

# Confucianism and Emerson

## *Friendship*

### INTRODUCTION

Emerson's awareness of Confucianism appears as early as a journal entry of 1824, "Indeed, the light of Confucius goes out in translation into the language of Shakespear[e] & Bacon."<sup>1</sup> Records show that Emerson borrowed Joshua Marshman's *The Works of Confucius: Containing the Original Text with a Translation*<sup>2</sup> from the Boston Athenaeum February 16 to March 1, 1836.<sup>3</sup> Excerpts from Emerson's *Journals* dated March 3, 1836, feature dozens of "Sentences of Confucius."<sup>4</sup> In 1843, upon further contact with Confucius via David Collie's complete translation of *The Four Books*,<sup>5</sup> Emerson again quoted Confucius in his journals.<sup>6</sup> That same year, Emerson and Thoreau collected and published quotes from Confucius in two installments of their coedited "Ethnical Scriptures" column of *The Dial*.<sup>7</sup> In 1863, Emerson continued his study of the Confucian classics, reading James Legge's translation of the *Confucian Analects, the Great Learning, and the Doctrine of the Mean*,<sup>8</sup> again excerpting sayings from Confucius in his journals.<sup>9</sup> In a speech at the banquet in honor of the Chinese embassy in Boston in 1868, Emerson summarizes the significance of Confucius in laudatory comparison:

Confucius has not yet gathered all his fame. When Socrates heard that the oracle declared that he was the wisest of men, he said, it must mean that other men held that they were wise, but that he knew that he knew nothing. Confucius had already affirmed this of himself: and what we call the GOLDEN RULE of Jesus, Confucius had uttered in the same terms five hundred years before. His morals, though addressed to a state of society unlike ours, we read with profit to-day.<sup>10</sup>

Despite such clear evidence of Emerson's interest in Confucian philosophy, only passing attention has been paid to the Confucian influence upon Emerson's thought. When the subject has been treated, most scholars have downplayed or even denied a philosophical influence, maintaining that Emerson's interest in Confucianism was only superficial.<sup>11</sup>

A broad range of scholars has perpetuated the view that Confucianism was of marginal influence upon Emerson's thought. John Jay Chapman writes in *Emerson, and Other Essays* (1899), "The East added nothing to Emerson, but gave him a few trappings of speech."<sup>12</sup> John S. Harrison corroborates this view in *The Teachers of Emerson* (1910), forecasting, "When the influence of Emerson's Oriental readings come to be worked out in all its details, it may be shown that they colored the manner of his speech."<sup>13</sup> In *Emerson and Asia* (1931), Frederic Ives Carpenter asserts that with respect to Chinese philosophers, Emerson "never actually incorporated their thought into his own writing, but merely quoted the sayings of Confucius, Mencius, and the rest, externally, as illustrations of his ideas."<sup>14</sup> In *The Oriental Religions and American Thought* (1981), Carl T. Jackson states, "whenever [Emerson] spoke of Asia, he usually meant India,"<sup>15</sup> conceding that Emerson "admired Confucius, but did not feel the same toward Chinese religion generally."<sup>16</sup> More recently, Richard Grossman claims in *The Tao of Emerson* (2007), "Emerson and Confucius were linked by their common belief in what Emerson called 'the infinitude of the Asiatic soul,'"<sup>17</sup> while stipulating, "But in practice, Confucianism was not a philosophy to which Emerson could have wholly subscribed, since it was almost exclusively concerned with societal structure, worldly

transactions, codified rules of behavior, and what might be called patriarchal politics.”<sup>18</sup>

Of course, influence does not require wholesale subscription. Wide reaches of Emerson’s thought could very well be compatible with, or influenced by, his contact with Confucianism, even if the totality of his thought is not. Commenting in 1942 on likenesses in style of composition and thought, Lin Yutang asserts, “Generally, the reader will find reading Chinese philosophers like reading Emerson.”<sup>19</sup> Arthur Christy identifies a deeper affinity, claiming in *The Orient in American Transcendentalism* (1932), “The Confucian, or Chinese, parallel is to be found in Emerson’s ethical writings.”<sup>20</sup> In a doctoral dissertation provocatively titled “Emerson, the American Confucius: An Exploration of Confucian Motifs in the Early Writings (1830–1843) of Ralph Waldo Emerson” (2013), Kyle Bryant Simmons claims, “Confucian motifs can stand side-by-side with all other thinkers that Emerson read, not dismissed or divided from them, like most investigations have attempted.”<sup>21</sup> It is the views of these scholars with which I am aligned. The discussion of friendship in this chapter may serve as an illustration of the Confucian parallel in Emerson’s early ethical writings.

