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PRACTICAL WISDOM IN CONFUCIAN PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT: Confucianism, since the time of Confucius, emphasizes “practical wisdom” as the realization of philosophy. This approach accentuates the practical aspects of wisdom rather than the analytical rationale of the intellect. Emphasis on practical wisdom persistently reinforces a moral foundation that is not differentiated from personal virtue. At the same time, practical wisdom in Confucianism stresses self-cultivation, or the complete transformation of the self, derived from the internal state of the heart/mind (*xin* 心). Finally, Confucius insists that practical wisdom must be transformed into practical action.

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1. MORAL VIRTUES

Based on these premises, “practical wisdom” is given more attention by contemporary philosophy. However this understanding should be differentiated from the term based on the Aristotelian root, *phronesis*, sometimes translated into Chinese as ‘an agent of prudence’ and more often translated as “wisdom or sagacity” (*ming zhi* “明智”), though “practical wisdom” is even better. This term is utilized in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI to refer to one of the five processes from which humanity can know truth. These five states of being include craft, science, knowledge, practical wisdom and wisdom (*sophia*). Certainly our contemporary understanding of “practical wisdom” has gone beyond these meanings discussed by Aristotle in ways which still include his original insights.¹

Originally, in the philosophy of Aristotle “wisdom” was accorded a higher status than “practical wisdom.” However Aristotle also pointed out, “That is why people say that Anaxagoras or Thales or that sort of person is wise, but not prudent, whenever they see that he is ignorant of what benefits himself. And so they say that what he knows is extraordinary, amazing, difficult, and divine, but useless, because it is not human goods that he looks for.”² It is obvious that “practical wisdom” (*phronesis*) occurs in the pursuit of what is beneficial, that is, the good in things and events. This establishes a strong relationship between practical wisdom and good practice. “Wisdom” (*zhihui* “智慧” *sophia*), in the Aristotelian sense embraces the analytics and the theoretical, as in his theoretical wisdom, which does not include practicalities and without practical capacity from the experiences of everyday life. This only includes the truth and falsity of phenomena without distinctions concerning good and evil.³

The original meaning of practical wisdom highlights the functions of intellectual cognition and rational deliberation with respect to virtuous practices. However the relationship between ethical virtues and practical wisdom within the Aristotelian position is not clear. Practical wisdom, which is a subset of intellectual virtue, is sometimes understood as utilitarian. Contemporary interpretation of practical wisdom leans toward the view that clever calculation is a departure from moral virtues and excellence of character.

The popular translation for *phronesis* is “wisdom or sagaciousness.” This narrow view is rather similar to the conception of *zhi* (智) in ancient Confucian philosophy. We naturally associate this definition with the oldest dictionary of China, the *Erya* in the chapters of *Shiyan* (尔雅释言) and *Shiming* (释名). The former completed around the third century B.C. said, “*Zhe* is *Zhi*.” (“哲, 智也”), which means wisdom, or the ability to know or understand. Ancient China used *Zhi* (wisdom) to explain the meaning of *zhe*, which is the same *zhe* that has been used in “*zhe xue*” (哲学) for the conception of “philosophy” for more than one hundred years. *Zhi* and *zhe* have the same meaning and can be viewed as a synonymous. Based on this notion, it can be said that, although China did not have the specific discipline of philosophy, the ancient Chinese during the early Axial Period understood philosophy as the school of the wise.⁴ The currency and interchangeable meanings of “*Zhi*” (智 rendered as wisdom or to be wise) is derived from *zhi* (知 rendered as knowledge or knowing) during the Spring and Autumn Period, where the former, which is derived from the latter, has the same meaning. Around the second century A.D., *Shiming* said, “There is nothing that a truly wise person does not know or understand.” (“智, 知也, 无所不知也”). Therefore *Zhi* is wisdom and *zhi* is knowledge; and wisdom is not ordinary knowledge, since it is of a higher class. (Note—The distinctions of the two *Zhi/zhi* symbols where the former is with a sun radical 日 and latter 知 is without.)

