

Chapter 7

“When the Heart-Mind Is Lost...”

Remarks on the Metaphysics of Educational Theory



Roland Reichenbach

Introductory Remarks

By Duck-Joo Kwak

I think Reichenbach's paper can be read as a good introduction to the western readers who are not much familiar with (Neo-) Confucianism or East Asian thoughts on education, and yet who have mysterious curiosity about it. For it provides us with a comprehensive perspective on why and how one should be interested in Confucian idea of education or comparative studies on educational thoughts between East and West. What is valuable about this essay is that it aspires after the discovery of a common ground between the two traditions without necessarily assuming the possibility to find it. The author is well aware of the fundamental differences between the two traditions in their metaphysics and ontology, let alone in their epistemological views of the world. But he invites us to examine the metaphysical assumptions that underlie Confucian educational thoughts, centering around the ideas of education, morality, learning or cultivation, presumably hoping to see something common or something new for each tradition to learn from the other.

The key concept the author sets up for himself to examine in this essay is the Confucian concept of 'heart-mind(心)'. It is one of the most important concepts in Confucian philosophy of education, distinct from the western concept of the mind. This choice the author made for his inquiry does not seem to come as a matter of convenience. He seems to think that the Confucian concept of heart-mind may be conceptually resourceful for our educational thinking by providing us with a way of overcoming the scientific approach to the concept of mind, which is analytic in the sense that it defines the mind as consisting of different independent functions such as cognition, emotion, desire, disposition, inclination, motivation and so on. In Reichenbach's view, the Confucian concept of heart-mind presupposes the holistic

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view of the self, which “can link between judgement and action”; he always finds something missing between them under the western view of the mind. In the Confucian mindset, or east-Asian mindset in general, the heart is not only the site of sensations and experiences but also that of monitoring and guiding one’s daily life. So the Confucian sense of heart-mind as an embodied intentionality is the source of our inner power in forming or cultivating the self with a sense of motivational direction. In connecting this notion in connection to the Confucian philosophy of self-cultivation, Reichenbach characterizes the Confucian sense of heart-mind as the source of our *readiness (or desire) to learn* to be good or virtuous; here our capacity for self-cultivation is ascribed to the heart-mind. This means that our heart-and-mind is already presupposed to have a *normative* orientation in it, not a cold-blooded agency as a neutral inspector, as in Descartes.

In the second half of the essay, the author attempts to sketch out the intellectual history of the Confucian concept of heart-mind in neo-Confucian tradition, which arose in the twelfth century, China. Here he covers four key Neo-Confucian thinkers: Hong, Xiangshan, Zhu Xi, and Wang Yang-ming. One of the key questions that these thinkers were concerned with was the nature of heart-and-mind and its relation to human goodness; for how to view the former was considered to determine how we can become morally good or good human beings. Unfortunately, the details of the argument in this part may not be that easy to follow, especially to those who do not have background knowledge on neo-Confucianism. Yet the discussion seems to leave us a few interesting yet puzzling questions about the Confucian notion of heart-mind.

First, I wonder how much we can take seriously the *normative* nature of the Confucian sense of heart-mind, especially for so-called postmodern contemporary education. Neo-Confucian culture of education is traditionally notorious for its moralizing power; it tends to impose a very strict set of moral norms upon young children; this has become the main target of criticism by progressive teachers in most of East Asian countries.

Yet, secondly, I can see why western educators can be enthusiastic about the Confucian concept of heart-mind and how it could benefit them in their educational thinking, given the prevalent concept of the mind in the West, where problem-solving *intelligence* or skill-like *competence* is highlighted as one of the main educational goals there days. In fact, those capacities of the mind are easily replaceable by a well-made machine of artificial intelligence to be developed. Thus, it seems urgent for us educators to newly conceive the nature of human mind in such a way as to redeem our educational practice as a uniquely *human* practice. This meta-physical inquiry of Reichenbach on the Confucian concept of heart-mind may be seen as a bold attempt to do this, seeking conceptual resources for a new notion of the uniquely human mind.

Thus, thirdly, it brings us back to the normative nature of the Confucian notion of heart-mind and makes us rethink of it. It is true that a strong normativity or strong imposition of moral norms could violate young people’s legitimate right to choose to be good; the imposition could deprive young people of the chance to choose to be good *from within*, and thereby prevent them from enjoyment in cultivating their desire to learn to be good. But a weak normativity still may be necessary for young

people to engage in the practice of self-cultivation in the first place. So the question is then: How can we lead our young people to cultivate this weak normativity in them in the form of self-cultivation. I think the author’s attempt to reformulate the Confucian idea of heart-mind in contemporary educational terms has a lot to offer in triggering our thoughts on the task.

7.1 Preparatory Notes: Learning to Search

There are some sayings that one needs to hear only once and then never forgets. Possibly one doesn’t know for a long time why they seem so important. In my case, a statement by Mencius was such a sentence: “When their dog or chicken is lost, they go look for it, but when their heart-mind is lost, they don’t bother” (*Mencius*, VI A, 11). It’s difficult to surpass the beauty, simplicity, and depth of the comment in my opinion. And then comes this mysterious term the “heart/mind”. The link between heart and mind pleases pedagogues. That’s clear. But it disappoints the analysts and the scientists, when philosophical or even spiritual interest is lacking. Those who lend credence to blunt clichés, for instance, crediting so-called “Western thinking” in general as being “analytical” and “East Asian” thought as “synthetic” or “holistic”, will have little difficulty in attributing the concept of heart/mind to Eastern or Chinese thoughts. And naturally many will then say *xin* (心) or *xinxue* (心學) is truly impossible to translate.

