



The Summit of a Moral Pilgrimage: Classical Confucianism on Meaningful Ageing and Social Eldercare

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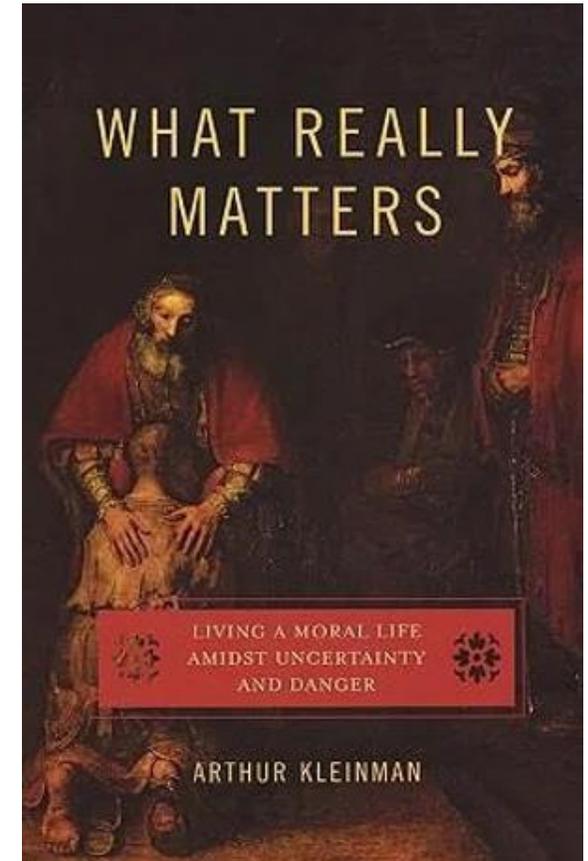
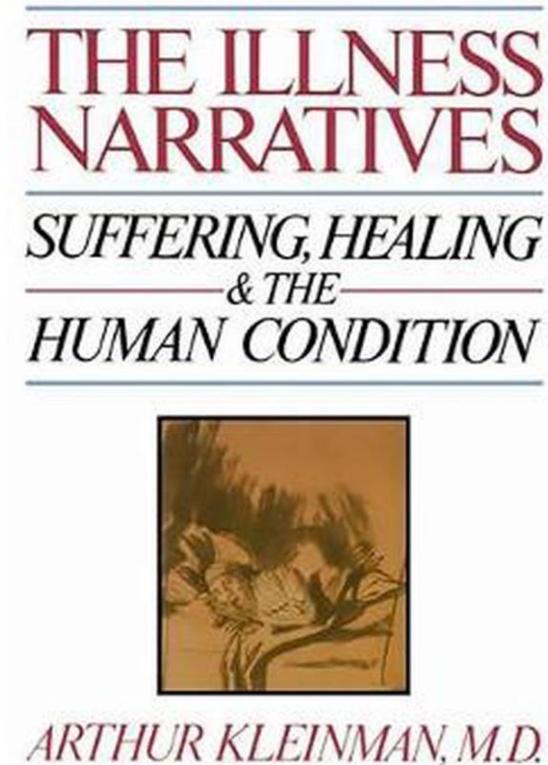
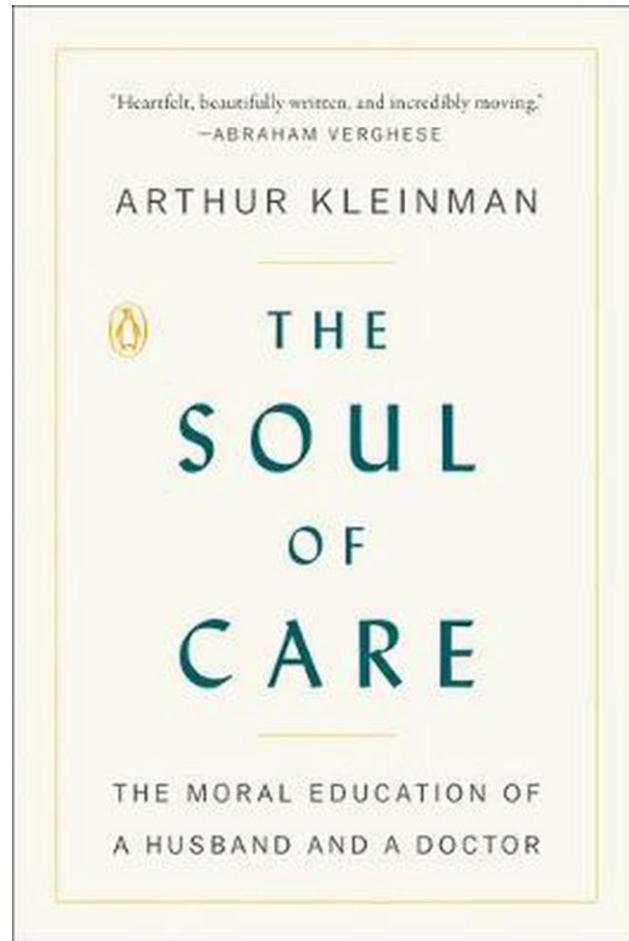
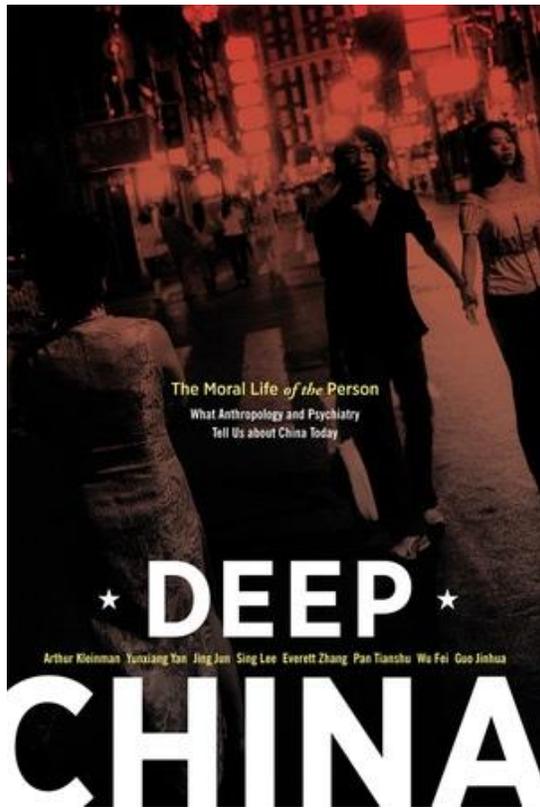
Otago : University

