

# Explicit and Implicit Aspects of Confucian Education

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## Abstract

The following essay contains a more general philosophical reflection on the significance and some main elements of pre-modern Confucian learning. The topic is developed by presenting some essential elements in the whole range from explicit (linguistically expressible) knowledge to symbolic aspects as well as the (philosophical) problem of ineffable knowing. The essay starts with the general conception of man which underlies the mainstream of Confucian learning. On that basis, the more explicit contents and easily explainable subjects or branches of classical Confucian learning are mapped out. This becomes the starting point to move on to reflect on a more symbolic layer of Confucian learning. Finally, the core level of Confucian learning is addressed. This presents us with the problem of ineffability. The reference points of the present essay are restricted to some important classical passages as well as the thought of Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529).

**Keywords:** Confucian learning, *ren* 仁, explicit knowledge, implicit knowing, ineffability, Wang Yangming

## Eksplicitni in implicitni vidiki konfucijanskega izobraževanja

### Izvleček

Esej vsebuje splošno filozofsko razmišljanje o pomembnosti in nekaterih glavnih elementih predmoderne konfucijanskega učenja. Tema se razvija skozi predstavitev nekaterih bistvenih elementov vse od eksplicitnega (lingvistično izraznega) vedenja do simboličnih vidikov ter (filozofskih) problemov neizrekljivega vedenja. Esej se začne s splošnim pojmovanjem človeka, ki poudarja glavno usmeritev konfucijanskega učenja. Na tej podlagi se izrišejo eksplicitni in lahko izrekljivi subjekti ali veje klasičnega konfucijanskega učenja. To je točka, s katere je mogoč premik naprej, in ta osvetljuje bolj simbolično plast konfucijanskega učenja. Na koncu je obravnavano še jedro konfucijanskega učenja, ki nam predstavi problem neizrekljivosti. Referenčne točke eseja so omejene na nekatere pomembne klasične odlomke ter na misli Wang Yangminga 王陽明 (1472–1529).

**Ključne besede:** konfucijansko učenje, *ren* 仁, eksplicitno vedenje, implicitno vedenje, neizrekljivost, Wang Yangming

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## As a Starting Point: A General Confucian Conception of Man

In the *Liji* 禮記, man is defined as *tian-di zhi xin* 天地之心 (“heart of Heaven-Earth”).<sup>1</sup> In the case of Confucian learning, the centrality of man doesn’t mean a fixed “acquis”, let alone a formal designation of a central characteristic of something like an eternal substance (much less in a sense assimilable to that of traditions of Aristotelian descent or other comparable traditions of philosophical thought). From the original Confucian angle, speaking of a centrality of man first and foremost means a practical obligation. Amongst other things, this is also expressed in the context of Wang Yangming’s 王陽明 (1472–1529) discussions on “*zhi-xing he yi* 知行合一” (“knowing-taking action, together (as) one”).<sup>2</sup> To understand and internalize the Confucian endeavor properly, we must strive to be in compliance with that obligation in each and every possible situation of our life:

Human—from time immemorial, this (word) means the excellence of *tian-di* 天地 (“Heaven-Earth”), the crossing of *yin-yang* 陰陽, the get-together of (earthly) spirits and (heavenly) gods, the refined *qi* 氣 of the *wu xing* 五行 (“five phases”). [...] That is why man is the heart of Heaven and Earth, the foundation of the five phases.<sup>3</sup>

The “heartness” of *ren* 人 (“man”<sup>4</sup>), i.e. the conversion and center of *tian-di* 天地, “is” only as real in as much as it is permanently *realized* through one’s own actions. Wang Yangming describes this as the basis of the learning of the *sheng ren* 聖人 (“sage-man”). By following the directionality of his innate and unceasing *liang zhi* 良知 (“good knowing”) permanently and freely, man is able to realize that “Heaven-Earth

1 See below the first quotation in the running text (and the related footnote 3).

2 Cf., f. ex., Wang (1933a, 38–39): “必有欲行之心·然後知路·即是意·即是行之 始矣。”[“[To know, DB] one has to have a heart which is eager to take action. After that, one knows the road. (That eagerness) is *yi* 意 (‘will’) and that is already the beginning of taking action.” (tr. DB)] Regarding further extensive analysis concerning *zhi-xing he yi*, cf. Bartosch 2015, 520–90. With regard to Wang Yangming, the famous German-French philosopher Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) once remarked: “Concerning the implementation of the thought that trueness is an experience in which cognition and taking action are involved in each other in a mysterious way, Wang Yangming has truly been a consummator of the teachings of Kongzi and Mengzi.” (Schweitzer 2002, 275, tr. DB)

3 *Liji* 禮記, “Liyun 禮運”, 20: “故人者，其天地之德，陰陽之交，鬼神之會，五行之秀氣也。[...] 故人者，天地之心也，五行之端也，[...]。”(tr. DB)

4 This general translation is due to the more generalizing philosophical nature of this essay. And it is related to the above cited passage of the *Liji* and the use of the word, f. ex., in the context of the thought of Wang Yangming. The author is conscious of the fact that with regard to different classical authors as well as regarding each of these cases separately, “人” might also be translated more specifically and divergently. In this regard, the author must also thank Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Kubin for some enlightening talks at Beijing Foreign Studies University.

cannot appear as Heaven-Earth without man's *liang zhi*: Heaven-Earth (and) the ten thousand things form one *ti* 體 (“(self-)organizing whole”<sup>5</sup>) with man.”<sup>6</sup>

To exemplify (this), (we can talk about) the body of a human being: The eyes see, the ears hear, the hands grab, the feet walk. (They all) contribute to the (living) functioning of (this) body as a whole. The eyes are not embarrassed about themselves (for) not (being able to) hear. But (when) the ears notice something, the eyes will necessarily turn towards where (the sound is coming from). The hands are not embarrassed about themselves not (being able to) grab. But (when) the hand is reaching for something, the feet by necessity are moving there (with it too). Under the surface, his source-*qi* is operating everywhere (in this body) in the same way. And blood and veins show no impairment. Thereby (we can say that) if one is troubled by an itching or one is out of breath, a (reciprocal) reaction of our thoughts and emotions is taking place in a mysterious way. We don't have any words for it, and yet its miraculous mysteriousness can be noticed. That's why [in the wider sense, DB] the learning of the *sheng ren* is very simple and extremely uncomplicated; (it is) easy to know and simple to follow. The learning is easy, competences and skills are easy to obtain. (It's) just (about) matching the great goal sincerely, i.e. to remain in the primordial state of *xinti* 心體 (the “heart's (self-)organizing whole”)—(which is) equality. Extensive knowledge [f. ex., in the sense of Zhu Xi, DB] and technical abilities have no place in this teaching.<sup>7</sup>

Seen from that angle, the foundational level of human consciousness might best be understood as an integrated state of intuitive spontaneity which is constantly in accord with the situational changes of what pre-modern Neo-Confucians have defined as *li* 理 (“organizing principle”). This kind of an integrated spontaneity is to be thought of as something which (as a form of naturally “knowing-in-action”<sup>8</sup>) always *lives through* one's own actions while being permanently directed from *ren* 仁

5 This has often been translated as “body”, but I think that the special expression “(self-)organizing whole” is more fitting, because it presents us with a more conceptual meaning than “body” (which sounds more metaphorical).

6 Wang (1933b, 13): “天地無人的良知·亦不可為天地矣·蓋天地萬物·與人原是一體...” (tr. DB); cf. also my German translation in Bartosch 2015b, 157.

7 Cf., f. ex., Wang (1933a, 51): “譬之一人之身·目視耳聽·手持足行·以濟一身之用·目不恥其無聽·而耳之所涉·目必營焉·足不恥其無執·而手之所探·足必前焉·蓋其元氣充同·血脈牒暢·是以癢病呼吸·感觸神應·有不·言而喻之妙·此聖人之學所以至易至簡·易知易從·學易能而才易成者·正以大端惟在復心體之同然·而知識技能·非所與論也” (tr. DB); cf. my German translation in Bartosch 2015b, 530–1, as well.

