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Examining Models of Twenty-first Century Education through the Lens of Confucian Cosmopolitanism

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Today, the intensification of global interconnectivity is a key characteristic of the twenty-first century. This has spurred governments and policymakers to envision how best to equip future-ready citizens who can navigate increasingly globalized workplaces resulting in the worldwide popularity of models that articulate twenty-first century competencies (21CC). Key catalysts to the widespread adoption of 21CC models were various reports from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank in the late 1990s that drew attention to the demand for highly-skilled workers in post-industrialized societies. In 1997, the OECD initiated the Definition and Selection of Competencies (DeSeCo) project. Various models of 21CC were later developed by major transnational organizations such as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and World Economic Forum as well as non-profit organizations such as Partnership for Twenty-first Century Learning (P21) and Assessment and Teaching of Twenty-first Century Skills (ATC21S). The framework developed by P21 involved collaborations with major multinational corporations such as Apple Computer, Microsoft Corporation, and Time Warner Foundation while the ATC21S model was sponsored by Microsoft, Cisco, and Intel.

Twenty-first century education models perpetuated by transnational and multinational organizations posit an idealized vision of the future-ready citizen equipped with requisite skills to compete in the global economy. Informed by economic rationality, such models promote a consequentialist approach to education where the primary aim of schools is to develop citizens as human capital who can thrive in globalized workplaces and ultimately contribute to the progress of their nation. In this paper, I focus on the twenty-first century education model currently infused across schools in Singapore. Using this as an example, I examine models of twenty-first century education from the lens of Confucian cosmopolitanism. I explore how the application of Confucian cosmopolitanism can facilitate an ethical re-orientation of twenty-first century education that shifts the focus from instrumental competencies to humanistic virtues needed for a more hospitable future.

Criticisms of a Consequentialist Approach to Twenty-first Century Education

Models of twenty-first century education offer an idealized vision of what the citizen of the future should look like by presenting a typology of competencies organized into visually captivating frameworks, diagrams or flowcharts. A comparison of OECD, UNESCO, World Economic Forum, ATC21S and P21 models reveal some degree of consistency. For example, critical thinking, creative thinking, communication, and collaboration are emphasized across all models with the exception of OECD. Also, ICT literacy and the ability to use technology interactively are emphasized in all models with the exception of UNESCO. The significance of global citizenship skills is also observed across the models, though this is framed as social and cross-cultural skills, intercultural understanding, and the ability to relate well with others.

By articulating a list of competencies, these models function as signposts directing school leaders on specific paths to take to prepare students for an unpredictable future. At the same time, what is foregrounded are the outcomes of what schools should aim for rather than the reasons why these are important. Attention is then paid to the means rather than ultimate ends of education as such models are informed by a consequentialist logic¹ expressed in the language of skills needed for one to survive and stay ahead. The normative impetus is centered on maximizing the happiness of the individual and nation by equipping him/her with the necessary competencies to get ahead in a global age. Success is tied to one's capacity to compete. For example, the justification by P21 (2019) for learning and innovation skills is that these "are being recognized as those that separate students who are prepared for more and more complex life and work environments in the twenty-first century, and those who are not" (p. 2). The purpose of competition is often tied to a country's economic growth. OECD's DeSeCo project begins with the question, "What competencies do we need for a successful life and a well-functioning society?" (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009, p. 4). The report further distinguishes successful outcomes for individuals and successful outcomes for societies. Both require individual competencies, institutional competencies, and the application of individual competencies to contribute to collective goals.

Various scholars have critiqued what they perceive as a human capital orientation undergirding education reform policies including twenty-first century education discourses (Authors, 2017; Spring, 2015; Tan, 2014). Increasingly, the influence of multinational corporations in crafting education policies and frameworks as well as the alignment between schooling and business in envisioning future-oriented goals of education, have led to the prioritization of educating citizens for twenty-first century economic globalization (Author, 2017). In categorising global citizenship education, Oxley and Morris (2013) distinguish moral from economic global citizenship education along with its subset, corporate global citizenship. Here, education's primary value is articulated in terms of economic outcomes – the capacity to thrive and compete in future work places, to get better jobs and higher wages, and to increase one's productivity for a country or corporation. This presumes that individuals are motivated by economic prospects and discounts the value of social, religious, moral, and non-material dimensions of life (Robeyns, 2006).

Twenty-first century competencies are thus akin to commodities to be invested in and measured for economic returns rather than for human development that then promotes a managerial school culture characterized by competition, standardization, and accountability. This assumes that such competencies can be universally integrated in schools without considering differing social-cultural practices in local contexts. This utilitarian approach to education also perpetuates the image of the citizen as what Foucault (2008) terms, *homo economicus*, one who is an "entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings" (p. 226). The idealized citizen, depicted as an individualistic and autonomous capitalist, rather than part of a collective society, seeks to maximize "utilities" via accumulating future-oriented skills.

