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Toward Spiritually Sensitive Social Work Scholarship: Insights from Classical Confucianism

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O Abstract

This article develops a proposal for a spiritually sensitive approach to social work scholarship by drawing on insights from classical Chinese Confucian philosophy. Confucianism is used as a source of inspiration because it has developed an elaborate vision of scholarship that presents a contrast to taken-for-granted assumptions in contemporary Western academia so as to provoke a fresh perspective. First, debates about ways to define and measure scholarship in social work are considered. Second, fundamental Confucian ideas about the nature, purposes, and methods of scholarship, including inquiry and teaching for service, are presented through a philosophical analysis of the major classical Confucian texts. Third, implications for spiritually sensitive social work scholarship are presented through discussion and poetry designed to encourage further reflection and debate in the profession.

O Key words

Spirituality, Scholarship, Social work education, Confucianism

What Is Scholarship?

Although social work educators, especially those at research-oriented institutions, are expected to engage in scholarly work, the meaning of "scholarship" in the field of social work is rarely addressed. Often higher educational

institutions' standards for quantity and type of publication, as determined by promotion and tenure procedures, drive faculty members' scholarly activities without providing a coherent philosophical conception of scholarship. Scholarship in this context is often operationalized as rate of academic publication and grant acquisition that may or may not be related to teaching and service. In this author's experience on both sides of the review process (reviewed and reviewer), commonly there are expectations for quality of productivity in line with the mission of the social work profession. However, I have never encountered an explicit, clear articulation of what a scholar or scholarship should be beyond quantity of production of peer-reviewed publications.

At the institutional level, articles continue to appear evaluating and ranking social work programs nationally based on productivity rates in social work and non-social work academic journals and national reputation (e.g., Bloom & Klein, 1995; Green, 1998; Green, Baskind, & Conklin, 1995; Johnson & Hall, 1995; Kirk & Corcoran, 1995). These articles placed more emphasis on quantifiable, technical, and extrinsic aspects of scholarship than on intrinsic qualities and values of scholarship.

An exploratory study of the views of deans and directors of social work programs' about leadership identified that most respondents

believed professional and academic leadership should involve intrinsic qualities, such as proactivity, congruence with professional values and ethics, support for empowerment of individuals and communities, communication abilities, participatory leadership style, and altruism (Rank & Hutchison, 2000). There was also an extrinsic concern to promote a positive public image of social work. In regard to doctoral programs, which are expected to generate scholars as potential leaders, the most common leadership content advocated was research; ethics was least often mentioned. This latter finding seems consistent with the productivity-focused studies.

Several authors have expressed views similar to those on leadership in the Rank and Hutchison study, proposing that social work education and scholarship should be evaluated with a strong emphasis on their quality in relation to contribution to growth of students and consistency with professional mission. They caution about reliance on productivity and elite reputation alone for evaluation of scholars and social work programs (Canda, 1989; Kreuger & Meinert, 1993; Longres, 1995; Marsh & Weick, 1992; Reamer, 1993). As a way out of dichotomizing between quantity and quality measures of scholarship, Weick (Marsh & Weick, 1992) emphasized the positive potential for synergy between teaching, research, and service consistent with professional mission. Weick's proposal for synergy among teaching, research, and service is promising, but a paradigm for what this might look like has not yet emerged. Perhaps part of the difficulty is that academicians too often

take for granted the meaning of scholarship. The question, "What should it mean to be a social work scholar?" needs to be examined in order to increase congruence between our profession's scholarly activities and our professional mission and values. Perhaps it would help to step outside the confines of typical academic thinking in order to get a fresh vantage on this question.

Toward a Vision of Scholarship as a Spiritual Path

This article examines this question deeply and philosophically through a cross-cultural approach in order to encourage more reflection and dialogue among students, educators, and researchers about how social work might re-envision the path of the scholar. Hall (1977), an anthropologist, said that one of the best ways to gain fresh perspective and critical insight into one's culture is to immerse oneself in another cultural context and then to look back at one's own. Accordingly, this article will use insights from classical Chinese Confucian philosophy about scholarship to stimulate a reconsideration of contemporary academic scholarship. Confucianism has made the role of the scholar a central aspect of concern for more than 2,500 years, so it has many insights relevant to our question (Chen, 1993; Chung, 1992; Ivanhoe, 2000; Tu, 1979). This article will fulfill three purposes: first and primarily, to formulate implications for a vision of contemporary social work scholarship; second, to present specific ideals and activities associated with Confucian scholarship for personal reflection by the reader;

and third, to introduce fundamental ideas of Confucianism that may be helpful in understanding aspects of traditional culture for clients influenced by Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese backgrounds (Chu & Carew, 1990; Chung, 1992, 2001).

Although this article respectfully utilizes ideas from classical Confucianism, it is not intended to promote traditional Confucian beliefs and practices *per se*. Rather it uses ideas from Confucianism to stimulate rethinking of contemporary social work scholarship. Readers are invited to step for a short while into a worldview that may seem antiquated or foreign to some, so that they can re-envision what is possible and desirable in the more familiar and taken-for-granted contemporary social work context. This is a challenge pertinent to social work students and educators both in the West and in East Asia, where current social work scholarship has been strongly influenced by European and American academic and scientific assumptions (Canda & Canda, 1996; Park Seung-Hee, personal communication, 2001).

This discussion builds on a rapidly growing movement in social work to develop a spiritually sensitive approach for theory, practice, and education (Bullis, 1996; Canda & Furman, 1999; Canda, Nakashima, Burgess, & Russel, 1999; Ellor, Netting, & Thibault, 1999; Van Hook, Hugen, & Aguilar, 2001). Canda (1988a & b) and Canda and Furman (1999) developed the expression "spiritually sensitive social work" to refer to social work that manifests social workers' abiding commitment to self-awareness and growth, reflecting on the fundamental purpose and goals of

human life, understanding our most significant motivations for service, honoring the diverse religious and nonreligious spiritual perspectives of those we serve, and developing knowledge and skills for helping people to achieve their highest potentials and aspirations. In their view, social work can be regarded as a spiritual path of service. Similarly, Yao (2000) has characterized the Confucian way of scholarship as a spiritual path because it connects the purposes and methods of scholarship to a vision of the moral purpose of human life and our potential for harmonious relationships with each other in society and the cosmos.

