

## Article

# The Role of Love in Ethical Development Beyond Family and Friendship in Confucianism: Insights from Matteo Ricci's *On Friendship*

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**Abstract:** The family is a form of human relationship or organization that has been vital to the Chinese, influencing various aspects of its tradition. At its core lies the parent-child relationship, which emphasizes the virtue of filial piety (*xiao* 孝) and serves as the beginning of ethical development. Beyond the family, friendship is another form of human relationship that can also contribute to ethical development but is seen only as an extension of the development that begins in the family. This article aims to discuss how friendship, as articulated in Matteo Ricci's *On Friendship* (*Li Madou* 利玛窦, 1552–1610; *Jiaoyou Lun* 交友论), can deepen or contribute to ethical development that begins in the family and extends into friendship, as understood in the Confucian tradition. The discussion places particular emphasis on the role of love as it emerges in Ricci's text. The overarching argument of this article is that Ricci's understanding of love, which is the indispensable element that binds friends together, can contribute to strengthening the ethical development that originates from the family and extends into friendship, as understood in Confucianism.

**Keywords:** Confucianism; Matteo Ricci; *On Friendship*; friendship; family



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## 1. Introduction

*On Friendship* (*Jiaoyou Lun* 交友论) is the first Chinese writing of Matteo Ricci (*Li Madou* 利玛窦, 1552–1610), a prominent religious missionary during the late Ming dynasty.<sup>1</sup> Previous studies have primarily examined the role of this text in Ricci's missionary efforts, highlighting the strategic importance of discussing the concept of friendship (Laven 2012, p. 106; Liu 2010, pp. 176, 181; Mungello 1989, p. 110). As Timothy Billings (2009, p. 12) states, this text “is an effort to accommodate in the broadest sense—to establish a common ground for cross-cultural understanding, respect, and goodwill; or, as we might also say, to make friends—in order to pave the way for proselytizing”.

Both Ricci's text and the Confucian accounts refer to ethical development as the main purpose of friendship. By ethical development, I mean the possibility of learning and increasing one's goodness or changing for the better through the help, influence, example, or excellence of friends (Cabural 2023, p. 822). However, it is essential to note that Confucianism attaches utmost importance to the family as the primary locus of ethical development, with friendship seen only as an extension of the development that begins in the family. Moreover, Ricci explicitly states that “[Confucianism] could derive great benefit from Christianity and might be developed and perfected by it” (Ricci 1953, p. 98).<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Hengtan Shi (2016, p. 123) argues that Ricci's text complements what appears to be lacking or less emphasized in the Confucian view of friendship. This article explores how Ricci's *Jiaoyou Lun* can enhance or intensify ethical development in the family, particularly

in the parent-child relationship, focusing on the virtue of filial piety (*xiao* 孝) and friendship as understood in the Confucian tradition. What distinguishes Ricci's text is the central role of love—both in how it defines friendship and diverges from Confucian notions of love in the family. The overarching argument of this article is that Ricci's understanding of love, which is the indispensable element that binds friends together, can contribute to strengthening the ethical development that originates from the family and extends into friendship, as understood in Confucianism.

By Confucianism and Confucian accounts, I refer to the ancient or early period and their respective texts. Specifically, I refer to the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 论语), the *Book of Mencius* (*Mengzi* 孟子), and the *Book of Xunzi* (*Xunzi* 荀子) for the Confucian perspective on friendship, and to these texts, along with *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing* 孝经), for the Confucian understanding of family and filial piety.<sup>3</sup> It is important to explain why I resort to ancient texts instead of those written during Ricci's time in China, which are historically symmetrical or aligned. For instance, it may be argued that examining Ricci's text vis-à-vis Neo-Confucianism and the thinkers who wrote about friendship during his time in China may be more appropriate. Some scholars have already conducted research in this area, identifying the historical significance of Ricci's text and placing it in the context of the Ming dynasty, when the theme of friendship was thriving (Wu 2016, pp. 75–86; Zou 2001, pp. 49–55).<sup>4</sup> However, the aim of this article is different: it seeks to show how Ricci's text on friendship can supplement Confucian teachings, particularly concerning ethical development in the family and its extension into friendship. This aim aligns not only with Ricci's missionary objectives but also with the broader aspirations of comparative philosophy. As David Wong (2024) notes, “another benefit that comparative philosophers have increasingly striven to realize is for traditions to interact and enrich one another”. Along this line, this article demonstrates how Ricci's *Jiaoyou Lun* can offer fresh insights into Confucian discussions of ethical development in both family and friendship. This article is divided into the following sections: *Confucian Ethical Development in the Family*; *Confucian Ethical Development in Friendship*; *Ricci: Friendship, Love, and Ethical Development*; and *Confucianism and Ricci: Some Comparative Reflections on Friendship, Family, and Love*.

## 2. Confucian Ethical Development in the Family

The foundation of ethical development, or how a child acquires moral principles or a sense of good and bad, starts with the family, particularly the parent-child relationship. It is where a person's character, identity, emotions, attitude, and behavior are initially shaped (Padilla-Walker and Memmott-Elison 2020, pp. 461–81). That is why the family serves as the beginning of ethical development; its role is vital as it affects how one interacts with others outside the family and in society. Like the ripples in the sea, starting from the core or inside, i.e., one's family, one can extend the lessons learned from the inside to the outside. In the *Xiaojing* (Chapter 2), for instance, it states that “The Emperor who loves his own parents would not presume to hate the parents of others; he who respects his own parents would not presume to be rude to the parents of others”. The relationship between the family, specifically the parent-child relationship, and ethical development resonate with various cultures or traditions, but it is arguably most evident in the Chinese, especially in the Confucian philosophical tradition. As Erin M. Cline (2015, p. xii) notes, compared to thinkers of other philosophical traditions, there is “the sustained attention Confucian philosophers give to the role of parent-child relationships in moral development”.