Bioethics
Centre

Te Pokapū Matatika Koiora



Medicine as Moral Practice Caregiving as Moral Experience



Aotearoa/New Zealand: “The land of the long white cloud” *Shiwai Taoyuan* 世外桃源

- Lake Wanaka & Mt Aspiring/Tititea, a view from the Roys Peak (March 2015)

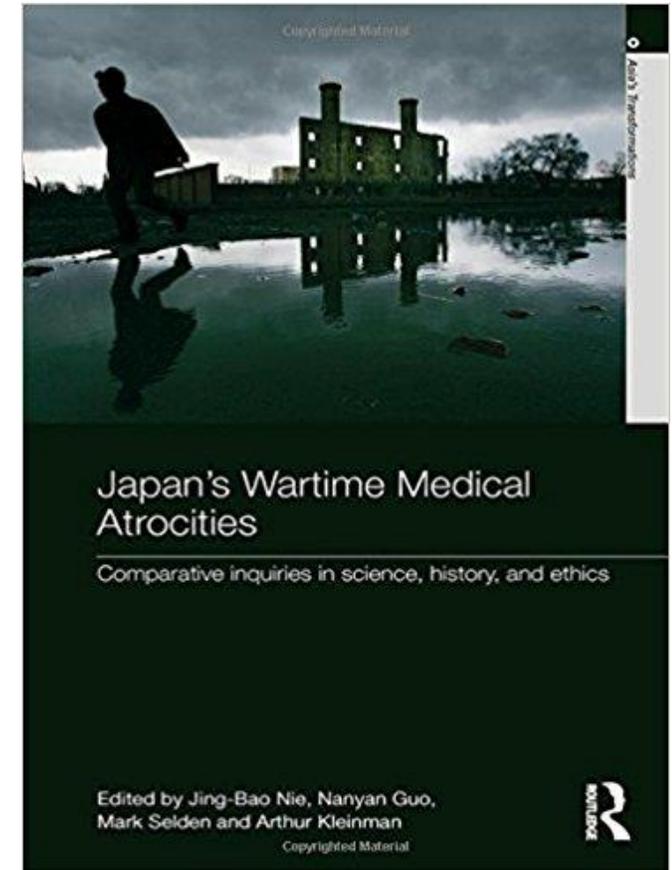
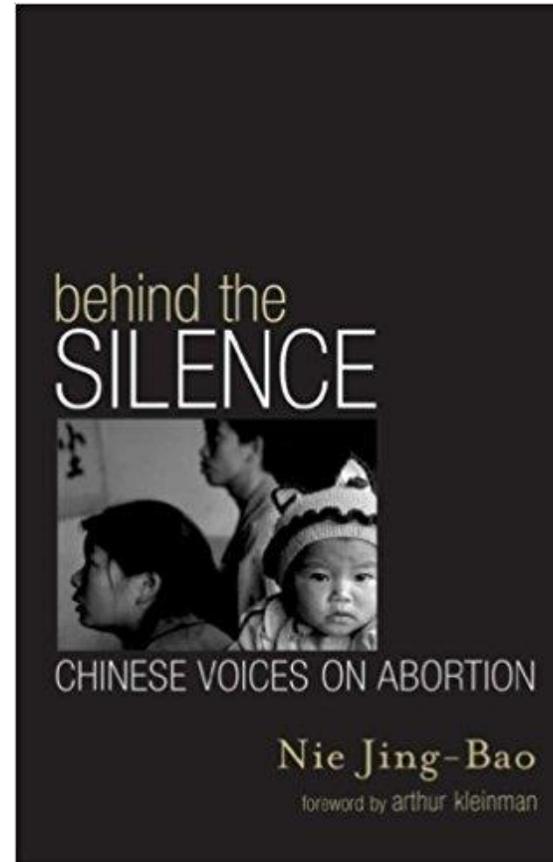


