In the Roman Catholic Church, Catholic social teaching (CST) is regarded as a prominent resource in giving guidance and direction for the Catholic community to respond to the moral needs of the society. It promotes a vision of human flourishing based on the dignity of all persons and a commitment to social justice in the wider human community. The immediate purpose of the church's social teaching is to propose the principles and values that can sustain a society worthy of the human person.¹

To actualize the moral vision of sustaining a good and just society, the CST must be able to speak to the Christians and other people of good will in their own cultural context, as well as to move the hearts and minds of Christians in order to transform them to embrace a more active commitment to the social mission of the Church and human flourishing.

My own pastoral experiences of faith formation and social justice awareness programs in Hong Kong inform me that different ways of teaching CST differ in their effectiveness at bringing Catholics to be more merciful and to show consistent concern to the poor and the marginalized. When CST is taught as principles to be applied, no matter how much Catholics have accepted and appreciated the principles cognitively and could intellectually articulate the need for systematic change in the society, their understanding did not lead directly to a change in their practice.² However, when we contextualized the vision of CST by linking the main themes with narratives from the field (voices of the marginalized and the justice promoters) and sacred traditions (stories in the Scripture and different periods of church history as well as stories in Chinese culture), and included learning opportunities for Christians to follow as examples and practices in real life, their attitudes were more likely to be transformed so that they were motivated to actions of justice in solidarity with others.

Critical to this formation, I believe, is articulating an ethic that will promote the virtuous life in the Asian context, particularly the Hong Kong-Chinese context. Apart from setting the guiding principles for a good society, CST can be seen as a resource for Christians to use in the process of moral cultivation, of becoming virtuous persons who would commit to virtuous action throughout life, in a life of discipleship. Such ethical discourse pays attention to the various dimensions of morality—cognitive, affective, volition, and behavioral.

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In promoting virtuous life in a Chinese Catholic community, I would like to integrate the insights of Confucian ethics to enrich Catholic social teaching. Confucian ethics is one of the Chinese cultural traditions that affect many Chinese people in Hong Kong in different ways. It is considered rich in virtue features. Such ethic is helpful in transforming one's character and motivating a person to commit to altruistic attitudes and behavior. These insights inspire me to retrieve the comparable virtue ethics features in the Catholic tradition. It is worth placing the Confucian and Catholic social ethics in dialogue through virtue ethics.

Some people may think that social ethics, which targets structural change, is action-oriented rather than aiming at individual transformation, thus, is different from the focus of virtue ethics. Nevertheless, virtue ethicists also ask questions such as: Who are we together? What will become of us? What habits of heart and mind should we have as a community? What roles and responsibilities do we as members of a community have? Both social ethics and virtue ethics have a communal, relational aspect.

In this article, I will demonstrate the importance of strengthening the virtue ethics approach in social ethics through putting the Catholic tradition and Confucian tradition into dialogue. In doing this, I will first examine the features of virtue ethics, which is different from principles-based ethics. Second, I will scrutinize the virtue features in early Confucianism, with focus on the other-regarding or social dimension. Third, I will investigate the comparable virtue features in Christian ethics. I will also demonstrate how Christians with social virtues can enhance their Christian commitment in the justice and peace effort.

**Virtue Ethics and Its Other-regarding Dimension**

The history of virtue theory is long and can be traced back to ancient Greece and China. Although it gave way to a more legalistic way of thinking after ancient Rome, there has been a revival of virtue ethics in the last few decades. In China, Confucianism is regarded as rich in virtue features explicitly. Virtue ethics is the implicit theory behind Confucian ethics, with emphasis on virtues, moral exemplars, and formation of moral character. Virtue ethics has become an important alternative to principle-based ethics. Instead of asking the question “What ought I to do?” virtue ethicists ask three interrelated questions: Who are we? Who ought we to become? And how do we get there? The answer to each question refers to the virtues. The good, rather than obligations, is the basis of morality; the moral agent, rather than moral action or its consequences, is at the center of moral reflection.