Yet the theoretical and practical price for the thesis of untranslatability is relatively high. We must not even discuss this notion with each other. In the German-speaking region there are also the advocates of untranslatability, even in the field of philosophy of education (*Bildungsphilosophie*). Then one will glibly insist that “*Bildung*” cannot be translated for the reason that the term is found in no other language. But at the same time it will be maintained that the concept is central to the German understanding of culture as well as its studies in education. Yet anyone who has even selectively experienced different languages and cultures knows that the claim of special semantic paths and postures may be an indicator of cultural bigotry and sometimes reveals a lack of intercultural experience, mistakenly considered as a real linguistic difference. Let’s then assume that “*Bildung*” is truly very important. Why should Germans alone be able to grasp this? Why not the Frenchmen, Japanese, and Mexicans as well? And let’s assume that the attribution of concept of the heart/mind (*xin*) is of universal importance. Wouldn’t it be a great shame that only the Chinese could understand this? As I read about ‘lost chickens and dogs’ in the German-language version, I naturally notice that a beautiful connection exists between *xin* and *Bildung*: „Wenn einem Menschen ein Huhn oder ein Hund verloren geht, so weiss er, wie er sie wieder finden kann; aber sein Herz geht ihm verloren, und *er weiss nicht, wie suchen*. Die *Bildung* dient zu nichts anderem als dazu, *unser verloren gegangenes Herz zu suchen*“ (*Mencius* VI A 11 / 2012, p. 204; emphasis being the author’s). In English, it says: “The way of learning is nothing more than to seek after this lost mind-and-heart” (*Mencius* VI A 11).

In my opinion, this passage is notable from several standpoints. First, *Bildung* and *xinxue* are more or less equated. Second, the problem, according to Mencius, does not consist primarily in not *finding* but in not knowing “*how to search*”. Third, *Bildung* does not promise to *find* the lost heart but to “*be able to search it further*”. This is a magnificent formulation, and we wish that contemporary planners and politicians would be able to recognize and understand it. The Jewish poet Elazar Benyoetz’s volume of verse is entitled “Finding makes the search easier” (“*Finden macht das Suchen leichter*”, Benyoetz 2002). If the seeker could be sure that he would find his quest, how effortless the search would be! But *Bildung* consists of learning to search, a view that is “interesting”, yet stands in diametric opposition to the superficial “philosophy” of today’s global discussion about competences. This is also the reason why I am interested in Confucianism; I am seeking for something there which I may not find. Yet it seems to me that many in the field of educational science run after chickens and dogs, and are not concerned about the connection of learning and education with the heart/mind. The loss will no longer be mourned because they are no longer aware of it; which is a real loss.

7.2 Comments on the Metaphysics of Educational Thought

Metaphysical thinking concerns itself with questions and hypotheses about (i) the nature of the mind and the world, (ii) the foundations of ethics and aesthetics, or even (iii) the proper course of moral self-cultivation (see Ivanhoe 2010, p. 260). When a person asks if intercultural discourse on *Bildungsphilosophie* may pay off, one can assume based on respect and care for ideas (see Noddings 1992) that mutual inspiration is at least possible. However, I agree with Ivanhoe that the commonalities between the occidental and oriental symbols of thought, especially in regard to Confucianism and even more in Neo-Confucianism must be much greater, “... it is possible to arrive at what John Rawls calls an ‘overlapping consensus’ (...) on important ethical issues based upon different and irreconcilable initial assumptions, metaphysical or otherwise” (Ivanhoe 2010, p. 260).

In English, the term ‘Neo-Confucianism’ was used only when we reached the twentieth century. According to John Makeham, it is an “umbrella term” for a philosophical discourse associated with the individual thinkers who have been classified as belonging to different schools or sub-traditions since the Song dynasty in China, particularly schools of “Learning of the Way” (*daoxue*), “Studies of Moral Principles” (*lixue*), and “Learning of the Mind and of the Heart” (*xinxue*) (cf. Makeham 2010, p. xiii). If the concept of heart/mind in the following is of interest, this occurs with the background insight that there is no homogenous “school of

the heart/mind” and there is no need to be one. “Heart/mind” or “mind-and-heart” is the English translation for the Chinese word *xin*(心).¹

The term heart/mind is a metaphor and it is no more or no less. And it will often be argued vehemently by its apologists that the term should be merely a metaphor. Still it is evident from a metaphorical viewpoint (*e.g.*, Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Blumenberg 1999) that any central cultural and scientific concepts cannot be more than metaphors. Metaphors have an ornamental function; but they also serve to promote the understanding and knowledge of scientific topics. Without a metaphorical style, the topics would remain more diffuse and beyond the reader’s grasp. Some important metaphors of educational thought and self-transformation can be a starting point in exploring ideas that link the East and West. The images and metaphors of *balance*, *center*, *being centered* and “*being oneself*”, *true self*, *agreement*, *congruence*, *accordance*, *correspondence* of the world and myself, heaven and myself,² and the over-arching enlightenment metaphor of *clarity* and being *clouded* (obscured) are great examples for such a study.

On the other hand, metaphysical questions are not *en vogue* at all in today’s discourse on educational theory. Traditional metaphysics mainly concerns ontological questions, *i.e.*, existential issues and the characteristics of things and ideas. Critical metaphysical thinking of the Orient shows how unconvincing their “methods” look today. Yet many scientists, above all those in social sciences, are not conscious of how obvious it is for them to presuppose and accept certain metaphysical positions, taking them for granted without any challenge. Some may “operationalize” their central concepts quite arbitrarily, such as *Bildung*, education, or skill, and use them in a loose and unreflected manner for their empirical purposes. Their assertions about the existence of things and ideas accompanying the concepts are never substantiated.

Thus, we may have to thank the tradition of transcendental philosophy for its criticism of metaphysics. It does not reject metaphysical questions as absurd or unworthy of a response but concedes at least, referring back to Immanuel Kant, that metaphysical issues always impose themselves on us, even if they cannot be answered definitively. The human being is regarded here anthropologically as “*animal metyphysicum*”. From this perspective, metaphysics’s critique of knowledge thus places its focal priority less on existential issues (ontology) than on those of knowledge and recognition (epistemology).

A convincing educational theory has no choice but to be driven by metaphysics, and this includes the critical recognition of transcendental preconditions of the concepts at stake, such as learning and education, as well as cultivation, personality, morality and character. These are not observational terms but must always be developed and interpreted. In addition, there are varying strategies or philosophical

¹ Gardener explains that “in the Chinese tradition the character [for *xin*] refers to both the source of intellect and understanding and the center of emotions and feelings” (Gardener 2007, p. 14, footnote), whereas *xinxue* stands for learning of the heart/mind.