Wisdom (*Zhi*) is based on seeing according to *Yanzi* who said, “To know simply by seeing is wisdom.”⁵ And *Wuxing Pian* said, “To see something and to know it (or understand the situation) is wisdom.”⁶ These statements express the importance of experience as the foundation of wisdom rather than rational activities without experiences. From another perspective, the term “wisdom” in Chinese philosophy

prior to the fourth century referred only to knowing people. This reference relates people to phenomena, knowledge and capacities and not to cosmological or universal events and things. As *Shangshu* said, “Wisdom (*zhe* 哲) lies in the ability to know people.”⁷ *Lunyu* recorded the questions from students to Kongzi asking about knowledge, “The Master said, “Being able to know people.”⁸ Mengzi said, “Wisdom is for knowing the sages.”⁹ These statements refer to *zhe* and *Zhi* as persons who possess wisdom. These references to *zhe* and *Zhi* highlight “practical wisdom.”

Zhouyi specifically emphasizes the action of practical wisdom where wisdom expresses the idea that: “Only the sages know of advancing and retrieving, survival and annihilation without losing their integrity.”¹⁰ The aspects of knowing when to advance, to step back, to exist or to conclude do not deviate from goodness which is the action of practical wisdom. Therefore *zhe* (哲) as wise, *ming* (明) as the ability to understand and *Zhi* as a higher form of knowledge embraces the meaning of wisdom in the ancient tradition. Xunzi said, “Wise deliberation leads to choices.” This gives prominence to the function of selection and elimination conveyed in the practical wisdom of Aristotle.

Confucius, who discusses benevolence more often than wisdom, said, “Those who are wise are not misled.” This *Zhi* can be equated to wisdom or sagaciousness. *Zhongyong* speaks of the three ways of excelling in one’s character. Wisdom placed in the primary position before benevolence highlights the important position of wisdom within *Zhongyong*, which is similar to what Aristotle posits. *Zhongyong* has another important point in claiming that “The love of learning is close to acting wisely.” We know that although Confucius seldom discusses wisdom, yet he places the “love of learning” in a prominent position. Based on *Zhongyong*, Confucianism advocates the “love of learning” and “wisdom and to be wise.” This suggestion leads into “practical wisdom.” The importance of the “love of learning” in Confucius’s thought was prominently expressed through his discussion of the “six qualities and the six flaws.”

The Master said, “You, have you heard about the six qualities and the six attendant faults?” “No.” “Be seated and I shall tell you. To love benevolence without loving learning is liable to lead to foolishness. To love cleverness without loving learning is liable to lead to deviation from the right path. To love trustworthiness in word without loving learning is to lead to harmful behavior. To love forthrightness without loving learning is liable to lead to intolerance. To love courage without loving learning is liable to lead to insubordination. To love unbending strength without loving learning is liable to lead to indiscipline.” (*Analects* 17.8 1983, p.178)

This passage is very important. The fondness for being benevolent, clever, trustworthy, forthright, courageous, and unbending refers to virtues as well as virtuous actions. Generally, as virtuous conducts, such virtues express the meaning of individual virtue for human existence. However, these virtues are not independent of each other. They are mutually dependent, supported, and cultivated. Proper character of the gentleman and the sage is formed based on non-deviation from the path through mutual support and cultivation of these virtues. At the same time, within the structure of this mutual support and cultivation, unknowingly, the love of learning takes a prominent position.

The six virtues—benevolence, wisdom, trustworthiness, forthrightness, courage, and unbending strength—are ethical virtues. But Confucius emphasized that the pursuit of ethical virtues cannot exist without the love of learning. All the ethical virtues must be integrated to develop their accumulated functions, and they cannot depart from either the virtue or the practice of the love of learning. If there is a departure from the love of learning, these ethical virtues will deviate from the path and will not be upright. In this case, the ethical virtues and educational virtues (intellectual virtues) are combined. Based on this understanding, the function of the “love of learning” as a capacity accumulated from diligently learning from practical applications is the same or roughly the same as Aristotle’s “practical wisdom.” Aristotle claims each virtue must be mutually integrating, constraining, and supporting, as each single virtue by itself will be flawed at the time of practical application.¹¹ From this comparison, we can comprehend that “The love of learning is close to acting wisely.”¹²

