Confucian learning

Learning to become fully human

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Confucius was a world-recognized and celebrated philosopher. He was an educator, a philosopher, and a politician in the history of China. For over 2,500 years, his thoughts and values have influenced and continued to occupy a unique place in Chinese culture, particularly in the education arena.

Confucius was born on August 27, 551 BCE in Zouyi of Lu State (currently to the south-east of Qu Fu of Shandong Province, China) and died on February 18, 479 BCE. His last name was Kong, his first name was Qiu, and people generally called him “Kong Fu Zi.” “Fu Zi” added following a surname is an honorific title, which is equivalent to the meaning of “Master.” Thus, Kong Fu Zi stands for “Master Kong.”

During the late sixteenth century, Confucian works started to be introduced to the Western world by European Jesuits. Matteo Ricci (1552 CE–1610 CE), an Italian Jesuit, latinized “Kong Fu Zi” (Master Kong) as Confucius (Dawson, 1981; Do-Dinh, 1969), hence, Kong Fu Zi has been known to the Western world as Confucius.

As one of the longest and richest ideologies of human history, Confucianism started from the thoughts of Confucius (551 BCE–479 BCE) (Huang, 2006; Zhang, 2009). It retained a dominant position in Chinese history, and still has tremendous and profound influence on almost every aspect of Chinese society today. It is the core of traditional Chinese culture (Wang, Yong, Liu and Tang, 2006; Zhang, 2009).

Confucianism was developed, enriched, and joined by the thoughts of Mencius (372 BCE–289 BCE), Xun Zi (298 BCE–238 BCE), and other followers. It was in the reign of Emperor Wu (156 BCE–87 BCE) during the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) that Confucianism was highly promoted and occupied the state ideology. Since then, Confucianism became the orthodox doctrine of Chinese society. Confucius was glorified as a Sage, the Confucian ideal human model (Sun, 2008). In the coming Wei (386 CE–534/535 CE) and Jin (265 CE–420 CE) Dynasties, Confucianism coexisted with Buddhism and Taoism. Up to the Sui (581 CE–617 CE) and the Tang (618 CE–907 CE) Dynasties, the struggle for dominance between the three became heated.

In its development over a millennium, Confucianism absorbed some thoughts from Taoism and Buddhism. The Song Dynasty witnessed a vital period of the development of Confucianism. In the Song Dynasty (960 CE–1279 CE) and then the Ming Dynasty (1368 CE–1644 CE), the Confucian school of idealist philosophy was featured and called “Li Xue” in Chinese, initiated by Zhu Xi (1130 CE–1200 CE), a Song Dynasty Confucian scholar who became the leading figure of the most influential rationalist “Neo-Confucians” in China. Confucianism restored its orthodox role for the following 700 years.
Historically, Confucianism has gone through many stages, such as the “original Confucianism,” the “Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) Confucianism,” and “Neo-Confucianism.” The long history and varied schools of thought based on Confucius’ philosophy exerted a profound influence on traditional Chinese culture. The philosophy, therefore, makes up the kernel of Chinese wisdom. It is not my aim, however, to examine in detail all of the schools of thought under the name of Confucianism. Thus, I have concerned myself only with the main tenets of Confucian thought, with particular reference to learning for human lifelong development, which is to realize the true nature and to become fully human.

First, the Confucian educational end, which signifies the great value for the purposes of contemporary lifelong learning and education, will be presented. There follows the review of Ren, the essence of the Confucian philosophy that guided Confucius’ educational practices. Then, Jun Zi, the Confucian exemplar of the educated will be illustrated. Last, core principles of Confucian teaching and learning will be discussed. This paper concludes by calling for holistic learning for the practice of contemporary lifelong learning and education.

Learning to be human: the ultimate end of Confucian learning

Confucius saw himself primarily as a scholar, teacher, and transmitter of culture (Lin, 1938; Tu, 1985), whose teaching practice profoundly influenced Chinese culture and education in particular. Sun (2004) stated, via his own practice, that Confucius helped: 1) model the role of the private teacher; 2) accomplish the idea and practice of lifelong learning; 3) design educational contents and methods; and 4) execute the broad application of liberal arts learning and the acceptance of students of all social backgrounds, with clearly established principles for doing so.

