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A Confucian Framework for 21st Century Education

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Keywords: competencies, competences, Confucian framework, 21st century education, skills

Abstract

This paper proposes a Confucian framework for 21st century education by building upon an existing framework, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills by P21. It is argued that a Confucian framework for the 21st century education will benefit students and educators in four main ways. First, by emphasising the centrality of li (normative behaviours with corresponding values and attitudes) in education, the framework ensures that all aspects of a student's life, be it one's career or the learning of ICT and core subjects, are undergirded by the pursuit of he (harmony) and ren (loving others). Second, the framework highlights the need for students (and educators) to love and enjoy learning while working towards the betterment of all fellow human beings. Third, the framework underscores the important contributions of the family and community towards an individual's identity formation and life goals. Finally, the framework offers an integrated model where core academic subjects are interconnected with a shared goal to develop students to observe li beyond the classroom to the world they live in.

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Introduction

What does it take to succeed in the 21st century?

A survey of current literature on 21st century education reveals that the key lies in ‘21st century skills’, ‘21st century competencies’ and ‘21st century competences’ (Trier, 2003; European Parliament, 2007; Silva, 2008; Ananiadou & Claro, 2009; Partnership For 21st Century Skills, 2009a, b; Binkley et al., 2010; National Research Council, 2012; Voogt & Roblin, 2012). A number of frameworks for 21st century education have been formulated by various governments and private organisations across the world. Some prominent organisations and the frameworks they have developed are as follows:

- The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) developed 21st Century Skills and Competences for New Millennium Learners (OECD, 2005)
- P21 – a national organisation in the United States that was formed in 2001 comprising the US government and several private organisations – produced Partnership for 21st Century Skills (Partnership For 21st Century Skills, 2009a, 2009b)
- The Council and European Parliament approved a European reference framework known as Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (European Parliament, 2007).
- ATC21S – an international project sponsored by Cisco, Intel and Microsoft – launched Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills (Binkley et al., 2010)

In a recent review of 32 major frameworks for 21st century skills/competencies/competences, Voogt and Roblin (2012) observe that these skills/competencies/competences are generally characterised as being (a) transversal (i.e., they are not directly linked to a specific field but are relevant across many fields), (b) multidimensional (i.e., they include knowledge, skills, and attitudes), and (c) associated with higher order skills and behaviours that represent the ability to cope with complex problems and unpredictable situations (p. 300). Based on their analysis of the major frameworks, they conclude as follows:

[O]ur analysis reveals that there are strong agreements on the need for competences in the areas of communication, collaboration, ICT [Information and Communication Technology] related competences, and social and/or cultural awareness. Creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, and the capacity to develop relevant and high quality products are also regarded as important competences in the 21st century by most frameworks (p. 308).

To enable students to acquire and master 21st century skills/competencies/competences, many frameworks advocate major changes to the curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and teacher education. Policymakers and educators are advised to promote ‘modern’ approaches such as problem-based learning, co-operative learning, experiential learning, formative assessment, and comprehensive use of ICT (Voogt & Roblin, 2012, p. 310). In terms of teacher education, the emphasis is on expanding the teachers’ repertoire of innovative teaching methods and enabling them to make use of relevant ICT tools to create learning environments that accommodate 21st century learning (p. 311).

At this juncture, some clarifications regarding ‘skills’, ‘competencies’ and ‘competences’ are instructive. A ‘skill’ essentially refers to an ability or capacity to do something well. Rychen and Hersch (2003) distinguish a ‘competency’ from a ‘skill’ as follows:

A competency is more than just knowledge and skills. It involves the ability to meet complex demands, by drawing on and mobilising psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context. For example, the ability to communicate effectively is a competency that may draw on an individual’s knowledge of language, practical IT skills and attitudes towards those with whom he or she is communicating (as cited in Ananiadou & Claro, 2009, p. 8).