However, the most important understanding of “wisdom or to be wise” within the classical Confucian mode of reflection is still Mengzi’s conception of “The mind of right and wrong is wisdom.” This idea distinguished “knowledge” and “understanding” in the discussion of right and wrong as a moral concept within his philosophy. This presupposition of practical wisdom is the deliberation between good and evil and the judgment of right and wrong. The conception of *Zhi* as wisdom or to be wise is one of the four main virtues of post Song Dynasty moral philosophy (benevolence, rightness, rites and wisdom), which derives from the continuation of this idea from Mengzi as established by Confucians of the Han Dynasty.¹³ This further differentiates Confucianism from Aristotle for whom practical wisdom is not a virtuous attitude but a capacity. Yet, compared to skills, practical wisdom is a form of virtue. Nevertheless Aristotle does not think that practical wisdom is an ethical virtue.

Yet, in the philosophy of Mengzi, wisdom is both an intellectual as well as an ethical virtue. Later, the Ming Dynasty philosopher Wang Yangming specifically argued for *liangzhi* (良知 real knowledge—in the Ivanhoe translation) as the mind of right and wrong to be the most fundamental virtue. Further, Aristotle believes that the way to happiness (*eudaimonia*) is through practical wisdom. He said that practical wisdom aims to bring benefits to people. This benefit is flourishing, which includes the good. However, the theory of virtues from Mengzi does not include any form of daily happiness or external perspective of goodness. It is completely focused on the perfection of morality. It is obvious that the practical wisdom of Confucianism is aimed at the moral virtues. The form of flourishing in Confucianism is similar to Kant’s moral flourishing, including external goodness and the flourishing of the body, which is not emphasized in Chinese philosophy, especially Confucianism.

II. SELF-CULTIVATION PRACTICES

However, Confucian practical wisdom not only advocates intellectual and practical virtues but also includes a rich variety of content.

First of all, Kongzi already clearly reveals the importance of practice in relationship with deliberation. This is exemplified by repeated discussions amongst

Kongzi's students to the effect that he tends to focus on human nature rather than on the Heavenly Way. Kongzi's emphasis on "ming" (名 naming) steers towards the political function of a position rather than the abstract conceptual meaning of the name (as in the West). Early Confucians already established this characteristic link between theory and practice and highlighted the development of practical wisdom as distinguished from theoretical wisdom. This focus reflects the ultimate Confucian concern for the moral goodness of the individual and the social group in aiming toward moral goodness for humanity. Further, Kongzi, who is concerned with the cosmological Heavenly Way, does not utilize "a theoretical approach" for such discussions aligned with the mode of human life. This Heavenly Way is based on his concern with theoretical wisdom applied to practices of everyday life. This primary position is thought to be the most important by all Confucians including those of the Song Dynasty and the New Confucians who followed. It is practical wisdom that is the most important and not theoretical (or intellectual) wisdom. Obviously, theoretical wisdom is important within the Confucian schemata. For example, *Zhouyi* functions as a foundational understanding for the Confucian worldview, which represents the cosmological interaction between the transformative essences and actual reality. This is a main concern in Confucian philosophy. Yet, under the framework of "tianrenheyi" (天人合一—Unity of Heaven and Human or the supernal heaven and humanity), the concern for cosmological and theoretical aspects aims at practical wisdom and is not an isolated topic.

On the other hand, Confucian practical wisdom ultimately supports wisdom and virtues, since wisdom and moral good align without differentiation. The practical wisdom of Aristotle advocates rational moral practices. This form of rational function is experienced through the selection of appropriate action with an eye towards moral goodness. This special feature of practical wisdom mobilizes rational functions for specific application. The manifestation of virtue ethics in the form of action cannot depart from practical wisdom. It follows that all right action is the product of these two aspects within Aristotle. Aristotle divided virtues into ethical virtue and intellectual virtue where the latter is divided into five categories of which practical wisdom is one. He said, "Clearly, then, practical wisdom (prudence) is a virtue, not a craft knowledge."¹⁴ Practical wisdom as understood by Confucianism is not skillful mode of thought, and not mathematical calculation, and specifically not functional methodology. It also does not belong to the category of utilitarian principles. Wisdom not only concerns personal needs and everyday livelihood¹⁵; it is also a form of wisdom based on moral practice. Aristotle's discussion of practical wisdom is unclear since on the one hand, he said practical wisdom must be related to moral goodness,¹⁶ and on the other hand, he also said deliberation is the greatest form of utility of practical wisdom.¹⁷ He said moral virtue steers the correctness of the goal of activities while practical wisdom allows us to choose the correct method to manifest these goals. This correctness is not related to moral virtues but rather to the rationale. Based on this interpretation, practical wisdom is moral virtue and cannot provide the goal of moral goodness. It provides no more than the specific practical method. Certainly, Aristotle, in highlighting the departure from moral virtues, does not allow practical wisdom to grapple with the means. He posits the

