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PARTE III

EL CONFUCIANISMO Y SU PARTICIPACIÓN EN EL DESARROLLO DE ASIA DEL ESTE

A CONFUCIAN RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS OF HUMANITIES EDUCATION: ON THE CONFLICT BETWEEN INSTRUMENTAL RATIONALITY AND VALUE RATIONALITY

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I. INTRODUCTION

The great advances in technology in recent decades have prompted many people to believe in the omnipotence of technology and, correspondingly, the uselessness of humanities education in general. Educational institutions worldwide are facing the dilemma of keeping a balanced curriculum or catering to the market more intimately. The harbinger of the crisis perhaps first appeared in Japan several years ago, where the government responded to the march of techno-society by proposing the elimination of curricula on humanities in many of its prestigious universities (Grove, 2015). The most news-media-sensitive move, however, came in the fall semester of 2024, when Harvard University suddenly canceled more than 30 classes across at least 20 departments and other programs, with history and literature taking the hardest hit. The canceled classes in the two departments included the Hist-Lit 90 seminars "British Soft Power from Shakespeare to Dua Lipa," "Marx at the Mall: Consumer Culture & Its Critics," "Global Transgender Histories," "Indigenous Genders and Sexualities in North America," "The Making of Race across Latin America," and "Global Histories of Capitalism" (Parker and Sykes, 2024), among others.

The cancellation of humanities classes at Harvard sent a shocking wave to higher education institutions worldwide, and once again forced people to ponder the value and plausibility of humanities education in the age of artificial intelligence. In fact, the crisis of humanities education is not just felt in Japan and the United States. Many other countries are confronted with more or less the same problem and the situation in Mexico is no less critical. For example, there are callings that "aloof" subjects such as philosophy

should be removed from curriculum in order to make space for programs more sensitive to technology and market. In China, there is also a wide spread and boiling discussion of the crisis of humanities education throughout social networks and blogs following the cancelation of humanities classes at Harvard University.

Is the current education, higher education in particular, really detached from reality that we have to make radical changes right away to amend the situation? Is technology so omnipotent that it alone will solve all the problems in society? This article tries to answer otherwise and stress instead the importance of a balanced education for social wellbeing. It will first analyze the fundamental confrontation between instrumental rationality and value rationality by drawing on the theoretical reflections of Max Weber (1864-1920). It will then trace the etymologies of zhexue (philosophy) and jiaoyu (education) in Chinese vocabulary and proceeds to examine the organic and holistic nature of the idealized Confucian education. Finally, the article will call attention to the alienating effect of industrial production and promulgate a cohesive, organic, and holistic vision on modern education by appealing to the Confucian vision of zhixing heyi.

II. THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN INSTRUMENTAL RATIONALITY AND VALUE RATIONALITY

When it comes to explaining what is instrumental rationality and what is value rationality, no other example is more vivid and illustrative than the contrast and conflict between Elon Musk, the currently richest and possibly most powerful man in the world, and his transgender daughter –Vivian Jenna Wilson. On October 29th, 2024, at the 8th Future Investment Initiative conference, which was held in Saudi Arabia's capital, Riyadh, Elon Musk made an ambitious and optimistic speech through a video call, stating that by 2040, there will be at least 10 billion humanoid robots priced between $20,000 and $25,000, which would increase the market value of Tesla, his own company of electric cars, robots, and many other things, to about 25 trillion dollars (Reuters, October 29, 2024). At the meantime, nobody will fail to notice that Elon Musk is simultaneously the owner of SpaceX, Starlink, Twitter/X, and Neuralink, as well as the Administrator of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) of the new Donald Trump administration of the United States. At some point, Elon Musk can be seen as a perfect personification of what Max Weber called "instrumental rationality," because he has so far best

manifested the principle of "efficiency" to achieve his goals– to be rich and powerful in the world.

On the other hand, Vivian Jenna Wilson, the transgender daughter of Elon Musk, openly accused her father as "an absent father who was cruel to her as a child for being queer and feminine" in an exclusive interview with NBC News on July 25th, 2024 (Ingram, 2024). Vivian said her father was rarely present in her life, leaving her and her siblings to be cared for by their mother or by nannies even though Musk had joint custody. Previously, in 2022, Vivian sought court approval in California to change her name (including her last name from Musk to her mother's, Wilson) and, in the process, denounced her father. "I no longer live with or wish to be related to my biological father in any way, shape or form," she said in the court filing (Ingram, 2024).

If it is theoretically illustrative to see Elon Musk as a very personification of "instrumental rationality," then his transgender daughter, Vivian Jenna Wilson, is no less than a perfect exemplification of "value rationality". The two terms, originally coined by Max Weber (1978), are often used to identify two rationalization processes in which individuals behave in order to optimize their behavior. According to Weber, while "instrumental rationality" recognizes means that function efficiently to achieve ends, "value rationality" recognizes ends that are "right" and legitimate in themselves.

