

# Liberal Arts in the Universities of Greater China: Current Models and the Historical Legacy

Webinar at the Centre for Global Higher Education  
Oxford University  
March 29, 3022

# The Liberal Arts in China's historic Christian universities – by Ruth Hayhoe

- A lifetime of studying Chinese universities – now focusing on translation of current Chinese scholarship
- Chose to work with Dr. Peter Ng of the CUHK & Leping Mou on the remarkable legacy of universities closed in the early 1950s
- Our new book: *Liberal Arts and the Legacy of China's Christian Universities* has 13 chapters by historians, sociologists and educators published since the 1990s
- Most of the authors were mentored by Professor Zhang Kaiyuan, eminent historian and past president of Central China Normal Univ.
- The following five slides were put together by Dr. Peter Ng



Prof. Zhang Kaiyuan (1926-2021),  
former president of Central China  
Normal University

Prof. Zhang is a well-known historian of the 1911 Revolution in China.

A pioneer leader in the study of History of Pre-1949 Christian Universities in China.

President– 1984-1991

Died on May 28, 2021

**First International Symposium on the History of China's Christian Universities, at Central China Normal University (1989.5.31- 6.3)**



**Retrospect and Prospect:  
The International Symposium on Thirty Years' Research  
On History of Christian Colleges in China (2019.10.11-14)**





## Ma Xiangbo and the Mind of Modern China

*Edited by*  
Ruth Hayhoe and Yongling Lu

Ma Xiangbo (1840-1939), the founder of Aurora University (Zhèndàn 1903), Fudan University (1905), and Fu Jen Catholic University (1925) ; a pioneer introducing Western LAE into China vs. Protestant missionary educators such as Calvin Mateer and John Leighton Stuart in the 20<sup>th</sup> century China.



# Shanghai Fudan University

Su Buqing (蘇步青) and  
Xie Xide (謝希德)

Fudan Center for  
American Studies was  
founded in 1985

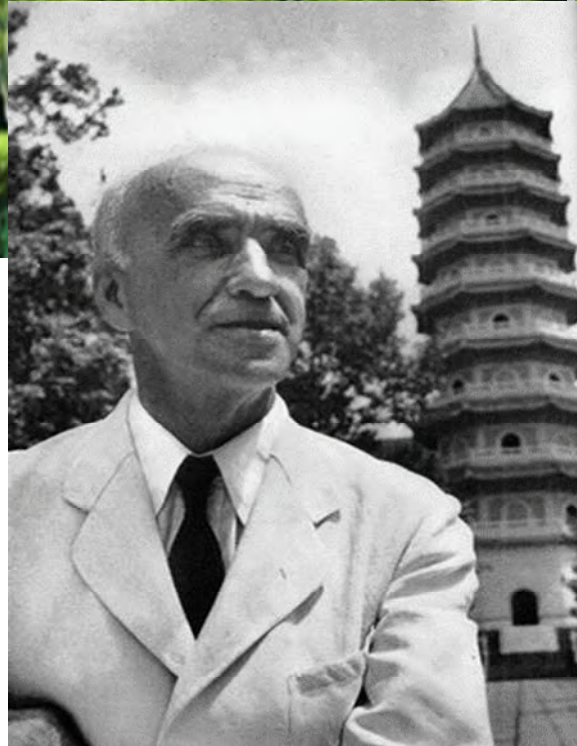
“Fudan Liberal Arts  
College” was set up in  
2005, together with a  
Research Center of LAE  
(General Education).



# University of Peking



(Yuan Pei College)



(Yenching Academy)



# Outline of our book

- **Part One: From Missionaries to Chinese Professors**
- Lead chapter by Zhang Kaiyuan, chapters on T C Chao, Chen Yuan and Wu Yifang (one of China's earliest women university presidents)
- **Part Two: Distinctive Characteristics of the Study of Christian Higher Education in China**
- Chapters on Liberal Arts at Yenching, Chinese classical studies & rural service programs
- **Part Three: The Interplay between Globalization and Localization**
- Chapters on the revival of Chinese classical architecture, gender in higher education and a concluding Chinese perspective on the work of the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia since 1952



