

The Ethics of Reciprocity: A Comparative Hermeneutical Analysis of the Golden Rule in Islam and Confucianism

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ABSTRACT

The Golden Rule, or the ethic of reciprocity, constitutes a foundational moral imperative across psychological, philosophical, sociological, and religious paradigms. While this principle exhibits universal presence across global faith traditions, its metaphysical foundations, linguistic structures, and operational mechanisms diverge significantly. Utilizing Aaron Stalnaker's "bridge concept" methodology alongside an explicit three-tier evaluative framework, this paper provides a comparative hermeneutical analysis of the ethic of reciprocity in Islam and Confucianism. It demonstrates that Islam grounds reciprocity in a transcendent framework where moral action (*akhlāq*) and divine devotion (*ibadah*) converge, driven by the emulation of God's benevolence (*Rahmah*) and realized through altruistic preference (*ithar*). Conversely, Confucianism presents an immanent, human-centered framework operationalized through the dynamic dyad of *Zhong* (conscientiousness) and *Shu* (empathetic reciprocity). To avoid monolithic essentialism, this study examines internal diversity across legal, theological, and mystical schools in Islam, alongside classical, Neo-Confucian, and modern developments in Chinese thought. Furthermore, by drawing upon contemporary moral psychology (Theory of Mind and dual-process empathy) and historical socio-institutional applications (*Waqf* and *Xiangyue*), the paper demonstrates how both traditions bridge theory and praxis. Ultimately, this study offers concrete applications of reciprocal ethics for pressing contemporary issues, including intercultural dialogue, organizational leadership, and intergenerational climate ethics.

Keywords: Golden Rule, Ethic of Reciprocity, Comparative Religion, Islam, Confucianism, *Shu*, *Zhong*.

INTRODUCTION

The ethic of reciprocity is commonly designated as the Golden Rule which serves as a primary pillar of universal human morality. Formulated positively, it demands that one treat others as one wish to be treated; formulated negatively (often termed the Silver Rule), it prohibits inflicting conditions upon others that one would personally reject. This dynamic establishes a functional equilibrium between self-interest and altruism, providing a normative matrix for human co-existence.

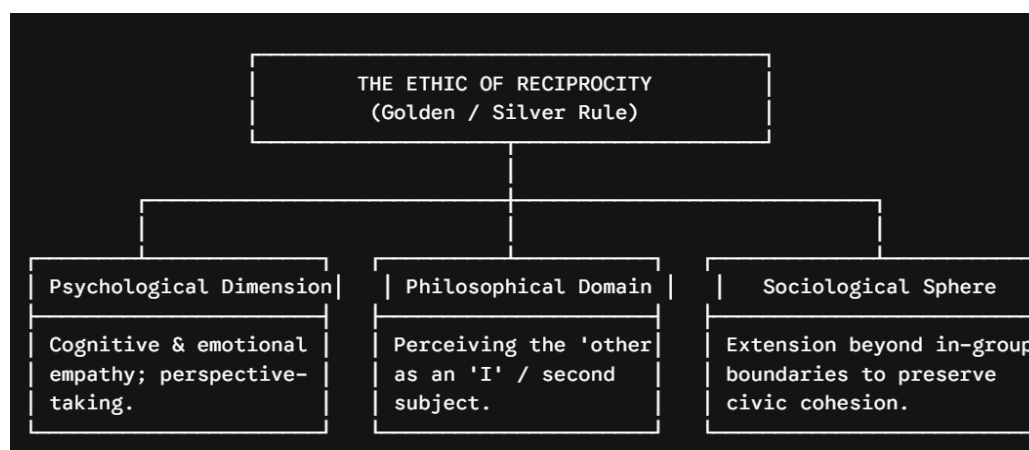


Figure 1: The Ethic of Reciprocity

The Figure 1 above shows that the principle operates across three primary disciplinary dimensions:

- **Psychological Dimension:** Demanding cognitive perspective-taking and emotional empathy to project oneself into the experiential state of another.
- **Philosophical Domain:** Presupposing an ontological recognition of the “other” as an equivalent subject (“an I” or second self) rather than a utilitarian object.
- **Sociological Sphere:** Providing a baseline mechanism for cross-boundary social cohesion across interpersonal, intra-group, and inter-group dynamics, compelling individuals to extend consideration beyond immediate in-group boundaries.ⁱ Sociologically, reciprocity acts as a foundational mechanism for social capital and civic trust. Beyond classical texts, the ethic of reciprocity relies heavily on mechanisms identified in contemporary moral psychology, such as Theory of Mind (ToM) where the cognitive ability to attribute mental states to oneself and others and dual-process empathy models that distinguish between emotional resonance and cognitive perspective-taking.ⁱⁱ