The Confucian philosophical tradition highlights the significance of family in ethical development through the virtue of *xiao*, which can be translated in various ways, such as filial piety, family reverence, family responsibility, family deference, family feeling, etc. (Rosemont and Ames 2009a, p. 1). It encompasses obedience, loyalty, service, love, respect,

generosity, and even remonstrance to parents. To practice or execute *xiao* requires the presence of a family. As Rosemont and Ames (2009a, pp. 1–2) note, “without family, there is no *xiao*, it is like swimming without water. But a family there must be in order for *xiao* to be practiced; to attempt to do so with total strangers, or alone, would be like trying to learn how to swim without water”. The natural or biological connection in the family provides a conducive environment to practice *xiao*, conform to the principles of *xiao*, or learn what is good in general. Moreover, the concepts of *de* (德) and *ren* (仁) and how they relate to *xiao* are helpful in understanding the role of the family in ethical development.

The first chapter of the *Xiaojing* states, “it is family reverence (*xiao*) that is the root of excellence [*de*], and whence education itself is born”. *De* can be translated as either virtue or excellence, and it has two aspects. According to Chen (2013, p. 15), these two aspects of *de* are virtuous conduct (*dexing* 德行) and virtuous character (*dexing* 德性). The former “is the perfection of moral standards of behavior,” while the latter “refers to the quality and character behind the behavior”. Yao Xinzong also makes a distinction between two aspects of *de*, which he refers to as external and internal. He describes the “internal in the sense of giving rise to moral consciousness or the moral heart-mind (*xin* 心), while external in the sense of relating to others in the world by way of understanding and knowledge, activity and interaction”. These two aspects of *de* indicate that to be virtuous, which can be described as holistic, necessitates a harmony or correspondence between one’s intentions or character and one’s actions (Yao 2021, pp. 9–10).

Since *xiao* is considered the root or origin of *de* or virtue, it plays a crucial role in ethical development or in becoming a holistically virtuous person. Referring to the following passages from the *Xiaojing* and the *Analects* that describe the practice of filial piety can aid in understanding the harmony or alignment between the two aspects of *de* initially cultivated in the family.

When their parents are alive they are served with love (*ai*) and respect (*jing*) and when they are deceased they are served with grief and sorrow. This is the basic duty being discharged by the living, the fulfilling of the appropriate obligations (*yi*) between the living and the dead, and the consummation of service filial children owe their parents. (*Xiaojing*, Chapter 18)

Ziyou asked about filial piety. The Master said, “Nowadays ‘filial’ means simply being able to provide one’s parents with nourishment. But even dogs and horses are provided with nourishment. If you are not respectful, wherein lies the difference?”. (*Analects* 2.7)

Zixia asked about filial piety. The Master said, “It is the demeanor that is difficult. If there is work to be done, disciples shoulder the burden, and when wine and food are served, elders are given precedence, but surely filial piety consists of more than this”. (*Analects* 2.8)

These passages elucidate the significance of serving parents, a vital element of *xiao*. It entails the external or virtuous action, which refers to providing parents with material needs and performing certain rituals. However, merely fulfilling these actions for their own sake is insufficient since they can be mechanical, involuntary, or perfunctory. The objective is not just to comply externally since the actions would then become empty. As stated in the above passage, even animals are given nourishment. It is the care and respect that accompanies when giving nourishment that distinguishes human relationships. Hence, the above passages emphasize the internal aspect or virtuous character underlying the action. Chapter 18 of the *Xiaojing* highlights love and respect, while *Analects* 2.7 also emphasizes the importance of respect. In *Analects* 2.8, demeanor or countenance (*se* 色) is mentioned as the internal aspect. Since the familial relationship or parent-child relation-

ship is the initial relationship formed, it is where people first learn and develop to execute *xiao* properly, become virtuous or holistically virtuous, and align their actions with their internal sphere. How a person interacts with their parents will undoubtedly affect how they deal with others and execute their actions.

Regarding the relationship between *xiao* and *ren*, *Analects* 1.2 states, “The gentleman applies himself to the roots. ‘Once the roots are firmly established, the Way will grow.’ Might we not say that filial piety [*xiao*] and respect for elders constitute the root of Goodness [*ren*]?” *Ren* is often translated as benevolence, humanity, humanness, or goodness. It is the most important virtue in Confucian ethics since it is the source from which other virtues are developed or obtained, thereby serving as the foundation of all other virtues (*Mengzi* 2A7). The fact that *xiao* is considered the root or origin of the most important virtue reinforces its essential role in ethical development and becoming virtuous. Confucian ethics is relational, which implies the importance of human relations in ethical development (Wang 2022, p. 922). Accordingly, there are also corresponding virtues that guide these relations (*Mengzi* 3A4; Zhong Yong par. 20). The importance of *ren* in this ethical framework lies in the fact that it is an onto-ethical concept, articulating both the ontology or nature of human beings and the required virtues to live an ethical life with others (Cheng 2002, pp. 168–75). Co’s (2005, p. 107) translation of *ren* as the consciousness-of-human-others captures this onto-ethical value of *ren*. As humans become conscious of others, they realize that they are essentially related to one another and must be careful and always do what is good since they affect one another with their actions. The development of this consciousness naturally begins within one’s family, particularly in one’s interactions with parents, where one first learns how to be good to others (Lu 2010, p. 241). Thus, exercising the virtues of *ren* and *xiao* when dealing with one’s parents is crucial to fostering people’s awareness of their relationality and how to be good to others.

