

## **DIMENSION AND CHARACTERISTIC OF PRAGMATIC CONTEXTUALISM IN CHINESE PHILOSOPHY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CONFUCIANIST AND DAOIST**

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### **Abstrak**

*“Science denialism” yang menyangkal “science” dengan “science” untuk mengarahkan “selected knowledge” telah menimbulkan “gap of truth,” seperti “hoax” yang menyebabkan timbulnya “doubts” (keraguan pada kebenaran pengetahuan atau informasi), yaitu fenomena skeptisisme dalam era “digital”. Pendekatan verifikasi pengetahuan “Cartesian” menjadi terbatas karena “alat” berbasis algoritme-psikologis dapat mengarahkan dan menggunakan data atau nilai ilmiah untuk mendukung/menegasikan pengetahuan demi tujuan tertentu terlepas dari kebenaran objektif. Dengan demikian, diferensiasi benar dan salah membutuhkan “qualitative reasoning” (penalaran kualitatif) seperti pada “pragmatic contextualism” (kontektualisme pragmatis): Sebuah pendekatan sensitivitas akan konteks yang diterapkan pada tindakan yang berdasarkan kearifan lokal sebagai wujud komunikasi benar dan salah (melalui tindakan nyata). “Pragmatic contextualism” dipraktikkan dalam filosofi Tionghoa, dibentuk oleh karakteristik dualitas “yin” dan “yang” berdasarkan filosofi Confucius dan Dao yang menyerap ke berbagai dimensi (manusia). Oleh karena itu, artikel ini mengidentifikasi karakteristik dan dimensi “pragmatic contextualism” dalam filosofi Tionghoa dari Confucius dan Dao sebagai upaya menemukan alternatif verifikasi kebenaran dari tindakan yang berbasis nilai-nilai lokal. Kajian pustaka dari perkuliahan, buku, dan artikel (berita dan jurnal) dilakukan untuk mengidentifikasi karakteristik dan dimensi “pragmatic contextualism”. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa karakteristik “pragmatic contextualism” adalah personalisasi, relativitas, holistik, multi-skala, relationalitas, “inter-spatiality”, “adaptivity”, dan kemajemukan (“plurality”).*

*Kata kunci: Filosofi Tionghoa, Pragmatic, Contextualism, Confucius, Dao*

**Abstract**

“Science denialism”, which counters “science” with “science” to direct a “selected knowledge” has caused a “gap of truth” as in hoax that led to doubts of knowledge, which is a phenomenon of skepticism in the digital era. “Cartesian” verification of knowledge is limited because an algorithm-psychological-based “tool” can direct and utilize scientific data/values to support/negate knowledge for particular purpose regardless of objective truth. Thus, differentiation between truth and false needs to acknowledge the “qualitative reasoning”, as in pragmatic contextualism: a context-sensitive approach, exercised on local values-based actions as communication acts of “truth” and “false”. Pragmatic contextualism is practiced in Chinese philosophy, composed by “yin” and “yang” duality characteristics based on Confucius and Dao philosophy, which permeates into varied dimensions. Therefore, the paper aims to identify the characteristic and dimensions of pragmatic contextualism in Chinese philosophy from Confucianist and Daoist as an attempt to discover an alternative “verification” of “truth” on local values-based acts. The literature study from lectures, books, and articles (journals, news) is conducted to identify the characteristics and dimensions of pragmatic contextualism. The study finds the characteristics of pragmatic contextualism are personalization, relativity, holistic, multiscale, relationality, inter-spatiality, adaptivity, and plurality. Further, these characteristics are expressed in social, education, politic, spiritual, environment, aesthetics, and temporal dimension.

*Keywords: Chinese Philosophy, Pragmatic, Contextualism, Confucius, Dao*

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Misinformation Age and Implication on Objective Truth**

In the digital era, knowledge exchanges occurred within a certain “virtual public sphere”, constructed by repetitive, “selective” objective sharing, which left the unverified truth and caused confusion. Digital communication tool utilizes algorithm-