Confucius (*Kongzi* or *Kong Fuzi*,¹ 551–479 B.C.E.) drew on wisdom of past sages in order to critique and renovate his society. In the following centuries Confucian philosophy elaborated a system of social ethics and ritual forms based upon a holistic cosmology that promoted harmony between heaven, earth, and humanity. This article is based upon the ideas of early Confucianism as embodied in the Chinese classics (the so-called Five Classics and Four Books) that formed the basis of scholarly study and ideals in China and other East Asian countries influenced by China for hundreds of years.²

Principles for Philosophical Use of Confucian Ideas

Most of the Confucian ideas used in this article date back hundreds to thousands of years and originated in China.³ Three principles were used to guide their application to contemporary social work: adaptability, learning from the past, and learning for mutual benefit.

Adaptability

First, there is support in classical Confucianism for the flexible and creative use of traditional ideas across time and places. Although Confucianism is sometimes negatively stereotyped as a rigid and socially regressive ideology, the classical writings advise that priority must be placed on the principles behind the teachings and the sincerity motivating their practice rather than on the forms themselves. Forms should be performed sincerely and meticulously in accord with propriety; but they should be adapted to circumstances according to human need. Confucius complained about superficial performance of rites and music (Analects, book 17, verse 11).⁴ The Record of Rites also emphasizes the importance of flexibility and timeliness in response to such conditions as the material limitations of the poor, times of economic crisis for a nation, historical changes, the social position of a person, variations in natural cycles of seasons, and different places and times. For example, a chapter of the Record of Rites, Ceremonial Usages (book 7, section 4, verse 9), said that if an observance passes scrutiny as correct, although it was not used by ancient kings, it may be adopted. Confucianism has always been a living and dynamic tradition, changing according to historical period and cultural context (Chen, 1993).

Learning from the past

Confucius described himself as a transmitter of past wisdom who sought to renovate the present and leave a legacy for the future (Chen, 1993). The Confucian classics are full of historical examples of personal misfortune and

social calamity due to failure to live in harmony with our true nature. These are reminders of mistakes to avoid. Likewise, the classics are filled with anecdotes, advice, and examples about virtue and ideal qualities of individuals and society in order to give a positive direction for life. This article uses the positive contributions of Confucian thought and also considers what we can learn from its past limitations and misuses.

Learning for Mutual Benefit

Canda and Furman (1999) warn about the simplistic and inappropriate ways that teachings and practices from various religious traditions might be used in social work. In accord with their cautions, this article is based on teachings that are in the public domain as well as those that current proponents of Confucian philosophy encouraged the author to share. Development of this manuscript has involved guidance by and collaboration with scholars of Confucian philosophy who are interested in cross-cultural sharing. It is not the author's intent to impose Euro-American cultural interpretations or agendas on East Asian ideas or peoples. Nor is it my attempt to romanticize or uncritically import traditional East Asian ideas. Rather, this article is motivated by a sincere desire to increase cross-cultural exchange and learning between East and West for mutual benefit. As social work has become an international profession, ideas in this article may be of interest to social work scholars in various parts of the world who explore philosophical, moral, and spiritual issues.

Limitations

This study has three major limitations. First, the vast, complex, and varied Confucian tradition must be simplified in this brief presentation. The reader can refer to primary and secondary sources in the references section as well as Internet sites for more information. While the ideas chosen for this article are pervasive in Confucianism, the reader should keep in mind that there is much variation, debate, subtlety, and profundity that cannot be represented here.

Second, reliance on English translations of the classics poses the danger of misrepresenting original Chinese language meanings. In order to guard against this, multiple translations and commentaries were compared whenever possible in order to deepen understanding. Key concepts and drafts of manuscripts were discussed with experts in Confucian philosophy. However, any mistakes are solely the author's responsibility.

Finally, the implications section of the paper relies on the author's ability to extrapolate insights and suggestions from Confucian ideas for contemporary social work. It is intended to generate discussion rather than to dictate conclusions.

The Classical Confucian Path of Scholarship

Scholarship as Service

Confucius (551–479 B.C.E.) transformed a long-standing tradition of *ru* (ceremonialists and teachers) into a path of scholarship committed to apply the wisdom of ancient sages and exemplars to the renovation of society during a period of social turmoil and, in his view, moral decline (Yao,

2000). In Chinese, the written character for "path" (*dao*) can mean a path, a way of human life, or the cosmic order. In Confucianism, the *dao* of scholarship is a way for a genuine human being to live in harmony with the universe. Confucius looked back to exemplars of virtuous government during the times of legendary sage kings, such as Yao and Shun (prior to 2200 B.C.E.), and the early Zhou dynasty (which began about 1100 B.C.E.) in order to critique his society. Mencius (372–289 B.C.E.), the second greatly influential Confucian teacher, also decried moral decline in society and political ineptitude of rulers; therefore he sought to carry on Confucius's mission. During the Han dynasty of China (206 B.C.E.–8 C.E.), Confucianism was adopted as the state ideology. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, Confucian scholar-officials were influential in shaping and implementing formal education and the principles and practices of government in China. Similarly, Confucianism influenced the development of Korean society for about 2,000 years and was adopted as state ideology throughout the Choson dynasty (1392–1910). Confucianism imparted a strong respect for learning throughout much of East and Southeast Asia that continues to the present time, especially learning that would contribute to the well-being of families and society (Chen, 1993; Chu & Carew, 1990; Reid, 2000; Yao, 2000). While Confucianism promoted education for the intrinsic merit of personal development, scholars were expected to act for the benefit of others in the context of the inter-relational and co-responsible nature of human beings and human society (Tu, 1985, 1989).