My point of departure is one short but compelling quote from Marshman’s translation of the *Analects* that Emerson continually returned to: “Have no friend unlike yourself.”<sup>22</sup> This remark, appearing in *Analects* 1.8 and 9.25, made more than a passing impression on Emerson.<sup>23</sup> In addition to its appearance in his journals (1836) and prior to its inclusion in *The Dial* (1843), he had used it in his “Society” lecture, delivered at the Masonic Temple in Boston, January 26, 1837. For much of that lecture, Emerson seems to endorse the dictum “Have no friend unlike yourself.” Interestingly, however, his quoting of Confucius initiates a pivot from ruminating on the delight of friendship with one who is like oneself, to admitting the elusiveness of such relationships, and making the concession that their rareness necessitates broadening the scope of those whom we befriend. Confucius’s words thus simultaneously capture something Emerson thinks to be true about friendship and signal something he wants to move beyond.

In this chapter, I will attempt to gain a clearer picture of compatibility between Emerson’s thought and Confucian thought about

friendship. I will first consider Emerson's comments about friendship in "Society." Then, I will examine remarks about friendship found in the *Analects*, some attributed to Confucius, others attributed to followers of Confucius. Finally, I will take up Emerson's "Friendship" essay (1841). I argue that while in "Society" Emerson seems to distance himself from Confucius's thought about friendship, a broader view taking account of the *Analects* as a whole and Emerson's more mature thought on friendship reveals more convergence than divergence between Confucian and Emersonian thought on friendship.

#### "HAVE NO FRIEND UNLIKE YOURSELF"

"Have no friend unlike yourself" appears first in *Analects* 1.8. Here I reproduce Marshman's translation of the passage—the translation with which Emerson was most familiar during his writing of both the "Society" lecture and the "Friendship" essay: "Chee says, an honorable man, without dignity of conduct, can obtain no respect. His learning cannot remain stable. Set the highest value on faithfulness and sincerity. Have no friend unlike yourself. Transgressing, you should not fear to return."<sup>24</sup> "Chee," a term that Marshman connects with "chief," is rendered "Master" in contemporary translations (i.e., "Chee says" is "The Master said"). It is understood that Confucius is the speaker in passages with this beginning. "Have no friend unlike yourself" is rendered "do not accept as a friend one who is not your equal" by Slingerland, and "Do not have as a friend anyone who is as good as you are" by Ames and Rosemont. In this passage, Confucius connects friendship with learning and virtue, suggesting that having a friend unlike oneself (or, not as good as oneself) will imperil one's learning and the quality of one's character.

In order to appreciate the ambivalent position that this quote from Confucius occupies for Emerson in "Society," we should take stock of the contexts immediately before and after the quote in that essay. Ahead of the quote, Emerson relates to his audience the benefits of keeping company with those with whom one can act naturally:

A man should live among those people among whom he can act naturally. Among those who permit and provoke the expression of all his thoughts and emotions. Among such only can there be one soul. . . . Then his education goes on and he is becoming greater; and not when he acts a constrained part in company which gratifies his ambition: then, his education stops; then, he is becoming less.<sup>25</sup>

At the same time that Emerson extols the value of living among those with whom one can act naturally and describes the ideal fellowship as the forging of “one soul,” he resists the notion that we should have no friends unlike ourselves. Emerson’s next words are his quote of Confucius:

“Have no friend,” said Confucius, “unlike yourself.” Yet, on the other part, the claims of the ignorant and uncultivated must always find some allowance. The course of events does steadily thwart any attempt at very dainty and select fellowship, and he who would live as a man in the world, must take notice, that the likeminded shall not often be sent him; that the unlikeminded can teach him much; that Apollo sojourns always with the herdmen of Admetus; that he must not be too much a utilitarian, with too exact calculation of profit and loss, but must toss his odors round broadcast to the Divinity, heedless if they fall upon the altar or upon the ground, for all the world is God’s altar. Let him not wait too proudly for the presence of the gifted and the good.<sup>26</sup>

Emerson contrasts the ideal of finding fellowship with the gifted and the good with the value to be had in fellowship with the unlikeminded, tempering the position taken to this point. Circumstances may be such that likeminded gifted and/or good individuals are not accessible. Because friendship is a crucial good, it is worthwhile to accept lesser, unlikeminded, individuals as friends. Such friendships serve us better than having none at all. All the world is God’s altar; all people can teach us much.