While world religions converge on this baseline ethic found across Islamic, Confucian, Christian, Judaic, Buddhist, and Hindu canons, their underlying metaphysical justifications, ontological frameworks, and operational pathways differ. This study contrasts the transcendent, theological grounding of reciprocity in Islam with the immanent, human-centered relational ethic of Confucianism.ⁱⁱⁱ

Methodological Framework: Comparative Religious Ethics

To analyze the ethic of reciprocity across Islam and Confucianism without falling into the dual traps of reductionist universalism (erroneously asserting that both traditions mean the exact same thing) or radical incommensurability (claiming they share no common ground), this study utilizes Aaron Stalnaker’s “bridge concept” method combined with comparative textual hermeneutics.^{iv}

To ensure analytical transparency, this study operationalizes Aaron Stalnaker’s “bridge concept” methodology through a structured three-step process:

1. **Formulation of the Bridge Concept:** Establishing *The Ethic of Reciprocity and Self-Transcendence* as an overarching interpretive category flexible enough to encapsulate diverse worldviews.^v
1. **Contextual Analysis (Mapping):** Examining how each tradition articulates this concept within its native metaphysical, psychological, and social frameworks (*Ithar*, *Ihsan*, and *Nafs* in Islam; *Zhong*, *Shu*, and *Xin* in Confucianism).^{vi}
2. **Comparative Evaluation (Rectification):** Synthesizing points of convergence and divergence without flattening unique theological or philosophical differences.^{vii}
3. The comparative evaluation throughout this paper relies on three primary evaluative criteria:
4. **Ontological Source:** Where the moral imperative originates (transcendent divine command vs. immanent human self-cultivation).
5. **Operational Mechanics:** The psychological and ethical tools used to bridge the self-other divide (cognitive perspective-taking vs. altruistic preference).
6. **Relational Scope:** How ethical obligations expand across social structures (direct universal duty vs. gradated/concentric expansion)

The Golden Rule in Islam: Transcendent Grounding and Action

In Islamic thought, moral action is intrinsically linked to faith (*iman*) and divine command. The ethic of reciprocity forms a bridge where ritual devotion (*ibadah*) and social ethics (*akhlaq*) coalesce into a unified expression of faith.^{viii}

The Ontological Axis: *Tawhid*, *Rahmah*, and *Ibadah*

In Islamic metaphysics, horizontal human relations (*mu'amalat*) are an inseparable extension of vertical divine devotion (*ibadah*). The universe is created upon the principle of divine mercy (*Rahmah*). Islamically, *Rahmah* shares its linguistic root (R-H-M) with *Rahim* (the womb), denoting an enveloping, life-giving, and protective compassion.

Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī anchors human reciprocity in the divine attributes of mercy (*Rahmah*) and affection (*Wadd*), citing Qur'anic declarations such as “My Lord is merciful and most loving” (Surah Hud 11:90) and “He is the Most Forgiving, the Most Loving” (Surah Al-Buruj 85:14).^{ix} Al-Ghazālī posits that God bestows grace upon creation unconditionally, without seeking utility, return, or repayment. God neither gains from human worship nor takes inherent pleasure in punishment; divine commandments are prescribed solely for the benefit of created beings.

Human beings, striving toward spiritual excellence (*ihsan*) through the emulation of divine characteristics (*al-takhalluq bi-akhlaq Allah*), are compelled to extend unconditional goodwill toward fellow creatures. Consequently, when Prophet Muhammad states, “None of you is truly a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself” (Sahih al-Bukhari),^x he establishes empathy as an ontological condition of faith (*iman*), rather than merely a polite social convention.