The Confucian path of scholarship is

based on a holistic approach to cultivating the whole person—physically, mentally, spiritually, socially—in order to allow virtuous human nature to sprout and grow and extend its benefits to all people (Chen, 1993; Chung, 1992, 2001; Chung & Haynes, 1993). This is a spiritually sensitive vision because it integrates the whole person in relationship with all for the well-being of all through the pursuit of understanding the fundamental meaning and nature of human life. As the first line of the Great Learning puts it, the purposes of learning are to manifest virtue, to renovate society, and to live in accord with a standard of excellence. If jade is not carved, it cannot be formed into a vessel for use; likewise, people should learn old and new knowledge well in order to live in harmony with the world (Rites: book 16, verse 2; book 28, section 2, verse 39; book 39, verses 1–4). When the scholar cultivates virtue and knowledge, one is able to share it to promote good government (Rites, book 38, verses 3 and 15). The Classic of History includes numerous admonitions for new kings and ministers to learn humbly and sincerely from the wisdom of the past in order to serve people well. For example, a king advised a newly appointed marquis: “Finally, enlarge your thoughts to the comprehension of all Heavenly principles, and virtue will be richly displayed in your person” (History, part 5, book 9, verse 5). To put this in contemporary academic terms, research and inquiry are for the purpose of serving society by applying what is learned to teaching and social service. Inquiry and teaching are inextricable, and both are for service. This holistic path of scholarship will be presented according to the Confucian perspective on inquiry as service and

on teaching as service.

Scholarly Inquiry

The Confucian path of scholarly inquiry is described as investigation of things starting with the cultivation of virtue inherent in the self. Knowledge should grow up from introspective inquiry and then move to the exploration of outside things. This article will first examine introspective inquiry (self-cultivation) and then consider inquiry into the outer world.

Introspective inquiry and cultivation of virtue

The Great Learning (Rites, book 39, verses 1–6) explains that cultivation of virtue in the person is the root of all education and welfare. *Cultivation of self means developing awareness of and manifesting virtues that are inherent in human nature, of which benevolence (ren) is primary. Ren is variously translated as benevolence, human heartedness, love, humaneness, and humanity. The Chinese character for ren depicts a person with two marks indicating connectedness with others. Confucianism emphasizes ren as the prime and core virtue, since it inheres in the inter-relational nature of human beings, the heavenly endowed heart of love, and the maturely developed sense of co-responsibility (Chen, 1993; Tu, 1979). The cardinal virtues are benevolence, wisdom, righteousness, and propriety. Related virtues are courage, filial piety (respect for parents and elders), fraternal responsibility, harmony, sincere friendship, and kindness (Chen, 1993; Rites: book 6, section 2, verse 1; book 24, verses 13–19). The virtues can be summarized as*

respecting oneself and loving others.

Heaven (*tian*) endows human nature with virtue. In classical Confucianism, heaven was not given a strict theological meaning. The concept of heaven could be used literally and metaphorically to refer to sky, a spiritual power overseeing natural life and human behavior, the director of fate, and the sacred source of human nature (Chen, 1993; Yao, 2000). Confucius did not talk much about heaven, but he regarded it with great respect. Indeed, he described his own process of self-cultivation and maturation in relation to heaven: "At fifteen I set my heart on learning; at thirty I took my stand; at forty I came to be free from doubts; at fifty I understood the Decree of Heaven; at sixty my ear was attuned; at seventy I followed my heart's desire without overstepping the line" (Analects, book 2, verse 4).

Mencius explained the virtue imbued in human nature by heaven through his concept of the mind. The Chinese character for mind (*shim*) designates the interaction of thinking and feeling centered in the heart. Mencius stated that the route to understanding heaven is through understanding our nature as expressed in the mind (Mencius, book 7, part A, verse 1). The mind is the aspect of the person that thinks and understands, so it is the greatest part (book 6, part A, verse 15). Mind has four constituent heart qualities that are linked to the four cardinal Confucian virtues: benevolence linked to feelings of care and compassion; righteousness linked to feelings of shame and conscience; propriety linked to a sense of respect and good comportment; and wisdom linked to the ability to discriminate right from wrong (book 6, part A, verse 6). Mencius said

that these four parts of our nature are as essential as the four limbs of the body. All one needs do is nurture them and they will blaze like fire or spring out like water. When we nurture them, they grow from the root in the mind to flourish in noble appearance of the body and behavior (book 7, part A, verse 21). Naturally, because of this virtuous heart-mind, we detest doing harm to others and feel commiseration with those who suffer (book 2, part A, verse 6; book 7, part B, verse 31). Naturally, we are pleased by clear reason and righteousness (book 6, part A, verses 7 and 11).

Unfortunately, when we do not use the mind diligently, it can become unruly as though overrun by brambles (Mencius, book 7, part B, verse 21). If we neglect or abuse the mind, it becomes like a mountain stripped barren of trees (book 6, part A, verse 8). If we allow appetites to become excessive, the mind can go to ruin (book 7, part A, verse 27). The sure way to keep the mind whole and free from anxiety is to love and honor all people (book 4, part B, verse 28).

In the Confucian sense, virtue (*te*) is a moral force closely related to the vital energy (*qi*) that pervades the human body and the cosmos. Mencius said that keeping the will focused on the essentials of virtue lets *qi* grow and flow naturally like a flood of water (Mencius, book 2, part A, verse 2). He advised that one nourishes vital energy by devotion, not forcing it or neglecting it. Smoothly flowing *qi* encourages good health and provides vigor for a life of service.

The Confucian classics describe various methods for introspective inquiry based on nurturing the virtues within the mind and guarding against influences from the environment that might

distort the mind. The Great Learning explains that the benevolent self can be cultivated by daily effort to overcome one's biases, to keep one's mind present in the moment, to attend consistently to the sincerity of one's thoughts even when alone, to allow no self-deception, and to treat others as one would wish to be treated oneself with the loving care of a mother for her child (Rites, book 39). The Doctrine of the Mean (Rites, book 28) explains that one cultivates oneself by keeping proper thoughts, purifying oneself regularly, and following the standards of propriety, all founded on benevolence. A person can do this by carefully preparing before speaking, acting, or finalizing plans.

