KEEP WARM THE OLD: EDUCATING FOR VIRTUE

by

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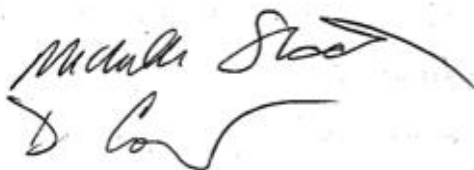B.A. (English), Beijing Foreign Studies University, 2004

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Abstract

Topics around standardized testing, teaching efficiency and effectiveness have recently aroused heated debates within and about schooling systems in both China and Canada. Instead of pursuing the "right" answers for the current disputes, however, I have chosen to return to ancient dialogues and explore the meaning and purpose of schooling: education. I hope to understand and re-interpret my own experiences as a teacher more educationally.

In order to accomplish this ultimate aim, I examine my teaching through the lenses of two philosophers from more than two thousand and four hundred years ago. Both are concerned with educating people to act well in the world, that is, with fostering good character. One is from the West; one from the East: Aristotle and Confucius.

Using as primary sources Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Confucius' *Analects,* I ask three fundamental questions: "Why do we educate?", "What counts as educating?" and "How might we educate? " by creating dialogues among Aristotle, Confucius, their various interpreters and myself. In Chapter Two: Why Do we Educate? I explore the notions of *eudaimonia* (happiness) and *dao* (the way). In Chapter Three: What counts as Educating? I study *phronesis* (practical wisdom) and *ren* (humanity). In Chapter Four: How Do We Educate? I examine the relationship between *habitus* (habituation) and *li* (rituals).

In *Keeping Warm the Old: Educating for Virtue*, I attempt to recover and reinterpret critical, but largely neglected, educational resources for modern schooling.

CHAPTER ONE

KEEP WARM THE OLD: EDUCATING FOR VIRTUE

"If by keeping the old warm one can provide understanding of the new, one is fit to be a teacher" (*Analects* 2:11).

Walking inside the middle school in which I taught for seven years in Beijing, I pass by a big plate in the school hall on which our school motto is inscribed. It is an extract from the *Doctrine of the Mean*: "To be fond of learning is to be near to wisdom(*zhi*, 智); To practice with vigor is to be near to benevolence (*ren*,仁）；To possess the feeling of shame is to be near courage (*yong*, 勇)." People seldom really pay attention to it since they tend to be too preoccupied with their busy lives to take notice of this plate. I, as a typical middle school teacher in this college preparatory school, usually hurried by with a big pile of exercise notebooks or exam papers. Sometimes I stopped by the plate--not to reflect on what was on it--but to adjust my big pile of papers and then take a deep breath to get myself prepared to enter a battle-like classroom in which students were soldiers and I was their commander. The content of teaching was prescribed and the aim for the battle is crystal clear for us all: get higher scores in exams in order to enter a good university and guarantee students a decent, well-paid job in the future.

During my first two or three years of teaching I was pleased when my students scored higher than other classes; I felt proud of myself when I won the first place in the nation-wide "Teaching Skills Competition"; I took delight in developing my teaching efficiency and effectiveness so that my students would obtain better marks. Sometimes, I was even impressed and moved by the diligence of my students who studied day and night

to gain better scores. Despite my self-pride and my admiration for my students' diligence, I still felt something was missing from my teaching. Sometimes I felt tired or bewildered at the constant military-like training of my students. I thought of myself much like a cog gaining more and more rust in the big machinery of the schooling system. I began to ask myself questions: Why should I teach students what I teach? What is in their best interest? Could we have other options other than getting better scores as the end of schooling? I was confused, but still did what I understood as my duty. I began to feel sympathy for my students as well as myself, since we both seemed somehow lost.

It was not until I left my teaching post in Beijing to study more than 8000 km away at UBC that I became more and more aware of my past experience as a teacher. With the benefit of the time, space and support, I began to reflect on my schooling experiences in China while physically in another jurisdiction--Canada. I began to connect my lived experience in two teaching systems: as student and then a teacher in China and a graduate student in Canada. Despite the disparity in time periods and levels of schooling, I found not only differences but also similarities between Eastern and Western schooling systems. I began with stereotypical images of Western schooling as creative, open, relaxed and Eastern schooling as conforming and competitive. After living both systems, however, I discovered many similarities. Under rhetoric such as "21st Century Learning", for example, the hidden agendas of schooling in both China and Canada, seem concerned with promoting teaching efficiency and increasing teachers' accountability by focusing on improving student scores on standardized tests—either on the *Gaokao* in China or on provincial examinations in British Columbia--with the presumption that better scores indicate more and better preparation of the young for future jobs. These similar schooling

concerns in both China and Canada have puzzled me and aroused my interest in understanding the issues in order to discover ways to explain these parallel discussions and perhaps imagine other options. Instead of searching for new paths for the current debates, however, I have chosen to return to what I believe to be the primary purpose of schooling: education. The few lines on the plate in our school hall came into my mind: I had never thought carefully about what Confucius meant. Ironically, far away in both time and space, I now find his words enlightening for me in my journey to explore what counts as education—and educational teaching.

I find myself in the intersection of two distinctive schooling systems that are embedded in different social, cultural and political backgrounds. Yet, the combination offers me a unique perspective that might help me interpret my past experience in a middle school in China from different lenses that are both similar and different. I am, of course, not attempting to find answers to the fundamental question about what counts as education (that is, my journey does not have a definite or final destination); rather, I hope to understand and re-interpret my own experiences as a teacher more educationally. In order to accomplish this ultimate aim, I would like to choose and view my stories again through the lenses of two philosophers who were both born more than two thousand and four hundred years ago. Both are concerned with educating people to act well in the world, that is, with fostering good character. Both have profoundly influenced human societies for centuries. One is from the East; one from the West: Confucius and Aristotle.

Aristotle and Confucius

Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC) is considered as one of the greatest philosophers in Western thought. Unlike his own teacher, Plato (and Plato's teacher, Socrates), Aristotle emphasized the practical over the theoretical in leading a fully human life. In *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle depicts human happiness (*eudaimonia*) as the self-sufficient and ultimate end worth of human beings by the acquisition and exercise of certain intellectual and moral virtues. He proposed that full virtue consisted of natural virtue (the dispositions we are born with), *habitus* (those that we acquire in living alongside certain virtuous people) and *phronesis* or practical wisdom (the capacity to do the right thing the right way in the right context for the right reasons at the right time). Intellectual virtues and moral virtues are defined in their interaction with each other. To be more specific, they are inseparable because they are not independent categories; rather, they are interwoven and infiltrate each other in a practically wise person. The virtues proposed by Aristotle should be rounded rather than one sided even if they are given different names and are manifest in particular actions rather than in the universal theories.

Confucius, born into the Spring and Autumn period (551–479 BC), is an ancient Chinese educator, philosopher, politician and the founder of Confucianism which developed into a school of philosophy by his followers in the Han Dynasty in China. His emphasis on *dao* (the way, the path), *ren* (humanity), *li* (rituals) has profoundly influenced Chinese traditions and beliefs over 2500 years. He was believed to be the author of the five classic texts (*Classic of Poetry, Book of Documents, Book of Rites, Classic of Changes, Spring and Autumn Annals*). Together with the Four Books (*The Great Learning, Doctrine of the Mean, Analects, Mencius*) that were selected and edited by Zhu Xi, one of

Confucius' followers in the Song Dynasty, the five classic works are considered as illustrations of the key belief systems of Confucianism. Confucius links the traditional Chinese rituals (*li*) to its essence of attending to humanity (*ren*); through this connection, Confucius denotes new meanings of *li* by adding the elements of *ren* to its core. Fan (2010, p. 15-16) explains: "Confucius was to reconstruct the Chinese ritual system in terms of the fundamental human virtue of *ren* that he teased out through his reflection on human nature".

Both Aristotle and Confucius lived in a period of great social conflict and upheaval and both focused on understanding how human lives could be brought into some kind of balance for ultimate human flourishing. In face of deteriorating morality as the result of constant warfare and political turnover, both sought social reconstruction by reviving and reconceiving what counts as human virtue—a concern that lies at the core of both Aristotelianism and Confucianism. Instead of confronting fierce social conflicts with arrows and spears, the two philosophers chose the gentlest ways to address the harshest warfare: to search for the glimmering lights in human nature, embrace, cultivate and combine them. Eventually, they could light the whole world.

Asking Fundamental Questions

As mentioned above, I used to be proud of myself for my devotion to helping my students get better exam scores in school. The busyness of the work in an overwhelmingly competitive environment, however, deprived me of moments of reflection about the fundamental questions about what I was doing, including: Why do we educate? What counts as educating? and How might we educate? These questions seemed so abstract and big that I seldom thought about them in a serious manner. I was more concerned with how

I could make my students master a new grammatical point or improve my students' reading skills, since they produced concrete, measureable learning results. I rarely—if ever—thought about how those big philosophical questions could influence me or my students. However, the more effort I made to improve the scores of my students, the more powerlessness I felt as a teacher, not because some students would not get satisfactory scores no matter how hard I pushed, but because of an absence of fundamental direction. I gradually realized the importance of reflecting upon fundamental questions since they would provide a foundation for my teaching and help me interpret my past, present and future experiences: These fundamental questions are rooted in my everyday teaching practice and manifested in all my interactions with my students. The significance of asking these questions does not lie in the search for the right answers. Indeed, they do not necessarily have an answer or answers. Rather, the constant reflection on the big questions itself is essential, since it makes the seemingly dull questions vivid by being relevant to my own experiences. Instead of merely asking the questions and trying to find answers to them, we add more meaning to these questions by trying to understand, explain and reinterpret our lived experience as teachers.

In the following chapters, I would like to develop my intellectual exploration by asking the three fundamental questions involving "why", "what" and "how" through building dialogues among Aristotle, Confucius, their various interpreters and myself. At the beginning of each chapter, I describe a teaching experience that I want to understand better, and then reflect on my stories using the resources provided by Aristotle and Confucius. In Chapter Two: Why Do we Educate? I explore the notions of *eudaimonia* and *dao*. In Chapter Three: What counts as Educating? I study *phronesis* and *ren*. In Chapter

Four: How Do We Educate? I examine the relationship between *habitus* and *li*. In each of the three chapters, I follow the structure of explaining the two concepts, comparing the similarities and differences of two concepts, relating the educational philosophies to my own stories and examining what influence they would have on me when I re-interpret my own stories.

I find it fascinating that Aristotle and Confucius--while coming from very different historical and cultural backgrounds with dramatically different moral codes and views of the world--share a similar emphasis on virtues in human flourishing. They are both, in current terms, interested in virtue ethics. Therefore, when I try to invite the two ancient philosophers into our discussion about education, I try to explore their common grounds in relation to the educational topics while being aware of the distinctness of their philosophical beliefs.

I focus on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Confucius' *Analects* as primary resources when I try to build conversations between the two philosophers and myself. It is worth noting the language challenges involved in using these two texts. For one thing, *Nicomachean Ethics* is translated from ancient Greek to modern English, a process in which the meanings of the original words can be lost, misunderstood, misinterpreted. As I note later, the original ancient Greek often has many interpretations in modern English—and often none of them capture the original meanings. Even with the *Analects*, Chinese being my native language, I still have trouble in understanding the literal meaning of some words in their original context since the meaning of the words itself has evolved greatly over 2500 years. Therefore, no one (and especially me) could legitimately claim to master the original meanings Aristotle and Confucius may have intended since changing

languages hinder our precise understanding. Being aware of this, I intend to be cautious in using certain words that denote different meanings and try to view translations with caution. For example, I avoid using English translations of key concepts (e.g. "practical wisdom" for *phronesis*) to remind the reader—and myself—of the challenges of language and time. Despite these difficulties, I continue to search for meaning: My goal is to create a dialogue involving Aristotle, Confucius and myself in which crucial ideas about education might be reconstructed so that I might understand better what it means to educate and perhaps also be a better teacher. My research involves something like looking for the light generated from far away stars that may be diminished or deviated during the journey—but still may reach us as long as we look into the sky with care, diligence and patience. The stars may be inconceivably distant, but we continue marvel at the light they provide for us.