In Islamic ethics, the psychological transition from parity (*musawat*) to proactive altruism (*ithar*) engages emotional and value-driven motivation, moving beyond mere cognitive projection to overcome in-group biases and egoistic self-preservation.^{xi}

Beyond individual moral psychology, historical Islamic societies operationalized the principles of *Ihsan* and mutual responsibility through concrete social institutions. Most notably, this was institutionalized through the Waqf (charitable trust system), which provided public goods, healthcare, and education to strangers and vulnerable populations without demanding direct reciprocity.^{xii}

Moral Psychology & Hermeneutics: *Musawat* vs. *Ithar*

Islamic moral psychology identifies the primary obstacle to reciprocity as the *nafs al-ammarah* (the egoistic self that inclines toward selfishness). To overcome this, Islamic ethics establishes a developmental spectrum of relational morality:

- Justice (*'Adl* / Parity): Giving others their exact due and treating them as equals.
- Benevolence (*Ihsan*): Doing good beyond legal obligation, extending grace proactively.
- Altruistic Preference (*Ithar*): Actively preferring the needs of others over oneself, even when experiencing personal scarcity.^{xiii}

Classical Hadith commentator Abū al-Zinād ‘Abd Allāh ibn Dhakwān clarifies the inner mechanics of the prophetic tradition, noting that while the literal wording of the rule suggests parity (*musawat*), its ultimate realization demands self-transcending preference (*ithar*):

“The literal meaning of this tradition is equality, yet its reality is to give preference, for the human being loves for himself to be preferred over others. Thus, when he loves for his brother the same as himself, he is included

among those who give preference to others... If his brother was wronged in front of him or he has a right to be restored, he takes the initiative to serve justice from himself even if it were laborious.”^{xiv}

Thus, Islamic reciprocity moves beyond negative non-harm (the Silver Rule) into active altruistic intervention (*ithar*), requiring believers to uphold the rights of others at personal cost.

Textual Evidence in Islamic Canons

The selected textual evidence from Islamic canons demonstrates how the ethic of reciprocity is structurally rooted in divine revelation (the Qur'an) and operationalized through prophetic traditions (Hadith). Across the Qur'anic passages, horizontal duties toward human society are tied directly to vertical devotion to God, mandating active benevolence (*ihsan*) across diverse social groups, from parents and immediate kin to vulnerable orphans, strangers, and wayfarers (Surah An-Nisa' 4:36, 4:8–9). This reciprocal responsibility is further emphasized in the context of filial piety, where believers are reminded to care for aging parents with the same tenderness they received as children (Surah Al-Isra' 17:23). Moreover, the principle extends to economic interactions through altruistic giving, which requires believers to offer quality charity rather than worthless items they would personally reject (Surah Al-Baqarah 2:267). The selected Qur'anic verses are:

- **Horizontal Duty Across Society:** “Serve Allah and join not any partners with Him; and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbours who are near, neighbours who are strangers, the companions by your side, the wayfarer, and what your right hands possess: For Allah loveth not the arrogant, the vainglorious.” (Surah An-Nisa' 4:36)
- **Justice to Vulnerable Groups:** “...orphans and the needy, give them something and speak kindly to them. And those who are concerned about the welfare of their own children after their death, should have fear of God [Treat other people's Orphans justly] and guide them properly.” (Surah An-Nisa' 4:8–9)
- **Reciprocal Filial Piety:** “Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none other but Him, and that ye be kind to parents... address them in terms of honour and spread over them humbly the wings of thy tenderness, and say: 'O my Sustainer! Bestow Thy grace upon them, even as they cherished and reared me when I was child.’” (Surah Al-Isra' 17:23)
- **Altruistic Giving:** “O you who believe! Spend [benevolently] of the good things that you have earned... and do not even think of spending [in alms] worthless things that you yourselves would be reluctant to accept.” (Surah Al-Baqarah 2:267).

Complementing these scriptural mandates, the Hadith literature elevates empathy from an optional virtue to a fundamental criterion of faith (*iman*) and salvation. Prophet Muhammad explicitly states that complete belief is unattainable until one desires for their brother what they desire for themselves (*Sahih al-Bukhari & Sahih Muslim*). This positive formulation of the Golden Rule functions as both an eschatological benchmark where treating others as one wishes to be treated determines entry into Paradise (*Sahih Muslim*) and a universal obligation toward all humanity (*Sunan Abi Dawud*). Together, these primary sources show that Islamic reciprocity requires active, proactive altruism (*ithar*) rather than passive non-harm. The selected Prophetic Traditions (Hadith) are:

- **Imperative of Faith:** “None of you is truly a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book 2, Hadith 6; *Sahih Muslim*, Book 1, Hadith 71)^{xv}
- **Eschatological Criterion:** “Whoever wishes to be delivered from the Fire and to enter Paradise should treat other people as they wish to be treated themselves.” (*Sahih Muslim*, Book 33, Hadith 88)^{xvi}
- **Universal Application:** “Do unto all men as you would wish to have done unto you; and reject for others what you would reject for yourself.” (*Sunan Abi Dawud*).^{xvii}

The Golden Rule in Confucianism: Humanist Relationality

Unlike Islamic ethics, which stem from divine revelation, Confucian ethics frame the Golden Rule as a human-centered path (*Rendao*). Grounded in the human heart-mind (*Xin*), Confucian reciprocity focuses on self-cultivation for social harmony.^{xviii}

Etymology and Hermeneutics of *Shu* (恕)

In *Analects* 15:23, when asked by his disciple Zigong if a single word could guide a lifetime of conduct, Confucius replies:

“It is *shu* (恕)! What you don't want done to yourself, do not do to others.” (*Lunyu* 15:23)^{xix}

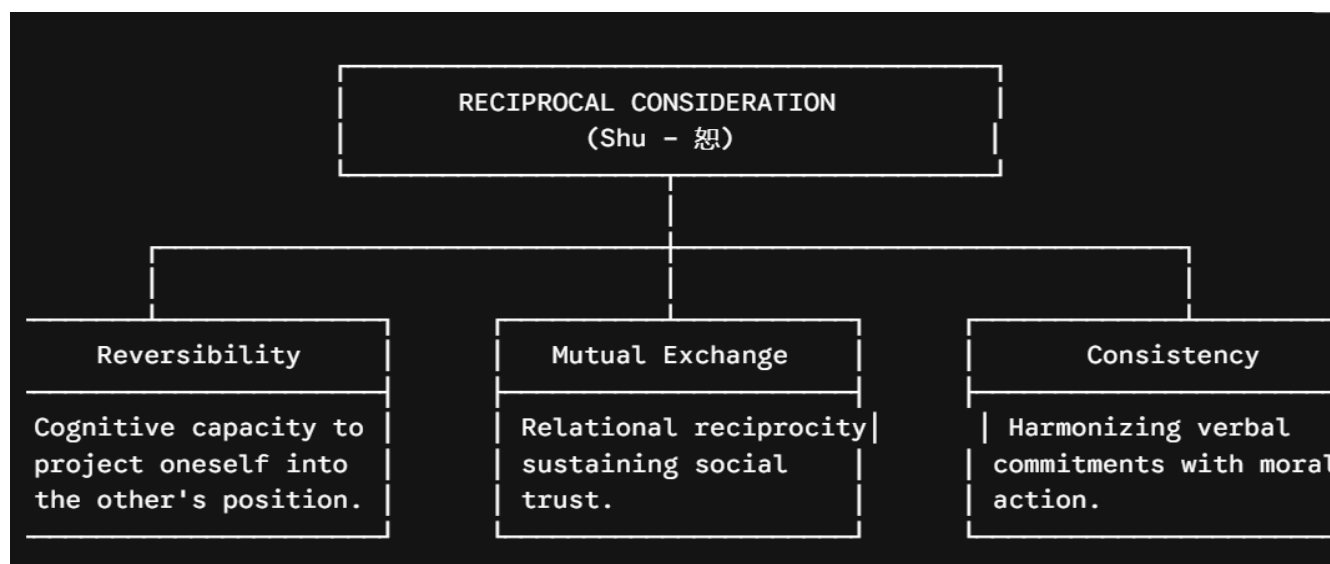


Figure 2: Reciprocal Consideration (*Shu*) in Confucianism

A textual analysis of the character **Shu** (恕) reveals its psychological mechanics: it is composed of 如 (*ru* – “as” or “likened to”) over 心 (*xin* – “heart/mind”). Etymologically, *Shu* signifies “matching hearts” or “measuring another's heart-mind using one's own as the standard.”