People are subject to distraction by attractions of power, beauty, and wealth; feelings of anger, pleasure, or sadness; and careless or improper thoughts (Rites, book 39). Therefore, we are prone to stray from the virtuous way. When individuals in a position of social influence allow themselves to go astray from the *dao*, social disorder can result. As the Record of Rites puts it, then "the strong press upon the weak; the many are cruel to the few; the knowing impose upon the dull; the bold make it bitter for the timid; the diseased are not nursed; the old and young, orphans and solitaries are neglected" (book 17, section 1, verse 12). Therefore, it is necessary to exercise daily diligent effort in continuous self-reflection to cultivate sincerity and benevolence; to avoid environmental influences that may lead one astray, such as excessive drunkenness, licentious music, and wayward companionship; and to practice ceremonies and customs that have been established by wise people as a barrier against

excesses, selfish indulgence, and other errors (Rites, books 27, 28, 39).

Inquiry into the External World and Methods of Learning

In classical Confucianism, self-cultivation is complemented by formal study of external things. The first line of the Analects sums up the proper approach to study: "Learning coupled with practice whenever possible—is it not joyful?" (Analects, book 1, verse 1, in Li, 1999, p. 9). The avid student takes reverence and joy in insights (Rites, book 26, verse 10). Confucius said that there are three things that bring sorrow to the avid learner: (1) that there be any subject one hasn't heard about and has had no opportunity to study; (2) that one hears of a subject but can't learn it; and (3) that one learns something but cannot practice it (Rites, book 18, section 2, part 2, verse 20). Learning the way (*dao*) is so important and intrinsically joyful that Confucius said a person who hears of it in the morning can be content to die that evening (Analects, book 4, verse 8).

Confucius and Mencius placed most emphasis on learning how to live a virtuous life. But this presumed a wide range of technical subjects of study such as martial arts, music, calligraphy, essay and poetry composition, study of the classics, performance of ceremonies, history, math, and other skills specific to social roles (Chen, 1993). Besides these formal school-based curricula, there was the curriculum of life itself. The student was to learn from the lessons of the earth, such as the way its energy manifests life (Rites, book 26, verses 7–10). The Classic of Changes gives detailed guidelines for how to relate personal experiences to patterns in the

wider cosmos, so as to be able to aspire to harmony between humanity, earth, and heaven (Wilhelm & Baynes, 1967). Classical education was designed to support the cultivation of the whole person, according to virtue, and to prepare the person to fulfill his or her roles and responsibilities in family, community, and world.

Learning requires constant effort and unwearied strength, studying early and late, according to one's own talents and abilities (Analects, book 19, verse 5; Rites, book 38, verses 3, 11, 12). The scholar holds aim in the face of neglect or danger. Some people can practice this easily by natural proclivity; some are motivated by hope for advantage; while others must use great effort. Confucius identified four levels of learners: the one born with knowledge; the one who gains knowledge by learning; the one who learns with labor; and lowest of all, the one who disdains learning (Analects, book 16, verse 9). But if learning is pursued consistently, the first three types of people can attain the same learning (Rites, book 28, section 2, verses 11, 21–22). Joining natural understanding with instruction by others can lead to perfection. Confucius recommended that each person find the right balance between intrinsic ability and self-improvement in order to achieve refinement and nobleness (Analects, book 6, verse 18).

The avid learner cherishes old knowledge and also acquires new (Rites, book 28, section 2, verse 39). He/she studies the ancients, while associating with those of the present (Rites, book 38, verse 11). By applying thus learned principles in the present, one becomes a model for the future.

In learning, it is important to keep proper company, because of the influence of friends and teachers (Rites, book 16, verse 9). So the scholar keeps company with those who share the same goals, path, and methods of learning (Rites, book 38, verse 17). One rejoices with them when they equal oneself in attainment, but never tires of them if less accomplished. If friends continue in one's direction, one goes forward with them. But if they go astray, one withdraws from them. However, one should not be cliquish. The scholar does not hastily agree with those who are like-minded. But neither does s/he condemn those with different views. In short, a scholar should seek to emulate the wise and to eliminate in him/herself what is observed in others as improper or insufficient (Analects, book 4, verse 17).

Results of Inquiry

A life dedicated to inquiry should result in the development of a complete and virtuous human being ready and able to serve others. Confucius and Mencius described two levels of a complete person: the *junzi* (noble-minded person) and the *shengren* (sage) (Chen, 1993). Sometimes the words "scholar" and "noble-minded person" are used interchangeably in Confucianism.

Prior to Confucius, *junzi* referred to a person of hereditary noble social class status. However, Confucius emphasized that nobility of character is more important than nobility of birth. He said, "A *junzi* who parts company with humaneness does not fulfill that name. Never for a moment does a *junzi* quit humaneness" (Analects, book 4, verse 5, in Yao, 2000, p. 214).

Thus, the noble person's character serves as an exemplar for people of all social stations. Nobleness is an ideal more attainable than that of the sage. Confucius described many people who had features of nobleness, although he viewed this as difficult to attain. The qualities include frugal living, diligent working, discerning listening, truthful speaking, probing questioning, moral acceptance of gain, warm personal demeanor, respectful behavior, and awareness of consequences in action (Analects, book 1, verses 7, 14; book 16, verse 10). Confucius did not regard himself as a sage and said he never met one because they are so rare. Rather, he praised others and himself insofar as they demonstrated a dedication to learning, self-improvement, and teaching others (Analects, book 2, verse 4; book 7, verses 1–2, 33). Thus, being a scholar or noble person is more a matter of ongoing growth toward ideals than a fixed set of standards by which to be measured.