# Some final thoughts

- Of the 16 Christian universities, 3 were Catholic and 13 were Protestant, established by North American missions and funded through the United Board for Christian Higher Education in China.
- Founded in 1922, it reached out to all of Asia in 1952, and is celebrating its centenary as the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia supporting whole person education, environmental sustainability and interfaith dialogue
- A remarkable part of the heritage that relates to the Liberal Arts was the revival of classical Chinese architecture and its harmonious interaction with Western patterns

中国古典建筑模式廊柱与现代建筑结构融和  
Chinese harmonious frame & pillars with modern structures

北京大學（燕京大學校園）







# 華西醫科大學

(華西聯合大學的校園)

四川

中式塔樓和西式鐘樓的結合；中式屋頂和西式天窗的結合

Chinese gestalt with clock tower & dormer windows



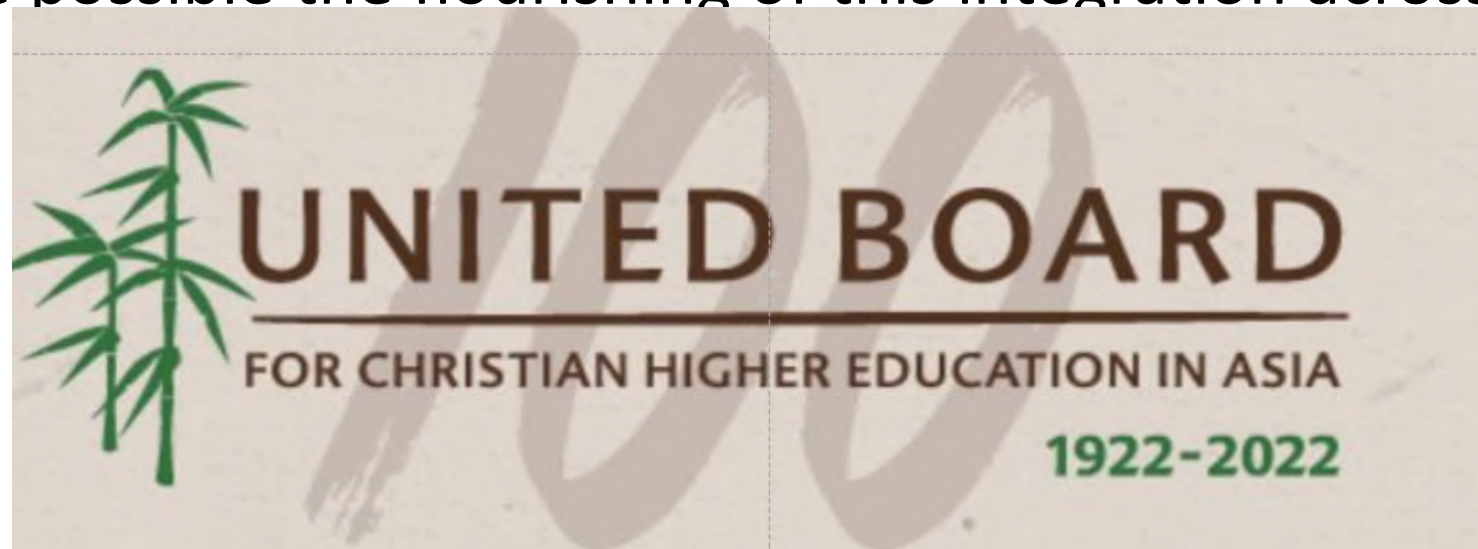
帶有希臘柱子、拱門和門廊的中國建築框架  
Chinese frame with Greek pillars, arches & portico





# Roots for the Liberal Arts in Asian civilization

- The early historical experience of China's Christian universities showed the possibilities of an integration between core values of East Asian civilization and those of the Western world toward a fuller and more responsible humanity
- The work of the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia has made possible the flourishing of this integration across Asia



# **Cultivating Whole Persons with Liberal Arts Education: A Case Study of Three Institutions in the Greater China Area**

**March 29, 2022**

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**PhD candidate**

**Ontario Institute for Studies in Education**

**University of Toronto**



**UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO**  
**OISE | ONTARIO INSTITUTE**  
**FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION**