Shu represents empathetic reflection or reciprocal consideration. As demonstrated in *Analects* 5:12 where Confucius gently corrects Zigong's overestimation of his own moral capacity. *Shu* is not an innate default state, but an ongoing exercise requiring disciplined self-cultivation.^{xx}

From the perspective of contemporary moral psychology, *Shu* (恕) functions primarily as an active cognitive exercise in perspective-taking, aligning with what modern cognitive science identifies as executive-driven empathy.^{xxi}

Anthropologically and sociologically, these reciprocal obligations were not merely theoretical; in traditional Confucian societies, they were embodied in *Xiangyue* (community village compacts), which regulated mutual aid, disaster response, and local dispute resolution through shared relational norms.^{xxii}

The Dyadic Structure: *Zhong* (忠) and *Shu* (恕)

In *Analects* 4:15, Confucius characterizes his teaching as a single underlying thread (*yi yi guan zhi*), defined by his disciples as the dynamic interplay between *Zhong* and *Shu*.^{xxiii}

The character **Zhong** (忠) is composed of 中 (*zhong* – “center”) over 心 (*xin* – “heart/mind”). *Zhong* signifies “putting one's heart in the center,” representing absolute internal integrity, conscientiousness, and self-realization. Classical commentators clarify this dynamic pairing:

Classical Scholar	Interpretation of Zhong (忠)	Interpretation of Shu (恕)
Huang Kan	Uncompromising focus and honesty of one's inner heart/mind.	Reflecting upon oneself to measure and evaluate others.
Wang Bi	Full realization of one's inner moral capacity.	Extending internal sympathy outward to encompass other beings.
Xing Bing	Centering and integrating one's cognitive and moral focus.	Using self-examination as a standard to gauge external needs.

Table 1: Classical Commentators on Zhong and Shu

Functionally, Zhong represents the positive movement (doing for others what one seeks for oneself), while Shu provides the prohibitive boundary constraint (refraining from imposing upon others what one dislikes). In the *Doctrine of the Mean (Zhongyong)*, this is summarized: “One who is zhong and shu will never stray from the Way. What he does not wish done to him he does not do unto others.”^{xxiv}

Mencius Human Nature (*Ren Xing*) and Concentric Care (*Wulun*)

Mencius (*Mengzi*) grounds *Shu* in innate human potential, asserting in *Mengzi* 2A:6 that all humans possess the “sprout” of compassion (*cinyin zhi xin*).^{xxv} However, Mencius situates *Shu* within the Five Human Relationships (*Wulun*): parent-child (*qin*), sovereign-subject (*yi*), spouse-spouse (*bie*), elder-younger (*xu*), and friend-friend (*xin*).

Rather than postulating an immediate, non-differentiated universal brotherhood, Mencian ethics operate through concentric relational expansion (*Mengzi* 7A:45):

“A true gentleman may love all living things, yet he will treat all living things with humanity. He may treat all human beings with humanity, but he will not treat them all with affection. However, he who feels the love of family feels humanity towards all men. He who feels humanity towards all men loves all living things.”^{xxvi}

Moral care originates in filial love (*Xiao*), stabilizes the family unit, and then expands outward through benevolence (*Ren*) to encompass society and nature.^{xxvii}

Internal Diversity within Islam and Confucianism

Far from being monolithic or static systems, both Islamic and Confucian ethics feature rich internal diversity shaped by theological debates, philosophical shifts, and historical adaptations. Within Islam, interpretations of reciprocity span from the transactional legalism of jurists (*fuqaha*) and rationalist-traditionalist debates over reason (‘*aql*’) versus revelation (*shar’*), to the radical ego-annihilation (*fana’*) and altruism (*ithar*) of Sufi mystics. Similarly, Confucian reciprocity (*shu*) evolved through foundational debates between Mencian optimistic cultivation and Xunxian ritual constraint, transformed into metaphysical frameworks during the Neo-Confucian period, and has been continuously reframed by New Confucians to meet modern democratic and ecological needs.