² “Heaven” is usually understood as a “generic term” for the “right way” (see Hu Hong, 14,18).

“methods” to deal with the underlying concepts of educational theory, such as speculation, dialectics, hermeneutics, phenomenology, or analysis.

The discourse on educational thought can also ask about (i) the motives behind the desire for knowledge as critical recognition metaphysics, (ii) employed philosophical methods for the comparison of different cultures, or (iii) establishing, describing, and understanding comparable epochs and commonalities and differences. This all belongs to the strategies of critical epistemology. One may agree with Philip Ivanhoe that the concept of heart/mind, which he especially discussed regarding the philosophy of Lu Jinyuan, potentially exceeds cultures and epochs. The holistic philosophy reflected in it is appealing to today’s discourse in education. The way it was discussed on the heart/mind looks like what we can emulate.

In short, “when it comes to ethics and aesthetics,” according to Ivanhoe, “it makes a considerable sense to think of the mind in terms of ‘heart/mind’ a combination of cognition, emotion, and volition. It is worth noting that many individual movements within modern Western aesthetics or ethics are based on defending one or more of these three aspects of the heart/mind over others” (Ivanhoe 2010, p. 260).³

7.3 The Notion of Heart/Mind

Among others ideas, the heart/mind is a very prominent concept of neo-Confucian philosophy from the Song to Qing dynasties in China. It emphasizes “the emotive nature of Confucius’ self-cultivation” (Lu 2014, p. 60). The term *xin*, most often translated as heart/mind, is originally understood as a physical organ, “but (...) it should refer to the functions and potency of the emotive heart and the cognitive mind” which are thought of as “analytically dualistic but functionally holistic” (Lu 2014, p. 61).⁴ “Heart” is simultaneously the name of the vital organ and the metaphor for life and lifestyle, particularly in regard to sensitive aspects. But the fact that the heart is also the organ of thought may also make sense from a Western perspective; speaking of “*Herzensbildung* (sensitivity, actually “formation of the heart”)” in humanistic and neo-humanistic pedagogy discourse, of “*Kopf, Hand, Herz*” (mind, hand, heart) attributed to Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, which is not to be found in his works..., or even the “*habits of the heart*” in the famous essay of Tocqueville (Tocqueville 1987) as well as the current example of “emotional intelligence” (Daniel Goleman), shows how the idea of mind/heart is deeply anchored in various names and facets within diverse cultural spaces and traditions. Yet Confucian and neo-Confucian thinkers are pioneers and role models in addressing this term. The heart

³“The Confucian tradition and Chinese thought in general have been much more attentive to this deep connection between ethics and aesthetics. (...) Literati like Lu Jinyuan placed tremendous emphasis on arts like calligraphy, painting, and composition” (Ivanhoe 2010, p. 262).

⁴“The unique graphic composition of *xin* clearly shows that ‘thinking’ actually is not merely a cognitive function, which is indicated by the *xin* graph for the fontanel, but also an emotive expression at once, which is represented by the *xin* graph for the heart” (Lu 2014, p. 61).

from this perspective is the physical site of human motives, wishes, and customs: “Of the various parts of the body, *xin* (...), the organ of the heart, is particularly important, because it is viewed as the site of what we would describe as cognitive and affective activities. *Xin* (the heart/mind) can have *yu* (desires, tendencies) in that it can be drawn to certain things; it also has *qing* (emotions, feelings) and can take pleasure in or feel displeasure at certain things” (Shun 2010, p. 179).

The heart is not only the site of sensations and experience but also the site of monitoring for the direction one’s own life in the lights of superior social goals and ranks in the existence of all things. “One capacity that is particularly important for Confucian thinkers is its capacity to set directions that guide one’s daily activities as well as one’s life as a whole” (Shun 2010, p. 179). Yet the seemingly abstract principle of the heart/mind “materializes” in the specific practices of everyday life. Here the concern and care for the heart/mind is closely related to the ancient Greek idea of self-reliance (see Kwak 2018).

Understanding the concept of heart/mind from a purely psychological standpoint and interpreting it that way is surely a mistake and disproportionate. It is also possible to explain the relevant aspects of the concept in philosophical terms. The revisited commentaries by Shun shows this. The orientations of heart/mind are understood as “*zhi*” (...) (goals, intentions):

Zhi can refer to specific intentions or general aims in life such as the goal of learning to be a sage. *Zhi* differs from *yu* (desires, tendencies) in that, whereas *zhi* pertains specifically to the heart/mind, *yu* can pertain to the heart/mind or to other parts of the body such as the senses. Also, while *zhi* involves focusing the heart/mind in a way that guides one’s actions or one’s life in general, *yu* involves tendencies that one may choose to resist rather than to act on (Shun 2010, p. 179).

The differences addressed here are as interesting as terminologies when they are of practical importance; the goals of the person are necessarily congruent with their intentions, not necessarily with their tendencies or dispositions. It’s a very different “psychology” which the Neo-Confucian concept offers us here. Yet the heart/mind is not only characterized as competing push-pull forces but also as thinking and thoughts, *yi*:

“*Yi* can refer to one’s thoughts or opinions, as well as one’s inclinations, which involve one’s wanting to see certain things happen or one’s thinking of bringing about certain things” (...); “Unlike *yu*, (...) *yi* is something one is aware of as part of one’s thoughts, which pertain to the heart/mind. On the other hand, *yi* is in a less directed state than *zhi* in that, while *yi* can be just a thought in favor of something without one’s actually having decided to act in that direction, *zhi* involves one’s actually forming the intention to so act” (Shun 2010, p. 179).