- 水遠，雪山外海水尤遠，天更遠



Some Bioethical Research Projects

- Japan's wartime medical atrocities and their international aftermath
- Abortion: Chinese views and experience
- China's birth control program
- Medical professionalism in China
- Chinese crisis of patient-physician trust
- Social and ethical issues of HIV cure research
- Confucianism and bioethics
- Classical Confucianism and elderly care
- Eugenics and human genome editing in China within a global context
- Ethics of enhancing global biosafety



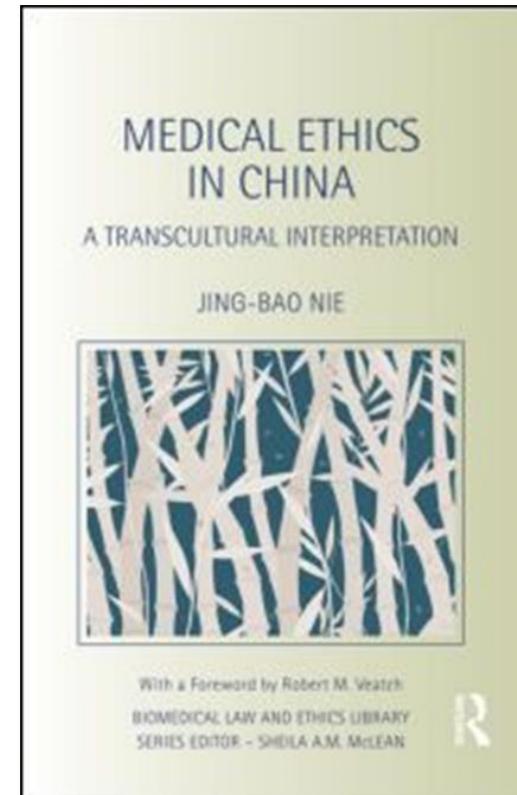
The Poverty of Global Bioethics: A Radical Critique

- Three Malaises of Cotemporary Global Bioethics
 - **Rootless**
 - Focusing on general ethical dilemmas and principles, overlooking the broader socio-cultural forces shaping bioethical issues and responses to them, as well as the richness of individual moral experience
 - Focusing upon the ethical matters arising mostly from the Western context, overlooking those issues concerning large populations in the non-Western and less developed world as well as the relevance of indigenous moral traditions there
 - **Emotionless or Heartless**
 - Focusing upon reason and rationality; overlooking the fundamental roles of subjectivity, emotions, feelings and irrationality in human moral life
 - **Soulless**
 - Focusing upon body and mind; overlooking the existential and spiritual issues
- Beyond Bioethics
 - Advancing a new “socio-bioethics” (Kleinman et al. 1999, ...)
 - Learning from the humanities including literature and arts (Thornber 2020, ...)
 - Reviving thought and wisdom of indigenous moral traditions



An Approach of Ethical Transculturalism

- Five Theoretical & Methodological Elements (or a CPCDM Approach)
 - Appreciating the **complexities** of cultural differences, rather than dichotomizing cultures
 - Taking seriously the internal moral **plurality** and diversity within every culture, rather than homogenizing and stereotyping any society and culture
 - Focusing on not only cross-cultural differences but transcultural **commonalities** and a **common humanity**, rather than treating the other culture as “the radical other”
 - Searching for more fruitful methods of genuine and deeper transcultural **dialogues**, rather than believing in the inevitability of cultural war or clash of civilizations
 - Upholding the primacy of **morality**, resisting the tyranny of political and socio-cultural practices over ethics,
- Nie JB. 2011. *Medical Ethics in China: A Transcultural Interpretation*. London: Routledge.
- Nie JB and R Fitzgerald, eds. 2016. A thematic issue on “Transcultural and Transglobal Bioethics: The Search for New Methodologies”. *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal* 26:3.
- Nie JB. In process. *Medicine as the Art of Humanity: A Chinese Vision of Transcultural and Global Bioethics*.



The Primacy of Morality: King Wen's Exemplary Polity

- Classical Confucianism
 - Great diversity of Confucianism
 - The need to return to classical Confucianism
 - The primary texts
 - Six Classics 六經, *The Analects* 論語 and *Mengzi* 孟子
- Eldercare as moral practice, as an essential part of *renzheng* 仁政 (benevolent or caring polity)
 - **Meng Zi** (Mencius) 孟子
 - King Wen (文王 1152-1056 B.C.E.): “*Shan yanglao*” (善養老) : Excellence at taking good care of old people
 - Later Confucian scholars
 - Zhu Xi 朱熹
 - Wang Quanshan 王船山 in Hunan



- **Geras, the Greek God of Old Age**

(Athenian red-figure pelike C5th B.C.,
National Etruscan Museum)

- **Hebe, the Greek Goddess of Youth**

(Hebe carrying nectar and ambrosia, detail of a vase
painting in the Jatta Museum, Ruvo di Puglia, Italy)



Francisco Goya:
Two Old Ones Eating Soup (or The Witchy Brew) (1819–23)