In *Analects* 12.22, Fan Chi inquired about *ren*, to which the Master responded that it means to love others. This love is demonstrated through the care or help that one extends to others, as described in the *Principle of Measuring Square* or the *Golden Rule* (Daxue par. 12; *Analects* 6.30, 12.2, and 15.24). The love advocated by Confucianism is universal, meaning it extends to all people. However, this love is hierarchical, as Confucianism emphasizes the concept of graded love or love with distinctions (Bai 2010, pp. 37–38). This graded love has both natural and ethical explanations that are intertwined. In *Mengzi* 7A15, Mencius recognizes the natural or original knowledge (*liangzhi* 良知) of loving one’s parents. Although it does not explicitly discuss graded love, the passage notes that love is first learned in the family and that it is through this initial experience of love that one can extend it to people outside the family. In *Mengzi* 7A45, Mencius mentions that love or affection should be greater within the family. The passage states, “In relation to the people, [Gentlemen] are benevolent toward them but do not treat them as kin. They treat their kin as kin, and then are benevolent toward the people”. The *Xiaojing* also mentions graded love in Chapter 9, stating that “to love others while not loving one’s parents is depravity (*beide* 悖德)”. This means that graded love is part of *xiao*. The same chapter also provides a justification for graded love by highlighting the natural or predestined nature of the parent-child or father-son relationship (*yitianhe* 以天合), suggesting that it is a natural connection (He 2007, p. 297). Citing this natural or original knowledge of loving in the family and how it relates to graded love and *xiao* ultimately underscores the importance of family in developing a person’s ability to exercise *ren* or to love others.

*Xiao* serves as the foundation for both *ren* and *de*, but how do these two virtues (*ren* and *de*) relate to each other? To answer this question, we can look to the *Golden Rule* or the *Principle of Measuring Square*, which is expressed in some passages. For example, *Analects* 6.30 states, “Desiring to take his stand, one who is Good [*ren*] helps others to take their stand;

wanting to realize himself, he helps others to realize themselves". Similarly, in *Analects* 12.2, "Zhonggong asked about Goodness [*ren*]... The Master said... Do not impose upon others what you yourself do not desire". Although these passages do not explicitly mention *de*, its two aspects are crucial to understanding what it means to embody *ren* and to follow the *Principle of Measuring Square*. In other words, to be good and to help others require harmony between one's internal and external. The internal aspect involves reflecting on one's sense of what is good and right to guide one's actions, while the external aspect involves taking action in a way that reflects one's sense of goodness or goodwill.<sup>5</sup>

Another remark deserves attention here, i.e., *xiao* goes beyond ethical implications and also has socio-political and cosmological significance. In the socio-political context, this is evident in the statement of Master You in *Analects* 1.2: "A young person who is filial and respectful of his elders rarely becomes the kind of person who is inclined to defy his superiors, and there has never been a case of one who is disinclined to defy his superiors stirring up rebellion". The cosmological aspect of *xiao* is discernible in Chapter 7 of the *Xiaojing*, which describes "family reverence [*xiao*] [as] the constancy of the heavenly cycles, the appropriate responsiveness of the earth, and the proper conduct of the people". These examples demonstrate the wide-ranging influence of *xiao* in Confucianism and the significance of the family as its foundation.

### 3. Confucian Ethical Development in Friendship

Friendship is one of the Confucian five cardinal relationships or the *Wulun* (五伦).<sup>6</sup> It is, however, at the bottom of the list, prompting the observation that it is the least important (Vervoornt 2004, pp. 2–4). This view may hold true in the ancient Chinese or Confucian society, where the family played a significant role. However, it is worth noting that friendship can contribute to ethical development and the organization of society or political order. The *Analects* contain two passages that explicitly underscore the role of friendship in ethical development, particularly in relation to the concept of *ren*.

Master Zeng said, "The gentleman acquires friends by means of cultural refinement, and then relies upon his friends for support in becoming Good [*ren*]". (*Analects* 12.24)

Zigong asked about becoming Good [*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 Good [*ren*]". (*Analects* 15.10)

The *Xunzi* also explicitly expresses the role of ethical development in friendship, specifically in relation to *de*.

In choosing friends and deeming people to be good, one must be careful, for this is the foundation of virtue [*de*]. The *Odes* says, "Do not push the big wagon; the dust makes things dark". This is telling one not to dwell in the company of petty people. (*Xunzi*, Chapter 27)

These passages suggest that people depend on friends outside the family for ethical development. Friends help each other to become better people and develop virtues or qualities such as *ren* and *de*. Since Confucian ethics emphasize human relations, learning from others is crucial, including friends, family, and even strangers. As Confucius states, "when walking with two other people, I will always find a teacher among them. I focus on those who are good and seek to emulate them, and focus on those who are bad in order to be reminded of what needs to be changed in myself" (*Analects* 7.22). However, there is a difference between learning from others and learning from friends. The aforementioned passage implies that learning from others is merely an introspective or passive process.

Learning from friends, in contrast, is more proactive and open, as friends can both criticize and demand goodness from each other (*Analects* 4.26, 12.23, and 13.28; *Mengzi* 4B30). Xunzi (Chapter 2) even likened the role of a friend to that of a teacher, highlighting the mutual nature of learning and teaching in friendships.

It is crucial to explain Xunzi's claim that friendship is the foundation of virtue, as it may appear to contradict the previous discussion on family or *xiao* as the origin of *de* and *ren*. Here, it is important to understand the similarities between family and friendship as relationships for ethical development or as a continuation of ethical development from one's family to friends (Xunzi, Chapter 2; Yao 2019, p. 18). As Xunzi (Chapter 29) asserts, "if within the home one's conduct is not cultivated, this is one's own mistake. If outside the home one's reputation is not renowned, this is the fault of one's friends. Thus, within the home the gentleman makes his conduct honorable, and outside the home he befriends the worthy". This passage suggests that an individual's choice of friends serves as a reflection of their character.<sup>7</sup> When read alongside other passages in the *Xunzi* (e.g., Chapter 27, as noted above), it highlights the crucial role of friends outside of the family, as they impact or influence what one has learned inside the family. In general, the people we encounter outside the family can impact us and present different perspectives that either contribute to our moral development or lead us astray.