> Social action, like all action, may be...: (1) instrumentally rational, that is, determined by expectations as to the behavior of objects in the environment and of other human beings; these expectations are used as "conditions" or "means" for the attainment of the actor's own rationally pursued and calculated ends; (2) value-rational, that is, determined by a conscious belief in the value for its own sake of some ethical, aesthetic, religious, or other form of behavior, independently of its prospects of success (Weber, 1978, pp. 24-26).

In his Economy and Society and Collected Essays in the Sociology of Religion, Max Weber divided rationality into four types: practical, theoretical, substantive, and formal, which together constitute rationalization processes in Western societies. For Weber, practical rationality and formal rationality are associated with means-end rational actions and can thus be lumped into the category of "instrumental rationality," while substantive rationality is associated with value-rational actions and belongs to the category of "value rationality" (Kalberg, 1980, pp. 1145-1179). Overall, society progresses by the coordination of the two categories: instrumental means with value rational ends. Specifically, "instrumental rationality" provides intellectual capabilities such as scientific and technological facts and theories, something that appear

to be impersonal, value-free means. At the meantime, "value rationality" furnishes legitimate rules, especially moral valuations, something that appear to be emotionally satisfying and fact-free ends.

The critical point of Max Weber's concept of rationalization is that "value rationality", or "substantive rationality" for that matter, is essentially dictated by a "radical perspectivism". "A radical perspectivism prevails in which the existence of a rationalization process depends on an individual's implied or stated, unconscious or conscious, preference for certain ultimate values and the systematization of his or her action to conform to these values" (Kalberg, 1980, p. 1156). With this radical perspectivism, a person's action is motivated by what Weber called "value postulate," that is, entire clusters of values that vary in comprehensiveness, internal consistency, and content. It is through this "value postulate" that real life events are selected, measured, and judged. According to Weber, action motivated by value and resistant to and counterpoised against environmental molding by interests has been of the greatest historical consequences (Kalberg, 1980, p. 1170).

It is thus not difficult to see the conflict between Elon Musk and his transgender daughter through the Weberian conception of rationality and rationalization. For Weber, there is a "sphere-of-life specificity" (Karberg, 1980, p. 1150) in rationality and rationalization processes. In other words, rationalization processes take place at their own rates and in diverse spheres of life, independent from one another. Actions deemed "rational" in one sphere might appear to be "irrational" in other spheres. As an idol of "instrumental rationality," Musk probably has best manifested efficiency and productivity by adopting scientific methods and empirical thinking. But when it comes to caring for his own transgender daughter, he seems hopelessly impotent and "irrational" because it is precisely "fatherly love" that Vivian holds as the ultimate value and that Musk cannot scientifically or "instrumentally" furnish. Simply put, his 10 billion humanoid robots, no matter how powerful and futuristic they might be, cannot be as sufficiently present and caring in his transgender daughter's childhood as a real father can. In this case, the fundamental confrontation between the two rationalities cannot be easily conciliated.

Ironically, maybe we can draw on the metaphoric conflict between Elon Musk and his transgender daughter to reflect on the troublesome situation of current education, namely, the accelerating and irreversible process of prioritization of science and engineering education and the marginalization of humanities education. It is certainly true that the development of science and technology has brought unprecedented convenience to our daily life, but

there are always some arenas or spheres that cannot be thoroughly addressed by "instrumental" means. No matter how advanced a society can be, humans will always have diverse emotions, feelings, as well as ethical, aesthetic, religious and other needs that cannot be readily calculated, quantified, or digitized. These are the spheres or areas that humanities education can fit in. But it would be highly unrealistic to maintain the same "status" and "glory" for humanities in the classroom as in good old days. Time has changed and the emphasis for science and engineering education will be around for any foreseeable future. Instead of insisting on a rigidly "balanced" curriculum of both sides, it is probably more plausible to seek a dynamically balanced curriculum, that is, to integrate pixels of humanities into the class of science and engineering and instill it with a more-or-less coherent and organic touch.

III. THE ETYMOLOGY OF ZHEXUE (PHILOSOPHY) AND JIAOYU (EDUCATION) IN CHINESE

With regard to the title of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Western higher education institutions, the term "philosophy" often does not refer to the discipline of philosophy per se, but is rather employed in a broader sense in accordance with its original Greek meaning, "love of wisdom". In most countries of Europe, many fields such as history, philosophy, social sciences, mathematics, and natural philosophy/sciences (Chang, 2010, p. 183) –other than theology, law, and medicine, or the so-called professional, vocational, or technical curricula– were traditionally known as philosophy, and the basic faculty of liberal arts was known as the "faculty of philosophy" (Wikipedia, accessed January 30, 2025). This simple fact reveals that philosophy in a broad sense permeates every discipline of knowledge and has assumed ultimate significance in the ways Europeans approach nature and universe, including human beings themselves. In traditional China, there was a similar phrase called, "the study of Confucian classics is the guiding principle of all other academic disciplines".[1] In this sense, the study of Confucian classics was elevated to the status of ultimate meaning, similar to the status of philosophy in traditional Western societies. Both cases suggest that academic disciplines, or general education for that matter, are expected to have a coherent, organic, and holistic nature by default.

