individuals interact with one another via stimulus and response, the self arises out of a similar exchange between the subjective I and the

\(^{125}\) Miller, 68.
\(^{126}\) Carreira da Silva, 44.
objective Me. The Me conveys the community attitude and meaning of a gesture, where the I responds spontaneously (although conditioned by the Me) to it. The community takes up this response and adjusts to reflect it accordingly, which is thus reflected in the Me. This reconceptualization of subject and object allows for a more organic, process-oriented self, rather than the mechanistic notions that arose from Cartesian dualism.

The Confucian tradition did not have to contend with a history of dualistic thinking and so the notion of self is free from subject/object jargon. Instead, fluidity and overlap are already built into the eastern tradition. Hall and Ames note that this process orientation is so fundamental it is built into the Chinese language such that characters have primary as well as ancillary meanings. That is, the meanings of characters overlap. For example: “The … important term cheng carries the associations of ‘sincerity’ and ‘integrity,’ as well as the sense we have foregrounded as most central to the text – namely ‘creativity.’”

They go on to write, “The Chinese language is not logocentric. Words do not name essences. Rather, they indicate always-transitory processes and events. It is important, therefore, to stress the gerundative character of the language.” Reality is not a fixed state of affairs, but a continually changing process. The processual (or “gerundative”) nature of language is a reflection of this kind of thinking. The transitory orientation that characterizes eastern thought influences the Confucian notions of self as being bi-directional (where the self authors the world and vice versa):

---

127 Hall and Ames, *Focusing the Familiar*, 16.
128 Ibid.
129 “The world is a field of many things and the “things” are not discrete objects but are themselves states of becoming; they are happenings.” (Hall and Ames, *Focusing the Familiar*, 11).
Creativity is always reflexive and is exercised over and with respect to “self.” And since self in a processive world is always social, creativity is transactional and multi-dimensional. Thus creativity is both self-creativity and co-creativity. It is this transactional, co-creative character of all creative processes that renders self-cultivation as self-creation nonegoistic. \(^{130}\)

Since there is no hard and fast distinction between self and world, the exercising of creativity is non-discriminating in its affect. Innovation is not limited to the individual but also modifies reality. The inability of western translators to come to a consensus as to what specifically certain characters denote is an affirmation of the Chinese ground of “intellectual and institutional harmony – namely, the recognition of the copresence of a plurality of significances with which any given term might easily resonate.”\(^{131}\)

Because the eastern orientation (i.e. thinking of things in terms of events or processes) did not emphasize distinction or dualism, the Confucian framework is not couched as an answer to the problems of this type of thinking. Instead, the Confucian notion of self, as a function of the ability to effectively integrate oneself into a context, is a natural outgrowth of a processual worldview. Since such a worldview holds things as events or “happenings,” a notion of self that is in a process of becoming is more or less natural. The Confucian self does not represent such a radical break with tradition as George Herbert Mead’s notion of self. The notion of the Confucian self is an organic consequence of such a cultural orientation, whereas Mead’s social self stands in sharp contrast to the dominant philosophical tradition in which he came up.

\(^{130}\) Hall and Ames, *Focusing the Familiar*, 13.
\(^{131}\) Hall and Ames, *Thinking from the Han*, 4.
Since the Confucian and Meadean selves arose in such different contexts (where the Confucian self was an organic consequence of a processual worldview and the Meadean self was a response to the problems of a different philosophic heritage), extracting Meadean language of subject/object and applying it to the Confucian notion of self can be contentious. Mead utilizes the resources of his tradition in responding to the problems of his philosophic heritage. Specifically, Mead is addressing subject and object autonomy, which gives rise to the problems of the external world and solipsism; as such, he couches his response in terms of subject and object insofar as he reconceptualizes how the two are related. Instead of seeing each as individual spheres that do not interact, Mead demonstrates how the development of the self is dependent upon an individual’s capacity to take on the objective (in the form of the generalized other) and the subject’s capacity to affect the objective (in the form of the creative response of the I). Applying the language of subject and object to the Confucian self runs the risk of implying that there are distinct subjects and objects in a Confucian framework. While the notion of an individual is present in Confucian thought, it is always tied to others:

We must remember that Confucian distinctions such as “self/other” are mutually entailing and interdependent correlatives, and are not dualistic in the sense of representing some underlying ontological disparity… “oneself” is always “becoming other,” and an “other” is always “becoming oneself.”