8 This termed is used here in a transferred sense with regard to Wang Yangming's *zhi-xing he yi*. Regarding the origin of the expression “knowing-in-action”, cf. Neuweg 2005, 582–3.

(“humane (interrelationship)”<sup>9</sup>) and growing out of a fundamental interrelatedness of all humans and living beings. In this sense it is to be understood as the basic condition as well as the main agent of the fountainhead of every living existence.

Accordingly, Confucius already sowed some important seeds for the later discussions. In the *Lunyu* 論語, he states: “Man is born for uprightness.”<sup>10</sup> Here, the idea of an *inborn or innate completeness of man* is already foreshadowed:<sup>11</sup> “I heard from Zengzi what [Zengzi, DB] had heard the Master say: That which Heaven produces (and grows) and that which Earth (gives birth to) and raises—none (of it is) as great as man. By completing, his parents give birth and raise *his childlikeness all complete*, and he returns it, which can be considered as *xiao* 孝 (“filial love-and-duty”<sup>12</sup>).”<sup>13</sup> More explicitly, an *innate* goodness of man has been highlighted as the starting point or central theme of Confucian education by Mengzi 孟子 and by such great proponents of Confucian education like, f. ex., Zhu Xi 朱熹 or Wang Yangming as well as others later on. Mengzi already remarks: “To desire to be honored is the common mind of men. And all men have in themselves that which is truly honorable. Only they do not think of it.”<sup>14</sup>

In that sense, every human consciousness is born into his or her unique personal and ever-evolving constellations and patterns of existing with a *common* obligation: From the womb of his/her mother, every man/woman is centered in between Heaven and Earth like a promising seed.<sup>15</sup> In this figurative sense, every personal appearance of

9 I am translating “*ren*” as “humane (interrelationship)”, because the “Classical” translations by Legge and others, like, f. ex., “benevolence” or “humaneness” do not address the above-stated fact (see running text) that in this case the humaneness isn’t to be thought of as the actuality of an individual character trait, but as naturally “growing out” of the human interrelationships which the natural human personality (as it might best be defined) is born into. This point of view holds true at least to the mainstream of Confucians who followed thinkers like Mengzi, Zhu Xi or Wang Yangming. Translating “*ren*” by using, f. ex., the expression “humaneness”, tend to “veil” the interrelational very nature of this humaneness as such. Therefore, I have used “humane (interrelationship)” here—one could also say to also represent more explicitly the “二” in the translation of “仁”.

10 Cf. *Lunyu* 論語, “Yongye 雍也”, 19: “人之生也直” (trans. Legge)

11 Cf. also the discussion in Reich; Wei 1997, 39–40.

12 The original translation using “piety” has been criticized much, so I am using the special expression “love-and-duty”, instead.

13 Cf. *Liji* 禮記, “Jiyi 祭義”, 29: “吾聞諸曾子，曾子聞諸夫子曰：『天之所生，地之所養，無人為大。』父母全而生之，子全而歸之，可謂孝矣。” (tr. DB)

14 Cf. *Mengzi* 孟子, “Gaozi shang 告子上”, 17: “欲貴者，人之同心也。人人有貴於己者，弗思耳。” (tr. Legge)

15 This is an allusion to the following passage, cf. *Lunyu* 論語, “Zi hanzi 罕”, 22: “子曰：「苗而不秀者有矣夫！秀而不實者有矣夫！」” “[The Master said, ‘There are cases in which the blade springs, but the plant does not go on to flower! There are cases where it flowers but no fruit is subsequently produced!’” (tr. Legge)]

human consciousness (to be understood as a unique relation of general humanity in time and space) exists in a way of being enabled to permanently grow in an indispensable network of human and extra-human relations. In the sense of naturally following what might best be pinpointed by using Wang Yangming's famous maxim *zhi-xing he yi* 知行合一 (“knowing-taking action, together (as) one”)<sup>16</sup> here, such a permanent enfoldment or constant realization of human consciousness in itself should be understood as a natural process by means of which man can be characterized as the heart of Heaven and Earth (*tian-di*)—not as a mere theoretical aftermath of doing things, but *as* doing things in the state of an undivided (and yet itself differentiating) attentiveness which is in accordance with a dynamic harmony of all relations in the course of the whole process of Heaven, Earth and ten thousand things:

The heart<sup>17</sup> of the *sheng ren* resembles a clear and bright mirror, (it is) simply clear and bright. Then to follow (what is being) sensed and to respond—there is no thing which wouldn't be mirrored. There are no former appearances which would still be contained by it. (And) there are no appearances which would be mirrored in advance.<sup>18</sup>

In this state, the student experiences the meaning of Wang Yangming's famous statements, like, f. ex.: “*Xin* 心—this is *li*. Could there be anything under Heaven outside of *xin*, (could there be) some *li* outside of *xin*?”<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, man is not a string puppet of *dao*, so-to-speak. He has the “freedom” to reject the Way. Human existence inherits the possibility to choose evil or the wrong path. Man is able to decide to walk the way he shouldn't, i.e. the wrong path of his own “belittlement”. Either unconsciously or even consciously, he or she may choose to be a *xiaoren* 小人 (“(self-)belittling human being”).<sup>20</sup>

Wang Yangming defines this condition as a state of *zisizili* 自私自利 (“egomania” or “selfishness”) and comprehends this as the exclusive root of all human evil.

16 See also footnote 2.

17 With regard to consistency, I am staying with the translation “heart” for “*xin*” in the present paper (as introduced with regard to the first citation above). I am not using the alternative expressions “heart-and-mind” or “heart-mind”, which otherwise would have been possible to use, of course.

18 Wang (1933, 11): “聖人之心如明鏡·只是一箇明·則隨感而應·無物不照·未有已往之形尚在·未照之形先具者·” (tr. DB); cf. also my German translation in Bartosch 2015, 99.

19 *Ibid.*, 2: “心即理也·天下又有心外之事·心外之理 乎·” (tr. DB); cf. also my German translation in Bartosch 2015b, 177, footnote 185.

20 Cf. my analysis in Bartosch 2015, 679–706 (the chapter “Äußerste, Mühen (*gōngfū*) um, Menschlichkeit (*ren*)” [“Utmost ‘Efforts’ (*gōngfū*) to [Implement] ‘Humaneness’ (*ren*)”]), which also contains some transcultural (comparative) remarks regarding the Christian tradition (Master Eckhart, Nicolaus Cusanus).

And—evil doesn't dwell in solitude: The neglect of *ren* or *dao* (in the Confucian sense of a self-induced “belittlement” of man) naturally comes with consequences. And these always seem to expand their reach. Human consciousness is not separate from everything else. The denying road of egoism inevitably affects the self in its social and environmental embeddedness. As a consequence, it furthers a destructive and self-declining possibility of everything that the turbid *xin* of the *xiaoren* comes into contact with. This is especially the case if such a person's social function is that of a decision-maker (like that of a politician, a manager, a general, etc.).

Therefore Confucian education and (constant) training have been established as a way to prevent humankind—or at least the decisive administrative elites—from this road of a self-induced decline and dehumanization.—For two and a half millennia, the proponents or members of the *Rujia* 儒家 (“the Confucian schools”) have discussed, reflected and practiced ways of swimming against the stream of those gnawing forces of humanity's possible decline, so-to-speak. Although all of them do not share the same opinions in many respects, all of them share the same motivation: They all strive for the right way of how to become fully human, i.e. how to redeem man's great promise of being the heart of Heaven-Earth (*tian-di zhi xin*).