Notice that in each of the passages quoted, Emerson appraises the value to be gained from a friendship in terms of how much one can learn from it. In the company of those with whom we can act naturally, education happens and we are better for it. It is “when he acts a constrained part” with others that the individual’s education stops and he becomes less. The ignorant and uncultivated (i.e., the unlike-minded) can teach the individual much, so it is imprudent to wait too proudly for the gifted and good (who presumably would be more adept teachers). But what, precisely, do we learn from our friends? Perhaps surprisingly, we learn from our friends about ourselves:

Whilst we sat alone, we could not arouse ourselves to thought, but sitting with a friend in the stimulated activity of the faculties, we lay bare to ourselves our own mystery, and start at the total loneliness and infinity of one man. We see that man serves man only to acquaint him with himself, but into that high sanctuary, no person can enter. Lover and friend are as remote from it as enemies.<sup>27</sup>

It seems unusual that what we gain from friendship is the capacity to “lay bare to ourselves our own mystery,” to acquaint ourselves with ourselves. It seems that such revelations would occur in solitude, for being in the company of others poses the possibility of distracting us from such revelations. Still, Emerson believes that we harbor unseen potentialities that only our friends will draw out of us. Moreover, while friends who are our intellectual and moral equal are optimal (presuming that we are not among the “ignorant and uncultivated”), those who are lesser than us may still suffice to achieve the aims of friendship.

When it comes to whom we can befriend, how sharp is the difference between Confucius and Emerson? Confucius and Emerson both acknowledge the possibility of friendship with those who are “unlike ourselves,” though Confucius apparently does not concede their possible benefit. But is this accurate? Is Emerson right in thinking that he is parting ways from Confucius’s view? Later in this chapter, I will add to the account so far given of Emerson’s thought about friendship, focusing on the more explicit and sustained discussion found in “Friendship.” Next, however, I will turn to Confucius.

## CONFUCIAN FRIENDSHIP

In the *Analects*, we are immediately introduced to Confucius's thought about friendship:

*Analects* 1.1: The Master said, "To learn and then have occasion to practice what you have learned—is this not satisfying? To have friends (*peng* 朋) arrive from afar—is this not a joy? To be patient even when others do not understand—is this not the mark of the *junzi* (君子)?"<sup>28</sup>

This passage invites a host of questions. To start, what do these three sentences have to do with one another? What relationship obtains among (1) learning and having occasion to practice what you have learned, (2) having friends arrive from afar, and (3) being patient even when others do not understand? Next, what sort of people are these friends? What sort of person can properly be said to be a friend? Moreover, what is the nature of the bond shared between friends? What makes a friendship a friendship?

Edward Slingerland cites the Jin dynasty commentator Li Chong (266–316) as holding that "the three activities mentioned in 1.1 refer to the stages of learning: mastering the basics, discussing them with fellow students and working hard at mastering them, and finally becoming a teacher of others."<sup>29</sup> Eric C. Mullis also connects Confucius's comment about friendship with the process of learning, stating that in *Analects* 1.1, "Confucius expresses delight in learning as well as delight when his 'young friends' (*xiaozhi* 小子) come from far away to study with him."<sup>30</sup> The former interpretation imagines the friendship as between disciples, whereas the latter imagines the friendship as between master and disciple. Given the likelihood of Confucius's making this remark in the company of his disciples, both of these interpretations are plausible. Each provides a coherent response to the question of how the sentences in the passage are connected to one another. But which is more accurate?

Not all scholars hold that "friends" in this passage should be understood as "young friends," although the idea that Confucius is here referring to friends that are in some sense inferior to oneself is

not unique to Mullis. Sor-hoon Tan observes that Confucius's use of "friendship" in *Analects* 1.1 is distinctive: "In the one instance where *peng* occurs alone (*Analects* 1.1), it is in no way deprecated—the joy of a visit from *peng* (even if they are inferior friends) coming from far away is compared to the delight of frequently practicing what one has learnt."<sup>31</sup> This observation is prompted by debate in the scholarship concerning two terms in classical Chinese usually translated as "friend," *peng* (朋) and *you* (友). The first four of the Confucian "Five Relationships"<sup>32</sup> (ruler–subject, father–son, husband–wife, elder brother–younger brother) are unquestionably hierarchical, with the former partner to the relationship being regarded as superior to the latter. The fifth relationship (friend–friend) may also be viewed as hierarchical, if one of *peng* and *you* is regarded as the superior friend and the other as the inferior friend.<sup>33</sup> If the "friend–friend" relationship is understood as analogous to that between brothers, it is not beyond the pale to think that the relationship would be understood as hierarchical. If entirely analogous to the relationship between brothers, the hierarchy would be indexed to age, with the elder friend being superior to the younger. This seems unlikely, however, and I will soon suggest what I think to be relevant consideration for marking out superiority and inferiority within the context of friendship.