Internal Variations in Islamic Ethical Thought

- **Legal vs. Philosophical vs. Mystical Perspectives:** While legal scholars (*fuqaha*) frequently emphasize reciprocity as a normative baseline of justice (‘*adl*’) and non-harm within contractual transactions (*mu’amalat*), Sufi commentators (such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn ‘Arabi) elevate reciprocity to radical ego-annihilation (*fana’*) and selfless altruism (*ithar*), treating it as an eschatological necessity.^{xxviii}
- **Theological Debates (Aql vs. Shar’):** Ash’arite theologians held that moral duties like reciprocity are binding solely due to divine revelation (*Shar’*), whereas Mu’tazilite thinkers argued that human reason (‘*Aql*’) could independently discern the moral necessity of treating others as oneself.^{xxix}

- Cultural Contextualization: In practice, regional expressions such as the Malay concept of *Gotong Royong* (mutual communal assistance) demonstrate how Islamic reciprocity harmonizes with local indigenous customs.^{xxx}

Internal Variations in Confucian Ethical Thought

- Mencius vs. Xunzi: Classical Confucianism itself contains deep debates on human nature (*Xing*). While Mencius viewed *Shu* as the natural expansion of an innate “sprout of compassion” (*cinyin zhi xin*), Xunzi viewed human nature as uncultivated (*Xing E*), arguing that *Shu* could only be enforced through rigorous external constraint, ritual propriety (*Li*), and deliberate effort (*Wei*).^{xxxi}
- Neo-Confucian Metaphysics: During the Song and Ming dynasties, Zhu Xi reinterpreted *Zhong* and *Shu* through the metaphysical lens of *Li* (Universal Principle) and *Qi* (Material Force), framing *Shu* as a means to clear egoistic desires and realize the fundamental oneness of all things.^{xxxi} In contrast, Wang Yangming emphasized intuitive moral knowledge (*Liangzhi*) as an immediate, heart-centered response.^{xxxiii}
- Modern Adaptations: Modern New Confucians (e.g., Tu Weiming) reframe *Shu* beyond traditional feudal hierarchies to champion democratic dialogue and ecological harmony.^{xxxiv}

Comparative Synthesis between Islamic Tradition and Confucian Tradition

Analytical Dimension	Islamic Tradition	Confucian Tradition
Ultimate Source	Transcendent Revelation; grounded in God's attributes (<i>Rahmah</i>).	Immanent Humanism (<i>Rendao</i>); grounded in the heart-mind (<i>Xin</i>).
Core Mechanism	Integration of Worship (<i>Ibadah</i>) and Morality (<i>Akhlaq</i>).	Interplay of Conscientiousness (<i>Zhong</i>) and Reciprocity (<i>Shu</i>).
Moral Zenith	Selfless Altruism (<i>Ithar</i>) mirroring divine grace.	Becoming an Exemplary Person (<i>Junzi</i>) via relational balance.
Primary Formulation	Positively oriented ("Love for your brother what you love for yourself").	Prohibitively/Silver oriented ("Do not do unto others...").
Scope & Progression	Direct universal duty across societal categories (strangers, orphans, kin).	Concentric expansion originating in filial ties (<i>Xiao</i>) outward.

Table 2: Comparative Synthesis between Islamic Tradition and Confucian Tradition

Table 2 above shows that while both traditions reject individualistic egoism and champion empathy, Islam frames reciprocity as a divine, universal duty connecting human action to transcendental accountability, whereas Confucianism frames it as a human-centered, relational discipline aimed at self-cultivation and societal harmony.

The comparative synthesis between Islamic Tradition and Confucian Tradition are as below:

Theological vs. Philosophical Grounding (Ultimate Source)

- Islam: Grounded in Transcendent Revelation and the divine nature of God (*Rahmah* / Mercy). The ethical mandate operates as a vertical command from the Creator to the creation. Humans practice reciprocity to reflect divine grace (*al-takhalluq bi-akhlaq Allah*).
- Confucianism: Grounded in Immanent Humanism (*Rendao* / Human Way) and the human heart-mind (*Xin*). The ethic does not depend on a divine lawgiver, but rather on moral self-cultivation (*Xiu Shen*) within the natural human order.

Operational Dynamics (Core Mechanism)

- Islam: Merges devotional worship (*Ibadah*) with social ethics (*Akhlaq*). Fulfilling duties toward fellow human beings (*Mu'amalat*) is an essential condition for achieving true faith (*Iman*) in God.
- Confucianism: Operates through the dynamic pairing of Conscientiousness (*Zhong*) and Empathetic Consideration (*Shu*). *Zhong* provides the internal, sincere drive (being true to oneself), while *Shu* provides the external reflective gauge (measuring others using oneself as the standard).

