

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# The morality of vengeance: Confucianism and Tutuism in dialogue

Luís Cordeiro-Rodrigues<sup>1</sup>  | Ting-mien Lee<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Department of Philosophy, Yuelu Academy, Hunan University, Changsha, China

<sup>2</sup>Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Macau, Taipa, Macao

## Correspondence

Luís Cordeiro-Rodrigues, Department of Philosophy, Yuelu Academy, Hunan University, Changsha, China.

Email: [lccmr1984@gmail.com](mailto:lccmr1984@gmail.com)

Ting-mien Lee, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Macau, Taipa, Macao.

Email: [tingmienlee@um.edu.mo](mailto:tingmienlee@um.edu.mo)

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## Abstract

This paper analyzes two main pro-vengeance Confucian arguments in light of Desmond Tutu's thinking. In the absence of just authority, Confucianism argues that carrying out blood vengeance is fulfillment of filial piety and fulfillment of moral duty for deterring crime and reforming the wrongdoer's character. Confucianism does not propose a systematic theory of blood vengeance after laws have been installed to prohibit act of revenge. As Confucian ethics focuses on virtue cultivation and advocates moral learning over punishment, it may find the Tutuist approach of addressing wrongdoing compatible and complementary. In line with Tutuism, we argue that revenge is not justified because engaging in vengeance fuels negative and obsessive emotions, which undermine virtue and may lead to undesirable results, such as escalation of violence and harming of the innocent. Moreover, we defend that more conditions need to be met than the ones enunciated by the pro-vengeance standpoint to justify an act of revenge.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

The desire for vengeance, or the feeling of righteousness of vengeance, often motivates individual and collective action to the extent that it sometimes results in warfare. The topic of whether revenge is morally justified has attracted much scholarly attention. Nonetheless, the Anglophone philosophical literature has mostly discussed the morality of vengeance from the point-of-view of Western philosophy (Govier, 2011; Murphy, 2005; Uniacke, 2000). Far less attention has been paid to cross-cultural perspectives that include Chinese and African perspectives on vengeance. As the cognitive empire of the Global North is declining and that of the Global South is rising (de

Sousa Santos, 2018), it is timely to consider what different traditions have to say about important moral matters, such as the use of violence. Given that military and other forms of cooperation between China and some African countries have emerged over recent decades, the interchange between Chinese and African philosophy concerning these matters might be particularly worthy of scholarly attention.

This article wishes to fill the gap in the Anglophone philosophical literature discussing Chinese and African ethical perspectives on vengeance. More precisely, we reconstruct two Confucian arguments on the morality of revenge and complement them with Tutuist insights. Some Confucian texts argue that vengeance is morally permissible and sometimes a duty, when there is no just authority to punish and educate the wrongdoer. One of the arguments is that revenge is morally justified when one's parents are wrongfully harmed, as it honors filial piety. Another argument (which, as explained below, is also linked to filial piety) is that revenge is justified because it deters future wrong-doing and would improve the wrongdoer's virtue. To complement Confucianism, we appropriate the tenets of Tutuist philosophy upholding that engaging in revenge fuels negative emotions that undermine one's virtue. Moreover, revenge tends to lead to escalations of violence and harm of the innocents, and thus is hard to be justified. On top of this, not committing revenge does not necessarily imply lack of virtue. Tutuist theory is complementary and compatible with the Confucianism, because the latter places strong emphasis on virtue and moral cultivation. As we will demonstrate in this paper, the Tutuist approach to vengeance does not challenge Confucianism; rather, it is *based on some core values that some Confucians already hold*. Our criticisms are directed only at the implications teased out for vengeance that some fragments from Confucian texts uphold.

This paper has three sections. The first section outlines Confucian pro-vengeance arguments, which occur in the *Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳 (Gongyang commentary), the *Liji* 禮記 (Record of Rites) and the *Lunyu* 論語 (Analects). In the next section, we evaluate these arguments in light of Tutuism and contend that revenge would undermine virtue. The third section responds to possible objections that pro-vengeance Confucians may raise, arguing that our theory is compatible with core Confucian values, better tackling the problem in preventing a variety of negative consequences which brought about by vengeance.

The thesis in this article differs from previous research in three main ways. Firstly, as most comparative philosophy studies focus on comparisons between the East and the West, we compare African and Chinese philosophies. Secondly, previous studies comparing African and Chinese philosophy have focused mostly on moral concepts such as harmony and filial piety, whereas we focus instead on the arguments about the morality of revenge (Bell & Metz, 2011; Li, 2016; Metz, 2014, 2016, 2017). Thirdly, we defend an account that has not yet been defended at length; namely, we uphold that Tutuism and Confucianism are to a great extent compatible and complementary when it comes to the topic of vengeance and to some basic moral values.

To begin with, we wish to clarify the terms “Confucianism,” “vengeance,” “revenge” and “vendetta” used in this article. Regarding “Confucianism,” Western sinologists have debated about its coinage, connotations and its conceptual relationship to the notion of “Ru” 儒 (Jensen, 1997; Standaert, 1999). Not intending to enter the debate, we follow the Chinese convention in applying the notion of “Confucianism” to the canonized classics and their exegeses, and the masters' texts categorized under “Ru.”<sup>1</sup> In brief, by “classical Confucian texts,” we refer to the texts that were reportedly composed in the pre-Han and early Han periods and are classified under the categories “liuyi” 六藝 and “rujia” 儒家 in the bibliographical treatise of the *Hanshu* 漢書 (Book of Han). The texts we focus on include the *Lunyu*, *Liji*, the *Gongyang zhuan* and *Guliang zhuan* 穀梁傳 (Guliang commentary) to the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals), *Zhouli* 周禮 (Rites of Zhou) and

the *Mengzi* 孟子 (Master Meng). In the discussion of Confucian perspective regarding vengeance and retributive war, the *Liji* and the *Gongyang zhuan* are more frequently cited as both advocate blood vengeance; the *Gongyang zhuan* is particularly known for presenting a radical perspective on vengeance.<sup>2</sup> Moderate and nuanced views, however, appear in other Confucian texts.

The terms “vengeance,” “revenge” and “vendetta” sometimes have different connotations. Nevertheless, in this article, we use them interchangeably to refer to act of retaliation, which aims to return a perceived injury, loss, or humiliation. In classical Chinese, the equivalents are “*bao*” 報 (return/pay back), “*fu*” 復 (reply/pay back) or “*fu chou*” 復讎 (revenge). The basic meaning of the word *bao* (also *fu*) is “to pay back,” which is neutral. It can apply to reciprocity whereby one gives the other help and advantages in accordance with how the other treats one. Yet, it can also be used in cases where one injures or harm the other, according to what injures or harms one received from that person. It is in this sense that some occurrences of *bao* (or *fu*) in classical Chinese texts can be rendered as “revenge” or “vengeance.”