Conceptualizing Confucian Cosmopolitanism

Since the late twentieth century, cosmopolitanism has been widely employed as an ethical response to counter neoliberal pressures to develop citizens of the future. The term has typically been traced to Diogenes, the fourth century Greek Cynic philosopher who rejected material and social attachments, describing himself as a *kosmopolitēs* or citizen of the world. Unlike a consequentialist approach, twenty-first century education from a cosmopolitan perspective prioritizes the development of ethical dispositions rather than mere competencies

and outcomes. One significant disposition is hospitality which entails an openness that transcends one's community and nation (Author, 2013; Baker, 2009). Another key disposition entails a willingness to engage with others. Drawing on Russian and German philosophers, Mikhail Bakhtin and Hans-Georg Gadamer respectively, Koczanowicz (2010) describes "dialogical cosmopolitanism" as engaging with different ideological perspectives, cultural values, and points of view while seeking mutual understanding. This involves a willingness to suspend one's beliefs in order to listen to and learn from others (Hansen, 2011). As an ethical orientation, a cosmopolitan approach to twenty-first century education seeks to encourage dialogue across cultures to the extent of exploring transnational ways that cultures intersect, mix, and appropriate from others (Rizvi, 2009).

The wealth of scholarship on cosmopolitanism as an idealized vision of an ethically-grounded education has predominantly stemmed from the West rooted in classical Greek, Hellenistic and Enlightenment philosophers such as Aristotle, the Stoics, and Kant as well as more contemporary postmodern philosophers such as Derrida and Levinas. Less documented has been the scholarship on cosmopolitanism emerging from philosophers in the East.

In this regard, Chen (2016) has documented how scholars in China began theorizing Chinese cosmopolitanism from the mid 1990s via the doctrine of "tianxia" or all under heaven. At the turn of the century, several scholars have sought to historicize this doctrine such as Zhao (2009) who examined how its enactment 3000 years ago under the Zhou dynasty perpetuated the principle of harmony premised on the inclusion of all peoples and lands leading to peace for many centuries in China. In 2012, a seminal conference at UC Santa Cruz brought together scholars mainly from the fields of History and Religion leading to an important edited volume titled, *Cosmopolitanism in China 1600-1950*. In framing the book, the editors, Hu and Elverskog (2016) explain its underlying premise that cosmopolitanism was operative during the Qing dynasty through the early Republican period and played a crucial role in guiding state relations with minority communities as well as the country's relations with the outside world. Many of the scholars in the volume ground their understanding of Chinese cosmopolitanism on the philosophical ideas of Confucianism. Further, two important works by American scholars, Neville (2012) and Ivanhoe (2014), sought to conceptualize Confucian cosmopolitanism by distinguishing this from Western conceptions of cosmopolitanism. While Confucian cosmopolitanism shares key fundamental principles with Western cosmopolitanism, namely "a serious ethical, intellectual and moral commitment to the other" and the "ability to think and act beyond the local" (Elverskog, 2013, p. 10), there are also subtle distinctions. Broadly, Confucian cosmopolitanism may be distinguished from Western cosmopolitanism through three concepts – *dao* (way of heaven), *ren* (humaneness) and *li* (ritual actions). It should be noted that the West cannot be regarded as having a monolithic tradition just as there are also multiple traditions and interpretations of Confucianism. Thus, in what follows, I elaborate on the three concepts located in Confucian cosmopolitanism and how this differs from three dominant strands in Western cosmopolitanism – Stoic cosmopolitanism, Enlightenment cosmopolitanism, and New cosmopolitanism.

1. The Human being as a participant as opposed to citizen of the cosmos

While the term "cosmopolitanism" may have originated with the Cynic philosopher Diogenes, it was the Stoics who provided a comprehensive and durable philosophy on cosmopolitanism. The ideas of Zeno and Chrysippus, particularly, were important in establishing basic principles of Stoic cosmopolitanism, namely, the idea that all human beings, despite their differences, are a single species and that humans are citizens of the

cosmos or universe (Heater, 2002). Only by comprehending divine universal law can humans transcend the parochial values of their city-state. These principles find similar resonance in Confucian thought. Like the Stoics, Confucianism subscribes to an “anthropocosmic worldview” in which heaven, earth, and human beings are interconnected (Tucker, 1998). While Confucianism has typically been regarded as an ethics rather than a religion in the form of membership to a belief system articulated via institutionalized rituals, dogmas, and theological precepts, it is evident that spirituality is prominent in Confucianism (Chai & Chai, 1973). Its concerns with spirituality is reflected in the view that the self is embedded in a larger cosmological system.

At the same time, a key distinction between Stoic and Confucian conceptions of cosmopolitanism lies in their perspective of the cosmos. For the Stoics, a citizen of the cosmos is one governed by “logos” denoting speech and rational thought (Heater, 2002). Thus, through speech, only the rational individual can comprehend divine universal law (Chen, 2016). Confucians, however, perceive the universe not merely as an external entity to be grasped by reason. Instead, *tian* or heaven is a creative, sustaining force of the universe that is immanent in nature and human beings. Rather than being concerned with cosmogony or how the universe originated, Confucianism lends attention to cosmology or an explanation of the workings of the universe in all facets of life (Tucker, 1998). In a study of *tian* as used in the Guodian manuscripts dated to the latter half of the Warring States Period (475–221 BCE), Chan (2011) observes that the notion of heaven is multifaceted entailing the source of the cosmic order, a description of social and moral patterns, and the source of synchronous events and personal experiences. The pervasive nature of heaven implies that the transcendental is immanent within the human being who seeks harmony with heaven and participates in heaven’s “organic naturalism” or the ongoing creative process of transformation (Cheng, 1991).