Virtue ethicists understand human agency as a means of shaping character, which is an important component of decision and action. It emphasizes a person in relationship with others through one's character and choices.

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Character gives us moral continuity and shows what kind of person we are through our actions, goals of life, convictions or beliefs, dispositions, and emotions that move us to act. Thus, the goal or vision, specific virtues, moral exemplars, and methods of moral cultivation are important elements in virtue ethics.

Generally speaking, virtues are admirable dispositions, habits, qualities, or traits of character or intellect that are in some way praiseworthy, admirable, or desirable, and that emerge from an examination of their narratives. They are dispositions to act, desire, and feel that involve the exercise of judgment and lead to recognizable human excellence, instances of human flourishing. Virtues are relatively stable and effective dispositions to act in particular ways. They are concerned with many other actions as well, with emotions and emotional reactions, choices, values, desires, perceptions, attitudes, interests, expectations, and sensibilities. People acquire virtue not so much by observing rules but by following examples in practice. Virtues are learned through practice; they then become a pattern of behavior or a habit that enables a person to constantly act virtuously and to shape his or her moral life, leading to genuine human flourishing or fulfillment.

In the view of these features, linking virtue ethics to social ethics would urge us to think: What constitutes a good human life that promotes common good? What virtues do we need to be just and caring? What would a person with relational and social virtues look like? How can a person foster or cultivate these relational virtues?

Some critics consider virtue ethics as an individual morality—self-centered and self-regarding; aristocratic rather than democratic in tendency; interested in the individual's pursuit of human excellence; and one that may tolerate human misery, inequality, and servitude. It seems that virtue ethics lacks social dimension and tends to depoliticize morality, thus neglecting social justice and social responsibility. One queries whether such an ethic can address social problems with structural roots or institutional origins of the larger society. However, ethicists who support theory defend virtue ethics against these critiques, affirming the communal aspect of virtue ethics. In different kinds of virtue ethic, apart from individual improvement, relationships and corporate activity are also central to the human good or end. Happiness is not only for oneself but also for others. Human fulfillment is not necessarily egoistic and there are many other-regarding virtues. Many virtues such as justice, courage, and generosity lose their purpose if we lack concern for the others' well-being.

Every society or culture has identified certain human characteristics as being especially praiseworthy and worth cultivating, while also identifying others as vices, which are morally corrupt, contemptible, or otherwise undesirable. Each society or culture has its vision of a good or ideal society. Below, I will discuss the virtue features in Confucianism and demonstrate how the cultivation of virtues helps in fostering people to embrace the Confucian moral vision of building a good and harmonious society.

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Virtue Features in Confucian Ethics

Confucianism is one of the earliest Chinese schools of thought. Over the two thousand years of development, it has gone through significant transformations and is still evolving. It offers a set of standards, including devotion to learning, filial piety, rectitude, and benevolence to others, that help form Chinese political and social life. The attitudes of being benevolent and compassionate to others and the establishment of a harmonious society in which all individuals know their role and cultivate their personal character are key elements in the worldview of Confucius (551-479 BCE), the founder of this school of thought. The moral vision or goal of morality of Confucianism is *tianrenheyi* (harmonious oneness of Heaven and humanity). This goal entails both the realization of the person in the human community and the unity of humanity and Heaven. People who have followed the *dao* (the Way) in themselves are people of *de* (virtuous) or sages.

The Confucian *dao* is the foundation of a harmonious universe, a peaceful society, and a good life, as reflected in a commonwealth state. It pays attention to harmony between human beings in relations, as well as harmony in society and politics, especially the relationship between rulers and common people. *Dao* was manifested in the wisdom of the ancient sage-kings, in the teachings of Confucius, and in the life of moral exemplars. Confucian virtues direct the adherents to actualize the vision of a good life and a good society. Below I will highlight the main virtue features in Confucianism, with its connection to building a good society.