Given the significant role of friends in making us better people, how can we identify who can be considered friends and establish friendships? The Confucian virtue of *xin* (信) is the foundation of friendship, and it is at the core of the discussion of this relationship in early Confucian texts (*Analects* 1.4, 1.7, 1.8., 5.26, and 9.25; *Mengzi* 3A4). *Xin* is commonly translated as trust, trustworthiness, integrity, fidelity, or faithfulness. The value of *xin* in friendship lies in the fact that it is voluntary, involves choice, and is an informal type of relationship.<sup>8</sup> Unlike family, which is secured by biological relations and governed by formalities or duties, friendship is founded on *xin* without any governing norms. Although historically and etymologically, friendship overlaps with family relationships, Aat Vervoon's study suggests that beginning in the Spring and Autumn period, *xin* became prominently associated with friendship, marking the beginning of relationships not necessarily based on kinship (Vervoon 2004, pp. 4–5).<sup>9</sup>

According to Xiufen Lu (2010, p. 238), *xin* "has two sides: (1) it involves the effort of making oneself trustworthy to others; and (2) it involves trusting the right people". These two sides are interrelated. Being trustworthy in relation to friendship has been repeatedly stated in the *Analects*. For instance, in 1.4, Zeng Zi, the student of Confucius, examines himself daily, including whether he failed to be trustworthy in his dealings with friends. In 1.7, Zi Xia, another student of Confucius, characterizes a learned person as someone who is "trustworthy in speech when interacting with friends and associates", in addition to other attributes. And in 5.26, Confucius himself states that one of his aspirations is "to inspire trust in [his] friends". To be trustworthy requires coherence between one's presentation of the self, either in words or actions and what one really is (Sung 2020, pp. 274–78). Trust becomes difficult to establish when there is incoherence or discrepancy between one's presentation of the self and what one really is. An example of this could be when someone consistently fails to arrive on time despite promising to do so, making it challenging to trust that person. The two sides of *xin* are interrelated because when a person's words or actions do not align with their true self, they do not seem to be the right people to be trusted.

Lu, in her analysis of how to identify the right person to trust, refers to *Analects* 1.8 and 9.25, which state: "Let your actions be governed by dutifulness and trustworthiness, and do not accept as a friend one who is not your equal". This suggests that since one is trustworthy, one must befriend or trust only someone who is equally trustworthy. Here, I

intend to emphasize that being trustworthy goes beyond simply having coherence between one's words or actions and one's true self. It is also important to possess goodness that can make oneself trustworthy and worthy of befriending or trusting. Even if someone is consistent in their presentation, there may be nothing about them that inspires trust or friendship. As Mencius (*Mengzi* 5B2) argues, "One befriends the virtue of another person", indicating that virtue or goodness is the foundation of friendship and factors such as age or social status are irrelevant. Moreover, in *Analects* 16.4, Confucius reminds us that there are two categories of friendships. He states:

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.

In this passage, Confucius highlights that not all friendships can be beneficial for one's ethical development, as some can even hinder it. It is also acknowledged that trust can be exploited by deceitful individuals who do not prioritize ethical development as the purpose of their friendships. Additionally, trust is necessary for demanding goodness and pointing out mistakes, which is a proactive and open form of ethical development unique to friendship, as opposed to simply learning from others. For friends to engage in this type of ethical development, they must trust each other's intentions and believe that demands and criticisms are for their own advantage. Trust is also important to ease the possible negative or painful part of criticism. Without trust, ethical development cannot take place in friendship, and friendship is impossible.

Regarding the role of friendship in organizing the society or political order, *xin* is again emphasized. *Mengzi* 4A12 states:

There is a Way for gaining the confidence of one's superiors. If one does not have the faith [*xin*] of one's friends, one will not have the confidence of one's superiors. There is a Way for getting the faith [*xin*] of one's friends. If one serves one's parents but they are not happy, one will not have the faith of one's friends.

Friendship serves as a crucial relationship that connects the natural or biological relationship of the family to the unfamiliar world of strangers in society or the political organization (Lu 2010, p. 242; Vervoorn 2004, p. 14; Rosemont and Ames 2009a, p. 39). The passage above pertains to someone who is aspiring to become a minister or hold a position in the government. Given the magnitude of the responsibility of those positions, it is indeed important to be trustworthy, which is manifested or tested in the relationship between friends. However, it is equally important for ordinary people to exhibit trustworthiness, i.e., to present themselves as they truly are. As Winnie Sung (2020, p. 286) points out, the way we present ourselves is also a respect to others because they have limited knowledge about us, and "by giving them reliable evidence about ourselves, [we are] allowing them to decide, in an informed manner, how they want to relate to us". This is especially important in a society where most people are strangers to each other, and familiarity with everyone is not possible.

In addition to ethical development and its role in society or politics, it may be pointed out that friendship in the ancient Confucian context is also associated with studying together or simply studying. The very first paragraph of the *Analects* expresses both the satisfaction of applying what one has learned and having friends coming from afar. Mencius speaks of the possibility of becoming friends with the ancients by studying their texts (*Mengzi* 5B8). However, it is essential to understand that for the ancients, studying or learning primarily meant self-cultivation or studying for ethical development.<sup>10</sup> Hence, as

friendship is linked with the purpose of studying or learning, it also points to ethical development as the purpose of friendship.