Rather than a rational citizen of the cosmos, Confucian thought perceives the human being as a participant of the cosmos. As distinct from Cartesian notions of mind-body dualism and, related to this, the push for the mind to transcend material desires of the flesh, Confucian thought does not dichotomize mind and body, the natural and supernatural. Heaven cannot quite be conceptualized as transcendent; though it is the source of all things, it is not an entity nor can it be understood by sense perceptions. At the same time, it is immanent as it penetrates the natural order of all living things and the moral order of human beings (Liu, 1972). The human being, as part of a triadic relationship with heaven and earth, participates in heaven’s ongoing creative force of transformation. This does not lead to the transcending of the self or the projecting of the self onto an absolute transcendental entity but the self’s immanent recovery of his/her authentic nature that encompasses an ontological unity with *dao* (Cheng, 1991).

2. The human being as an embodied cosmopolitan as opposed to abstract cosmopolitan

The Confucian cosmopolitan, more clearly conceptualized as a participant of the cosmos, is paradoxically embodied in concrete rather than abstract realities. This perspective is at odds with Enlightenment cosmopolitanism advocating an abstract universalism. Such a view, popularized in the eighteenth century, notably by the philosopher Immanuel Kant, proposed that national differences be minimized in favour of one uniform enlightened culture. In a period characterized by rising nationalism, Kant (1795/1963) theorized the importance of cosmopolitan rights extending beyond the nation state proposing, in his title, that the “law of world citizenship shall be limited to conditions of universal hospitality” (§358, p. 102). In this worldview, all rational beings are citizens in a federation of states and

as members of a moral community, they should be treated as ends rather than as means to fulfill the aims of state or community (Kant, 1795/1963).

In more recent times, this universalistic conception of enlightenment cosmopolitanism has been revived by scholars such as Nussbaum (1997) who advocates being “philosophical exiles from our own ways of life” and giving “that community of humanity our first allegiance” (pp. 58–59). Nussbaum’s essential premise is that our primary obligation is not to the family, nation or state but the moral community of human beings. She argues that our task is to treat all human beings in the same way we treat our fellow city-dwellers or neighbours. Ivanhoe (2014) has provided a comprehensive critique of Nussbaum’s universalistic approach to cosmopolitanism. Namely, such a position renders one’s obligation to the “world” as an abstract community and hence, it is impractical given that individuals have specific duties to nations they live in such as the paying of taxes.

It is here that Confucian cosmopolitanism offers a more practical alternative, one that recognizes the importance of retaining rootedness to one’s family and community while striving to extend this to others in the world. Confucian cosmopolitanism subscribes to the view that even as heaven imbibes all things, the *junzi* or morally exemplary man is the one who seeks to fully realize the way of heaven in his/her life. In his seminal *Source book in Chinese philosophy*, Chan (1963) observes that one of Confucius’ greatest contributions to Chinese philosophy was in establishing a humanism concerned with good government and harmonious human relations. For example, when his disciple Fan Ch’ih asked about wisdom, Confucius said, “Work for what is appropriate and right in human relationships; show respect to the gods and spirits while keeping them at a distance – this can be called wisdom” (*Analects*, 6.20).

Confucius was less concerned about spiritual beings or life after death than the moral perfectibility of the individual on earth. The nobility of a person was not determined by blood nor by an external entity; rather, it occurred through the cultivating of character as the individual demonstrated the virtue of *ren* or humaneness, akin to goodness, benevolence, and love toward his/her family, community, and the world at large. Essentially, Confucian cosmopolitanism subscribes to an embodied cosmopolitanism in which the individual is one fully rooted in his/her specific location and attuned to the fluctuations and rhythms of the natural world. Such an embodied cosmopolitanism recognizes the importance of fidelity to one’s family, community and the world.

3. Cosmopolitanism as a relational learning as opposed to a moral response to others

Since the late twentieth century, another brand of cosmopolitanism has gained popularity among scholars from North American and Europe. Known as new cosmopolitanism, this conception differs from old Enlightenment cosmopolitanism, as it acknowledges that one can inhabit multiple spaces and learn to “balance reflective openness to the new with reflective loyalty to the known” (Hansen, 2011, p. 1). The new cosmopolitanism worldview, as Hansen (2011) describes, is akin to a prism in which one is conscious of a plurality of perspectives without losing one’s own rootedness. Terms such as “cosmopolitan patriot” (Appiah, 1997), “Rooted cosmopolitanism” (Beck, 2003), and “vernacular cosmopolitanism” (Bhabha, 1996) capture the push for an epistemic outlook (Beck, 2006) that accommodates a multiplicity of cultures while finding affective affinity with diverse others at home and in the world.