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1 Siku quanshu zongmu-jingbu zongxu (《四庫全書總目經部總叙》："蓋經者，非他，即天下之公理而已").

In classical Chinese, there is no word correspondent to the Western term "philosophy," while the modern word zhexue 哲學 (philosophy) consists of two characters, zhe and xue, meaning wisdom and study/learning, respectively. In fact, the term zhexue was introduced into China from Japan at the turn of the 20th century, with zhe implying wisdom and xue being a neologism in its own right (xue with the meaning of –ology is a semantic innovation amid the wave of Westernization). The Japanese philosopher Nishi Amane (1829-1897), widely claimed as the father of modern Japanese philosophy, was responsible for the term tetsugaku (哲學) (in Japanese, zhexue in Chinese), which he coined in 1873 by combining the two characters to designate the Western notion of philosophy, meaning "the study of human nature and the principles of things" (Defoort, 2006, pp. 625-660).

Traditional Chinese scholarship is not divided into specific categories or disciplines as we see today. Instead, the imperial library of dynastic China created four departments for the totality of classical writings: jing 經 (Confucian classics), shi 史 (history), zi 子 (writings of various philosophical schools), and ji 集 (miscellaneous, mainly literature) (Huang, 1993). Approximately, the writings from the departments of jing (Confucian classics) and zi (of various philosophical schools) correspond to what we call philosophy today, if we are not entangled with what exactly constitutes philosophy. Among the so-called "hundred schools of thought" with varied degree of philosophical orientation, the Confucian school is especially concerned with the issue of education, the spectrum of which could range from cultivating the self to pacifying the whole world.

On the other hand, unlike zhexue, which is a relatively new compound word in modern Chinese, the word jiaoyu 教育 (education) already exists in classical Chinese, though not with the exact meaning as in modern vocabulary. Due to the possible complexity and subtlety in its connotations, it is worth quoting in length the original text, the chapter Jinxin 1 of Mengzi, where the word jiaoyu emerges for the first time.

> Mencius said, "The superior man has three things in which he delights, and to be ruler over the kingdom is not one of them. That his father and mother are both alive, and that the condition of his brothers affords no cause for anxiety; this is one delight. That, when looking up, he has no occasion for shame before Heaven, and, below, he has no occasion to blush before men; this is a second delight. That he can get from the whole kingdom the most talented individuals, and teach and nourish (jiaoyu教育) them; this is the third delight. The superior man has three things in which he delights, and to be ruler over the kingdom is not one of them" (Mengzi, Ch. Jinxin 1).

In Shuowen Jiezi (Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters), a 2nd century Chinese dictionary, the author Xu Shen explains the word jiao as "what the superior man instructs and the common man enacts or imitates" (教, 上所施, 下所效也);[2] and yu as "raise children and make them do good" (育, 養子使作善也).[3] Here in the text of Mencius, jiaoyu is thus understood as "instruct and nourish", both intellectually and ethically. We should bear in mind that the word jiao actually implies two aspects, instruct and enact. In other words, the process of education involves both the instructor/educator and the learner/enactor/imitator, the one in which the former instructs by exemplifying or edifying and the latter learns by enacting or imitating. The act of instruction and that of learning together constitute what is called jiaoyu (including both education and transformation), a coherent, organic, and spontaneous process which cannot be mechanically divided or imposed. A paragraph in the chapter of Jing Jie (Explanation of the Classics), the Book of Rites (Li Ji), has vividly illustrated the point:

> Therefore, the instructive and transforming power of ceremonies is subtle; they stop depravity before it has taken form, causing men daily to move towards what is good, and keep themselves farther apart from guilt (crime), without being themselves conscious of it (The Book of Rites, Ch. Jing Jie).

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the classical word jiaoyu was utilized to designate the Western term education, along with the introduction of notions, principles, and ideologies associated with education from the West. The organic and spontaneous nature of jiaoyu in the Chinese context was thus practically superseded by the modern Western notion of education, which is "the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university" (The Oxford Dictionary, accessed December 20, 2024). In 1905, the imperial examination system (keju 科舉) was formally abolished, symbolizing the end of traditional education, while Western style education was systematically introduced in China. To be sure, the original meaning of education in the Western terminology also embodies an organic and holistic vision,[4] but it is the notion of institutionalized and professionalized education that was introduced into China along with the wave of wholesale Westernization amid troublesome times.

2 *Shuowen Jiezi* (Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters). http://ctext.org/shuo-wen-jie-zi/jiao-bu?searchu=%E6%95%99&searchmode=showall#result.

3 *Shuowen Jiezi.* http://ctext.org/shuo-wen-jie-zi/bu46.