CHAPTER TWO

WHY SHOULD WE EDUCATE? 一 *EUDAIMONIA* **AND** *DAO*

When I taught students in Grade 7, I did a survey about what my students wanted

from schools or teachers at the beginning of each year. Most of them responded with

similar answers: to learn knowledge and practice skills. This type of response was taken

for granted as the "right answer" for a young teacher like me. Almost everyone around

them including peers, parents and teachers (including me) expected them to be like that

in order to be "a good student." However, I received unexpected feedback from one of

my students, Jian Xu. Jian roughly responded as follows: "I don't like schools since I

hate math." It was a plain, but defiant answer in my eyes at that moment. I scheduled a

meeting with Jian and wanted to get him to explain the reason why he hated math so that

I could talk him into loving it. I planned to tell him how important math is for him in

terms of the scores for the college entrance examination and his future career; however,

my intentions did not work out after I listened to him. Jian talked about being laughed at

as a dumb boy because of his poor scores in math, being forced to go to a camp for the

whole summer by his parents to improve his math, and being occupied by math all the

time so that he had no time for the fictional stories he liked so much. I became

speechless after hearing this. I was then unable to answer my own question: "Why would

we convince him to suffer?" I do not mean to deny the importance of math; rather, I

would like to raise the question for educators--including myself--about how mathematics

contributes to students' education.

In the following part of this chapter, I firstly would like to explore the notions of Aristotle's *eudaimonia* and Confucius' *dao*, and then I would compare the two notions and invite myself into the discussion about *eudaimonia* and *dao* by reflecting on the story of my student Jian. I intend to rethink and reconnect myself to the question of why we educate through these two philosophical concepts.

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A Brief Introduction to *Eudaimonia* and *Dao*

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Aristotle realizes the ultimate and self-sufficient chief good for human beings, which is *eudaimonia* (happiness). On one hand, Aristotle's chief good is valuable "in itself which means that it is never desirable because of something else." Aristotle further articulates the chief good as "complete without qualification" (1097a30 -1097b1). "The chief good is achieved only in individual lives and through the active engagement of individuals themselves" (Broadie & Rowe, p. 11). On the other hand, Aristotle's notion of self-sufficiency of the chief good "does not mean sufficient for oneself alone, for the person living a life of isolation, but also for one's parents, children, spouse, and generally those one loves, and one's fellow citizens, since man is by nature a civic being" (1097b8-11). Aristotle also comments that "For single and straight is the road of the good; the bad go bad every which way" (1106b35). It shows there is only one road to achieve the chief good which is the avoidance of excess and deficiency and embrace the intermediacy. He emphasizes several times in *The Nichomachean Ethics* that *eudemonia* is a certain sort of activity which is in accordance with excellence.

Comparatively, in the *Doctrine of the Mean* (XIII, 1), Confucius says, "*Dao* is not far from man". The Master also comments "The sage can find himself in no situation in which he is not himself" (*The Doctrine of the Mean*, XIV, 2). Based on this discourse, I regard *dao* for Confucius is more like the compass to direct our actions rather than the North Star which is far from reach. As long as human beings find *dao*, they will arrive at a state of inner balance as well as beautiful harmony with the outside world: The whole world will be free of forces and embrace the peace with rejoicing hearts. "It is said in the Book of Poetry… humans being sincere and reverential, the whole world is conducted to a state of happy tranquility" (*Doctrine of the Mean*, XXXIII: 5). Some may argue that it is just a utopian world that Confucius envisions; however, I believe it demonstrates Confucius' ultimate belief in *dao* as a human destination, still reachable by humans and that those who attempt to live by *dao* can be blessed with the beautiful harmony in themselves. For Confucius, *dao* is valuable in itself and everyone should pursue it rather than other options, which Confucius would regard as being led astray. The essence of *dao* lies in the pursuit of human virtue.

Eudaimonia of Aristotle

Reeve (1992, p. 151) explains that Aristotle's *eudaimonia* (translated variously as the "chief good," "happiness" and the "good") includes four features:

1. It must be an activity, the activation of a state, not a state.

2. It must be self-sufficient.

3. It must be choiceworthy by itself not for any para end.

4. It must be an activity expressing virtue.

Eudaimonia is divided into three categories: primary *eudaimonia*, secondary *eudaimonia* and external goods by Aristotle. Primary *eudaimonia* is "the expression of something divine, something superior to and so different from the merely human" (Reeve, 1996, p. 156; see also 1177b26-31) the pursuit of which could be understood as study. Study, as the activity of *sophia,* is concerned with abstract and theoretical understanding and is regarded as superior to the concerns of practical life. For Aristotle's teacher, Plato, the only route to *eudaimonia* is a life of study and those who practice such a life are lovers (*philos*) of study (*sophia*). Aristotle echoes his mentor in valuing *sophia*, but worries that ultimate understanding of the world is beyond human capacity and that we need to make the best life possible within our human capabilities: The pursuit of *sophia* can contribute to leading a good life, but attaining sophia "will be divine as compared to a human life." (1177b30-32).

Secondary *eudaimonia* involves making use of our human capacities to make the best mortal life, that is, "the life in accordance with the rest of excellence; for activities in accordance with this are human" (1178a6-10). On the one hand, then, Aristotle advocates that we should pursue primary *eudaimonia* which consists of supreme and divine *nous* that lies ultimately beyond human capacity. On the other hand, however, he believes that *eudaimonia* also involves making the best human life possible: "In so far as he is a human being, and shares his life with others, he chooses to do the deeds that accord with excellence, and so he will need such things for the purposes of living a human life"

(1178b5-7). Determining the requisite excellences to lead a good human life and acting

on them requires practical wisdom, that is, *phronesis*.

The acceptance of human limitation also entails the acceptance of vulnerability—a

constraint that many philosophers beginning with Plato have attempted to overcome. In

The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy,

Nussbaum (2002) powerfully captures "Plato's heroic attempt…to save the lives of

human beings by making them immune to [fate and] Aristotle's …conception of practical

rationality that will make human beings self-sufficient in an appropriately human way"

(p. 8). External goods are one of three types of goods defined by Aristotle as necessary to

lead a good human life: external goods, goods related to the body and to the soul. Goods

related to the soul are goods "in most proper sense and good to the highest degree"

(1098b16), while "external goods and goods of the body are things that the virtuous

person uses to change the world or himself for the better, and that the vicious one uses to

change himself or the world for the worse" (Reeve, 1992, p161): Indeed, "it is

impossible, or not easy, to perform fine actions if one is without resources"

(1099a33-34).

In Book I of *the Ethics*, Aristotle raises the question about how *eudaimonia* is

achieved: by learning or habituation, or sent by god or by chance. He is inclined to refer

this question to another inquiry. On the one hand, "*eudaimonia* seems, however, even if

it is not god-sent but comes as a result of excellence and some process of learning or

training, to be among the most godlike things" (1199b14-16). On the other hand,

however, "It will also be something available to many; for it will be possible for it to belong, through some kind of learning or practice, to anyone not handicapped in relation to excellence" (1199b18-20). The answer to the question above seems clear: "For we have said that happiness is a certain sort of activity in accordance with excellence; and of the remaining goods, some are necessary to happiness, while others contribute to it by being useful tools" (1199b27-29). Practicing virtues is essential in Aristotelian path to the ultimate happiness. This definition of happiness excludes animals and small children from achieving it since they are not "doers of fine things" (1199b32), because they lack in full virtue as well as a complete life with it. Aristotle draws the conclusion that no person who is living the *eudaimon* life will ever become miserable, since "the quality of fineness shines through"(1100b31) which helps him to face up to misfortunes with dignity and calmness.

I interpret the *eudaimon* life as living in harmony with oneself and with the world, through activities that promote it constantly. The *eudaimon* life cannot be distorted by panic or stresses, which would impede pursuit of it. The *eudaimon* life, according to my understanding, must be a pleasant one consistent with the fundamental nature of human beings; as long as a person aims at a *eudaimon* life, she would be leading an effortless life since she would be living her life by going beyond it. However, leading such a life requires efforts and time. Aristotle uses metaphors to show that the pursuit of *eudaimonia* will be a process requiring time and devotion: "For a single swallow does not make spring, nor does a single day; in the same way, neither does a single day, or a short time,

make a man blessed and happy" (1098a19-21).

Lee (2001, p. 167) points out that "the best form of an individual or a nation is attainable through knowledge of the definition of *eudaimonia.*" He explains that three moral factors contribute to the realization of the ultimate happiness: nature (*physis*), habits (*ethos*) and reason (*logos*). Full virtue generally consists of the above mentioned three categories, respectively natural virtue, *habitus* and *phronesis* simply defined as acting properly in specific contexts out of good reasons.

Dao of Confucius

Dao is a high frequency word (about one hundred times) in the *Analects*, and it is of great importance for understanding Confucius central beliefs. The Chinese character of *dao*(道) literally means "the way, path, method, the ethics, to tell, to express." It consists of two parts: the left part is "辶" which has root of "to move, to go over"; while the right part "首" refers to the "head" which has an underlying assumption of to lead. *Dao* is given the primary importance in Confucius' *Analects*: "He has not lived in vain who dies in the evening, having been told about *dao* in the morning." (*Analects*, 4:8)

Waley interprets *dao* as "one infallible method of rule" (1971, p. 30) and for Fingarette (1972) *dao* is the absolute and transcendent moral principal to which every human being should conform and obey. I primarily view *dao* as a verb rather than a static and absolute principle; in other words, it is a constant pursuit of what leads our life. *Dao,* literally meaning the way or the path, suggests it is a connection between two ends: one end is rooted in the nature of human beings and the other end is manifested in the

interactions of human beings. Therefore human elements could not be neglected in their pursuit of *dao*.

Fingarette's interpretation of *dao* stagnates the fluidity of *dao* by making it as an impersonal principle and deprives human beings of their creativity in pursuing it. Therefore, I agree more with Hall and Ames on their explanation of *dao* as bearing two folds of nature: the received *dao* "as a door way which provide a person with a direction" and the created *dao* which "ultimately dependent on human action for its coming into being" (1987, pp. 228-229).

The pursuit of *dao*, for Confucius, does not mean that everyone follows the same pre-laid road. Rather, what is suggested by Confucius, is that we should pave our own roads through efforts to experience, to understand, to interact with other people. Just as Hall and Ames put it (1987, p. 228): "*Dao* lives in the people, is carried forward by them, and is to be learned from them. And individuals receive and embody *dao* in unique and qualitatively different ways". *Dao* is embedded in human beings and originates from human beings. Human beings realize themselves as the embodied *dao* and interpret themselves through the pursuit of *dao*. *Dao* is created through the activity of actually doing it. Therefore, on the one hand, *dao* is derived from history, which provides a framework for human beings; on the other hand, *dao* is not restricted to a prescribed way. *Dao* requires human beings' involvement to make it enriched and meaningful. Human beings are active agents in pursuing *dao* by interpreting, broadening, adding to the notion of *dao*.