In this context, it is important to remember that in Confucianism *man is not seen as a creature*.<sup>21</sup> That means humans are not seen as separate creations in the context of a cosmic, to use a word from Medieval Christian philosophy tradition, *creatio continua*. Humans are not depending on some personal over-human force of creation in the sense of a creator (or “*Deus*”, “*unum*” etc.) here. On the contrary, in schools like *Xinxue* 心學 (“Learning of the Heart”), man himself is comprehended as the central living aspect (i.e. the *xin*) of Heaven and Earth—without the need of a creator “above” of him. In an ideal sense, the central human aspect or “*tian-di zhi xin*”<sup>22</sup> should *generate itself* in uniform progression with the auto-poetic transformations of the universal whole. Consequently, Confucians did/do not believe in any kind of godlike savior or messiah who *hopefully* might be working in favor of humanity. *There is no savior of humanity but humanity himself*.<sup>23</sup>

For a Confucian, no religiously connoted consolation and neither paradise nor hell awaits man besides what he/she may create during his/her life-time in the varying contexts of his respective social surroundings and by living through all the special situations of his/her unique life-experiences. Concerning death, the only possible “remuneration” which man can hope for might be a feeling of satisfaction

21 Cf. my comparison of the philosophies of Nicolaus Cusanus and Wang Yangming in this regard in Bartosch 2015b, 25–122 (the chapter “Kreativität” [“Creativity”]).

22 See above, the first citation in this paper and footnote 3.

23 Although it seems hard sometimes, we, at least in this regard, shouldn't give up hope.

that, at least, the continuation of the family is possible and that his/her right deeds may help to provide stability for his descendants as well as for other humans and for future generations, in general.

Therefore, it is of utmost importance to contribute to a floating and flexible equilibrium of the social relationships of one's family members as well as to the stability of the state which one lives in. In this regard, the only true and lasting salvation of humanity lies *in persistent learning and teaching* as well as moral training and reciprocal self-cultivation:

However fine the viands be, if one do not eat, he does not know their taste; however perfect the course may be, if one do not learn it, he does not know its goodness. Therefore when he learns, one knows his own deficiencies; when he teaches, he knows the difficulties of learning. After he knows his deficiencies, one is able to turn round and examine himself; after he knows the difficulties, he is able to stimulate himself to effort. Hence it is said, "Teaching and learning help each other;" as it is said in [*Duiming* 兌命, DB], "Teaching is the half of learning."<sup>24</sup>

In the Confucian sphere of influence, it was not a religion or some other kind of dogmatic belief system which became the prime mover of civilization: In China and some of its neighboring lands, learning, education and the path of spontaneous insights into general wisdom themselves became the forces which have glued (and still glue) together many important aspects of society:

The jade uncut will not form a vessel for use; and if men do not learn, they do not know the way (in which they should go). On this account the ancient kings, when establishing states and governing the people, made instruction and schools a primary object; as it is said in [*Duiming*, DB], "The thoughts from first to last should be fixed on learning."<sup>25</sup>

For man to fulfill his obligation as *xin* of Heaven and Earth, it is necessary to prevent human society from descending into chaos. Therefore the people have to be provided with special ways of learning which will enable them to keep the heart in a permanent state of realizing itself in permanent communion with everybody as well as with *tian-di wan wu*, in general. These methods of learning

24 Cf. *Liji* 禮記, "Xueji 學記", 3: "雖有嘉肴，弗食，不知其旨也；雖有至道，弗學，不知其善也。故學然後知不足，教然後知困。知不足，然後能自反也；知困，然後能自強也，故曰：教學相長也。《兌命》曰：「學學半。」其此之謂乎！" (tr. Legge)

25 Cf. *ibid.*, "Xueji 學記", 2: "玉不琢，不成器；人不學，不知道。是故古之王者建國君民，教學為先。《兌命》曰「念終始典于學。」其此之謂乎！" (tr. Legge)

should be of help in the reflection and realization of the people's full dignity as *tian-di zhi xin*. From a Confucian perspective, every kind of learning which doesn't fit this goal of achieving one's innermost human(e) completeness would have to be labeled pointless.

## Explicit Knowing in Confucian Learning: Subjects and Modalities

But how is man's innate goodness—or to use the term which has been made prominent by Wang Yangming: *liang zhi* 良知 (“good knowing”)—to be nourished and cultivated? To start with, it can thus be stated that it is evident that man has to learn some basic skills and techniques which will provide him with the means necessary to create a civilized state of human existence. In the present paper, this kind of knowledge or know-how is also called *explicit knowledge* (of Confucian learning). In this context, we also have to bear in mind that although this kind of knowledge seems to be in the foreground, we will see that in the long run it turns out to be more like a kind of a “user surface” which contains—and in some respects more or less overlays—some deeper aspects of Confucian learning.<sup>26</sup>

Starting with the “outer layer” of Confucian learning, we can say that although Kongzi is generally known as a “moral teacher”, he didn't forget to integrate the field of objective knowledge into his way of learning. In *Lunyu*, f. ex., he emphasizes the value of the *Shijing* 詩經, because one can learn much about animals and plants in that work.<sup>27</sup> Such forms of explicit knowledge (or know-how) can also be understood as explicit contents of Confucian education. And not completely without justification, Wang Yangming has been criticized for the attempt to cut back this aspect of original Confucian lore. With regard to a modern environment, but also with regard to maybe sorting out new ways to reunite the positions

26 In that wider sense, the explicit knowledge in Confucian learning must be understood as some “apparitional circumference” (as one might call it) of a wisdom which shines through all of these necessary fields of knowing and skills which are taught at school in a much more subtle or *implicit* sense. With regard to Confucianism, objective forms of knowing must be understood as a kind of impetus for a deeper kind of learning. The goal of this deeper kind of learning is how to become a decent human being. The explicit content and subject of the Confucian learning of antiquity can also be comprehended as an integral part of the whole “body” of (inter-personal) human existence and reflection, so-to-speak.

27 Cf. *Lunyu* 論語, “Yang Huo 陽貨”, 9: “多識於鳥獸草木之名。” In my opinion, this also opens up the tradition of Confucian learning as a practice of personal self-cultivation for a modern science-based environment in the 21st century. It means no contradiction to follow the path of a modern Confucian learning and to be a natural scientist. Besides, one can find many examples of pre-modern Confucian scholars which have done marvelous scientific work. The famous prince Zhu Zaiyu 朱載堉 (1536–1610), f. ex., who, in a very scientific manner, has combined music, physics, mathematics and astronomy to create a new way of Confucian self-cultivation is one of them.



of Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming in the future, we have to respect this aspect of Confucian learning. With regard to present requirements, the science of nature which is mainly based on the inseparable unity of knowledge (theories) and practice (experiments in the context of certain experimental systems and scientific communities) could easily be analyzed in an extended and modernized framework of Yangming's *zhi-xing he yi*.<sup>28</sup>

In principal, we can say that such contents can easily be denominated and taught, *because they are expressible in a systematic way*. Therefore, *explicit knowledge* might be understood as, respectively compared to a functional equivalent to some teachable technical know-how which is also needed not the least because of keeping society alive, to balance human communities out internally, or to improve human living conditions in general. In this sense, explicit contents of Confucian learning were mediated in contexts of comparatively mature educational systems, very early on:

According to the system of ancient teaching, for the families of (a hamlet) there was the village school; for a neighborhood there was the [*xiang* 庠, DB]; for the larger districts there was the [*xu* 序, DB]; and in the capitals there was the college [*xue* 學, DB]. Every year some entered the college, and every second year there was a comparative examination. In the first year it was seen whether they could read the texts intelligently, and what was the meaning of each; in the third year, whether they were reverently attentive to their work, and what companionship was most pleasant to them; in the fifth year, how they extended their studies and sought the company of their teachers; in the seventh year, how they could discuss the subjects of their studies and select their friends. They were now said to have made some small attainments. In the ninth year, when they knew the different classes of subjects and had gained a general intelligence, were firmly established and would not fall back, they were said to have made grand attainments. After this the training was sufficient to transform the people, and to change (anything bad in) manners and customs. Those who lived near at hand submitted with delight, and those who were far off thought (of the teaching) with longing desire. Such was the method of the Great Learning; as is said in the Record, "The little ant continually exercises the art (of amassing)."<sup>29</sup>

28 The author is not sure how far this has already been done. If not, this would be a viable philosophical task to write upon.