Mead’s notion of self captures this Confucian sense, however in employing subject/object language to discuss these features of the Confucian self there is the potential for losing the Meadean context and reading dualistic thinking into the Confucian notion of self.

132 Ibid., 27.
It should also be noted that the Meadean notion of self is different from the Confucian notion in that Mead’s social self develops against a background of communication. The self burgeons insofar as an individual can make herself an object to herself. As a behaviorist, Mead begins his analysis of self by addressing observable behavior, starting with the gesture. Mead conceives of gestures as “that part of the social act which serves as a stimulus to other forms involved in the same social act.”[^133] For example, a growling dog elicits a response from the other dog at which he is growling (perhaps the other dog shrinks away, or bares his teeth). A meaningful gesture, or a significant symbol, not only elicits a response from the other, but also arouses the same response in the individual conveying the symbol. When I shout, “stop!” at my friend who is walking into traffic, I elicit a response from her; namely, she ceases from walking into the traffic. Additionally, I expect that response from her because I have aroused the meaning of the gesture (“stop!”) in myself as well. In shouting at my friend, we both have the meaning of the gesture (since she responded in the way I anticipated she would). Communication via significant symbols is directed toward the calling out of a response from others, but such communication also serves to call out an implicit response from the individual conveying the symbol: “What is essential to communication is that the symbol should arouse in one’s self what it arouses in the other individual.”[^134] The stimulus and response of communication introduces a self insofar as the individual becomes an object to herself when she tacitly responds to her gesture by apprehending the meaning of that...
symbol. Communication is the mechanism that allows for an individual to objectify herself and as a consequence see herself “through the eyes” of the other.

The Confucian self does not originate against a background of communication, but instead develops as a result of an individual’s capacity to effectively integrate herself into a context. Integration is carried out via ritual propriety (li or situational appropriateness) and the capacity to significate (yi or the disclosing or personal uniqueness). In li, the individual is given a set of community attitudes in the form of ritual instructions that guide behaviors according to certain situations. However, the individual must exercise her own unique judgment (yi) in how specifically she will act with regard to the situation. Effective integration means achieving social harmony, which is accomplished by navigating social relationships. Harmony amongst individuals is the product of careful consideration in taking into account li and appropriating these ritualized responses for one’s own unique situation, thereby disclosing yi. Proper action requires the taking into account of others concerns or shu:

It is not simply abandoning one’s own person in assuming the persona of another; rather, it is projecting oneself personally into the circumstances of another, and responding to those circumstances as one deems most appropriate.\(^{135}\)

Integration takes place, and consequently the self develops, as an individual is able to extend herself to others and act appropriately drawing on li and the facts of the unique situation.

The concept of the Meadean self also draws on something akin to Confucian integration, insofar as the response of the I is spontaneous and creative (like personal

disclosure of yi) but at the same time is conditioned by community attitudes (which correspond to Confucian li). In taking on the attitudes of others, the Meadean self overlaps with others and becomes embedded in a context. For Mead, the capacities to integrate and objectify oneself to oneself evolve simultaneously. However, objectification (via communication) is in some sense prior to integration. Objectification and capacity to integrate may develop in tandem, but the ability to objectify oneself is what makes integration, and thus the self, possible. As has been discussed, the Confucian framework has no inherent notion of subject or object\textsuperscript{136} since it did not have to contend with a history of dualistic thinking. As such, objectification in the Meadean sense is not a consideration for the development of self in a Confucian framework. In a Confucian framework integration is the most fundamental process, where in a Meadean framework, objectification is most basic.

These caveats should be kept in mind when drawing parallels between the Confucian and Meadean selves. Because of these divergences, one cannot wholly be mapped onto the other. But despite these differences, similarities can be drawn.