If Confucius thinks friendship to be hierarchical, "Have no friend unlike yourself" appears to signal an inconsistency in his thought. But I think it would be hasty to draw such a conclusion. While friends might be superior and inferior *in some sense*, they may be akin to one another *in some other sense*. Tim Connolly observes, "The *Analects* opens by remarking on the joys of friends coming together. Friends also take on a shared commitment to virtue; this can take place even between people of different rank or economic status."<sup>34</sup> This reading is consistent with the view that friendship in *Analects* 1.1 refers to the relationship that Confucius has with his disciples, a relationship that is clearly marked by hierarchy in at least two ways—age (Confucius is older) and wisdom (Confucius is wiser). At the same time, Confucius and his disciples may be said to share a commitment to virtue; it is this shared commitment, presumably, that brings them together in the first place. To receive such a friend (a past disciple, or perhaps a present



disciple who has traveled for whatever reason) could indeed be a source of joy, no matter whether the friend is a *peng* as opposed to a *you*.

The question remains as to what exactly Confucius thinks friendship involves. Is Connolly correct that for Confucius, friends take on a shared commitment to virtue? Mullis similarly suggests, “Confucius emphasizes that studying with friends is enjoyable and that one stands to be improved by morally good friends.”<sup>35</sup> Tan also states that, for Confucius, “to be a true friend is to bring about, to contribute to, another’s ethical development.”<sup>36</sup> It is no mere coincidence that each of these three scholars treats Confucius’s notion of friendship in tandem with that of Aristotle, whose highest type of friendship, the “perfect friendship,” occurs between equally virtuous, morally excellent people. But the foregoing discussion concerning the asymmetrical nature of Confucian friendship suggests an important contrast between Confucian and Aristotelian notions of friendship. Aristotle would claim that the gap in age between master and disciple is joined by a gap in moral development, and that this closes off the possibility of such a friendship being a “perfect friendship.” Instead, such a bond would be a friendship of pleasure or a friendship of utility. Although types of friendship nonetheless, they are not the primary type of friendships that we should strive to cultivate. For Confucius, however, the situation is different. Moral development is an essential component of the ideal friendship. If there is a superior party in the friend–friend relationship, then, it is the individual who is more mature morally; the inferior friend is the individual who is less so.

This view is to some extent that of David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, who explain that in classical Chinese, “Friendship is based upon appreciated differences between oneself and another person that present themselves as specific occasions for one’s character development, rather than upon perceived commonalities with the other person.”<sup>37</sup> Because the hierarchy within Confucian friendship is indexed to character, Hall and Ames claim, “a Confucian ‘friend,’ a *you* 友, who is not better than oneself is not properly a friend.”<sup>38</sup> Of course, it is plausible to regard Confucius and his disciples as friends, *pengyou* (朋友), who are mutually invested in moral development, and who, through their interactions, help one another develop morally, even if Confucius is

the one who formally occupies the role of mentor (*you*), the disciples being the mentees (*peng*).

I want to emphasize *mutual* moral development as a component of Confucius's notion of friendship, rather than *mere* moral development. It is not sufficient that I develop morally as a benefit of my relationship with the other party. Even in hierarchical or asymmetrical friendships, in which I am the inferior party, I can still contribute to the moral development of my friend. By insisting on this point as a crucial element of Confucius's notion of friendship, I differ slightly from Xiufen Lu, whose list of seven "unique aspects of the Confucian concept of friendship" does not include this:

- (a) Friendship is not based on hierarchy—although hierarchies of age and social status are recognized among friends, they do not determine the nature of the relationship between friends—friends may develop mutual respect and bonds in spite of these hierarchies; (b) Friendship is not characterized by sharply defined duties and obligations as are family relations; (c) Friendships, like ideal family relations, however, are characterized by affection, concern, and trust, but they are not structured or shaped by family ties, rather, they are voluntary—friendship, furthermore, has some distinctive characteristics; to wit: (d) Friendship offers a unique type of joy and enjoyment and personal fulfillment; (e) Friendship provides a form of understanding and recognition that cannot be attained in other ways; (f) Friendship involves freely trusting others and being trusted; (g) Friendship is necessary for one's moral cultivation toward the virtue of *ren*. All of these qualities are unique aspects of the Confucian concept of friendship.<sup>39</sup>

I say that I differ slightly from Lu, as Lu comes close to articulating my position with (a) and (g). But I think that (a) must be put more strongly; for Confucius, friends *do* develop mutual respect and bonds in spite of hierarchies. If not, the individuals in question are not truly friends, but simply people interacting with one another. Further, (g) must be clarified. I agree that friendship is necessary for one's moral cultivation toward *ren*. But it should be made clear that it is necessary

to be both a giver and a receiver in the context of friendship. Moral cultivation occurs both in what one learns and in what one teaches, and learning and teaching of this kind can happen in virtually any context in which human beings interact.