The impoverishment in our era’s psychological language also tends to generate extremely vague terms. It speaks of “cognitive processes” in which pure “events” within the human brain “run off”. Basically, the concept of heart/mind can be understood as the “missing link” between judgment and action, comprehending within it motivation, will, or other forms of inner process. The gap between judgment and action is of major interest in the Kohlbergian tradition (see Oser and Althof 1992; Garz 2006). Various models have been proposed to understand this gap. Somehow

the analytical approach has always turned out to be insufficient at the end of the day; knowledge, judgment, motivation, inclination, and action form a down-to-earth nexus, a stable or less stable unity which is either calm or clearly imbalanced, which we one analyze or explain convincingly with the tools of scientific psychology. Going back the old concept of the heart/mind concept does not necessarily mean pursuing our romantic motives. Rather it means to recognize that we must guard against the urge to separate the self or the learning process into two seemingly sharply distinguishable elements. Ultimately, one cannot escape from the metaphysics of *Bildung* and the self. But what is this heart/mind? We cannot really know this; yet we can attribute its possibility or capability to an authority that we consider vital. The heart/mind is a capability to form both *yi* and *zhi*. It has “the capacity to reflect on one’s life and reshape one’s life accordingly” (...); “this capacity for self-cultivation is ascribed to the heart/mind” (Shun 2010, p 179).

7.4 Hu Hong, Lu Xiangshan, Zhu Xi, Wang Yang-ming

The following section brings the concept of the heart/mind into contact with an array of insights from the Neo-Confucian tradition.

7.4.1 Hu Hong

According to Makeham, Hu Hong (1105–1161), author of *Zhiyan (Understanding Words)* “was the first scholar of the *daoxue* (道學) movement whose overall stress lay on the importance of the concept of the heart/mind (*xin*, 心), which he took to be the governing principle of the nature (*xing*, 物 as well as the thinking force within each human being” (Makeham 2010, xvi). For Hu, the heart/mind transcends the human condition; it is eternal, representing cosmic principles (Makeham 2010, xvi; cf. van Ess 2010).⁵ Hu Hong’s interpretations of *Mencius* (7A.1) “He who has exhausted his heart/mind knows his nature. Knowing his nature, he knows heaven” (*Mencius* 7A.1) is crucial. The “heart” beats in close harmony with the “right way”. Van Ess, the German translator of the *Zhiyan*, stresses in detailed comments that Hu Hong wanted to understand the meaning of the heart in explicit opposition to the prevailing Chinese Buddhism of the time. The latter held that the heart played the role of producing illusions, the illusion of the world which hindered the recognition of the truth.⁶ To Hong, the relationship is to be turned around: “The heart alone is

⁵“There is (...) a superhuman heart/mind working in the world” (van Ess 2010, p. 113). “(...) both the heart/mind and nature have to be understood as words for cosmic principles which extend far beyond the human condition” (van Ess 2010, p. 114).

⁶To Hu Hong Buddhists were egoistical because they want to escape from the cycle of death and life (van Ess 2010, p. 117). “The Buddhists in secret do not know how to serve heaven, whereas in

the site where truth is recognized” (van Ess 2009, p. 229). In the last paragraph of the first chapter of *Understanding of Words*, Hu Hong writes: “What heaven has conferred is the nature. The nature of man is the heart/mind” (Hu 1987, 4; cit. van Ess 2010, p.111). This “anthropological reduction” stresses the point, that consciousness and thinking are the core elements which constitute the human condition (van Ess, *ibid.*).⁷

But one tends to read the following passage from Hu Hong: “Those who lead the Way in learning increase their skills daily. The skills of those who advance in virtue decline daily. Those who no longer rely on themselves but on heaven lose their abilities.” (*Zhiyan*, 2,16; Hu 2009, p. 26). Here, as van Ess formulated it, the human and heavenly spheres coalesce, *first* those who must no longer promote their virtues in harmony with the heavens (the right way) and therefore must no longer gain further skills but can let the heavens govern (van Ess 2009, p. 226). It is also clear to Hong that the heart/mind is concerned only with existing things, that is, “things at hand” (see *Chin-ssu lu*, Zhu Xi and Lü 1967).⁸

The dualism between specifics and abstractions as well as between particulars and generalities, less typical of Oriental insights, never appears here. It is not considered solving or causing problems of learning and education. The difference is taken as something analytically, acceptable:

What is meant by the heart/mind is the nature of being capaciously intelligent and having consciousness. This is nothing other than the ears and eyes having the power to see and hear. Between heaven and earth it penetrates old and new without perfection or decay. In men and other living beings, however, it has a beginning and an end in accordance with the body and with *qi*. Once one has understood that the pattern is the same but that the [two] parts are different, what need is there for a theory that the heart/mind is not subject to life and death – a view which merely serves to startle students (Hu 1987, p. 333; quoting from van Ess 2010, p. 113).

7.4.2 Zhu Xi (1130–1200)

Zhu Xi too recognized a “transcendent heart/mind which does not die and which penetrates history” (van Ess *ibid.*, p. 113). Yet the know-how and the love of learning stand at the center of Zhu Xi’s learning philosophy. It always deals with

public they do not know how to order (*li*) things (...) To serve heaven and to order things, this is the great enterprise of a Confucian” (Hu 1987, p. 41, quotation from van Ess 2010, p. 118).

⁷Hu Hong’s (pedagogical) anthropology is neither positive nor negative, but basically neutral. Hu cites Mencius: “When Mencius said that the nature was good, he used the word only as an expression of sighing admiration, not with the opposite meaning to ‘bad’” (Hu 1987, p. 333).

⁸“What exists is visible because it coalesces. We call it existing because by means of our eyes we know that it exists. Therefore we call non-existing what is dispersed so that it cannot be seen. What is real and ‘can be trampled under the feet’ [*Zhongyong*; Legge 1879-: 389]”. We call it existing because by means of our heart/mind we know that it exists. Therefore what is irrelevant and cannot be trampled under the feet we call non-existing” (Hu 1987, quoting from van Ess 2010, p. 111).

the specifics of learning, thus the title *Chin-ssu lu, Reflections on things at hand*. The *Chin-ssu lu* anthology, which Zhu Xi has published with Lü Zuqian, whose family, by the way, was acquainted with Hu Hong's, is the first compilation of the sayings from the five great masters of neo-Confucians of the eleventh century. Zhu Xi didn't support Hu Hong's radical rejection of Buddhism. In particular, Buddhism concerns the question of meditation that Zhu Xi practiced in his youth, which yet was rejected by the neo-Confucians. Zhu Xi's accommodation turned out to be an important factor later to become the undisputed leader of neo-Confucianism during the Song dynasty. The sectors of philosophy, religion, and ideology blurred during the establishment of Neo-Confucianism (see van Ess 2009, p. 202). Without compromise in teachings, the success of this newly reinforced thinking tradition of neo-Confucianism would have been very much less distinct.