\textsuperscript{136}“We must remember that Confucian distinctions such as ‘self/other’ are mutually entailing and interdependent correlatives, and are not dualistic in the sense of representing some underlying ontological disparity...‘oneself’ is always ‘becoming other,’ and an ‘other’ is always ‘becoming oneself.’” (Hall and Ames, \textit{Thinking Through Confucius}, 27).
CHAPTER V

RESONATING THEMES

In the previous chapter I highlighted two important points where the Meadean self diverges from the Confucian self: 1) Mead’s social self was a response to the problems of Cartesian dualism that have influenced ideas of self, and 2) Mead’s self develops against a background of communication. Despite these differences, these concepts of self share a common ground in that they both reject two underlying assumptions that are present in some western models of self; namely, extrinsic relationships (and by extension dualism) and recourse to a transcendent guiding principle. Since the Confucian self does not rest on these assumptions they are poor descriptive models for the Confucian self. The Meadean and Confucian understanding of self are similar in their notions of extension and bidirectional authorship. These similarities show that Confucian and Meadean selves make use of intrinsic relations, which imply self-organizing entities – assumptions that are opposed to the underlying assumptions of the western models.

Hall and Ames have criticized western approaches to understanding the Confucian sense of self because most of them hinge on dualistic tendencies: Conceiving of the self as self-abnegating (or individualistic), as a mind or matter, as a biological organism, or as a volitional center each imply a distinction either between public and private, mind and body, subject and object, etc. An underlying assumption behind these
models is the conceiving of the self as autonomous and independent from one another and from a context or world. The self/other distinction is more explicitly present in conceiving of the self as an independent entity in the self-abnegating model, which implies a distinction between the public and private realms: that there is a private autonomous self that must be surrendered for the public good.\textsuperscript{137}

The consideration of the public good taking primacy over the private self introduces a second underlying assumption of these models: there is a transcendental principle according to which particulars are organized. In the self-abnegation model, this is evident as the particular self is what it is insofar as it adheres to the principle of the renunciation for the sake of the public good. The principle of the public good guides the development of particular “selves” underneath it. A simpler example is the received view of Plato’s forms, where a particular chair is what it is because of the form of Chairness. The form or concept dictates what the particular will look like. This assumption about transcendent principles is also quite evident in the conceiving of self as a biological organism. “Aristotle thought of an organism as a vital whole whose parts acted in accordance with an organizing telos or aim.”\textsuperscript{138} In this model, the organization of the investigation into a particular subject is guided by that subject’s purpose; for example, analysis of an acorn is guided by the notion that it will develop in accordance with the purpose of it becoming a tree. The assumption of this model is that a purpose or principle is guiding development of the self. Since the Confucian sense of self lacks dualistic

\textsuperscript{137} Hall and Ames, \textit{Thinking From the Han}, 25.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 35.
distinctions that entail the notion of a transcendent organizing principle, these western approaches are limited in how well they elucidate the Confucian notion.

The Confucian understanding of self does not fit these models since it does not rest on these two underlying assumptions. Self in a Confucian context is not autonomous and therefore not independent of one’s context or world; instead, the self is integrated into a context and dependent upon it for continued growth and development. The relationship of self/other and subject/object are intrinsic – they overlap. The self is developed when an individual extends herself to others via deference to qualitatively achieved others. *Shu* designates deferential activity in which one analogically takes the stance of another. By thinking of itself as others the self increases its possibilities and capacity for self-construal. In taking others into consideration the self overlaps with other individuals and grows since its field of concern is now wider. In effecting these kinds of internal or intrinsic relations, an individual is integrating herself into a context. The self must overlap with others if it is going to develop.

The development of the Confucian self occurs without recourse to a transcendent principle. Particulars are self-organizing rather than being organized with respect to a guiding principle. There is no force that commands the self to develop in any particular manner; instead, the self arises spontaneously from the harmonizing of entities. Via deference, an individual is able to integrate herself into a context. In this harmonizing of one’s position with the positions of others in a context, the self emerges. Kwang-Sae Lee writes: “The East Asian sense of aesthetic order is not keen on an originative principle…or the notion of determinism. Rather, it is alive to the idea of self-organizing
and self-renewing of particulars…”\(^{139}\) Confucianism pushes toward generality; that is, parts organize themselves giving rise to patterns and principles, especially in the form of \(li\) – the prescribed ritual action for a given situation. This is in contrast to the assumption of the previously discussed western models of self: the underlying assumption of these models is that parts are organized with respect to a transcendental principle. These western models derive organization of particulars from patterns and principles, while in Confucianism, patterns and principles arise from the self-organizing particulars.