#### 4. Ricci: Friendship, Love, and Ethical Development

The *Jiaoyou Lun* presents reasons for the significance and value of friendship, including religious and psychological reasons (Lo 2006, pp. 230–31).<sup>11</sup> However, the ethical development that transpires in friendship stands out as the most significant reason or value for developing, maintaining, and terminating such a relationship. Ricci explicitly articulates this reason or value in *Maxim* 69. He writes:

The aim [reason or value] of making friends is none other than this: if my friends have more goodness than I do, then I must learn from them and adopt their habits; if I have more goodness than they do, then I must teach them and improve them. Learning in order to teach and teaching in order to learn are mutually beneficial. If their goodness is not worthy of studying and adopting, or if their wickedness cannot be changed, why should I exhaust whole days together with indecent pastimes and vain shadows?

The above maxim, as it presents teaching and learning as mutual processes, points to the idea that friendship is a reciprocal or mutual form of human relationship. This means that both friends can learn something or equally have ethical development despite not having the same level of ethical development or status. Two additional maxims are worth noting here since they also posit this reason or value of friendship, presenting some analogies. In *Maxim* 20, Ricci compares a friend to a physician, noting that both processes of curing a patient's illness and helping fix or remove the vices or evilness of a friend can be painful.<sup>12</sup> Ricci, in *Maxim* 70, depicts a scenario of ethical struggle, confusion, or indecisiveness toward goodness and an inclination to commit mistakes.<sup>13</sup> In this scenario, a friend is described as a living law whose virtuous authority can demand, inspire, or lead another friend toward the good.

As Ricci's text links ethical development to friendship, it also reminds us that there are also friends who can hinder ethical development, or they can even make other people worse. For instance, Ricci states in *Maxim* 33, "If we tolerate the vices of a friend, then those vices become our own vices". Terminating or leaving a friend seems justified in such a scenario. But this must be done carefully, which means that there are only certain cases or there is an endpoint when one can resort to termination of friendship. In *Maxim* 31, Ricci refers to this idea of leaving a friend in conjunction with the act of forgiveness.<sup>14</sup> It explains that there are faults that can simply be forgiven, and there are also faults that are morally wrong which are adequate grounds to justify the act of leaving a friend.

In making friends, Ricci also reminds us of the importance of trust. The way he employs trust shares similarities with the two sides of the Confucian idea of trust, as analyzed by Lu. In *Maxim* 7, Ricci underscores that before one can trust or make friends, it is important to scrutinize people and their intention.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, in *Maxim* 45, Ricci stresses the value of keeping one's word or promise, which is part of making oneself trustworthy.<sup>16</sup> Trust is crucial for ethical development within a friendship. Since not all friends contribute to ethical development, it is vital to carefully evaluate people before placing trust in them. When trust is present, the pain or bitterness that may come as part of the process of ethical development becomes insignificant because it is understood that the other friend can do something good for one's life.

Thus far, ethical development, trust, and demand for good, as in a friend like a living law, are discussed above. These resonate in Confucian friendship, or these are themes that are found in both Ricci's text and Confucian accounts. In the succeeding discussion, I intend to bring to the fore the notion of love (*ai* 愛) in friendship as found in Ricci's text.

Arguably, this is what makes Ricci's text distinct from Confucian accounts. It is an element of friendship and a factor that impacts ethical development in such a relationship. I also argue that it impacts and strengthens the broader ethical development that begins in the family.

Love occupies an important place in Ricci's text. It is the link between friends, an indispensable element that without which friendship cannot exist. In *Maxim 50*, Ricci states:

Friends surpass family in one point only: it is possible for family members not to love one another. But it is not so with friends. If one member of a family does not love another, the relationship of kinship still remains. But unless there is love between friends, does the essential principle of friendship exist?

As Ricci compares friendship and family in the above maxim, it may be suggested that love serves as the equivalent of "blood" or biological connection—the element that binds and sustains familial relationships. Cicero's *Laelius* is the inspiration for this maxim.<sup>17</sup> In this same work, Cicero (1923, par. 100) states that "both words [i.e., *amor* or love and *amicitia* or friendship] are derived from a word meaning 'to love'". It is, however, in his other work that Cicero describes love in relation to friendship. He states, "What is love, from which the Latin word for friendship is derived, if not the wish that someone have as many good things as possible irrespective of whether any advantage accrues to oneself?" (Cicero 2004, Book II, 78). This description of love in friendship may appear to be selfless or a one-directional kind of love. However, Cicero explicitly points out that friendship is a mutual relationship (Cicero 1923, par. 20). Ricci appears to align with Cicero's understanding of love and friendship as a mutual relationship. As Ricci states, "If one person does not love the other, then the two cannot be friends" (*Maxim 73*). In addition to love, Ricci's allusion to equality also shows that his understanding of friendship is truly a mutual relationship. Since all people possess inherent limitations, be they physical, religious, psychological, or ethical in nature, they require each other to foster friendship.<sup>18</sup>

Love has ethical implications, or it impacts ethical development in friendship. Since love may have several objects, including those that are disadvantageous or misguided, Ricci, in some maxims, reminds us of the importance of prioritizing virtuous or loving goodness. For instance, in *Maxim 90*, Ricci describes how virtue or goodness is loved, valued, or admired by various people, whether they are enemies or friends. In *Maxim 27*, he states, "If you would become my true friend, then love me out of affection; do not love me for material things".<sup>19</sup> If the material benefit is the purpose of making friends, it will be a fleeting and unstable purpose; it also contradicts the mutual love, affection, or care that exists in friendship. This is because focusing on material benefits can be selfish. In his commentary on *Maxim 52*, Ricci explains, "Since my friends must be virtuous and benevolent, they will know whom to love and whom to hate. This is why I rely upon them". Here, the reliance is based on trust, as one knows that one's friends will do what is good and loveable.