*In swaddling clothes
Hehold the bud,
Of sweet and gentle
womanhood.*

*Next she foreshews
with mimic plays,
The business of
her future days.*

*Now glorious as a
full-blown flower,
The heart of manhood
feels her power.*

*A Husband now
her arms entwines
She clings around
him like the vine.*

*Now bearing fruit,
she rears her boys,
And tastes a mother's
pains and joys.*

*Like sparkling fountain
gushing forth,
She proves a blessing
to the earth.*

*A busy housewife
full of cares,
The daily food
her hand prepares.*

*As age creeps on
she seeks for grace,
Always to church
and in her place.*

*Now second childhood
loosens all her tongue,
She talks of love and
prattles with the young
they send her forth.*

*A useless lumberer
on the earth,
From house to house
they send her forth.*

*Chained to her chair
by weight of years,
She listless knits
till death appears.*

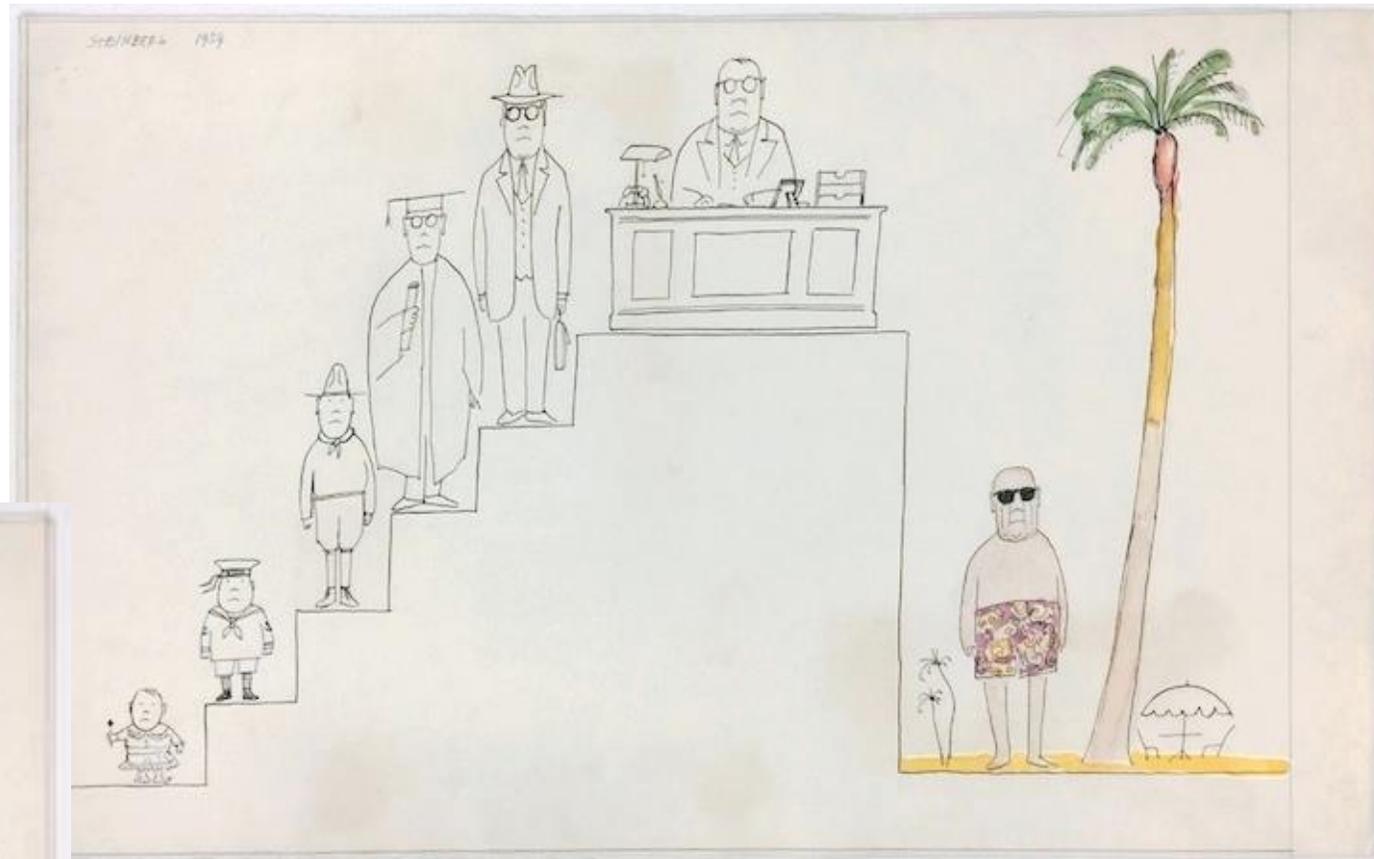
Entered according to Act of Congress in the Year 1846, by J. Baillie, in the Clerk's Office of the Dist. Court of the South-Dist. of N.Y.

Published by James Baillie, 87th St. near 3rd Avenue N.Y.

