

**The Media and Oneself:
Cultivating Genuine Relationships Through Xin**

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Xin, a virtue devised by Confucius, describes the practice of honesty, integrity, and fidelity. In particular, *xin* is more accurately embodied when one “[follows] through with what one has said.” This “is reinforced by the fact that commentators sometimes translate *xin* as ‘trustworthiness in word’” (Wee 517). While I did not initially know the concept of *xin* by name, I feel that I have unknowingly practiced it in both social and professional contexts. Largely, the notion of integrity holds great weight, not only in my personal life but also in my career aspirations as a student majoring in media and communication. Keeping one’s word and staying true to oneself in order to nurture relationships on the basis of loyalty is not always easy, but it is necessary. As a young child, I felt compelled to be honest because guilt was too heavy a burden to carry. As I got older, the virtue of integrity, honesty, and fidelity—*xin*, developed into a more complex understanding of both it and its application. However, I struggled as my values began to conflict with societal expectations and cynicism—exacerbated by unethical practices in the media. The answer, I feel, is believing that *xin* is a virtue I can apply not only in personal ways, but in my career as a media practitioner, even if Western virtue ethics have been more frequently applied.

Being raised by a Bosnian family, I recognized their desire to teach values based on a collectivist mindset. They placed a great deal of importance on developing trust through giving solemn promises. From their perspective, cultivating integrity was something to take pride in and I felt attached to this idea without rationalization. It was only when my integrity had been challenged that I recognized it as being a virtue that was meaningful to me.

When I had just started middle school, I wasn’t sure about the sort of person I wanted to be; and my peers weren’t very sure either. The issue was that I had two very different friends. With one I had to maintain an image and with the other I had to be myself. It was a chapter of

my life where I felt drawn to appearing impressive. But, I began to realize over the course of that first year that being true to myself was more rewarding; for the relationships that I built were genuine. From that moment onward, I was able to follow a path where the virtue of *xin* would eventually be adopted. I would do what I can to keep my integrity and my promises, and it would be applied in the context of friendship, group projects, and even work related responsibilities. Based on these experiences, the ultimate reward from practicing *xin* has always been the ability to develop genuine friendships--because sincere relationships only sprout from the ability to be vulnerably honest. Today, the same friend I was able to be my true self around in middle school is like a sister to me--we've been best friends for twelve years.

As I pursued my interests in writing by also majoring in communication and media, I began to see obstacles that would prevent individuals from practicing *xin*. From unethical practices to questionable choices, I knew that whatever career I chose I would want to be able to be true to myself and my own word. Yet, it became clear to me that it wasn't so simple for media practitioners. Or, rather, the practice of virtue is impersonal and written out in the form of ethical codes, and then only hastily considered. Thus, it was through the analysis of mass media ethics that I realized the importance of *xin* as a virtue to be practiced in a professional sense.

As such, one of the greatest obstacles in carrying out *xin* involves keeping one's integrity in the pursuit of a fulfilling career. My relationship with media related work is complicated. The desire to communicate something through this medium is strong for me, but the ethical issues that arise in doing so, correctly and transparently, is a fear of mine. Media professionals have, at times, employed deception for ratings. To "minimize harm" professionals must be transparent, they must have integrity and not succumb to special interests, and they must be loyal to the

public good (SPJ Code of Ethics). Yet, ethical standards are easy to take for granted when they don't mean much to the individual “practicing” them.

Still, even well meaning media practitioners are called upon to make difficult decisions. If we consider the duties media practitioners have in communicating information to the public, *xin* would play a crucial role. While *xin* may be associated with interpersonal relationships in terms of its practice (Wee 517), the relationship between the public and media-makers may even be analogous to intimate connections. The average media professional is expected to do what is right with regard to information delivery and communication. This is especially true of journalists; for, “ethical journalism strives to ensure the free exchange of information that is accurate, fair and thorough. An ethical journalist acts with integrity” (SPJ Code of Ethics). But, integrity can mean something a bit different depending on one’s perspective.

The “Western concept of trust,” for instance, may be formulated based on one’s expectation that an individual will carry out their particular role with integrity, given that a professional role necessitates the practice of this virtue (Wee 518). And, in some way, this is true of journalists and other media professionals. Ethical conduct is an expectation, even if it isn’t legally enforced. But, because journalists communicate with the public, there is a deeper, perhaps sociological, implication behind their actions. A platform for communication is powerful, and with it comes the need to consider how certain communication tactics can affect or shape society. Loveless summarizes the argument that “[the way] individuals process information explains how they formulate their opinion, but that most of the information used to do so [is] heuristically driven; that is, more or less directly from elites or media” (65). In essence, the media is responsible for informing a society; but whether society is ethically informed or not is the issue in need of questioning.

Journalists must go beyond just expectation and duty, they must believe that their relationship with the public is one of significance. While western standards for ethics may be applicable in a variety of contexts, the particular dynamic of media communications necessitates the practice of *xin*. It is implied that, by Confucius' description of *xin*, *xin* is “[manifested]...when one performs as one has said one would (or, more broadly, as one has represented)” (Wee 517). And, if my own experiences are anything to go by, being able to practice *xin* fosters the possibility for genuine relationships. For a journalist, this is integral to transparency. While the issue of transparency is complex, there is no greater way to ensure fidelity in a relationship built between the media and the public than for the media professional to humanize themselves and the public they are communicating with. In order to do so, maintaining a degree of honesty through keeping one's word, on this interpersonal level, would create an environment where people favor trusting the media because they know the media is composed of individuals who want to do the right thing.

Xin is a virtue that I embody not only because it feels right to do so, but because the virtue that encompasses integrity, honesty, and fidelity has helped me cultivate strong relationships. In realizing that, over the course of my life, I eventually felt drawn to addressing the ethical issues that arise in media related careers. Discussing and understanding where things go wrong from an ethical standpoint may be an easy thing to do in hindsight, when the damage is already done. However, truly personifying a virtue like *xin* could transform the average media environment, preventing many ethical issues from occurring in the first place. If media practitioners could practice honesty and fidelity from an interpersonal level, simply because one deeply believes *xin* is a virtue worth following, then a sincere relationship between the media and

the public could be developed. Ultimately, it is an issue I hope to continue addressing in my future career in media without ever compromising my integrity.

Works Cited

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