Referring again to Cicero, the inspiration of Ricci in some maxims about love, he states that "For it is love (*amor*), from which the word 'friendship' (*amicitia*) is derived, that leads to the establishing of goodwill" (Cicero 1923, par. 26). Since love aims for the good of the other, it must also take into account the limitations, imperfections, or lack of goodness that exist between friends. Because all people have limitations, everyone needs a friend who can give this love that will not condemn them for their limitations but will instead help them overcome or repair them. In *Maxim 20*, Ricci explains and instructs how to approach the limitation, imperfection, or lack of goodness of a friend, which manifests as vices in this context, in a way that allows ethical development to take place within the relationship. He writes:

Having a friendship is like curing an illness. This is because the physician who honestly loves the sick person must certainly hate the sickness and, in order to cure that sickness, will hurt the sick person's body and embitter the sick person's mouth. The physician cannot endure the sick body of a sufferer, so why should a friend endure the vices of their friends? Admonish them! Admonish them! Why pity their recalcitrant ears? Why fear their knitted brows?

Here, Ricci equates the love of a physician to a sick person and the love of a friend. The healing process of a sick person involves some pain and embittering, which may also happen in helping a friend to overcome his vices. Providing constructive criticism to others and suggesting ways for improvement can be a challenging task. It requires careful consideration in terms of word choice, timing, and other factors. It takes great courage and effort to make this process more bearable. However, at the heart of this process is the love for a friend and the desire to see them become a better person. On the part of the friend receiving feedback, it is important to understand that it is not them as a person that is being disliked, but rather the negative qualities or actions that need to be eliminated. If the focus is solely on the pain and embittering aspects of the process and the end goal is not considered, ethical development may not occur, and the friendship may even be jeopardized. Focusing on the good and having a love for what is right can alleviate the pain of this process.

## 5. Confucianism and Ricci: Some Comparative Reflections on Friendship, Family, and Love

Ricci's *Jiaoyou Lun* and the Confucian accounts present friendship through several shared themes, yet they also exhibit notable differences. Both view friendship through the lenses of ethical development, trust, and the demand for goodness. In each case, friends are considered essential to one's ethical development, and trust is portrayed as a prerequisite for selecting friends, maintaining commitment, and engaging in mutual ethical development. For instance, offering or accepting criticism is only possible if a foundation of trust exists; without it, the friendship is compromised. However, significant differences emerge, particularly concerning the theme of demanding goodness. In Ricci's text, the friend is portrayed as a living law, carrying an implicit moral authority that does not appear to characterize the Confucian depiction of friendship. Furthermore, Ricci likens the friend to a physician, framing evilness as a form of sickness that must be cured—a metaphor absent from Confucian discussions on friendship. Ricci also highlights other purposes for friendship, such as religious and psychological dimensions, which are not found in Confucian texts. Another key distinction is found in the social and political implications of friendship, especially in *Mengzi*, where friendship is framed not only as a personal relationship but also as a force that contributes to broader social order and organization. Most significantly, as this present article shows, Ricci's text places particular emphasis on the primacy of love, positioning it as a defining feature of friendship. This emphasis on love can be interpreted as suggesting the superiority of friendship over family—a view that directly contrasts Confucian accounts, which consistently position the family as the primary locus of ethical development and as a fundamental institution shaping many aspects of their tradition.

The kind of love Ricci describes is what I call autonomous or voluntary. This is especially evident in the role of choice—one chooses friends freely, even though friendship is recognized as a natural human need. For Ricci, God's command to have friends does not erase this voluntariness; rather, the choice lies in selecting who among potential friends will be loved and who can contribute to one's moral development.<sup>20</sup> In other words, while friendship fulfills a natural human need, the capacity to love what is good must be cul-

tivated. This is where autonomy or voluntariness becomes apparent. More specifically, Ricci's understanding of love aligns with the notion of goodwill, as discussed earlier in connection with Cicero's influence. Goodwill, or the commitment to seek the good of others, also involves recognizing the limitations and imperfections of one's friends. Yet this tolerance has limits. *Maxim* 31, for instance, states: "The things for which friends should forgive one another have limits". Ricci comments: "If a friend commits a fault, and it is only very small, one may countenance it. If a friend does something morally wrong, that is a serious matter, and one must discard that friend". This illustrates that while love involves understanding and forgiveness, it is ultimately anchored in the commitment to goodness and ethical development. If a friend's actions obstruct this growth, ending the friendship may be the appropriate course. In Ricci's view, love for a friend entails the freedom to choose, the priority of moral goodness, and the shared pursuit of ethical development—all grounded in deliberate, voluntary commitment rather than obligation.

Moreover, for Ricci, friendship is not bound by rules, formalities, or prescriptions that govern the relationship and is not based on duty or obligation. Although duties and responsibilities exist in friendship, they are different in that they are not enforced or defined like laws or societal rules and do not have corresponding rewards or sanctions. *Maxim* 46 reflects this point: "The obligation of friends extends as far as virtuous conduct will allow and no further".<sup>21</sup> Duties in friendship are shaped by love and moral goodness; without love, these duties cannot be genuinely fulfilled. For Ricci, friendship transcends mere obligation and calls for actions rooted in voluntary goodwill.

Andrew Lambert (2020, pp. 261–62) observes that "while friends (and virtue) are valued in [Confucian texts], they are not a locus for discussions of love". I concur with this observation and also agree that "familial love is the most important form of love for the Confucians". In contrast to Ricci's autonomous or voluntary love in friendship, Confucian love is primarily rooted in the family. It is characterized as natural or naturally bestowed in the parent-child relationship, duty-bound or demanded. Aside from familial love, there is also a general kind of love that is embedded with political implications.