*The Moral Ideal and Exemplars*

Virtue ethics emphasizes the notion of human *telos* or human end, transiting from who we are to who we could be. The human good or *telos* refers to an ideal of human excellence and perfection that best expresses what it would mean for us to fulfill the utmost possibilities of our being as human persons. It provides guidance in acquiring and developing capacities, interests, and habits.

Confucius believed in the perfectibility of all persons. He had trust in the impact of role models as moral exemplars for others to follow. Confucius himself was indeed a moral exemplar of continuous learning, self-reflection, and self-improvement for his students. He reinterpreted the traditional concept of *junzi* (profound person or gentleman) as a moral exemplar. The profound person is one who possesses an ensemble of virtuous behaviors that encompasses, among other things, justice, impartiality, and harmony. The *Analects* portrays the ideal of the *junzi* as realized by persons of genuine substance who are undisturbed by the failure of others to recognize their merits.

In some cases Confucius discussed *junzi* in reference to the ruler. Rulers must be role models for their people. They have to rule with virtue and employ moral suasion. Confucius stressed that a good leader should be a model of

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15 An ideal Confucian society is a *datong* (commonwealth), reflecting egalitarian fraternalism and public-over-private ownership. The disadvantaged in the society, such as widows, orphans, the old without children, the disabled, and the sick are all well taken care of. It was depicted in “Li Yun” of *Li Ji* (*The Book of Rites*), in *Confucius* (trans. S.W. Wong), “Li Yun,” section 9, in *Li Ji*, Book 7, [http://www.taousa.org/classic-texts/6The-World-of-Da-Tong.pdf](http://www.taousa.org/classic-texts/6The-World-of-Da-Tong.pdf).
18 Confucius said that only the most intelligent and the most stupid are not susceptible to change. See Confucius, *The Analects*, 17:3.
personal integrity and take good care of the people, treating them justly. However, in most cases, Confucius used junzi to denote a morally superior person, possessing various excellent qualities. From these qualities, we can see that Confucian ethics stresses that both inner motive and its external results must be taken into account when we evaluate people or their actions. Moral motivations and moral feelings are highly exalted in Confucian ethics.

Mencius took the ultimate self-transformation of the person as the key to the realization of social and political values. His theory of human nature calls our attention to our internal resources for spiritual growth. Learning to be human, in the Mencian perspective, is to refine oneself so that one can become good, true, beautiful, great, sagely, and spiritual. The ideal characters articulated by Confucius and Mencius not only set a goal for people’s moral cultivation, but also underscored the importance of moral education for the society. The Confucians are taught to be good persons as well as persons who can serve in the government.

**The Virtue of Ren (Humanity)**

Many scholars regard ren (humanity) as a central concept in Confucian ethics. It can be considered as a cardinal virtue in Confucianism. To be a virtuous person, one must possess the quality of ren. The virtue of ren has a broad meaning associated with an array of different virtues. According to Confucian scholar Wing-tsit Chan, there are two levels of meanings of ren—a particular virtue that stands for the tender aspect of human feelings and an altruistic concern for others, and the general virtue that is “basic, universal, and the source of all specific virtues.”

As a particular virtue, ren is translated as benevolence, kindness, love, or humanity. This contains the sense of affection and emotion. Mencius says, “All humans have hearts that are not unfeeling toward others. . . . The heart of compassion is the sprout of benevolence.” He used the story of a child about to fall into a well to demonstrate that all have ceyin zhi xin (the heart of compassion). Ren is applicable not only to close personal relationships but to everyone. He claims that everyone has a heart sensitive to the suffering of others and will be moved to compassion by innocent suffering.