# Introduction

- **Background and Context**

- Liberal arts education (LAE) for social challenges and uncertainties in the 21st century
- Educating students as socially responsible citizens during the COVID 19 pandemic
- Global resurgence of LAE, a strong presence in Asia
- LAE carrying on tradition from former Christian universities in China



# Research Question

- **Question**

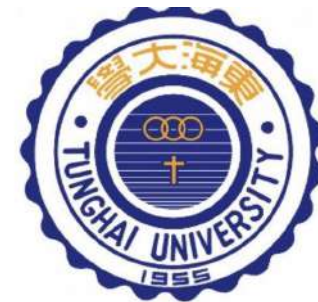
How do LAE models in three universities in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan contribute to cultivating whole persons with capabilities for their societies?

- **Three case institutions**

Yuanpei College at Peking University in mainland China

Lingnan University in Hong Kong

Tunghai University in Taiwan.



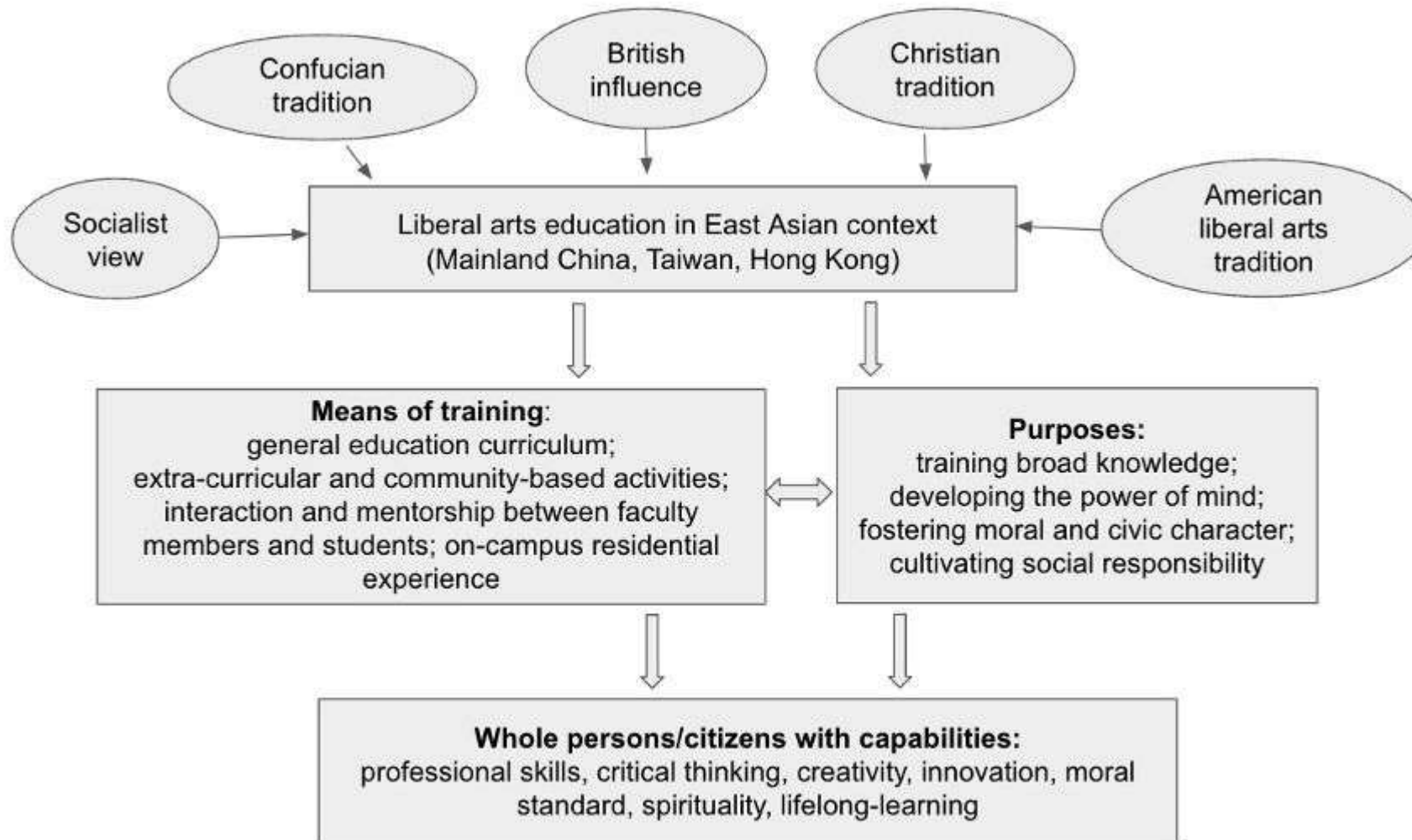
TUNG HAI UNIVERSITY



# Theoretical Framework

- Capabilities approach (Nussbaum, 2001, 2009; Sen, 1999)
  - "what are people actually able to do and to be?"
  - substantial freedoms with a set of interrelated opportunities to choose and to act
  - broader conception of wellbeing and human flourishing





# Mixed Methods

- **Document** analysis (curriculum, missions & goals, university newsletters)
- **Interviews** with admin & faculty members, students & alumni (N=31)
- Online **Survey** with students & alumni (N=42)



# LAE in Lingnan

Founded in 1967 by Lingnan Alumni. One of the eight public universities in Hong Kong.

Carries on the “Lingnan spirit” from former Lingnan University in Guangzhou “passion, loyalty, perseverance, openness to different ideas and cultures, and a readiness to serve.”



## Lingnan’s LAE modules

broad-based curriculum

small-class teaching

close staff-student relationship

fully residential campus

out-of-class learning experiences;  
community service;  
multi-faceted workplace experience;  
alumni and community support

global learning opportunities



# LAE in Tunghai



Luce Chapel, designed by architectural master I. M. Pei

Establish in 1955 by the UBCHEA as a Christian university in Asia ...to inherit the 13 Christian universities in China

1955 Tunghai University; 2008 Poya School, to revive its LAE tradition

**Teng Nien:** LAE in the early days of Tunghai were laid on four main points from our founder William Fenn. They were small class teaching, general education, residential learning, and labour program.

## LAE modules

**Six Arts** in a modern version

(rites, music, archery, chariotting, literacy, and numeracy)