Saul Steinberg (1914-1999)

Untitled (Stages of Life – Women)

Untitled (Stages of Life – Men)





Old Age in Biomedicine and Traditional Chinese Medicine

- Biomedicine
 - The **disease** model of old age
- Traditional Chinese Medicine
 - *Huangdi Neijing* (The Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic of Medicine), c. 2nd Century BCE
 - Divides physiological development of man or woman into periods of seven or eight years
 - Women start to decline in their late thirties and men in their early forties
 - In old age, “the body become corrupt and the *jing qi* (spirit and energy) exhausted”



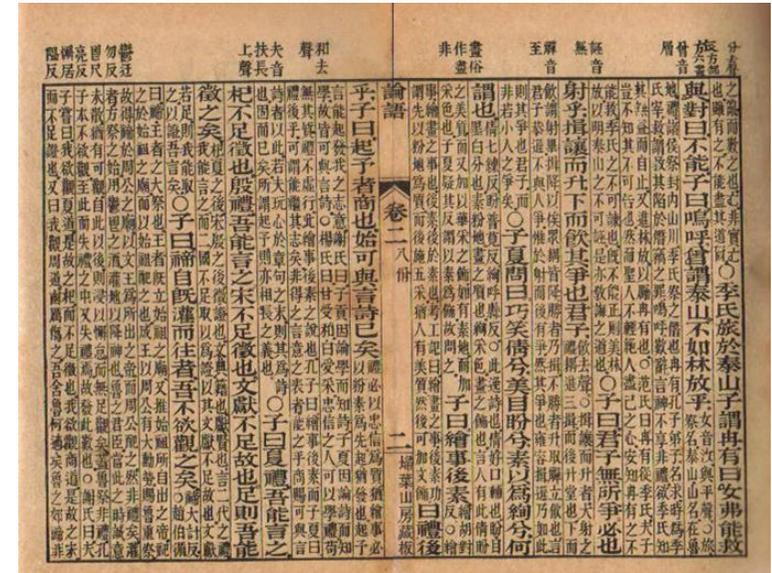
Old Age as the Summit of a Moral Pilgrimage

- A contrast
 - Radically different from the popular and pervasive perception of ageing in the West as well as China which regards old age as a period of inevitable decline, classical Confucianism treats human life as an ongoing moral pilgrimage, with old age the summit of the lifelong journey.
- Kong Zi (Confucius):
 - At seventy, I follow my heart's desires without transgressing moral principles.
 - At sixty, my ear was attuned [to Dao, the Way].
 - At fifty, I understood the Mandate of Heaven.
 - At forty, I had no illusion.
 - At thirty, I took my stand.
 - At fifteen, I set my heart to learning.



Meaningful Ageing: The Role of Life-long Learning

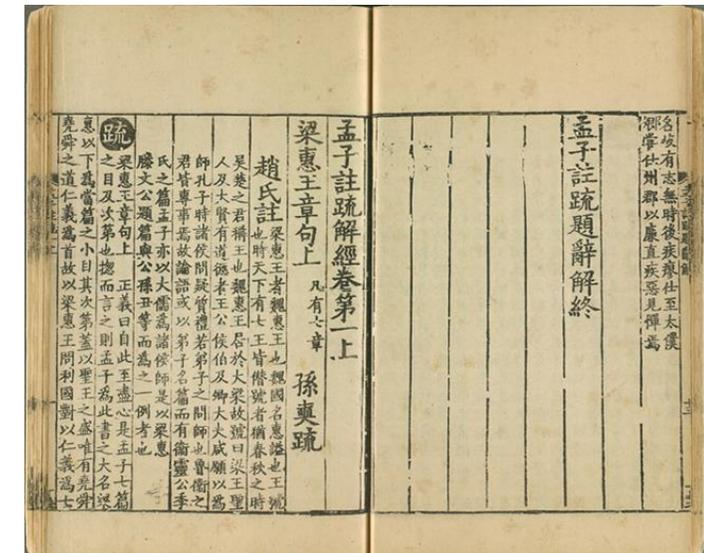
- Life-long learning
 - as life-long moral cultivation
- The role of learning in the Confucian moral and social programme
 - E.g. *The Great Learning*
 - “Three Items”
 - 3rd: **Abiding in the highest good**
 - 2nd: Loving people
 - 1st: Manifesting the clear character of man
 - “Eight Steps”
 - 8th: Promoting the world peace, or **promoting humankind as a moral commonwealth**
 - 7th: Governing the nation
 - 6th: Regulating the family
 - 5th: Cultivating the personal character
 - 4th: Rectifying the mind
 - 3rd: Making the will to be sincere
 - 2nd: Extending knowledge
 - 1st: Investigating things



Xiao (Filial Piety) and Its Broader Social Dimension

- Xiao (Filial Piety)
 - The Foundation of morality and socio-political life
- Xiao as a Principle of Social Ethics
 - Meng Zi (Mencius):
 - Treat with the care due to age the elders in your own family, so that the elders in the families of others should be similarly treated; treat with the kindness due to children the young in your own family, so that the young in the families of others should be similarly treated (老吾老以及人之老，幼吾幼以及人之幼): — do this, and the kingdom will be made to go round in your palm.
 - From familial to social
 - Responsibilities of the state and society
 - Empowering individuals and families to care for elderly people
- Xiao as an Norm for Intergenerational Flourishing