29 Cf. *Liji* 禮記, "Xueji 學記", 4: "古之教者, 家有塾, 黨有庠, 術有序, 國有學。比年入學, 中年考校。一年視離經辨志, 三年視敬業樂群, 五年視博習親師, 七年視論學取友, 謂之小成; 九年知類通達, 強立而不反, 謂之大成。夫然後足以化民易俗, 近者說服, 而遠者懷之, 此大學之道也。《記》曰: 「蛾子時術之。」其此之謂乎!" (tr. Legge)

This leads us to the question, which kinds of subjects or fields of study Kongzi 孔子 was propagating. The Master discerns several fields of study. In my opinion, all of these subjects blend into each other as a sort of *holistic training*. In that context, Kongzi attaches great importance to activate his student's own abilities to reflect and to act and to grow independently.

The subjects of writing and mathematics were seen as basic skills or *Xiaoyi* 小藝 (“Learning of the Smaller Arts”). Based on that, Confucius propagates another four subjects: poetry, history, customs (or ritual knowledge) and music.

In this context, the followers of Kongzi have always stressed the importance of learning by rote—especially with regard to the content of the *Shijing*:<sup>30</sup>

My children, why do you not study the Book of Poetry? The Odes serve to stimulate the mind. They may be used for purposes of self-contemplation. They teach the art of sociability. They show how to regulate feelings of resentment. From them you learn the more immediate duty of serving one's father, and the remoter one of serving one's prince.<sup>31</sup>

History was an important task, because it helps a great deal to get an orientation in political practice. One ought to learn from the past. Therefore, “[t]he Master said, ‘A transmitter and not a maker, believing in and loving the ancients, I venture to compare myself with our old Peng.’”<sup>32</sup>

Music was to be practiced on a regular basis: “The Master said, ‘It is by the Odes that the mind is aroused. It is by the Rules of Propriety that the character is established. It is from Music that the finish is received.’”<sup>33</sup> “For changing their manners and altering their customs, there is nothing better than music.”<sup>34</sup>

Besides these skills and fields of knowledge<sup>35</sup>, Confucius also bore in mind the importance of physical education. Hence Confucius introduced archery and the art of the charioteer as another two subjects which his students were obliged to practice diligently. The idea behind this was that the personalities of the students

30 Rote learning has been an important aspect of all high cultures. One striking example would also be the Vedic culture of India. But also some great scientists of the twentieth century were friends of rote learning, cf., f. ex., Lorenz; Kreuzer 1988, 49.

31 Cf. *Lunyu* 論語, “Yang Huo 陽貨”, 9: “小子! 何莫學夫詩? 詩, 可以興, 可以觀, 可以群, 可以怨。邇之事父, 遠之事君。” (tr. Legge)

32 Cf. *ibid.*, “Shu Er 述而”, 1: “子曰: 「述而不作, 信而好古, 竊比於我老彭。」” (tr. Legge)

33 Cf. *ibid.*, “Tai Bo 泰伯”, 8: “子曰: 「興於詩, 立於禮。成於樂。」” (tr. Legge)

34 Cf. *Xiaojing* 孝經, “Guang Yaodao 廣要道”, 1: “移風易俗, 莫善於樂。” (tr. Legge)

35 According to the *Xiaoxue* 小學, all of the aforementioned subjects were later subdivided into a plurality of minor subjects.

should be shaped by these specific forms of taking action. The general background here was that “[f]rom the Son of Heaven down to the mass of the people, all must consider the cultivation of the person the root of everything besides.”<sup>36</sup> Until today, East Asian cultures which have been influenced by Confucianism can still partly also be analyzed with regard to this aspect of *xiu shen* 修身 (“cultivating (the somatic) character”)—which does not only include the ways of an individual human being, but especially also the social “community-characters” of groups of people in that context, of course.

Last but not least, we can also learn something about some *foundational modalities of a way of holistic learning* in the ancient Confucian teachings. In my opinion, these are still very inspiring with regard to possible modern understandings of education. A passage from the *Zhongyong* 中庸 sheds a light upon these foundational modalities of learning. They were named as follows: (1) *boxue* 博學 (“extensive study”), (2) *shenwen* 審問 (“accurate inquiry”), (3) *shensi* 慎思 (“careful reflection”), (4) *mingbian* 明辨 (“clear discrimination”), (5) *duxing* 篤行 (“earnest practice”):

He who attains to sincerity is he who chooses what is good, and firmly holds it fast. To this attainment there are requisite the extensive study of what is good, accurate inquiry about it, careful reflection on it, the clear discrimination of it, and the earnest practice of it. The superior man, while there is anything he has not studied, or while in what he has studied there is anything he cannot understand, will not intermit his labor. While there is anything he has not inquired about, or anything in what he has inquired about which he does not know, he will not intermit his labor. While there is anything which he has not reflected on, or anything in what he has reflected on which he does not apprehend, he will not intermit his labor. While there is anything which he has not discriminated or his discrimination is not clear, he will not intermit his labor. If there be anything which he has not practiced, or his practice fails in earnestness, he will not intermit his labor. If another man succeeds by one effort, he will use a hundred efforts. If another man succeeds by ten efforts, he will use a thousand. Let a man proceed in this way, and, though dull, he will surely become intelligent; though weak, he will surely become strong.<sup>37</sup>

36 Cf. *Liji* 禮記, “Daxue 大學”, 2: “自天子以至於庶人，壹是皆以修身為本。” (trans. Legge)

37 Cf. *ibid.*, “*Zhongyong* 中庸”, 22: “誠之者，擇善而固執之者也。博學之，審問之，慎思之，明辨之，篤行之。有弗學，學之弗能，弗措也；有弗問，問之弗知，弗措也；有弗思，思之弗得，弗措也；有弗辨，辨之弗明，弗措也；有弗行，行之弗篤，弗措也。人一能之己百之，人十能之己千之。果能此道矣，雖愚必明，雖柔必強。” (tr. Legge)

## The Crossing: *Ren* and Confucian “*Bildung*”

Keeping in mind that the above-mentioned skills and fields of knowledge as well as the modalities of Confucian learning might best be understood as an “outer layer” of the endeavor to become a *junzi* 君子<sup>38</sup>, we also have to draw attention to some core aspects which are not so easy to mediate—at least not theoretically. The reason for this is clear: To assist the student to transform himself into a better human being, it would not be enough to provide him with some technical know-how or to teach him music or, generally speaking, some arts of bodily movement or skills in bodily performance (like archery or chariotteering) without any deeper significance attached to it. Self-cultivation is not just a way of achieving any merits for the external recognition of others, but the (re)transformation of one’s whole personality in the direction of one’s afore-mentioned (universal) innate goodness.

The genuine way of this Confucian “*Bildung*”<sup>39</sup> starts from the valuable insight that man is permanently “woven in and out” of an ever-changing net of (transpersonal) human relations. Every human being is an internal relation of a living family system which, in turn, is integrated or embedded as an inherent relational appearance of the dynamic overall-relation of *tian-di* (“Heaven-Earth”).

In this context, the lasting point of departure in all forms of human self-cultivation is reflected in the Confucian term “*ren*”.

In a narrower sense, this word stands for the loving and caring relationship between a giving and caring father and a receiving and obedient son. For Confucians,

38 The word is at least partly translatable into German as “(*ein*) *Edler*” / “(*der*) *Edle*” while the English word “gentleman” is even worse. Unluckily, there is no English expression which transports the same possibilities of meaning as “(*der*) *Edle*” in German. It contains possible uses of the words “noble-minded”, “exquisite”, “gentle”, “generous”, “genteel”, “virtuous”, “lofty” (in a positive sense), “gallant”. The word “(*der*) *Edle*” is akin to “*Adel*” (“nobility”), but can also be related to “*Geistesadel*” (close to “noble spirit” / “spirit of nobility”, but with a wider “halo” of meanings). But be it as it may, the translation of “*junzi* 君子” into English and other Indo-European languages is still a rather unresolved issue.