**Family system of mentorship**

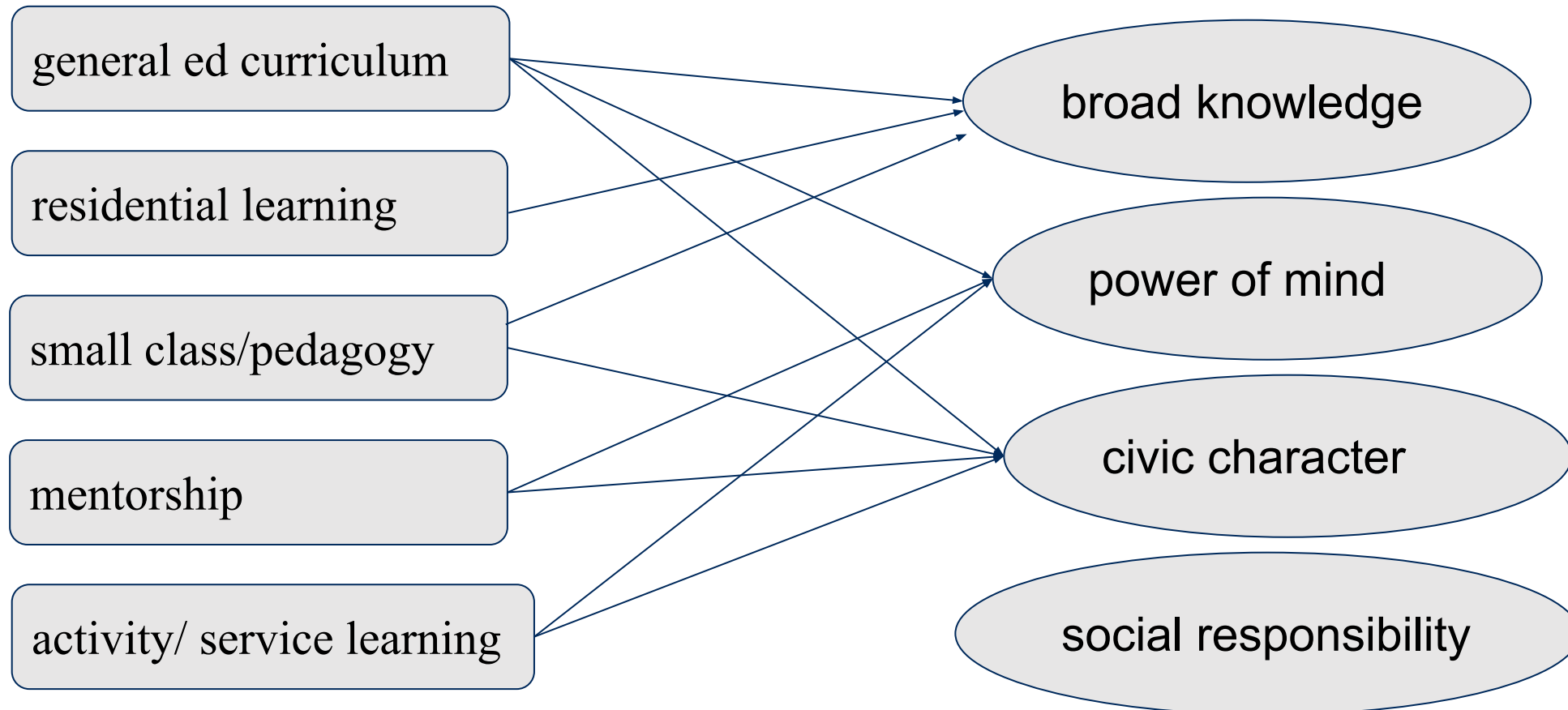
# LAE in Yuanpei at Peking University

former Yenching University,  
named after Cai Yuanpei,  
LAE with Chinese characteristics a



Yuanpei's LAE modules
General education foundation courses; Forward-looking curriculum system; Featured interdisciplinary majors
Entrance education; Flexible program length; Free choice of majors and courses
Mentor system
Residential college
Social practice
International exchange programs

# Findings: Cultivating capabilities (quan)



Linear regression analysis reflected positive relationship between LAE modules and capabilities development

Note: variable “social responsibility” data violates normal distribution, regression was not able to conduct with validity.



# LAE in Chinese Contexts

- **LAE in the Chinese Societies in the 21st Century**
  - *Boya Jiaoyu* (博雅教育) for LAE
  - An ideal of higher ed as person making (做人) rooted in Confucianism
  - Moved away from elite status, offered to the majority of students, egalitarianism (有教无类) in Confucian educational thoughts.



**Lan Feng:** [the most important thing of LAE in Lingnan] is about how to become a ‘person’ [我觉得是关于怎么做人]

**Adam:** [LAE in Tunghai] is to train students to be an upright person [一个堂堂正正的人].

**Cho Yun:** Not everyone will be an elite, but everyone of us must be a [well-rounded] person. (Tunghai)

# How Does LAE Work?

- **LAE Modules and Educational Outcomes**

- Whole person cultivation, long-term development, rooted in Confucianism (education as a hundred-year project 百年树人)
- This integrated LAE model contributed to the overall development and experiential learning process, echoing with educational philosophy in both the Confucian education tradition and Western learning approaches

**experiential learning**



**learning and way of  
teaching through  
mentorship**

# LAE Experience and Capabilities

- A broader impact on life and development, a mindset prepared for uncertainties in the future
- LAE for social justice, equity, and inclusion

**Niu Gengsheng:** [YP] somewhat experimental and relatively free.... to cultivate talents that can't be cultivated by any university with a traditional system...this kind of freedom and the opportunity to bear the responsibilities [**civic character**]

**Carol:** [TH activity] special experience...the unknowingness of life. [You don't know about the future of life], but you have a group of friends who walk a long distance together, and there are also resources when you need them. [**power of mind**]