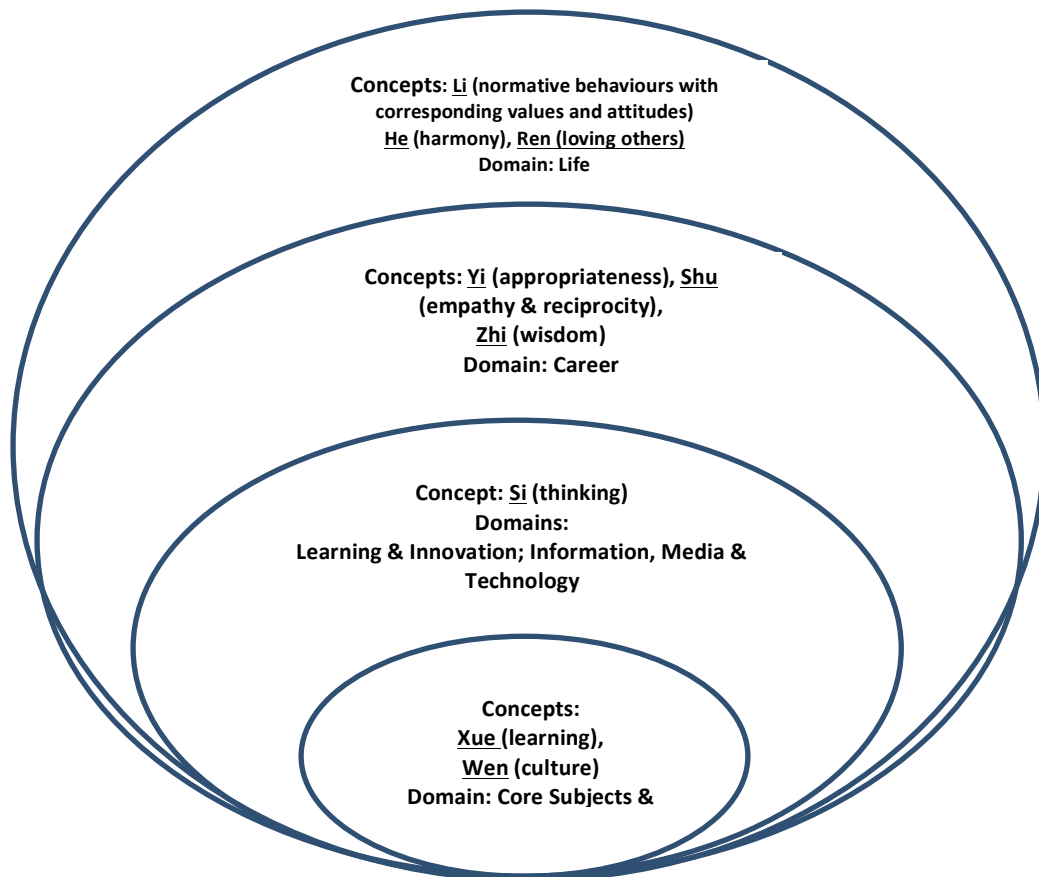
The terms ‘competencies’ (plural form of ‘competency’) and ‘competences’ (plural form of ‘competence’) appear to be used synonymously in the literature on 21st century education. For example, Ananiadou and Claro (2009) use the two terms interchangeably. Likewise, OECD (2005)’s definition of ‘competency’ is identical to that of ‘competence’ used by Rychen and Hersch (2003) cited above. In view of the overlapping meanings of ‘skills’, ‘competencies’ and ‘competences’, I shall use the term ‘21st century skills’ to refer collectively to ‘21st century skills, competencies and competences’ for the rest of the paper.ⁱ

A Confucian Framework for 21st Century Education

I propose a Confucian framework for 21st century education by adapting an existing framework, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills by P21 (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009a, 2009b) (henceforth the P21 framework). This framework has been selected as it is representative of the other frameworks. The P21 framework aims to develop a vision for student success in the new global economy (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009a, p. 1). The framework comprises four broad areas:

- Core Subjects and 21st Century Themes
- Learning and Innovation Skills
- Information, Media and Technology Skills
- Life and Career Skills

The framework includes the support systems in standards, assessment, curriculum and instruction, professional development, and learning environments. I should clarify that I do not claim that my framework is the best or the only acceptable one on 21st century education. Neither am I asserting that my Confucian framework is the only Confucian model; it is entirely plausible for other writers to formulate different frameworks based on Confucius’ or Confucian ideas as well. What I am putting forward, instead, is a (not ‘the’) Confucian framework that I believe is salutary for the education of the young in the 21st century (for further reading on Confucius’ work, see Fingarette, 1972; Lau, 1979; Tu, 1970, 1985; Yang, 1980; Hall & Ames, 1987; Ames & Rosemont, 1998; Slingerland, 2003; Tan, forthcoming).