4 Online Etymology Dictionary. "educate". Accessed December 30, 2024. https://www.etymonline.com/word/educate.

IV. THE IDEALIZED AND HOLISTIC VISION ON EDUCATION IN CONFUCIANISM

Education has always been a fundamental factor for the facilitation of social well-being throughout Chinese history. Ideas about education were consciously illustrated as early as in the Rites of Zhou (Zhou Li),[5] where a rudimentary curriculum was used for the education of noble youngsters. Specifically, the curriculum included six subjects, called six arts–rites, musicianship, archery, chariot-driving, calligraphy and mathematics, the purpose of which was to impart skills and know-how through practice. However, this is just part of the picture because an ideal Confucian formula for education is to cultivate a person as a wholesome one, both intellectually and morally qualified. According to Confucius, the mastery of the six arts has to be combined with the study of the six classics,[6] something that was necessary for the competent exercise of public office. These didactic works, in addition to training the students with knowledge and skills, were more important in inculcating them with a sharp consciousness of social relations and ethics. In other words, the three aspects –intelligence, skills, and morality– were the integral components that made up an ideally educated person who would qualify for the public office.

In fact, this organic and holistic vision on education is best captured in the Book of Rites, the one that expounds Confucian ideas on almost every aspect of social life. In the chapter Jing Jie (Explanation of Classics), the paragraph about an ideally civilized society goes like this:

> Confucius said, "When you enter any state you can know what subjects (its people) have been taught. If they show themselves men who are mild and gentle, sincere and good, they have been taught from the Book of Poetry. If they have a wide comprehension (of things), and know what is remote and old, they have been taught from the Book of History. If they be large-hearted and generous, bland and honest, they have been taught from the Book of Music. If they be pure and still, refined and subtle, they have been taught from the Yi (Book of Changes). If they be courteous and modest, grave and respectful, they have been taught from the Book of Rites and Ceremonies. If they suitably adapt their language to the things of which they speak, they have been taught from the Chun Qiu (Spring and Autumn Annals). Hence the

5 *The Rites of Zhou* (Zhou Li). http://ctext.org/rites-of-zhou/di-guan-si-tu.

6 The six Confucian classics are the *Book of Poetry* (Shi Jing), the *Book of History* (Shang Shu), the *Book of Rites* (Li Ji), the *Book of Changes* (Yi Jing), the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (Chun Qiu), and the *Book of Music* (Yue Jing), the last of which had been lost sometime in the early part of Chinese history.

> failing that may arise in connection with the study of the Poems is a stupid simplicity; that in connection with the History is duplicity; that in connection with Music is extravagance; that in connection with the Yi is the violation (of reason); that in connection with the practice of Rites and Ceremonies is fussiness; and that in connection with the Chun Qiu is insubordination (The Book of Rites, Ch. Jing Jie)".

From the above quotation, we can observe that the Confucian-oriented education, by integrating the six arts with the six classics, would play a fundamental role in the development of society and of individuals alike. In fact, virtue was always held as a prerequisite of government and education, the indispensable path to moral integrity and social wellbeing. Henceforth, with the improvement of moral standards through education and edification, the human world would be rendered more virtuous: the self being cultivated, the household being ordered, the state being well-governed, and all under Heaven being pacified. It is for this very reason that The Great Learning (Da Xue), one of the most venerated Confucian classics, unequivocally declares:

> Things being investigated, knowledge became complete. Their knowledge being complete, their thoughts were sincere. Their thoughts being sincere, their hearts were then rectified. Their hearts being rectified, their persons were cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their states were rightly governed. Their states being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy. From the Son of Heaven down to the mass of the people, all must consider the cultivation of the person the root of everything besides (The Great Learning).

It is apparent that moral instruction through edification became the primary and ultimate goal of Confucian teaching, a precondition for anything else. Furthermore, ethics, intelligence and politics were regarded as indivisible to each other, the first of these being characterized by a vitality which was the driving force of civilization for more than two millennia. The very core of Confucian ethics is centered on ren (benevolence or humaneness), which is manifested in all types of relations between human beings and contains the germ of other qualities: filial piety (xiao), loyalty (zhong), trustworthiness (xin), righteousness (yi), among others. In other words, all these qualities stem from ren, which enjoins human beings to show mutual sympathy, solicitude and respect, and to watch over one another. As the founder of classical China's education system, Confucius defined its basic content by working out his concept of moral instruction, and established guidelines for its further

development. To be sure, this fundamental importance of moral instruction was essentially attributable to Confucius' philosophy of rites, which enjoyed supremacy over law. In the Analects, Confucius thus says:

> If the people be led by laws, and uniformity sought to be given them by punishments, they will try to avoid the punishment, but have no sense of shame. If they be led by virtue, and uniformity sought to be given them by the rules of propriety, they will have the sense of shame, and moreover will become good (The Analects, Ch. Wei Zheng).

V. THE CONFUCIAN APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM OF MODERNITY

Nevertheless, modern China is diametrically different from traditional China in many senses, and so is the case of education. The drastic shift from the paradigms of Confucianism to those of modernity around the turn of the 20th century has created a recurring situation in which the Chinese have to constantly transcend themselves in order to understand the way they used to be and the way they were going to be. Amid a sequence of frustrations, reforms, revolutions, and changes of regime from the mid-19th century to the mid-20th century, Confucianism went through a process of transformation, negation, condemnation, and regeneration, and finally arrived at the stage of so-called "New Confucianism" (xin rujia 新儒家),[7] a form of existence that has enjoyed relative prosperity and stability for the following decades.