Finally, we would like to provide a brief methodological remark. We do not adopt interpretive methodologies that aim to contextualize and restore the historical meaning of the Confucian texts analyzed in this paper. Instead, we follow a school of Anglophone philosophy (including Anglophone Confucianism) that explores the philosophical relevance of these texts to contemporary issues. For example, we do not deny that the *Liji* and the sayings ascribed to Confucius were intended to lay out behavioral guidelines for the elites and ruling classes. We are also aware that some of the Confucian arguments do not apply to individuals but rather to state actors. Because the core of the argument is that one is shameful and not qualified to live, if one does not avenge one’s family; and the actors in the arguments are often ruling classes in a hereditary system. Our goal is not to restore the meaning of the texts as intended by their composers, but to reconstruct arguments based on their generalized statements. The reconstructed arguments may yield philosophical insights beyond the time they were composed.

## 2 | THE CONFUCIAN CASE FOR VENGEANCE

Some Confucian texts advocate and even glorify revenge (Li, 2012, pp. 9–10). Among the texts, the *Gongyang zhuan* is particularly noteworthy for its zealous account of vengeance. The most well-known example is the war launched by the Duke Xiang of Qi 齊襄公 against the state of Ji 紀 in the year 693 BC. The *Chunqiu* narrates the event of the eradication of Ji State as “the Marquis of Ji took ultimate leave from his state” (Miller, 2015, p. 51).<sup>3</sup> According to the *Gongyang zhuan*, the *Chunqiu* uses such an *euphemistic expression*, “took ultimate leave” (*da qu* 大去) to gloss over Duke Xiang’s aggression because it approves the war as an act of avenging the death of Duke Xiang’s ancestor. The *Gongyang zhuan* considers this act permissible because it served an ancestor:

What was worthy about the Duke Xiang? He [was worthy in that he] avenged a wrong. What was the grudge? It was done to a distant ancestor. Duke Ai [of Qi] was boiled alive by the Zhou, because [the then] Marquis of Ji slandered [him]. With regard to the reason that Duke Xiang did this, it is because he [wanted to] exhaust his devotion to the service of his ancestors. (Miller, 2015, p. 51)

By glorifying the war, the *Gongyang zhuan* seems to express zealous advocacy of vengeance. It states:

“As to the ‘distant ancestor,’ at what remove was he?” “Nine generations.” “Is a vengeance at a remove of nine generations still permissible?” “Even at a remove of one hundred generations, [vengeance] is still permissible.” (Miller, 2015, p. 51)

This passage is known for spelling out a theory dubbed as the “Grand Vendetta” (*da fu chou* 大復仇), which advocates vengeance for a wrong done to one’s ancestor of nine or even a hundred generations back (Huang, 2007; Jiang, 1995). The *Gongyang zhuan* also narrates about Wu Zixu’s 伍子胥 story in a positive tone, suggesting that vengeance is permissible (and even honorable) if the mistreatment of one’s direct blood relatives has not been paid back and justice has not yet been ministered. Wu Zixu assisted the state of Wu 吳 in attacking the state of Chu 楚 to avenge his father, who was killed by a former ruler of Chu (Sima, 1985, pp. 2171–2183). This case expresses strong advocacy of blood vengeance because Wu Zixu was once a subject of Chu. Instead of searching for a balance between his obligation to the state of Chu and to his family, Wu Zixu escaped from Chu and instead swore loyalty to the state of Wu for offering him an opportunity to retaliate against his former lord. The *Gongyang zhuan* also considers this vengeance justified: “If the father is wrongfully executed, then it is quite permissible for the son to avenge him; if the father is rightfully executed, and the son chooses to avenge him, then he is starting down the path of endless vengeance and counter-vengeance.” (Miller, 2015, p. 251).

These and other examples in some Confucian texts suggest that vengeance is morally justified and even becomes a duty when one’s parents are harmed (Wang, 2006, p. 44). Yet, why is revenge for one’s parents’ death morally justified? The answer lies in the importance of filial piety (*xiao* 孝) in Confucian ethics. Filial piety is a paramount virtue that can be understood as affection for and inherent inclination to respect and care for one’s parents (Huang, 2017; C. Li, 1997). That Confucian classics frequently discuss about filial piety indicates its important role in Confucian ethics. Nevertheless, as Li Chenyang points out, “one can hardly find a well-formed systematic statement justification among them.” (C. Li, 1997, p. 221). Contemporary scholars of Chinese philosophy have offered various interpretations of Confucian justification of the value of filial piety (Huang, 2017). The dominant one suggests that for Confucians, filial piety is the moral feeling which renders possible the realization of the core Confucian value of *ren* 仁 (often rendered as “benevolence” or “humaneness”). The *Lunyu*, for instance, states that “filial piety and brotherly respect are the root of humaneness” (*Lunyu* 1.2). Likewise, the *Mengzi* hold that *ren* results from filial piety: “the substance of humaneness consists in serving one’s parents, and the substance of righteousness consists in obeying one’s elder brother” (*Mengzi* 4A27). According to the *Mengzi*, filial piety is the feeling that serves as the basis of *ren*: one is *ren* if one also feels compassion toward those who are not one’s family (*Mengzi* 6A6). The Mencian justification for the importance of filial piety is explicitly laid out by Neo-Confucians. For example, Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) asserts “the reason that humans possess love is that love begins from loving one’s parents and relatives; extended to things, there are gradations and classes” (J. Li, 1997, p. 1174) and how “humanity is like the source of water; filial piety is the first flow of the water; loving people is the second flow, and loving things the third” (J. Li, 1997, p. 415). Hence, one of the primary reasons why filial piety is morally worthy is because treating others with care and altruism comes from the root of loving one’s parents. Filial piety is thus the root of practicing humanity and only by practicing it can one cultivate the principle of humanness toward others (J. Li, 1997, 2008).

Taking this on board, one of the Confucian arguments in favor of vengeance is that to not revenge is a failure to practice filial piety and, by failing to practice filial piety, one is failing to abide by the norm of benevolence. In other words, one has a duty to avenge one’s parents and the failure to perform this duty is a failure to practice benevolence. A question that

remains here, is why vengeance, rather than forgiveness, is the right way to fulfill the need for benevolence. The answer lies in the second Confucian argument, which concerns the social functions of revenge.