The core value of Confucian education is how we learn to become fully human. We are all human beings. However, we are not born fully human. Each of us must still consciously learn to become fully human. To Confucius, lifelong learning and self-cultivation are vehicles to realize the true nature of human beings. In fact, it is the ultimate end of every human being. At the beginning of The Great Learning, one of the Confucian classics, is written:

Self-cultivation is a fundamental task for all — from the Son of Heaven (the ruler) to the common populace. As the root for everything comes from morality, only by reaching the utmost morality, can human beings realize the true nature, can access to the Tao of Human.

(Chap. Sheng Jing)

Furthermore, it is critical to our human development and lives. Confucius clearly stated, “One who has no lifelong end must suffer from goals at hand” (L.Y., XV, 12). Sun (2011) interprets that the “lifelong end” means an ultimate end of each human being that he or she should endeavor to realize during their lifetime, which will lead them to enjoy the true sense of happiness. Thus, everything else becomes its subordinate goals. “Goals at hand” refers to the ephemeral aims that will actually never lead to a feeling of true satisfaction, even if realized. Instead of true happiness, they lead to anxieties and unsatisfying desires of various kinds.

Although people use the words “aim,” “purpose,” “goal,” and “end” interchangeably to mean the outcome of learning activities that they participate in, there are different meanings among them. For instance, we simply may find the word “end” in a dictionary that means “the last point,” or “the point in space or time beyond which something no longer exists” (Cambridge International Dictionary of English, 1995). The other three words definitely lack this meaning. “Purpose,” “goal,” and “aim” do not necessarily indicate anything ultimate or final. We understand end to be “the last point of something;” “nothing exists beyond this point;” “the completion of something.” Therefore, “end” is truly an ultimate point that is distinguished from the meanings that “aim,” “goal,” or “purpose” would hold. Aims, goals, and purposes are either small, temporary ends, or may sometimes be means to achieving larger ends.
In general, learning and any educational activity must have aims, goals, purposes, and ends. These are, in turn, associated with certain “means” that help reach the “ends.” Often times, however, aims or goals become the means of other aims or goals when time moves, situations change, needs shift, or places transfer. Therefore, they are actually temporary ends that will always be replaced by new ones. This alternation can go on endlessly.

In short, if we do not have an ultimate end in mind, we will suffer every day with anxiety from our short-term ends, which soon become the means of other short-term ends. Most importantly, we may not be able to realize the true nature of human beings to become fully human. Precisely, one of the fundamental roles of Confucian teaching was to assist learners to establish their lifelong end before they learned to justly pick up varied means to reach the end (see Sun, 2011).

Although human beings are provided the potentials of realizing the Tao of Human, they are usually not aware of it. These potentials, thus, do need to be cultivated and developed through education and learning, which is a lifelong process. In order to conceive and apprehend the Tao of Human, one must learn, develop, and grow. One does not know Tao without learning/education.

(Sun, 2008: 565)

Hence, learning is a stepping-stone to the state of becoming fully human.

**Ren: the essence of Confucian philosophy**

*Ren*, generally translated as humanity, morality, and righteousness, is the core value of Confucian philosophy, which has manifestly influenced Confucian educational thought and practice. Elsewhere, as I have presented (see Sun, 2008 for details), from an axiological perspective, Ren is the utmost virtue of the Universe. It is the totality of morals, the summation of ethics, the principles of operating the Tao of the Universe and the Tao of Human. Applying this to human beings, the principle of the Tao of Human is concerned with human affairs. Thus, Ren leads human beings to manifest their true nature.

From an epistemological perspective, Ren is the knowledge of morality and humanity. Confucius believed Ren is gained through lifelong self-cultivation and practice. It embraces the nature that separates human beings from beasts. Thus, central to Confucian learning is to realize the wholeness of the conscious being, to become a balanced person.