Despite the emphasis on human beings, *dao* for Confucius also possesses the power beyond human existence: "*Dao*… in its utmost reaches, it shines brightly through heaven and earth" (*Doctrine of the Mean*, XII:4). Most importantly, for Confucius, society affords meanings for human beings and in turn, human beings should contribute to the well-being of society. Therefore, Confucius' *dao* could be understood as a path within a person and then extend to bridge the individual and society. What *dao* conveys is not conformity of individuals to the society; rather, it is social re-construction from the efforts of individuals.

Confucius comments: "A man has no way of becoming a gentleman unless he understands *dao*" (*Analects*, 20:3). Confucius' ultimate emphasis on the destination or *dao* of human beings, but he is also concerned with social conventions and communication. *Dao* is used by Chinese philosophical schools to represent distinct meanings in tradition, like *Confucianism* or *Daoism*. For Confucianism, the Way is closely related to *ren* and stands for the way of *ren* which could only be developed and manifested through human interaction: "Never for a moment does a gentleman depart from the *dao*" (4:5). Also the master also points out that: "there are three things in the gentleman's *dao*: the man of *ren* is free from anxiety; the man of wisdom is free from delusion; the man of courage is free from fear" (14:28). *Dao* is approachable in people's constant practice of *ren*. Hall and Ames (1987, pp. 229-230) describe the respective nature of *ren* as "person making" and *dao* as "world making". We have to admit that Confucius' *dao* has an end in society other than oneself. *Dao* is "determined by the

exchange between an emerging humanity and a changing world" (Hall & Ames, p. 230).

Dao for *Daoism*, in contrast, is intimately related to nature. *Daoism* believes there is a

metaphysical way (*dao*) behind every creature. *Dao* could be discovered only with the

naturalist state through the moments with oneself and to be oneself without interference

from the outside world. In a word, *dao* for Confucianism is to live "into" the world,

while *dao* for *daoism* is to live "out of" the world.

Similarities between *Eudaimonia* and *Dao*

Aristotle's notion of *eudaimonia* and Confucius' notion of dao share three key

features. Firstly, both *eudaimonia* and *dao* are not a state but should be interpreted as an

activity. Secondly, those who are in possession of either *eudaimonia* or *dao* are supposed

to arrive at the ultimate destiny of human beings which is rooted in but goes beyond

human life. Thirdly, both *eudaimonia* and *dao* involve achieving harmony within oneself

and with others.

For the first statement, the belief that *eudaimonia* and *dao* are interpreted as

activities rather than states determines the dynamic nature of the two. They bear the fluid

proposition and are defined in activities. Aristotle comments "By excellence we mean

excellence of soul, not of body; *eudaimonia*, too, we say, is activity of soul" (1102a

16-17). Dao as well lives in the people and is manifest through human activities: "Dao of

Wen and Wu had not crumbled to the ground—it still exists in people" (*Analects*, 19:22).

Therefore, *eudaimonia* and *dao* symbolize proper self-sufficient ends for human beings

rather than an identical end for everyone. The nature of both as an activity predetermines

that their manifestation could be and should be in various forms in different circumstances.

Drawing from the idea of fluidity and flexibility for human's *eudaimonia* and *dao*, I reflect on Jian's story. I should not blame Jian for his poor performance in math. We have pushed students into a fixed box we have designed for them, like math for Jian. We stick labels like laziness and dumbness to the individual student if they are not suitable for the box we have designed with ignorance and never look into the box itself. Rather, it is the designing of the box itself that is the root of our problems. We need to think carefully about purposes of education for each person rather than be busy with squeezing individual students into identical containers of knowledge. The purpose of education, based on the self-sufficiency principle of *eudaimonia* and *dao*, should be concerned with the goodness in itself rather than for the purpose of finding a decent job or making much money. The purpose of education lies in understanding the uniqueness of individual students and finding out a way to help each of them find their own happiness.

As for my student Jian, I would like to suggest we should develop what he feels enthusiastic about like reading or writing and help him build confidence in himself. What is more, like nurturing young plants, we have to pay enough attention to whether the plant's roots are healthy--and the roots of plants are like the virtues of students which should be our priority. Jian's journey as a student is so occupied by the so called important knowledge that he could hardly have time to run in the woods or to appreciate the beauty of a bird; he had little time to sit and chat with his parents with a cheerful and

appreciative heart; he could spare no time to be with himself to contemplate about what kind of person he wants to be. His obsession with scores caused by the high pressure schooling system distorted the beauty in life which is simple and warm.

As for the second argument, *eudaimonia* and *dao* are both rooted in the worldliness and yet extend beyond the world. The conceptualization of the ultimate goodness for human beings for *eudaimonia* and *dao* is more than an abstract one. Rather, it depends on certain substances. In terms of reaching the *eudaimon* life, Aristotle believes that it requires study as the primary *eudaimonia*, activity expressing *phronesis* as secondary *eudaimonia* and certain external goods. The external goods such as the resources which a person needs to realize his primary and secondary *eudaimonia* determines that the *eudaimon* life could not be created out of a separate soul. Instead, it is dependent on certain provisions of the worldly life, including interactions with other human beings.

For *dao*, Confucius includes the realization of *ren* (humaneness) and *li* (rituals), *zhi* (wisdom), *yong* (courage) in order to attain the life of *dao*. Only by attending to full virtues which are embodied in human beings could we have the possibility of approaching or reaching *dao*. Yao explains:

> Confucians are convinced that human nature is rooted in the existence and activities of individuals both internally and in association with other people and larger communities. Wisdom does not arise merely from acknowledging what human nature is, but from the exercising and functioning of the nature. (2006, p. 123)

Despite the fact that the nature of *dao* is embedded in human beings, it still has elements going beyond human beings that are interpreted as the will of heaven. "This is illustrated by what is said in the Book of Poetry--be always studious to be in harmony with the ordinances of Heaven, so you will certainly get for yourself happiness" (*Mencius*, IV: 6).

There is an important relationship involving the worldliness of *eudaimonia* and *dao* to Jian's story. It is crucial for teachers to realize that Jian, like everybody else, could only obtain his own good and flourishing life through having interactions with others. Math, as the headache for Jian, draws him from his peers due to his shame about himself, separates him from his parents because they push him too much and isolates him from teachers who think he is not as diligent and clever as they expect him to be. However, we should not blame math; it is our own emphasis on math and our neglect of other more essential elements in life that separates Jian from the people around him. In other words, whether we could reconnect Jian with others depends on whether we have an educational attitude: to help individual students reach their different notions of goodness. As for Jian, what I would like to do is to provide space and time for Jian to play with his peers, to discuss his dream with his parents, to read the novels he enjoys, to have a moment for himself.

The third argument shows that either *eudaimonia* or *dao* requires harmony; however, the meanings of harmony for *eudaimonia* and *dao* differ to some extent. I interpret harmony for *eudaimonia* as a peaceful and pleasant feeling with oneself and

with the world. "Pleasure in doing virtuous acts is a sign that a virtuous disposition has been acquired" (1104b3-1105a17). Without harmonious and pleasant feelings, one is unable to attain *eudaimonia* since it is something complete. If one suffers from the conflict within his heart, his body and his actions would be impeded by negative emotions. In other words, it is the harmony that aligns one's soul and body. And harmony for *dao* is a dynamic balance that could ensure the smooth and natural development of different counterparts. The harmony for *dao* is closely related to the principle of attending to the golden mean in activities. Striking the harmonious point requires people to constantly adjust themselves between two extremes according to specific context. What is worth mentioning is that only through experiences could one learn about and possess harmony for both *eudaimonia* and *dao*.

Jian's suffering of math suggests that he does not live in harmony with himself. Happiness eluded him because of his inner struggles. I don't mean that giving up on math is the best choice for Jian to pursue his happiness, since it would be another extreme. The harmony advocated by Aristotle and Confucius is not the shallow pleasure of peoples' appetites; rather, it is a dynamic harmony of the golden mean. For Jian, he should not completely give up on math, since it indeed would do certain good to him in terms of logical thinking or even building up the courage to overcome difficulties. However, as he was forced to push himself too hard in math, the result was devastating. He would lose not only interest or patience for math, thereby losing confidence in himself or hope for his school life. I would suggest that we, as educators, should leave

some space for Jian to contemplate what is best for him. When we pushed him to study, we actually undermined his particular talents and interests. He stopped wondering about the world and his place in it. Instead, if we could leave space and time for Jian to think and reflect, he could search—and perhaps even discover--balance.

Differences between *Eudaimonia* and *Dao*

Although *eudaimonia* and *dao* share many similarities, they have two fundamental differences involving the situatedness of human beings and the key virtues necessary to lead a good life. The first difference involves the historical character of human lives; the second pits reason against benevolence.

Curiously, Aristotle rarely mentions *eudaimonia*'s relationship to history. Instead, he draws on its reference to god. According to Aristotle, only god is self-sufficient and self-complete and is eternally engaged in studies. But we cannot engage in study without god, since it is god's activity that provides us with the final cause (Reeve, 1992). We might attempt to approach god; however, we can never be god since our soul is embedded in our body. Aristotle often mentions god as a reference for people in their pursuit of *eudaimonia* rather than the real people. However, he uses it in a way that god's *eudaimonia* is in contrast with human beings' *eudaimonia*. The *eudaimonia* of human beings is still rooted in worldly human experience, since the soul and body are inseparable for human beings and the external goods are a necessity to realize the *eudaimon* life.

On the other hand, *dao* is described by Confucius as a historical *dao* which means

traditions play an important role in its realization: "The Way of King Wen and King Wu never fell into oblivion, it always remained alive among the people. The wise retained its essentials, the ignorant retained a few details. All of them had some elements of the Way of King Wen and King Wu" (*Analects*, 19:22).

I believe *dao* could be interpreted multi-dimensionally: from the historical reference, in the interaction with others and finally in the reflections on oneself. The historical perspective of d*ao* is manifest by Confucius' emphasis on following traditional *li* as the overt expression of Confucius essential virtue *ren*. Historical figures like King Wen and King Wu and their experiences are like a mirror to reflect the truth of *dao*: People gain experience by referencing the ancients. Confucius' advocacy for the historical *dao* is not focused on the imitation of historically exemplary people, however, but on the initiation of a dialogue between the past and the present, a dialogue that should be creative rather than rigidly following traditions since such a dialogue must include unique historically-situated people.

Understanding *eudaimonia* by referencing a god beyond human beings, I begin to understand the limitations of human beings and take the limitations as a source for development. In other words, there is nothing absolute of us since we cannot go beyond the human layers in the worldly life. With regards to Jian's story, I believe that we should hold back our own ideas of life and withdraw from judging others so quickly. To put it simply, we, as educators, have our own limitations as human beings; therefore, we should exercise humility when trying to interpret others' lives. Indeed, by referencing the

historical *dao*, I can reinterpret the story of Jian by trying to understand him through his background, that is, his life in the past and present, both inside and outside of schools. This could help us see Jian as a multi-dimensional person rather than just a poor math student. With better understanding of particular people, dialogues might really begin between Jian and me. Empty slogans had no meaning for him. As his teacher, I should have known of his love for writing; I should have known that he was described as a "dumb duck" by his classmates; I should have known his parents sometimes beat him if he got low scores in math. By actually knowing Jian, I would not have thought about "talking him into loving math." Instead, I would have thought of a way to start a real conversation with Jian, perhaps beginning with my own story about my suffering with P.E. when I started middle school.