老吾老以及人之老
幼吾幼以及人之幼
孟子



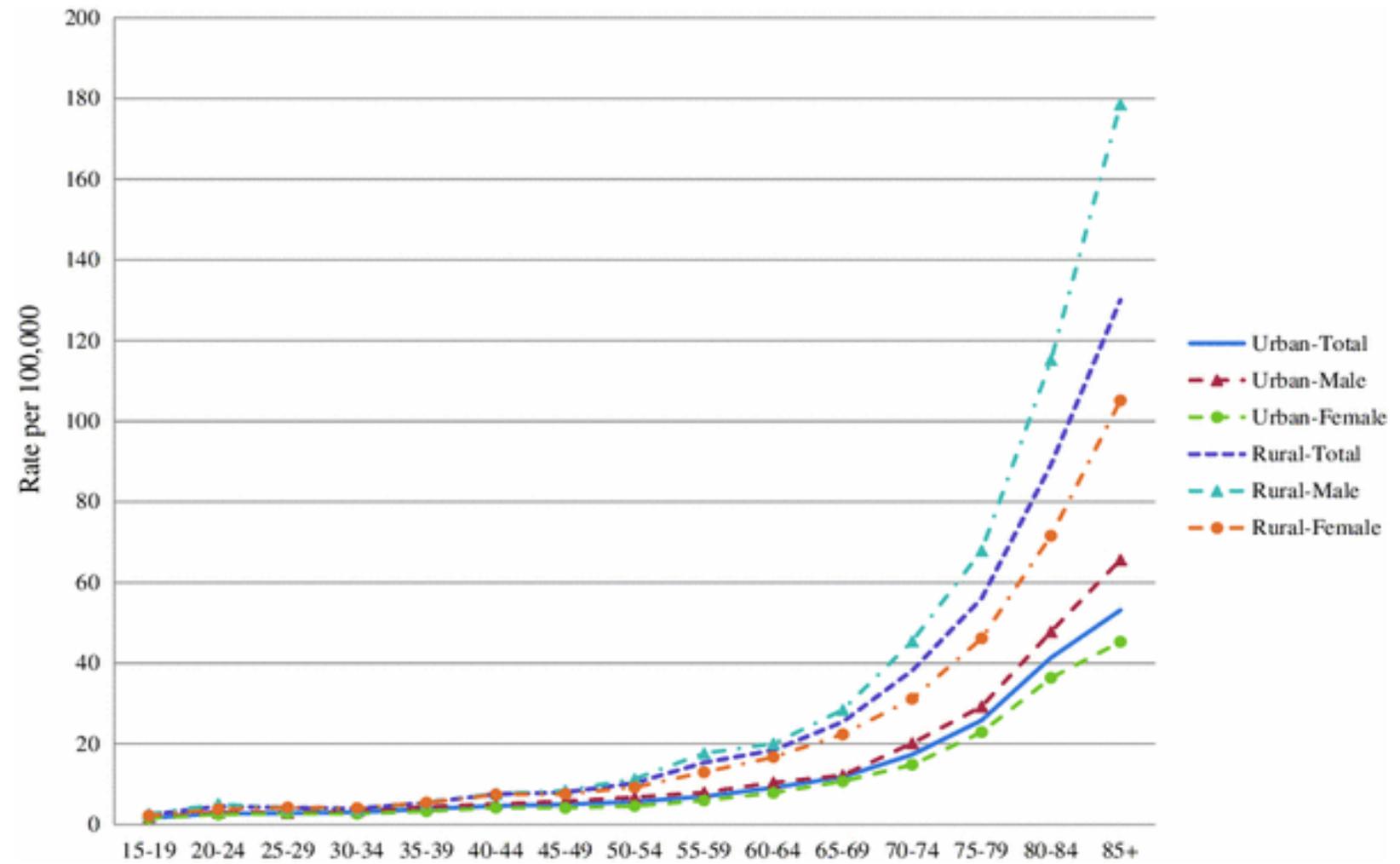
A Matter of Justice and Dignity, not Merely Charity

- The “Charity” Approach
 - Are the popular term “*ruoshi qunti*” (弱势群体, weak groups) and, especially, “*guanghuai ruoshi qunti*” (关怀弱势群体, caring for the weak groups) approach ethically sound?
- Merits of the charity approach
 - Not straightforwardly denying the problem
 - Having good intention
 - Calling up societal attention
- Ethical pitfalls of the charity approach
 - Confusing and disguising injustice and inequality with misfortunes
 - Endorsing the ideology of victim-blaming
 - Encouraging the spirit of social Darwinism
 - Promoting a patronizing mentality in formulating social policies and programmes