This portrayal of Confucius's conception of friendship finds support in other passages of the *Analects*. Consider *Analects* 12.24: "Master Zeng said, 'The *junzi* acquires friends (*you*) by means of cultural refinement, and then relies upon his friends (*you*) for support in becoming *ren*.'" Master Zeng was one of Confucius's earliest disciples, and several of the passages in the *Analects* feature him rather than his teacher. Those who compiled the *Analects* must have regarded him as a reliable transmitter of Confucian ideas. Here, Master Zeng succinctly and explicitly expresses the feature of mutuality inherent in moral development between friends. As Slingerland comments, "Friends in virtue are drawn to each other by their common interest in learning and culture—their common love of the *dao* (道)<sup>40</sup>—and then support each other in these endeavors."<sup>41</sup>

That Master Zeng's remark is faithful to Confucius's own thinking can be inferred from *Analects* 15.10:

Zigong asked about becoming *ren*.

The Master said, "Any craftsman who wishes to do his job well must first sharpen his tools. In the same way, when living in a given state, one must serve those ministers who are worthy and befriend those scholar-officials who are *ren*."

Confucius's response to his disciple's inquiry about moral cultivation is to stress the necessity of surrounding oneself with worthy and *ren* people. This includes befriending scholar-officials who are *ren*, presumably because of their positive influence. Doing so is analogous to the patient, steady work of a craftsman who sharpens his tools in order to do his job well.

With an echo of "Have no friend unlike yourself," Confucius warns in *Analects* 16.4 that not every friendship is worthwhile:

Confucius said, "Beneficial types of friendship number three, as do harmful types of friendship. Befriending the upright,

those who are true to their word, or those of broad learning—these are the beneficial types of friendship. Befriending clever flatterers, skillful dissemblers, or the smoothly glib—these are the harmful types of friendship.”

This trio—clever flatterers, skillful dissemblers, and the smoothly glib—constitutes a collection of sorts of people who clearly are not conducive to moral development.<sup>42</sup> As Whalen Lai points out, “The reason for avoiding ‘lesser’ friends is that by their very proximity, they might influence a man’s character—for worse.”<sup>43</sup> Of course, choosing the right friends is not always easy. It can be difficult to discern the clever flatterer from the sincere giver of praise. Confucius is certainly aware of this problem, intimating the difficulty of selecting appropriate friends in *Analects* 9.30:

The Master said, “Just because someone is able to learn with you does not necessarily mean that they can travel the *dao* in your company; just because they can travel the *dao* in your company does not necessarily mean that they can take their place alongside you; just because they can take their place alongside you does not necessarily mean that they can join you in employing discretion.”

Slingerland suggests that although this passage “is most directly a comment about virtue and friendship . . . its larger purpose is probably to emphasize that the journey of self-cultivation is long and requires many steps.”<sup>44</sup> I would argue that these purposes go hand in hand. Self-cultivation is a long and difficult journey, in which friendships figure prominently. Of a piece with other aspects of self-cultivation, navigating one’s friendships carefully is crucial. While we do not choose our family, we do choose our friends. These choices are reflective of who we are, and our presence with our chosen company further contributes to the shaping of who we will become.

The *Analects* features several passages highlighting the need to be attuned to the delicate nature of friendship. Consider the following:

*Analects* 1.4: Master Zeng said, “Every day I examine myself on three counts: in my dealings with others, have I in any way failed to be dutiful? In my interactions with friends and associates, have I in any way failed to be trustworthy? Finally, have I in any way failed to repeatedly put into practice what I teach?”

*Analects* 4.26: Ziyou said, “Being overbearing in service to a lord will lead to disgrace, while in relating to friends and companions it will lead to estrangement.”

*Analects* 12.23: Zigong asked about friendship.

The Master replied, “Reprove your friend when dutifulness requires, but do so gently. If your words are not accepted then desist, lest you incur insult.”