The second difference for *eudaimonia* and *dao* is that they derive goodness from distinct sources in human beings. *Eudaimonia* highlights the importance of rationality and regards reason as the distinct property of human beings. This emphasis is manifest in the illustration that full virtue essential to *eudaimonia* consists of elements of *physis* (natural virtue), *ethos* (*ex ethous* or *habitus*) and *logos* (reasoning). Indeed, for Aristotle, "Excellence is a state of character (*hexis*) concerned with choice, lying in a mean, the mean relative to us, this being determined by a *logos*" (1106b36-37a2).

Confucius' *dao* makes rational reasoning inferior to *ren*, that is, benevolence or humanity. In other words, *ren* is an essential element in realization of *dao*. If everyone practices *ren* in relation to other human beings, the society will reach the ultimate

harmony without the need for rules or regulations. Confucius does not offer concrete methods of reaching *ren*; however, he indeed puts much emphasis on the practices of *li* and regards it as the embodiment of *ren*.

   Eudaimonia's emphasis on habituation and reasoning and *dao*'s emphasis on benevolence together create a more complete picture for educators. As a teacher, I should primarily possess the deepest concern and caring for my students. I would never put label like "lazy" or "unintelligent" on Jian due to his underperformance in some subject, since I would think him as a child in need like a young plant requiring the most tender care. I would only blame myself if I could not let him feel enough care and love. I regard the Confucius' *ren* as a spring of water never running dry, on which I could depend to make a real influence on Jian, just as the formless and humble water helps grow the young plant. I agree with Aristotle's emphasis on habituation and reason in order to reach *eudaimonia* since they play an essential role of guidance for teachers to follow when they respond to or interact with their students. As for Jian, I should have perceived Jian's loathing for math not as a problem for Jian but as an educational issue for me to think about. I should have deliberated about Jian's suffering from different aspects to determine a suitable way to engage him rather than attempt to talk him into following my own plan for his life.

CHAPTER THREE

WHAT COUNTS AS EDUCATING? *PHRONESIS* **AND** *REN*

Tingting Sun, a grade 8 student, was a very pleasant, helpful and intelligent girl who always won teachers' favors with her excellent performance in classes and top grades on exams. She was considered as a model student both by her teachers and her classmates; however, one day she was caught cheating on a history exam. I was stunned and felt quite disappointed. As her head teacher, I invited her parents to meet to talk about a serious problem; at the meeting, her parents told me something that caused me a great deal of pain: Tingting had been diagnosed with anorexia nervosa two weeks before and was undergoing medical treatment after school. It all explained why she had recently become much thinner, quieter and why she was late for school twice in the past few days (something that had never happened before). I had actually noticed the changes, but I felt that I should have done much more than just ask her "Are you okay?" I felt very sorry that I hadn't found out about her problem earlier.

I later talked to Tingting about her cheating on the history test. She cried with regret and said: "I was worried to let my parents and teachers down if I didn't do well on exams or they found out my problem." I felt sympathy for her that she felt so much pressure from teachers and parents; I had believed that praise could bring students confidence and pride, but I now realized that it could also create great pressure and cause fear in their hearts. I faced a dilemma in dealing with her cheating: According to school policy, cheating is

intolerable and whoever is caught cheating is automatically suspended for at least two weeks and might even be asked to withdraw from school depending on the severity of the infraction. I knew what I was supposed to do: Report Tingting's infraction. However, considering Tingting's situation--her high demands on herself, her suffering from anorexia nervosa and her pride—I was not sure what I should actually do.

In this chapter, I would like to explore Aristotle's *phronesis* and Confucius' *ren* to understand what might count as educational action, that is, educational teaching. Through comparisons between the two concepts I reflect on Tingting's situation and attempt to understand how I could view the case in better ways and perhaps act differently. Central to both *phronesis* and *ren* is the link between understanding and acting.

A Brief Introduction to *Phronesis* and *Ren*

Aristotle points out that knowing what is the good and right thing to do does not always lead to good conduct; Confucius too is concerned with the problems caused by discrepancies between knowing and acting. Aristotle comments: "We are not inquiring into what excellence or virtue is for the sake of knowing it, but for the sake of becoming good" (1103b28-30). Confucius also points out that the learning must be practiced (*Analects*, 1:1) and when Zi Gong inquires about a gentleman, the Master replies: "his actions go first of his words" (*Analects*, 2:13).

Phronesis involves practical perception, deliberation and rational decision; it attempts to account for the particularity of individual cases and how that might lead to appropriate action. I understand *phronesis* generally as drawing pictures instead of taking

photos: The artist's perception of the object is dependent on her own subjectivity and her decisions about what to draw and how to draw; she might deliberate about many aspects, including her intentions, what she prefers to draw, what she wants to show, who her intended audience is, what the ethics of the drawing involve and how much time she has to devote to the project. And then she decides what to do.

Ren is also embedded in and determined by human action; indeed, *ren* puts emphasis on relationships between people. The deepest caring and concern for others constitutes the core of *ren*. Confucius does not provide us with a fixed definition of *ren*; moreover, it is the fluidity and indefiniteness in the practice of practice of *ren* that characterizes Confucian *ren*: often vague rather than crystal clear, sometimes controversial rather than logical, inclusive instead of exclusive. I regard these as strengths because they acknowledge the unpredictable nature of practice. For example, when his disciples ask him about *xiao* (filial piety), Confucius gave diverse answers--not with regards to "what is *xiao*"—but to reflect that *xiao* depends on what each person needs to do to achieve *xiao* (*Analects*, 2.5; 2.6; 2.7; 2.8). The same holds true for *ren*. What lies in the core of Confucius' belief is not absolute truth, but the detailed and context-based actions which reflect human agency.

Aristotle's Virtues

Aristotle divides virtues into moral virtues and intellectual virtues. Moral virtues are concerned with excellences of character (e.g. courage, moderation, justice); intellectual virtues include *episteme* (systematic knowledge, scientific knowledge), *techne* (craft, art,

skill), *phronesis* (wisdom, prudence, practical wisdom, practical judgment), *sophia* (wisdom, theoretical wisdom, intellectual accomplishment), and *nous* (intelligence, understanding, intuitive reason). The intellectual virtues are interrelated and are connected by *phronesis* to the moral virtues. Aristotle contends that one cannot attain full virtue without obtaining all of the five intellectual virtues and moral virtues. I understand the five intellectual virtues do not have rigid boundaries; they are linked to one another in complex ways, that is, they are interwoven and inseparable. For example, as I show below, each intellectual virtue is defined by its relations and interactions with other intellectual virtues.

The Concept of *Phronesis*

Phronesis (practical wisdom) is a disposition "accompanied by rational prescription… in the sphere of human goods, relating to action" (1140b20-22). *Phronesis* enables people to have cognitive access to particulars as well as universals through deliberation; indeed, *phronesis* provides guidance for people to act properly in particular circumstances. Aristotle explains: "Nor is practical wisdom only concerned with universals: to be wise, one must also be familiar with particulars, since wisdom has to do with action, and the sphere of action is constituted by particulars" (1141b15-18). As indicated by Aristotle, there is non-coincidence between universal knowledge and particular knowledge: We may encounter someone who is in possession of much general knowledge but who is unable to employ that knowledge to act well in the world. Conversely, someone may not know what nutrients some food contains, but is still able to eat healthily based on past experience. In sum, *phronesis* is linked to *episteme*—but not

tightly linked. They both involve forms of knowing: knowing the right thing to do (and being able to do it) and knowing about the world we inhabit.

Phronesis is a kind of executive virtue (Reeve (1992, p. 76) describes it as "architectonic"), marshaling the requisite intellectual and moral virtues to support and enable right action. Nussbaum (2001, p. 302) further explains that "practical choices cannot be adequately captured in a system of universal rules. And the three features [of practice at issue] are mutability, indeterminacy, and particularity." By mutability of the practical Aristotle emphasizes its "lack of fixity" in dealing with change over time; indeterminacy stresses its "complexity and contextual variety"; particularity implies the "non-repeatable" elements of the concrete case (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 302). The three features of practice suggest that universal principles and rules inevitably fall short of explaining and dealing with human action in changing situations in shifting contexts at different times. Flexibility and responsiveness are essential for acting well in the world. In other words, *phronesis* should not be firm and rigid; rather, it should nurture sensitivity to each complex and detailed situation.

The Elements of *Phronesis*

In Book VI of *The Nicomachean Ethic*s, Aristotle presents *phronesis* in a complicated conceptual framework. In this paper, I would like to focus on three key components of *phronesis*: practical perception, deliberation and decision.

Practical Perception

As mentioned above, *phronesis* requires knowledge of both universals and particulars: "One of the premises is a universal judgment, while the second has to do with particulars, over which it is perception that holds away" (1147a25-26). The practical perception involved in *phronesis* is not knowledge of the general (*episteme*) since *phronesis* is concerned with particulars. Reeve explains:

First, [the perception involved in *phronesis*] is not perception of proper objects. Second, it is a search, partly perceptual, for the solution to a problem. Third, it involves finding the right universals and bringing them together with a particular in the way that solves that problem. (1992, p. 69)

Indeed, for Aristotle, our emotions—which involve not only sensations, but beliefs and desires-- are important modes of practical perception: perceiving situations as problematic stimulates deliberation about the best courses of action.

Deliberation

Deliberation involves "the things that depend on us and are doable; and these are in fact what are left once we have been through the rest" (1112a31-33). I understand Aristotle to be arguing that one of the prerequisites for deliberation is the possibility for agency and that our efforts might have a productive end. However, the end is not the focus of deliberation: "We deliberate, not about the ends, but about what forwards those ends" (1112b12-13). In other words, what is sought is the proper means to an assumed end. For example, the doctor does not deliberate about whether he would make his patient healthy;

rather, based on his prior experience, he deliberates about what medicine and treatment is suitable for his specific patient which could bring about the health of the patient.

Nussbaum (2001, p 290) explains that Aristotle says two anti-Platonic things about practical deliberation: "First, that it is not and cannot be scientific; second, that the appropriate criterion of correct choice is a thoroughly human being, a person of practical wisdom." Human factors play an important part in deliberation since it concerns the interweaving of emotionality and rationality of both particulars and universals. Nussbaum explains:

We shall then give an account of the interplay of universal rule and particular perception in Aristotelian deliberation…. The person of practical wisdom both values and allows himself to be guided by these unreliable features of his human makeup. This will give us the materials to put together, finally, a picture of the sort of deliberation that Aristotle finds most appropriate and relevant to our human lives" (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 291).

Decision

Aristotle points out that "decision seems to be something highly germane to excellence, and to indicate the differences between people's characters more than actions do (1111b6-7). He contends that people make decisions voluntarily and decision-making is not shared by non-rational creatures since it involves reasoning. Decision differs from judgment because decisions can be divided into good or bad, while judgment (for Aristotle) is either true or false. Given the above distinctions, when we make decisions we have to be

aware that we are not in search of the correct answer; rather, we are usually looking for a good course of action in a particular context.

Deliberation is intended to lead to decision, and decision to voluntary action; both are about attaining ends that are presumed good: "Decision too will be deliberational desire for things that depend on us; for it is through having selected on the basis of having deliberated that we desire in accordance with our deliberation" (1113a11-14).

Phronesis and the Other Intellectual Virtues

Phronesis, as an architectonic virtue, is uniquely related to each of the other four intellectual virtues: *episteme, techne, nous* and *sophia*. Here I attempt to focus on one important link between each of the other intellectual virtues and *phronesis* without attempting to develop the relationship in any depth.