Moral Ideal (Moral Zenith)

- Islam: Reaches its peak in Selfless Altruism (*Ithar*). Beyond simple parity or non-harm, the highest spiritual state requires actively preferring others over oneself—even during times of personal scarcity or hardship.
- Confucianism: Aims for the ideal of the Exemplary Person (*Junzi*). The goal is achieving harmonious social equilibrium and moral maturity through proper conduct and relational balance across human communities.

Directives and Boundaries (Primary Formulation)

- Islam: Primarily positively oriented (“Golden Rule”). It commands proactive benevolence: actively wishing and working to bestow upon others the good that one desires for oneself.
- Confucianism: Primarily prohibitively/negatively oriented (“Silver Rule”). As expressed in *Analects* 15:23 (“What you don't want done to yourself, do not do to others”), it acts as a boundary constraint to prevent moral encroachment and maintain relational peace.

Social Scope and Vector (Scope & Progression)

- Islam: Establishes a direct universal obligation. Moral duties apply immediately across social boundaries to neighbors (kin and strangers), orphans, wayfarers, and the vulnerable.
- Confucianism: Operates through concentric relational expansion. Moral development begins at home through filial piety (*Xiao*), stabilizing the immediate family before expanding outward step-by-step to neighbors, society, and the wider world.

Positive Imperative vs. Prohibitive Boundary

The structural distinction between Islam’s positive formulation (“Love for your brother...”) and Confucianism’s primary prohibitive formulation (“Do not do to others...”) reflects different moral emphases. Confucian *Shu* functions as a protective boundary designed to prevent moral encroachment and preserve relational harmony. Islamic *Ithar*, by contrast, demands proactive intervention, asserting that faith (*iman*) remains incomplete until one actively seeks for others the good one desires for oneself.

Universal Mandate vs. Gradated Affection

A significant point of divergence lies in the scope of application. Islamic ethics institute an immediate, universal obligation that explicitly mandates equal consideration to the distant stranger (*al-jar al-junub*), the orphan, and the wayfarer alongside kin. Confucianism, adhering to the principle of gradated care (*aijian*), posits that moral development must follow a natural order. Expecting equal treatment for strangers before fulfilling filial duties to parents is viewed as unnatural; true universal care is built upon the foundation of cultivated family ties.

Diagnosis of Egoism

Both traditions identify human self-centeredness as the primary obstacle to the Golden Rule, but diagnose its origin differently:

- Islam views egoism as a spiritual malady of the lower self (*nafs*), requiring divine guidance, self-reckoning (*muhasabah*), and spiritual purification (*tazkiyah*) to align human will with divine mercy.
- Confucianism views egoism as uncultivated raw nature and unrefined self-interest (*si*), requiring ritual propriety (*Li*), study, and reflection (*Shu*) to expand the self into a fully relational human being (*Junzi*).

Practical Applications of Reciprocity in Global Contexts

While classical scriptural and philosophical formulations provide the theoretical bedrock of reciprocity in Islam and Confucianism, the true efficacy of these moral traditions lies in their capacity to address contemporary global challenges. In an era marked by geopolitical fracturing, institutional mistrust, and existential environmental threats, abstract moral imperatives must be translated into actionable normative frameworks. Bridging theory and praxis, the comparative ethics of Islamic *Rahmah* (active mercy) and *Ithar* (altruistic preference) alongside Confucian *Shu* (empathetic reciprocity) and *Wulun* (relational ordering) offer vital insights for modern global governance. By examining these traditions across intercultural peacebuilding, organizational leadership, and ecological stewardship, reciprocity moves beyond text-critical analysis to serve as a pragmatic blueprint for contemporary global ethics.

Intercultural Dialogue and Peacebuilding

- Perspective-Taking in Civilizational Conflict: Confucian *Shu* (measuring others' feelings by one's own) serves as a vital diplomatic framework, compelling conflicting parties to understand their counterpart's security anxieties and historic grievances.^{xxxv}
- Proactive Goodwill: Islamic *Rahmah* (active mercy) encourages nations to initiate unearned goodwill gestures and reconciliation efforts rather than relying on strictly conditional or punitive diplomacy.^{xxxvi}

Leadership Ethics and Organizational Management

- Self-Correction over Egoism: The dyad of *Zhong* (internal integrity) and *Shu* challenges toxic leadership by demanding that leaders evaluate their demands on subordinates against what they would accept for themselves.^{xxxvii}
- Stewardship and Accountability: Islamic *Amanah* (trust) and *Ihsan* require corporate leaders to prioritize social welfare and employee dignity over unconstrained profit maximization.^{xxxviii}