Of the three dominant strands in Western cosmopolitanism, new cosmopolitanism aligns most closely with Confucian cosmopolitanism particularly with its recognition that a cosmopolitan worldview does not negate the local. In fact, Confucianism recognizes that we naturally have a greater fidelity to our family and community than to distant others and does not discount the value of such attachments because without first learning how to be filial to one's family, one would not be able accord this same respect and love to distant others (Ivanhoe, 2014).

Perhaps one key distinction is on one hand, new cosmopolitanism is commonly invoked as a moral stance that one adopts while relating to others who are different. This may involve how one should navigate the complexities of "reattachment, multiple attachment or attachment at a distance" in increasingly globalized spaces (Robbins, 1998, p. 3) or the ways individuals can collectively organize to mitigate "inhuman" imperatives of capitalism and neoliberalism (Cheah, 2006; Robbins, 2012). On the other hand, Confucian cosmopolitanism is often contextualized as a relational learning orientation. In other words, it lends attention to the ideal of cosmopolitanism, conceived as one's participation in the cosmos, as a continuous process of lifelong learning rather than as a temporal response to others we encounter. Such a lifelong pursuit involves demonstrating a curiosity about other cultures, humility in suspending one's judgement and in learning from others, as well as a sincerity in seeking to find ways to engage with others authentically. Learning how to relate to and learn from others is thus a lifelong endeavour that allows one to become more invested in the lives of others over time.

Confucius himself has been described as the first person in Chinese history to devote his entire life to teaching particularly the training of character and to making education available to the common people (Chai & Chai, 1973). Confucian cosmopolitanism as lifelong learning begins with one's family. This is because the family is the first community one is born into and provides the training grounds for developing *ren*. No other subject, not even filial piety, preoccupied Confucius and his disciples as much as *ren*. Demonstrated through affectionate sympathy and love for others, *ren* occurs in the most basic way when a child puts the interest of the family before his/her own. However, filial piety reaches its highest virtue when it is then extended to all people (Nguyen, 2016). Because *ren* challenges one to overcome self-centeredness, *li* or ritual action is an important catalyst that pushes one to relate to others through rituals of interaction. *Li* performs an important role in training one to behave appropriately and respectfully towards others.

In summary, one may describe Confucian cosmopolitanism as the pursuit of realizing *dao* in one's life by demonstrating *ren* to others that becomes habitual as one continually learns to relate to others through *li*. This is a lifelong educative goal that pushes one to overcome egoism, nepotism, parochialism, ethnocentrism, and chauvinistic nationalism in order to embrace inclusivity through a widening circle of relationships (Tu, 1994).

Twenty-first Century Education from the Perspective of Confucian Cosmopolitanism

Having distilled the key characteristics of Confucian cosmopolitanism, the question is how this may be applied to models of twenty-first century education. Here, I focus specifically on Singapore where twenty-first century education is best conceptualized via the "Framework for Twenty-first Century Competencies and Student Outcomes" (21CC Framework) launched in 2010 by the Ministry of Education (MOE). The 21CC Framework was part of an important series of reforms initiated since 1997 as part of the Thinking Schools, Learning Nation vision which sought to strengthen thinking and inquiry among

students and prepare them to tackle the challenges of more globalized and technological interconnected environments (Poon et. al., 2017). The 21CC Framework comprises three concentric circles – the innermost ring centers on core values; the middle ring on social and emotional competencies; and the outermost ring on emerging twenty-first century competencies (see MOE, 2018a). The purpose of the 21CC Framework is to explicitly articulate desired attributes of the twenty-first century student and to ensure systemic coherence and alignment of goals across Singapore schools (Tan & Low, 2016). The MOE has taken a balanced approach emphasizing standardization and autonomy. On one level, the MOE has concretized the goals in the 21CC Framework into specific benchmarks at various grade levels. Curriculum planners have also integrated 21CC into subject syllabuses and instructional materials (Poon et. al., 2017). On another level, the MOE has also encouraged the autonomy of school leaders and teachers to translate the framework and benchmarks into concrete curriculum plans, pedagogies, and assessment.

The systemic implementation of the 21CC Framework has been significant in propelling education reform in Singapore schools. Not only does the framework translate abstract vision into concrete realities, it creates a unifying discourse and common language among policymakers, school leaders, teachers, and parents about key knowledge and skills to prioritize in order to prepare students for the future. At the same time, the development of such a framework needs to be contextualized as part of a broader movement perpetuating the popularity of twenty-first century competencies as described earlier. For example, the 21CC Framework aligns with OECD, P21 and other models with its emphasis on critical thinking, creative, collaborative, and communicative skills demonstrating the cross-borrowing of twenty-first century education discourses as well as the infiltration of transnational corporations and businesses into local policies (Spring, 2015). Consequently, I propose that Confucian cosmopolitanism can offer an important lens that can better inform the goals of the 21CC Framework so as to ensure that they are more clearly grounded on ethical aims. In what follows, I apply Confucian cosmopolitanism to rethinking the three rings in the 21CC Framework.