Let us briefly review the Tao, the Tao of Heaven and Earth, and the Tao of Human, terms associated with Ren. Viewing Chinese culture from a metaphysical perspective, according to Sun (2008): Heaven and Earth symbolize the great whole of the universe – the transcendent sphere in which all is but a transitional process. What is called Heaven and Earth, in fact, is the Universe with a cosmic force. This force, according to Confucius, is the Tao. The Tao constitutes the formula for the production of all things. The Tao of Heaven and Earth refers to the principle that everything obeys. Confucius believed that all things in the universe are ever in a state of flux and change. Consequently, the great attribute of Heaven and Earth is to produce.

The Tao of Human is to cultivate and use the light of reason and to penetrate the nature of things. Like the myriad of things subsisting in this universe, contended Confucius, human beings, as part of the generating organism, also embodied the Tao of Heaven that manifested Ren.

Confucius highly valued Ren and considered it as a true virtue or trait that human beings potentially hold to differ themselves from other beings. Thus, to be Ren is to realize within ourselves the true nature of human beings. Confucian learning is therefore to search for Ren that helps to ultimately realize the wholeness of conscious beings and be fully a human being.

To facilitate the cultivation of Ren, the means, Li (Rites), was borrowed, renewed, and explained by Confucius from its customary denotation. Li originally was the term designated for religious rites and rules.
for worship, ceremonial observances and festivities, and the name of the official rites and ritualistic behavior practiced at the Zhou Dynasty, as stated in “Zhou Li.” To Confucius, Li had an ethical rendition, and coexisted with Ren, one complementing the other. Ren becomes concrete with Li, which in essence is a body of rules governing human conduct, so as to give Ren a full behavioral expression.

Confucius’ thought “to be Ren, then Li,” was the highest form of Confucian learning. This means that, to have the end of being a fully human being, it is necessary to learn the rites, etiquette, or manners to identify ourselves properly. In other words, Confucius consciously reminded us of the fact that, in learning without a true understanding of its end, we may become distracted by various attractions and lose the ultimate end in the learning processes. Although there are an array of contents and areas that may help reach certain aims or goals, one must learn to consciously realize one’s ultimate end, which is to gain and present Ren. Using the Confucian term, Jun Zi, is the learning outcome. Accordingly, Jun Zi becomes the realistic goal of Confucian learning.

Jun Zi: the Confucian exemplar of the educated

The term Jun Zi appeared frequently in The Book of Odes before Confucius, and generally meant people with high ranks in society, or people from noble families. Sun (2004, 2008) described that, starting from Confucius, Jun Zi stood for the model of morality, synonymous with a person of humanity characterized by outstanding knowledge, courage, and skills to access and practice humanity. Jun Zi, therefore, is a self-directed and self-cultivated lifelong learner. In fact, he or she is the exemplar of the educated, who is willing to learn and practice humanities or morality via lifelong learning and cultivation.

As an exemplar of realizing Ren, Jun Zi is not only able to establish himself or herself, but also willing to enlighten others. Confucius contended that a winged steed’s value was not because of its power, but because of its virtue (L.Y., XIV, 12). Thus, the power of Jun Zi is the virtuous mind, rather than strength of body. This is explicitly the consequence of Ren, or morality and humanity-oriented education. For only the moral exemplar will present Ren towards his or her people, and the will “to govern with morality.” Confucius emphasized Jun Zi as one who “cultivates oneself and brings peace and happiness to the whole populace” (L.Y., XIV, 42).

This attribute illustrates the basic theme of the rectitude of human beings, emphasized by Confucius. In L.Y. (The Analects), we notice that words such as, morality, virtue, righteousness, and uprightness are referred to numerous times while discussing the educated. All of these echo that Confucian learning is morally oriented.

The learning process to become Jun Zi is a highly complex process. First, it not only requires a personal decision and commitment, but it also embraces multi-dimensions. Second, the learning process is not only life long, but also life wide. It cannot be conceived of as a project or degree program that can be completed within a limited period. Third, the areas of study are not only all-round; approaches to learning are also holistic.

