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Confucius: Philosopher of Twenty-First Century Skills

Abstract

In this essay, I examine the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) framework from a Confucian perspective. Given that this framework has attracted attention around the world, including Confucian-heritage societies, an analysis of how key ideas compare with Confucian values appears important and timely. As I shall show, although Confucian philosophy largely resonates with the “Learning and Innovation Skills” in the P21 framework, namely, critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity, it also provides fresh perspectives and nuances the framework. These insights include the notion that critical thinking is not a strictly cognitive endeavour but an affective one as well, a social construal of the self, and an ethical notion of creativity. This paper aims to redress the under-representation of Asian philosophy in the philosophy of education. It also hopes to initiate more philosophical dialogues between Asia and the West.

Keywords: Twenty-first century skills, Critical thinking, Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, Confucius

Educational discourse in recent years has increasingly centered on the much-touted “twenty-first century skills” that aim to prepare students to meet the challenges and demands of contemporary society (e.g., Binkley et al., 2012; European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, 2007; National Research Council, 2012; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009a, 2009b; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). These skills have attracted much attention around the world (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009; Gordon et al., 2009; Voogt & Roblin, 2012), including “Confucian-heritage” societies (Niu, 2012, p. 274; Starr, 2012, p. 17) such as Mainland China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and Singapore. This raises the following questions: How do the twenty-

first century skills resonate with Confucian ideas? How might Confucian philosophy contribute to a twenty-first century approach to education in this present globalised world?

In this philosophical comparative analysis, I examine the twenty-first century skills from Confucian lenses. In particular, I draw on three major Confucian texts—the *Analects* (“collected sayings” or *lunyu* 論語), the *Zhongyong* (中庸: “Doctrine of the Mean”), and the *Daxue* (大學: “the Great Learning”)—to show how Confucian philosophy resonates with the “Learning and Innovation Skills” in the influential “Partnership for 21st Century” (P21) framework (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). These skills, often known as the four “C”s (i.e., critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity), are important and worthy of study because they are “the keys to unlocking a lifetime of learning and creative work” (Trilling & Fadel, 2009, p. 49). In addition to showing resonances between Confucian philosophy and the P21 framework, I also illustrate how the philosophical ideas of Confucius may enhance ideas articulated by Trilling and Fadel. In the sections that ensue, I discuss the four “C”s in turn.

Critical Thinking

In their discussion of critical thinking, one argument Trilling and Fadel (2009) forwarded was that in “every subject, at every grade level, instruction and learning must include commitment to a knowledge core, high demands on thinking, and active use of knowledge” (p. 50). As I shall show, all three aspects are prominent in Confucian philosophy.

For Trilling and Fadel (2009), “commitment to a knowledge core” is crucial to critical thinking. Citing Resnick and Hall (1998), they argue that “just as facts do not constitute true knowledge and thinking power, so thinking processes cannot proceed without something to think about” (p. 50). The futility of thinking “without something to think about” can be seen in how Confucius laments that he once engaged in thought (*si* 思) for an entire day without eating and an

entire night without sleeping, but it did no good. Instead, it would have been better had he “spent that time in learning (*xue* 學)” (*Analects* 15.31; Slingerland, 2003, p. 186). For Confucius, it is important to learn a knowledge core of the classical texts, such as the *Odes* or the *Shijing* (詩經), a collection of three hundred songs and poems sung at religious and court ceremonies in early China (*Analects* 3.8, 13.5 and 17.9). Without such a core, there is no basis for one to think clearly (Slingerland, 2003). In fact, Confucius goes so far as to say that one who does not learn the *Odes* is “like someone standing with his face to the wall” (*Analects* 17.10; Slingerland, 2003, p. 204. See also *Analects* 16.13).

While thinking (*si* 思) without learning (*xue* 學) a knowledge core leads to one being “lost,” learning without thinking leads to “danger” (學而不思則罔，思而不學則殆) (*Analects* 2.15; Slingerland, 2003, p. 13. See also, the *Xunzi*: 1/1/12). This Confucian emphasis on thinking resonates with Trilling and Fadel’s call for educators to place “high demands on thinking” in education at all levels. For Trilling and Fadel (2009), learning is not about mere rote memorisation, but the ability to “ask significant questions that clarify various points of view and lead to better solutions” (p. 52). This is emphasised in the Confucian texts, where Confucius himself often asks questions (*Analects* 3.15), is persistent in his questioning (*Analects* 9.8), and expects his students to question and even contradict what he teaches (*Analects* 2.9). In addition, it is important for Trilling and Fadel (2009) that students are able to “synthesise and make connections between information and arguments” (p. 52). This recalls a dialogue where Confucius asks his disciple Zigong if he sees him as a person who studies a great deal and remembers it all. Zigong says, “Yes. Is this not the case?” And Confucius replies, “It is not. I bind it all together with a single thread (*yiguan* 一貫)” (*Analects* 15.3; Slingerland, 2003, p. 174). As Kim (2003) argues, such “binding” is “cognitive in nature, and requires attending to