1. The teleological end as centered on moral development

At the innermost ring of the 21CC Framework are six “core values” – respect, responsibility, integrity, care, resilience, and harmony. These values are a derivative of publicly articulated national values. In particular, four out of six values – respect, responsibility, care, and harmony – are derived from Singapore’s Shared Values (Lim, 2015). Various scholars have noted that the Shared Values correspond closely with Confucian ethics and how the government has utilized this to support a secular ethics privileging communitarian ideology (Chua, 1997; Englehart, 2000; Tan, 2012). The other two values – integrity and resilience – are based on the Desired Outcomes of Education and the Singapore 21 vision.²

The grounding of twenty-first century education on a set of shared national values is important in conveying the message that education should be driven by principles rather than practical training in skills. At the same time, the teleological end of these values are not clearly articulated in the 21CC Framework where a list and definition of values are described without further explanation about what these should contribute to. This may lead one to construe that such values appear more akin to political rather than moral values. Political values are essentially state values socially reinforced through ideological state apparatuses such as schools (Althusser, 1968; Connors, 2019). One wonders then, whether the values in the 21CC Framework are ultimately geared towards supporting the government’s agenda to

enhance national competitiveness. For example, the purpose of the 21CC framework and its values is to ensure citizens adapt to the challenges of globalization:

Globalisation, changing demographics and technological advancements are some of the key driving forces of the future. Our students will have to be prepared to face these challenges and seize the opportunities brought about by these forces. (MOE, 2018a, para. 1)

While branding Singapore as a global city open to foreign investment, the government is also acutely aware of its vulnerabilities given the country's small land mass, lack of domestic market, and natural resources. A value such as resilience is perceived as a fundamental "internal defence system" to safeguard the nation against threats of external attacks such as terrorism and fluctuations in the global economy as well as internal risks arising from racial and ethnic conflict (Koh, 2007, p. 28).

The central difference between political and moral values has to do with the teleological end of values. First, political values center on the flourishing of the nation while moral values, from a Confucian perspective, is cosmopolitan in its ethos since it centers on the flourishing of the family that then extends to the world. Second, political values ultimately reinforce the values of the dominant class or the state and often serve their interests while moral values are centered on the cultivation of the individual's character in order that he/she may follow a righteous way (*dao*). This point is given primacy in the first lines of the *Doctrine of the Mean*, a key text in the canon of Confucian literature:

What Heaven imparts to man is called human nature. To follow our nature is called the Way. Cultivating the Way is called education. (Chan, 1963, p. 98)

Applying Confucianism to twenty-first century education frameworks would mean foregrounding the teleological end of education centered on cultivating the moral character of the individual. Following the way of heaven is not an other-worldly endeavour concerned with doing good works to reap rewards in another life; rather, its essential ethos is other-oriented and cosmopolitan in its aspirations as illustrated in the following:

Zilu asked about the gentleman [*junzi*]. The Master said, "He cultivates himself in order to acquire a respectful attitude."

"Is that all?"

"He cultivates himself in order to give ease to those around him."

"Is that all?"

"He cultivates himself in order to give ease to the people. To cultivate oneself in order to give ease to the people – even the sage rulers Tao and Shun found it difficult to do." (*Analects*, 14.42)

In this exchange, Chan (1963) translates the notion of "giving ease to the people" as "to give all people security and peace" (p. 43). In Confucian thought, the self learns for the sake of the self but this is paradoxically aimed at integrating the self into an ever-widening circle of human relationships through developing empathy, respect for, and responsibility to others. The morally exemplary man (*junzi*) is a cosmopolitan self who, through a process of lifelong learning, trains himself to be responsive to his community and the world at large which then

represents the teleological end of education. Thus, the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and even political values are subjugated to this end.

2. The development of self-social responsibility and cultivation

The middle ring of the 21CC Framework emphasizes social and emotional competencies which refer to students' capacity "to recognise and manage emotions, develop care and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships, and handle challenging situations effectively" (MOE, 2018b, para. 10). Five competencies are highlighted – self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision-making.

To a large extent, these social and emotional competencies are reflected in the ideas of Confucius who discussed the importance of mastering oneself by showing restraint, practising self reflection, and taking steps to know others deeply (*Analects*, 1.10, 1.16, 12.1, 12.22). The application of Confucianism would extend these competencies particularly notions of self and social "awareness" and "management" (repeated twice in the framework) to self-social responsibility and cultivation.

In the 21CC Framework, self and social awareness are two distinct categories that convey the impression of an autonomous self who establishes his/her identity through such skills as "identifying and recognising emotions, accurate self-perception, recognising strengths, needs and values, self-efficacy and spirituality" (MOE, 2018b, Table 1). The self is then aware of an external other through such capacities as "perspective taking, empathy, appreciating diversity, and respect for others" (MOE, 2018b, Table 1). This distinction echoes Descartes' notion of the thinking self isolated from the body and world. Consciousness of one's thought is constitutive of self-identity and external, social roles and responsibilities are peripheral to the self (Bockover, 2007). Unlike an individualistic and intrinsic concept of personhood predominantly observed in Western philosophical traditions, Confucianism subscribes to a relational concept of personal identity in which consciousness is innately other-directed and the self is formed through its interdependent relationship with others. When Confucius states, "Let the ruler be a ruler, the subject be a subject, a father be a father, a son be a son" (*Analects*, 12.11), the implication is that one's identity is situated. Thus, self awareness cannot be separate from social responsibility, which begins from understanding the role one plays in maintaining harmony in the social order. Even the act of self-reflection is not merely confined to self evaluation but to evaluating how one has served others as exemplified by Zengzi, the youngest of Confucius' disciples who said, "Every day I examine myself on three points. When I worked to benefit someone else, did I do my best? In my relationship with my friends, did I fail to be trustworthy? Did I pass on any knowledge I myself had not put into practice?" (*Analects*, 1.4).