The second argument is that performing vengeance advances justice in at least two important ways. By inflicting a punishment on the wrongdoer, one deters future wrongs by setting a good societal example of how wrongdoers ought to be treated, therefore, deterring potential wrongdoers from committing wrongs. More importantly, by doing so, one is also proactively helping the wrongdoer to transform and become a better person (Huang, 2013; Lee, 2017; Tiwald, 2017). Regarding deterrence, take the following quote from the “Biaoji” 表記 (Record on Example) chapter of the *Liji*:

The Master said, “If kindness is returned for kindness, the people are encouraged [to be kind]. If enmity is returned for enmity, the people are warned [to refrain from harming others]. It is said in the Book of Odes that, ‘Every word finds its response; every deed has its recompense.’” (Wang, 2006, p. 848)

According to the “Biaoji,” people are deterred from harming others if they can clearly see that they will have to pay for every injury they have ever done to others. In this regard, vengeance is beneficial to society because a lack of revenge serves wrongdoers and those who are capable of injuring others in meeting their own goals. In brief, the absence of vengeance would risk licensing people to act willfully. Thus, according to this argument, choosing to not revenge is choosing to compromise justice and thus would impair the societal good. If perpetrators realize they can get away with their wrong actions, they have an incentive to continue wrongdoing and this will lead to collapse of social order and justice. For this reason, those who are wronged have a moral obligation to avoid this collapse of justice, even if it might imply sacrificing their own daily comforts and pleasures in their pursuit of vengeance. This is especially so with regard to cases in which one’s parents have been murdered; for the unjust killing of one’s parents is one of the worst injustices that can be committed and, therefore, will incur higher negative effects on society if not revenged. The *Liji*, therefore, suggests that if a stranger inflicted a harm upon you, it is permissible that you pay him back the same amount of harm that he did to you. This *does not necessarily* mean that revenge is only restricted to situations where one’s parents are harmed, although the Confucian examples are primarily about filial piety.

With respect to punishment’s function of improving the moral quality of a wrongdoer, Huang Yong (2013) attribute the idea to *Lunyu* 13.18, which states that one should recompense injury with uprightness (*zhi* 直), and recompense kindness with kindness. According to Huang, the *Lunyu* says “repay injury with uprightness” rather than “repay injury with injury” because for Confucius, paying back is not a means to vent one’s emotions or avenge a grudge; instead, it is an advanced moral obligation. To meet this more demanding moral standard, one will not repay injury with kindness because one wishes to help the wrongdoer become a better person. Paying back is a higher moral deed than forgiving or repaying in a good turn because it prioritizes the internal well-being of the wrongdoer over his external well-being. By paying back, one could transform the wrongdoer internally by trying to make the wrongdoer cease to be immoral (Huang, 2013).

The aforementioned pro-vengeance arguments seem to suggest that Confucianism generally advocates revenge. Yet, it should be noted the arguments are reconstructed mainly on the basis of some *Liji* and *Gongyang zhuan* fragments. As *Chunqiu* scholars have pointed out, the *Gongyang* tradition displays a more explicit pro-vengeance view; the *Zuo zhuan* tends to downplay war of revenge in its narratives about retributive wars, while the *Guliang zhuan* emphasizes

the restrictions on justified revenge. This brings us to a more nuanced account on Confucianism's take on vengeance.

The pro-vengeance argument does not mean that for Confucianism, an act of revenge is justified so long as it is supported by the arguments. It is not that revenge is permissible if it fulfills the obligations of filial piety and can administer justice and help improve the moral quality of the wrongdoer. There are also restrictions that regulate act of revenge. These restrictions are key to the discrepancy between the *Gongyang zhuan*, *Zuo zhuan*, and *Guliang zhuan* in terms of their evaluative judgment of historical events of revenge. The latter two do not seem to support the cases as vehemently as the *Gongyang zhuan* because they think the cases do not account for the restrictions. Yet, the *Gongyang zhuan* thinks they meet the restriction requirements. The four main restrictions are as follows.

First, revenge is only justified in situations of lack of institutionalized justice enforcement. That is, if there is no system of justice that has the authority and capacity to punish wrongdoers for their actions. For example, the *Gongyang zhuan* considers the Duke of Xiang's revenge war permissible because there was no authority to enforce justice:

Assuming there were an enlightened Son of Heaven, would the Duke of Xiang have been able to act as he did? The answer is no. How, then, are his actions justified? With no Son of Heaven above or leader of states ruling below, one is subject only to the pleasure and pain of his ancestors. (Miller, 2015, p. 52)

Second, as a main argument for vengeance is to pursue justice and the public good, if by conducting an act of revenge one would violate one's social duty, one's vengeance would not be justified. Wu Zixu's blood vengeance, as we have seen above, is approved by the *Gongyang zhuan*. This is not only because it was a case of blood vengeance but also because Wu Zixu adhered to the norm of being loyal to his lord, that is, he did not enact revenge when he found that it violated the duties toward the state and principles a state ruler should abide by. As he commented:

Feudal lords do not raise armies for common folk. What's more, I've heard that serving the ruler of a state is the same as serving one's own father. Now that I am going to serve Your Majesty, it would be a violation of the principle, if I undertook it only to avenge my father. I will not be party to it. (Miller, 2015, p. 251)<sup>4</sup>

To take both moral duties, the duty to revenge and the duty to serve the state, into account, Wu Zixu waited until he could assist the state of Wu to invade Chu on righteous grounds. According to the *Gongyang zhuan*, Wu Zixu's blood vengeance is permissible, not only because he did not neglect other moral norms but also because his father did not deserve to die. The third restriction on revenge is that a son can justifiably avenge his father only when the harm done to the father is intentional and unjust (especially when it involves killing), that is, he cannot enact revenge if his father is executed on justified grounds. As we have mentioned above, Wu Zixu was once a subject of Chu. It seems then, that his escaping from Chu, and taking part in a war against Chu violates the principle of loyalty. However, as stated in the *Gongyang zhuan*, "if the father is wrongfully executed, then it is quite permissible for the son to avenge him" (Miller, 2015, p. 251).

Fourth, one's payback should be directed to the wrongdoer only. "Despising evil should stop with the evil-doer himself" (Miller, 2015, p. 232). Thus, one's vengeance would not be permissible if one inflicts harms on the innocent in carrying out vengeance. To convince the reader that Duke

Xiang's vengeance is admirable, the *Gongyang zhuan* compliments his mercy to the innocent: for example, he interred Boji of Ji 紀伯姬.