The confrontation of instrumental rationality and value rationality, as manifested in the current crisis of humanities education across the globe, can be better understood in light of the Confucian approach to the tension of tradition and modernity. When science and democracy were the predominant discourses during the early part of the 20th century, New Confucianism assumed a seemingly conservative appearance, which was simply conceived as a reaction against a modernization that did not meet the terms of Confucianism. After its exile to Hong Kong, Taiwan, and North America since 1949, it has emerged as the only intellectual tradition that harnessed sympathy for Chinese

7 New Confucianism is an intellectual movement of Confucianism that began in the early 20th century in Republican China amid national crises, and further developed in post-Mao era contemporary China. It is deeply influenced by the neo-Confucianism of the Song (960-1279) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties. Most of the scholars of New Confucianism lived in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

culture during the following four decades. In comparison with other trends of cultural conservatism in the early 20th century, the New Confucian response to the challenge of modernization and modernity is registered by its strong inclination to identify Chinese civilization with Confucianism in general, and Song-Ming neo-Confucianism in particular. It is also characterized by a universalistic claim that Confucianism features some fundamental values cross-culturally relevant for the modern age.

The New Confucian approach to the problem of modernity is most explicitly stated in its declaration about Chinese culture: the 1958 manifesto.[8] The central theme of the manifesto is to clarify typical Western misunderstandings of Chinese culture and to present the ethico-spiritual symbolism of neo-Confucianism, an orientation that has a deep sense of religiousness, as a valid answer to the question of modernity. It trumpets the New Confucian battle against scientific positivism by championing an intuitive and empathic mode of thinking that appreciates the spirit and meaning of Chinese tradition in terms of their contemporary relevance. For New Confucian scholars, the intrinsic values of Chinese tradition can only be grasped with "sympathy and respect," since any real comprehension of tradition requires something more than the lone exercise of intellect. The manifesto rejects the conventional view held by Western sinologists that Confucianism barely goes beyond the preaching of moral principles and interpersonal manners, and accordingly affirms its transcendental value and religious spirit:

> With regard to Chinese civilization, for many years there has prevailed a view among many people both in China and abroad, that Chinese civilization put its emphasis on moral relationships between people and de-emphasized religious belief in God. This view is not mistaken in principle. However, many people are of the opinion that the moral culture which is the focal point of Chinese civilization only seeks to order actual human relations so as to maintain social and political stability. They also think that there is no religious feeling of transcendence and that the Chinese moral thought does not go beyond prescribing norms for proper behavior and thereby fails to provide a basis for inner spiritual life. These views are seriously mistaken (Chang, 1976).

The manifesto identifies the neo-Confucian doctrine of xin-xing (心性 mind and nature), which conveys the notion of transcendence and the belief in the numinous, as the core of Chinese culture (Chang, 1976). It rejects

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8 The manifesto was published at the beginning of 1958, in *Minzhu pinglun* (*Democratic tribune*) under the Chinese title "Wei Zhongguo Wenhua Jinggao Shijie Renshi Xuanyan".

the inclination to interpret xing (性) either in a naturalistic, psychological, or materialistic sense and embraces a metaphysical view in which xing is understood as the source of moral consciousness. The manifesto further emphasizes the intrinsic connection between the inner transcendence of xing and the outer transcendence of tian (天 Heaven) or tiandao (天道 the way of Heaven). While tian or tiandao is believed to refer to the metaphysical ground of being and source of meaning, xing as the transcendental moral self is regarded as an endowment from Heaven. According to the New Confucian notion of xin-xing, the ultimate meaning of humanity resides in the actualization of transcendence –that is, the unity of Heaven and human beings (tianren heyi) (Chang, 1976). In other words, human nature reflects the nature of Heaven, and the morality of humankind is also that of Heaven. The way to perfect humanity is thereby to follow the way of Heaven.

The doctrine of xin-xing, especially the notion of tianren heyi, holds the key to understanding the religious spirit and the transcendental value of neo-Confucianism. It is through the process of actualizing the way of heaven in humanity that the religiousness of Confucianism is ultimately channeled. Because of the oneness of Heaven and human beings, the problem of how to actualize the way of Heaven is also the problem of how to actualize the xing, or the inner moral self in human life. According to the doctrine of xin-xing, the actualization of the way of Heaven in humanity needs to be pursued in the ideal of self-cultivation (xiushen 修身) through its engagement in an endless and rigorous process of moral-spiritual discipline (Mou, 1963, pp. 68-78).