Ren as an overarching virtue has many other moral qualities, referring to the moral standard governing one’s entire life, and leading one to be a morally perfect person. It is both the source and a combination of other virtues. Three sayings in The Analects help us to have a deeper understanding of ren: (1) “to master oneself and to return to propriety” (12:1); (2) the Golden Rule—“do not do to others what you do not wish them to do to you” (12:2,

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22 These qualities include “conscious of his own superiority without being contentious,” “does not recommend someone on account of what one says, neither does one dismiss what is said on account of the speaker,” “agrees with others without being an echo,” and “at ease without being arrogant.” Confucius, The Analects, 15:22, 23, 26.
23 Liu, The Unity of Rule and Virtue in Confucianism, 58.
26 Confucius inherited and developed previous usages of ren in the ancient classics but reinterpreted the term in light of his humanistic spirit and promoted it as the highest ideal. It is a central concept in all Confucius’ teachings, the underlying principle and substance, the primary motive of all action and behavior, and the essence of human nature and Heaven. Y ao, Confucianism and Christianity, 70-71.
27 Scholars have translated ren in many other terms, such as love, altruism, kindness, charity, compassion, magnanimity, human-heartedness, humanity, perfect virtue, goodness, and so on. See Chan, “The Evolution of Confucian Concept of Ren,” 295-319.
29 In the Analects, Confucius claims ren is love (12:22); Mencius also emphasizes “ren is to love others” (4B28) or “ren is to love all” (7A46).
30 Mencius, 2A6.
15:23), and (3) “wishing to establish his own character, also establishes the character of others, and wishing to be prominent himself, also helps others to be prominent” (6:30). The above teachings denote not only self-perfection, but also bringing about a perfect society.31

These sayings also contain the meaning of reciprocity, expressed in the Confucian virtues of shu and zhong.32 Shu refers to not doing harm to others whereas zhong refers to doing good to others. The latter connotes positive intention and action. This is an affirmative relation to others. Reciprocity is also a principle of fairness—the renunciation of prerogatives for oneself and the granting of everything one thinks appropriate for oneself to the other. It asks a person to imagine himself or herself in the place of the other on the basis of the actor’s generalized wants.

The Confucian virtue of ren can be extended to the political order, where it is defined as humane government. Those in government should rule with virtue, employing moral persuasion rather than using punishment. Mencius wanted to replace the way of the despot or the way of force with the kingly way, the way of moral power and ruling by ren.33 It was the virtuous kings that had brought to the people physical security, material prosperity, and education. Moreover, leaders should provide an example of personal integrity and selfless devotion to the people, treating the common people justly with respect and kindness. Mencius suggested that “the people come first; the altars of the earth and grain [signifying political authority or the state] come afterwards; the ruler comes last.”34

According to Confucius, the virtue of ren must be informed and structured by li (propriety) that is, informed by one’s knowledge of what is appropriate and proper in a social context expressed through a shared form of ritual and a shared social expression of meanings. Li requires one to take a serious and reverential attitude toward others. The proper spirit behind the observance of li includes attitudes such as respectfulness, attentiveness, and seriousness.

**Methods of Moral Self-Cultivation**

To become morally excellent and acquire the virtue of ren, one has to learn and practice various ways of moral cultivation or character formation. Through moral cultivation, one tries to manifest the original substance of the clear character and the innate knowledge of the good, and to love other people. Thus, from the emperor to the common person, cultivation of the personal life became the basic foundation. According to philosopher Kwong-loi Shun, self-cultivation in Confucianism is the process of shaping one’s own character out of a reflexive concern for the kind of person one is—learning and thinking, constantly reflecting on and examining oneself, setting one’s heart/mind in the proper direction, shaping the person as a whole, and bringing about ethical improvements in oneself under the guidance of the heart/mind. The heart/mind is independent of external control in having the capacity to hold on to the directions it sets.35

Confucius took learning as the first step in gaining moral virtues, which is why he began his lifelong endeavor by setting his mind on learning.36 Learning involves drawing moral lessons from the cultural heritage, which includes such elements as poetry, history, rites, music, and archery, and embodying such lessons in one’s life. Confucius