Figure 1: A Confucian Framework for 21st Century Education

Following the P21 framework, the domain of ‘Core Subjects and 21st Century Themes’ remains unchanged. However, the thrust of the three domains – ‘Learning and Innovation’, ‘Information, Media & Technology’ and ‘Life and Career’ – goes beyond ‘skills’, ‘competences’, or ‘competencies’ to an emphasis on and integration of values, attitudes and behaviours. Although not apparent in the diagram, the framework includes the support systems in standards, assessment, curriculum and instruction, professional development, and learning environments. I shall not elaborate on these support systems and shall instead focus on the four domains as presented in the diagram.

The framework consists of four concentric circles, each containing one or more Confucian concepts. Two preliminary observations are necessary regarding Confucius’ concepts mentioned in the framework. First, not all of Confucius’ concepts are listed here; for example, I have left out dao (Way) and zhengming (rectification of names). The omission does not mean that they are unimportant or that they are excluded from the framework. On the contrary, they are intertwined with and implied in the other Confucius’ concepts, as I shall explain later.

Second, the association of selected Confucian concepts with specific domains (for example, wen (culture) is associated with ‘Core Subjects and 21st Century Themes’) does not mean that the concept is only applicable to that domain. Neither does it mean that the various Confucian concepts are unrelated and mutually exclusive. The reverse is true: all the concepts are necessarily linked and inseparable in practice. For example, yi (appropriateness) is

intertwined with ren (loving others) as the former is an expression of loving others by doing what is appropriate for a specific situation. My purpose of linking individual concepts to specific domains is to highlight the central roles played by these Confucian concepts in the corresponding domains.

Let me explain the framework in detail. I would like to start with the innermost circle, and show the progression from the specialised domains to the most general domain. The **innermost circle** comprises the domain of Core Subjects and 21st Century Themes. Following the P21 framework, the Core Subjects include English, reading or language arts, World languages, Arts, Mathematics, Economics, Science, Geography, History, and Government and Civics. The 21st Century Themes, on the other hand, similarly include topics such as Global Awareness, Financial, Economic, Business and Entrepreneurial Literacy, Civic Literacy, Health Literacy, and Environmental Literacy.

The key Confucius' concepts here are xue (learning) and wen (culture). Xue (learning) essentially refers to bringing up or instructing a person in her thoughts, feelings and actions through providing educational experiences. It highlights the need to enjoy and love learning so as to promote the Way (dao) for the good of humankind. It is through unceasing and passionate learning that one acquires ren and other qualities in one's self-cultivation to achieve the Way. One participates in xue primarily through wen (culture) that refers to a broad-based and interdisciplinary curriculum. Confucius advocates learning the 'six arts': li, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy or writing and mathematics. Whether one is engaging in sports or enjoying a piece of music, one learns to love and find joy in such learning, and appreciate their spiritual-ethical-aesthetic value.ⁱⁱ Learning of wen enables a person to acquire the wherewithal to be knowledgeable, confident, well-mannered and refined. More importantly, a cultured person is one who has achieved internal and external harmony, and is inspired to contribute to the world by broadening the Way.

What then are the implications that arise from the application of Confucius' concepts of xue (learning) and wen (culture) to the domain of core subjects and 21st century themes? I would like to suggest five implications for policymakers and educators in their endeavours to promote 21st century education. The first implication is that the focus of learning should not to be learning for the sole or dominant purpose of enriching oneself and thriving in a competitive world, but to broaden the Way (dao) for the good of humankind. To broaden the Way is to think, feel and act normatively by loving fellow human beings (the essence of ren) in accordance to li (I shall elaborate on these two concepts later). A dominant theme in the current frameworks for 21st century skills is a view of education as primarily a means for one to compete and succeed in a globalised world. While there is nothing wrong in wanting to be educated for one's own benefit, a possible negative consequence is that it may foster excessive self-centredness and unhealthy competition rather than peaceful co-existence and altruistic collaboration among people. In short, 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.

Second, the emphasis of finding joy in and loving learning implies that we need to assist students and educators to appreciate the non-utilitarian function of education. The accent on acquiring 21st century skills so that one could survive and thrive in an increasingly stressful and competitive world often implies that education is primarily valued for its instrumental role. Little emphasis may be placed on the intrinsic worth of education and non-economic

outcomes of learning, such as enabling one to appreciate love, beauty, simplicity, and human existence.