Her state was destroyed, so she was buried alone in Qi.<sup>5</sup> But it was a vengeance, so why [would the ruler of Qi] bury her? [Because the ruler of Qi] destroyed what it is permissible to destroy, and he buried what it is permissible to bury. (Miller, 2015, p. 52)

According to this statement, for a justified cause, the Duke Xiang, made the Marquis of Ji “take ultimate leave” and destroyed the state of Ji. He thus made it impossible for Boji to be buried with her husband in Ji. Duke Xiang then arranged for her to be interred in the state of Qi. This deed, according to the *Gongyang zhuan*, shows that the duke did not violate the norm of restricting the act of revenge.

### 3 | CYCLES OF REVENGE AND FORGIVENESS

In this section, we develop an argument that is more cautious to restrictions of revenge, offering an account inspired by Desmond Tutu's philosophy, whereby vengeance is harmful and there is a better way to tackle injustice (Tutu, 2000; Tutu & Tutu, 2015). Further, we uphold that this view is compatible with some Confucian values. Tutu endorses the value of *Ubuntu*; a Bantu word that can best be translated as “a human being is a human being because of other human beings” (Metz, 2014). According to this perspective, individuals are inextricably connected with each other and one's identity is not dissociated, but instead in continuum with the identity of others. In the Tutuist model (manifested in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission) the ‘I’ and the ‘We’ are only artificially separated (Doxtader, 2002; Villa-Vicencio, 2002). This idea is best expressed through the explanation of the meaning of the African art motif, the Siamese Crocodile—a crocodile with two heads and a shared stomach. Because of the shared stomach, whatever one head eats affects the other. Thus, the well-being of one influences the well-being of the other, and the best way to promote one's own well-being is to also promote the well-being of others, as the common and individual good tend to be connected (Gyekye, 2011). From Tutu's point of view, this means to cultivate virtues and positive emotions in oneself to form one's character (Tutu, 2000). That is, for one to achieve well-being one needs to cultivate a disposition to notice, value, feel, choose, and act in certain ways. To possess a virtue is to have a certain complex mindset that makes an individual feel, make decisions, and act in the right way. With practice, this disposition becomes relatively stable. Virtue is acquired through consistently performing an action that makes an individual interiorize the virtue. For Tutu, this is closely connected with having the right emotions; it is emotions that dispose individuals to act in certain ways. Hence, we need to look for forms of behavior that create habitual positive emotions. Behavior and emotions mutually influence each other, therefore, by acting rightly one builds positive emotions and vice versa. Likewise, negative emotions and bad actions reinforce each other (Tutu & Tutu, 2015).

Based on this theory, Tutu has suggested that forgiveness and healing rather than vengeance are the right acts when faced with a wrongdoer. As one of the main architects of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Tutu applied this theory to addressing the crimes of the Apartheid regime. The model aims at being one which can turn an evil into a good through a transformative deliberative process where individuals who are alienated to believe that they are simply an ‘I’ come to realize that they are a ‘We’ (Gitay, 2002; Villa-Vicencio, 2002). Tutu's process of

forgiveness contains four steps: Telling the Story, Naming the Hurt, Granting Forgiveness, and Renewing or Releasing the Relationship. To tell the story and to name the hurt consists of the victim or the significant other describing the facts of what happened during the wrongdoing. More specifically, this process involves describing it to whom, who, and why the wrong was committed (Tutu, 2000; Tutu & Tutu, 2015). The process is, therefore, one that requires full disclosure of grievances, feelings, emotions, behavior and so forth. This process of full disclosure involves a story-telling approach, handing in oneself totally to the process and accepting to make oneself vulnerable. The process is, therefore, not cost-free and not easy, but this process is what can turn evil into good (Binsbergen, 2002; Doxtader, 2002; Lollini, 2002; Villa-Vicencio, 2002). According to Tutu, verbalization of pain is self-healing. When one communicates the pain, names the hurt and the aggressors, one releases the negative emotions that otherwise would be stuck inside. These emotions, if not externalized, create various negative effects. Particularly, such negative emotions not only cause individuals physical (e.g., emotionally related diseases) and psychological (e.g., self-loathing) suffering, but also bar individuals from pursuing their goals and relating positively as they are consumed by negative emotions, such as anger. Additionally, Tutu considers that this verbalization of a wrong helps better understand the wrong and thereby avoid future wrongs. The third step is to forgive the wrongdoer, which allows individuals to then achieve the fourth step, which is to release or renew the relationship. Tutu is critical of models that accept communion without friendship. Instead, he wishes to challenge the Manichean dualistic opposition between friends and enemies and put forward a model which does not have winners and losers by building friendship among those who feel antagonism toward each other (Lollini, 2002; Villa-Vicencio, 2002).

Two kinds of cycles Tutu mentions explain why one needs to forgive to heal: the Revenge Cycle and the Forgiveness Cycle. The Revenge Cycle refers to the state of affairs when individuals keep holding onto feelings of anger, hostility, and resentment. According to Tutu, this cycle is destructive to the extent that individuals never feel satisfied with what they achieve, and they will always want more. In the case of vengeance, Tutu argues, those trying to revenge will never feel they have done enough. During the Revenge Cycle, the victim is always dependent on the aggressor, in the sense that the victims' actions are constantly directed by what the aggressor has done or does. This cycle does not renew relationships and indeed fails to break negative cycles.

In contrast, in the Forgiveness Cycle, one breaks with the destructive cycle. By forgiving, Tutu does not mean to forget; what he means is to stop feeling anger and resentment and accept that wrong has been done. When one forgives, Tutu contends, one becomes independent of the aggressors and is no longer tied to them. By forgiving, individuals take back their control of fate and feeling and thus construct a future, something which they were previously unable to do due when driven by negative emotions. This stage of forgiveness, in other words, helps individuals to construct positive emotions which, for Tutu, are closely related to well-being. That is why Tutu's book title is "*No Future Without Forgiveness.*" Without forgiveness, one grows negative emotions that keep one stuck in the past without being able to free oneself and build a future. This is a renewal of a relationship not just with the aggressor (by becoming dependent) but also with oneself (allowing oneself to develop inner peace) (Tutu, 2000; Tutu & Tutu, 2015). The benefit of forgiving is not just personal; it is instrumentally important for the sake of justice. If one's actions are dependent on whether one is virtuous or not, and virtue is dependent on positive emotions, a future where one can build a good society and relate in an ethical way to others is the one where one has positive emotions; these require one to not engage in acts, such as vengeance, that reinforce negative emotions. Just like the crocodile, if one has negative emotions it will affect others. By engaging in acts that reinforce feelings of



anger a person is constructing virtues which undermine one's capacity to positively relate and act in ethical ways; thus, to engage in vengeance not only brings harsh costs to oneself but also negatively impacts on the rest of society.