Episteme--variously translated as knowledge, science, systematic knowledge—seems to have almost replaced all the other intellectual virtues in its modern form. Indeed, For Plato, *episteme* is the highest form of knowledge, capturing Truth and Goodness in the Forms; Aristotle agrees that *episteme* is about "the eternal, since everything that is by necessity …is eternal" (NE, 1139b23-24), but he more regularly worries about the capacity of humans to access the eternal and specifically rejects his mentor's doctrine of the Forms. Aristotle also distinguishes *episteme* and its concern with what is invariably true from forms of knowing involving mutable concerns, that is, things that can be otherwise (i.e., *techne* and *phronesis*). Aristotle explains that generals cannot

reliably subsume relevant particulars in unstable matters (e.g., human conduct). He

explains:

> The sorts of account we demand must be determined by the subject matter: things in
>
> the sphere of action…have nothing stable about them…. What one says about
>
> particulars is…lacking in precision; for it does not fall either under any expertise or
>
> any set of rules—the agents themselves have to consider the circumstances relating
>
> to the occasion" (1103b34-1104a10)

Acting well in the world (i.e., *phronesis*) does, however, depend on a reliable and

demonstrable account of that world and therefore someone who aims for *phronesis* also

requires some degree of *episteme*.

Techne (art, skill, craft, technical expertise) "will be the same as productive

disposition accompanied by true rational prescription" (1140a10-11). Aristotle explains:

> Every technical expertise is concerned with coming into being, that is, with the
>
> practice and theory of how to bring into being some one of the things that are capable
>
> either of being or not being, and the origin of whose coming into being lies in the
>
> producer. (1140a14-18)

Phronesis and *techne* are both concerned with the means to ends: *Techne*

emphasizes production while *phronesis* stresses action: "*Phronesis* will not be *techne*,

because action and production belong to different kinds" (1140b4-5). On my

understanding, *techne* is concerned with "coming into being" for a rationally prescribed

end, while *phronesis* studies the particular to figure out a desirable general, that is, an

action. Both *techne* and *phronesis* concern things that can be otherwise, that is, practical matters.

Nous (intelligence, understanding, intuitive reason) involves knowing the right starting points or first principles, from which, for example, *episteme* is developed and justified. In attempts to understand, *nous* provides the fundamental concepts, that is, the necessary building blocks, underlying our attempts to make sense of the world and our experience in it. *Nous* allows us to intuitively grasp the basic givens we use to construct our understandings of reality—and possible action--much as the fundamental theorems of geometry (e.g., triangles) cannot be proved, but are starting points for further knowledge. Clearly, beginning from the wrong assumptions about the world—either physical or social—is not conducive to right action.

Sophia (wisdom, theoretical wisdom, intellectual accomplishment) is "the most precise of the kinds of knowledge. The person possessing it, then, must not only know what follows from the starting points, but have a true grasp of the starting points themselves." (1141a16-18). *Sophia* is "a combination of *nous* and *episteme*"(1140a 18-20). Aristotle explains that people with depth and breadth of understanding and knowledge "are accomplished in a general, not in a specific sense" (1141a14), that is, they are philosophers, that is, loving (*philos)* wisdom *(sophia)*, that is, scholars, or learned people who have secure knowledge of the world in which they live. Acting on that knowledge, however, involves *phronesis*:   Those who are in possession of *phronesis* are concerned about "things human, things one can deliberate about…" (1141b8-9). In sum, people with

phronesis deliberate about things that lead to a practical good, that is, "what is best for a human being" (1141b14-15).

Phronesis **and Moral Virtues**

Aristotle believes that in order to achieve the ultimate good, one needs to know what it is and how one might achieve it:

> If then, there is some end in our practical projects…it is clear that this will be the good, i.e., the chief good… Like archers with a target would we be more successful in hitting the point we need to hit if we had this knowledge?" (1194a18-24)

Aristotle's chief good is determined by excellences of character, that is, moral virtue; how to hit that target, however, depends on *phronesis*, the intellectual virtue that helps people act wisely in a particular context. The cultivation of moral virtues, therefore, is a prerequisite for those who want to achieve the ultimate good, that is, *eudaimonia* in practical life.

Phronesis and moral virtues are therefore complementary elements: They penetrate each other to make one another possible; indeed *phronesis* could become merely cleverness without moral direction and moral virtues would be inert if they were not employed in the right time in the right way for the right reasons. Moral virtues ensure that what we aim at doing is in some way good and *phronesis* figures out the best way to act to further that good in specific situations through reasoning:

Again, the 'product,' [*eudaimonia*], is brought to completion by virtue of a person's having [*phronesis*] and excellence of character; for excellence makes the goal correct, while [*phronesis*] makes what leads to it correct" (1144a7-10).

Confucius' Virtues

Confucius regards education as primarily concerned with learning how to behave (Dawson, 1981, p. 4), so it is understandable that he develops an interest in human virtue and understands virtue as bridging between knowing about the world and acting in the world. Yutang Lin (2009, p. 4) summarizes Confucius' principles as standing "for a rationalized social order through the ethical approach, based on personal cultivation." Confucius' primary concerns are human nature, comportment and relationship. The worldly, practical humanism of the *Analects* is manifest in an overarching ideology of discovering and practicing virtues.

Fan (2010, p. 14) explains that "the Confucian notion of personhood is a virtue-based notion…. A concept of virtue is inherently relevant to a specific view of human nature." Confucius believes that the pursuit of virtue is essential for the flourishing of human beings. Indeed, human well-being does not consist in the possession of material goods, but on whether the person lives a virtuous life providing a path to the ultimate human happiness which is embodied in *dao*. Fan contends that the cultivation of virtue lies in the harmony between one's inner character and the activities of an individual embodied in the practice of *li*. He further asserts: "Virtue is understood as good character. It is not only a state of affairs, but is also proper human activity" (2010, p. 14).

Like Aristotle, Confucius has a typology of virtues: Confucius' most famous

disciple, Mencius, explains that human beings have four virtues just as they have four

limbs: *ren* (humaneness), *yi* (justice), *li* (rituals), *zhi* (wisdom): "The feeling of

commiseration is the principle of *ren*. The feeling of shame and dislike is the principle of

yi. The feeling of modesty and complaisance is the principle of *li*. The feeling of approving

and disapproving is the principle of *zhi*" (Mencius, VI: 4). It is justifiable to say that the

fundamental concern of Confucius's philosophy is developing *ren.*

The power of virtues is described by Mencius: "When one by force subdues men,

they do not submit to him in heart. They submit, because their strength is not adequate to

resist. When one subdues men by virtue, in their hearts core they are pleased, and sincerely

submit, as was the case with the seventy disciples in their submission to Confucius"

(Mencius, III:2).

Confucius' Notion of *Ren*

Ren is actually homophonous with the notion of a human being(人). The Chinese

character "*ren*" (仁) consists of two parts: the left part of the word " 亻" means human and

the right part means two. The Chinese character itself suggests its close relation with

humans and its emphasis on the interaction and communication among people. According

to Lin's (1938) interpretation, *ren* is often described as a state of mind rather than

exemplified by a concrete being. Lin (1938, p. 19) points out that Confucius' *ren* is a state

where one 'searches for', 'attains', 'feels at peace in', 'departs from', 'is based upon', and

'dwells in' as in a house.

Translating *ren* into English is very challenging: words have implicit associations with a specific cultural, historical, political background; accurate translation from "*ren*" or other philosophical terms from Chinese to English is a difficult task. There are various translations of *ren*: love, humanity, benevolence, kindness, goodness, perfect virtue, humaneness, etc. For example, Waley translates *ren* as "goodness"; Legge translates it as "perfect virtue"; Leys translates it as "humanity"; and Lau translates it as "benevolence." I would like to stress the idea of *ren* as linked to human beings, therefore, I prefer the translation of humanity or humaneness. In my text, however, I continue to use *ren* instead of any English translation to signal the multiple meanings in Confucius' usage.

Ren, to some extent, is regarded as an integration of different types of virtues. Zizhang asked Confucius about Ren:

> The Master said: "Whoever could spread the five practices everywhere in the world would implement *ren*." "And what are these?" "They are courtesy, tolerance, good faith, diligence and generosity. Courtesy wards off insults; tolerance wins all hearts; good faith inspires the trust of others; diligence ensures success; generosity confers authority upon others." (*Analects* 17:6).

In the following paragraphs, I highlight the nature of *ren* from three distinctive perspectives.

Ren as Love for People as Unequals

For Confucius, *ren* involves loving people (*Analects,* 12:22). Questions ensue: What are the implications of loving people? Do we love different people differently? How could people practice such love in their lives? In order to love people, we have to know them first; without knowing them individually, there would be no possibility of cultivating the ability of love since one would be blind to their specific needs. In other words, loving people does not mean treating all people in identical ways. Indeed, loving people requires specific knowledge of that person and developing a trusting relationship with that person in order to express your love in the right way at the right moment, something that varies from person to person, from one circumstance to another, at different times. What is crucial is that we cannot know the other person without blending our own personality into the new relationship, a process in which we must continue to maintain our own cultivated judgment. Hall and Ames explain: "It is not simply abandoning one's own person in assuming the persona of another; rather, it is projecting oneself personally into the circumstances of another, and responding to those circumstances as one deems most appropriate" (1987, p. 116). This is then generalized as the "two perspectives grounded in one judgment…. This one judgment is continually conditioned and refined by relationship between it and the changing circumstances with which it is engaged" (Hall & Ames, 1987, p. 117). *Ren* is then understood as love nurtured during one's involvement with others, a process that resembles the fluidity of water which filters the boundary between the individual and the people around.

The above mentioned "how to act *ren*" reminds us that to love different people contains different meanings in different circumstances. In "Treating People as Unequals" Fan (2010) explains that loving people does not mean the identical treatment of everyone and compares the practice of *ren* to adopting a family-oriented approach to relationships in civil society. In Confucius' concept of a harmonious family, Fan asserts, we should regard and treat people appropriately as unequals built on family love and extend this practice to the entire society. For Confucius, humaneness is not based on equal rights, but rather depends on the practice of certain virtues. Instead of aiming to treat people as equals and exercising caution to set the boundaries among people, Confucius proposes a virtue-based path to *ren*. The virtuous person is to regard all people as relatives in families and then extend love to them as appropriate. In comparison with the rights-based notion of personhood, the Confucian virtue-based notion of personhood is

(1) grounded in a natural love between parent and child (rather than on emphasis on universal reason) so that people are naturally driven in practicing this notion of personhood;

(2) duty-oriented (rather than claim/entitlement-oriented) so that it carries more mediating power in dealing with human problems and conflicts;

(3) family-oriented (rather than individual-oriented) so that it promises natural human unions and harmonious relationships. (Fan, 2010, p. 18)

Ren as Communal Application

Ren is "the integrative process of taking in and subsuming the conditions and concerns of the human community in the development and application of one's own personal judgment…. The ultimate source of *ren* is the communal application of one's own personal judgment rather than something external" (Hall & Ames, 1987, p. 120). Hall and Ames point out that "the *ren* person is fundamentally inter-subjective, definable in terms of his human community" (1987, p. 222). Confucius stresses human agency in creating the world through the practice of *ren* in communal settings; human beings must go beyond their individual selves and enter into a great sphere of living in the world. I believe Confucius' notion of self-cultivation of *ren* has deep roots in society--and to some extent, *ren* is for the sake of society. Confucius contends that *ren* is pursued to perfect individuals through interactions among other people; however, *ren's* ultimate destiny lies in the larger society.

On one hand, *ren* bears a lot of weight and requires people's effort to achieve *ren*. Master Zeng said: "A shi cannot do without strength and stamina, for the burden is heavy and the journey long. He takes up *ren* as his burden—is it not heavy? He will not stop until death—is it not long?" (*Analects*, 8.7). On the other hand, however, *ren* is very approachable as long as people determine to pursue it: "The Master said: 'Is *ren* out of reach? As soon as I long for *ren*, *ren* is at hand'"(*Analects*, 7:30).