The third implication concerns the inclusion of the core subject of sports into the curriculum. In view of Confucius' emphasis of the integration of one's mind and body, sports – surprisingly omitted in the P21 framework – should be included as a core subject in the framework.ⁱⁱⁱ Sports need not be confined to archery and charioteering that are mentioned in the Analects; it should include a variety of physical exercises and games. The aim is to nurture students to appreciate the relevance of and observe li in all aspects of their lives. Through an integration of subjects, from languages to mathematics, arts, music and sports etc., students may achieve internal harmony in their heart-mind (xin) and body, as well as external harmony in communicating and collaborating with others according to li.

Fourthly, the 21st century theme of civic literacy, which is one of the 21st century themes, should be promoted in all societies, including East Asian societies. According to the P21 framework, this refers to participating effectively in civic life by staying informed and understanding governmental processes; exercising the rights and obligations of citizenship at a local, state, national, and global level; and understanding the local and global implications of civic decisions. Civic literacy is essential for the young to contribute actively and meaningfully in public policies both locally and internationally for the good of humankind. There is a general perception that Confucianism suppresses political and democratic participation, due to the prevalence of authoritarian governments in East Asian countries that share a Confucian heritage (Frederick, 2002). But what does Confucius think of civic participation?

We have seen how Confucius is critical of the political rulers of his time, and believes in actively serving in public office and participating in public discourse.^{iv} I have elsewhere argued that Confucianism recognises correlative rights, premised on the right to human dignity, worth and equality, and attached to individuals in specific social positions (Tan, 2012a, b).^v The specific expression of civic literacy, of course, will depend on the specific social, political and cultural conditions, people, and issues involved. This is where the Confucian concept of yi (appropriateness) is applicable; yi refers to exercising one's discretion and discernment to arrive at a sound judgement based on the needs and demands of the situation. Yi guides a person to participate effectively in civic life, exercise her citizen rights and obligations, and understand the local and global implications of civic decisions in a culturally sensitive and contextually appropriate manner.^{vi}

Finally, I recommend the addition of the 21st century theme of spiritual literacy into the curriculum. We have already learnt that Confucius' worldview includes a distinctive spiritual component that entrusts human beings with the mission to fulfil the mandate of tian (heaven). We have seen how although Confucius enjoys a close relationship with heaven, he does not dwell much on the topic of heaven and even discourages any speculation on supernatural matters. Instead, his concern is on the need for human beings to broaden the Way by establishing peace, order and harmony on earth by following the exemplary conduct of the sage-kings.

In view of Confucius' spiritual outlook, the spiritual literacy I have in mind is not religious education. I have argued elsewhere for the promotion of spiritual education in schools, which is distinct from religious education (Tan, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2010). My distinction stems from a basic difference between 'religion' and 'spirituality'. Briefly, 'religion' comprises "a

set of ethics, doctrines, organisational hierarchies, and the history of any particular religion” (Minney, 1991, p. 388) while ‘spirituality’ refers to a distinctive capacity for the individual to make sense of oneself within a wider framework of meaning. Examples of spiritual ideals are feelings of transcendence, knowledge of the divine, a search for meaning, purpose and service, a sense of awe, wonder and mystery, and self-knowledge. Spiritual development is characterised by reflection, attribution of meaning to experience, and an emphasis on a non-material dimension to life and intimations of an enduring reality (OFSTED, 1994). Spiritual development may include, but is not confined to, any set of religious beliefs, an institutionalised belief system, or any realm of worship.

In line with the spiritual dimension of Confucius’ teachings, I propose that schools introduce spiritual education to help students acquire insights from their personal existence, attribute meaning to their life experiences, and value a non-material and transcendental dimension to life (Tan & Wong, 2012). Spiritual literacy supports the 21st century theme of ‘global awareness’ since it enables students to appreciate people of diverse cultures, religions and lifestyles at a deeper and sustained manner. It enables and inspires students to view ‘the other’ empathetically and respectfully against a backdrop of shared humanity and mission to seek the common good. Undergirded by a desire to pursue a shared vision for humanity, students are motivated to understand and address global issues by engaging in open dialogue and international collaboration.

The **next outer circle** comprises two other domains for the 21st century: Learning & Innovation, and Information, Media & Technology. The two domains focus on the attributes needed in a digital world and knowledge society. Following the P1 framework, ‘Learning and Innovation’ consists of ‘creativity and innovation’, ‘critical thinking and problem solving’ and ‘communication and collaboration’. The domain of ‘Information, Media and Technology’, on the other hand, consists of ‘information literacy’, ‘media literacy’, and ‘ICT literacy’. It should be pointed out that these two domains in this circle presuppose the learning of the core subjects and 21st century skills found in the innermost circle.