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31 See Chan, “Chinese and Western Interpretations of Jen (Humanity),” 108.
32 According to Confucius, shu is said to be the key word guiding one’s whole life and the thread running through Confucianism. See Confucius, The Analects, 4:15, 15:3, 24. At other times, both shu and zhong are regarded as Confucius’ doctrine of a pervading unity. Confucius, The Analects 4:15. See also Yao, Confucianism and Christianity, 71.
33 Mencius wanted to convince a ruler to do the right thing—to stop waging wars and exploiting his people, to lower taxes to prepare for bad years, and so on. He urged rulers to follow the path of humanity and righteousness in order to keep and perhaps even enlarge their profits. Mencius, 1A1.
also contends that learning must be accompanied by thinking or reflection. Reflection on what one has learned allows adaptation to one’s present circumstances. Moral self-cultivation is a lifelong process and takes hard work to accomplish. Even though a person has learned and acquired a virtue, one must practice it continuously in order to maintain it and strengthen it. He claims that all people are the same by nature; it is practice that makes people so different.

Self-cultivation is also a comprehensive and unceasing process of internal examination; it suggests a kind of unremitting vigilance. This idea is presented in The Doctrine of the Mean in terms of “self-watchfulness when alone.” In The Great Learning, meditation and inner reflection are employed for cultivation of the personal life, for the purpose of discipline of the self. Being calm has the implication that direction has been set, while tranquility contrasts with activity, and peaceful repose suggests that the mind is at ease. Under such conditions the mind can deliberate clearly.

Moral Guidance and Transformation

Confucians sees meditation and the activities of daily lives as inseparable. The active dimension of practices and the quiet dimension of self-watchfulness and examination complement each other. The strengthening of the emotional/affective element in partnership with practice is important in transforming oneself and motivating one to commit to the common good and solidarity with the vulnerables. Therefore, although Confucian ethics does not offer ready-made answers or concrete solutions to solve contemporary issues, it offers a method of moral cultivation for practicing constantly and persistently, so that we can be transformed and make good judgments and plans regarding various social issues.

Confucian and Catholic Ethics in Dialogue

From the above, we can see the rich virtue features in Confucianism and its other-regarding dimension, with profound persons and sages as moral exemplars, the other-regarding virtue of ren as a cardinal virtue and other related virtues, and the methods of cultivating virtues. Based on the above discussion, below I will discuss the comparable features in Christian virtue ethics. They shed light on how to strengthen the virtue ethics approach in Catholic social teachings, which focuses more on principles than on formation of virtues.

Teleological and Communal in Nature

As stated above, the Confucian moral vision is harmonious oneness of Heaven and humanity. This goal entails both the realization of the person in the human community and the unity of humanity and Heaven. The purpose of moral self-cultivation is to become a person of humanity through self-transformation. An ideal Confucian society is a commonwealth and a harmonious society. This is similar to the Christian vision of achieving the common good.

In Christian virtue ethics, the human telos is communal in nature, and human good is a shared good. A Christian virtue ethic would view true human excellence, the true human good, as involving loving service to God and others and the important virtues are those characteristics that lead towards this goal. Moreover, the notion of

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37 “If one learns from others but does not think, one will be bewildered. If one thinks but does not learn from others, one will be imperiled.” Confucius, The Analects, 2:15.
40 The Doctrine of the Mean, 1.
41 The Great Learning, 2.
justice in the scripture is preoccupied with the needs of those who are poor, weak, disadvantaged, or oppressed. It is focused on helping those in distress and need; it is interested in protecting the powerless and enabling everyone to contribute.\(^43\)

In Thomas Aquinas' idea of goodness, the universe is a web of creatures bound together by relationships of mutual benefit, in which each creature is oriented toward the wider good, that is, toward other creatures and the universe as a whole.\(^44\) The human beings are oriented toward the common good of their community.\(^45\) People cannot be good unless they are well ordered to the common good of the family or state; the common good of the state cannot flourish unless the citizens are virtuous.\(^46\) Thus, for Aquinas, the true human good of the individuals includes their participation in a just community, apart from orientation to their own private good, because the promotion of the well-being of the individual members of the community is intrinsic to the nature of the common good.\(^47\)

Christian virtue ethics' concern for bringing honor to God and seeking the well-being of others assumes that we have or will develop the desire, tendencies, dispositions, and skills necessary to that end. It expects people to acquire the kind of virtues that direct them outward and seek the goodness of others, such as care, empathy, affections, and just and fair-minded dispositions.