Confucius aims at political order by laying the basis for it in a moral order, and he

seeks political harmony by trying to achieve the moral harmony in himself. Generally

speaking, the political order envisioned by Confucius is an extension of committing to *ren*.

Ren **as a Guide for Knowledge**

Confucius stresses the importance of learning and thinking: The Master said: "If one

is engaged in learning but does not think, then one will be bewildered; if on the other hand

one thinks, but does not engage oneself in learning, one will be in peril" (*Analects*, 2:15).

The linking of learning and thinking is apparent in Confucius' beliefs; however, Confucius

does not regard learning and thinking as merely a way of accumulating facts for their own

sake. Rather, he asserts that learning is for the sake of guiding one's conduct. In the

Analects (1:1), the Master points out that "To learn something and then to put it into

practice properly: Is this not a joy?"

What fills the gap between knowledge and proper practice? Confucius' answer is *ren*.

The moral virtues are not only deeply involved in the process of transforming from

knowing to doing, but also provides the ultimate end for one's conduct which is to find the

dao. *Ren* is essential since it provides the guidance for people's proper conduct so that

learning and virtue are inseparable elements in one's pursuit of *dao* (17:8): Further, in

order to develop *ren*, Confucius refers to the practice of *li* which is embodied *ren* as a

pathway to lead people to *dao*. While Confucius is careful to avoid claiming that anyone

can attain complete or perfect *ren*, the worldliness of *ren* is at the heart of Confucianism

(*Analects*, 6.28).

Similarities between *Phronesis* and *Ren*

Phronesis and *ren* share three key features: they are both concerned with human conduct; they are both tightly linked to other excellence of character; and they are both vitally concerned about the practical. The most fundamental similarity between Aristotle's *phronesis* and Confucius' *ren* is that they both provide the basis for human action and they are both developed and manifest through interactions with other people. The person who possesses *phronesis* does not try to stand outside of the circumstances of human life; rather, she will base her deliberation on long and wide experience of these conditions. *Phronesis* is embedded in subjective human existence. The same is true of Confucius' *ren*--a virtue that is defined and manifest through human interactions. Concrete experiences rather than abstract concepts best explain the essence of *ren* which lies in human community.

From the perspective that both *phronesis* and *ren* are imbedded in the subjectivity of human beings, I came to reflect on the story of Tingting and how I should have dealt with her cheating on the exam. If I had strictly followed the written rules of our school, she could have collapsed psychologically (and perhaps physically) because she took such pride in herself and cared so much about others' opinions of her. I had no doubt the merciless punishment according to the school rule would break her. Out of my sympathy for her, I actually didn't report her cheating to school authorities, but I felt lost to explain my actions at the time. I knew what I wanted to do, but could not explain why. Right now with the human-centered philosophical discourse supported by Aristotle and Confucius, I

not only feel reassured of my way of dealing the Tingting's cheating, but also I realize it is necessary to propose to the our school to rethink "zero-tolerance policies." I have come to realize that absolute rules that fail to attend to or account for the particular circumstances of individual people are fundamentally immoral and are contrary to what Aristotle and Confucius advocate, that is, to fully consider and appreciate the uniqueness of individual cases. I now regard sparing Tingting from severe punishment not as avoidance of school rules but as an opportunity for her to pull herself together--and as a chance for educators to think about how we use rules and policies.

Secondly, *phronesis* and *ren* play a central role in the realization of the ultimate good. By practicing *phronesis* a person would be able to select and apply the requisite virtues, both moral and intellectual. For example, in order to act properly in a specific situation, one has to understand the general knowledge of the context first, which means in the process of practicing *phronesis*, one has to draw from (theoretical wisdom) which includes *episteme* (the general knowledge of the situation) and *nous* (the right starting points). A *phronimos* might then employ *techne* to produce the desired results.

Ren also acts as a coordinating virtue in Confucius' ethical discourse. Without *ren*, other virtues will be wilted like the flower without the nourishing soil. Only by attending to *ren* could other virtues obtain the wholeness of their being; through *ren*, the person derives the required virtues to the proper extent in order to act well. For example, *yong* (courage) could become a rushed and foolhardy endeavor if it does not fully embrace *ren* which is to act properly with love for others shown in concrete human interactions.

As Tingting's head teacher, I needed to draw from other virtues to take the proper action. For example, attempting to be *phronetic*, I could employ *techne* which enables me to think of means to the desirable end; I could become informed by *sophia* which provides the general knowledge of teenagers of Tingting's age and the consequences of anorexia nervosa; and through possessing *nous*, I would be able to possess the right starting point to perceive or understand the situation. *Phronesis* acts like a coordinator and an igniter for other virtues by producing a comprehensive understanding of the situation, finding a way through the mist of the dilemmas and puzzles, reaching the decision which best suits the particular situations—and then guiding subsequent action. Confucius' *ren*, as rich soil, grows and nourishes other virtues. Attending to *ren* helps me practice *yi* (justice) in Tingting's case. I didn't publicize her cheating around school, an action that would have devastating consequences for the proud girl. Instead, I talked with her in private about the seriousness of cheating and warned her not to do that again. Her tears showed that she learned from our talk and I believe that I was able to practice *ren*.

Thirdly, *phronesis* and *ren* are both concerned with practical matters rather than universal theories. As mentioned above, *phronesis* is concerned with both universals and particulars, but in relation to practical matters, while *ren* manifests itself in the concrete human interactions through the mingling of rationality and emotion. While both emphasize the practical, each has a distinct understanding about what counts as practical. *Phronesis* accentuates the practicality of actions, which I interpret as the practically wise people deliberating about things which could lead to a practical good. *Ren*'s practicality

does not prioritize special talents or good reasons for reaching the practical good; instead, it emphasizes the enhancement of human existence rather than its utility. People practice *ren* to improve themselves and to have positive influences on others and society. In short, the target of *phronesis* is practically good action, while the object of *ren* is improving the person.

In trying to be *phronetic* in Tingting's case, I would begin by contemplating the context from different perspectives: What was Tingting's true character? What impact had anorexia nervosa had on her? Why did she cheat on the history exam? And then I should reason to a multi-dimensional understanding: Tingting used to be a proud and hardworking girl; she cheated in the history exam because of her suffering from anorexia nervosa, because of her limited time and energy to prepare for the test, and because she was under great pressure due to the high expectation from parents and teachers. It was not Tingting who we should automatically blame. Instead, I needed to think about our testing system and our attitude towards improving exam scores. While we need to worry about cheating on exams, we also need to think carefully about the reasons why people cheat.

As for Confucius' *ren*, human beings are the means and objects of *ren*. What I should primarily consider is not the school rules, but what Tingting needs to continue to grow as a person. I believe what she needed least at that moment was public punishment from the school. I needed to give her what she really needed—love from a teacher. Acting *ren* is like providing the freshest air for her to breathe which could give her energy to defeat anorexia nervosa; acting *ren* is like giving the purest water for her to drink that

could wash away the stresses of so desperately needing to excel on the history examination.

<div align="center">**Differences between *Phronesis* and *Ren***</div>

Aristotle stressed self actualization through reason and habit, while Confucius emphasizes self-cultivation through spirituality and humanity. The core of *phronesis* is a logical reasoning process including practical perception, deliberation and decision, while *ren* is more concerned with a deep love of humanity and is manifested through the combination of emotion and logic.

While both *phronesis* and *ren* are concerned with practical matters and human agency, they have different centers. *Phronesis* puts emphasis on the rationality of human beings to perceive a situation comprehensively and deliberate in order to make the best choices about how to act. To be a *phronemos*, it is crucial to select and employ the requisite virtues, both intellectual and moral, in order to act well for the right reasons. The love and deep concern for humanity so important for *ren* are not so apparent in *phronesis*.

In discussing *ren*, the Master said: "the clever talk and a pretentious manner are seldom found in *ren*"(*Analects*, 1:3), a statement that emphasizes the need for sincerity of heart. *Ren* embraces love; every action stemming from *ren* has love as its core element. How humans attain and exercise *ren* is not always clear, however. On one hand, *ren* is rare and extremely hard to obtain: Even Yan Hui, Confucius' favorite disciple, could practice *Ren* for only three months (*Analects*, 6:7). On the other hand, Confucius emphasizes that everyone can approach *ren* with proper effort (*Analects*, 4:6). Li (2004, p. 112) argues that

the ambiguity and scope of *ren* reflects Chinese traditional philosophy. *Ren* does not count on its logical development and rational reasoning; rather, it involves humanity as its core. Li (2004) captures this well in his phrase "three in one": *ren* is composed of three types of action in secular ethics, politics and religion. Indeed, the uncertainty and indefiniteness of *ren* reflects its role in the emotional, spiritual and rational interactions of human beings.

  Phronesis and *ren* equip me with two lenses to understand Tingting's cheating. One involves rational reasoning and the other the human heart. I appreciate the two perspectives since they provide me with an all-around approach to view Tingting's case. On the one hand, logical thinking enables me to infer that Tingting's pride of self and her mental suffering from anorexia nervosa would never let her survive the school's public punishment; my reason provides grounds for my ensuing actions. On the other hand, without considering every aspect and making decisions based on logical reasoning, a loving heart would inform me what I should do. I cared for Tingting therefore I knew how to best protect her and encourage her. A combination of *phronesis* and *ren* would help me not only act properly out of the deepest concern for others, but also be able to provide good explanations for my actions.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHY SHOULD WE EDUCATE? *HABITUS* AND *LI*

I was half happy and half worried about Meng Zhang who was born into a very caring family, since the "caring" from her parents was too much and not in a proper way: they spoiled her with fancy dresses and with high-tech expensive gadgets. In sum, her parents satisfied her material requirements and she took that for granted. Meng was not a single instance; I observed that many students in my class had the same problem. The atmosphere of comparing to one another materially often made students selfish and uncaring, which worried me more than their test scores did.

Instead of addressing this problem verbally, I chose another way. In the bustling city of Beijing, I invited my students to the places on which the flashlights of the city did not often shine: Hong Zheng School for children of migrant peasant workers and the Song Tang nursery house for seniors. Students took turns going to these two places regularly about one visit per week during the weekend or after school. At first my students were surprised to find out that there were children in this big city who could not afford a pair of warm socks to wear in the winter and they felt sorry for the seniors who deserved more care from their families and society. As time went by, however, the students' attitudes changed. Their sense of responsibility grew when they put aside their homework to help raise funds for the children of the migrant peasant workers; their caring for others was nurtured when they chatted and laughed with the seniors in the

nursery; they became self-reflective when they saw children of their age ask for nothing but a new pencil box and some paper to paint their dreams; their hearts rejoiced when they made friends with students in the migrant workers school and wrote letters to one another.

One of Meng's compositions read "I wasn't aware of my past indifference to others until I really saw others. I had to admit there was only myself in my heart. I felt ashamed that I only paid attention to something of trivial importance: what could a beautiful dress do with an empty heart?" I saved her composition because it is so precious for me as well as for her.

General Introduction to *Habitus* and *Li*

Habitus is a Latin translation of the Greek term *hexus,* which originates from Aristotle's philosophical formulation. The concept of *habitus* was used to "describe a positive quality of being that came through training and repetition in various arts and practices" (Sallaz, 2010). I understand *habitus* as habituated virtue in English, as distinct from natural virtue. Despite its difference from natural virtue, *habitus* is rooted in human nature and is developed through practice: Human nature is nurtured from its initial state by living with other people. *Habitus* subconsciously and automatically informs people how to do what is generally accepted as socially correct—and perhaps morally correct—action. What is worth noticing is that the process of *habitus* not only involves the subjectivity of human beings, but also depends on the intertwined relationship between individual subjectivity and social construction.