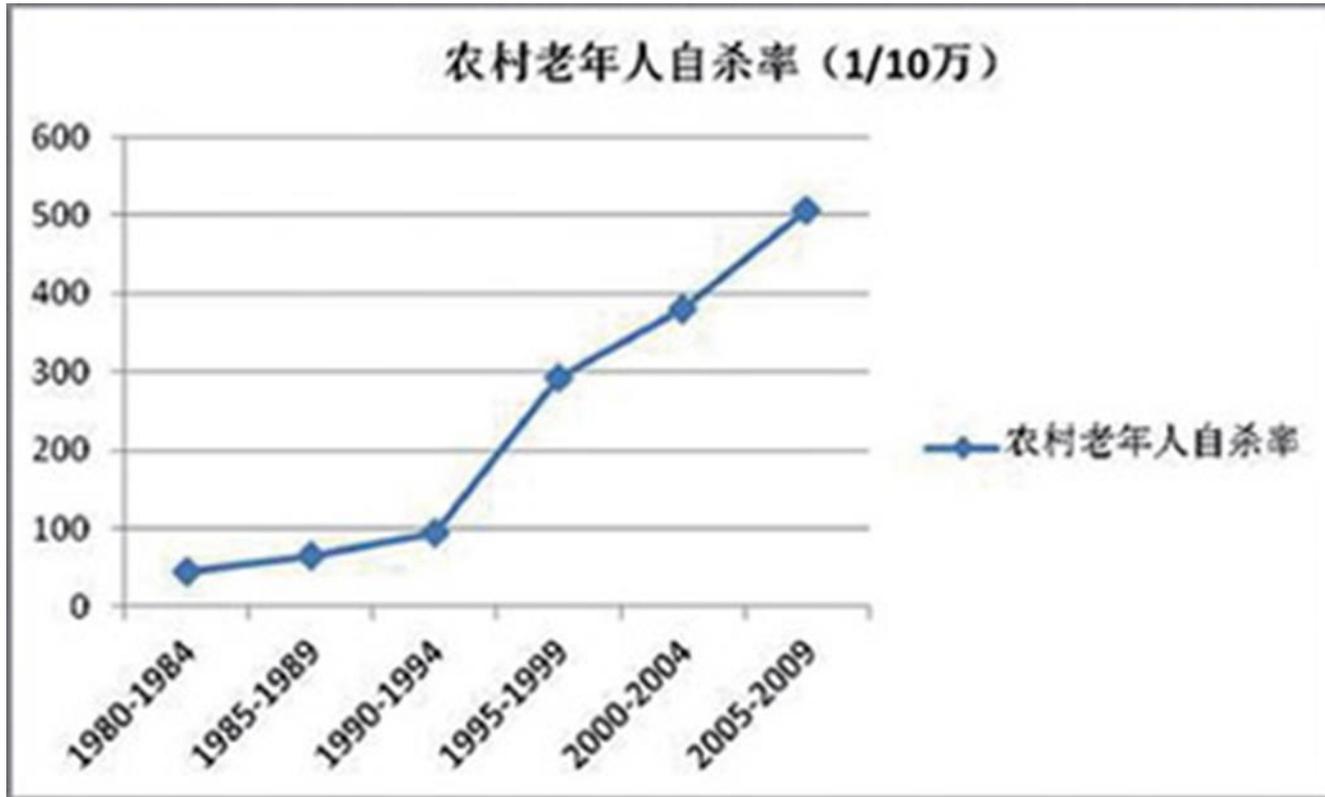


Suicides of the Elderly in China

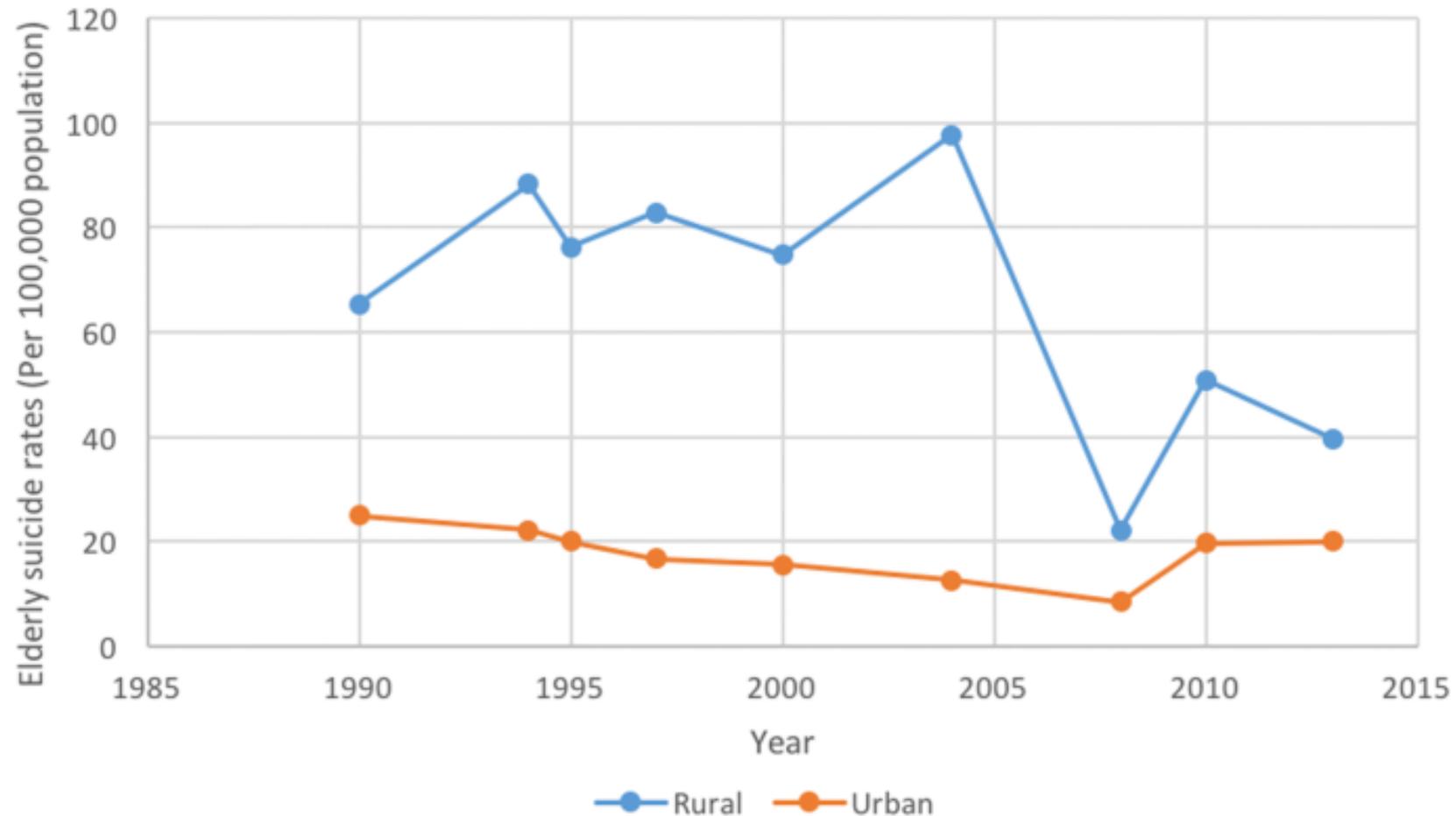
- Age-, gender-, and region-specific suicide rates, China, 2009-2011 (Wang, Chang and Yip 2014, p.935)