In the 21CC Framework, self and relationship management capacities that have to do with impulse control, self discipline, conflict management, and working cooperatively with others are also evident in Confucianism. However, this management of self and relationships may raise concerns about the disciplining of mind and body to support neoliberalism that critical theorists, building on the work of Foucault, have observed. Scholars have commented how East Asian authoritarian governments have utilized Confucianism to legitimize paternalistic rule and passive obedience (Englehart, 2000; Wu & Devine, 2018) which parallels Weber's (2002) astute observation of how protestant values of self control were utilized by those in power to facilitate the growth of capitalism in Western societies. To

mitigate this, it is crucial to return once again to the teleological end of social and emotional competencies established not on managerial but moral principles.

While Confucius discusses the importance of self regulation (*Analects*, 1.10, 12.1, 12.6, 16.7), this should be contextualized under the larger project of self-social cultivation. Here again, we see the integral connection between self and other for the whole point of self cultivation is the cultivation of others. Confucian ethics thus differs from Aristotelian ethics where the teleological end of all human endeavour is *eudaimonia* or human flourishing. As Williams (1985) argued, Greek ethical thought was predominantly egoistic and this is also observed in Aristotle's argument where decisions to exercise virtues lie with the agent and it is the self's own well-being that is privileged. Conversely, in Confucianism, a key attribute of *ren* is the flourishing of both self and community. As Confucius said: "A humane person wishes to steady himself, and so he helps others to steady themselves. Because he wishes to reach his goal, he helps others to reach theirs" (*Analects*, 6.30). In another passage, the other-oriented nature of *ren* is also evident:

Fan Ch' h asked about humaneness. The Master said, "Love others." He asked about wisdom. The Master said, "Know others." (*Analects*, 12.22)

The moral cultivation of the individual is integrally connected with the cultivation of others in an ever-widening circle of relations. Self-social cultivation occurs not privately but via a community of fellow travelers pursuing *dao* or the way of heaven while mutually encouraging one another (Tu, 1994). *Eudaimonia* is then part of a larger project of human flourishing that the individual participates in by learning with and from others.

Further, the word *shu*, another important concept in Confucian thought, denotes empathetic reciprocity as highlighted in the negative golden rule, "do not impose on others what you yourself do not want [others to impose on you]" (*Analects*, 15.24). The capacity to put oneself in another's shoes goes beyond "communication, social engagement and building relationships" which is one of the descriptors for the social and emotional competency of "relationship management" in the 21CC Framework (MOE, 2018b, Table 1). From a Confucian perspective, one's relationship with others should be governed by *shu* encompassing deep fraternal love. The closest equivalence is perhaps best described by Levinas, one of the most influential philosophers of the late twentieth century, who called for ethics as first philosophy or the priority of ethics in our philosophical quest to understand the nature of man. Levinas (1998) argues that when one imbibes such a deep ethical commitment to an other, it effects a "burning for the other" (p. 50) and "a suffering for his suffering" (p. 18). Likewise, the relationship between self and other that Confucius envisions can be described as a cosmopolitan love in which love is not only expansive, extending beyond the family to others in the world, it transcends the material to the cosmological to denote spiritual communion among the human fraternity.

3. Performing dispositional routines as opposed to instrumental skills

The outer ring of the 21CC Framework comprises three key competencies – civic literacy, global awareness & cross cultural skills; critical and inventive thinking skills; and information and communication skills. Through consultations with school leaders, teachers and policymakers, these competencies have further been defined as a set of benchmarks students should demonstrate at the end of various grade levels. Sample lessons are shared as well as school and cluster levels presentations organized to provide teachers with models on how to infuse these competencies in teaching. On one hand, the 21CC framework provides a

systematic approach to facilitating the translation of future-oriented goals into concrete actions across the curriculum. On the other hand, two challenges are evident.

First, the application of competencies occurs unevenly and is more often determined by the individual teacher based on his/her comfort level. Teachers may attempt to infuse these competencies without considering how they may build on those taught to a class the year before or how they may complement those taught in other subject disciplines. Further, lesson plans make reference to these competencies but these may be given token acknowledgement since there is little detailed explanation of how these competencies are developed in the course of a lesson or how they will be extended subsequently. Second, the focus on competencies leads to the over-attention on measurable, instrumental skills. Even though the term competencies, as defined by OECD encompasses knowledge, skills and attitude (OECD, 2018), in the 21CC Framework, competencies are defined as skills which then this leads to reinforcement of “skills-based schooling” (Spring, 2015) rather than long-term character dispositions. It is then the utility of a person that is privileged above his/her moral development.