Tutu's prescriptions are not just for victim but also for wrongdoer. Wrongdoers are generally vicious individuals. For them, the process of healing consists of removing vice and gaining virtue. For this process to go through, the wrongdoer has to verbalize the wrongs that he did and by verbalizing them should eventually realize the wrongness, repent and apologize. The act of verbalization forces the aggressor to think and this has a healing effect. Given that emotions and behavior are inextricably connected, the wrongdoer is a vicious individual, filled with negative emotions but through the act of verbalizing, repenting and apologizing, the wrongdoer steps in a circle of positive emotions and behavior which cultivate virtue in her/him. Again, Tutu wishes to provide a perspective of the wrongdoer as someone who lost his/her humanity and who is not diametrical opposed to the victim but in a continuous of negative cycles that reinforce each other's status (Garver, 2002; Lollini, 2002).

Although his theory rejects revenge, Tutu does not always oppose punishment. Indeed, punishment may be particularly required in cases where the aggressor has been dehumanized to a point beyond which he cannot be rehabilitated and thus poses a threat to others in society (Tutu, 2000; Tutu & Tutu, 2014). Yet this does not allow for revenge because, contrasting with legal punishment, revenge can emerge as uncontrolled and emotional, potentially leading to random violence. The difference between punishment and revenge is that the former is carried out by a third party, who can stay emotionally detached from the wrong committed. Emotional detachment is crucial because just retribution requires a certain degree of epistemological certainty in order to assess the wrongness of the wrong committed. It demands we determine what evidence, due process, legal authority (by a judge, a group of judges or a jury) and intervention of various parties (lawyers, witnesses and experts) are required to scrutinize the truth and mitigate the likelihood of random violence (Satne, 2016).

#### 4 | POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS FROM CONFUCIAN ADVOCATES OF VENGEANCE

In this section, we address some possible Confucian objections to the approach of forgiveness. One possible line of objection is that this approach reflects one's weakness and lack of virtue. The "Biaoji" chapter of the *Liji*, for example, suggests that forgiveness is simply a way for the weak to justify their weaknesses of not enacting revenge and prioritizing their own comfort. "Returning kindness for injury, this is nothing but kindness for one's own well-being," as it states (Wang, 2006, p. 848). Forgiveness, therefore, might be an excuse one allows oneself to justify one's incapability and unwillingness to do the right thing and, thereby romanticizing weakness as a strength. Hence, when one is forgiving one is not acting morally; rather the absence of revenge is a selfish behavior, undertaken for the purpose of furthering one's own comfort and escaping one's duties.

A second line of objection is that we exaggerate the negative aspects of revenge when we characterize it as uncontrolled, obsessive, and emotional. Confucian texts do not tend to describe or understand revenge as an emotional and uncontrolled act. As we have seen from the fragments quoted above, their narrations of revenge barely contain terms referring to emotions, rather, they see revenge as a pursuit of justice (Lee, 2017). Hence, revenge is not necessarily violent and uncontrolled.

A third possible objection is that having feelings of peace and forgiveness toward wrongdoers is morally wrong. Negative emotions are necessary because they underlie our sense of justice and are fundamental for morality. It is those negative emotions that provide individuals with moral insights about moral wrongness (Murphy, 2005; Tiwald, 2017). For example, it is individuals' "sense of shame" (*chi* 耻) that allows them to identify their moral flaws (Tiwald, 2017). This explains why the *Gongyang zhuan* invokes the notion of *chi* (shame) to justify the revenge war launched by Duke Xiang. A truly virtuous person should have the appropriate feelings, so a person who does not feel negative emotions in the face of injustice has the wrong sense of justice.

A final possible objection that can be raised against our view is that asking to not enact revenge but to forgive instead is unreasonable or even impossible and, therefore, not a morally binding prescription. A moral obligation exists only when it is reasonably possible for individuals to perform it. As it is extremely demanding to abstain from vengeance and even more difficult to forgive, because of our attachments to family, then it is unreasonable to prescribe that individuals do not avenge their family, let alone forgive wrongdoers. In particular, the *Lunyu* considers that following the principle of *zhi* (uprightness) means you will not repay injury with a good turn, nor will you support the retaliation of your father's wrongdoing. This is seen in Confucius' objection to the Duke of She's applying "zhi" to a son who testified that his father stole a sheep (*Lunyu* 13.18). Confucius would not consider this as evidence of the quality of being straightforward/upright (Huang, 2017). Instead, a straightforward person would not disclose his father's wrongdoing at all. Generally, in the *Lunyu*, Confucius contends that family is at the center of all moral development and because of that and because we develop special relationships with family members, then one has a significant attachment to family (Csikszentmihalyi, 2020). One of the ideas Confucius is implying is that given the high burden that disclosing the wrongdoing of one's own father would imply, then one has no moral obligation to disclose it. Hence, the argument is that there is a need for some degree of psychological realism when prescribing moral norms, and that the forgiveness prescription is not realistic (Huang, 2017).

Similarly, the prevailing socio-cultural circumstances may make it costly or impossible to do things otherwise. Daniel Bell, for example, argues that Confucian-driven political systems are morally justified according to specific contexts; this is because socio-cultural conditions entail that other forms of governance would not likely function as well as the one currently existing (Bell, 2016). If this view is correct, moral justification is linked to the context of a certain culture: what is reasonable and moral may vary with context. In particular, one of the reasons for this has to do with the importance of acting according to one's conscious understanding of what is right and what is wrong; one of the most difficult things for individuals to do is to act against their consciousness and to do what they consider to be morally wrong (which is significantly conditioned by culture) (Kukathas, 2007). Resultantly, asking individuals from a Confucian culture to ignore the prescriptions of vengeance prescribed by a Confucian culture exerts a high burden on individuals because it would demand them to act against their consciousness.

With respect to the argument that revenge reflects weakness, note that revenge is often connected with problem of escalation, lack of control, negativity and other forms of behavior that tend to be harmful for oneself and others. That is, revenge is often associated with the weakness or vice of lacking control of one's behavior or capability of managing emotions. Managing one's emotions and controlling negative dispositions are also viewed as sages' enterprises in both the *Liji* and *Lunyu*. The *Liji* says that fear, anger, and hatred are emotions that men are born with, so to achieve peace and order, a sage endeavors to cultivate people's emotions with the use of rituals (Wang, 2006, p. 376). The *Lunyu* too approves of ending the cycle of hatred. "Boyi and Shuqi never bore old grievances in mind, and hence the resentments directed towards them were few"

(*Lunyu* 5.23). Therefore, the burden of proof lies with those Confucians who defend vengeance to show that this lack of control should be identified with strength rather than weakness. Indeed, current research suggests that, in fact, these strategies of freeing oneself from negative emotions do exert a positive impact on psychological and physical health; the act of forgiveness, in contrast to resentment, anger and other negative emotions, promotes well-being (Pinker, 2011). Furthermore, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission can hardly be understood as an act of the weak; it was carried out after the ending of Apartheid, when the African National Congress was in power, had substantial international support and forgiveness it upheld was not carried out by individuals who had previously engaged in physical violence.