*Moral Exemplar*

In Confucian ethics, people learn through role models that are junzi, the sage, and former kings. Rulers have a special role in being virtuous leaders and set good examples for people. Confucian adherents take them as moral exemplars embodying the goal of moral cultivation. They demonstrate the qualities of virtuous persons with the virtue of ren and other specific virtues.

In Christian virtue ethics, Jesus is the most significant moral exemplar for Christians, providing direction for Christian lives through his words and deeds. The Christian notion of discipleship has resonance with the Confucian teaching of modeling one’s life on moral exemplars. Christological images affect one’s concept of discipleship. Richard Gula argues that discipleship is not concerned with reproducing the external aspects of the master’s life and work, but rather the master’s wisdom, dispositions, and spirit that shape our own character so that we will lead the way of life that harmonizes with the master’s. Jesus provides the guiding pattern for our lives, as Jesus said in his final meal to his disciples, “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (John 13:34).\(^48\) Authentic discipleship of Jesus is to take seriously what he took seriously—free and faithful loyalty to God, which showed itself in a life of self-emptying love committed to those most in need of justice and liberation. To do this, Christians have to let go of all forms of self-made securities in order to be secured in divine love.\(^49\)

For William Spohn, the path of discipleship is indicated by the analogical imagination, which has been tutored by the stories of Jesus, and the dispositions of the heart prompted by the person of Jesus Christ. His attitudes take root in our dispositions and emotions: inclusive love, compassionate service, radical trust in God, fidelity, gratitude, gratitude,

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\(^{45}\) The notion of common good is central in Aquinas’ moral thought because for him, as for Aristotle, human beings are intrinsically social beings who can exist and flourish only within the context of a community. See Aquinas, ST, I, 96.4; II–II, 47.10.

\(^{46}\) Aquinas, ST, I–II, 92.1 ad 3.


\(^{49}\) Matt 10:37 (giving up family and its affection); Mark 10:21 (giving up property); Mark 10:43 (giving up ambition); and Mark 10:45 (giving up life itself). Also see Gula, *The Good Life*, 86, 90, 91.
joy, peace, forgiveness, courage, a thirst for justice, nonviolence, freedom from anxiety, dependence on God, and obedience. Christians are not called to replicate the life of Jesus but to imitate it, in different times and distinctive ways, in the spirit of Jesus. Dispositions informed by the story of Jesus prompt appropriately Christian assessments and actions. Discernment tries to spot the resonance between what we are doing and what Jesus did, between who we are becoming and the destiny of Jesus.\textsuperscript{50} It is the capacity to bring the commitment to follow Christ into the stuff of everyday relations and situations, so that we can be creatively responsive to the needs of our day in the ways that harmonize with the way of life that Jesus led.\textsuperscript{51} While meditation nurtures these dispositions, they have to be lived out in order to become deep habits of the heart. Christians led by the Spirit come to resemble the person of Jesus by having his attitudes and dispositions, which will produce a life rich in good works.\textsuperscript{52}

It is true that the intentions (for glorifying God in the case of Christian ethics) and the life situations of the role models in the two traditions vary. However, in both traditions, these role models embody moral excellence and express integrity, manifesting virtues in different circumstances. Both Confucius and Jesus taught their students or followers according to their particular circumstances and personalities, to help students develop their personalities and potentials according to their gifts and stage of development. Jesus is well-known for employing real-life contexts and elements of his environment in his parables for teaching. Confucius (and Mencius) also referred to actual events or circumstances, and taught according to the personalities and qualities of students and interlocutors. In this way, the students, followers, or interlocutors could learn from the wisdom of the masters and re-appropriate what they learned in their own situations.