The differences between Zhu and Hu Hong are more important than they may seem at first glance. They concern the understanding of the essential concepts:

For Zhu, heavenly norms are not, as Hu Hong thought, an abstract ideal that is extremely difficult to approach due to one's inborn human desires. On the contrary, heavenly norms belong to man's inborn nature whereas human desires develop only due to the negative effects of inappropriate socialization, bad habituation, or physical problems such as imbalanced mixture of *qi* (van Ess 2010, p. 119).

While Buddhism tends to pass over suffering during life, Confucianism devotes itself entirely to life. Hu Hong, as other Confucians, criticized Buddhists for their withdrawal from active life and their rejection of the ordinary world (Schirokauer 1986, p. 488). From the political revivalists movement, Hu Hong had developed neo-Confucianism into a sort of "civil religion" (van Ess 2009, p. 202) whose "supreme goal was to renew the world through training by wise teachers" (*ibid.*). The proximity to the idea of philosopher kings in Plato's *Politeia* (Plato 1992) is apparent here. The difference between Hu Hong and Zhu Xi concerns their understanding of openness to the world and the priorities of tasks in the learning process. Van Ess says:

Zhu Xi disapproved of the idea that in order to act humanely one first had to study and to recognize the structure of humaneness (...). He thought that humaneness was already an inherent aspect of human nature. Hu Hong, however, was convinced that the central task of man was to use his heart/mind and to learn before he could act in a humane way (p. 121).

Zhu Xi rejected some of Hu Hong's doctrines. He particularly distrusted intuition and highly valued reflection and fine nuances all the more. Finally, students after Zhu Xi faced the task of completing the sequences shown in the *Daoxue* (The *Great Learning*), which emphasizes "to extend knowledge, to make the thoughts sincere, and to rectify the mind" (Schirokauer 1986, p. 492). He also believed that the so-called Hunan School had a big problem in balancing the importance of tranquility and action. Major differences between Zhu Xi and Hu Hong arose over their views on the mind and human nature. Indeed, the two aspects do not stand in a simple relationship to each other. Zhu Xi particularly criticized the view that the mind is the state of sensation, while nature represents the state before feelings are aroused in us. For Zhu Xi, "the mind is present in both states, and both are found in

the ordinary world of experience. In the tranquil state, when the feelings are not yet aroused, mind and consciousness are present” (Schirokauer 1986, p. 493). Precisely this situation is considered important for self-cultivation. Emotions are the expression and function of nature, and, according to Zhu Xi, the mind has the function to orient nature and sensitivity, and to bring them into harmony with one another.

Without being able to go into details on the nuances and critical points here, it can be said in agreement with Schirokauer that the theory of Zhu Xi is more complex than that of Hu Hong. Without doubt, Hu Hong is viewed as the loyal follower of Mencius, while Zhu Xi makes more direct reference to Confucius. On the other hand, Hu Hong had a knack for terse and “high suggestive statements” that, Schirkauer believes, “invite reflection but are open to misinterpretation”. “A debate”, he suggests, “might have forced him to greater precision” (1986, p. 496). Yet it never came to that, unfortunately. While Zhu Xi was able to spread his ideas on self-cultivation convincingly at the same time with great success, the importance of Hu Hong should nevertheless not be underestimated. “Hu Hong left open certain possibilities in neo-Confucianism and to the degree that his sayings have stimulated present day philosophers, he has helped to fuel neo-Confucian discourse in the 20th century as he did in the 12th”, Schirokauer writes the recognition of him (Schirokauer 1986, p. 497).

7.4.3 *Lu Xiangshan (1139–1192) and His Disciples*

There are also important and dramatic differences between Lu Xiangshan (Lu Jinyuan) and Zhu Xi. Lu’s criticism of Zhu may remind one of our latitudes of romantic criticism of enlightenment, perhaps gladly supporting Charles Taylor (1996) in his being able to say something coarse, that romance and enlightenment could be understood as both the sides of the same coin. Lu believed Zhu Xi’s interpretation of Confucian or neo-Confucian learning theory and its philosophy of life to be “excessively complex, highly speculative, and over-intellectualized.” It “threatened to lead people astray” (Ivanhoe 2010, p. 259). Lu’s criticism of Zhu Xi’s rationalist interpretation of Confucianism was picked up later by Wang Yangming and led into an independent orientation of neo-Confucian thought. Viewed today, the latter possesses intensely romantic motives.⁹ The culture of ‘attentiveness’ or ‘mindfulness’ that experiences a renaissance today can largely be traced back to Lu Xiangshan. According to Lu, moral education is based on “a critical attentiveness to one’s responses and reactions to the affairs of one’s own life while working to eliminate an excessive concern with oneself. Rather than being focused on theoretical understanding, self-cultivation is primarily driven by a kind of reflective practice

⁹“Lu Jinyuan’s original insights waited for and were taken up by Wang Yangming. In the process, Wang transformed Lu’s initial vision into his own distinctive philosophy” (p. 260).

aimed at coming to see and appreciate the fundamental ethical goods that all human beings desire” (Ivanhoe 2010, p. 264).

Regarding its metaphysical understanding, Lu supported the idea that the principles of heart/mind and those of the world could coincide in a harmonious manner. He claims that “The heart/mind was the unique site where a full understanding of the world could take place; it is where all principles can come to consciousness and be known” (Ivanhoe 2010, p. 253). The heart/mind here is not primarily an individual trait or skill but rather something divided among all humanity that remains the same in a supra-contextual and supra-historical sense.¹⁰ We have it explained here as a metaphysical version of *common sense*. Perhaps one could say that the Neo-Confucian metaphysics is oriented to the world; it is not purely immanent but concerns the meaning of “transcendence of immanence”. Confucian common sense, which comes into play in the concept of heart/mind, is the condition of avoiding self-deception in personal lifestyle. It is less a skill than a readiness to learn.