underlying principles or roots in a critical manner” (p. 83). Confucius does not merely memorise, but analyses, interprets, evaluates, summarises, and synthesises what he learns, all of which are important aspects of critical thinking.

In addition, Trilling and Fadel’s efforts to dispel aspects of the famous “Bloom’s Taxonomy” resonates with the 2,500-year-old tradition of Confucian philosophy. For Trilling and Fadel (2009), “the lockstep, one-before-the-other learning sequence that teachers have been taught in education schools’ that leads from “knowledge, then comprehension, then application, then analysis, then synthesis, and finally evaluation” has been “shattered by decades of accumulated research that proves this is not how students really learn most effectively—or in many cases, not how they learn at all” (p. 51). No such rigid sequence of learning is found in the classical Confucian texts. The Chinese word for thinking, *si* (思), is a broad term that “encompasses a range of thought processes such as understanding, reflection, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, making connections, drawing analogies, making inferences, forming judgments and so on”—it is a “taxonomy of thinking” (Tan, 2015, pp. 430-431). While Confucian philosophy stresses the importance of deep learning, reflecting on what one has learned, and the so-called “higher-order thinking skills” in Bloom’s taxonomy, it does not construe them in a rigidly hierarchical manner.

Having shown how Confucian philosophy resonates with Trilling and Fadel’s call for twenty-first education to focus on a “knowledge core” and place “high demands on thinking,” I turn now to the third aspect, that is, “active use of knowledge.” This is seen very clearly when Confucius declares that “If people can recite all of the three hundred Songs and yet when given official responsibility, fail to perform effectively . . . what good are they?” (*Analects* 13.5; Ames & Rosement, 1998, p. 163). For Confucius, commitment to a knowledge core and thinking about

them are not enough; it is crucial to use the knowledge. Similarly, the *Zhongyong* exhorts us to “study the way (*dao* 道) broadly, ask about it in detail, reflect on it carefully, analyse it carefully, and advance on it with earnestness” (Ames & Hall, 2001, p. 104). Like the P21 framework, Confucius is of the view that learning should not lead to theoretical knowledge for its own sake, but knowledge that should actively be used.

Furthermore, Confucian philosophy resonates with Trilling and Fadel’s (2009) argument that “recent research in cognition” has “punctured a time-honored tenet of teaching—that mastering content must come before an attempt to put it to good use.” On the contrary, “using knowledge as it is being learned—applying skills like critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity to the content knowledge—increases motivation and improves learning outcomes” (p. 50). In the Confucian tradition, no strict dichotomy exists between mastery of content and the application of this content. As evident in the *Daxue*, learning and its application through active doing is an interrelated, dynamic process whereby one constantly morphs into the other (Chan, 1963). Just as learning enables one to apply and actively put it into practice, active doing as one learns facilitates learning.

It is clear therefore, that all three aspects of critical thinking noted by Trilling and Fadel resonate with Confucian philosophy. To recapitulate, for both Confucius and the P21 framework, critical thinking cannot take place in a vacuum without the acquisition of a knowledge core. Additionally, it is crucial for critical thinkers to ask questions. Contra Bloom’s taxonomy, learners ought to engage in complex thinking, such as the synthesis of knowledge, in a holistic, non-hierarchical manner, and actively apply knowledge as it is being learned. Clearly, the P21 framework resists the tendency to construe learning in an atomistic, linear fashion, one that moves rigidly from “lower-level” to “higher-order” thinking skills and from learning to active

application. Its emphasis on a more holistic, “all-at-once” approach finds weight in the philosophical tradition of Confucianism.