Jun Zi – living in and with a multi-dimensional world

Evidently, we live in a world of multi-dimensions. We, as human beings, not only live in a cosmic world, a natural world, a social world, but also an inner, and spiritual world. In this sense, we are not only natural beings, moral beings, but also social, political beings, and spiritual beings. These contexts naturally require human beings to learn and develop continuously in order to live in and interact with these different worlds properly.

Confucius emphasized that, for Jun Zi living in and interacting with different contexts, he or she is required to learn and practice Ren accordingly. To become Jun Zi, one must remain in a continuous dialogue with the cosmic world, natural world, social world, inner world, and spiritual world (Sun, 2004,
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2008). Critical to understanding this is that Confucian philosophy takes a humanistic orientation and advocates a humanistic way of life (Lin, 1938; Tu, 1979; Zhang, 2009). For instance, as Jun Zi, an exemplar of the Confucian educated, living in and interacting with the universe, he or she respects the Tao of Heaven and understands each human’s fate. “Understanding the fate of human beings” can be interpreted as the understanding of limitations of human endeavors toward something that is beyond human capability. Confucius upheld this stance: to be conscious of human limitation and to keep a positive attitude when in difficulty. Confucius firmly believed, “Without recognizing the ordinances of Heaven, it is impossible to be a Jun Zi” (L.Y., XX 3).

As Jun Zi living in and interacting with societies, he or she considers human affairs as his or her own responsibility. Living and interacting with other beings, he or she follows “do not impose on others what you do not desire”; and living in and interacting with the inner world, he or she never ceases self-strengthening (Sun, 2008).

Yang and Zhang (2003) indentified six relationships that humans are constantly interacting with. They are: relationship with nature; relationship among people; relationship with activities; relationship with self; relationship with past (perception of time and space); and relationship with the ideal destination of a human being.

All these worlds of different kinds and various relationships require and facilitate the deepening of the relevant facet of our humanity. Confucius stressed that Jun Zi must be strong and resolute, for his or her burden is heavy and his or her road is long. “Isn’t it heavy? Jun Zi shoulders the Tao of Human as his or her own responsibility. Isn’t it a long way? Only with death does the road come to an end” (L.Y., VIII, 7). These perspectives illustrated that Jun Zi needs personal decision and strong commitment to looking up toward Ren and from much larger contexts consistently, persistently, and insistently.

Jun Zi – learning to perform among human relationships

Confucius stressed that the virtue of humanity is meaningless unless it is involved in actual human relationships. Interesting to note, the etymology of the word “Ren” is derived from the words “two” and “person” or “human being.” Therefore, the true manifestation of the quality of Ren is in the practice of human relationships.

In the Confucian tradition, human relatedness is the primary given. Human beings exist in a social context. In a social relationship, the continuous interaction is within the structures of human beings. They learn from one another, they interact with one another. Confucian values view harmony among human beings as the necessity to achieve a harmonious society (Huang, 2006). Hence, the emphasis that relationships among people should fall into proper places and order, so that they can relate to and interact with each other in a supportive and harmonious manner (Zhang, Lin, Nonaka and Beom, 2005).

Five basic human relationships had been established and practiced through the historical development of the Confucian philosophy. They are ruler–subject (the relation of righteousness; father–son (the relation of love); husband–wife (the relation of chaste conduct); elder brother–younger brother (the relation of order); and friends–friends (the relations of faithfulness) (Chang and Holt, 1991; Chen and Chung, 1994). The order of the five relationships is taken from that given by Confucius’ most famous follower, the philosopher Mencius (327–289 BCE), whose conversations were recorded in The Book of Mencius (Meng Zi) (see the Classics). The five relationships and human relatedness are vital to Confucian values and they have tremendously influenced the mode and comportment of interactions within Chinese society.

In Chinese culture, family, an enriching and nourishing support system, serves as a vehicle for the true realization of the self in its center. The self, in turn, must develop in its various roles as son or daughter, parent or sibling. Therefore, gaining and practicing Ren begins in the context of the family. In other words, “starting from the family as a center, when everyone is able to accord to his or her own role and
treat others with propriety, the whole society can be well-regulated according to gender, age, generations and so on” (Chang and Holt, 1991: 254).
Equally important, one must also learn to extend one’s relationships beyond the familial structure, and so beyond nepotism, in order to be able to relate meaningfully to a larger community. At a higher level, to truly realize one’s commitment to one’s own culture and to one’s own nation, one must go beyond simple-minded cultural or national chauvinism. It is, in this sense, a process of learning and education for the creation of an open-minded character that can relate meaningfully to an ever-enlarging network of human relationships (Tu, 1985).