Lu’s influence is important with regard to this understanding. In her article on the “Four Masters of Mingzhou”, Linda Walton describes the transmission and innovations among the disciples of Lu Jiuyuan (1139–1192), namely Yang Jian (1141–1226), Yuan Xie (1144–1224), Shu Lin (1136–1199), and Shen Huan (1139–1191). Of interest in this context is Yuan’s discussion of the relationship between the “*human heart/mind*” (*renxin*) and the “*moral heart/mind*” (*dioxin*) which is also called “*original heart/mind*” (see Walton 2010, p. 283). Walton quotes Yuan who says:

The heart/mind that all people have is called the human heart/mind. The moral heart/mind is the good heart/mind (*liangxin*...). When the human heart/mind is in peril, it is difficult to achieve equilibrium. When the moral heart/mind is obscured, then it is difficult to be clear. What is called moral heart/mind is just this heart/mind’s recognition of moral principle (*daoli*...). The human heart/mind daily comes into contact with things and is easily seduced by things... If moved by joy or anger, or enticed by wealth and rank; or if moved by sound and color, how can [the heart/mind] not be imperiled? (cited by Walton, *ibid.*, p. 283).

Walton shows at this point that Yuan’s understanding of the heart/mind is placed between the view of his teacher, Lu Jiuyuan, and that of Zhu Xi. While the human heart/mind and its moral equivalent are viewed as identical by Lu Jiuyuan, Zhu Xi draws a clear line between them. Yuan tries to show its connection in saying “I believe that the purpose of study is to obtain the original heart/mind and nothing more” (Yuan, quoted by Walton *ibid.*, p. 285). We can reformulate this by borrowing the phrasing of Wilhelm von Humboldt (1968/1785) on educational thought, that the study of the world brings human beings to themselves. Or we can put even more pathetically as he had expressed it originally: “Simply because both his thoughts and actions are only possible thanks to a third party, only thanks to imagination and development of something (whose actually differing matter is to be non-human in the world), he tries to seize as much of the world as he possibly can to link us as closely as he can to himself” („*Bloss weil beides, sein Denken und sein Handeln*

¹⁰ See Ivanhoe 2010, p. 254.

nicht anders, als nur vermöge eines Dritten, nur vermöge des Vorstellens und des Bearbeitens von etwas möglich ist, dessen eigentlich unterscheidendes Material es ist, Nicht-Mensch, d. i. Welt zu seyn, sucht er, soviel Welt, als möglich zu ergreifen, und so eng, als er nur kann, mit sich zu verbinden“ (Humboldt 1968, p. 283).

Yet Walton’s analysis also shows that the common sense of the “Four Masters of Mingzhou” as a philosophical group who may have been much less than what later commentators and thinkers “inclined toward regional narratives of intellectual history” have seen or presented (Walton *ibid.*, p. 290). Comparable or common is the focus on the heart/mind and the clarification of one’s own situation and motive. A sincere desire should help to avoid self-deception. Central to this school of thoughts is their metaphysics of the true self. “The sincere person is someone who possesses the will to return to the true, natural, self” (Nuyen 2010, p. 630–1). In the *Doctrine of the Mean* we find the claim “that one’s true self is the moral self” (*ibid.*, 631). Equating the true self with the good and moral self is obviously a problematic assumption that we face in humanistic psychology and its authenticity discourse in the twentieth century. Given this premise, “the sincere person who is true to his or her natural self is *ipso facto* a moral being. Something like this interpretation is also evident in Wang Yang-ming’s account of sincerity in his commentary, *Inquiry on the Great Learning*” (p. 632).

7.4.4 Wang Yangming (1472–1529)

Wang Yang-ming’s *Instructions on the Practical Living* represents the major work of the *idealistic* wing of neo-Confucianism, whereas, according to Wing-Tsit Chan, the *Chin-ssu lu*¹¹ (texts collected by Zhu Xi [1130–1200] and Lü Zuqian [1137–1181]) is the major work of the *rationalistic* wing of Neo-Confucianism. In ontology or metaphysics, the two neo-Confucian thinkers view *li* (the principle of order, 理 or 禮) differently. In Confucianism, all forms of manners and behavior are signified with *li* (理) and they can cover both unusual rituals and ceremonies as well as “lesser” everyday habits.¹² “For Wang and most neo-Confucians, everything is constituted by some combination of *li* and *qi*. *Li* (...) refers to the way a thing or state of affairs ought to be. When things or states of affairs are not in accord with *li*, they are deemed deviant” (Tien 2010, p. 296). However, as Tien states, both Wang

¹¹ Zhu Xi and Lü Tsu-Ch’ien (1967) and Zhu Xi (1991).

¹² Hence *li* can be translated as propriety, usage, custom, etiquette morality, and behavior norms. Yet Zhu Xi among the neo-Confucians held *li* to connote a somewhat differently imbedded meaning. According to the *Stanford Encyclopedia*: “*Li* is inherently perspectival. Zhu adopts metaphors of the grains in wood, the lines in jade, the “veins” in a leaf, the lines in marble, and even the texture of beef, to stress that *li* are manifested immanently rather than abstractly, and thus are to be sought concretely by observing phenomena in the world, not by pure, disengaged, abstract ratiocination. Moreover, *li* are never presented in their putative optimal pure form. They always appear conditioned by the degree of purity of the *qi* through which they are manifested and of the environment conditions”.

and Zhu distinguish between the universal *li* (or “heavenly *li*”) and the “manifested *li* of particular, individualized things or events” (Tien 2010, p. 296).¹³ *Li* not only structures things and objects but also thinking, the intellect, and language. This allows human beings to understand and deal appropriately with things and situations which confront them. As noted in Humboldt’s formula of understanding of the world and oneself, learning about the world is learning about the self; To understand the *li* of the outer world helps to relate *li* to the inner world, *i.e.*, the intellect and character. Tien says:

Even though all things possess the same universal *li*, the individualized *li* that are actually manifested are determined by their *qi* endowments. That is why different things are said to have different *li*. Bricks, bamboo chairs, boats, and carts all differ from each other because their *qi* endowments differ, so the *li* that they manifest also differ (Tien 2010, p. 299).¹⁴

However, Wang’s metaphysics are not, despite what many modern authors claim, the essence of Berkeley’s ontological idealism “which claims that the physical world exists only as an appearance to or expression of heart/mind” (Tien 2010, p. 299). In accordance with other interpreters, Tien summarizes Wang’s understanding of *li* and heart/mind in six points. In his view, Wang claims:

1. “that one should not search for *li* in the external world because such a search would prove terribly ineffective” (...);
2. “that one should leave open “the possibility that *li* exists both in the heart/mind and in things” (...);
3. “that one should not engage in such a search, because all the *li* are already present in the heart/mind (...), which is why Wang advocates *monitoring one’s responses to things and events of the world; the alternative he offers is not navel gazing but an engaged self-scrutiny as one perceives, responds, and acts in the world*” [emphasis R.R.] (...);
4. “that every *li* that exists in the external world is also present in the universal *li* of the heart/mind” (...)
5. “that *wu* are the content or objects of thought, and hence, also in the heart/mind” (...); and
6. “that while the external world is dependent for its existence on the heart/mind of humanity, the clear intellect of human beings, as the most rarefied form of vital energy, is also ontologically dependent on the external world” (Tien 2010, p. 305–306).

¹³“*Qi* is the stuff of which the universe is made. It exists in various grades of purity. Although all things possess all the *li* of the universe within them, because of the impurity of the *qi* of which they are composed, some *li* are obstructed. Different combinations of *li* and *qi* are what account for the differences between things” (Tien 2010, p. 297).

¹⁴According to Wang, the heart/mind or consciousness is always so-to-speak intentional: “Whenever one thinks, there must be something about which one thinks. That about which one is thinking is the *wu* or ‘object of thought’. The *wu* are the content of one’s thoughts. (...) *Wu* constitutes the locus of one’s attention and is where one’s heart/mind is directed” (Tien 2010, p. 303).

This reconstruction results in Wang Yangming being classified as a “non-reductionist, naturalist, cognitivist, moral realist” (Tien 2010, p. 308) “What sets Wang apart from other Neo-Confucians is his account of the process by which an irreducible moral property can affect the senses” (*ibid.*).

Wang is a *moral realist* because he believes that there are “moral facts or properties in the world of the sort required to render our moral judgments true and that the existence of these moral facts or properties is constitutively independent of human opinion” (p. 308). He is a *cognitivist* “because he believes that moral judgments are able to be true or false and can be the result of cognitive access to the facts that render them true or false” (*ibid.*). And finally Wang is a *naturalistic non-reductionist*: “Given that Wang Yangming and most Neo-Confucian philosophers believed that there is a corresponding *li* for property, whether moral or non-moral, then not just Wang Yangming but all Neo-Confucian philosophers would appear to be moral naturalists. For Wang and other Neo-Confucians, *li*, whether moral or non-moral, is both causal and detectable by the senses” (p. 308). Whereas neo-Confucian philosophers did not divide things into the ‘natural’ and ‘non-natural’, they can be regarded as naturalists, “insofar as one considers *qi* to be ‘natural’, and given that *li* is never found apart from *qi*, one can conclude that moral properties are also ‘natural’” (p. 309).

Wang Yangming’s idea of education is the extension of pure knowing. The concept of pure knowing (*liangzhi* [...]) is idealism that one today can also call a romantically graceful concept of an inner awareness that should be termed both cognitive and affective – an ability to come into contact with the *li* of the heart/mind and the universe. This permits distinguishing spontaneously between the right and the wrong. Pure knowing should be part of everyday practice. This alone would enable us pure knowing.¹⁵ “Pure knowing naturally knows”, Wang said, “which is in fact quite easy. But often one cannot extend one’s pure knowing to the utmost. This shows that it is not difficult to know but difficult to act” (Wang, quoted by Tien 2010, p. 311). Knowledge then becomes real or correct (*zhenzhi* [...]), if it is linked with action. Knowledge without action is not only inferior knowledge but, according to Wang, basically no knowledge at all: “There have never been people who know but do not act. Those who are supposed to know but do not act simply do not know” (Wang Yangming, quoted by Tien 2010, p. 312). This makes it clear that Wang is using the term for action in a very broad sense: “‘Action’ for Wang includes the ‘acts’ of thinking, feeling, intending, and doing” (Tien 2010, p. 312, footnote 32; emphasis R.R.).

Such thinking suggests, to put it a bit brutally, that one has nearly arrived at the lyrics of contemporary discourse on skills. Yet the appearance is naturally deceptive. Wang’s philosophy, even if one views it critically, is immune to vulgar pragmatism.

¹⁵“Extending one’s pure knowing means to apply successfully the pure knowing to the matters of one’s daily life. Since one cannot extend one’s pure knowing if self-centered desires are obstructing it, the extension of pure knowing is contingent on first eradicating self-centered desires in relation to specific items of knowledge. Only after the pure knowing is extended can one attain real knowledge” (Tien 2010, p. 311).

7.5 The Search for the Heart/Mind

Confucian metaphysics is not really pushy. Confucius comes across as agnostic and pursues an epistemological modesty. There are powers that, if you fail to understand, can at most be named. Confucius did not explain in the *Analects* what heaven meant, but his comment on the effective power of heaven recurred again and again.

Heaven could regulate the workings of nature such as the procession of the seasons [17.19], determine whether a person has wealth and honor [12.5], or even whether the culture of the past should persist in a later age [9.5] (Lu 2014, p. 65).

Heaven has the power to endow virtue in someone like Confucius [7.23] (...) and set him on the path to sagehood [9.6].

Heaven can cast a curse on people, including Confucius [6.28; 11.9]

It can be offended and appeased [3.13].

Heaven cannot be deceived [9.12].

The will of Heaven should be held in awe [16.8].