Mencius added an important nuance to the ideal of the sage by making this lofty ideal more approachable than had Confucius. On the one hand, along with Confucius, he described the sage as a supremely virtuous person, endowed from birth with a perfect nature and capable of bringing complete fulfillment to one's own virtue and physical makeup as well as to social welfare (Mencius, book 7, part A, verses 8, 24, 30, 38; book 7, part B, verse 25). As Yao (2000) explains, the Chinese character for sage (*sheng*) depicts a person who accomplishes greatness in the world more by listening than by talking: listening to the call from heaven, to the people, and to nature.

On the other hand, Mencius emphasized the commonality and similarity between the sage

and ordinary people. He pointed out that the legendary sage kings Yao and Shun were originally from so-called barbarian groups but that their virtue was nonetheless excellent and brought them the mandate of heaven to rule (book 4, part B, verse 1). All people have the same heart of virtue as the sage, though we differ in aptitude and effort to fulfill our nature (book 4, part B, verse 32; book 6, part A, verses 7, 10; book 7, part A, verse 30; book 7, part B, verse 25). Mencius taught that all people have the capacity to become sage-like, so the ideal of the sagely leader became a guide for the education of all people (Chen, 1993).

Scholarly Teaching

Informal Teaching in Family Life

In the Confucian perspective, each individual is inextricably woven into the fabric of family and families are interwoven into the larger fabric of society and world. Therefore, self-cultivation is interconnected with family life and social participation. Family is the nexus between individual and society. The family is the source of birth, the upbringing of children, and the continuance of generations. It is also the home from which people go out to influence the world. Therefore, the scholar is expected to cultivate mutually beneficial family relations and then extend them outward further to society.

According to the Great Learning (Rites, book 39), the cultivated person extends influence to help one's family to become harmonized. In classical Confucianism, family members are to be taught according to the standards of filial piety of children to parents, respect and distinction between husband and wife, obedience to elder

siblings, and kind gentleness toward those younger. Hierarchical pairs of roles were intended to be complementary and mutually beneficial. These family relationships are the prototype for all other social relationships, to which these qualities should be extended (verse 17; book 21, section 1, verse 15). For example, filial piety toward parents illustrates service to the leader. Obedience to elder siblings illustrates service to elders in society. Kind gentleness to the young and needy in the family illustrates the way all people should be treated. It is said that when the Great Way of harmony (Rites, book 7, section 1, verse 2) was followed in ancient times, people not only loved their own parents and children but also cared for all aged, youths, and those in special need (such as solitaries, orphans, childless, poor, and people with disabilities). Mencius said that family is the basis of all service and that there should be no end to what we serve (book 4, part A, verse 19). In Confucianism, filial piety (*xiao*) is a pivotal relational virtue because it forms a link between life in the traditional patriarchal family and the larger society. According to the Record of Rites (book 21, section 2, verse 13), the highest degree of filial piety is to honor one's parents by never failing to care for them and to extend beneficial care and consideration to all people.

Teaching in a Formal Educational Context

Confucius did not turn away students who came to him, regardless of their ability to pay (Analects, book 7, verses 7–8). On the other hand, he did not repeat lessons for people who refused to deepen their questions or show enthusiasm for learning. In demeanor he was awe-inspiring but not overwhelming; he was polite but relaxed

(Analects, book 7, verse 38).

The Record on the Subject of Education summarizes Four Rules of Teaching (Rites, book 16, verses 11–22): (1) act to prevent harm, because when harm has already been done, it is difficult to oppose it; (2) instruct in a timely manner, for otherwise excess toil and difficulty will be made for students; (3) adapt lessons to circumstances, or injury and disorder will result; (4) give good mutual example between teacher and students and between students. Following these rules prevents feelings of isolation, loneliness, and inadequacy and prevents harmful friendships for students.

This text advises that a teacher should lead but not drag a student, thus encouraging harmony. One strengthens rather than discourages, thus making attainment easy. A teacher should open the way to learning but should not bring the student to a conclusion without the learner's own effort; thus the student becomes thoughtful. Overall, the skillful teacher develops that in which the pupil excels and corrects any particular deficiencies.

An exemplary teacher helps students to carry out and perpetuate ideas. His or her words are brief but far-reaching; unpretentious but profound. Examples given are few but instructive. She or he waits to be questioned, being like a bell that when struck leisurely and properly gives a great sound. If students are not able to ask questions, the teacher instructs further. If this fails, then he or she leaves them alone. The exemplary teacher teaches by proceeding from the simple to the complex and using comparisons and analogies.

Further, the scholar practices beforehand what one advises to others and never waivers despite temptations and threats (Rites, book 38, verses 7, 15). In correcting social superiors, one is quiet and relaxed but clear and persistent. Genuine teaching means knowing what one knows and what one does not know (Analects, book 2, verse 17).

Chen (1993) gives an excellent summary of teaching methods used by Confucius as depicted in the Analects. Confucius made teaching available to all; related new ideas to familiar ones through similes, metaphors, analogies, and parables; tailored teaching styles to students' particular aptitudes and situations; maintained close personal contact with students; emphasized formats of small-group dialogue; taught in natural settings; encouraged critical thinking and questioning; taught by personal example; and kept his actions consistent with the values he advocated.

Teaching in the Socio-Political Context

If a scholar was able to gain appointment as a minister in government, social administration was to illustrate and extend virtue to those for whom one was responsible and also to guide and correct the sovereign. With regard to the populace, scholarly administrators should keep their commitments, economize expenditures, and prevent exploitation of labor (Analects, book 1, verse 5). With regard to the ruler, they should resolutely but respectfully remind the ruler of responsibilities to aid the populace and to live according to standards of virtue. Administrators may have to risk offending a recalcitrant ruler when advocating for virtue. If superiors refuse

good advice, Confucius suggested that the noble-minded administrator should consider resigning (Analects, book 4, verse 26; book 14, verse 22).

Summary of the Confucian Path of Scholarship

On the path of the scholar, learning is a lifelong process. The scholar learns extensively and continuously, using all his/her might untiringly (Rites, book 38, verse 12). Indeed, teaching is itself a path of learning. As recounted in the Classic of History, teaching is one-half of learning; when a person's thoughts are persistently focused on learning, virtue grows subtly and naturally (part 4, book 8; part 3, verse 5).