Both Confucian and Meadean concepts of self grow by extending the self to take others into account. For Mead, extension takes place through communication: in communicating a symbol the individual volunteering the symbol not only understands the meaning of that symbol but also anticipates a response from the individual on the receiving end of the gesture. “The individual’s consciousness of the content and flow of meaning involved depends on his thus taking the attitude of the other toward his own gestures.”\(^{140}\) Communication via significant symbols calls out a response not only from the individual toward which the symbol is directed, but also arouses a response from the individual who conveys the symbol: “What is essential to communication is that the symbol should arouse in one’s self what it arouses in the other individual.”\(^{141}\) Thus, the significant symbol meets two criteria: 1) the individual responds to her own stimulus as others do, and 2) the response within oneself serves as a stimulus in addition to it’s

\(^{139}\) Lee, 81.  
\(^{140}\) Mead, 47.  
\(^{141}\) Ibid., 149.
serving as a response. Communication introduces a self insofar as the individual becomes an object to herself when she tacitly responds to her gesture by apprehending the meaning of that symbol. The individual’s making an object of herself to herself means that “We are unconsciously putting ourselves in the place of others and acting as others act.” In engendering in ourselves the same response we call forth from others we are “taking the attitudes of the other persons in our own conduct.” Through language, the individual can objectify herself and take on the attitude or role of the other since she herself also understands the meaning of the symbols she uses. The capacity to extend oneself to others by taking on the role of the other is prerequisite for self-growth.

Similarly, the Confucian self can only be developed within a context since deference and extension are the requirements for growth of the self. Although, rather than communication being the mechanism for extension, the Confucian self extends via deference. As mentioned, shu designates deferential activity in which one analogically takes the stance of another; that is, by thinking of itself as other. Fundamentally, shu means extending oneself by taking in the concerns of others. At the same time, one preserves one’s own sense of judgment such that one acts in accordance with what she finds appropriate with regard to another’s concerns. In doing so, the self increases its possibilities and capacity for self-construal. Thus, the self grows as a result of extending oneself to others by taking on the concerns of others and applying one’s own judgment.

142 Silva da Carreira, 34.
143 Mead, 69.
144 Ibid.
In addition to the extension of self to include others, both the Meadean and Confucian accounts hold that authorship of the self and context or world is bidirectional, such that the self and world, to some extent, contribute to the developing nature of one another. For Mead, the influence of the world or context on the self takes the form of the Me. An individual makes herself and object to herself by seeing herself through the eyes of the other, so to speak. As the self develops, the individual is able to abstract from her context a sense of the generalized other, which is “organized set of attitudes, and their corresponding responses which are common to the group.”\textsuperscript{145} Instead of being able to conceive of how other individuals perceive her, the developing self begins to understand the responses that are expected according to the conventions of her context. Mead uses the example of a player in a baseball game to illustrate this concept:

Each one of his own acts is determined by his assumption of the action of the others who are playing the game. What he does is controlled by his being everyone else on that team, at least in so far as those attitudes affect his own particular response. We get then an “other” which is an organization of the attitudes of those involved.\textsuperscript{146}

The response of the player on the baseball team is determined by the roles of the other players in the game (i.e. the player’s context). The shortstop responds by covering third base when the third baseman moves to cover home plate and the catcher runs to catch a fly ball. The shortstop not just taken on the third baseman’s attitude, but has internalized the general attitude of the players and acts according to how those players expect her to perform her role as shortstop. Mead continues:

\textsuperscript{145} Miller, 49.  
\textsuperscript{146} Mead, 154.
The attitude of the generalized other is the attitude of the whole community. Thus, for example, in the case of such a social group as a ball team, the team is the generalized other in so far as it enters – as an organized process or social activity – into the experience of any one of the individual members of it.  