In its totality, heaven appears to be some sort of transcendental power that is much larger than the human individual, yet somehow it is immanent and operative in the human realm. Confucius was hesitant to discuss it, but heaven operates in a way that is accessible to human understanding (Lu 2014, p. 65).

One can only refer to certain things or matters. “On matters that one cannot discuss, one must remain silent” (Wittgenstein 1993, p. 85). Confucius and Wittgenstein do not appear far apart from each other on the ethics of silence. There are matters that are known. And, for the other things, read the corresponding parts of the *Analects* (2.17): “Yu, shall I tell you what it is to know. To say you know when you know, and to say you do not know when you do not, that is knowledge” (Confucius 1979, p. 65). However, for Confucius, “the line that demarcates known and unknown, as well as what can be known and what cannot, is not self-evident. Not only does it vary from individual to individual, but at a more profound level, it may mark the limit of human knowledge itself” (Lu 2014, p. 71). And his view on the meaning of knowledge about ignorance (*i.e.*, lack of knowledge) is entirely Socratic: “The known is always recognized in the presence of the unknown, which may not be consciously acknowledged” (*ibid.*) (...); “we may still be unaware of our known ignorance when we think we actually know what we know which is made possible because of our ignorance. Thus knowledge and ignorance are ontologically interdependent” (p. 72).

What can be said about the heart/mind after all? Simultaneously a great deal and very little and almost everything and nothing. But, regarding the search for the heart/mind, something negative can be mentioned, because the chickens and hounds are too few for us and because it violates humanism that wants to see people lacking any metaphysics. Confucianism can be viewed critically as teaching pure immanence, but in our closer reading, especially if the heart/mind remains focused, shows that the dualism of immanence and transcendence is basically lifted. Besides the dramatic and courageous search for the heart/mind, there is also the joy of learning, which is prominently discussed in the *Lunyu*... “Is it not a pleasure, having learned

something, to try it out at due intervals” (1.1) (1979, p. 59). However, for enjoyment and this pleasure, it is necessary to know and become engaged with the world: “To be fond of something is better than merely to know it, and to find joy in it is better than merely to be fond of it” (Confucius 1979, p. 84; [*The Analects*, 6.20]). Feeling good, being oneself, and finding the balance do not contradict the search for the heart/mind; “A man’s true character reveals itself when he is feeling at ease” (Lu 2014, p. 73). The so-called true self is found in the self-fulfilling joy of learning, since “pure joy is self-sufficient and autonomous by virtue of its subjects being so in the first place” (*ibid.*).¹⁶ And the learning traditions does not contradict the search for one’s self. “Tradition and particular others with whom one has a relationship influences the substance of the self, but the heart-mind has the capacity to reflect on and criticize these influences, to the point where a person can totally reject the social order and seek to live outside it” (Wong 2014, p. 193).¹⁷ The Confucian ethic does not exhaust itself in justifying the need to take over moral motivation as an adaptation to society, as was promptly maintained.¹⁸ Despite the orientation toward the figure of the wise man, it did not concern a hero ethic. Yet the question would still be raised for whom the search for the heart/mind is reserved. Wong says: “If in fact the achievement of robust virtues requires long and hard training, supported and guided by others who have taken similar paths before, and if (...) people cannot engage in such training until they have the material security that enables them to take their minds off the sheer task of survival, then it is no mystery at all why there are no such traits in societies structured to achieve very different goals” (Wong 2014, p. 194–5).

7.6 Final Considerations

One needs not to agree with Confucian or neo-Confucian cosmology to be inspired by the concept of the heart/mind. Basic questions and basic positions on educational thought can be recognized and distinguished for the discourse on educational theory as well as for educational practice of importance within our degrees of latitude. A few aspects or viewpoints of the various schools of heart/mind are mentioned.

¹⁶This stands in a certain opposition to Daoist teaching: Joy is not an intrinsic value to be pursued in Daoism (see Lu *ibid.*, p. 74): “The experience of joy, for instance, is to be avoided by Zhuangzi’s (...) philosophy of non-attachment, as it is considered to be equally detrimental as sorrow to one’s well-being” (*ibid.*). “Whereas Confucius seeks to feel at ease with his true self and in his communion with his fellow human beings, Zhuangzi can only find peace in the impersonal passage of time and the unpredictable unfolding of events alien and external to his mind-heart” (Lu 2014, p. 74).

¹⁷See *Analects* 18.5–18.6).

¹⁸“Thus Confucian ethics both recognizes the profound influence that tradition and one’s relationship with others have in shaping and constituting the person, but also maintains the possibility of the self’s critically reflecting on and controlling the effect of these influences, especially as they bear on developing the ability to reliably judge and act on what is appropriate for the situation at hand” (Wong 2014, p. 193).

- (a) *Finding out what is correct and good as well as who one is coincide in a certain sense.* This humanist idea with a supporting philosophical anthropology of it is represented today by scholars including Charles Taylor (1996).
- (b) “Theoreticians of the heart/mind” are undecided about the *status of working with the world*, particularly in studying and promoting “objective” *knowledge as well as love of learning*. Zhu Xi’s rationalist variant and Wang Yangming’s idealistic view confront each other as great neo-Confucian schools in this regard. These differences too have conspicuous parallels within our educational discourses.
- (c) At variance are views regarding the *connection between knowledge and action*. In a manner of speaking, this issue has been a topic of ethics and education since Socrates.
- (d) *The heart/mind has a balancing and functioning task to fulfill.* The human being makes mistakes when he has lost the balancing and he may need someone to help to find it again. Education and pedagogy, development and leadership have a complementary role here.

The Confucian and neo-Confucian lessons on the concept of the heart/mind allow us to recall a language and a way of thinking that doesn’t shy away from accepting the limits of expression without concluding: A thought that cannot be expressed is also nonessential. Education as a form of understanding the search for the lost heart, according to Mencius, will indeed fail to lead us to a definition that manages to convince academics or scientists in education. Yet it is an expression of knowledge and an experience that presents enrichment and encouragement even outside the sphere of Chinese culture more than 2000 years later.

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