The effort of self-cultivation requires the conjunction of practice and understanding since it is a long-held conviction in the Confucian tradition that moral conduct and comprehension are closely connected and thus must progress together. As a consequence, what appears to be obedience to social regulations or to divine behests is, in the understanding, no more than the fulfillment of xin-xing. The human will in the application of moral principles is unlimited in its involvement, and the fulfillment of xin-xing is also unlimited. In other words, the only way to fulfill the moral principles in all activities is to endeavor to the utmost in accordance with the doctrine of xin-xing. This is the neo-Confucian ideal of "conformity of Heaven and man in virtue" (tianren hede 天人合德), which is believed to have achieved "a high degree of religiousness," since to engage in moral effort is at the same time to fulfill one's inner real self and, thereby, to also follow the command of Heaven (Mou, 1963, pp. 89-101).

The sense of religiousness inherent in the neo-Confucian doctrine of xin-xing is also embodied in the moral and spiritual ideal of ren (仁), which

originally refers to the notion of benevolence or human-heartedness. As a fundamental concept of neo-Confucian metaphysics, ren is used to connote the ethical and spiritual dimension of humanity resulting from the integration of the inner moral self (xing) and the metaphysical ground of being (tiandao). Mou Zongsan, one of the most prominent New Confucian scholars, maintained that the inner function of ren is to achieve sagehood, whereas its external function is to correlate the transcendental notions of xing and tiandao (Mou, 1963, p. 49). In other words, the actualization of the way of Heaven in humanity is verified and contemplated in the ethical and spiritual principle of ren.

The more profound implication of ren, according to Mou Zongsan, is embedded in the ontological sense of "creativity," which generates an overflow of vitality fueling the growth of life in the cosmos. Ren in this sense points to the ultimate reality where everything is unified with everything else and with the universe as a whole. It is thus clear that under the auspices of the development of New Confucianism, the moral ideal of ren has been imposed with an ontological significance comparable in its nature and function to God in Christianity (Mou, 1963, pp. 43-44).

Scholars of New Confucianism have generally insisted that the contemporary relevance of Confucianism resides in its combination of an orientation to this world with an aspiration for transcendence (Mou, 1963, pp. 68-78, 96-97). The doctrine of xin-xing, the notion of tianren heyi, and the moral-spiritual ideal of ren all indicate that neo-Confucianism places great emphasis on the significance of transcendence and assigns the ultimate source of meaning and value to the numinous beyond (i.e., the way of Heaven). But these same notions also suggest that the transcendent can achieve moral and ethical relevance through its actualization in humanity. Thereby the way of Heaven is inherent in the daily life of every individual. The ultimate value and meaning of human life can be immanently actualized in this world regardless of their transcendental sanction. The moral-spiritual principle of ren is specifically reflected in the Confucian vision of the moral transformation of this world to achieve the universal humanization of existence, a vision that is best captured in the supreme ideal of neisheng waiwang, or "inner sageliness and outer kingliness" –that is, an individual's inner moral cultivation and perfection would express itself outwardly in benevolent management of the outer reality through the actualization of ren (Mou, 1968, p. 6).

According to the Confucian ideal of neisheng waiwang, both the moral perfection of one's personality and the attainment of sagehood dispense the external grace of God. The New Confucian scholars believe that an individual's

moral cultivation is motivated by the inner source of the human mind –the Heaven-endowed xing– and that the attainment of sagehood is within the reach of every ordinary individual. Moreover, the individual who has attained sagehood must go beyond the realm of moral and spiritual cultivation and concern him- or herself with the outer world. But the challenge for New Confucianism is still how to bridge the gap between neisheng, the inner realm of moral cultivation, and waiwang, the outer realm of reality.

Despite the this-worldly orientation of Confucianism, the failure of neisheng waiwang to address the social, political, and economic problems in traditional Chinese society is widely acknowledged by the New Confucian thinkers. The problem became all the more acute when Western powers invaded an impotent China with the aid of not just guns and ships but also a whole range of advanced systems. Partially because of both the cruel reality of Western intrusion and the intellectual legacy of the May Fourth generation, the New Confucian scholars have been trying to innovate the concept of neisheng waiwang by aligning it with the twin triumphs of modern Western civilization –namely, science and democracy (Mou, 1962, pp. 164-193).

The failure to develop science and democracy in traditional Chinese society has suggested the deficiency of Confucianism in coping with problems of the outer world. But this liability does not prevent the New Confucian scholars from elevating the instrumental significance of Confucianism to the equivalence of its moral and spiritual importance. For them, the challenge of Chinese modernization is not about the question of whether Chinese culture is compatible with science and democracy, but rather about the question of how Chinese culture can be creatively transformed so that the values of science and democracy may take root in the native soil. They believe that an innovated ideal of neisheng waiwang would dispose the Chinese toward accepting Western ideas. The striving for the development of science, according to them, would be facilitated by the individual's active involvement in the outer world as the precept of moral perfection requires, and by a strong element of pragmatism in Confucianism, which acknowledges the importance of material wellbeing for the moral transformation of people. Hence, the development of science becomes an imperative when the Confucian moral obligation to humanize the outer world is considered; in return, Chinese culture would be greatly renovated and enriched by this universalistic commitment (Chang, 1976).