Global Citizenship and Climate Ethics

- Intergenerational Altruism: The Islamic concept of *Ithar* (preferring others over oneself) extends naturally to climate ethics, demanding that current generations curb consumption to protect future generations and vulnerable global populations.^{xxxix}
- Relational Global Citizenship: The Confucian model of concentric care (*Wulun*) provides a realistic path toward global citizenship which building ethical responsibility from the local family unit outward to global humanity, avoiding abstract detachment.^{xl}

CONCLUSION

Both Islam and Confucianism champion the ethic of reciprocity as an indispensable pillar of human morality and character development. Islam anchors reciprocity in divine love and transcendental accountability, treating altruism (*ithar*) as an essential requirement of complete faith (*iman*). Confucianism approaches reciprocity as an immanent, humanistic method of self-cultivation (*Zhong-Shu*), structuring social cohesion along dynamic relational ties. Furthermore, as this study demonstrates, neither tradition is a static monolith; both encompass rich internal variations across legal, theological, mystical, and historical sub-traditions that dynamically adapt over time.

Bridging classical textual hermeneutics with contemporary moral psychology and historical socio-institutional structures (such as *Waqf* and *Xiangyue*), this comparative analysis illustrates how abstract ethical imperatives are operationalized into lived social capital. Despite their differing metaphysical origins, both traditions converge on a fundamental ethical truth: true moral maturity requires stepping outside of egoism to honor the shared dignity and humanity of the “other.”

In an increasingly interconnected yet polarized global environment, the complementary insights of Islamic altruism (*ithar/rahmah*) and Confucian relational empathy (*shu*) move beyond theoretical reflection. They offer robust, pragmatic conceptual frameworks for addressing contemporary global challenges supplying actionable paradigms for civilizational conflict resolution, ethical organizational leadership, and intergenerational climate justice. Ultimately, the reciprocal ethics of Islam and Confucianism provide a shared global compass for building a more empathetic, just, and harmonious world.

ⁱ See Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Nonviolence and Peace Building in Islam: Theory and Practice* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2003), 35–42.

ⁱⁱ Simon Baron-Cohen, *Zero Degrees of Empathy: A New Theory of Human Cruelty* (London: Penguin UK, 2011); and Daniel Batson, *Altruism in Humans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 32–45.

ⁱⁱⁱ For an in-depth analysis of the metaphysical origins of Islamic versus Confucian anthropological concepts, see Nur Suriya binti Mohd Nor, “Fitrah in Islam and Ren Xing in Confucianism: Its Relation to Islamic and Confucian Ethics,” *Al-Itqān: Journal of Islamic Sciences and Comparative Studies*, Special Issue 1 (2018): 17–27.

^{iv} Aaron Stalnaker, *Overcoming Our Evil: Human Nature and Spiritual Exercises in Xunzi and Augustine* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2006), 15–23.

^v Aaron Stalnaker, 15–18.

^{vi} Aaron Stalnaker, 21–24.

^{vii} Aaron Stalnaker, 29.

^{viii} Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam: The Qur’anic Principle of Wasatiyyah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 88–94.

^{ix} Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* [The Revival of the Religious Sciences] (Cairo: Dar al-Hadith, 2011), Vol. 3, 112–118.

^x Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, trans. M. M. Khan (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997), Book 2, Hadith 6.

^{xi} Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *The Invocations & Supplications: Book IX of the Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn)*, trans. K. Nakamura (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1990).

^{xii} Murat Çizakça, *A History of Philanthropic Foundations: The Islamic World from the Seventh Century to the Present*, (Istanbul: Boğaziçi University Press, 2000), 8–15.

^{xiii} Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, Vol. 3, 125.

^{xiv} Quoted in Yahya ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, *An-Nawawī’s Forty Hadith*, trans. Ezzeddin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davies (Damascus: Holy Koran Publishing House, 1977), Commentary on Hadith 13.

^{xv} Al-Bukhārī, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book 2, Hadith 6; Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), Book 1, Hadith 71.

^{xvi} Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Book 33, Hadith 88.

^{xvii} Abu Dawud Sulayman ibn al-Ash’ath al-Sijistani, *Sunan Abi Dawud* (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2008), Hadith 4590.

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