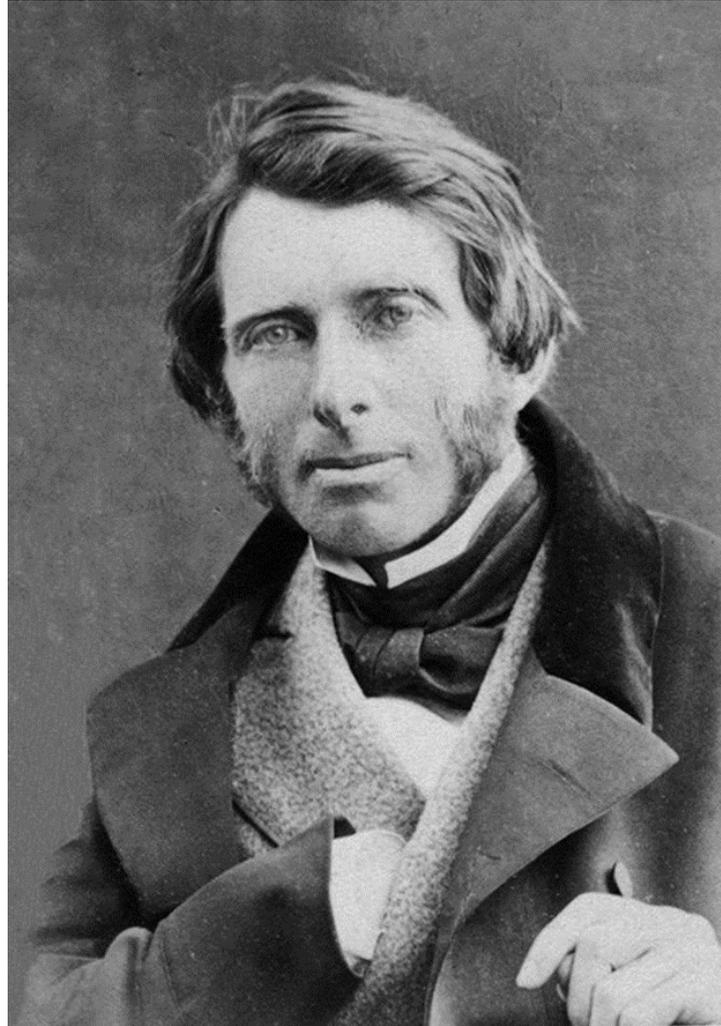
Elderly Suicide in Rural China



Urban-rural inequalities in suicide among elderly people in China (Li and Katikireddi 2019)



Proust, Ruskin, Rembrandt



Rembrandt(c. 1609-1669):
Rembrandt Laughing; Self Portrait with Two Circles



Rembrandt:
Aristotle with a Bust of Homer



Rembrandt:
Two Old Men Disputing



Rembrandt:
Old Woman Reading



Rembrandt:
Portrait of an Old Woman



Rembrandt:
Return of the
Prodigal Son
(1968-1969)



Luo Zhongli:
Father (1980)



- One may ask:
 - What is the point of bringing in Rembrandt's paintings in a talk on Confucianism?
- The points are:
 - Rembrandt's dignified portraits of elderly people vividly illustrate what the insightful Confucian metaphor of old age as the summit of a moral pilgrimage means and aims for.
 - Confucianism endorses and promotes an affirmative attitudes toward ageing and eldercare underlying many great works by artists, both Chinese and non-Chinese.

Conclusions

- Against the popular and pervasive belief on old age as an inevitable or even doomed decline, classical Confucianism defines old age as the summit of a life-long moral pilgrimage.
 - the essential role of learning (moral cultivation) in meaningful ageing
 - the importance of social eldercare and intergenerational flourishing
 - the need to treat eldercare as a matter of human dignity and social justice
- How should ageing and eldercare be influenced by Confucian values?
 - To identify contemporary failings in the area of eldercare
 - To generate novel ideas, inspiration and wisdom for cultivating meaningful ageing and developing ethical eldercare in a more positive and humane way