need for practical wisdom to be guided by ethical virtue for completion in rightness of action. Nevertheless, a moral practice of integrity requires both practical wisdom and ethical virtue. Virtue ethics is not Aristotelian. It is a Thomistic interpretation of Aristotle. Therefore, we can see that for Aristotle practical wisdom is a rational tool for practice and not action guided by personal virtue.

As we see, the philosophy of Aristotle is directed towards “doing”¹⁸ by taking up appropriate decisions for action. This does not include the discussion of “being” which is different from Confucianism. The Confucian interpretation of practical wisdom is mainly focused on self-cultivation where “being” equates to “learning to be a person of integrity.”

In other words, practical wisdom in Greek philosophy highlights “becoming something” while Confucian philosophy emphasizes “being a true person.” Therefore, from the perspective of Confucianism, Aristotle’s practical wisdom is not a holistic form of virtue ethics. Aristotle’s practical wisdom, though different from science and skills, is after all a form of external rationality directed towards action. Yet, this does not include the so-called internal aspects of conscious understanding of self-cultivation of virtues. Based on this, Aristotle’s practical wisdom is the rationale behind “doing,” in relation to a value system based on rational thinking (cognitive aspects). Hence, it cannot be a form of ethical virtue based on practical wisdom. Here, practical wisdom is only a functional tool rather than a virtue ethics that begs for true moral goodness.

Here, we can borrow a quotation from Aristotle, “For virtue makes the goal correct, and practical wisdom (prudence) makes the things promoting the goal correct.”¹⁹ This statement should be able to provide detailed guidelines for practical wisdom. Yet Aristotle is not always consistent in his views.

Contemporary Chinese philosopher, Fung Youlan pointed out that the enhancement of the spiritual state is the goal of practical wisdom. The function of philosophy from the Chinese perspective is to enhance or transform this spiritual state through a completely new form of re-visioning the world. The enhancement of the spirit, the harmonization, the freeing of and the pacification of the internal state, as well as the transformation of the spiritual self are the fundamental goals of (everyday) practice. Practical wisdom represents not only the philosophical goal in the enhancement of the spiritual state but also the exploration of various cultivation methodologies in accomplishing this goal. The Confucian form of spiritual transformation is the cultivation of the spirit through moral cultivation different from the dialogue and meditation (starting from the practical) of Ancient Greece.

Therefore, an important distinction for this form of practical understanding does not lie in the knowledge outside of oneself, so as to transform the external world. Rather, it highlights the internal subjective perspectives for change. Reaching the ultimate good as the ultimate fundamental goal of practical action (as the highest good of Aristotle) is established by “The self-sufficiency of reaching the ultimate good.” from *The Great Learning* (Daxue [大学]). Therefore Confucian practical wisdom includes the self-transformative elements of the self-cultivation practice following the completion of personal character as advocated in *The Great Learning*. (Similar to Aristotle’s highest goods.)

There are tools to establish these special features to begin this state of moral good in Confucian practical wisdom. They include: being watchful over oneself when alone; cultivating uprightness within the heart/mind; possessing sincere intentions, maximizing knowledge and investigating things. Amongst these, the maximization of knowledge broadens the development of practical wisdom, while the investigation of things (*gewu* 格物) leads toward moral good and eliminating evil, which allows self-sufficiency in benevolence and application of reverence to conduct and action in specific situations.