In each of these passages, the speaker (Master Zeng, Ziyou, Confucius) treats the subject of scrutiny in the context of friendship. Master Zeng introspects daily on whether he has been trustworthy to his friends. He is a habitual scrutinizer of his own behavior in the context of interpersonal relationships, friendships among them.<sup>45</sup> Ziyou warns that being overbearing to friends will lead to estrangement, implying that scrutinizing the behavior of one’s friends can become problematic if taken too far. Confucius essentially says this, too, though his remark explicitly acknowledges the occasional necessity of scrutinizing one’s friends. What is critical is balancing this necessity with that of the “support” required in helping a friend to become *ren*.<sup>46</sup>

Recall the questions provoked by *Analects* 1.1. I wondered about the relationship shared among (1) learning and having occasion to practice what you have learned, (2) having friends arrive from afar, and (3) being patient even when others do not understand. Drawing further on the *Analects* and on scholarly commentaries, the close relationship obtaining among these becomes clearer. It is plausible that Confucius refers to his relationship with his disciples in each clause. If so, we have indication that for Confucius, individuals of different positions within a hierarchy—the very hierarchy that gives rise to their

interaction—can be friends. Moreover, while education is prominent in the context of Confucius's friendships with disciples, mutual moral development between friends in any context involves learning from one another. There is an affinity, then, between this aspect of Confucian thought about friendship and that of Emerson in "Society."

I also wondered what sort of people friends are, and what sort of bond friendship is. Textual evidence shows that friends are people with whom we are joined on our journey along the *dao*, our journey of moral development or self-cultivation. Again, there is a similarity between this part of Confucian thought about friendship and Emerson's thought in "Society," as Emerson there cites expansion of one's self-knowledge as a main benefit of friendship. Navigating friendships is a delicate and difficult enterprise, requiring careful attunement to oneself and others. While (1) and (3) need not be confined to the context of friendship, it is evident that they are applicable in that arena. At the same time, friendship is a source of joy, and our lives are far better off with friends than without. Although virtually everyone would say this about friendship, this is nonetheless another aspect of compatibility between Confucian thought about friendship and Emerson's thought about friendship in "Society."

### CONFUCIANISM IN EMERSON'S "FRIENDSHIP"

I turn now to Emerson's "Friendship" essay, published in *Essays: First Series* (1841). It is here that Emerson gives sustained treatment to the subject of friendship. The tone of "Friendship" vacillates, often coming to rest in a mood dourer than that which one might expect. To be sure, Emerson prizes friendship, but he is also attuned to a range of letdowns that are borne from it. Given its fluctuating mood on the subject, it is difficult to disagree with Russell B. Goodman's summation of "Friendship" as "a meditation or set of variations on [the] theme of hope and disappointment in our lives with others."<sup>47</sup> I will take account of several strands of "Friendship" with the question of compatibility with

Confucius's thought on friendship in mind. In "Society," Emerson's stance toward Confucius's thought on friendship is decidedly ambivalent. Having considered several passages in the *Analects* relevant to friendship, a close reading of Emerson's "Friendship" should furnish a more informed view of how closely the thought of each is related.

The style of "Friendship" is undoubtedly unconventional. George Sebouhian describes Emerson's style as being "intended to force the reader, along with the writer, to engage in dialogue, to slow down, to exclaim, to enter into the irresolution, and not sit in passive expectation of prepared truth."<sup>48</sup> Christopher J. Newfield elaborates on this irresolution, asserting that Emerson "almost never sustains a description of relations between equal men without these relations becoming those of domination or submission."<sup>49</sup> While I think that Newfield overstates the point, it is true that Emerson continually points to incommensurability, be it between friends or between one's idea of one's friend and the friend as he really is.

Also unconventional is Emerson's way of beginning the essay, not by discussing friends, but by musing on the kindness of "the whole human family," marveling at the "many persons we meet in houses, whom we scarcely speak to" and the "many we see in the street, or sit with in church."<sup>50</sup> In the next paragraph, he describes in abstract terms "emotions of benevolence and complacency which are felt toward others,"<sup>51</sup> not pausing to take up a specific example of these emotions felt toward a friend. Continuing in this vein, in the third paragraph, he remarks on anticipating the arrival in one's house of a "commended stranger."<sup>52</sup> Ahead of this visitor's arrival, the "house is dusted, all things fly into their places, the old coat is exchanged for the new."<sup>53</sup> Upon his arrival, we "talk better than we are wont" and engage in "a series of sincere, graceful, rich communications."<sup>54</sup> It is not long, however, before things take a dispiriting turn:

But as soon as the stranger begins to intrude his partialities, his definitions, his defects, into the conversation, it is all over. He has heard the first, the last and best he will ever hear from us. He is no stranger now. Vulgarity, ignorance, misapprehension

are old acquaintances. Now, when he comes, he may get the order, the dress, and the dinner,—but the throbbing of the heart, and the communications of the soul, no more.<sup>55</sup>

This vignette about how we stand in relation to the stranger introduces a framework through which Emerson will discuss how we stand in relation to our friends. While we might expect for the case of friendship to be set in sharp contrast against the example of the stranger, Emerson draws out more similarity than difference.