39 During the nineteenth and twentieth century, the discourse of German philosophy connected the word “*Bildung*” with criteria for an education which in a certain sense shows several touching points with the intent of Confucian learning. “*Bildung*” is a word which has no counterpart in the English language. Until around the end of the last century, when the traditional German study system and the understanding of its philosophical background in the teachings of von Humboldt and others started to be replaced by other principles, the word “*Bildung*” meant a process which transforms and activates the whole person, its mores and manners and its skillfulness while nourishing the self-reflexivity of the learning person. In this sense, one might think of Germany’s famous writer, poet, scientist and politician Johann Wolfgang von Goethe as an equivalent to some of the polymaths of Confucian learning and administration in China (the ones who were *truly* striving to live the life of a *junzi*). It might be in this regard that Goethe once wrote to a friend: “The Chinese people share many similarities with the Germans.” (Eckermann 1982, 458)

this is the archetype for a humane interrelationship. From a Confucian perspective, this eminent human(e) relationship is to be understood as the “gravitational center” of all human civilization and cultivation. (With regard to Kongzi’s own words, which have been cited above<sup>40</sup>, the common neglect of the female aspect in this context is to be seen as a sort of “constriction”, of course. There is still space for up-to-date Confucian gender studies.)

The son sees the father as a kind of role-model, while his father reflects himself as a son in relation to the grandfather of his son. From their respective fathers, the sons receive their basic human principles of conduct and common decency. On that basis, the fundamentals of human society should be kept alive and practiced on a daily basis. In addition, the loving and caring meaning of *ren* in the sense of a reciprocal relationship of giving and taking, of teaching and being taught is also valid regarding the relationship of older brother and younger brother, husband and spouse as well as the human relation of older friend and younger friend—a relation which also marks the connection of the family system with its surrounding sociological habitat.

Traditionally, *ren* is also comprehended as a prevalent definition of the relationship of ruler and minister. Last but not least, “*ren*” is an important part of the word “*ren’ai* 仁爱” (“humane loving”)<sup>41</sup> which expresses the way how superiors should regulate their environment and the common circumstances of their subordinates. As all the families (in their basic human interrelatedness in the sense of *ren*) can be seen as the constituent organs of a community, so is the relationship of ruler and minister to be understood as the main constituent of the political meta structure—an institution which is meant to center all actions of the people in a kind of organic and dynamic equilibrium as a whole. In a certain symbolic sense, the relation of ruler and minister in the field of governance and administration resembles the relationship of father and son.

The difference, of course, lies in the fact that the relationship of ruler and minister isn’t based on bodily descent and family ties but should be related exclusively to the worthiness of the subordinate administrator. And the superior should also be worth to take the leadership position, of course: At least in the ideal sense, the most worthy son of the dynasty should also ascend the throne. According to the meritocratic principles which became prevalent in Chinese “imperial management”, only the most learned and skilled man were to be entrusted with the administration of the country. At least in an ideal sense, only the worthiest “sons” of the country were to be granted such responsible posts.

40 See footnote 13.

41 Regarding this term cf. Chen 1991, 268–76.

In accordance with that, the character of the ruler was supposed to have been molded by the practice of *xiao* 孝 as well: Even as emperors (with no other human being superior to them) the rulers of *Zhongguo* 中國 were then not only understood as children of their parents, but also as the one and only *tianzi* 天子 (“Son of Heaven”). They had to implement *tianming* 天命 (“the decree of Heaven”). At least in the sense of an ideal, they were seen as the channel or pathway, so-to-speak, to provide human society with the omnipresent cosmic order and celestial harmony and to connect humanity as much as possible with the ways of Heaven and the order of ever enfolding and permanently transforming *yi* 易 (“(universal) change(s)”).

In this connection, one ought not to forget that the imperial family itself was supposed to serve as an educational example for all other families under Heaven. In *Daxue* 大學, we can find some important text passages considering that topic:

What is meant by “In order rightly to govern the state, it is necessary first to regulate the family”, is this: It is not possible for one to teach others, while he cannot teach his own family. Therefore, the ruler, without going beyond his family, completes the lessons for the state. There is filial [love-and-duty, DB]—therewith the sovereign should be served. There is fraternal submission—therewith elders and superiors should be served. There is kindness—therewith the multitude should be treated.<sup>42</sup>

[(Coming from the example of) one (imperial) family (which realizes the trait of) humane (interrelationships internally), a whole state becomes (a developing) humane (interrelatedness), DB], and from its courtesies the whole state becomes courteous while, from the ambition and perverseness of the One man, the whole state may be led to rebellious disorder. Such is the nature of the influence. This verifies the saying, “Affairs may be ruined by a single sentence; a kingdom may be settled by its One man.”<sup>43</sup>

[W]hen the ruler, as a father, a son, and a brother, is a model, then the people imitate him. This is what is meant by saying, “The government of his kingdom depends on his regulation of the family.”<sup>44</sup>

42 Cf. *Liji* 禮記, “Daxue 大學”, 11: “所謂治國必先齊其家者，其家不可教而能教人者，無之。故君子不出家而成教於國：孝者，所以事君也；弟者，所以事長也；慈者，所以使眾也。” (tr. Legge)

43 Cf. *ibid.*: “一家仁，一國興仁；一家讓，一國興讓；一人貪戾，一國作亂。其機如此。此謂一言僨事，一人定國。” (tr. Legge, with changes by DB)

44 Cf. *ibid.*: “其為父子兄弟足法，而後民法之也。此謂治國在齊其家。” (tr. Legge)

We therefore see that the innate goodness of man has to be cultivated from at least two different angles which are inseparably interconnected. One environment of Confucian learning is the family. Secondly, we have to take into consideration the social environment of human coexistence. Furthermore, the aforementioned relation of older friend and younger friend might be seen as a third kind of specific area of cultivating one's innate human goodness. And one might just think of the reciprocal relationships of Confucius and his disciples to see that the relationship of teacher and pupil has *also* been understood as based on friendship, originally. A person who unites all of these three attributes in his personal self-cultivation and his striving to enfold his learning to the utmost extreme was/is to be characterized as a *junzi*.

If we analyze the core principles of Confucian ways of teaching humanity humane ways, we can see that a very substantial task thereby lies in the stimulation of (a naturally inborn) *xiao* as well as an all-encompassing and caring (or empathic) practice of *ren* which starts with the closest relatives and is supposed to be extended in a way that it may become one's exclusive regulating scheme for all possible human relations and situations. In this regard, it is Wang Yangming who states:

Therefore [when I] “connect (lovingly and) as closely as possible with” (*qin* 親) my father as well as the fathers [of other] people as well as the fathers [of all] people under Heaven, then my humanity truly joins with my father, the fathers [of other] people as well as the fathers of all people under Heaven and it forms one (self-)organizing whole [with all of them]. This true togetherness of forming one (self-)organizing whole is followed by the brightening of the clear virtue of filial love-and-duty.