The meaning of *habitus* has, of course, changed over time. Social structures and individuals are closely related and this relationship is "materializing in a set of 'embodied' inclinations, dispositions, schemes of actions and appreciations captured in *habitus.… Habitus* shapes the ways in which subjects act toward, invest in, experience, produce, and reproduce the social world" (Green, 2008, p. 599). I understand *habitus* as a kind of second nature after an initial responsive and interactive forming process. To be specific, *habitus* is on one hand influenced by the preexistent social structures and accustoms people into acting properly, and on the other hand, *habitus* helps reconstruct the social order. According to Bourdieu (1990, p. 52), "the objects of knowledge are constructed, not passively recorded ..., the principle of this construction is the system of structured, structuring dispositions, the *habitus*, which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions."

Li, in the *Analects*, has various different translations including "rituals", "rites", "propriety", "ceremony" and "manners." Confucius considers *li* and *ren* as the two core virtues. Shun (2002, pp. 56-57) explains: "*Ren* and *li* are related by casual relations that make one a means to the other." He further argues that those who possess *ren* would observe *li* as a means to express their emotions and character that compose the *ren* ideal, while for those who do not have *ren*, *li* provides a means of cultivating the *ren* ideal. In other words, "participation in *li* practices has a feedback effect on a person, and makes the person more susceptible to having emotional dispositions and attitudes of the ideal kind" (2002, p. 57). The Master said: "If a man has no humaneness, what can he have to

do with ritual? If a man has no humanity, what can he have to do with music?" (*Analects*, 3.3).

The Concept of *Habitus*

According to Aristotle, moral virtues are divided into three categories: affections, capacities and dispositions; dispositions belong to the genus of moral excellence. Hughes analyzes Aristotle's close relationship between habits and dispositions. He explains that by dispositions, Aristotle means "properties of things which give rise to relatively fixed patterns of behavior" (2001, p. 54); dispositions have an impact on the way that people behave. Indeed, "some dispositions are habits" (Hughes, 2001, p. 54), a feature that helps explain why disposition (*ethos*) is a deviation from the word habit in Greek. Aristotle writes:

> Intellectual virtue … comes into existence and increases as a result of teaching (that's why it requires experience and time), whereas excellence in character results from habituation--which is in fact the source of the name it has acquired (*ethike*), the word for "character-trait"(*ethos*) being a slight variation of that for 'habituation' (*ethos*)." (1103a16-20)

Dispositions can be nurtured through habituation; they are not just givens. As Aristotle puts it: "The excellences develop in us neither by nature nor contrary to nature, but because we are naturally able to receive them and are brought to completion by means of habituation" (1103a24-26). The habitual disposition may have roots in our nature, but it does not develop automatically; to be specific, Aristotle believes that one

cultivates her character through habituation combined with nature. I believe nature is the prerequisite for excellence, while habituation acts as the means to accomplish excellence. Aristotle uses a metaphor of a rock to show that "nothing by nature one way be habituated into behaving in another" (1103a22-23). The character of human beings is not naturally determined; instead, human characters are naturally sensitive to habituation and possess the ability to be developed through habituation.

Aristotle points out the importance of *habitus*: "Law givers make the citizens good through habituation, and this is what every lawgiver aims at" (1103b2-3). The ensuing questions to be addressed include, of course: What counts as *habitus* and how might it be developed? Aristotle does not give specific suggestions about what steps to follow in order to obtain *habitus*. He generally conceptualizes the notion of *habitus* and makes an overall recommendation about doing good deeds in order to possess good habits; however, a crucial element of doing good deeds is not elaborated: "What counts as a good deed?"

Habitus, according to Aristotle, lies in actual practice, that is, *habitus* consists in actual doing (not, for example, didact teaching about how to act). Aristotle points to how we use our senses to show that we possess natural senses before we use them, while we experience *habitus* only "by engaging in the activities…by doing them"(1103a26-34). In summary, Aristotle suggests that "dispositions come about from activities of a similar sort," which I interpret as the quality of activities reflected in the dispositions and actively contributes to the forming of the dispositions; therefore, it is justifiable for

Aristotle to believe that it makes a great difference whether people are habituated to behave in one way or in another way from childhood on.

As for the question about how to develop appropriate *habitus*, Hughes explains that habituated virtue has its roots in our nature, but does not develop automatically (2001). On one hand, in accordance of the notion of *habitus* which stresses actual practice, developing dispositions requires training of certain quality: People can develop good habits through good training—or bad habits through bad training. Just as the metaphor of good building will result in good builders, bad building in bad builders (1103b10-11), Aristotle suggests that cultivating *habitus* is like developing one's *techne*, since both require repetition of the corresponding acts. However, *habitus* and *techne* are distinct: The development of *habitus* highlights the processes of doing (how they do and view what they do), while *techne* aims at the products of doing.

For Aristotle, people should act well because they are truly virtuous, that is, virtuous action results from acting consistent with good dispositions. In contrast, good action as the product of coercion would not count as genuinely virtuous action. Aristotle suggests that pleasure in doing virtuous acts is a sign that the virtuous disposition has been truly acquired (II 3).

Habituated virtue is also related to external goods, such as good training or being around good people. Therefore, it is correct to say that Aristotle emphasizes external influences on individuals that possess transformational power.

The Concept of *Li*

Li* in Relation to *Ren

I would like to begin my interpretation of *li* by relating it to the concept of *ren*. The following is a dialogue between the Master and Yan Hui, one of Confucius' favorite disciples. I interpret the dialogue as an explanation of the notion of Confucius' *li* which is rooted in attending to *ren*. *Ren* is an implicit spirit underlying *li* while *li* is a form of propriety in explicit actions.

> Yan Hui asked about *ren*. The Master said: 'The practice of *ren* requires controlling oneself and restoring the rites. Taming the self and restoring the rites for but one day, and the whole world will rally to *ren*. The practice of *ren* comes from the self, not from anyone else.' Yan Hui said: 'May I ask which steps to follow?' The Master said: 'Observe *li* in this way: don't look at anything improper; don't listen to anything improper; don't say anything improper; don't do anything improper.' Yan Hui said: 'I may not be clever, but with your permission, I shall endeavor to do as you have said.' (*Analects*, 12:1)

In this dialogue, what is worth noticing is that Confucius has given concrete steps to follow *li*, which could be generalized as the people who practice *li* should commit to propriety in a wide range of actions using different senses. It echoes the comment by Confucius in *The Analects* (2:12): "The gentleman is not a utensil." A utensil could only fit certain occasions. Confucius uses this metaphor to show that gentlemen should have a wide range of knowledge of different fields and therefore, they could act properly in a

variety of situations; secondly, he negates the functionality of "gentle", that is, gentle involves more than utility or functionality.

What Constitutes *Li*?

In *The Analects* (1:12), Confucius points out that *li* lies in harmony or appropriateness in doing beautiful actions, yet harmony is not a self-sufficient end because it requires *li* to regulate it. Confucius also stresses that modesty contributes to the establishment of *li*: The Master said: "If you can govern a state with courtesy and modesty, there is no more to be said. Otherwise, what can you do with *li*?" (4:13). Modesty is also regarded as the core of *li* in *The Commentary of Zuo*: *Li* is nurtured from modest experiences such as refined manners, restrained appetites, willingness to share, humility in talking and in actions. The overt and concrete observance of modesty is actually internalized by a person in *li*. A famous traditional Chinese story depicts Kong Rong who leaves the bigger and nicer pear for his elder brother when he was four (Three Word Scripture), serving as an example of modesty. In this sense, *li* is embedded in the detailed observance of modesty.

Lin Fang asked: "What is the root of ritual?" The Master said: "Big question! In ceremonies, prefer simplicity to lavishness; in funerals, prefer grief to formality" (*Analects*, 3.4). The core of the ritual experience does not lie in the procedures of the ritual; rather, the core meaning of rituals lies in the moment of experiencing them with an attentive heart. According to Fingarette's interpretation of Confician *li*, the proper experience of *li* involves beautiful and effective ceremony requiring the personal

"presence" to be fused with the learned ceremonial skill (1972, p. 8). For Confucious, *li* and music both require full participation emotionally, intellectually and spiritually to become meaningful. In other words, rituals, while they have certain structures necessary for performance (just like music which has its specific expressive ways) must extend beyond the procedural or technical to achieve presence and intense subjective involvement. *Li* and music are both regarded as paths to achieve a subjective and unpredictable enlightenment.

This idea resonates with Maxine Greene's depiction of the power of authentic "aesthetic education," but, for Confucius, this experience is not limited to aesthetic education. Greene (2001, p. 170) asserts that aesthetics is a process of "empowering diverse persons to engage reflectively and with a degree of passion with particular works of art." I interpret the phrase "engage reflectively" by attributing two layers: One is social interaction among people; the other is to be with oneself. The two layers are fluid and intersect. The moments of aesthetic education dwell in the dialogic relationship between people and within people.

All forms of aesthetic experience—e.g., painting, rituals, music—require following certain guidelines, yet there is still a certain amount of creativity involved in performing rituals, the music or the painting (Hall & Ames, 1987). Hall and Ames compare ritual practice with playing jazz: Jazz artists, like ritual participants, play ostensibly the same music, but actually no performance is the same as another because each concert involves the musician's constantly changing emotions, understandings, experiences and

imagination.

Living in the moment of what we experience as physical, emotional and spiritual beings, opens up the conversation about the future and reconnects us to a past that we might otherwise forget. Such experience can release the imagination for different possible futures: McBride (2006) points out that the ecstatic experience triggered by aesthetic feeling favors a reshuffling in the individual's perception of reality and disrupts formulaic modes of experience, freeing the individual from the spell of established pictures of the world and opening up a space for imaginative play. We are sometimes too familiar with the taken-for-granted world to be able to question it. Living in the aesthetic moment with a full attentive and open heart may allow us to see the world in another—perhaps better-- way. Yet, we also need to be mindful that we are not overwhelmed by excessive imagination without ethical concerns.

In order to become a saint (*sheng ren*) who is supposed to be in possession of full virtue, one has to be able to learn, understand and get involved in *li*; however, this does not mean that the practice of *li* ensures the achievement of full virtue.

A Comparison between *Habitus* and *Li*

Habitus and *li* are distinct concepts within Aristotelian and Confucian philosophical systems; each involves unique notions and implications. However, based on their common ground and relating factors, *habitus* and *li* are comparable and through comparison their similarities and differences can provide educational inspiration and valuable possibilities. Based on reviews of these two philosophical concepts, I would

like to apply them to my story of Meng's volunteer work and try to interpret his experience.

Similarities Between *Habitus* and *Li*

Habitus and *li* have certain fundamental similarities. Firstly, both are concerned with and defined by actual practices and they both emphasize certain patterns of doing; secondly, both *habitus* and *li* involve excellence in character; finally, the underlying principle of both is attending to the golden mean.

For the first point, the essential element of both *habitus* and *li* is action. *Habitus*, as already discussed, is shown and developed in the process of acting with other people. As I understand *habitus*, it begins with and ends in actual practice. The doing of actions is the prerequisite for the formation of *habitus*. *Li* is also manifest in action: If a person does not commit to action, we could not tell whether he possesses *li* or not. Like *habitus*, *li* is focused on, defined by and developed through actual practice. The doing of *li*, as discussed above, depends partly on the preexistent social and cultural traditions and partly on creative and subjective interpretation of those traditions.