The Confucius’ concept associated with the above-mentioned domains is si (thinking). This concept refers to higher order thinking such as understanding, reflection, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, drawing analogies, making inferences, and so on. Given that si is closely related to xue (learning), the former presupposes the presence of the latter as well as wen (culture). Si is essential to education as it ‘leads forth’ or nurture a person by encouraging her to think for herself. The emphasis is not just about getting students to learn about and accept tradition, but to reflect on her tradition so as to learn to critique, change and improve it where necessary.^{vii} Through this process of self-directed inquiry, the students are encouraged to contribute towards the norm or discourse – a social process of constructing shared meanings that instruct a community on the proper form and purpose of given practices.

Applying the Confucian concept of si to the domains of ‘Learning and Innovation’ and ‘Information, Media and Technology’ means that one does not just acquire relevant knowledge and skills, such as learning about deductive and inductive reasoning or the cutting-edge ICT tools. Important these knowledge and skills may be, the learning should be accompanied by the learner’s zeal to actively reflect, ask and seek answers to relevant questions. A example is to explore the ethical implications of critical thinking, such as the question of whether critical thinking itself is culturally biased. Another example is to critique the advantages of using ICT for student learning especially in poor countries.

Si also entails the learner extending her learning by applying what she has learnt to real life, drawing inferences and forming her own judgements about people and things; as well as engaging in self-examination. Throughout her inquiry process, she is encouraged to harmonise her cognitive and affective faculties through her heart-mind (xin), and channel her learning to observing li by demonstrating normative behaviours with corresponding attitudes and values. Combining xue (learning), wen (culture) and si (thinking), we have a portrait of a lifelong and life-wide learner who cultivates herself in a spontaneous, meaningful and joyful manner. She is on the way to become a junzi – an ideal human being who fulfils her mission in life by broadening the Way by observing li.

The **second most outer circle** is the domain of Career. This circle presupposes the possession of the aforementioned concepts of xue (learning), wen (culture), and si (thinking) in the other smaller circles. Following the P21 framework, this domain comprises the sub-topics of ‘Productivity and Accountability’ (manage projects and produce results) and ‘Leadership and Responsibility’ (guide and lead others, and be responsible to others). The Confucian qualities central to this domain are yi, shu and zhi.

Yi (appropriateness or rightness) is crucial to one’s career prospects as it directs a person to exercise her individual discernment, discretion and judgment at work. An employer or employee guided by yi will do what is appropriate in managing projects, producing results, guiding and leading others, and being accountable to others. Accompanying yi is shu (empathy and reciprocity), where one learns to live and work harmoniously with people around her. Shu is about treating others with respect by not imposing on others what you yourself do not desire. It stresses reciprocity through cooperation and mutual support, attributes that are especially necessary in an interconnected and globalised world. Another essential key concept for the workplace is zhi (wisdom or realisation), where one not only acquires facts but also learns to apply one’s knowledge in real life. Such applied knowledge comes in the form of knowing how to relate to different types of people, bring out the best in others, and help others realise their potentials. In other words, a wise person is a responsible person who guides and leads others by appreciating and developing the talents of others. The above illustrates how yi, shu and zhi work together to empower an individual to obtain not just skills, competencies or competences but also the spiritual-ethical-aesthetic values, dispositions and worldviews needed for a successful career.

Finally, the **outermost circle** contains the Confucian concepts of li (normative behaviours with corresponding values and attitudes), he (harmony), and ren (loving others) for the domain of Life. Following the P21 framework, this domain comprises the sub-topics of ‘Flexibility and Adaptability’ (adapt to change and be flexible), ‘Initiative and Self-Direction’ (manage goals and time, work independently, and be self-directed learners), and ‘Social and Cross-Cultural Sensitivity’ (interact effectively with others and work effectively in diverse teams). A note for the last sub-topic of ‘Social and Cross-Cultural Sensitivity’: the original sub-topic in the P21 framework is ‘Social and Cross-Cultural Skills’ but I have replaced the word ‘skills’ with ‘sensitivity’ to show how it is not just about abilities but an integration of one’s values, attitudes and behaviours. As the biggest circle, it encompasses all the concepts and domains of all the other circles.