The application of a Confucian cosmopolitan perspective could potentially address these two challenges by shifting the focus from competencies to dispositions and shifting the emphasis from skills to routines. In practice, twenty-first century education would be enacted not primarily by competencies and skills but what I term, dispositional routines. The first problem of continuity may be addressed as routines are practised consistently in formal and non-formal curricula shaping the culture of the school. The second problem related to the over-attention on skills is also addressed as such routines are aimed at developing long-term character dispositions.

The notion of dispositional routines is grounded on the concept of *li* or ritual action, a central idea in Confucian thought. A common stereotype of Confucianism is its perpetuation of conformity through adherence to rigid rules of propriety. However, the purpose of *li* is not the performance of ritual action but the facilitation of moral development. Ritual actions originally involved rites and ceremonies tied to religious observances but its focus shifted from man’s relationship to the supernatural to man’s relationship with other members in the community and world. At the same time, these ritual actions retain their sacred importance by providing an apparatus for spiritual development through social relations (Hall & Ames, 1987). For Confucius, moral development is determined by everyday actions, consistently performed through rituals. Yet, these ritual actions are not simply rules to be followed. As Ivanhoe (1991) observes, Confucius “did not just want people to act in a certain way, he wanted them to act out of certain dispositions” (p. 57).

Li is inherently tied to *ren*, the quality of humaneness as an indefinable virtue that is concretized through everyday customs, rituals, and practices. Li (2007) uses the analogy of a cultural grammar where *li* is akin to basic rules and norms embedded in everyday behaviour and mastery of this facilitates the development of *ren* which is the highest virtue demonstrated by a morally exemplary person or *junzi*. Just as grammar comprises rules inherited from tradition, learning and practising *li* also ensures the continuation of a culture’s traditions. At the same time, grammar also changes with time incorporating shifting ways of meaning-making; similarly, *li* is also amenable to adjustments based on changing contexts.

In education, routines are ultimately aimed at cultivating ethical dispositions which occurs both progressively and expansively in stages. In terms of progression, Lai (2006) has proposed a three-stage developmental process. In the first stage, the learner is introduced to

various routines directed at appropriate forms of behaviour. Familiarity and continual practice are forms of moral training. In the second stage, the learner reflects on principles from these routines and also explores possible applications and limitations through a process of active inquiry. In the third stage, the learner engages with the principles and ideals in meaningful social relations and *li* no longer functions as constraints on behaviour but becomes an avenue for aesthetic expression of a morally cultivated self.

In terms of expansion, another typology proposed by Hall and Ames (1987) suggests that the process of becoming an exemplary person entails the gradual dissolution of the distinction between self and other. This occurs first between the self and family followed by the community and then wider world. The purpose of dispositional routines is thus to facilitate person-making, community-making, and world-making processes of moral cultivation.

Perceiving dispositional routines in terms of progressive and expansive stages also addresses the debate among Confucian scholars about whether Confucian ethics subscribes to role ethics in which morality occurs through assigned roles and by implication, the performance of ritual actions through these roles (Rosemont & Ames, 2016) or whether it is a virtue ethics in which morality is tied to an agent's character and dispositions (Angle & Slote, 2013; Sim, 2015; Van Norden, 2007). The progressive and expansive nature of dispositional routines perhaps reconciles both given that moral development occurs through roles and cultural practices that one is born into and yet, these should culminate in the virtue of *ren* or humaneness that one performs in an ever-expansive circle of human relationships. What would the shift to dispositional routines look like in the 21CC Framework? Here, I focus on three key dispositions – critical, creative and communicative dispositions.

In relation to critical dispositions, its ultimate goal is moral rightness, denoted by the word *yi*, another key concept in Confucianism.³ Nationwide, there has been a concerted push to infuse higher-order critical competencies, inquiry-based learning, and the use of thinking routines as popularized by the visible thinking movement (Ritchhart, Church, & Morrison, 2011). Not only is critical thinking decontextualized from sociopolitical realities (Lim, 2014), absent from such conceptions is the Confucian connection between critical thinking and moral rightness. In Confucian thought, critical thinking is evident in the way Confucius encouraged his disciples to examine arguments and present counter arguments (*Analects*, 2.9) and pushed them to seek out weaknesses even in his own teaching and not engage in baseless opinions (*Analects*, 9.4). Confucius was against dogmatism and disdained inflexibility (*Analects*, 14.32). He encouraged his disciples to ask questions, even about rituals (*Analects*, 3.15). More significantly, in Confucian thought, the ultimate goal of such critical thinking is the pursuit of moral rightness. Confucius highlighted the principle of remonstrance or duty of someone junior to correct his superior when the latter compromised on moral issues (Andrew & LaFluer, 2014). For example, when Master Zheng asked Confucius whether children would be deemed filial simply by obeying every command of their father, he replied:

“What on earth are you saying? What on earth are you saying?” said the Master. “Of old, an Emperor had seven ministers who would remonstrate with him, so even if he had no vision of the proper way, he still did not lose the empire. The high nobles had five ministers who would remonstrate with them, so even if they had no vision of the proper way, they still did not lose their states... Thus if confronted by reprehensible behaviour on his father's part, a son has no choice but to remonstrate with his father and if confronted by reprehensible behavior on his ruler's part, a minister has no choice but to remonstrate with his ruler. Hence, remonstrance is the only response to

immorality. How could simply obeying the commands of one's father be deemed filial?" (Cited in Rosemont & Ames, 2009, p. 114)

Remonstrance must be done out of respect and deference and should be in the context of reproof when moral issues are compromised. Remonstrance also extended to government:

The Master said: "When a state is governed according to the moral way, be exact in speech and action. When the state is not governed according to the moral way, be exact in action but soften your speech." (*Analects*, 14.3)

Routines like asking questions about everyday concerns and sociopolitical issues and learning to counter arguments to see from other perspectives should go beyond the solving of problems. They should be governed by a disposition of wanting to ensure the moral rightness of everyday actions of individuals and those in power.

Likewise, in relation to creative dispositions, its ultimate goal is not tied to the creation of things for the validation of one's ego or for the profit of nation. Rather, creativity is tied to the moral enlightenment of self and others. Confucius gives the example of archery:

The Master said, "Gentlemen have no reason to contend. But of course, there is the archery contest. Yet, on such occasions, they bow and yield to each other as they ascend the steps to the hall; afterward, they descend the steps and drink together. Even when they compete, they are gentlemanly." (*Analects*, 3.7)

Archery was not about hitting the mark. Rather, as a competitive sport, it was an occasion to foster harmonious friendship through social routines that were an aesthetic and expressive way of living out the *dao* (Chua, 2018). As Niu (2013) observes, the closest word to "creativity" in ancient Chinese is *dao* which is the origin of all things but also the key force in the continual production of new things. As distinct from the biblical idea that God created the world out of nothing i.e. *creatio ex nihilo*, in Confucianism, creation already exists and creativity occurs in a continuing process of interactivity between heaven and human beings, *creatio in situ*. Thus, the moral force of creativity is a relational, communal, contextual, and transactional activity (Ames & Hall, 2001) occurring as the self seeks to realize the *dao* or way of heaven in everyday reality. In the process, the self collaborates and co-creates with others to achieve enlightening ways of seeing and relating to the world.

Finally, in relation to communicative dispositions, its ultimate goal is altruism. These would include among others, routines that allow one to exhibit trustworthiness (*Analects*, 5.25, 12.10, 17.6), humility and sincerity in listening to others (*Analects*, 8.11, 12.20), and careful rather than skillful speech (*Analects*, 4.22, 4.24, 5.5). More importantly, such dispositions are translated into routines that express respect towards others and as the morally exemplary self grows, he/she becomes more invested in the flourishing of others in the world.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have sought to examine twenty-first century education models, using Singapore's 21CC Framework as an example, through the lens of Confucian cosmopolitanism. This is not to say that there are no limitations to such an approach. Aside from the fact that there have been many differing schools of thought across history, the revival of Confucianism today has been attributed to China's spread of soft power. In education, Confucianism has been criticized for promoting rigidity, passivity and conformity

(Zhao, 2014). Its brand of creativity may be deemed non-progressive given that it is not connected to a radical invention of the new as evidenced in Confucius' description of himself as a follower of the way rather than initiator (Sim, 2009). Even Confucian dispositions do not remain static but change through time as determined by dynamically shifting traditions of culture (Li, 2007).

Despite this, the value of Confucian cosmopolitanism is in reclaiming a vision of cosmopolitan moral development at the timeless heart of all educational endeavours. From the rudimentary level of routines on to more abstract values, education is aimed at the moral flourishing of self and others. From students to teachers, school leaders, parents, and state officials, the school is a moral ecosystem with each person accountable to and responsible for another's flourishing. The significance of such a communitarian vision is that it transcends ethical individualism at the heart of child-centered progressive education where the well-being of the individual is prioritized. More importantly, Confucian cosmopolitanism challenges the assumption that human flourishing is equated with the accumulation of knowledge and skills for economic ends. Instead, it offers a vision of human flourishing as an educative, lifelong process of learning how to live out the virtues of *ren* or cosmopolitan love in everyday interactions with others. In a global age increasingly characterized by extremism, intolerance, and xenophobia, it is perhaps education grounded on Confucian cosmopolitanism that can prepare our youth with the dispositions to respect others, particularly those with different beliefs, and to be ethically invested in tackling local-global injustices affecting the everyday lives of others. In this way, education becomes a powerful force for strengthening harmony rather than competition among nations.

Notes

1. Consequentialism is a branch of normative ethics that posits that actions should be judged on the basis of outcomes. Classical utilitarianism, a branch of consequentialism, centers on the maximization of happiness.

2. Moral integrity is one of the developmental outcomes of the MOE's Desired Outcomes of Education, formulated in 1997, to articulate key attributes that students should have on completing formal education. The Singapore 21 vision was launched in 1999 and articulates a national vision to develop a cohesive and resilient nation to face the challenges of globalization.

3. For the etymology of *yi*, see Hall & Ames, 1987.

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