As for the relation between democracy and Confucian moral and spiritual ideals, the New Confucian scholars see a greater degree of congeniality. They believe that there was a native potential for developing democratic institutions and ideology in traditional Chinese society, though it did not evolve fully in

the modern age. However, the combined tradition of moral and ideological protest and institutional restraints that curbed the rampage of political despotism in traditional society would readily lay a foundation for the growth of democracy in modern China. For the New Confucian scholars, democracy is the institution that facilitates the utmost fulfillment of the spirit of public-mindedness, which is perfectly manifested in the Confucian utopian ideal of tianxia weigong (天下为公 all under Heaven belongs to the public). At the same time, the Confucian conception that sagehood is within the reach of every individual promotes the democratic idea that people are entitled to equal status because of their moral autonomy. Therefore, the New Confucian scholars strongly believe that the principles and values of democracy are in full compatibility with the Confucian ideal of ren (Chang, 1976, pp. 11-13).

From the perspective of New Confucianism, the problem of modernity is essentially about the question of how to understand the challenge of modernization in terms of Confucian moral-spiritual symbolism. To a large extent, the development of the neo-Confucian ideal of neisheng waiwang has furnished solidly a metaphysical foundation for the novel notions of science and democracy. Meanwhile, the Confucian doctrines of ren and xin-xing with innovated interpretations have lent useful insights into understanding the existential situations of human life. The quest for meaning has led the New Confucian scholars to see in Confucianism not just historical significance, but also a living tradition with moral and spiritual relevance that they feel they belong to. By interpreting away the blow of modernization, which is at odds with the moral idealism of Confucianism, the modern world has once again become meaningful for the New Confucian scholars. They can now appeal to Confucian principles and values not just for moral orientation but also for the explanation of life and of the world. As far as the all-explanatory framework of Confucianism goes, the integrity of humanity is safely guarded in terms of the notion of Heaven-human-unity, which prescribes that nature and society are a humanized totality.

VI. THE CONFUCIAN NOTION OF ZHIXING HEYI (UNITY OF KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION)

The Confucian ideal of organic and holistic education had been put into practice throughout the most part of pre-modern Chinese history, especially during the more Confucianized dynasties such as Han, Song, Ming, and Qing. Although Confucianism did not develop a system of speculative philosophy comparable to ancient Greek philosophy, its organic and holistic

vision on education was later endorsed and philosophized during the Song and Ming dynasties by the neo-Confucianism, a metaphysical innovation of classical Confucianism which paradoxically attempted to renounce its theorizing tendency.

For more than two thousand years, the vitality of Confucianism as an intellectual tradition precisely resides in its emphasis on practice rather than theory, on intuition rather than speculation, as is most explicitly registered by the neo-Confucian ideal of zhixing heyi 知行合一 (unity of knowledge and action).[9] The great neo-Confucian philosopher Wang Yangming (1472-1528) believed that there was no way to use knowledge after gaining it because knowledge and action were unified as one. Beyond knowledge there was no action, and beyond action there was no knowledge. In other words, any knowledge that had been gained then put into action was considered delusion or false. What was stressed in Wang's notion here was the simultaneity between knowledge and action, as can be seen from his saying:

> Zhi (knowledge) is the beginning of xing (action), while xing is the completion of zhi. With a full comprehension of this, a mere mention of zhi would be sufficient since xing is already embodied in it; a mere mention of xing would be sufficient since zhi is already embodied in it (Wang, 2015).

The neo-Confucian emphasis on the intuitive and empathic mode of thinking was further articulated in the theoretical construction of New Confucianism during the 20th century, for which the real import of Confucianism as the "religion of moral cultivation" (chengde zhi jiao 成德之教) (Mou, 1968, p. 6) consists in achieving the infinite and the perfect out of the finite existence of human kind. The ultimate reality –the source of the meaning of life– can only be seized as a personal, immediate, and transcendent experience by an exercise of the intuitive and empathic mind, or in New Confucian terms, tiren 體認 (experiential recognition) and zhenghui 証會 (understanding through personal witness) (Chang, 1976, p. 285). Correspondingly, the quintessence of the Confucian moral-spiritual system, according to the New Confucian thinkers, is its focus on practice and experience, whereas the theoretical construction is not endowed with primary significance.

If we may translate the neo-Confucian notion of zhixing heyi (unity and knowledge and action) and the New Confucian terms of tiren (experiential recognition) and zhenghui (understanding through personal witness) into

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9 The doctrine of *zhixing heyi* was established by Wang Yangming and was fundamental to the philosophy of the School of Mind of neo-Confucianism.

the terminology of education, the Confucian stance on modern education would still be marked by its insistence on the inseparability of knowledge and ethics. In other words, the instruction of practical knowledge has to be accompanied by the inculcation of ethics. Confucius had clearly stated this point in the Analects, "The exemplary person is not a utensil (junzi bu qi 君子不器)" (The Analects, Ch. Wei Zheng). This phrase can be interpreted as: junzi (morally accomplished person) cannot be indifferent to moral stance and merely depend on his knowledge for survival, but has to understand the ultimate meaning of life.