Notwithstanding the similarities noted between Confucian ideas and the P21 framework, Confucian philosophy also provides fresh perspectives in the notion that thinking is not a strictly cognitive endeavor, but an affective one as well. In the Confucian tradition, thinking cannot be divorced from feeling. The Chinese character 心 (*xin*) refers to both the “heart” *and* the “mind”; the affective cannot be dissociated from the cognitive (Ames, 2003). If this were accepted by mainstream educational theory, the Bloom’s taxonomy would not only have to be re-written in a non-linear and non-hierarchical manner, but would also have to include insights from other affective theories and taxonomies as well.

Communication and Collaboration

For Trilling and Fadel (2009), communication and collaboration skills are crucial to promote learning together in the twenty-first century. They argue that while education has traditionally focused on the importance of good communication, such as skills in reading, writing, and speaking, the demands of this century and digital technology necessitates “a much wider and deeper personal portfolio of communication and collaboration skills to promote learning together” (p. 54). This means that learners ought to be able to “communicate clearly” and “collaborate with others” (p. 55). In short, they need to learn the skills of “complex communicating” (p. 49). Teamwork is important, and humans have to work with and relate to one another. As I shall show, the Confucian philosophical enterprise emphasises these values.

With respect to communicating clearly, Trilling and Fadel (2009) stress the need for twenty-first century learners to “articulate thoughts and ideas effectively using oral, written and nonverbal communication skills in a variety of forms and contexts.” Furthermore, learners ought

to be able to “communicate effectively in diverse environments” and “use communication for a range of purposes” (p. 55). Clearly, merely learning how to read, write and speak are not enough in the P21 framework. Skills to communicate effectively in complex environments are needed, skills that by no means can easily be taught via traditional book learning.

Confucius may well be the ideal kind of twenty-first century learner that Trilling and Fadel describe. In his home village, he is known to be rather quiet—almost as if he is “at a loss for words” (*Analects* 10.1; Slingerland, 2003, p. 98). This seeming lack of eloquence is, for Slingerland (2003), “an expression of reverence” (p. 98) for Confucius’ elders; even if he were to disagree with his elders, he would do so in a respectful manner using very few words. However, in the public sphere, such as the ancestral temple and court, he would be articulate with his words (*Analects* 10.1, 3.15, 10.21), though always with caution and restraint. Additionally, at court, Confucius would always be congenial, affable and pleasant to his subordinates, and respectful but straightforward to his superiors (*Analects* 10.2). In short, Confucius adapts his speech, behaviour and countenance according to changing social demands (i.e., between family and public life, and between superiors and subordinates). Clearly, as Trilling and Fadel would argue, Confucius is able to articulate his thoughts and communicate effectively in diverse situations; he goes beyond the three “r”s of reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Another aspect of effective communication, for Trilling and Fadel (2009), is the ability to “listen effectively to decipher meaning, including knowledge, values, attitudes and intentions” (p. 55). The importance of listening cannot be overemphasised in the Confucian tradition. Contra Plato who is pejorative about those who “rate their ears above their intellect” (*The Republic*, 531b), the Confucian sage is one who listens: the Chinese character for the ear (*er* 耳) is embedded in the characters for the sage (*sheng* 聖) and intelligence (*cong* 聰) (DeWoskin, 1982).

Hall and Ames (1987) go so far as to term the Confucian sage a symphony orchestra “conductor,” one who “conduces to a collaboration of unique contributions” through “various media of communication and communion,” thus fostering “harmony that at once achieves unity while preserving diversity” (p. 278). Like an orchestral conductor, the Confucian sage, as Trilling and Fadel (2009) would say, “listens effectively” (p. 55) to the voices of different personalities. Differences are not suppressed, but harmonised in such a way that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Just as an orchestral conductor listens carefully to the players to decipher their creative intent (Tan 2014, 2016), the twenty-first century learner ought to acquire the skill of keen listening in order for genuine communication to happen.

With respect to collaborating with others, Trilling and Fadel (2009) highlight the need for learners to not only “work effectively and respectfully with diverse teams,” but also to “exercise flexibility and willingness to be helpful in making necessary compromises to accomplish a common goal” (p. 55). These values lie at the core of Confucianism. Confucius explicitly warns against being stubborn and inflexible (*Analects* 9.4), which recalls his doctrine of timeliness (*shi* 時): “responding flexibly and appropriately to the situation with which one is confronted” (*Analects* 7.11; Slingerland, 2003, p. 67). For Confucius, since every situation in life differs, one should not apply moral rules in a rigid fashion (*Analects* 18.8). Rather, an ethically exemplary person (*junzi* 君子) makes the appropriate judgment at the appropriate time. Flexibility that is similarly emphasised by the P21 framework is required.