The ideal scholar is a person of noble character who is always learning toward sagehood and always ready to teach and help others, even if disregarded by the world (Rites, book 28, section 1, verse 22; Analects, book 1, verse 1). The person who can fully develop her/his nature can complement the action of heaven and earth to help other people and all things in their development (Rites, book 28, section 2, verses 22–32).

Yet a true scholar is not so common. Confucius said that the true scholar is not what is commonly called a scholar. "Those to whom the multitude now-a-days give that name have no title to it, and they constantly employ it to one another as a term of reproach" (Rites, book 38, verse 19).

In Confucianism scholarship is a spiritual path (*dao*) dedicated to learning what it is to be a morally responsible, complete human being in harmony with other people and the cosmos (Chen, 1993; Ivanhoe, 2000; Yao, 2000). The path of scholarship is the fulfillment of *ren*, our natural human heart of love. The process of self-

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cultivation is aided by formal aspects of study and teaching. Virtue motivates the scholarly quest and the services that scholars provide to society. Without virtue, conformity to external social expectations for the appearance and behavior of a scholar results in shallowness and hypocrisy.

The following verses on Qualities of a True Scholar were adapted and condensed by the author from the *Treatise on Conduct of the Scholar* (Rites, book 38), in view of insights from all the classics, especially the Great Learning and the Doctrine of the Mean. In this treatise Confucius describes 98 qualities of a scholar. These qualities were organized, combined, summarized, and paraphrased into five sets of five verses, plus a final verse. Each stanza is related by a common theme. The first stanza conveys the scholar's persistence and consistency. The second stanza conveys the scholar's ways of learning. The third stanza conveys the scholar's ways of teaching. The fourth stanza conveys the scholar's comportment. The fifth stanza conveys the scholar's style of life. The final line sums up the mission of the scholar.

The Qualities of a True Scholar

A True Scholar...

Carries always the gem of virtue and is eager to share it

Remembers always that goodness is the heart of humanity

*Watches always the mind and heart
Feels always the people's afflictions and yearnings*

Stays always on the path of benevolence

*Studies continuously, extensively, and untiringly
Repeats not any mistake*

*Learns both ancient and new wisdom
Applies wisdom in the present*

Serves as exemplar for the future

*Stands ready to teach those who are sincere
Promotes the learning and advancement of others*

*Guides people gently, quietly, and patiently
Practices first what one teaches and advises
Acts carefully and conscientiously*

*Shows courtesy and respect to others
Enjoys friendly and good natured company
Refrains from hasty agreement or condemnation
Protects oneself well so as to be ready to serve
Declines both great and petty praise*

*Wavers not by temptation or threat
Seeks good accomplishments rather than acquisitions
Regrets not the past nor lack of preparation for the future
Lives comfortably without extravagance
Participates in ceremony, music, and play with dignity and ease*

Complements heaven and earth in the nourishment of all things

Implications for Spirituality Sensitive Social Work Scholarship

Caveat

Like any religious and philosophical system, Confucianism has its limitations and problems as well as its strengths and continuing relevance. Classical Confucian ideas were formulated in a specific historical and cultural context quite far removed from contemporary society West or East. It would be unrealistic to propose that the details of custom and belief associated with classical Confucianism, which developed within a feudalistic and patriarchal culture, should be applied literally and rigidly in this postindustrial, global era. It would also be contrary to the Confucian principles of timeliness and adaptability. Further, this author believes that it

would be inconsistent with the NASW Code of Ethics and the educational values underlying the Council on Social Work Education's 2001 curriculum standards to promote the autocratic, feudalistic, and patriarchal features of classical Chinese society in a vision of contemporary scholarship. Even within the classical Confucian context, Confucius, Mencius, and many other scholars who have come to be regarded as sages in China and Korea took it as their responsibility to remonstrate, criticize, and rebuke social customs and political leaders when they strayed from the primary standard of *ren*, humaneness. Currently, the positive and negative aspects of the Confucian heritage for governance and human rights are being actively debated in East Asian countries and elsewhere (De Bary, 1991; De Bary & Tu, 1998).

Beyond the cultural and historical limitations of classical Confucian customs and beliefs, Confucian ideals and values have often been distorted to support oppressive social conditions and inhumane behaviors in East Asian countries. It is important to distinguish between the principles themselves and their distorted applications, however. Mencius described good government as government of love (*ren*), royal (*wang*) government, or sagely (*shengren*) government (Chen, 1993). In classical Confucian thought, government leaders who oppress the people lose the approval of heaven, invite calamity on themselves and society, and make themselves vulnerable to the revolt of the people. However, some critics of Confucianism fail to distinguish between the way of the despot and the humane way. Confucianism then becomes blamed for all the worst features of traditional society and any

failures of contemporary society. Therefore, if we are to glean insights from classical Confucianism for contemporary social work scholarship, we need to avoid simplistic transfer of culture- and history-specific ideas as well as past distortions of Confucianism. Within English-language social work literature there are a few authors who have begun to explicate insights from Confucianism for contemporary social work and general social transformation East and West (Canda & Canda, 1996; Canda, Shin, & Canda, 1993; Chung, 1992, 2001; Chung & Haynes, 1993; Imbrogno & Canda, 1988). The remainder of this section builds on this previous work by focusing on re-envisioning social work scholarship.

Learning from Past Misuses of Confucianism

The Confucian emphasis on social harmony and role clarity sometimes has been misused to rationalize oppressive forms of political autocracy, bureaucratism, classism, and patriarchy in traditional East Asian societies. As the Confucian classics warn, when the foundations of personal sincerity and humaneness are abandoned, social role performance becomes trite, self-serving, or oppressive. This cautions us to avoid hypocritical enactment of the scholar role that fulfills mere professional and bureaucratic expectations but has no genuine heart. If being a scholar is nothing more than perfunctory doing of the job of an academic, meeting institutional targets for grant acquisition and publication, promoting uncritically the latest trends in research grant priorities and ideology, and "going through the motions" with students, this is not being a true scholar, in the Confucian sense. This is what

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Confucius lamented as the proliferation of people who claimed the name of scholar but did not live according to the spirit and virtue of scholarship. Confucianism reminds academics to pursue a lofty ideal of scholarship as a way of humane living, learning, and serving and to be humble and cautious in claiming the title of scholar for oneself or to use it loosely for others.