When I connect (lovingly and) as closely as possible with my older brother and the older brothers [of other] people as well as the older brothers [of all] people under Heaven, then my humanity truly joins with my older brother, the older brothers [of other] people as well as the older brothers of all people under Heaven and it forms one (self-)organizing whole [with all of them]. This true togetherness of forming one (self-)organizing whole is followed by the brightening of the clear virtue of the younger brother. Ruler and minister, husband and wife, friends—up to mountains and rivers, gods and demons, birds and land animals, trees and plants—to attain the humane (interrelationship) of myself forming one (self-)organizing whole (with Heaven, Earth and ten thousand things), there is nothing which would not be connected (in love and) as closely as possible (to myself) in that sense. Only in this case, there is nothing which would not be brightened in (the light of) my clear virtue. And the

one (and only) body of Heaven, Earth and ten thousand things can truly be realized in this way.”<sup>45</sup>

We should also remember what Confucius himself points out: “[*Xiao* (“filial love-and-duty”, DB) is the root of (all) virtue, and (the stem) out of which (all moral) teaching is growing.”<sup>46</sup>

In that context, Kongzi also emphasizes the ruler’s responsibility not only for the well-being of his subordinates but also for a public education which meets the end of an all-encompassing realization of *ren* in the whole of the human community. Therefore, in *Lunyu*, we can find the statement that

[w]hen the Master went to Wei, [Ran You 冉有, DB] acted as driver of his carriage. The Master observed, “How numerous are the people!” You said, “Since they are thus numerous, what more shall be done for them?” “Enrich them,” was the reply. “And when they have been enriched, what more shall be done?” The Master said, “Teach them.”<sup>47</sup>

By means of educating the people and thereby raising as much worthy citizens as possible for the administration of the state and the common good, the ruler is also supposed to act as a role model himself. In this sense, he should be capable to serve as the perfect teacher. He ought to provide his people with examples to help them mastering the never-ending struggle of the realization of *ren*. Therefore, it is emphasized:

These were the words of the Master—Difficult is it to attain to what is called the perfect humanity of the superior man! It is said in the Book of Poetry, “The happy and courteous prince is the father and mother of his people.” Happy, he (yet) vigorously teaches them; courteous, he makes them pleased and restful. With all their happiness, there is no wild extravagance; with all their observance of ceremonial usages, there is the feeling of affection. Notwithstanding his awing gravity, they are restful; notwithstanding his son-like gentleness, they are respectful. Thus he

45 Cf. Wang (1933c, 36–37): “是故親吾之父·以及人之父·以及天下人之父·而後吾之仁實與吾之父人之父與天下人之父而為一體矣·實與之為一體·而後孝之明德始明矣·親吾之兄·以及人之兄·以及天下人之兄·而後吾之仁實與吾之兄人之兄與天下人之兄而為一體矣·實與之為一體·而後弟之明德始明矣·君臣也·夫婦也·朋友也·以至於山川鬼神鳥獸草木也·莫不實有以親之·以達吾一體之仁·然後吾之明德始無不明·而真能以天地萬物為一體矣。” (tr. DB)

46 Cf. *Xiaojing* 孝經, “Kaizongmingyi 開宗明義”, 1: “夫孝，德之本也，教之所由生也。” (tr. Legge)

47 Cf. *Lunyu* 論語, “Zi Lu 子路”, 9: “子適衛，冉有僕。子曰：「庶矣哉！」冉有曰：「既庶矣。又何加焉？」曰：「富之。」曰：「既富矣，又何加焉？」曰：「教之。」” (tr. Legge)



causes them to honor him as their father, and love him as their mother. There must be all this before he is the father and mother of his people. Could anyone who was not possessed of perfect virtue be able to accomplish this?<sup>48</sup>

In a similar manner, or in a wider sense, this also accounts for *every* Confucian teacher in his relations to his respective students. The personality of the teacher is utterly important. Besides the mere contents of his teaching, a Confucian teacher is also supposed to serve as a role model, so-to-speak. As mentioned earlier, this is especially the case when it comes to educate future leaders and political administrators. In *Lunyu*, Confucius therefore states with regard to the outcome of such an education: “If one is acting properly, things demanded will happen without commands.”<sup>49</sup>

Kongzi felt responsible for the learning of more than 3000 students. In his actions, he was *exemplifying* the practice of empathy—thereby didactically mediating one of the root principles of his teaching without using language itself. In *Lunyu*, we find the following passage: “When the Master was eating by the side of a mourner, he never ate to the full.”<sup>50</sup> And the Sage even taught empathy with respect to the animal kingdom.<sup>51</sup>

Originating from this practice of empathy, Confucius is also able to see through the personal characteristics of each of his students. In *Lunyu*, he states: “See what a man does. Mark his motives. Examine in what things he rests. How can a man conceal his character? How can a man conceal his character?”<sup>52</sup>

In his teaching, Confucius likes to draw on actual situations of every-day life which then can become valuable examples of certain *general* insights into the same special situation. On one occasion, when the Master sees a bird-catcher who intentionally is catching only young sparrows, he asks the man why he doesn't try to catch any old birds. The bird-catcher's answer is quite insightful: “The old sparrow is very smart, that's why he is hard to catch. The young ones are only desperate for food. For this reason, they are easy to catch.” The Master then addresses his students and, amongst other considerations, draws the following comparison:

48 Cf. *Liji* 禮記, “Biaoji 表記”, 26: “子言之: 「君子之所謂仁者其難乎! 《詩》云: 『凱弟君子, 民之父母。』凱以強教之; 弟以說安之。樂而毋荒, 有禮而親, 威莊而安, 孝慈而敬。使民有父之尊, 有母之親。如此而後可以為民父母矣, 非至德其孰能如此乎? ” (tr. Legge)

49 Cf. *Lunyu* 論語, “Zi Lu 子路”, 6: “「其身正, 不令而行; [...]” (tr. DB)

50 Cf. *Lunyu* 論語, “Shu Er 述而”, 9: “子食於有喪者之側, 未嘗飽也。” (tr. Legge)

51 Cf. Bartosch 2015a.

52 *Lunyu* 論語, “Wei Zheng 為政”, 10: “「視其所以, 觀其所由, 察其所安。人焉廋哉? 人焉廋哉? 」” (tr. Legge)

Did you listen? [...] Happiness and sorrow of the sparrow depend on which road the sparrow follows: [...] If one follows the excellent thoughts of the ancients – whatever the danger might be—one is safe. If one follows the ideas of the inexperienced youth, one easily experiences great sorrow.<sup>53</sup>

## Implicit Knowing in Confucian Education: The Ineffable Center

At this stage of our investigation, we might think back to what has been introduced as explicit knowledge in Confucian teaching and learning in second part. As already indicated, I would like to stress again that all the above-mentioned subjects and practices were not only to teach the students some practical skills or knowledge or some techniques in the sense of “l’art pour l’art”. Even in the case of explicit contents of learning, the underlying intention is always implicitly two-fold, so-to-speak. Similar to Confucius’ aforementioned method of drawing his pupils’ attention to actual situations of every-day life, *all* of these practices and subjects of explicit learning in a *symbolical sense* refer to an ineffable aspect of Confucian teaching, i.e. insights and understanding which cannot be transmitted like the characteristics of a physical object, the steps of a technical process, or the mere technical aspects of an art (for example the know-how of how to hold the writing-brush properly or how to shoot an arrow with the bow). But nevertheless, the student *has to realize this symbolic extension of learning*. He has to realize it by himself and by means of his own efforts.

*Symbolic meaning*, as an underlying dimension of meaning, *is not precise*; it transcends the boundaries of fixed notions; it always remains open for further personal development and it *has to be carried out* practically and regularly until it becomes permanent and has put down roots into the all-encompassing fountainhead of *xin*. *By practicing* the art of charioteering, f. ex., the student also opened a way for himself to be enabled to maybe eventually grasp an underlying symbolic meaning of this activity (in the sense of a meaning which cannot be finalized and which is permanently enriching itself): In this sense of a *symbolical practice* of learning, *the practice* of charioteering also in an alluded sense was meant to help the learner to understand how to always attentively follow the right road or right path in life.

53 Cf. the whole passage in *Kongzi Jiayu* 孔子家語, “Liu Ben 六本”, 7: “孔子見羅雀者，所得皆黃口小雀。夫子問之曰：「大雀獨不得，何也？」羅者曰：「大雀善驚而難得，黃口貪食而易得。黃口從大雀，則不得；大雀從黃口，亦不得。」孔子顧謂弟子曰：「善驚以遠害，利食而忘患，自其心矣，而獨以所從為禍福。故君子慎其所從。以長者之慮，則有全身之階；隨小者之戀，而有危亡之敗也。」”(tr. DB)

Here we touch upon the first aspects of a topic which concerns a more hidden but rather *central* issue. Kongzi tries to mediate this issue throughout his teachings. In my opinion, *all* of Kongzi's sayings contain a deeper symbolic meaning. In this regard, something is always left unspoken and therefore points to a level of wisdom, to an unspeakable dimension of understanding—a dimension which cannot be put into words, conclusively. Although this level of wisdom and achievement might be referred to from different angles allusively, it stays unspeakable in its entirety or totality. In brief: It confronts us with the philosophical problem of ineffability.