Jun Zi – learning via holistic cultivation

Confucius provided Jun Zi with holistic learning. Confucius’ school studied the old pre-Confucius “Six Arts,” which refer to “rites” (礼), “music” (乐), archery” (射), “driving “(御), “the Book of Documents” (书), and “math” (数) (Jia, Pan and Tang, 2009; Zhang, 2009). Learning and practicing rites enables Jun Zi to better follow and operate social and political systems, rules, and regulations for various official activities. It also facilitates the proper interactions under various contexts. In fact, it is essential to help govern the nation, raise family, and establish oneself. Music includes not only music, but also reading and singing poetry. Confucius himself enjoyed playing Qin, a traditional Chinese musical instrument. He believed music nurtures human hearts and cultivates inner feelings. Reading and singing poems improves knowledge from social experience and cultural traditions. The use of the sword is a part of archery, which not only exercises and improves body strengths, but also enhances military knowledge and skills. Driving is a must for daily life and military requirement. Studying The Book of Documents, the documents and interpretations from the history of Emperors Yao, Shun and Yu, to Dynasties of Xia, Shang and Zhou, allows one to clearly have a historical perspective when articulating. Math is the capability and knowledge of calculation.

Confucius also selected and developed his own curriculum, the new “Confucianized six arts” (Wang, Yong, Liu and Tang, 2006). The Confucianized six arts stand for “poetry” (诗), “the Book of History or the Book of Documents” (书), “Yi” – I Ching (易), “rites” (礼), “music” (乐), and “Chun Quo Zou Zhuan” (春秋) (Zhang, 2009). Both the old and the new “Six Arts” embrace “rites” (礼), and “music” (乐), which signifies their significance in Confucian learning.

As a self-defined cultural transmitter, Confucius self-portrayed “to relate and not to invent, to believe in and to be devoted to antiquity” (L.Y., VII, 1). Confucius strongly emphasized learning from one’s own culture, history, and social political participation and beyond. Confucius applied human experience and human concern extensively to his teaching and learning in the culture he had inherited, specifically, the classic texts, some of which Confucius compiled, studied, reviewed, and finalized, such as Shi Jing (The Book of Odes), Chun Quo Zou Zhuan (The Spring and Autumn Annals), and Yi Jing (The Book of Changes). These classics Confucius saw as being crucial to the process of learning to become fully human.

From Shi Jing (The Book of Odes), Confucius guided his disciples to learn from poems that historically collected and reflected human experience via artistic expression. The Book of Odes generally encompasses six styles or formats. Each functions with its own uniqueness of expression in conveying the meaning of the contents within certain contexts.

Human beings are emotional beings who are involved in the much larger context of culture. Poetry, art, and music are essential in refining human feelings and sentiments into artistic expressions of humanity. Poetry, through artistic expression, appeals to the person’s internal resonance. It also provides special connections and interpretations between the person and the larger world. Through poems, art and music, people communicate and deliver their inner-world feelings in a sinuous, yet powerful, way. Moreover, one learns to gain access to expressing personal feelings, increasing the ability to respond to multiple worlds in different forms. In fact, utilizing different types of poems to convey
meanings or ideas was common in Confucius’ time among both officials and common people (Zhang, 2009). Hence, poetry and music are considered essential for the development of a fuller person.

From The Book of Rites, Jun Zi learned to express and act in proper contexts. Ritual (Li) is a shared, mutually understood system of non-verbal as well as verbal communication. As a socially recognized form, it both preserves and transmits the most authentic human ways of interacting. How does one become acquainted with another person, how does one greet others, how does one smile, how does one show deference? These are all simple human acts.