The pursuit of moral goodness with sincere intentions is similar to the love of beautiful colors. This implies an internal state of self-awareness. Sincere intention is the spirit of self-cultivation that is watchful of oneself when alone. This sincerity is internal contemplation while action is external. In summary the most important aspect of Confucian practical wisdom is the self-cultivation of the internal aspects of the heart/mind (in both the cognitive and affective sense).

Although Confucian practical wisdom embraces the conception of governing the nation to bring harmony to all, the manifestation of the transformation and restructuring of political circumstances does not depart from the core values of one's private desires, which should not be imposed on others. This message is clearly discussed within *The Great Learning* which says that from the emperor to the ordinary person the necessity of self-cultivation is fundamental.

Cultivation of the person is the basic path to enhance the accumulation of practical wisdom. The training of character is the most important practical aspect of Confucianism. *Zhongyong* said, "The cultivation of the person is to be done through the Way."²⁰ If one cultivates his personal life, the Way will be established.²¹ Furthermore, *Zhongyong* highlights that a gentleman does not depart from human life just as the foolish husband and wife know ordinary life. Therefore, "The Way is not far from man. When a man pursues the Way and yet remains away from man, his course cannot be considered the Way."²²

Practical wisdom requires the application of rationality, which does not deviate from the relational function and action of daily life. *Zhongyong* further posits, "maintaining the mean at any time."²³ This "maintaining" is "within the event," "along with the time," "do the right thing." It focuses on the individual event and things, and the specific situation. It is an attitude of the proper application of practical wisdom. Reaching the Way of the Mean of the sage is the ultimate journey for the person since integrity is never tired of the Mean and does not reach being virtuous without reflection.

Zhongyong develops practical wisdom as "careful reflection and clear deliberation," which is different from Aristotle. His careful reflection is the forthright consideration of the specific situation as concerns moral goodness applied to the review of action and conduct. This is different from the review of the self, based on self-reflection of the internal heart-mind.

Confucian practical wisdom is also referred to as the "School of Self-Completion." "Self" is understood through the development and transformation of the self where the goal of "completing the self" is the cultivation of the spirit and the nurturing of virtues. This ultimate effort in spiritual cultivation of virtuous

development is what the Christians liken to spirituality. *Zhongyong* says: “Sincerity/*Cheng* is not only the completion of one’s own self, since it is that by which all things are completed. The completion of the self means humanity (benevolence). The completion of all things means wisdom. These are the character of nature, and they are the Way in which the internal and the external are united. Therefore whenever it is employed, everything done is right.”²⁴

Based on this narrow interpretation of *Zhi* (wise or sagacious), one can say that it leads towards the completion of things in the same way as in ancient Greece. However, in the broader general sense the meaning of practical wisdom is the unity of completion in things and the self. This includes the sincerity of completing oneself and the wisdom for completing things. The completion of things embraces wisdom as related to the appropriate handling of the situation (at the time). This latter aspect is precisely the similarity between Aristotle’s conception of practical wisdom and *Zhongyong*’s Way of the Mean. However, the Confucian sense of completion of things is built on the foundation of appropriate situational choice derived through the Confucian view of practical wisdom as based on the self-completion form of self-cultivation.

III. UNITY OF KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION

The specific feature of Confucian practical wisdom is the theme concerned with practice. Because of this the Confucian standpoint includes the broad understanding of practical wisdom leaning towards self-cultivation. The highlight of virtuous self-cultivation is a fundamental difference between the Aristotelian and Confucian sense of virtue ethics. This perspective results in a conception of philosophy as a life style where practical wisdom is not only the wisdom of doing the appropriate action under certain circumstances but also is a form of holistic wisdom intended as a means to face the whole of one’s life. Further, the practical wisdom of Aristotle only addresses the rational guidelines for specific actions but true practical wisdom must be able to address the relationship between knowledge and action.

Therefore, the accurate function of practical wisdom could be said to manifest “the virtuous knowledge” (from Heaven) connected with situational demands through the promise of values transformed into right action. Broadly speaking, it is not only the knowledge of the virtuous described in all the classics leading to reality but also must be transformed from practical wisdom into practical action.