From a transcultural comparative perspective, this might be compared to aspects of education, f. ex., in late pagan Neo-Platonism. In this context, the student had to master several branches of philosophical learning (metaphysics, ethics, psychology etc.). The uniform processing of these branches of learning should then lead to an experience of a fundamental understanding or “enlightenment”, i.e. a universal understanding which cannot be mediated by words sufficiently, as the author of the famous Platonic *Seventh Letter* (originally ascribed to Plato) explained.<sup>54</sup> At least in the sense of a partial analogy, the branches of explicit learning in Confucianism also lead back to a hidden center of wisdom. In one of his poems, Wang Yangming hints at this, when he states: “Every human heart has a Kongzi.”<sup>55</sup>

To be able to reflect on this issue more clearly, we might imagine the branches of the *Liu Yi* 六藝 (“Six Arts”) as a six-pointed star in the form of a snow-flake, with little twigs on the respective branches of the crystal which then are supposed to symbolize the respective subdivisions of each of the Six Arts). The ineffable aspect of Confucian learning then might be referred to as the center-point of this “snow-flake” or “six-pointed star”, symbolically. The center is the seventh aspect. All other six branches are rooted in it and also coincide in it.

But Kongzi shifted the main attention to other areas than, f. ex., Neo-Platonist philosophers. The big difference is that, in the case of *early* Confucianism, the problem of ineffability is not connected to any metaphysical issues (in a possible Western meaning of “metaphysics”). Instead, Kongzi—and I am not talking about any later developments, especially not about those in Neo-Confucian philosophy of the twentieth or twenty-first century—keeps his attention mainly focused to the moral fountainhead. He strives for the betterment of humankind

54 Cf. also Edelstein 1966, 100: “But to be sure, such a vision is not a vision of ordinary experience or thought. Unlike such experiences or thoughts, it can, the letter holds, not be expressed in words. It also falls within the province of a specially gifted soul. ‘Neither receptivity or memory can ever help him who is not kindred to the object [to see it], for it does not arise to start with in alien states [of the soul]’ (344 A).”

55 Wang (1933d, 128): “個個人心有仲尼” (tr. DB)

without looking for any remedies outside of humanity itself (in the sense of his understanding of humanity). This is comparatively special and keeps his way of self-perfection focused on man himself. Therefore Confucians are in the favorable situation of not being susceptible to get lost in mental visions or religious mythology of any sort, let alone any distracting theological disputes.<sup>56</sup>

*In this favorable and unique sense* (which keeps up a more or less agnostic position), the unspeakable becoming of *dao* 道 cannot be put into terms as such. But it can be achieved indirectly (and only situational) by indicative allusions of the Master (who himself is already dwelling in—or as—limitless processuality and oneness of *dao*): Kongzi and other great Confucians like Wang Yangming did not explain what *dao* is. Unlike Socrates, Plato and others in ancient Greece, they didn't follow a *theoretical* road in search for any abstract or transcendent meanings of the main terms they were using. Any such ways in *modern* Confucian *philosophy* of the twentieth and twenty-first century are influenced by the reading of Western philosophies like that of Kant, or the classics of Greek antiquity etc. The words “theoretical” and “theory” point to a very different origin than Confucian thought and its special enlightening or educational function.<sup>57</sup>—Kongzi himself was not trying to create any abstract meanings which then would have been tied to the idea to transcend them into “higher” intellectual spheres of self-reflection. Such kinds of practices would have been pointless under these *earlier* pre-modern Confucian circumstances.

Instead, these original Confucian teachers used their language in a varying and therefore always contextualizing manner (i.e. in accord with the individual situations and unique (inter)personal circumstances of their respective students). The reason for this is that *they always used their speech to regulate the conduct of*

56 For a transcultural comparison which deals with the philosophical problem of ineffability in Neo-Platonism and Neo-Confucianism, cf. Bartosch 2015b, 233–300.

57 There is not enough sufficient space left in the present paper to address this important issue more in detail. For supplementary reference please see my extensive and partly comparative analysis on the topic with regard to Plato's and Aristotle's as well as other notions and origins of the philosophical use of the word “θεωρία” in Bartosch 2015b, 489–506 (the chapter “Exkurs: Zu Kontexten der cusanischen Theorieauffassung” [“Excursus: On the Contexts of da Cusa's Views Regarding Theory.”]). Let me just emphasize here that Kongzi didn't strive to live the theoretical life in the sense of Aristotle; his sayings are not an aspect of a sort of *vita contemplativa*; and he also doesn't have a Platonic “θεῖα θεωρία” (“vision of God”) in mind; the philosophical sense of “I run and see” of the original meaning of Greek “θεωρῶ” (according to Nicolaus Cusanus (1401–1464)) also doesn't fit to describe the Confucian ways, cf. *ibid.*, 500 and the citation on page 291 as well. Cf. also Rausch 1982, 21–47: The most important original meaning of the “theorist” (θεωρῶς) is that of an *envoy to a religious festival* who leaves his polis to “see the god” (f. ex. a statue in a temple) at another place of cult or another polis. To put it in other words and more bluntly: Confucian rituals are not about *visio Dei*. Confucian lore is not theoretical in the classical Western sense.

*their students*.<sup>58</sup> The Confucian situational use of terms might best be understood as the use of semantic “pointers” or “pointing-rods” (“*Zeigestäbe*”, Max Scheler (1874–1928)). This method simply consists in *pointing out* (or *pointing at*) the right “direction” in the context of a situation, semantically. Wang Yangming even goes so far as to explain this with regard to *Chan* 禪:

“Once there was a master of Chan. People came to ask for the method (of the Buddha). But he just lifted a feather duster. One day, his students hid his duster. They were curious to know how he’d demonstrate the method. The Chan master was looking for his duster which he didn’t find and rose his empty hand into the air, instead. My (remarks on) ‘good knowing’ (*liang zhi* 良知) (can be compared to) the demonstration of the method by means of the duster. What else could I raise into the air besides this (expression).” A little later another friend asked with regard to the essentials of the task. Yangming looked besides himself and said: “Where is my duster?” Instantaneously, (that which he had alluded to) appeared to all of those who were sitting around him in a vital and lively way.<sup>59</sup>

On no account, the teacher would have told the student directly what to do (in the sense of direct prescriptions for his actions). He wouldn’t have tried to define the terms he uses in the sense of a fixed or “immovable” meaning.<sup>60</sup> The overall/general meaning always stays ineffable, it can only be “caught” (or, figuratively speaking, be “fished” out of the “pond” of the deeper layers of the heart) situation-wise (while it stays ineffable, i.e. non-expressible by just trying to put it into words). To put it another way: Confucius and his followers knew that the moral content of their respective student’s personalities could only be awakened from the inside. At the same time, they also kept in mind the fact that it was and will never be possible to drum the life of the *junzi* into the pupil’s *xin* from the outside, so-to-speak.

In that sense, the wisdom which is the fountainhead of Confucian education is unspeakable and relates to the field of *implicit knowledge*. It is in itself without words. It can be understood as the harmony and overall progression which moves

58 Cf. Schmidt 2005, 134; Bartosch 2015b, 261.

59 Wang (1933b, 19): “一友問功夫不切·先生曰·學問功夫·我已曾一句·道盡·如何今日轉說轉遠·都·不著根·對曰·致良知蓋聞教矣·然亦須講明·先生曰·既知致良知·又何可講明·良知本是明白·實落用功便是·不肯用功·只在語言上轉說轉糊塗·曰·正求講明致之之功·先生曰·此亦須你自家求·我亦無別法可道·昔有禪師·人來問法·只把塵尾提起·一日·其徒將其塵尾藏過·試他如何設法·禪師尋塵尾不見·又只空手提起·我這箇·良知就是設法的塵尾·舍了這箇·有何可提得·少聞·又一友請問功夫切要·先生旁顧曰·我塵尾安在·一時在坐著皆躍然·”(tr. DB)

60 This is because there is no such fixed sense. Meanings are created by the use of words. This usage is always situational.

and brings forth and navigates everything through everything and which connects everything in a constant overall movement or transformation of the whole of “Heaven, Earth and ten thousand things” (*tian-di wan wu*).