The Confucian emphasis on familial love is evident and prioritized over love for those outside the family. To recall, Mencius provides a natural explanation and justification for graded love (*Mengzi* 7A15). A corresponding sense of duty and service also accompanies this graded love, making it feel like it is demanded or required (*Xiaojing*, Chapter 9). In addition to familial love, Confucianism also recognizes a general kind of love that is extended or bestowed to others (*Analects* 12.22). This kind of love is not intimate or personal like familial love but is considered general love or care. This kind of love not only has ethical implications, as explained in the previous section, but it also has a political purpose, which truly makes it a general kind of love. Tongdong Bai (2010, pp. 30–31) refers to *ren* or the general love for others as a social glue that helps people deal with one another in a community of strangers. It is also a kind of duty; as David Wong (1989, p. 269 or Note 6) describes, "this love is manifested in the performance of duties owed to everyone, in contributing to the attainment of peace, security and a minimum level of material being for all".

A well-known and often debated passage from *Analects* 13.18 illustrates the Confucian approach to familial love. It states:

The Duke of She said to Confucius, "Among my people there is one we call 'Upright Gong'. When his father stole a sheep, he reported him to the authorities". Confucius replied, "Among my people, those who we consider 'upright' are different from this: fathers cover up for their sons, and sons cover up for their fathers. 'Uprightness' is to be found in this".

This passage suggests a kind of love that requires the protection of family members at all costs. Huang (2017, pp. 15, 41) interprets this as implying that the family's responsibility is to correct its members internally, better without external interference. This highlights the depth of familial obligation: because family ties are natural and indissoluble, members have no choice but to love and defend one another in all instances.

Succinctly, the kind of love between friends in Ricci's text is autonomous or voluntary, while Confucian love—especially within the family—is natural and duty-bound or demanded. There is also a general kind of love with political implications in Confucianism. Moreover, while Confucian texts rarely associate love with friendship, Ricci's writings elevate love as central to it. This contrast raises a question: if love already exists within the family and extends, in some form, to others, what can be learned from the kind of love between friends as found in Ricci's text? The autonomous or voluntary kind of love found in Ricci's text offers a compelling answer. Through this kind of love in friendship, one can learn how to love freely and sincerely—not out of duty or biological attachment but as a conscious moral commitment. Perhaps this voluntary dimension of love may address a problem raised in the *Analects* and *Xiaojing*, where duties are performed without genuine love and sincerity. By learning how to love voluntarily and sincerely in the context of friendship, individuals may be better equipped to fulfill their duties and express love towards their parents when they return home.

## 6. Conclusions

This article has taken Ricci's *Jiaoyou Lun* as an important source to supplement or complement Confucian accounts of ethical development, particularly within the family and its extension into friendship. As both a religious missionary and a thinker, Ricci consistently sought to bridge cultures and demonstrate how different traditions could learn from one another. Although his primary focus was on religious matters, his reflections on friendship also offer valuable ethical insights. In fact, Ricci himself noted that it was his discussions on friendship—rather than Western tools and mechanical inventions—that most piqued the curiosity of his Chinese interlocutors.<sup>22</sup>

Love is indeed a powerful and recurring concept, not only in Chinese and Roman or Greek thought (as reflected in Ricci's text) but across various cultures. While the idea of love is universal, it has been conceptualized and understood differently from one tradition to another—and these differences offer meaningful opportunities for dialogue and learning. Ricci presents love, particularly within friendship, as autonomous or voluntary, whereas Confucian love within the family is understood as natural and duty-bound or demanded. It is precisely this voluntary dimension of love in Ricci's account of friendship that can serve to complement or supplement Confucian understandings of love, offering important ethical insights. Learning to love sincerely and voluntarily within the context of friendship can deepen one's capacity to express genuine love within the family and to extend sincere care to others beyond it. More broadly, this form of moral training fosters an attitude of authenticity and integrity in all human interactions and undertakings.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This article uses the edition with the original text (Ricci 2009) and translation by Timothy Billings (2009). In citing this source, I refer to the maxim number instead of the page numbers. Hereafter, this source is cited as *Maxim* followed by the number. In cases where the *Maxim* is not mentioned in the main text, it is fully mentioned in the notes section.