\textit{Methods of Moral Cultivation}

In Confucian ethics, there are various ways to cultivate virtues, including learning, constant reflection, critical self-examination, assiduous vigilance, and self-watchfulness when alone. From these various methods of moral self-cultivation, we can see the active dimension in practices and quiet dimension in self-examination and reflection. We can also see the dimensions of cognition, emotion, and action in moral cultivation. One uses the intellect to learn the classics. One emphasizes emotion when learning through culture and rites and attending to suffering. One practices virtues in action through practicing in daily life. These different dimensions are complementary to each other in virtue cultivation.

In Christian virtue ethics, methods of moral formation include practicing virtues, biblical meditation, and examination of conscience. These methods of moral cultivation are often neglected in approaching CST. Like Confucian moral cultivation, apart from learning intellectually, Christian virtue ethics emphasizes emotion and practice. Based on Aquinas’ account of virtues, Paul Wadell argues that to become virtuous is a process with the painstaking repetition of the kinds of actions capable of transforming us from people who can be good to people who truly are good.\textsuperscript{53} Practicing social and relational virtues such as compassion and solidarity involves understanding the meanings of the virtues, practicing the virtues consistently with the right intention, and learning and growing in virtue through experientially encountering the suffering ones. Through the experiences of reaching out to other people, particularly the marginalized, and immersing ourselves with others in daily life, we can broaden our

\textsuperscript{50} William Spohn, \textit{Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics} (New York: Continuum, 2000), 150.

\textsuperscript{51} Gula, \textit{The Call to Holiness}, 193-194.

\textsuperscript{52} Spohn, \textit{Go and Do Likewise}, 153. Also see Ronald Rolheiser, \textit{The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality} (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 120.

\textsuperscript{53} Aquinas observed that it is not easy to grow in virtue (ST, I–II, 51.3). He defines three stages to the acquisition of the virtues. There are the virtues of beginners, the virtues of those already on their way, and the virtues of those who have finally arrived (ST, II–II, 24.9). Aquinas’ delineation of the virtuous life into stages assures us that, however difficult, we can make progress in the moral life. We can take on the qualities (such as justice, forbearance, generosity, or compassion) the more we practice these acts. See Paul Wadell, \textit{The Primacy of Love: An Introduction to the Ethics of Thomas Aquinas} (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 118-19.
perspective and social experiences. Reflecting on these experiences in spiritual practices, our vision to see God everywhere can be sharpened.

Spiritual practices in the Catholic tradition, such as meditating on scripture, adoration of the Eucharist, attending liturgy, examination of conscience, and quiet contemplation, can help one to grow in virtue. They have both personal and communal dimensions. They can assist one in cultivating altruistic and relational virtues in which emotion and affection play an important role. With deep commitment, these practices can be effective means of forming dispositions and emotions through broadening our perceptions, emotions, and basic values according to gospel values.54 With James Gustafson, Richard Gula agrees that the Christian stories ought to be the most decisive, the most informing, the most influencing of beliefs and experiences in the lives of Christians.55 For example, praying with the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29–37) and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31), can help us to be open to God, to associate the stories with our everyday relations and situations in relation to our experience of God, and to examine our own attitudes and behavior toward the vulnerable. Spiritual practices in Christian virtue ethics offer significant ways of virtue cultivation and moral formation. They can narrow the gap between spirituality and morality, strengthening the relationship of Christians with God and other people.

**Christians with Social Virtues**

The rich and multivalent concept of the Confucian cardinal virtue of ren (humanity) contains meanings of specific virtues such as love, benevolence, reciprocity, and working toward the good of a society. It is also closely linked to propriety and righteousness. Confucian ren points to an altruistic direction that defines a person's relationships with others, not only within the role-based framework, but also toward other suffering people. With this other-regarding aspect, the virtue of ren is compatible with many Christian social virtues, such as justice and solidarity.