From a Confucian angle, learning can be regarded as a gentle accession process towards that ineffable wisdom (another “feather duster” would be the word “*dao*”) which Confucius also alludes to as “*one to permeate everything*”. In that context, Confucius asks one of his pupils: “‘Ci, you think, I suppose, that I am one who learns many things and keeps them in memory?’ [The answer was, DB], ‘Yes—but perhaps it is not so?’ ‘No’, was the answer; [‘I have one to permeate everything. DB]’<sup>61</sup> In another passage, the Master says: “[M]y doctrine is that of an all-pervading unity.”<sup>62</sup>

But we can still ask: What does this “one” mean? In principal, we can say that “it” cannot be defined conclusively. “It” is “something” which permanently (in the sense of a verb) “principles” and is always correcting through all the changing occurrences of our lives in accord with the constant self-development and self-modification of everything’s situations themselves. One might hint at it by saying that it is the fully realized, permanent self-reflection *in and as concrete action*. In that sense, the obligation of man (as the heart of Heaven and Earth) lies in mirroring or self-reflecting the flow of situations in their ever-changing process of the promulgation of things—permanently and without aberration. Concerning the included aspect of ineffability, Confucius himself states that he would rather like to realize his teaching *without using any words*:

The Master said, “I would prefer not speaking.” Zi Gong said, “If you, Master, do not speak, what shall we, your disciples, have to record?” The Master said, “Does Heaven speak? The four seasons pursue their courses, and all things are continually being produced, but does Heaven say anything?”<sup>63</sup>

In a sense, this reminds us of the central importance of this topic for another great stream of earlier Chinese thinkers which stems from *Daodejing* 道德經 and the basics of earlier Daoists, like, f. ex., Zhuangzi 莊子, who stated that *dao* which is the root of all wording is itself without words.<sup>64</sup>

61 Cf. *Lunyu* 論語, “Wei Ling Gong 衛靈公”, 3: “「賜也，女以予為多學而識之者與？」對曰：「然，非與？」曰：「非也，予一以貫之。」”(tr. Legge, with changes by DB)

62 Cf. *ibid.*, “Li Ren 里仁”, 15: “「參乎！吾道一以貫之。」”(tr. Legge)

63 Cf. *ibid.*, “Yang Huo 陽貨”, 19: “子曰：「予欲無言。」子貢曰：「子如不言，則小子何述焉？」子曰：「天何言哉？四時行焉，百物生焉，天何言哉？」”(tr. Legge)

64 Cf. the famous beginning of the *Daodejing* 道德經, 1; alternatively cf. *ibid.*, 41: “道隱無名。夫唯道，善貸且成。”[“*Dao*—hidden and without name, this *dao* alone is good at bestowing and completing.”(tr. DB)]

But Wang Bi 王弼 already has stated that Kongzi's dealing with the ineffability of *dao* (respectively *wu* 無) is to be valued *as more elaborate* than that of Laozi 老子 and Zhuangzi who have stressed the ineffability of *dao* more emphatically. In contrast to them and instead of *speaking* about the ineffability of *dao*, it turns out that Confucius *embodies* the unspeakable fountainhead of all wisdom and worldly transformation.<sup>65</sup> While centering his efforts towards the human plane, he is thereby constantly giving signs from that all-pervading oneness. Later, Wang Yangming and also many others have combined Daoist and also *Chan*-Buddhist ways of communicating the incommunicability of *dao* with an understanding of the *embodiment* of *dao* in Confucian learning in various ways. On one occasion, Wang Yangming calls this *da dao* 大道 (“Great Way”).<sup>66</sup>

In a symbolical or transferred sense, the latter thereby even compares or relates the activities of Confucian learning and teaching to acts of divination (*bushi* 卜筮). In that context and in Yangming's sense, the aforementioned five foundational modalities of holistic learning from the *Zhongyong* (see part 3)—i.e. (1) *boxue* (“extensive study”), (2) *shenwen* (“accurate inquiry”), (3) *shensi* (“careful reflection”), (4) *mingbian* (“clear discrimination”), (5) *duxing* (“earnest practice”)—should be understood as fundamental ways of “divination” in a much deeper or symbolical (and therefore *extended*) sense. That is to say that these modalities should be understood as direct ways of reflecting the ineffable source of the ever-present transformation of *tian-di wan wu*. In this regard, Wang Yangming states:

[Most people] do not know that questions and answers between friends, extensive studies, accurate inquiry, careful reflection, clear discrimination and earnest practice are all [ways of] divination [i. e. “reading”/reflecting *dao* in the context of a specific situation, DB].<sup>67</sup>

On the basis of these deeper levels of learning and teaching, Kongzi himself realizes to walk in on the road of wisdom in such a way that, according to every situation and change of his life, he can earnestly state: “I have no course for which I am predetermined, and no course against which I am predetermined.”<sup>68</sup> At this stage of learning, human consciousness is led back to its utmost clarity and spontaneity—while at the same time still being confronted with the implied (philosophical) problem of (in)effability.

65 Cf. Yuet 1999, 64; cf. also Wagner 1991, 463.

66 Cf. Wang (2006, 1180): “聖人與天地民物同體，儒、佛、老、莊皆吾之用，是之謂大道。二氏自私其身，是之謂小道。”

67 Cf. Wang (1933b, 12): “不知今之師友問答·博學·審問·慎思·明辨·篤行之類·皆是卜筮。” (tr. DB)

68 Cf. *Lunyu* 論語, “Wei Zi 微子”, 8: “「我則異於是，無可無不可。」” (tr. Legge)

## Outlook

Concerning further internationalization of Confucian-based practice of learning and self-cultivation, we have to ask ourselves how we might connect classical Confucian learning and the modes of learning and understanding presented in this paper with any fitting conceptions of modern Western education.<sup>69</sup> In my opinion, some aspects of pre-modern Confucian general understanding and learning would fit exceedingly well to assist in solving the problems of the modern world. The element of ineffability and the way how pre-modern Confucian teachers have dealt with it are still inspiring. Confucian scholars and practitioners have shown that their way of learning stays open to receive and absorb anything which might provide some means to solve current affairs or any problems of the day.<sup>70</sup> It seems very obvious that our modern and future world of the Information Age will have to be “recharged” by means of the interpersonal human(e) bonds which naturally “grow out” of *ren*, so-to-speak: We face the problem that our modern way of education is mostly fixated on the cultivation of forms of explicit knowledge. We should start to understand that our technological and informational rationality and her artificial extension are nothing more than a superficial exterior of total human(e) learning. In these contexts, it is important that humanity learns not be carried away by the technological reality, by its overstrained senses and by its current outcomes of technologically enhanced explicit knowledge. Without neglecting the achievements of modernity, man has the obligation to return to his original wisdom today, i.e. the symbolic and situational root of an intuitive and situational consciousness which always finds its way by striving for a continuous and humane self-integration in the constant flow of Heaven, Earth and the ten thousand things. Reviving Confucianism to a new form and adapting it to the needs of the twenty-first century or combining it with modern educational or philosophical concepts might help humanity to swim against the stream of entropy which was involuntarily amplified by the technological and scientific revolutions of the last 200 years. Achieving equilibrium and keeping an economic, ecological and social balance should be the furthestmost concern of humanity as a whole. In this regard, pre-modern Confucian learning might provide us with a lot of helpful insight.

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69 For a proposal in this regard cf. Bartosch 2015b, 427, 522–8.

70 Cf. *Lunyu* 論語, “Li Ren 里仁”, 10: “「君子之於天下也，無適也，無莫也，義之與比。」” [“The Master said, ‘The superior man, in the world, does not set his mind either for anything, or against anything; what is right he will follow.’” (tr. Legge)]



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