As a part of Confucian learning, Li is not an empty, meaningless pattern of gestures superimposed upon one to maintain dogmatic control over that person’s behavior. Nor is it stuffy concern with correct behavior merely for the sake of form. Rituals are acts that must be learned properly, to communicate meaningfully to other members of society. Furthermore, there are different forms of ritual and different ways of relating to others corresponding to the proper time and to the proper context. Doing so facilitates non-verbal communication to the harmony of human relationships.

Learning to be human means to have Ren in mind, and then use Li to facilitate the practice. Otherwise, “what is the good of Li, if a person is void of humanity, even though he perseveres in rites and decorum?” (L.Y., III, 3). Li, therefore, appears to be an attribute of a moral person; it is the code of conduct governing proper behavior. The moral person abides by the principles of Ren, and fulfills his or her obligations toward him or herself, his or her family, and society through this code of conduct of Li.

Central to understanding the reason for including rites and music in both the “Six Arts” is that Confucius emphasized that, when Ritual (礼) poetry (诗) and music (乐) were integrated, rites should be allowed to express actions, and poetry and music to represent feelings, for ritual was associated with external action, and poetry and music were connected with internal feelings. Ritual helped people identify each other. Music assisted people to enjoy their commonalities. Let action and feelings, external appearance, and internal emotions, complement each other. One of Confucius’ famous aphorisms illustrates the significance of the integration of the three: “Thrive with the Odes, establish stands with the rites, and accomplish with music” (L.Y., VIII, 8).

From Chun Quo Zou Zhuan (the Spring and Autumn Annals), Confucius presented to Jun Zi to learn from the collective memory. History, as a knowing from when and where we come, helps contact the major values, ideas, experience and lessons that have shaped the larger community of which we are a part. History becomes significant as we become capable of relating to our own past and enter into personal dialogue with those generations who contributed to the culture that shapes us today.

From Shi Ji, (The Book of History or The Book of Documents), a vision of political participation is learned. As social beings, human beings are also political beings, thus social participation is vital as a member of a society. In fact, one is expected to participate in the polity of which one is a part. Learning to participate in political activities successfully is a necessity for Jun Zi to be able to serve the public. This is because Jun Zi considers human affairs as his or her own responsibility. He or she worries about human affairs ahead of the general populous; he or she enjoys happiness after others do. These are attitudes for the world now and here and are the characteristics of being a political person who gives extensively to the common people and brings help to the multitude (L.Y., IV, 30). As can be seen, humans are not only artistic beings and historical beings; we are also social beings and political beings who should be responsive and responsible participants in the political community.

The Book of Changes (I Ching) has been one of the most important classics for the development of Chinese Culture. Confucius regarded it highly. In fact, it was recorded in the Analects that Confucius himself once said that, given more years, he would thoroughly study I Ching to avoid major faults (L.Y., VII, 17). Confucius studied The Book of Changes and highly regarded its values. From I Ching, Jun Zi learned a cosmic vision of being human. Using contemporary terminology, The Book of Changes represents an ecological perspective, both in an environmental and in a spiritual sense. Human beings do not exist only in
the anthropological world of other human beings. Beyond this human world is a larger universe. Therefore, we need to understand an ecologically sound cosmic vision.

In summary, a Confucian jun Zi is required to learn various aspects and via holistic approaches to enrich and enlarge his or her dimensions of learning to be human. As a culture transmitter, Confucius wanted to pass on richly textured traditions, which Confucius treasured and advocated throughout his own learning and teaching. Although each text has its own form, its own content, and, therefore, its own inner logic and spirituality, together they offer us a meaningful way to perceive today that Confucian learning involves large aspects of human experience, concern, and desires. Thus, we see, there is not only a poetic vision of being human, a ritual version of being human, and a historical version of being human. There is also a political version and a cosmic version of being human.

These are vivid examples of using a variety of resources for Confucian holistic and transformative learning. The Historical Record, written by Si Ma Qian (c. BCE 145–BCE 90), says that Confucius had taught 3,000 learners from different states in his time, among them 72 disciples who were excellent at the “Six Arts” and became distinguished scholars, government officials, teachers, and vital consultants to the government of different states.