Moreover, it is not necessarily the case that not carrying out revenge reflects a lack of virtue; this is because the person not revenging may be motivated by other justice considerations that render vengeance unjustified. Vengeance requires a strong moral justification because as an act of deprivation and harm which is inflicted on someone else, it involves an interference in negative freedoms; often philosophers consider that such a violation requires a strong justification because it interferes with the most basic rights and freedoms individuals are understood to have (e.g., the right to life and movement) (Moore, 2010). The *Mengzi* also contends that even for justified military acts, harm should be carried out with caution and a high degree of certainty (*Mengzi* 2B18). As such, in order for an act of revenge to be morally justified requires that the person who is committing the act should know *with reasonable certainty* what punishment the guilty deserves and that it is a *last resort measure* when no other means are available to pursue justice (Moore, 2010). This squares with Confucian pro-vengeance arguments, which stress the condition of the absence of just authority to enforce justice. If the individual is unsure or if there are other means available, then revenge is not justified; therefore, one's actions may not be motivated by lack of virtue but by the right consideration of other factors of justice.

The argument that vengeance can in theory be carried out in a peaceful manner underestimates how in reality circumstances are often non-ideal and acts of revenge tend to lead to further retaliation, resulting in spirals of wrongdoing. Take the case of ethnic tensions in the Balkans. Between 1998 and 1999, Serbs in Kosovo sought revenge against Muslims for centuries of oppression, particularly events that occurred in 1389. NATO intervened to defend the Serbs and, resultantly, the Muslim exiled individuals returned. These returned exiles then sought revenge against the Serbs. This subsequently created further tension in various Balkan countries, leading to a spiral of revenge (Govier, 2011). The reason why revenge is linked with more violence is that individuals tend to consider the harm they inflict to be justified and forgettable whereas the harm they suffer to be unfair. Individuals fail to understand that our own acts may inspire hatred or be harmful. Moreover, it is likely that people seeking revenge may make mistakes about the identity and motives of the perceived wrongdoers and direct violence to the wrong person, or direct it disproportionately (Govier, 2011; Minow, 2001).

The pro-vengeance viewpoint also miscalculates the real victims of revenge. In reality, revenge is often not directed only at the wrongdoer. One's actions contain externalities and may affect others (Pinker, 2011). For example, by avenging one's father, it is likely one will neglect time that could be spent educating one's own child. So, although the child is not the target of revenge, the act has an externality that impacts on him/her. What usually happens, as the case of the Balkans above shows, is that the emotion of vindictiveness and a sense of victimization are cultivated, with things getting out of control. This will either impact inadvertently on others or purposefully be inflicted on those people who had nothing to do with the actual wrongdoing (Govier, 2011). This problem is also recognized in the Confucian classics. Both the *Gongyang* and *Guliang* agree that blood vengeance is morally approvable if certain justifications and conditions are met. What

renders the *Guliang* commentary appear to be set against *Gongyang* tradition, however, is that from the *Guliang* point of view, the wars (if not all wars) could hardly fall under the category of justified revenge because they injured the innocent. Consider also the case of Duke Xiang, who orchestrated a war in order to avenge an ancestor. Even if it is the case, as the *Gongyang* says, that there was no political authority to address injustice, the then Ji ruler and subjects were no longer the same people. Therefore, as some *Guliang* scholars point out, the *Guliang* asserts that the worthy is not Duke Xiang but rather the Marquis of Ji. The expression that the marquis “took ultimate leave” echoes Mengzi’s narratives about King Tai of Zhou (*Mengzi* 1B14). It implicitly suggests that the Marquis of Ji was as benevolent as King Tai, who did not ask his people to fight a defensive war against the Di invasion; instead, he left Bin, giving away his territory and power (Li, 2017). The identity of the revenged agent is blurry when it comes to war, not to mention avenging a state ruler’s ancestor. Being aware of the possibility of the escalation of violence, *Guliang zhuan* prescribes that revenge ought to be directed only to the wrongdoer. This view is clearly in conflict with the *Gongyang* perspective, which considers that future generations have a duty to correct injustice. Here, the future generations who will suffer the payback are unlikely to have played any role in the initial wrong committed (Li, 2017).

The contrast between the idealistic picture of revenge and a non-idealistic one is not trivial. As Charles Mills has pointed out, when applying ethics using only abstract and idealistic concepts without paying attention to the actual social circumstances of society, one is also ‘abstracting away from realities crucial to our comprehension of the actual workings of injustice in human interactions and social institutions’ (Mills, 2005, p. 170); consequently, one is not only failing to contribute to the achievement of justice. In fact, this abstraction becomes deeply antithetical to the purposes of theoretical ethics (e.g., in providing a framework for guiding one’s actions and making individuals and the world more ethical) (Mills, 2005).

Regarding the argument that negative emotions are the adequate response to moral wrongness, it is important to first to distinguish between the reaction one individual may have to a certain wrong and how one can become controlled by that emotion. Tutu does not reject the idea that individuals ought to feel sad, angry, ashamed and so forth when confronted with moral wrongness or one’s own flaws. In fact, the process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was one where those involved did experience various emotional stages and Tutu does think these stages are necessary. Tutu’s point instead is that one ought not to be controlled by these emotions but should instead learn how to transform them. If persistent, these negative emotions become damaging to the self and the other. Revenge which is fueled by such emotions tends to become an obsession which brings harm to oneself and others (Govier, 2011). Specifically, revenge requires that one disables empathy toward the other and, by doing so, it contributes to incapacitating individuals from acting virtuously, as virtue requires that one is able to perceive wrongness and act in the right way and at the right time in relation to it. In other words, to the extent that virtues are acquired through doing akin activities, one loses the capacity for empathy by engaging in acts that are violent. As recent studies on brain research suggest, engaging in acts similar to revenge disable empathy in the brain (Singer et al., 2006). This suggests that the individual will thus not be able to act virtuously because empathic emotions are necessary for one to do so. To look at harming the other, as in vengeance, is to cultivate and induce one’s willingness to harm. These correlate with the *Mengzi* insight whereby one can cultivate virtue, even by developing his empathy with an ox (*Mengzi* 1A7).

With regard to the objection about the absence of moral obligation, one reply to the argument implies that agents can indeed forgive, and this is demonstrated by some examples of individuals who forgave their aggressors during and after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearing.