The Me, as the objective part of the self, is the taking up of all the organized attitudes of a context. The individual’s takes on the attitude of the generalized other, which results in self-consciousness and an understanding of how she fits into her community or context insofar as the Me. “The ‘me’ is the conventional, habitual individual. It is always there. It has to have those habits, those responses, which everybody has.” The Me, thus conditions or sets the stage for the I, which is the part of the self that actively responds to stimuli. The I, as subjective experience, is unknowable. As soon as the I acts or responds its passes into the Me as part of the historical record of the self. It is unpredictable in its response to stimuli. To recall the baseball example, the shortstop may catch a fly ball in the outfield even though this out of the terrain typically covered by the shortstop; the I acts spontaneously. However, that the shortstop even moves to catch the fly ball is part of the conditioning of the Me. The Me tells the shortstop that in this context (the baseball game) the ball ought to be caught. The Me conditions the response of the I, although the act of the I is unpredictable. This moment of novelty is introduced into the community and then becomes part of it. The particular move of the shortstop, while spontaneous, becomes part of the context and passes into the Me such that the shortstop and other individuals take it on as part of the Me and internalize it. Other players may make similar catches, since it is part of the Me and as

---

147 Ibid.
148 Ibid., 197.
such conditions the response of the I. The community authors the self insofar as the actions of the self qua the I are shaped by the community qua the Me. The self in turn authors the community in that the self qua the I introduces new attitudes into a context.

This way in which self and community are related is similar within a Confucian framework. The community shapes the development of the self in the form of *li*, which are prescribed ritual action for a given situation. *Li* are similar to Mead’s Me in that they represent the organized set of attitudes of a context. They are the set of traditional responses to situations handed down to the current generation by the previous generations. *Li* are the prescribed manner of comportment of an individual in a given situation. Thus, they are normative in that they guide social interaction, thereby effecting social harmony and an individual’s integration into a context. However, the normative dimension of *li* must be qualified: “Ritual actions are certainly not perceived as divinely established norms. If they have normative force, it is because they have been generated out of the human situation, and hence render informed access to it.”\(^{149}\) While the physical acts associated with *li* are visibly present, these rituals are sacred by virtue of an individual’s investing them with *yi*, the capacity to significate or make meaning.\(^{150}\) This means that an individual ought to invest a personal significance or meaning in the action for the action to be called *li*. In summarizing the consequence of community of the development of self, Hall and Ames write:

…allusions to historical figures are more often than not allusions to specific acts in concrete instances of right behavior. And we can frequently observe a

\(^{149}\) Hall and Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius*, 89.

\(^{150}\) Ibid., 91.
movement from allusion to attribution such that the historical figure and his repertoire of acts are recreated for subsequent generations… We model our actions upon the person who is constituted by both his agency and the act in which it culminates. The sage-kings and Confucius himself serve as models of yi because of the presumably high degree of consistency with which they realized yi in their individual acts.\footnote{Ibid., 106.}

Individuals look to models that embody the cultural attitude of appropriateness in order to effect social harmony (or integration into a context), which allows for the development of a self. Li, as the representation of the community attitude and by way of effecting social harmony, facilitate the growth of the self.

Hall and Ames write that li are “the creative product [that] is the consequence of the play between one’s personal uniqueness and some continuing historical structure…”\footnote{Hall and Ames, Thinking From the Han, 33.} As a historical structure, they influence an individual’s response to a situation. However, li are not transcendent principles that dictate an individual’s response. Rather, the qualitatively achieved individual (one who has effectively integrated herself into a context and therefore has developed a self) takes up these rituals and personalizes them. Li are also vehicles for personal disclosure of a particular’s uniqueness. In personalizing the rituals handed down from previous generations, the self invests yi, which has previously been defined as the self’s capacity to significate or make meaning. Yi calls for creative judgment in response to a situation, such that the self takes up the ritual passed down from previous generations and personalizes it with her own unique judgment. Li are transformed according to the investment of the self’s yi and
passed down to subsequent generations who will accordingly take up and revise the ritual yet again:

From this perspective, ritual is a pliant body of practices for registering, developing, and displaying one’s own sense of cultural importances. It is a vehicle for reifying the insights of the cultivating person, enabling one to reform the community from one’s own unique perspective, and ultimately, to leave one’s own mark on the tradition.\(^{153}\)

Thus, *li* are a resource from which an individual draws on in making unique judgment.\(^{154}\) In fact, Hall and Ames comment that Confucius distances himself from Bo Yi and Shu Qi who seem to hold too strictly to the tradition at the expense of appropriateness\(^ {155}\); “I am different from these people. I do not have fixed rights and wrongs.”\(^ {156}\) An individual discloses her uniqueness by exorcizing personal judgment with respect to ritual *li*. In so doing, the self alters the future community by releasing into the community a transformed set of rituals that reflect the current attitudes of appropriateness. Like Mead’s self, the Confucian self develops within the framework of bidirectional authorship, where the individual is conditioned by the cultural attitude embodies in *li* and also influences the development of the community by personalizing those rituals.