In fact, one might go a step further to argue that Confucian philosophy is undergirded by assumptions that emphasises the importance of collaboration to an even greater degree than the P21 framework. For Trilling and Fadel (2009), learners ought to “assume shared responsibility for collaborative work, and value the individual contributions made by each team member” (p.

55). Notwithstanding the emphasis on teamwork, it nonetheless remains rather individualistic in its call to “value the *individual* contributions made by *each* team member” (emphasis added). The basic point of reference remains the individual: it is individuals who contribute to the collective.

An illustration serves to contrast an individualistic construal of the self against a Confucian construal. Take, for example, two teachers, one in Britain, the other in Taiwan. When addressing their respective classess, the first teacher is likely to use the word “everyone” (e.g., “Everyone, please stand up”). The second teacher, speaking in Mandarin, will probably say, “大家” (*dajia*), which does mean “everyone,” but literally translates as “big family” (i.e., “*Big family*, please stand up”) (Ames, 2011, p. 105). While the English language construes “everyone” in the class as being a sum total of discrete, singular individuals, the Chinese language portrays all class members as belonging to one “big family” (*dajia* 大家). This distinction is not trivial. The Western portrait of the self is inextricably linked to the notion of the “atomic individual” that harks back to the soul of the Greek and Christian traditions. According to this construal, each human being has an internal experience: even if a body is being cut, there nonetheless exists an internal thing—the “real” self or the “soul.” By contrast, in the Confucian tradition, there is neither a self nor a soul that is present when a person is born (Ames, 2011, p. 96). Rather, what constitutes a self and personality flows from the community, in particular, the family. One is not born a human *being* with a ready-made soul, but *becomes* human (“human becoming”) by fostering relations with the family and community (Ames, 2011, p. 87).

The Confucian portrait of the self, therefore, is irreducibly social and radically relational. One cannot be truly human *in silo*, but only in relation to others. The P21 framework, with its emphasis on “the *individual* contributions made by *each* team member,” sees the individual as a

matter of antecedent reality who then contributes to the whole by working with other individuals. With the Confucian framework, it is the collective that comprises the antecedent reality: relationality and interdependence are the basis of departure. This theory of the social self foreshadows that of the American pragmatist George Herbert Mead, who argues that “the whole (society) is prior to the part (the individual), not the part to the whole; and the part is explained in terms of the whole, not the whole in terms of the part or parts” (Mead, 1934, p. 37). A person is always a part of a larger community, which in turn is a part of an even larger community, and so on. The fingernail is a part of the finger, which in turn is a part of the hand, which in turn is a part of the limbs, and the entire body. The notion of the fingernail in and of itself is meaningless—a holistic construal of the human body that forms the basis of Traditional Chinese Medicine (Ames, 2011).

The importance of communication and collaboration in the Confucian tradition, therefore, is emphasised to an even deeper degree than the P21 framework. Notwithstanding the call for communication and collaboration in many major twenty-first century skills frameworks, Charlene Tan (2013) argues that these frameworks are founded on an individualist construal of education as their focus are on the need to enable learners to compete, get ahead of others and succeed in the present globalised world. Tan warns that while there is nothing wrong in this in and of itself, it may possibly “foster excessive self-centeredness and unhealthy competition rather than peaceful co-existence and altruistic collaboration among people,” further noting that “we should learn to benefit ourselves as well as others since the two cannot be separated—to help ourselves, according to Confucius, is to help others” (p. 4). When one organ of the body functions well, the other organs and the entire body are healthy too.

To summarise, Confucian philosophy buttresses the P21 framework in its emphasis on the need for learners to articulate their thoughts and ideas, being adaptable to diverse environments, listening effectively, and exercising flexibility when working in teams. In its construal of humans as being inextricably linked to others, it offers an alternative pair of lenses from which to view collaboration—one that does not construe the world in terms of individualistic competition and zero-sum game.