But if the objection is that not revenging and forgiving is possible but remains a significant burden to the victims, then the answer needs to be a different one. Firstly, it is important to point out that we do not argue that there is a moral obligation to not revenge and to forgive. With regard to vengeance, our argument is that the case for it requires a strong justification, which the aforementioned rationales lack; that is, the onus of the proof is on the pro-vengeance side because it is an act that involves substantial harm to another and potentially more persons. So far, pro-vengeance Confucian scholars fail to provide such proof (Jiang, 1995, p. 262). With respect to forgiveness, we contend that this is beneficial over vengeance, but we do not contend that individuals *have to* perform it. In both cases, however, the fact that the cost of not revenging and forgiving is high does not mean that it should not be performed. Ethics may sometimes demand difficult things, but these still need to be done. It may be costly and difficult for someone with homicidal instincts to not go on a killing spree, but that does not make the killing spree morally acceptable. The criteria for deciding whether there is a moral obligation ought to be if it is possible to perform it and if there is a good justification that includes this obligation. Moreover, this objection can also be applied to the pro-vengeance Confucians to the extent that it demands too much from the revenger and, to that extent is very costly. Revenge tends to be an act that requires sacrificing one's time and resources, as well as making a psychological investment in it, which can all be expensive. In fact, for some Confucians, revenge is considered an obligation that could even require suicide. Imagine, for example, the only option for revenging one's parents is to make the wrongdoer fall in love with the avenger and, then, the avenger committing suicide herself to make the wrongdoer suffer. The pro-vengeance view seems to imply that this is a moral obligation in terms of blood vengeance, which is clearly excessively demanding.

Regarding the point about the importance of acting according to conscious argument, the view we defend here is not antithetical to Confucianism. We have mentioned various times and quoted some fragments to show that at least some Confucians would agree with the argument we are making. More importantly, we think that Tutuism and Confucianism share some core values which render these views compatible and complementary. Firstly, Confucius emphasizes the importance of ritual (*li* 禮) for virtue cultivation, contending that virtue tends to be acquired with age due to precisely this sense of repetition; likewise, Tutu's view considers that repetition is important as Africans generally consider that elders tend to be more virtuous because of their wealth of experience. Moreover, both Confucians and Tutuists consider that positive relationships with family are key for learning these virtues. Finally, just like Tutu, Confucianism emphasizes the importance of interiorizing the right norms and is often reluctant to prescribe punishment. Punishment also tends to be a less preferred approach for Confucius himself who instead prioritizes moral cultivation (Walker, 2019).

Thirdly, the link between emotions and virtue is also present in Confucian thought, as suggested by above quote from the *Liji*. Fourthly, Confucians and Tutuists agree that the right way to deal with a wrongdoer is to rehabilitate her/him by making him/her more virtuous. Fifthly, as Huang points out, Confucius' prescription on how to repay injury is general enough to not exclude forgiveness. What matters to Confucius is that the action is truly conducive to allowing a moral example and making the wrongdoer become virtuous; if vengeance fails to do this and forgiveness is successful in carrying out this task, then Confucius would be unlikely to be opposed to it (Huang, 2013). As Confucius states, "that we approve people when they become better does not mean we will approve them when they become worse. Why must you be so severe? When a person purifies himself and becomes better, we approve his purification, although we cannot change his past" (*Lunyu* 7.29). Moreover, Confucius does occasionally demonstrate some skepticism regarding the effectiveness of punishment (*Lunyu* 2.3). Thus, it is reasonable to interpret

Confucianism as saying that to address injury is to treat individuals morally and that treating individuals morally does not necessarily entail vengeance.

But do these similarities render Tutuism redundant for Confucianism because the latter has the resources to lead to these conclusions? To answer this question, it is important to understand further the complexity of the morality of vengeance in Confucianism. To understand why Confucianism tends to understand vengeance as morally justified it is crucial to also understand how the concepts of filial piety, benevolence, and justice have been articulated with other concepts. In other words, these pro-vengeance arguments result from framing filial piety, benevolence, and justice in a conceptual scheme influenced by a specific cultural setting where certain ideas persist over others.

Confucian harmony is not sameness but instead a combination of differentiated elements which are, in fact, opposing forces in tension but which are integrated in a balanced way. Confucian harmony, therefore, admits a constant tension between the elements, but when in harmony, they tolerate each other (Li, 2016). This harmony is also highly hierarchical.<sup>6</sup> Crucial to it is the respect for the *ranking of positions* and *the standard* is to have a *superior element* in the relationship who supposedly acts on the interest of the inferior one (Metz, 2017). Parents, for example, always have a say about their children's affairs. Thus, it is essential to these relationships that there is a hierarchy (Wang, 2011). In fact, as Michael Bond contends, those who follow the Confucian tradition tend to believe "in the naturalness, necessity and inevitability of hierarchy. It is self-evident to Chinese that all men are born unequal" (Bond, 1992, p. 118). Due to this hierarchy, less importance is given to sharing emotions, dialog, storytelling, but more on rituals and respect for superiors. As Confucius suggests in the following passage of the *Analec*s:

When your parents are alive, serve them in accordance with rites; when they pass away, bury them in accordance with the rites and sacrifice them in accordance with the rites. (*Lunyu* 2.5)

What Confucius advises that in these this passage is not just about doing the right thing, but doing the right thing in *the right way*. Furthermore, the superior element can listen to good advice, but ultimately does not necessarily need to consult others or pay attention to the emotions shared by others because he/she is supposedly, or expected to be, the most virtuous and can find an answer by his own reflection.

The concept of harmony plays a fundamental role to comprehend the idea of benevolence. In Confucian thought, benevolence and harmony 'complement one another' (Li, 2014, p. 20) and, thereby, a life of harmony is one that is lived beneficently. More precisely, a person would only live according to benevolence if she took her relationships in harmonious ways, i.e., respecting hierarchies and roles that she may have. Clearly, one of the most fundamental aspects is, as we explained above, filial piety, which entails living harmoniously in the family, i.e., respecting hierarchies (Metz, 2017).