The Meadean and Confucian selves are inherently open-ended, such that the self is continually growing and expanding with no definite culmination. The self develops against the background of community and contributes to community in a creative state.

\(^{153}\) Ibid., 271.
\(^{155}\) Hall and Ames, *Thinking From the Han*, 177.
\(^{156}\) Confucius *Analects*, 18.8.
moment. For the Meadean self, this moment takes the form of the I, in which the actions of the I, though conditioned against the background of the community via the Me, are spontaneous responses that are taken up by (and therefore alter) that community. For the Confucian self, this creative moment is represented by an individual’s investment of yi – one’s ability to make meaning. While yi is influenced by historical responses, it is, nonetheless, an individual’s capacity for unique judgment of situational appropriateness. Such unique responses to situations are taken up by the community and serve as a historical record and guidelines for future generations to exercise yi. Both notions emphasize a taking in of community attitudes in order to develop a self, and continuous readjustment to a dynamic community (since the community is constantly being altered according to the creative input of individuals) in order for continued growth.

The interplay of community and individual, out of which the self arises, points out an interrelatedness of entities that is well expressed by Thomas Kasulis’s *Intimacy* orientation: “…intimacy involves an inseparability, a belonging together, a sharing.” Entities that are intimately related are thought of as overlapping. In the Confucian and Meadean frameworks, the self and the community are not held in separate realms. Rather, they are intimately related, where the community is part of the self and the self is part of the community - the self develops as a result of its capacity to incorporate the other into oneself. Both the Meadean and Confucian notions of self manifest this notion in terms of extension. The Confucian self does this via *shu*, while the Meadean self accomplishes extension by taking the attitude of the other. Out of these overlapping relations, the self is

---

157 Kasulis, 24.
able to derive an abstract notion of the attitudes of the community. For the Confucian self the abstract attitude of the community is manifested in ritual *li* as the prescribed action for a given situation. For the Meadean self, this is manifested in the notion of the generalized other – “the organized social attitudes of the given social group or community…to which he [the self] belongs…” The self utilizes intrinsic relationships in developing insofar as the individual must incorporate others into herself in order to develop as a self. Intrinsic relations should be contrasted with extrinsic relations, where individuals remain autonomous and independent from one another. As such, entities that are related extrinsically remain fundamentally unaltered by their relationship with other entities. Extrinsic relations are a characteristic of what Kasulis calls the *Integrity* orientation, of which he writes: “integrity means being able to stand alone, having a self-contained identity without dependence on, or infringement by, the outside.” The overlapping nature of individuals in the Confucian and Meadean notions of self implies an intrinsic relationship between self and community. Since development of the self depends upon an individual’s ability to incorporate others into herself, and further to incorporate the general attitude of the community into herself, the self is a function of her ability to integrate herself into a context. Additionally, the dynamic character of a community is dependent upon the unique contribution of the self. Thus, self is contingent upon community, and community growth relies upon novel responses of individuals – the two are functionally dependent upon one another; that is, they are intrinsically related.

---

158 Mead, 156.
159 Kasulis, 53.
The creative input of an individual is an important feature insofar as it drives the growth of an individual, which in turn highlights the Meadean and Confucian character of self-organizing particulars. Without creative responses to stimuli, the self does not have the capacity for indefinite growth. Instead, entities would exist within a closed framework, where they would react to a definite set of stimuli with a definite set of responses. To use Aristotle’s example: the only response the acorn is capable of is to develop into an oak tree. The acorn cannot make a novel contribution, which will result in the development of any other kind of tree. The unique input of entities in a growth and development teleology highlights the notion of self-organizing particulars, which stands in contrast to the underlying assumption of some western models of self that entities develop with regard to a transcendent guiding principle. Aristotle’s oak tree is the final cause of the acorn; that is, it is the express purpose of the acorn to develop into an oak tree. The acorn’s final cause is the guiding principle by which it develops. In the Meadean and Confucian frameworks, an individual’s unique contribution to the community (whether in the form of the I or of yi) shapes that community, which, in turn, shapes the individual. Thus, the creative input of individuals’ effects mutable patterns that characterize the community. Organization of individuals (the community) is the result of those individuals’ creative contributions – that is, individuals are self-organizing. Unlike, the acorn, there is no fixed, transcendent principle according to which entities are organized.