In CST, the principles of justice and solidarity are often employed in advocating justice and peace. However, they can be treated as virtues too. Conceived as a virtue, justice is defined by Aquinas as “the constant and perpetual will to render to each one that which is his right or due.”56 To be just means to owe something and to pay the debt. We owe something to others because our lives are always enmeshed in relationships that carry inescapable moral demands. Applying this sense of justice to our daily life, people of justice are those habitually attuned to the needs of others and characteristically attentive to their well-being. They know how to live in right relationship with God, with friends and family, with co-workers or community members, with anyone he or she may come in contact with, and with the natural world. Such persons see the bonds that connect all of life together and recognize the obligations those bonds create. Thus, we need to learn to live in a way that respects and strengthens those bonds instead of ignoring, denying, or violating them. Justice is relevant to every relationship, to every situation and circumstance of life.57

The virtue of solidarity is closely linked with justice as it teaches us to think beyond our own individual good to the common good. Solidarity makes justice both intelligible and imperative because it recognizes that human life is shared life. It fosters us into persons who are willing to take care of the needs of others, particularly the poor and vulnerables.58 It is a virtue concerned with relationships, interdependence, and mutuality. It engages us in physical works of compassion and consistently brings us face-to-face with suffering people and the systematic causes of

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54 Spohn, Go and Do Likewise, 120-22; Gula, The Call to Holiness, 97.
56 Aquinas, ST, Ia Iae, 58, a.1.
58 Wadell, “Reimagining the World: Justice,” 199.
their suffering. As John Paul II points out, solidarity is a firm and presevering determination to commit oneself to the common good—that is to say to the good of all and of each individual—because we are all really responsible for all. As a moral virtue, solidarity “is not only a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far.” It motivates people at community, national, and international levels to carry out actions in transforming the world in different ways.

People with the virtue of solidarity are those willing to be in the world and live among people, experience the poverty of the poor, be empathetic to the suffering, speak out against injustice, support those who are oppressed, preach freedom to the captives, and so on, just as Jesus did. Solidarity must be practiced between individuals, professions, classes, communities, and nations, as all must be committed to the common good and to overcoming the alienation and injustice that oppress so many people. Solidarity translates into the willingness to give oneself for the good of one’s neighbor, beyond any individual or particular interest.

Specific relational, other-regarding virtues like solidarity and reciprocity can correct some inadequacies of CST. Merciful perception attending to the overlooked particularities of the human condition fosters an organic response to social injustices. Our personal experiences of getting in touch with the suffering people allow us not to be easily misled by the stereotyped images of certain groups in the society. Moreover, the specific virtues offer ways to practice and ways of living that can promote the common good and social justice. Furthermore, the combination of the emotive and rational approaches can motivate and engage the moral agent intellectually and affectively in the face of the plight of the vulnerable.

Conclusion

In this article, I showed that the virtue ethics approach has its other-regarding dimension. Strengthening this approach in CST is an attempt to achieve the vision of CST through moving the hearts of Chinese Christians and engaging them to embrace a more active and comprehensive commitment to social justice in accordance with the social mission of the Church, leading to human flourishing and union with God. It can complement the principle-based approach in CST.

In a Chinese Christian community that values virtuous life, I suggest to integrate the insights of both Confucian and Christian virtue ethics to enrich the CST. Through examining the virtue features in these two traditions, it is found that they share commensurable elements such as the communal nature of human good, the emulation of moral exemplars, the methods of moral cultivation that include both continual practice of certain actions and silent meditation, and many virtues that are relational, although there are differences. Employing virtue ethics to approach CST, it would emphasize both rational and emotive approaches rather than primarily cognitive principles, leading to a more holistic formation. It also offers concrete ways of practice through practicing various virtues. Moreover, it can integrate spirituality and morality, linking personal ethic with social ethic.