A central concept in this domain is li that refers to the totality of normative human behaviours, accompanied by corresponding attitudes and values in all aspects of life. The observance of li requires the integration of one’s thoughts, feelings and actions through one’s

heart-mind (xin) so one can be flexible, adaptable, self-directed, exercise initiative, and demonstrate social and cross-cultural sensitivity. Li is a foundational concept in the framework for 21st century education because it brings together a community of junzi who collectively broaden the Way (dao) for humankind.^{viii}

We have learnt in earlier chapters that li comprises the spiritual, ethical and aesthetic dimensions (1.12). The implication here is for the learner to go beyond skills, competencies and competences to become a person who internalises and observes spiritual-ethical-aesthetic li in all aspects of her life. Briefly, li is ‘spiritual’ in that it focuses on knowing the divine and one’s place in the universe. It takes one beyond being merely a ‘good’ person to acquiring insights of enduring worth from one’s personal existence, attributing meaning to one’s life experiences, and valuing a non-material and transcendental (although not necessarily otherworldly) dimension to life. The ethical dimension of li emphasises the harmony of one’s thoughts, feelings and actions by helping oneself and others to observe li. The aesthetic dimension refers to appreciating harmony by beholding beauty, joy and ethical values in the arts and humanities, especially poetry and music. Furthermore, li is related to he (harmony) in the sense that the former serves to achieve the latter. Internal harmony refers to the ease, joy, contentment one obtains when one’s thoughts, feelings and actions are integrated according to li. External harmony exists when a person co-exists peacefully, purposefully, and joyfully with other human beings and the world around them in accordance with li.

To live a life in accordance to li is to live a life of ren or loving others in one’s values, attitudes and behaviours. The achievement of ren is particularly evident in one’s demonstration of ‘Social and Cross-Cultural Sensitivity’, where one is able to interact genuinely with others and work effectively in culturally diverse teams. Ren or loving others does not mean that we love everyone in the same way and to the same degree. In other words, the achievement of ren involves the practice of zhengming (rectification of names) and xiao (filial piety). Zhengming emphasises the need for all people to demonstrate ren by performing their respective social roles. Xiao (filial piety, on the other hand, is the root of ren in the sense that one must first love one’s parents and family members before one can extend love to other people in society.

It follows from zhengming and filial piety that the formation of self-identity cannot be separated from our social functions and responsibilities in the world. I have elsewhere argued that rather than seeing the self as a single, separate individual who stands apart from, or over and against, the community or society, the individual is socially embedded in a web of relations (Tan, 2012a, p. 459). Self-realisation is not just a matter of transforming one’s understanding of the self; it requires communion with others in the common pursuit of ren. The importance of the family and community in contributing towards one’s life and career means that we need to acknowledge and draw upon the resources of the family and community to enable every individual to succeed in the 21st century. In the context of schools, this means that educators need to work closely with the family and community to bring up (instruct) and lead forth (nurture) their students in values formation and holistic growth.

It is apparent that my Confucian framework supports a communitarian approach to education by acknowledging the central role of the community in shaping and influencing an individual’s growth and identity. However, this does not mean that the self is ignored or subservient to the interests of the common good. We have seen how Confucius’ concept of harmony is not about homogeneity but diversity in unity. Being a junzi is not about conformity

and blind allegiance to the rulers but about demonstrating ethical autonomy, critical reflection and creativity through self-cultivation (see chapter on junzi for details). There is therefore a strong stamp of individuality, meritocracy, equality, and civic involvement in Confucius' worldview.^{ix}

It is also necessary, in our discussion of the relevance of Confucius' work for 21st century education, to explore the implications of this Confucian framework for **teacher and teacher professional development**. A teacher, according to Confucius, should be an ethical exemplar to her students. To put it simply, a teacher should strive to be a junzi.

In the context of teacher education and professional development, priority should be placed on the character development of the teacher and secondarily on teaching methods, assessment abilities, or other technical competencies. A Confucian teacher is one who has achieved, or at least strives to achieve, internal and external harmony through spiritual-ethical-aesthetic li. Such a person possesses and manifests harmonised ren attitudes, values and behaviours in her relationships with her students, colleagues, parents and others. She is convinced that "in helping oneself to take a stand, she helps others to take their stand; in desiring to reach a goal, she helps others to reach the goal" (6.30). Since helping one's students presupposes teacher competency the training and upgrading of the teachers' abilities, techniques, and strategies are of course necessary. But more important and fundamental than knowledge and skills training is for the educator to abide in and demonstrate ren by loving her students and people around her in accordance to li.