The Confucian conception of “practical experience” actually is the commonly connoted sense of practical experience based on the manifestation of moral self-cultivation. *Zhongyong* states, “Study it extensively, inquire into it accurately, think it over carefully, sift it clearly, and practice it earnestly.”²⁵ This includes “practice it earnestly” which is an important aspect of practical wisdom within *Zhongyong*. The author often considers the inter-relationship between “zhong yong” (Mean and function) and wisdom (*Zhi*), which includes moral virtue as well as practical wisdom. Further practical wisdom must include understanding of expression and practical action on the basis of the self-knowledge of virtues.

The concept of practice in Confucianism after the Song Dynasty is widely used, the word “*Shijian* (practice)” is often used with the word “*Gongxing*” (personally practice).²⁶ Neo-Confucianism highlights “the learning for sagehood to pay more attention for the purpose of practice” and “investigating principles for extending knowledge is to examine oneself in the process of practice.”²⁷ Experts from the Northern Song Dynasty Confucian in later history saw practical learning as core focus.²⁸ The characteristic of the Confucianism of the Southern Song Dynasty called “practice without saying a word”²⁹ was summarized by Zhu Xi’s philosophy as “learn in order to practice personally what one preaches.”³⁰ These historical experts believe that the Neo-Confucianism of the Song Ming period is “to practice for the purpose.”

Liang Shuming, the contemporary New Confucian, utilizes “practical experience” to aim at intellectual wisdom. He posits four forms of epistemological truth: science, philosophy, art and self-cultivation. Self-cultivation is intended to build and to construct; to support and grasp; to contain and cultivate and to give birth to and to foster the internal aspects. He further said, “Kongzi regards reflection and philosophy as internal aspects of practical experience. But these internal aspects are only derivatives of daily experience rather than developed from theoretical ideas. Kongzi encourages his students to self-reflect with respect to internal substance and quietly acquire this knowledge.”³¹

He regarded Kongzi’s and Mengzi’s views about cultivating the self as empty talk, inapplicable to actual life and nothing more than a travesty. It is imperative that the learning of Confucianism directly and intimately embody the highest possibilities for human beings and reflect subtlety on how to attain these in order to fulfill human nature.³² Therefore what he understood to be practical experience is also the internal aspects of practical experience. This relates to the Confucian understanding of philosophy. Based on Liang’s understanding it is not the Western conception of “*sophia*.” It is “a form of scholarly endeavor to enhance the self by internal cultivation” as a wisdom that highlights transformation by cultivation as an enhancement of one’s life through practical wisdom. He holds, “That which has been considered in the ancient classics as philosophy is based on precisely what is considered practical activities that are reflected internally.”³³ Confucians aspire to complete the self and to complete other things as well; in later times, this is simply referred to as *being human*. And so, they understand the *practice* of philosophy to be “an inward reflection upon the self”; this is how Confucians comprehend philosophy.

The Ming Dynasty philosopher, Wang Yangming pointed out that “Everything that is referred to as ‘acting’ is simply the actual performance of some affair. If one actually engages in the effort of study, inquiry, reflection, and discrimination, then study, inquiry, reflection, and discrimination are examples of acting. Study is studying some affair; inquiry is inquiring about some affair; reflection and discrimination are reflecting upon and discriminating in regard to some affair. And so, acting is studying, inquiring, reflecting, and discriminating. If you say that you first study, inquire, reflect, and discriminate about some affair and afterward you go on to act, how do you carry out this initial study, inquiry, reflection, and discrimination while

suspended in a vacuum? When it is time to act, how can you carry out study, inquiry, reflection, and discrimination? The intelligent, conscious, refined, and discerning aspects of acting are knowing. The authentic, direct, sincere, and substantial aspects of knowing are acting.³⁴

The practical wisdom of Aristotle leans towards careful reflection and clear deliberation for action. Wang Yangming said, "To reflect and deliberate is the reflection and deliberation about the doing of this matter."³⁵ The views of Aristotle and Wang Yangming are similar. The highlight of practical wisdom as the clear analysis of action as well as the necessity of knowledge, which must be united with action, is expressed through these two statements: "The aspects of clear analysis (understanding, conscious, refined and observing) of action is to be wise." "The aspects of true consistency: "Knowledge in its genuine and earnest aspects is action."³⁶

In ancient Chinese philosophy before Kongzi, the conception of "virtue conduct" was used and at times equated to virtue. The ancient conception of "virtuous conduct" does not distinguish between the internal and the external. It sweepingly discusses virtuous quality and conduct while emphasizing virtue conduct.