# Comparison across Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan

- **Hong Kong:** international; balance with professional training; informed citizens
- **Taiwan:** influence of Christian and Confucian legacy; egalitarianism
- **Mainland China:** socialist view of education for talent training; serving the nation; Chinese culture, and LAE tradition

*Thank You*

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University of Toronto



# **Confucian Humanism through the Lens of the SDGs**

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**A Research Initiative**





# An Issue Arises

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On one hand, the notion of “tien-ren-he-yi” (the harmony/unity between Heaven and Humanity) is a core idea in the Confucian humanism, which people often easily take as a signpost for the Confucian ecocentrism.

On the other hand, the notion of “tien-ren-he-yi” could have multiple meanings, thus there needs to be an appropriate lens for the purpose of interpreting the Confucian environmental concerns and in contemporary terms.

# Some Cosmological Examples Implying Confucian Ecological Ideas

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- Perhaps an early clue is provided by a pre-Confucian scholar, Shi Bo, who lived in the Western Zhou period (1066-771 B.C.E.), and elaborated on “*he*”: “harmony (*he*) is indeed productive of things. But sameness does not advance growth. Smoothing one thing with another is called harmony. For this reason things come together and flourish.”
- The Confucian cosmological reasoning become explicit in the *Doctrine of the Mean*.
- Wang Yangming further provided an ontological assertion that the ability to strike a sympathetic resonance with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things is a defining characteristic of being human.

# The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Serving as Such a Lens

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- The Sustainable Development Goals or Global Goals comprise a collection of 17 interlinked goals.
- Approximately, these SDGs may be clustered into three thematic domains: (1) respecting life and civilization for a dignified living, (2) achieving a sustainable social and economic development, and (3) maintaining the harmoniousness between humans and nature.



# The Parallels and Compatibilities Identified (I)

Excerpts from Confucian Classic Texts	Compatibility with the SDGs	Interpretations
<p><b>“If one uses the same thing to complement the same thing, it is a dead end and will become wasted.”</b></p> <p><b>“A single sound is nothing to hear, a single color does not make a pattern, a single taste does not satisfy the stomach, and a single item does not harmonize.”</b></p>	<p>SDG 2.5: “maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species”</p> <p>SDG 15.9: “integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes”</p>	<p>The Confucian notion of harmony presupposes the existence of different things and implies a certain favorable relationship among them. A harmonious world must be a diverse world; this is so because a healthy and prosperous world relies on its diverse things to go together. Harmony out of diversity produces a lively world; sameness without adequate difference can only lead to a dead end.</p>

# The Parallels and Compatibilities Identified (II)

Excerpts from Confucian Classic Texts	Compatibility with the SDGs	Interpretations
<p><b>“With coarse rice to eat, plain water to drink, and my bended arms for a pillow, joy can be found in the midst of these [...]” (Analects 7.16); “He did not demand his rice to be superbly polished or his meat and fish to be finely minced.... When eating, he would not converse.... Even when he had only coarse rice and vegetable soup, he would always offer them as sacrifice, and he always did so as if he were fasting” (Analects 10.8-10.11; trans. Ni, 2017).</b></p>	<p>SDG 12: ensure sustainable consumption patterns</p> <p>SDG 12.3: control per capita food waste and reduce food losses</p>	<p>One should be content with a simple life. Furthermore, every food item is given full consideration from both mind and body: sensational, emotional, and intellectual. Food is not merely consumed, but a source for appreciation and aesthetic enjoyment of what has been served.</p>

# The Parallels and Compatibilities Identified (III)

Excerpts from Confucian Classic Texts	Compatibility with the SDGs	Interpretations
<p><b>“He did not eat rice that was spoiled, nor fish or meat that was rotten. He did not eat if the food was discolored, or it smelled bad. He did not eat anything that was improperly cooked or during periods other than regular mealtime. He did not eat meat if the animal was not properly slain, nor did he eat what was served without the right sauce. Though there might be plenty of meat, he would not eat more of it than rice.” (Analects 10.8-10.11; trans. Ni, 2017)</b></p>	<p>SDG 2: “achieve food security and improved nutrition”</p> <p>SDG 2.1: “ensure access by all people....to safe, nutritious and sufficient food”</p>	<p>Special attention is paid to the quality, the look, the smell, the taste, the quantity of the food, and to the right time of eating. All these contribute to the conscious ritual of eating, thus an appreciation of what nature serves us.</p>