The Confucian emphasis on educational attainment sometimes has been given a reductionistic, antihumanist form. Rather than evaluating learning by one's virtuous qualities and behavior, simplistic measures such as passing rigid exams based on conventional thinking and conformism have been used. Not surprisingly, this led to occasions of harsh competition, cheating, and corruption in the Confucian examination system for aspiring scholars. This cautions us to avoid over-reliance on mechanical evaluations of learning and scholarly contribution, such as numbers of articles published by faculty in specified types of journals, student grade point averages, or student scores on standardized examinations. These kinds of measures can be used helpfully to indicate a person's educational strengths and weaknesses and ways to support scholarly growth. But when people become reduced to scores, they have been stripped of their humanity.

This raises the question of how to evaluate scholarship. From a Confucian vantage, genuine scholarship cannot be evaluated simply by measuring external behaviors and outputs of productivity. One's own intrinsic aspects of scholarship can be evaluated through conscientious self-reflection and careful

observance of influence on others. Respectful critical dialogue among teachers, researchers, and students in the context of daily personal and professional interactions can also shed light on the intrinsic quality of a person as scholar. However, it is also practical to employ qualitative and quantitative ways for colleagues, peers, and administrators to evaluate academic job performance as a student, teacher, or researcher. This is consistent with the classical Confucian principle of promoting the worthy so that able and virtuous teachers and public servants can benefit society widely. But academic or administrative job performance should not be equated with scholarship in its holistic sense. Indeed, Confucian scholars (including Confucius himself) often found it impossible or undesirable to hold official positions in teaching institutions and government because they would not in good conscience support inept or corrupt leaders or because the leadership refused to employ them (or even persecuted them) because of their "prophetic" stance against corruption (De Bary, 1991; Yao, 2000).

This is not to say that classical Confucian standards for evaluating scholarship were lax. On the contrary, Confucius and Mencius held themselves and others who aspired to be scholars to extremely high standards of nobility of character, untiring effort in learning, and effective public service. It is also not to discount scholarly productivity. But it is important to clarify that productivity should be the fruit that comes naturally by cultivating the root of virtue in personal and family life and in general participation in society. Scholarly productivity that is not humane is insipid

or even dangerous. In the Confucian view, scholars should indeed be productive in the form of constant service to society through teaching, inquiry, and social administration.

Self-cultivation has sometimes become an elitist luxury divorced from social service. Then the so-called scholars worked for their own pleasure, aggrandizement, fame, or political advancement while ignoring human suffering or attacking rivals. Yet Confucius emphasized that the scholar's first priority is to cultivate and enact virtue, even if this leads to public disregard or poverty. On the level of individual behavior, this cautions us to avoid self-seeking academic advancement and professional competition. On an educational institution level, when examination and grading of students and when evaluation, pay, and promotion systems for faculty are set up in such a way that one can advance only at the expense or decline of others, this is certainly not benevolent.

Social service has sometimes become divorced from self-cultivation. Then bureaucratic rules and regulations were applied without consideration of their fairness, compassion, or contribution to social justice. This cautions us as scholar-practitioners to avoid becoming petty bureaucrats or enforcers of crass social conformity in students and clients. The Confucian ideal emphasizes that genuine self-cultivation is inextricable from promotion of well-being for loved ones and the wider society.

Actually, the ideals of the social work profession are an excellent fit for the Confucian path of scholarship. Social work, like classical Confucianism, openly propounds a mission, value-based purposes, and ethical standards based on

well-being and justice for all people (Canda & Furman, 1999). Social workers may disagree about the particular meaning and implementation of the mission, purposes, and ethical standards, but we cannot ignore them. As Canda and Furman pointed out, social work can be regarded as a spiritual vocation, a spiritual path of service. The way of the social work scholar, in this context, is also a spiritual path.

A Proactive Vision of Spiritually Sensitive Scholarship

The previous implications were stated as a reaction to limitations and misuses of traditional Confucianism. In this final section possibilities for re-envisioning social work scholarship as a spiritual path are offered proactively as inspired by Confucian ideals.

Complementarity of Teaching, Research, and Service

In the introduction, a synergy between teaching, research, and service was proposed. Given the social work mission to promote well-being and justice for all people, the Confucian view that teaching and research both should be for the purpose of service makes sense. Teaching is a service directly to students and also helps prepare them for their professional service. Further, teaching in the form of consultation and community education brings scholars outside the classroom to impact the public. Research and any research-based publications can be explicitly geared toward service. The recent trend in empowerment research is a good example of this because it prioritizes topics that most directly

address oppression and injustice (Chesler, 1991; Lincoln, 1995; Rapp, Shera, & Kisthardt, 1993). Further, people who are subjects of research are involved in the design, implementation, and dissemination of research. Research findings also can enliven teaching and keep it current.

Research as Holistic Inquiry

Confucian ideals of scholarship place research (learning) at the center of self-cultivation and formal study. In this case research is literally re-search: to search and search again to understand the principles and workings of the self and the world. Scholarly research is well described by an alternate word, "inquiry," literally to query inward. We have seen that Confucian scholarship requires examining deeply one's own nature, scrutinizing one's own behavior, and examining the qualities of family life and society. This challenges us to engage in holistic inquiry that engages the whole person (thinking, feeling, intuitive, and sensory aspects) in the inquiry process and examines the holistic patterns and processes of human experience (Canda & Furman, 1999; Imbrogno & Canda, 1988). Scholarly inquiry should unite both introspective research and research into the external world. This is consistent with the heuristic paradigm of research in social work, which utilizes qualitative, quantitative, and other empirical approaches together with theoretical and philosophical reflection (Tyson, 1995). Further, it suggests that social work researchers might apply transpersonal research methodologies to examine spiritual experiences that give a profound sense of meaning and direction to life, heighten awareness of human interconnection with the cosmos, and

stimulate energy and hope for resilient response to afflictions and injustice (Braud & Anderson, 1998; Canda & Smith, 2001).