Shifting immediately to a more optimistic note in the fourth paragraph, Emerson effusively marvels at the pleasure of “the jets of affection that make a young world for me again” in the “just and firm encounter of two, in a thought, in a feeling.”<sup>56</sup> In words that seem to echo and amplify Confucius’s comment about the joy of receiving a friend from afar in *Analects* 1.1, Emerson writes, “Let the soul be assured that somewhere in the universe it should rejoin its friend, and it would be content and cheerful alone for a thousand years.”<sup>57</sup> In the fifth paragraph, the expressions of appreciation for friendship turn personal. For the first time, Emerson speaks in the first-person singular: “I awoke this morning with devout thanksgiving for my friends, the old and the new. Shall I not call God the Beautiful, who daily showeth himself so to me in his gifts?”<sup>58</sup>

As the essay moves forward, so too do the vicissitudes of Emerson’s appraisals of interpersonal relationships. In the sixth paragraph, Emerson confesses, “I have often had fine fancies about persons which have given me delicious hours; but the joy ends in the day: it yields no fruit.”<sup>59</sup> In the seventh paragraph, he laments, “Friendship, like the immortality of the soul, is too good to be believed.”<sup>60</sup> At the same time, Emerson admits, “every man passes his life in the search after friendship,” even if the new friend is best understood as “a delicious torment.”<sup>61</sup>

The ebb and flow of Emerson’s thought about friendship in this essay is perhaps emblematic of the ebb and flow of his thought on friendship over time. On the subject of whether friendship may occur between individuals unlike one another, Emerson’s thinking seems to have evolved since “Society.” Now, all friendships involve some degree of likeness and some degree of unlikeness:



Friendship requires that rare mean betwixt likeness and unlikeness, that piques each with the presence of power and of consent in the other party. Let me be alone to the end of the world, rather than that my friend should overstep, by a word or a look, his real sympathy. I am equally balked by antagonism and by compliance. Let him not cease an instant to be himself. The only joy I have in his being mine, is that the *not mine* is *mine*. . . . There must be very two, before there can be very one. Let [friendship] be an alliance of two large, formidable natures, mutually beheld, mutually feared, before yet they recognize the deep identity which beneath these disparities unites them.<sup>62</sup>

It remains accurate to say that Emerson is ambivalent toward Confucius's "Have no friend unlike yourself," but he is ambivalent in a new way. Whereas in "Society," he tempers his apparent agreement with the quote by conceding the probable need to lower one's criteria in order to attain the goods of friendship, Emerson now suggests the *impossibility* of having a friend unlike yourself, *as well as* the impossibility of *not* doing so. "A friend," writes Emerson, "is a sort of paradox in nature. I who alone am, I who see nothing in nature whose existence I can affirm with equal evidence to my own, behold now the semblance of my being, in all its height, variety, and curiosity, reiterated in a foreign form; so that a friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature."<sup>63</sup>

To be sure, Emerson's description of the friend as "the masterpiece of nature" rings of exaltation. Still, the friend is conferred this distinction not because of his inestimable worth, but because he embodies a paradox, at once "the semblance of my being" and "a foreign form." Given the undulations of Emerson's attitude toward friendship, it is uneasy to surmise how we are to take this description. I think it is significant that Emerson calls the friend *the* masterpiece of nature rather than *a* masterpiece of nature. This wording suggests a singular quality of friendship. As such, the laudatory tone of the comment calls for emphasis, even if the remark is accompanied by an undertone of reticence. Such a reading is consistent with Emerson's stating, "I do not wish to treat friendships daintily, but with the roughest courage. When

they are real, they are not glass threads or frostwork, but the solidest things we know.”<sup>64</sup> *When they are real*, friendships are “the solidest things,” but there is always the possibility that they will prove illusory, the stuff of “glass threads or frostwork.”