How can this Tutuist conceptual framework inform the arguments on vengeance? It is important to answer this question by pointing out what the rationale underlying the aforementioned Confucian pro-vengeance arguments is. Firstly, underlying the arguments that vengeance over 100 generations is justified when parents are harmed, and that having feelings of peace is an impossible/unreasonable and inappropriate response to harm is the idea to be engaged in a cycle of enmity and tension is morally acceptable, to the extent that hierarchies are respected. That is, underlying these arguments is the idea that living in a tense harmony is acceptable to the extent that there is nothing wrong of acting in ways—such as

vengeful ways—that lead to living without friendship, i.e., in a tense harmony. Note that the Confucian pro-vengeance arguments admit as an acceptable outcome a continuation of a tension, which entails a dualistic worldview of ‘winner’ and ‘loser’. Particularly, in the case of the vengeance for over 100 generations, this is self-evidently present because the argument does not or seek a peaceful state of affairs and instead accepts as the normal outcome a perpetual war. Similarly, for the inner feelings arguments this Confucian view does not consider the possibility of friendship, but instead it renders as an inevitable outcome the harmonious tension or antagonism.

Secondly, the Gongyang argument exaggerates the glory of vengeance, it focuses on highly politicized cases, and cases where the actors involved are state rulers. Even though the ones on superior positions ought to act in ways that promote the welfare of the ones in inferior positions, there is a clear elitism or ranking of moral status in some Confucian thought which entails a higher moral consideration to the ones in a superior position. Underlying the argument about exaggeration are assumptions about who's wellbeing's matters; such as whether it matters if a peasant gets harmed by an inter-state war. In the *Gongyang* perspective on vengeance, what underlies moral considerations is the ‘one body (*yi ti* 一體) thesis, that is, the state and the state ruler are unified, and so do the present and past state rulers.’ (Lee, 2021, p. 72).

The argument that forgiveness is an excuse of the weak likewise presupposes a hierarchy. In a thought pattern which because the superior knows best because of his virtue and ought to be followed, then the kind of Tutuist forgiveness which involves dialog, storytelling, sharing emotions is less relevant. In other words, the logic that listening to others and going through a process of understanding and forgiving is a sign of weakness is the reflection of an elitist and supposedly meritocratic viewpoint that understands that someone in a superior position needs not to engage in this because he/she is already virtuous enough to know the way to proceed. Finally, the idea that the wrongdoer will only be deterred through vengeance also presupposes that there is a superior positioning which *unilaterally* knows how to best educate the wrongdoer.

These features, as we explained before, are not essential to Confucianism: rather they result from how a tradition has articulated concepts and been informed by specific contexts. Opening intellectual circles to other traditions can therefore be critical for improving one's theory. Taking this on board, as Hans-Georg Gadamer recommended, a fusion of horizons, i.e., engaging in a conversation with different cultures is important for this (Gadamer, 2013). It is precisely here where Tutuism can inform Confucianism in a way that other philosophical traditions are unlikely to do. More precisely, Tutuism informs Confucianism by bringing a viewpoint that harmony does not to be such where there is tension, but where a bad can be transformed into a good through dialog, storytelling, and full disclosure of grievances. This is because Tutuist harmony is not hierarchical, but encompassing of victims, facilitators, and wrongdoers as having a valid voice which is informative of solution (Binsbergen, 2002; Doxtader, 2002; Garver, 2002; Gitay, 2002). Therefore, in contrast with some Confucians, it does engage in a duality of ‘winner’ versus ‘loser’ (Gitay, 2002). Tutuism does not advocate for a silent enmity as an outcome, but for a verbalization that renews relationships to flourish friendship. This is because Tutuist harmony entails sharing a self and identifying positively and empathetically with one another, enjoying a sense of togetherness and, thereby, foreseeing as possible a future without tension (Doxtader, 2002). On top of this, albeit Tutuism does attribute, like Confucianism, great value to the family, its distance from filial piety and endorsement of partiality allows the inclusion of a larger group of individuals (the relevant community) in the scope of those toward whom we owe special duties. Hence, partiality allows one to care more about family than others and, simultaneously, include the welfare of strangers (and even wrongdoers) as relevant for fulfilling one's filial piety duties.

Like retributive theorists from the West, contemporary Confucians ought to pay attention to these dialogical and reconciliatory aspects of Tutuism. Tutuism has much to offer due to the fact that great part of other traditions tend to have a different approach to such issues (Binsbergen, 2002; Villa-Vicencio, 2002). The Western tradition is either focused on forgetting (indeed, the word ‘amnesty’ originates from the Greek ‘amnesia’ which means forgetfulness) rather than fully disclosing the truth, and on punishment (e.g., the Nuremberg trials) instead of conversation and reconciliation for renewal of friendships. The fact that Tutuism and Confucianism agree at the core level—on special duties toward significant others, the value of forgiveness, the focus on cultivating character and virtue and how having the right emotions is important for this, the importance of internalization of moral norms and on the rehabilitation of the wrongdoer—suggests that there is space for conceptual articulation of these theories, that is, in the sense that they are not simply local philosophies with limited scope, but instead complementary viewpoints. In short: what Tutuism can offer to Confucianism is a fresh cultural view on how to honor the values of cultivating virtue, caring for significant others, and addressing wrongs that does not deviate from the core of Confucian moral system but that applies these in a different way.

## 5 | CONCLUSION

In light of Tutu’s thought, this paper evaluated two Confucian arguments that consider vengeance to be permissible, or obligatory in some cases. Some Confucian texts argue that in the absence of just authority, revenge is justified when it honors filial piety, deters future wrongs and educates the wrongdoer. However, it does not focus on and theorize how one cultivates virtues relating to empathy to others as an actor of revenge, especially in a situation where there is a proper authority to administer justice. To complement Confucian values of self-cultivation and moral empathy, we argue that revenge is not morally justified because it undermines virtue, is likely to lead to an escalation of violence, harms innocents and that there are more necessary conditions for revenge to be justified than the ones prescribed by Confucians. The Sino-African approach to revenge presented in this paper aims to initial more in-depth cross-cultural dialogues, which will expand the scope and focus on a comparison between this view and Western perspectives on revenge.

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### ORCID

*Luis Cordeiro-Rodrigues*  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9571-2120>

*Ting-mien Lee*  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1591-7682>

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Generally, Chinese and Japanese language scholarship does not consider the misleading nature of the name “Confucian-ism” to be an urgent issue. A main reason for this is that the character “*ru/ju*” 儒 is still used in modern Chinese and Japanese. For more details, see Lee (2020).



- <sup>2</sup> As many have indicated before us, the *Liji* and the *Gongyang Commentary* have been focal materials mainly because other Confucian texts do not make their opinions explicit. For an interesting political explanation, see Kuang (2018).
- <sup>3</sup> Our translations of the *Gongyang Commentary* are based on Miller (2015).
- <sup>4</sup> Slightly adapted from Miller's translation.
- <sup>5</sup> We adapted the translation according to Pu and Li (2001, p. 211).
- <sup>6</sup> Note that although hierarchy is prevalent in Confucian thought, this kind of hierarchical characterization differs according to the kind of Confucianism we may be analyzing.

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