Teaching as Holistic Education

The Confucian ideal of education encourages us to engage physical, intellectual, emotional, contemplative, and artistic forms of communication and experience in teaching. It is already widely practiced in American social work education to build social work course work on a foundation of liberal arts and sciences. Perhaps it is especially important at the doctoral level of preparation for advanced scholarship that scientific ways of thinking and doing research are complemented by philosophical inquiry, contemplative introspection, aesthetic sensitivity, and personal reflection on how one's life as an academic can be integrated in a healthy way with family life and broader social participation. Also, the classical Confucian teaching methods based on close contact between students and teachers, mentorship, and active dialogue highlight the importance of interpersonal relationship quality between teachers and students and among students. A humanistic learning context, with small class sizes, individualized teaching approaches, and rapport with nature likely would be more conducive to scholarly development than the standardized large-class, mass-production approach to teaching that is common in many large schools of social work at the BSW and MSW levels.

Scholarly Development as Moral Self-Cultivation

Although social work is a profession that espouses a strong mission and values, the

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classical Confucian priority on a scholar's cultivation of virtue in both personal life and professional conduct may seem especially controversial and unfamiliar. Who is to decide what is virtuous behavior and what is not? Yet perhaps the Confucian emphasis on virtue can remind us to focus more attention on debates about the nature and source of standards for morality, virtue, and codes of ethics. It can also remind academics to keep in mind the clinical practice principle of working on one's own developmental issues as preparation for service, so as to be able to mentor and inquire well. Especially for doctoral education, it might be useful to place highest priority on matters of ethics, philosophy, and theory in order to help students clarify the "why" and "what for" of inquiry in order to help them work out a clear basis and direction for the "how to" of research and teaching.

The spirit of these suggestions is well summarized in a section of a poem about characteristics of spiritually sensitive social work by Sheridan (1997, cited in Canda & Furman, 1999, p. 184): "*If we nurtured the soul of social work: our students would feel stimulated and supported, instead of stressed-out, pushed through, used, and abused; our faculty members would act like colleagues and friends, instead of like competitors and adversaries; . . . our educational programs would be more committed to creative and transformational learning, instead of to being in the top 20 list of *US News and World Report*; our scholarship would focus on pressing human needs, instead of counts of faculty productivity and debates about competing paradigms.*"

The suggestions for a spiritually sensitive approach to scholarship advocated in this article are meant only as possibilities to consider and debate. It is the author's view that the process of careful reflection and dialogue among colleagues about the issues is more important than reaching a consensus or forming strict rules about them. In any case, the suggestions reflect a vision of scholarship as a spiritual path requiring lifelong effort to explore. There is no pretense that anyone (and certainly not the author) fully attains the ideals. Aspiration to ideals and the process of constant growth are already the way of spiritually sensitive scholarship.

It is customary for Confucian schools to post aphorisms and lists of principles to guide study. Inspired by this tradition, this article concludes with a list of principles stimulated by classical Confucianism that might guide spiritually sensitive social work scholarship.

Guideposts for the Path of Scholarship

Approach every moment of life as a precious chance for learning.

Be persistent, consistent, and well-balanced in the pursuit of learning.

Make the study of virtue the primary subject of learning.

Investigate things in all their detail and significance.

Nurture body, mind, and spirit.

Respect one's teachers, living and dead, and learn from their wisdom and mistakes.

Appreciate one's students and mentor them so that they may also be teachers.

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Teach by means of good example and clear yet gentle guidance.

Keep good company with colleagues and support each other on the path of scholarship. Apply all that is learned for the benefit of family, community, and world.

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Internet Resources

Numerous sites about Confucianism can be found on the World Wide Web by entering the word "Confucius" in a search engine. The reader should be cautious about accuracy on these sites, though, as there is no careful monitoring of quality. A good way to find links to many sites with images related to Confucianism, translations of some texts, and cultural information is to logon to: <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/qthursby/rel/kongfuzi.htm>

Endnotes

1. This article will italicize Chinese words and render them in English by using the *pinyin* system, except in quotes that use a different system or in words that have become accepted in English.

2. In order to reflect the original ideas that underlie all the various forms of Confucianism, this study relies on the Five Classics (*Yi Jing*, Classic of Changes; *Shu Jing*, Classic of History; *Shi Jing*, Classic of Poetry; *Li Ji*, Record of Rites; and *Chun Qiu*, Spring and Autumn Annals) and the Four Books (*Da Xue*, Great Learning; *Zhong Yong*, Doctrine of the Mean; *Lunyu*, the Analects of Confucius; and *Mengzi*, the Book of Mencius). These books have served as the foundation of Confucian education for hundreds of years. There are many debates about the origins, authenticity of authorship, and alterations of these texts over the centuries (Chen, 1993; Yao, 2000). However, they have been given great authority and influence as the core of classical Confucian teaching for hundreds of years. The author studied all of these classics over a period of 25 years in English translations with guidance from experts in

Confucian philosophy. During 1999–2001 the texts were reviewed for content specific to social work, social welfare, and education. Relevant passages were labeled and organized according to subtopics. Confucian philosophers in South Korea and written works by experts in Confucian philosophy were consulted to check accuracy of the author's understanding.

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4. Numerous citations from Confucian texts are given in this article. In order to avoid confusion related to multiple translations, the following translations will be used when indicating

chapter and verse for particular classics, unless another source is specified: Changes = Wilhelm & Baynes, 1967; History = Legge, 1960, vol. 3; Poetry = Legge, 1960, vol. 4; Rites = Legge, Chai, & Chai, 1967; Great Learning = Legge, 1960, vol. 1; Doctrine of the Mean = Legge, 1960, vol. 1; Analects of Confucius = Lau, 1979; Mencius = Lau, 1970.