The practice of *li* can change the actions of human beings. Confucius admits that "if you do not learn *li*, you will not have the means to take a stance" (*Analects*, 16:13). Hall and Ames (1987, p. 85) highlight *li*'s function and its role in "person making" by emphasizing certain patterns of doing things: *Habitus* can only be achieved by doing a certain action of a certain quality and *li* is approached by doing certain actions properly with the requisite attention in different contexts.

In *The Analects* (VI), the Master said: "Staying with good men is like stepping into a room full of irises and orchids, you are unable to detect the fragrance after long hours because you are part of it; Staying with bad men is like entering a room with dead abalone, you are unable to smell its odor after long hours because you are part of it." This statement shows Confucius' emphasis on the importance of habituation in order to acquire virtue. Human beings are always sensitive to the environment and subject to its influence either with or without consciousness. For example, in "Three Word Doctrine", a traditional Chinese story, Mencius' mother moves three times in order to find a good neighborhood. Mencius' family was at first located in a place full of wealthy people who indulged themselves in play and demonstrated laziness and so Mencius became subject to his appetites. His mother determined to find another place to live despite her bad health and eventually, they moved to a place of poor, but good people. Mencius overcomes his bad habits by spending time with his new friends. He becomes diligent and helpful. Indeed, he becomes one of the most important figures in the Confucian school.

In my student Meng's story, the volunteer work, can be regarded as an opportunity to nurture *habitus*. Staying with the right people can promote enlightenment: By interacting with the children in the migrant farm workers' school and caring for the seniors in the nursery house, the students, including Meng, began to question their obsession with material pursuits. They woke from their self-centered life patterns to build or rebuild their own caring and loving character, something that could only be

achieved by undergoing a particular kind of experience. Sadly, many teachers and

parents today are often busy spinning cocoons for young people. Such shells can be

regarded as protection; alternately, however, they can be cages that prevent children from

having the kind of experiences that help them grow into caring adults. We, as educators,

need to provide our students with carefully staged and monitored opportunities to break

from cocoons to fly as butterflies.

The second similarity between *habitus* and *li* involves character: *Li* and *habitus*

both contribute to dispositional excellence. While the core of *li* consists in the propriety

in doing things (*Analects*, 12:1), propriety is not an absolute or rigid set of rules. Instead,

propriety is understood as a relative and fluid concept of doing things according to the

specific situation; the excellence of the actor is demonstrated in the doing things. With

their close relationship to character excellence, the underlying principle for both *habitus*

and *li* is the mean—although emphatically, in both cases, not an absolute mean. The

Golden Mean is interpreted as the intermediate relative to individual cases by Aristotle:

"By intermediate 'relative to us' I mean the sort of thing that neither goes to excess nor is

deficient--and this is not one thing, nor is it the same for all" (1106a31-34). One of the

Confucian books, *The Golden Mean* (*zhong yong*), is regarded as a book that records the

practice of the non-deviating mind and of harmony. *Zhong*(中) is interpreted as "the

middle or harmony" and *yong*(庸) means "to use" or "to employ" In the first chapter of

Doctrine of the Mean (1:4), reads:

While there are no stirrings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, or joy, the mind may be said

to be in the state of equilibrium. When those feelings have been stirred, and they

act in their due degree, there ensues what may be called the state of harmony

(*zhong*). The equilibrium (*he*) is regarded the great root from which grow all

human acting in the world, and this harmony is the universal *dao* which they all

should pursue.

Like Aristotle, Confucius' notion of *Golden Mean* involves sensitivity to context, but for

Confucius the mean extends beyond the relative mean between extremes. It emphasizes

the building of harmony after due consideration of all aspects and weighing the

importance of each. It is like weaving a net: the threads are interwoven and every knot

strikes the balance when the net is stretched due to forces of the threads from different

directions. And the knot of the net is more comparable to the Confucius' *Golden Mean*

rather than a spot in a line between two extremes.

　　Meng was generally considered as an arrogant and indifferent student by her

teachers before she was transformed by the volunteer work. Like the metaphor of

bending wood, in order to make the wood straight, we have to use the forces in the other

direction: The intensive caring moments "for" others are what Meng needed most

because of her experience of only receiving care "from" others. Character is nurtured and

formed by doing the right work, the right actions. As Aristotle puts it, "being habituated

to scorn frightening things and withstand them we become courageous people, and

having become courageous we shall be best able to withstand frightening

things"(1104b1-3). In order to reach the mean advocated by both Aristotle and Confucius,

the essential element is that students like Meng experience the very moment of caring for others that enables them to develop the corresponding character. By combing the seniors' hair and reading them news, Meng's indifferent heart became tender and sensitive; by tutoring the children in the migrant peasant workers school and buying them pairs of warm socks with her pocket money, she felt the happiness involved in giving love to others in need. The moments of real caring for others taught her how to care and habituated her into becoming a caring person herself.

The Difference Between *Habitus* and *Li*

H*abitus* and *li* are also distinct. I would like to focus on one fundamental difference between the two concepts*: Habitus* stresses the of importance forming good habits through training or being with the right people, while observing *li* is a more comprehensive and concrete approach.

As I have already elaborated, *habitus* is developed through doing good deeds or being around good people: habit forming through actions and human interactions is a priority. However, Aristotle does not elaborate what he means by goodness or good people to any great extent; he assumes his ideas about goodness are largely shared by his audience. He stresses on the importance of doing good and being around good people. And we could only infer from his ensuing argument that actions must avoid excess or defect, and good actions lie in attending to the golden mean.

Li is afforded more explanation by Confucius. Hall and Ames (1987) explain that *li* developed from a code of rites and ceremonies governing specific religious observances

to the embodiment of the total norms, customs, relationships and institutions. Indeed, Confucius is much more interested in the social implications of *li* than the sacred religious *li*. The focus for Confucius' *li* is the human being: Whether *li* is performed well is determined by human agency referencing historical, cultural and social traditions. As mentioned above, a person who possesses *li* should be able to act properly in different settings rather than in a limited context; a person who possesses *li* should act with modesty, which shows that he knows his own limitations and be humble across the social, cultural and historical spectrum; a person who possesses *li* should be present and become involved. Only by connecting *li* with the self, can the person internalize and reconstruct the meaning of *li* for himself.

I relate this difference between *habitus* and *li* to Meng's story: Meng and the other students' participation in volunteering demonstrates their character. As for *habitus*, volunteer work provided the students with space and time to be with the right people—in this case, those who are in need. The very presence of these people and the interactions with different others helped habituate Meng and the other students into another setting of life. Virtues of caring, giving, self-control are cultivated through habituation. I contend, however, that the volunteer experience most exemplifies the practice of *li*. As discussed above, *li* requires acting properly in different contexts—the migrant school or the nursery house. Meng and other students learned how to act properly in these different contexts, broadening and enriching their understanding of the human experience. I told my students they didn't go as saviors; instead, they were learners. Indeed, the students were

humbled by the perseverance in conquering difficulties and by the forgiving nature of the children and seniors. Most important of all, *li* requires the presence and involvement of practitioners. In Meng's case, she not only brought relief and happiness to the needy children and lonely seniors but also she transformed herself through her genuine presence and interactions with them.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

In the above chapters, I have mainly reflected upon three fundamental questions including: "Why do we educate?" "What counts as educating?" and "How might we educate?" by viewing and reinterpreting my own teaching experiences through the lenses of two ancient philosophers, Aristotle and Confucius. By putting together the distinct but comparable Aristotelian and Confucian concepts: *dao* and *endaimonia*, *phronesis* and *ren*, *habitus* and *li*, I not only compare the differences and similarities of the three pairs of concepts with regards to virtues, but also intertwine my own stories into their philosophical discourse to create dialogue between them and myself. The three stories I introduce at the beginning of each chapter seem ordinary; however, I believe that each story is meaningful in describing an educational experience both for teachers and students. Being a good teacher means that we should avert our eyes from the overpowering emphasis on test scores or slogans like "21st century learning"; what we should really care and feel with our hearts is rooted in every single action we make, in every single word we say, in every single hand we reach out for our students.

Jian, as a student who resents math, is in some way forced by his parents and teachers to hate math, since they put so much pressure on him and lock him in a predesigned box. Both Jian's parents and I seldom took the time to understand Jian; indeed, we rarely gave a chance for Jian to reflect on his own life--we were just so sure that our own intentions and actions were good. The notions of *eudaimonia* and *dao*

provide me with a language and a way of thinking to reconsider why we educate.

Tingting, being such a proud and hardworking girl, cheated in exams for various reasons. *Phronesis* and *ren* provides me with a combined perspective to view her story more roundly: *Phronesis* with an emphasis on logical reasoning depending on the particular circumstances and *ren* with a focus on the deepest concern and love for individual human beings. The two notions are not opposed; rather, they could be best defined by attending to each other. To be specific, I understand the underlying assumption for *phronesis* is the love for humanity, otherwise why should people act properly according to particularities; similarly, attending to *ren* does not negate the importance of reasoning or explanations. In the *Analects*, the patient and detailed way the master responds to his disciples best exemplifies the explanatory character of *ren*.

Meng, a girl from a family with smothering care, is far from an isolated case in today's schools in China. People often accuse children of a lack of caring or responsibility for others. However, the children are not primarily to blame: They have learned what they have been taught by their parents. Too many children are used to receiving instead of giving and their worth being determined externally (by, for instance test scores in school). *Habitus* and *li* offer an approach to schooling that can be more educational: The proper acts of students might be carefully promoted by habituation—with the proviso that we have to discuss what counts as good habituation. To be specific, who defines what is *habitus* and why we should follow it? *Li*, in some ways, provides missing aspects of *habitus*. The historical relevance of *li* mingles with the

individual subjectivity; moreover, *li*'s concern for humility and good action begins to articulate a normative framework for *habitus*.

If I Could Ever Imagine

Through building dialogues with the ancient philosophers Aristotle and Confucius, I am able to view my past stories again and understand them differently. However, I believe that the meaning of asking these fundamental questions and searching for answers in the ancient voices should extend beyond my own stories, because this can be an opportunity for teachers who want to make the schooling experience for their students more educational, like myself, to reflect on their own experience. The concepts will no longer be abstract or vague when we bring our own stories, our own experience, to them. Through dialogues with the ancient philosophers, with people around us, with our own subjectivity, we can learn to reinterpret our responsibilities as teachers. We will no longer be trapped in schooling when we think about what counts as education. As long as we constantly review and reflect upon our past experiences with an educational perspective, we can make a difference.

The old philosophical beliefs about virtues can shine in today's schools. People too often rush toward the future, losing sight of what they have at the moment. What we need to do is to slow down or even step back to search for some hint from the river of history. Listening to ancient voices from the past, we might develop the needed wisdom and imagination to open up the future.

Words inscribed in a plate in our school hall flash back into my mind again: "To be

fond of learning is to be near to wisdom (*zhi*); To practice with vigor is to be near to

benevolence (*ren*); To possess the feeling of shame is to be near courage (*yong*)." I find

myself wearing a broad smile once I detect one more interesting thing about these words:

not a single sentence provides a complete statement of *zhi*, *ren*, or *yong*. The doctrine

only provides some suggested actions that might help people to be "near to" the three

qualities. I like the point that Confucius still leaves room for people to imagine what

counts as the best virtues. We need to do the same. I understand education as an on-going

process of interpreting and reinterpreting our lives with open endings. I believe that

recovering and recapturing the old languages might help us in our efforts to make toady's

schools more genuinely educational.

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