In further describing the intimacy orientation, Kasulis writes,
Starting with the assumption that reality is a process in the midst of which we live, such a metaphysics would not dwell on issues of origins. If reality itself is an all-inclusive whole consisting of interdependent processes, it makes little sense to speculate about which entity sets the processes in motion. Any such creating entity would be outside the totalistic process and, by definition, not a reality itself.\footnote{Kasulis, 100.}

That entities are interrelated and overlapping means the course of reality is a function of these interactions and not a function of an overarching transcendent principle, such as God or a final cause.

The interrelated nature of the self (insofar as its development requires the incorporation of others into itself) entails dissolution of the boundaries between self and other, as well as self and community. A product of this kind of interaction is the character of self-organizing particulars, where (by virtue of their capacity to make a unique contribution to the context) individual selves organize themselves into a community without recourse to a transcendent guiding principle. Because entities overlap, nothing can be external to a system. Thus, an overarching principle that guides development would not make sense in this kind of system, since such a principle would be external to it.

The affinities of the Meadean and Confucian senses of self demonstrate Mead’s evading of the two assumptions implicit in other western models of self previously discussed. By virtue of Mead’s avoidance of the assumptions of extrinsic relations (and by extension dualism) and transcendent guiding principles, his model of self is a good analog for the Confucian sense of self. Mead avoids dualism in his reconceptualizing of the relationship of subject and object. Previously mentioned western models of self
conceive of entities as autonomous and distinct from one another. However, the Confucian self is intrinsically rather than extrinsically related to other entities in its context. In fact, the Confucian self develops as the result of its interaction with its context; that is, the development of self is dependent upon an individual’s capacity to include the concerns of others, or incorporate others into the self. These are the same kinds of intrinsic relationships found in Mead’s concept of self. For Mead, the self develops as a result of an individual’s taking on the attitude of the other (i.e. seeing oneself as objectively, as others would). Both conceptions of self rely on the internalizing of the other. This is in stark contrast to the conception of self as autonomous or fundamentally distinct from others or from the self’s context.

Additionally, Mead’s concept of self does not appeal to transcendent guiding principles according to which the self develops. To repeat, western models of self have been criticized in their ability to serve as an analog for the Confucian self because of the underlying assumption of transcendent principles. The Confucian self arises out of the interplay between individual and community. The individual affect the development and direction of the community in her ability to personalize ritual and pass these new meanings on to future generations. The community influences the individual insofar as the individual inherits these rituals and notions of appropriateness; they serve as a foundation that guides the individual. The self grows out of this interplay rather than as a result of an end purpose or goal the self is destined to realize. Mead’s self also develops amid the interplay of community and individual, where the individual contributes to the community with the spontaneous action of the I and is influence be the community by the
taking on the attitudes of the community, known as the generalized other, via the Me. The I and the Me are parts of the self that represent the community and individual. In conceiving of the self as both subject and object, Mead approximates the dynamic tension of community and individual that is present in the Confucian framework. As such, he does not make use of the idea of transcendent principles that guide the self toward realizing some end goal.

The Meadean notion of self is a good lens through which to view the Confucian sense of self since they both reject assumptions about autonomy and transcendent principles and instead appeal to intrinsic relations and self-organizing particulars. Additionally, features of Mead’s self map well onto the Confucian self, thus reinforcing their connection. Mead’s Me comes close to Confucian \( li \), in that they both reflect community attitudes about what kinds of behaviors are appropriate given a particular situation. The I is akin to \( yi \) in that they are the expression of the self’s novelty and uniqueness. Parallels can be drawn in Confucian and Mead’s thought in looking at the roles of extension and community/individual interplay, which entail intrinsic relations and self-organizing particulars. Differences, such as Mead’s viewing of the process of objectification as more basic than integration and the establishment of his thought as a response to a particular philosophic heritage, though important, are relatively superficial when assessing the fundamental assumptions upon which both conceptions of self rest.