Creativity

For Trilling and Fadel (2009), creativity rank very highly on the inventory of twenty-first century skills; this is because the world’s global economy has a constant demand for new products and services. Despite the general acceptance of creativity worldwide as a good (e.g., Craft, 2003), research has indicated the presence of a stereotypical conception that Asians (and by extension, their education systems) are less creative than people from the West, a view held not just by Westerners, but also Asians themselves (e.g., Niu, 2012; Wong & Niu, 2012). In *Why Asians are less creative* (Ng, 2001), Singaporean writer Ng Aik Kwang attributes the supposed lack of creativity to the Confucian tradition. After all, Confucius said that “I transmit rather than innovate. I trust in and love the ancient ways” (*Analects* 7.1; Slingerland, 2003, p. 64). Is the pursuit of creativity in the P21 framework then, fundamentally at odds with Confucian philosophy? In the discussion that ensues, I argue that Confucian philosophy not only resonates with key ideas on creativity in the P21 framework, but also has much to nuance and enhance it. Indeed, as Wen (2009) argues, there are dimensions of Confucian philosophy that are “profoundly creative” (p. 1).

For Trilling and Fadel (2009), a learning environment that nurtures creativity is one that fosters “questioning, patience, openness to fresh ideas,” and “high levels of trust” (pp. 57-58).

All four aspects can also be seen in the Confucian tradition. First, a learning environment that emphasises questioning is important to Confucius. Speaking of his disciple Yan Hui, Confucius notes how “I can talk all day long with Yan Hui without him once disagreeing with me. In this way, he seems a bit stupid” (*Analects* 2.9; Slingerland, 2003, p. 11). Clearly, Confucius expects his students to question him. Additionally, Confucius models the art of questioning in his own teaching—the *Analects* is filled with conversations between Confucius and his students, many of which feature the master questioning his students. In the artful use of questions in teaching, Confucius’ approach recalls that of Socrates, which has a similar maieutic quality (Slingerland, 2003; Tan, 2014). Second, patience is emphasised in the Confucian learning environment. The *Analects*—arguably the most important document of Confucius’ teachings—opens with Confucius stressing the importance of devoting oneself to long periods of study, even when one’s talents are not recognised (*Analects* 1.1). For Confucius, one should not seek immediate rewards and recognition, but ought to study for its own sake. Confucius models such patience in teaching and learning, and is known as someone who teaches others “without growing weary” (*Analects* 7.2; Ames & Rosement, 1998, p. 111). Third, Confucius’ “openness to fresh ideas” (Trilling & Fadel, 2009, p. 57) can be seen in how he listens to and learns from the people around him, and selects what is good and follows it (*Analects* 7.28). He also explicitly forbids being stubborn, demanding absolute certainty, and insisting on oneself (*Analects* 9.4). Fourth, Trilling and Fadel’s (2009) emphasis on “high levels of trust” finds resonance in the Confucian philosophical tradition where trust or *xin* (信) is one of the six desirable character traits (*Analects* 17.8). In fact, Confucius goes so far as to teach his disciples to “let your actions be governed by dutifulness and trustworthiness *xin* (信), and do not accept as a friend one who is not your equal” in this regard (*Analects* 9.25; Slingerland, 2003, p. 95).

Trilling and Fadel’s call for educators to create environments that nurture creativity betrays an underlying assumption of the P21 framework: the notion that creativity is something that can be developed. For Trilling and Fadel (2009), it is a common misconception that “creativity is only for geniuses” (p. 57). In so doing, they seek to overturn a notion of the creative genius seen most clearly in the writings of Continental philosophers such as Arthur Schopenhauer (2011), who argues that genuine art is produced by those who have been “inspired to the point of genius” (p. 261), and Immanuel Kant (2000), who posits that “beautiful art is art of genius” (p. 186). Trilling and Fadel’s efforts to dispel the Western notion of genius resonates with the Confucian tradition, where no such notion of genius exists. Contra Western *creatio ex nihilo* where creativity is construed in terms of the Judeo-Christian God’s transcendent act of “creating from nothing” (and hence requires genius), Confucian creativity—*creatio in situ* or “situational creativity”—renders creativity in terms of flexible responses to ever-changing situations (Ames, 2005; Hall & Ames, 1987; Niu & Sternberg 2006; Tan, 2016; Wen, 2009). Like the P21 framework, Confucian philosophy is of the view that creativity can be developed, thus providing an alternative philosophical resource on which Trilling and Fadel’s arguments may lean on.