Besides character development, teacher education and professional development should also focus on cultivating educators who enjoy, love, and engage in lifelong and life-wide learning. Such a teacher is a zealous learner of multi- and inter-disciplinary curriculum, and adept at making the connections between what she and her students already know (the old) and what she and her students are learning (the new). She is willing to teach anyone who is keen to learn, regardless of his or her family background, individual potential, learning ability and other factors. By patiently guiding her students to learn systematically, such a teacher inspires them to constantly reflect and engage in higher order thinking and conscientiously apply what they learn in life. Given that a junzi is one who draws close to fellow junzi, teacher education and professional development should also encourage teachers to collaborate with other teachers. To be sure, the P21 framework does mention teacher collaboration: "Encourages knowledge sharing among communities of practitioners, using face-to-face, virtual and blended communications" (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009b, p. 9). However, the focus of this framework is on 'knowledge-sharing' with an emphasis on improving the teachers' skills, rather than mutual encouragement to abide in ren and cultivate oneself to observe li. This is in contrast to the Confucian framework that highlights the importance for teachers to be a part of a community of junzi who collectively and selflessly promote harmony and broaden the Way.

Conclusion

This paper has argued for a Confucian framework for the 21st century education where li, instead of 'skills', 'competencies' and 'competences', is at the heart of education. The centrality of li ensures that all aspects of a student's life, be it one's career or the learning of ICT and core subjects, are undergirded by the pursuit of he (harmony) and ren (loving others). Furthermore, the framework highlights the need for students (and educators) to love

and enjoy learning while working towards the betterment of all fellow human beings. Third, the framework underscores the important contributions of the family and community towards an individual's identity formation and life goals. Finally, the framework offers an integrated model where core academic subjects are interconnected with a shared goal to develop students to observe *li* beyond the classroom to the world they live in.

Endnotes

ⁱ OECD (2005)'s definition of 'competency' is as follows: "A competence is more than just knowledge or skills. It involves the ability to meet complex demands, by drawing on and mobilising psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context. For example, the ability to communicate effectively is a competence that may draw on an individual's knowledge of language, practical IT skills and attitudes towards those with whom he or she is communicating" (p. 4). As noted in the text, this definition is identical to Rychen and Hersch (2003)'s definition of 'competence'.

ⁱⁱ Tweed and Lehman (2002) note that "Confucius had a pragmatic orientation to learning; the idea of learning merely for the sake of learning was foreign to him" and that "[a]n acceptable goal of learning, in addition to personal reform, is to competently conduct oneself within a civil service job (13:5), a role Confucius viewed as important for reforming society." (p. 92). However, I disagree with them as Confucius praises the ancient scholars who "learn for their own sake" (14.24) and extol the virtue of the love for and joy of learning (8.13, 6.20). Tweed and Lehman cite 13.5, but the context of that verse is not about the need to learn for the sake of civil service job, but about the need to put into practice what one has memorised from the Songs.

ⁱⁱⁱ Dahlgaard-Park (2006) posits that Confucius "possessed a rather holistic and dynamic view of knowledge and learning, in which the different dimensions of individual, social learning, cognitive and practical learning, universal as well as situated learning, etc. are considered" (p. 231). Also stressing the integration of theory and practice, Kim (2004) argues that Confucius' notion of truth offers a more integrated model than the emphasis on truth as corresponding to reality; the latter view is dominant in Anglophone societies. He explains as follows: "The concept of truth is understood differently between the Western and the Confucian world. In the West, truth is knowledge of reality, basically representations of the world. In the Confucian cultures, truth is performative and participatory. Confucian "truth" is knowledge about the humanistic way, how to live as a person in an interdependent community. The Confucian sense of truth as knowing to live to become a harmonious, integrated person within a community is contrasted with the Western notion of truth as attaining corresponding knowledge of reality. ... Compared to correspondence and coherence notions of truth, the notions of "appropriateness or fitness" and "harmony" are emphasised as truth notions in Confucian cultures. What is important in truth notions, for Confucian cultures, is learning to act appropriately and to live harmoniously with others in the community" (p. 118, also see Hall & Ames, 1998).

^{iv} It is evident that Confucius propagates taking an active interest in political affairs. But this does not mean that he believes that the only worthy occupation for everyone is public office, or that the only purpose of studying is for the sake of political involvement. As noted by Meng (2005), "Confucius was indeed very concerned about politics, very concerned about society, with strong practical concerns. Furthermore, joining politics was the main employment for someone who pursued studying in ancient society. This is unlike the current

situation where there is a variety of occupations and avenues for one to attain life's value. But from Confucius' perspective, joining politics is an important avenue but not the only one, and one should not study for the sake of becoming an official" (pp. 143-144).