VII. THE ASSAULT OF MODERNITY AND THE INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF EDUCATION

Modern education, in East and West alike, is essentially resulted from the process of modernization taking place during the past three centuries, with the Industrial Revolution as the watershed. The rapid advances of technology and the magnitude of industrial production have so far shown no mercy and any predictable future for human kind is yet to be seen. The increasing demand of industrialization (digitalization in particular) has constantly dictated an infinite process of labor division and professionalization, and the modern ramifications of education are correspondent to this demand. What we have seen, sadly, is the increasingly accelerating pace of instrumentalization of education, a tendency that is taking place at the expense of none other than humanity itself. While we are conveniently provided with more and more material abundances, we seem to be drifting further away from a balanced combination of simple emotions such as joy, contentedness, happiness, etc.

To be sure, Karl Marx had poignantly articulated the notion of alienation more than a century ago: within the capitalist mode of production, the worker invariably loses the ability to determine life and destiny (Marx, 1977). While Marx drew a clear line between the worker and the bourgeoisie, with the latter victimizing the former, in modern times all human beings are indiscriminately becoming victims of the Leviathan: the unstoppable massive production of almost everything. Following Marx's theory of alienation, Herbert Marcuse formulated the concept of "one-dimensional man", criticizing both the capitalist production and the communist society as two forms of social repression. He argued that "advanced industrial society" created false needs, which integrated individuals into the existing system of production and consumption via mass media, advertising, industrial management, and contemporary modes of thought (Marcuse, 1991, xi). If we follow Marcuse's

thinking, Elon Musk´s claim to have 10 billion humanoid robots by 2040 serves as a perfect example of creating "false needs," especially so in that he cannot even attend his transgender daughter's emotional needs, the "real" needs. Besides Karl Marx and Herbert Marcuse, numerous philosophers, thinkers, intellectuals, writers, and activists have also lamented the brutal assault of modernity and the "dire" future of humanity, and have seen no solutions or remedies for the dead-end trajectory of society.

Following Karl Marx's cold German rationality, Max Weber's terminology of instrumental rationality and value rationality (Weber, 1978) –the former being popularly understood as means and tools, and the latter, goals and ends– didn't emerge as a surprise. To use Weber's terms, the process of professionalization (reads "prioritization of science and engineering") in modern education can be seen as the dominance of instrumental rationality over value rationality. In other words, modern education has been increasingly instrumentalized in order to cater to the demand of massive production and consumption that is taking place right now in our society. If we can borrow the neo-Confucian term zhixing heyi (unity of knowledge and action), then the ramifications of education can be regarded as the separation of zhi (knowledge) and xing (action), something the Confucian thinkers would vehemently oppose. Sadly, but true, the organic and holistic vision of Confucianism has hopelessly giving away to the cold machinery of instrumental rationality that is looming large behind every facet of modern education.

Even more ironically, New Confucianism since the 1950s has followed a path that is undermining its own claim of orientation to practice and experience. The general tendency of the philosophical school is increasingly characterized by its inclination to academize (xueyuan hua 學院化) and epistemize (zhishi hua 知識化) the intellectual heritage handed down by Confucius (Zheng, 2001, p. 293). To some extent, New Confucianism has actually become an "–ology" exclusive to the academic circle, shifting its focus from experiential recognition to metaphysics, from moral cultivation to theoretical perfection. In the end, an academized and epistemized Confucianism will stray from the real spirit of its own –the constant striving to achieve sagehood and the unity of Heaven and humanity– and thus violate its commitment to zhixing heyi (unity of knowledge and action).

Western civilization's highest ideal resides in the perception of the autonomous and free individual whose actions were given continuity by their reference to ultimate values (Kalberg, 1980, p. 1176). This ideal somehow coincides with the Confucian vision of tianren heyi (unity of Heaven and humanity), as exemplified in the action guidance of zhixing heyi (unity of

knowledge and action). It is in this sense that we may say human beings, no matter from East and West, North and South, are facing the same challenge of the alienating process dictated by the massive production and consumption powered by machinery, automation, and artificial intelligence. The cold fact that a man as powerful and rich as Elon Musk cannot even satisfy the simple and pristine need of his troubled child sends us penetrating chills.

After all, values are not demonstrable by the methods of science, but rather remain in the only reserved domain in which the autonomous individual confronts his or her "own demons". In this sense, even the "instrumentally efficient" rationalization cannot be said to be legitimate and valid as "progress" at the level of values. Humanities courses address some fundamental issues related to the meaning of our life and the future of humanity. They may not offer immediate answers but they at least furnish awakening questions. Just like knowledge cannot be separated from action, as Wang Yangming claimed, humanities education cannot be replaced or eliminated by the curriculum of science and engineering, and thus deserves a reserved and autonomous space in modern age. Regarding the confusion of the gender identity of his transgender daughter, Elon Musk hopelessly exclaimed, "I lost my son, essentially," because she was "dead, killed by the woke mind virus" (Ingram, 2024). Maybe this is a wake-up call coming at the right moment.

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