All these signify that, to become fully human, one must learn life long and life wide, and one must transform oneself through holistic approaches and arenas towards successfully living in and interacting with worlds of many kinds.

Facilitating Jun Zi: the core Confucian teaching principles

Individualization

One of the Confucian teaching principles was individualization. Confucius highly recognized individual differences and adjusted his teaching methods to the needs, circumstances, and capacities of his students. He paid special attention to each individual and their distinctions while teaching his disciples. We see plenty of such examples in Lun Yu. For instance, Confucius provided diverse answers to the same questions raised by different disciples regarding “Ren”, “government”, “jun Zi”, or “filial piety”, etc.

For example, Lun Yu recorded that:

Meng Yi Zi, asked what filial piety was. The Master said, “Without deviation of rites.” Soon after, as Fan Chi (another disciple) was driving him, the Master told him, saying, Meng asked me what filial piety was, and I answered him, “Without deviation of rites.” Fan Chi said, “What did you mean?” The Master replied, “Serving your parents during their lifetime according to rites. When they die, bury them according to the rites, and make sacrificial offerings to them according to rites.”

(II, 5)

Meng Wu asked what filial piety was. The Master said, “For your parents, your greatest worry should be their health.”

(II, 6)

Tsze-yu asked what filial piety was. The Master said, “Nowadays to provide for parents is considered filial piety. However, dogs and horses are so provided. Without respect, what is the difference?”

(II, 7)

The reason why the disciples received diverse responses was that each student had his own background, situations, and level of personal development, thus Confucius endeavored to individualize his teaching to best meet the needs of each.
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Apperception

Apperception means cognition through relating new ideas to familiar ideas, or the unknown to the known. Confucius adopted this principle in his teaching. He drew extensively upon the previous knowledge of his students by frequent reference to the well-known historical events of the past, and to the famous books in his day (the Classics), such as The Book of History, The Book of Rites, and The Book of Odes. He also made effective use of simile, symbols, metaphor, analogy, and parable.

He, in fact, taught his students to learn from nature as well their personal experiences. Confucius, said, “one can gain new insight through research (learning); what one has learned previously may serve as a teacher” (L. Y., II, 11). From what you have learned, to knowing how to learn new things: isn’t this a “learning how to learn” approach?

Motivation and facilitation

Learning frequently becomes dull when no thinking on the part of the learner is involved. Being a teacher, Confucius was also keen on motivated students. Confucius paid attention to motivating people, and his teaching and facilitation were full of interesting conversations and dialogues, attracting and holding the attention of the learners. However, Confucius did not push them when there was no engagement in learning. “If one is not eager to learn, I do not open up the truth, nor help put any one who is not anxious to explain himself or herself. When I have presented the corner of a subject to any one, and she or he cannot from it learn some other things, I do not repeat my lesson.”(L.Y., VII, 8) Besides, “I do not teach one who never asked what is that, what is that?” (L.Y., XV, 16).

In fact, Confucius himself learned a great deal via asking questions. Although he knew extensively about ritual, people observed, “On entering the grand temple, Confucius asked about every detail” (L.Y., III, 15). This displayed that Confucius taught learners to open their minds to learn and to think for themselves, then facilitated their doing this, rather than feeding them what he thought was good and letting them recite what he believed were truths. In short, Confucius’ teaching and facilitation rested upon personal motivation and commitment to learning.

Becoming Jun Zi: the core Confucian learning principles

Study extensively

Confucius understood the broad scope of knowledge and encouraged Jun Zi diligently to observe the phenomena of the universe, read as much as possible, and gain cognition and appreciation of the persons and things that we come into contact with day by day. Learning extensively can be perceived as meaning that learning is unlimited, not only from books, but also from life and experiences.

“Jun Zi should study extensively, stick to his or her aspirations and interests, and eagerly ask about what is not understood, and constantly reflect on what is at hand” (L.Y., XIX, 6). In addition, what one has already acquired, one should not forget. In fact, one must constantly review the learned, which leads to further inquiry. Thus, the more we seek, the more extensive the field becomes, and the more extensive the field, the greater the subtlety our knowledge attains. Confucius hence guided his learners to learn holistically and from all kinds of sources.