# The Parallels and Compatibilities Identified (IV)

Excerpts from Confucian Classic Texts	Compatibility with the SDGs	Interpretations
<p><b>“If the seasons of husbandry be not interfered with, the grain will be more than can be eaten. If close nets are not allowed to enter the pools and ponds, the fishes and turtles will be more than can be consumed. If the axes and bills enter the hills and forests only at the proper time, the wood will be more than can be used. When the grain and fish and turtles are more than can be eaten, and there is more wood than can be used, this enables the people to nourish their living and mourn for their dead, without any feeling against any. This condition, in which the people nourish their living and bury their dead without any feeling against any, is the first step of royal government” (Mencius, Liang Hui Wang I)</b></p>	<p>SDG 1: “end poverty”</p> <p>SDG 2: “end hunger”</p> <p>SDG 3: “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”</p> <p>SDG 14.4: “effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing”</p> <p>SDG 16: “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development”</p>	<p>Agriculture, husbandry and fishery in compliance with the seasons would help conserve the nature, lead to economic and social prosperity, and thus set the condition for a benevolent government.</p>



# The Parallels and Compatibilities Identified (V)

Excerpts from Confucian Classic Texts	Compatibility with the SDGs	Interpretations
<p><b>“The sage-king should establish his rules as follows: when grasses and tress are budding and growing, no saw or sickle is allowed to be taken into mountains and woods. Never hinder the growth of plants or cause them to become extinct. During the season of reproduction, fish traps and toxins are not allowed to be put into waters. Never impede animals from growing or cause them to die. Plough in spring; weed in summer; harvest in autumn; and collect in winter. Follow the seasonal cycle and the crops will not fail to feed people. Impose fishery rules strictly and aquatic animals will be sustained for humans to use. Log and plant at the proper season and there will be enough forests for timber”</b> (Xunzi, 9:22).</p>	<p>SDG 2.4 “ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production”</p> <p>SDG 8: “promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth”</p> <p>SDG 12.2: “achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources”</p> <p>SDG 12.8: “ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature”</p> <p>SDG 17: “strengthen the means of implementation”</p>	<p>The Confucian anthropocentrism holds that human beings should take the responsibility and actions to nurture and conserve a friendly and sustainable nature, rather than simply enjoying and appreciating what nature serves us.</p>

# Confucian Ecology Fits Well with an Anthropocene Epoch

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- The Confucian ecology heightens a gratitude and an appreciation of what the nature serves us, and embeds such a sensation in human ethical perfection, through forming sensational, emotional, and intellectual bond with the nature, e.g., associating care for nature to filial piety: “cut a tree, slain an animal, not in a proper time, thus violate filial piety” (断一木, 杀一兽, 不以其时, 非孝也)
- The Confucian ecology advocates a kind of anthrocentrism in which human is an active participant in the cosmic with ethical responsibility to nurture and maintain the nature. This is significantly from other anthrocentric perspectives that see nature as serving human needs.
- The Confucian ecology celebrates diversity and a harmony out of diversity, which is believed to nurture a lively world, while sameness without adequate difference can only lead to a dead end.
- Confucian ecology sees a harmony not necessarily friendly and coming out of the continuous interplay of opposing forces. Through such interplay the myriad things of the world “negotiate” with one another and strike a balance, not from a predestined principle but through some kind of give-and-take. It is like rocks and water in the river: both can have their way, yet both have to yield in some way.

# Further Research Plan

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- Creating a coding system (i.e., keywords retrieved from the SDGs and selected Confucian classic texts)
- Applying such a coding system to a wider range of Confucian classic texts using Nvivo software
- Detecting the Confucian ecological ideas and their linkages to specific SDGs
- Analyzing the scope, strength and limitations of the Confucian ecological ideas benchmarked against the SDGs

**THANK YOU!**

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