^v Sim (2010) avers that Confucius' concept of *yi* (appropriateness or rightness) implies certain civil and political rights: "[O]n account of Confucius' emphasis on appropriateness (*yi*) in actions, which actions cannot be achieved without liberty and security, we can imagine his support for the first generation civil and political rights. The right to life, security and liberty are essential not only for acting fairly so that one does not unfairly profit oneself in material goods, honor, power or safety, but also for the other conditions on which Confucius insists for morality, namely, acting with *li*, proper intention, proper respect (*xiao*), and genuine self-investment" (pp. 206-207).

^{vi} Confucius' teaching on achieving *ren* by observing *li* for political leaders could help to address the current problem in many countries, where people increasingly have little trust and respect for government. As argued by Frederick (2002): "There is widespread evidence of a sharp decline in trust of government officials and a diminished respect for governmental institutions (Nye, Zalikow, & King, 1997). The limits of governmental capacity to manage complex social problems by laws and regulations are now apparent. As a consequence, we see the stirrings of the civil society movement and the yearning for community. We witness the relentless calls for a higher morality among our leaders. Western leaders would do well to consider the public morality of the Confucianist good official practicing moral conventions so as to earn the trust and respect of all the people" (p. 625).

^{vii} I share Slingerland (2001)'s view that Confucian training allows room for self-criticism: "Although the training through which virtues are acquired proceeds according to a general set of rules or principles, the actual decisions made by a person with fully virtuous dispositions are both more flexible and more authoritative than the rules themselves. Thus, once a practice has been mastered, in the sense that the requisite virtues have been fully developed, this mastery brings with it a certain independence from the rules that constitute the practice: the master is able to reflect upon the rules and may even choose to transgress or revise them if, in her best judgment, this is what is required to realise the good or goods specific to that practice. Practice mastery thus brings with it a type of transcendence: the freedom to evaluate, criticise and seek to reform the practice tradition itself" (pp. 102-103, italics added). Characterising Confucius' approach as a 'critical appropriation of tradition', Chan (2000) adds that "the sayings of Confucius reflect an essentially 'conservative' orientation, finding in tradition a reservoir of insight and truth", coupled with "a critical dimension to it in that ethical reflection and self-cultivation would enable the individual to challenge particular claims of tradition" (p. 245). Jones and Culliney (1998) also highlight what they call the 'inherent potential for growth' in *li*: "In Confucius's thought there is an awareness that *li* has an organic aspect, that is, it has the inherent potential for growth or diminution over time. The structure, sustainability, and orderly flow of information within the system could and would change. Confucius suggests that observance and affirmation of this orderly flow was crucial to the preservation of society. If the social system's *li* did not respond to the changing needs of society, stability would be lost. Once stability was lost, society's fragile fabric would come one step closer to losing its pattern of order. ... Confucius thus allowed for variation in *li* over time, but this variance had to be in harmony with the emergent order of the system" (p. 399).

viii Kim (2004) highlights the communal role of *li*: “‘Ritual practice’ or ‘propriety’ [*li*] is not composed simply of given standards or rules of action but has a creative dimension. Even though rituals inform the participants of what proper actions are, it is the participants who actually appropriate the rituals through performing them. When performing rituals, participants reformulate rituals to accommodate uniqueness and quality of the participants: the participants personalise the rituals. Rituals, on the one hand, inform the participants of the shared set of values. On the other hand, rituals offer persons the opportunity to contribute novel meaning to the community and thereby to be integrated in a way enriching to the community” (p. 119).

ix Commenting on the primacy of the self in Confucius’ conception, Fingarette (1979) explains, “We have the concept of the self as a self-observing and self-regulating individual, a self sharply distinct from Others, a self with interests that may in fact conflict with those of Others but that ought ideally to be brought into accord with or even yield to the interests of Others. From this self there arises a kind of directed dynamism-wanting, willing-that characteristically is what mediates the orientation of the self and the actual conduct of the self” (p. 133). Stressing the centrality of the individual, Hall and Ames (1987) assert that a person becomes an ‘author’ in his creative disposition, in the sense that he becomes “an ‘authority’ in his deference to and embodiment of existing meanings” in his interaction with heaven (p. 244).

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