It seems that Emerson’s view of friendship elides the sort of questions surrounding *peng* and *you* in the Confucian tradition. In contrast to the Confucian conception of the friend–friend relationship, there is little in Emerson’s thought to suggest that it is analogous to the brother–brother relationship. Given the spurts of romantic prose with which Emerson recurrently idealizes friendship, it seems more akin to a husband–wife relationship (albeit one forged in Emerson’s cultural context rather than Confucius’s). Consider, for instance, Emerson’s remarks on the end of friendship:

The end of friendship is a commerce the most strict and homely that can be joined; more strict than any of which we have experience. It is for aid and comfort through all the relations and passages of life and death. It is fit for serene days, and graceful gifts, and country rambles, but also for rough roads and hard fare, shipwreck, poverty, and persecution.<sup>65</sup>

Emerson could easily have quoted from the *Book of Common Prayer*, stating that a friend is “to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death.”<sup>66</sup> Friendship is thus an “an absolute running of two souls into one.”<sup>67</sup>

Elaborating on this point, Emerson credits God with using friendship as a way to dissolve barriers that would otherwise sequester disparate souls from one another:

My friends have come to me unsought. The great God gave them to me. By oldest right, by the divine affinity of virtue with itself, I find them, or rather not I, but the Deity in me and in them derides and cancels the thick walls of individual character, relation, age, sex, circumstance, at which he usually connives, and now makes many one.<sup>68</sup>

At this point, it would seem that Emerson would be in complete agreement with the statement from Confucius that he once rejected. "Have no friend unlike yourself" seems to be an underlying motto when Emerson describes friendship as "an absolute running of two souls into one," heralding the power of friendship to "deride" and "cancel" walls that separate individuals from one another.

Indeed, that Emerson views friendship as the "divine affinity of virtue with itself" suggests a fundamental compatibility between his notion of friendship and Confucius's. And it is this aspect of their view of friendship that I think is most crucial when considering their compatibility. I have argued that for Confucius, mutual moral cultivation is the hallmark of friendship. I have begun to show that the same is true of Emerson. References to virtue abound in "Friendship." Examining the context of some of these references will strengthen my case for compatibility with Confucian thought about friendship.

The first appearance of "virtue" in "Friendship" occurs in the midst of Emerson's discussion of the pending visit of the stranger:

See, in any house where virtue and self-respect abide, the palpitation which the approach of a stranger causes. A commended stranger is expected and announced, and an uneasiness betwixt pleasure and pain invades all the hearts of a household. His arrival almost brings fear to the good hearts that would welcome him.<sup>69</sup>

Emerson suggests that a mixture of pleasure and pain overcomes the members of a house where virtue and self-respect abide. But why should the pending visit of a commended stranger cause uneasiness in the hearts of the virtuous and self-respecting? My reading is speculative, but perhaps it is their standing as praiseworthy moral agents that prompts excitement at the prospect of meeting someone else of good repute, and it is the very same aspect of their identity that causes them to worry—almost to fear—that they are not his moral equal. In short, they worry that the commended stranger is their moral superior, which might expose (to him, or to themselves) their vulnerabilities—in their own home, no less. As we have seen, during the course of his visit, the

commended stranger reveals his defects, and the image that had been built of him is shown to be false. He is welcome to visit again, but the scintillation that he once aroused is not to return. There is little to be said in favor of forging a friendship with the stranger, as such a bond is lacking in the potential for growth in virtue.

Once we have found a friend, much of our satisfaction with this relationship derives from our shared virtue. On this view, virtues are not discretely possessed; they are possessions held *mutually* by both friends. Therefore, "I must feel pride in my friend's accomplishments as if they were mine,—and a property in his virtues."<sup>70</sup> There is an affinity between this view and that expressed in *Analects* 16.4. If my friend's virtue *is* my virtue, then it stands to reason that the beneficial types of friendship would be those that involve befriending of those who are virtuous. Confucius cites friendships with those who are upright, those who are true to their word, and those of broad learning. Numerous others could be enumerated.

Sometimes it comes to light, however, that we do not, after all, stand for the same values. Perhaps we never really did, or perhaps our friend has changed. In any case, we come to the sobering realization that our friend is not who we projected him to be. Thus, "in the golden hour of friendship, we are surprised with shades of suspicion and unbelief. We doubt that we bestow on our hero the virtues in which he shines, and afterwards worship the form to which we have ascribed this divine inhabitation."<sup>71</sup> We can imagine a number of permutations of friendship precipitating in this way. It is not difficult to imagine that we had been a party to one of the three types of friendship that Confucius deems harmful in *Analects* 16.4. Perhaps our friend had been a clever flatterer, a skillful dissembler, or smoothly glib. Again, other descriptions are possible.

If the viability of a friendship is measured by the quality of the friends comprising it, we should expect that Emerson would advise attentiveness to one's own character within the context of friendship. Emerson does note, "The only reward of virtue is virtue; the only way to have a friend is to be one."<sup>72</sup> But this is far from an expression of the importance of daily introspection about whether one has been a trustworthy friend, as we find from Master Zeng in *Analects* 1.4. Emerson