Furthermore, Trilling and Fadel’s critique of the individual creative genius also implies that creativity does not necessarily have to be construed in individualistic terms; rather, it is important for learners to collaborate with others. Such a notion of creativity resonates with Confucian creativity. Unlike Western *creatio ex nihilo* that dichotomises the Creator and the created, Confucian *creatio in situ* construes humans as co-creators of the cosmos. While *tian* (天: heaven/sky) creates, it is humans who continue *tian*’s work to extend the *dao* (道) or the Way (*Analecets* 15.29; Ames & Rosement 1998; Ames & Hall, 2001). In the classical Confucian

worldview, humans collaborate with *tian* to create the world; the universe is by no means solely created by a single God. It follows therefore, that a collaborative view of creativity lies at the heart of Confucian *creatio in situ*. In fact, just as the Confucian view of the self is irreducibly social and stresses interdependence, the Confucian notion of creativity is collaborative right from the outset: *tian* and humans *require* one another; creativity cannot be achieved without one or the other. No one ever creates alone; the others matter. And because the others matter, what one creates is inextricably linked to the larger socio-cultural context. Although novelty is prized, appropriateness or *yi* (義) is valued in Confucian creativity as well (Niu, 2012); creativity is not so much for its own sake as it is to be of value to society. This resonates with Trilling and Fadel's (2009) comment that "students must invent solutions to real-world problems" (p. 58). Contra Oscar Wilde's "art for art's sake" which has roots in Kantian philosophy (e.g., Kant, 2000), the practical value of creativity is crucial for both Confucius and the P21 framework.

In short, Confucian philosophy provides theoretical foundation for the P21 framework in terms of the ideal learning environment to foster creativity, the notion that creativity can be nurtured, the nullification of the solitary creative genius, and the proposition of a collaborative and practical construal of creativity. It must be stressed, however, that in its emphasis on the practical value of creativity, Confucian philosophy, unlike the P21 framework, is not driven by economic concerns, but by a desire to meliorate the world in which we live. For Trilling and Fadel (2009), the purpose of engaging in collaborative creativity with others is ultimately to lead to "useful real-world innovations, a prize skill in our 21st century innovation-driven economy" (p. 58). For Confucius, however, creativity is an ethical endeavour (Tan, 2015). As noted by several prominent Confucian scholars, such as Tu Weiming and Roger Ames, *cheng* (誠)—often translated as "sincerity"—is inextricably linked to creativity (Ames & Hall, 2001; Tan, 2016;

Tu,1989). So important is *cheng* to creativity that according to the *Zhongyong*, “*cheng* is the beginning and end of things,” further noting that “without *cheng*, there would be nothing” (Chan 1963, p. 108). In addition to sincerity, *cheng* may also refer to “perfect genuineness,” “authenticity,” “integrity,” “to complete” and “to perfect” (Ames & Hall, 2001, p. 33; Tan, 2012, p. 134). Clearly, creativity is construed in the Confucian tradition not as a means of being competitive and getting ahead of others, but to create a better world through the many virtues and values encapsulated by the single character, *cheng* (誠).

Conclusion

This essay was prompted by two questions posed in the opening paragraph: How do the twenty-first century skills resonate with Confucian ideas? How might Confucian philosophy contribute to a twenty-first century approach to education in this present globalised world? It is hopefully clear from this paper that there are indeed ideas in the P21 framework that resonate with Confucian philosophy and are relevant to Confucian-heritage societies. Furthermore, Confucian philosophy contribute to a twenty-first century approach to education by adding nuance to the existing P21 framework. As noted in the discussion above, these include the notion that critical thinking is not a strictly cognitive endeavour but an affective one as well, a social and relational construal of the human self, and an ethical notion of creativity. The significance of this discussion and comparison lies in these three key aspects in which Confucian philosophy might contribute to P21 globally.

This paper also raises deeper questions for global education. For example, notwithstanding the influence of classical Confucianism over huge stretches of Asia, including Mainland China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Vietnam and Singapore (Tu, 1996), this paper cannot claim to speak for all of Asian philosophy as it draws on only three Confucian texts. Indeed, it

remains to be seen how other Asian philosophical traditions—such as Indian, Islamic, and Thai philosophies—may compare with, add value, or even clash with extant twenty-first century frameworks. This paper is further limited in the omission of other philosophical schools in classical China, later developments in Confucianism, and other twenty-first century skills frameworks. How would the P21 framework look like if it were to synthesize insights from myriad philosophical traditions? Is a genuinely global and transcultural approach to twenty-first century education possible? These questions remain to be answered. Nonetheless, other writers may build on my work for further research, and I hope to have contributed to philosophical dialogue between Asia and the West. Surely, this is much needed for the globalised world of the twenty-first century.

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