Think pensively

To Confucius, learning and thinking constantly integrated together. “Learning without thinking is labor in vain; thought without learning is perplex” (L.Y., II, 15). He deemed that reflection was essential to a full
comprehension in the process of learning. It is a deliberation of the material of knowledge in order to master it thoroughly. In the realm of knowledge, we must associate what we know with what we remember, and deliberate on their mutual relationships. As Confucius believed, without thinking, the eyes and ears are hidden from things. The mind thinks; with thinking something is gained; without thinking nothing is gained. Only then, can conception be formed. Without conceptions, the materials of knowledge become diffuse and useless.

**Practice earnestly**

Confucius recognized the importance of learning through doing. In fact, learning must be applied in reality. He urged his disciples to be doers and not hearers or learners for the sake of learning itself. In the opening sentence of *Lun Yu*, this whole idea of the importance of doing or practicing is brought out very clearly: Confucius said, “Is it not pleasant to learn with a constant perseverance and application?” (*L.Y.*, I, 1). In fact, he frequently practiced the skills he had acquired and tried all his life to apply them. Application has the most meaningful function of what one has learned. He asked his disciples to imitate the way of Heaven, because it works all the time, “The four seasons pursue their courses, and all things are continually being produced” (*L.Y.*, XII, 19). Confucius encouraged his students repeatedly to put their learning into action.

One famous citation from the *Lun Yu* regarding the relationship between knowledge and application says, “What is the use of being able to recite the three hundred songs/poetry if one cannot perform the official duties given, or negotiate properly when sent to other states?” (*L.Y.*, XIII, 5). It is clear that one learns these ways for the purposes of applying them in life and work, and practicing them wholeheartedly, happily, with an urge that cannot be swerved (Ding, 1997). To be able to talk about knowledge, for Confucius, was not to be regarded as of the first importance, but to put that knowledge into actual practice was of the first importance.

**Conclusion**

The Confucian educational philosophy highlights that learning serves to realize human nature—learning to be human, which is a continuous transformative learning process that involves whole beings and their multiple life worlds/contexts. Interacting with and experiencing each world then involves certain kinds of learning that help develop an appropriate and needed quality of knowledge and skills, socially accepted values, attitudes and beliefs (see Sun, 2008: pp. 568–71 for details). Their integration facilitates the fulfillment of the roles that human beings may successfully play in the worlds of different kinds. As Sun (2008: p. 573) asserts:

Confucianism recognizes the multidimensional nature of human beings, the various purposes of being human and their realization via lifelong learning, indicating a more holistic development encompassing the many capabilities and roles that human beings possess in the multiple worlds they belong to, live in and interact with.

In summary, Confucian learning illustrates a holistic development of a human being via an integration of learning and practice from multiple dimensions. Confucian learning, via the cultivation of *Jun Zì*, presents us with the ultimate end of lifelong learning via holistic and multiple dimensional approaches. For Confucius, human beings live in and with different worlds: the universe, the natural world, the social world and the inner world. Thus, human beings need to learn from, live with, and live in each reality, which helps realize the true and full nature of being human. Linking Confucian learning with contemporary education, we see the significant implications. In the fast-changing and globalized world, Confucian learning calls for a reconsideration of the ultimate end of our learning and the need for multidimensional transformation for human development.
Notes

1 L.Y. refers to *Lun Yu*, a compilation of Confucius’ sayings and aphorisms by his disciples of the succeeding generation, which is also called “Analects” by Westerners. It is generally accepted as the most direct and reliable source on Confucius and his doctrines. For the purpose of identification, both chapters and section numbers are included. The division of section is based on *The Analects of Confucius*. (1992). (Bao: Shixing, Trans. into Modern Chinese and Lao; An, Trans. into English).

2 The Book of Odes was a book required by all government officials, especially negotiators during the Spring and Autumn Period in Chinese history. The poems and songs touch on facts and thoughts about government knowledge and the rites.

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