Actually, early Confucianism further distinguishes the question of virtue from that of Aristotle. That is, the Mencian collection is concerned with the question of "virtue" while Kongzi and other early Confucians emphasize the concept of "virtue conduct."

The presupposition is the unity of virtue and action and knowledge and action. From this perspective, virtue is not only regarded as an internal quality but also an accentuation of external behavior. Confucian practical wisdom must pinpoint the meaning of experience. Wisdom is not only the selection of a choice or the process of reasoning. Knowledge must concern action, be related to action and be fulfilled by action. Knowing which is not put into action is a case of weak intention where basically practical wisdom has not been developed enough or broadened enough and has not reached its "truth."

As discussed earlier, if "the maximization of knowledge" is to extend practical wisdom as posited by Wang Yangming of the Ming Dynasty, then *Zhi* or *zhi* is *liangzhi* (real knowledge), which is the combination of knowledge and action. From the standpoint of Confucianism practical wisdom is the same as virtue ethics as well as moral knowledge. Therefore practical wisdom must include a combination of knowledge and action.

Heidegger calls upon the resolution of one's own actual existence to return to Being by equating practical wisdom with real knowledge (*liangzhi*). Therefore, the Confucian understanding of philosophy is not concerned with transcending emotional scope, or with the theoretical construction of abstract rationality or logical exposition. The Confucian philosophical view appears not to be what Heidegger criticizes as the "theoretical attitude." Confucianism emphasizes a life world where life is experienced and practiced. This practical life is centered on the human being.

Certainly, despite its emphasis on practical wisdom, Confucianism highlights self-cultivation. It accelerates social harmony and political reform by not deviating from affairs and matters, and by energizing social and political attitudes and practices. This is within the parameter of the eight entries from *The Great Learning*

“Peace all under Heaven with good government of the nation.”³⁷ This is also similar to the broader understanding Aristotle’s view of practical wisdom within his political philosophy, which will not be discussed in this paper.³⁸

NOTES

1. Hung 1997, pp.4–5.
2. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1141b.
3. *NE*, 1339a.
4. Zhang 2008, p. 34.
5. Yanzi 1962, p. 471.
6. Wu Xing 2007, p. 102.
7. *Shangshu* 皋陶谟 2014, p. 32.
8. *Analects* 颜渊篇 1983, p. 139.
9. *Mencius* 公孙丑上 1983, p. 234.
10. *Zhouyi* 乾·文言 2011, p. 96.
11. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (*NE*), translated by Miao Litian, p. 132.
12. *Zhongyong* 20, 1983, p. 29.
13. Pan 2009, pp. 91, 87.
14. *NE*, 1140b.
15. *NE*, 1142a.
16. *NE*, 1140b.
17. *NE*, 1141b.
18. 1141b15 and 1144b25 also see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (*NE*) trans. Miao Litian, pp. 123, 132.
19. *NE*, 1144a.
20. *Zhongyong*, trans. Chan, p. 104.
21. *Zhongyong*, trans. Chan, p. 105.
22. *Zhongyong*, trans. Chan, p. 100.
23. *Zhongyong*, trans. Chan, p. 99.
24. *Zhongyong*, trans. Chan, p. 108.
25. *Zhongyong*, trans. Chan, p. 107.
26. Song Yuan Xue An “SYXA” 31.
27. SYXA 59.
28. SYXA 73.
29. SYXA 86.
30. SYXA 91.
31. Liang 1993, Vol. 7, p. 498.

32. Liang 1993, Vol. 7, p. 159.
33. Liang 1993, Vol. 7, p. 756.
34. Wang, Vol. 6, trans. Ivanhoe 2009, pp. 123–124.
35. Wang, Vol. 6, trans. Ivanhoe 2009, p. 123.
36. Wang, Vol. 6, trans. Ivanhoe 2009, p. 123.
37. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics (NE)* trans. Miao Litian, p. 123.
38. This paper was translated into English by Elizabeth Woo Li, Peking University, Beijing, China

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