- Ricci's text on friendship is composed of one hundred maxims from European classical and patristic sources (Billings 2009, p. 19). Discussions and debates have arisen regarding the religious or secular nature of this text and whether the reference to God in two maxims can be considered Christian elements (Hosne 2011, pp. 7–9; Xu 2021, p. 63; Liu 2010, p. 171). Although the nature of Ricci's text is debatable, it is unlikely that he would have used it to interfere with his purpose in China. The text was strategic material to find a way to reconcile or integrate Christianity with Confucianism as part of his missionary efforts.
- This article uses Edward Slingerland's (2003) translation of the *Analects*. In citing this source, I refer to the book or chapter and the part numbers instead of the page numbers. Hereafter, this source is cited as *Analects* followed by the book or chapter number and part number. This article uses Bryan W. Van Norden's (2008) translation of the *Mengzi*. In citing this source, I refer to the book or chapter and the part numbers instead of the page numbers. Hereafter, this source is cited as *Mengzi* followed by the book or chapter number and part number. This article uses Eric L. Hutton's (2014) translation of the *Xunzi*. In citing this source, I refer to the chapter numbers instead of the page numbers. Hereafter, this source is cited as *Xunzi* followed by the chapter number. This article uses Rosemont and Ames's (2009b) translation of the *Xiaojing*. In citing this source, I refer to the chapter numbers instead of the page numbers. Hereafter, this source is cited as *Xiaojing* followed by the chapter number.
- Exploring the potential impact of Ricci's text on Neo-Confucianism may not be as worthwhile as the focus of this present article, as Ricci himself expressed critical remarks about Neo-Confucianism (see Ricci 1985, II, pp. 77–101; this is from *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (T'ien-chu Shih-i), cited as chapter and paragraph division).
- My response somehow agrees with Yao's point. He, however, refers to *Mengzi*, and my explanation refers to the *Analects*. Yao (2021, p. 10) states, "As an essential quality of being a fully realized human, *ren* involves both the inward understanding of one's own humanity and the outward appreciation of the needs of others".
- Mengzi* 3A4: "The sage Shun was anxious about this too, so he appointed Xie to be Minister of Instruction, and instruct them about human roles: between father and children there is affection; between ruler and ministers there is righteousness; between husband and wife there is distinction; between elder and younger there is precedence; and between friends there is faithfulness". I am grateful to the reviewer for the clarification regarding the interpretation of this passage.
- For the informal and voluntary nature of friendship, see the following sources: Vervoorn (2004, pp. 2–3), Rosemont and Ames (2009a, pp. 38–39), Lu (2010, pp. 235, 241), and Kutcher (2000, p. 1615).
- What I am implying here is that the accounts I employ in this article refer to friends as mainly outside of kinship. It is, however, important to note that there are still instances in these accounts that refers to friendly feeling in family or a brother. For instance, *Analects* 2:21 cites the *Book of Documents* to remind friendliness toward one's elders and juniors. This reminder is also found in *Xunzi*, Chapter 12.
- In his translation of the *Analects* 1.1, Slingerland cites Cheng Shude: "People today think of 'learning' as the pursuit of knowledge, whereas the ancients thought of 'learning' as cultivating the self".
- For religious reason, see *Maxims* 16 and 56. For psychological reason, which states friends as important in attaining happiness, *Maxim* 57: A world without friends is a world without joy.
- See succeeding discussion for the whole passage.
- Maxim* 70: Suppose there is a man who has no great faith in this Way, and whose cultivation of virtue is moreover still in danger, his heart still struggling and undecided over whether he will manifest goodness or enter into shamefulness. In order to lay open and resolve his doubts, to nourish his virtue and save him from an imminent fall, I believe that there is nothing better than an excellent friend, because whatever I constantly hear and constantly see gradually sinks into my breast until I suddenly understand it all at once—truly, such a friend is like a living law that reproves me with goodness. How magnificent the honorable man is! How magnificent the honorable man is! Sometimes even without the use of speech, and even without the show of indignation, his virtuous authority can prevent immoral actions.
- Maxim* 31: The things for which friends should forgive one another have limits. Commentary: If a friend commits a fault, and it is only very small, one may countenance it. If a friend does something morally wrong, that is a serious matter, and one must discard that friend.
- Maxim* 7: Before making friends, we should scrutinize. After making friends, we should trust.
- Maxim* 45: Since a promise made even to an enemy must not be broken, how much more so a promise made to a friend! Faithfulness to friends goes without saying.
- Cicero (1923, par. 20) states, "For friendship excels relationship [*propinquitias*] in this, that goodwill may be eliminated from relationship while from friendship it cannot; since, if you remove goodwill [*benevolentia*] from friendship the very name of friendship is gone; if you remove it from relationship, the name of relationship still remains". Also see Harbsmeier (2018, pp. 196–97).
- It is noteworthy that Ricci, in one maxim of his text, recounts a story of a king that, despite his stature, admits of his ethical limitation and is in need of a friend who can point out and help him address his shortcomings. *Maxim* 97: An ancient king of a land in the West had made friends with a scholar and feasted him sumptuously in the capital, considering him to be a wise and virtuous man. Yet as the days passed and the king received no remonstrance, he dismissed the scholar abruptly, saying: "Since I am human, it is impossible for me not to have faults. If you do not see them, then you are not a virtuous scholar. If you do see

them but make no remonstrance, then you are not a virtuous friend". This ancient king acted this way for not having received remonstrance for his faults. What do you suppose he would do if he were among the people of today, who disguise their faults with adornments?" For a more detailed discussion of equality in Ricci's text on friendship, see Cabural (2023, pp. 825–28).

- 19 The same idea is also found in Cicero (1923, par. 31): "...friendship is desirable, not because we are influenced by hope of gain, but because its entire profit is in the love itself".
- 20 See *Maxims* 16 and 56 for Ricci's reflections on the relationship between friendship and God. *Maxim* 16: Each person cannot fully complete every task, for which reason the Lord on High commanded that there be friendship in order that we might render aid to one another. If this Way were eradicated from the world, humankind would surely disintegrate into ruin. *Maxim* 56: The Lord on High gave people two eyes, two ears, two hands, and two feet so that two friends could help each other. Only in this way can deeds be brought successfully to completion.
- 21 Here are the other maxims where Ricci mentions some of the duties, responsibilities, or obligations of friendship. *Maxim* 19: Proper friends do not always agree with their friends, nor do they always disagree with their friends, but rather agree with them when they are reasonable and disagree with them when they are unreasonable. Direct speech is therefore the only responsibility of friendship. *Maxim* 53: If you do not support a friend in a crisis, then when you will fall into a crisis yourself there will be no one to help. *Maxim* 64: Someone who comes to see me in my hour of glory only when invited, and who comes to see me in my hour of trouble even when not invited—now, *that* is a friend. (Emphasis is in the original).
- 22 As quoted by Billings (2009, p. 3) in his Introduction, Ricci States: "This *Friendship* has earned more credit for me and for our Europe than anything else that we have done; because the others do us credit for mechanical and artificial things of hands and tools; but this does us credit for literature, for wit, and for virtue".

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