based machine and psychological aspect of the human being to persuade a certain expected behavior as “truth”. The mixed algorithm-psychological have formed a science denialism, providing “science” to counter “science”, also possibly by “utilizing emotional aspect” to trigger certain emotional responses, which purpose is to propagate or debate certain ideas to be accepted or negated by society regardless objective truth or false of its “science” or “idea” (O’Connor & Weatherall, 2019). Science denialism is applied through repetition, not invention, in the persuasive attitudes, which is infused, ingrained subtlety as slowly perceived as “social truth” or the “popular truth”. The “misinformation” is indirectly a social-constructive tool in the digital era, which has been part of everyday life, become a new “ruler” of social conduct (O’Connor & Weatherall, 2019). Science denialism, which denotes “science” to counter with another “science” has created doubts and confusion, as called digital skeptics (Carlson, 2021; Weissman, 2011; Michaels & Montforton, 2005). Digital skeptics are rooted examples of Skepticism, which is the attitude of doubting knowledge or claims (Popkin, 2020). The remedy of skepticism is contextualism (Feldman, 2001), which utilizes the senses in context sensitivity to fill in the “doubts” as possibilities of “knowing” (Cohen, 1999). Skepticism argues that “knowing” is not relying on the dichotomy “truth” and “falsity”, but within a “spectrum of possibilities”, which is elaborated and determined on contextualism by qualitative reasoning: an approach of senses, produced as socio-cultural values, which constructs the intangible code of conduct. Contextual-sensitivity creates an accommodative standard as a “spectrum of possibilities” (DeRose, 1995). Therefore, the “logic” truth and its quantification verification are no longer enough to differentiate truth or false, as the algorithm-psychology “tool” is able to construct the countermeasure of “statistical/numerical” data to argue or create doubts on the objective facts. Differentiation of truth and false in the digital era is no longer simply checking on “absolute truth” or universal “logic”, but needs to expand towards “educational” actions as interactional context, to go beyond the “theoretical facts”

(Foster, 2022). Thus, the alternative “ethics”, which is reflected in the contextual actions, is the “socio-educational” approach to identifying the truth and false within high-speed knowledge exchange in this digital era.

### **Finding “Alternative” Verification of Truth**

Consequently, creation ex nihilo is the “pragmatist” thinking (Benetatou, 2009), exercised in argumentative reasoning to pursue the logic “truth”, which percepts Virtue can be attained through knowledge capacity. Plato in Republic lays importance on justice as the virtue that becomes the “health of the soul” (Kenny, 2006), which refers to the importance of decision-making in personal judgment. A good personal judgment needs the intellectual capacity to decide right and wrong for him to be a wise man. Meanwhile, Contextualism provides justification of knowledge in context sensitivity since “to know all” retains the possibility of “not knowing some” within, which culminated diversely based on situations, events, or individuals to hold their degree of possibilities. The unified axis for truth or false verification in contextualism is constructed as a “public purpose agreement”, exercised as practical conduct to serve the “public purpose”, which is called pragmatic contextualism. The verification of knowledge is expanding to “practical” actions of “truth”, exercised in social interactions, and expressed as “preferred” behavior conducts.

### **Pragmatic Contextualism in Chinese Philosophy**

The example of pragmatic contextualism, which is continually persisted for centuries and permeates equally in all aspects of human life, is exercised in East Asian civilization, locally developed in Chinese philosophy. The *creation in situ* is to “create, re-create something according to the contextual site or place”, which utilizes the embedment of constructive elements (on-site) as an individual creative contextual process (Behuniak, 2010; Wen, 2009). The pragmatic contextualism is the paradigm of conduct, which percepts Virtue can be attained through daily self-cultivation. The verification of truth or false is constituted based on contextual

sensitivity of personal character, situation/place, and time to practice propriety and benevolence. The intention of differentiation between truth and false is to achieve a balanced state of self and society, rather than to prove facts. In this view, the qualitative “measurement” is a social process in multiscale human relationships, which provides alternative parameters of truth or false as in-between “public good” and “private-intention”. Pragmatic contextualism provides a “resistance” to local value to preserve the local contents, which is the differentiation “tool” of truth or false (Shusterman, 2004).

Furthermore, Confucius's and Dao's philosophy contains pragmatic contextualism, which cultivates “yin” and “yang” characteristics in human-societal dimensions. Confucius perceives social, culture, and spirituality as approaches to differentiating truth or false, which is expressed in the cultivation of benevolence and virtue of self and others to achieve a harmonious society during the state of war (Csikszentmihalyi, 2020). Meanwhile, Dao complements Confucius thinking as in “yin” and “yang” characteristic; Confucius is the “active” attitude, described as “yang”, the masculine, which actively, concretely cultivates self-benevolence, meanwhile Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi (Dao) provides the passive, the “yin” femineity, which “follows” the course, allowing the nature to construct and cultivate its nature (Gao, 2021, Csikszentmihalyi, 2020; Hoff, 1983), which is exercised as “non-obstructive”, “non-destructive” behavior on the “Way” of Virtue. The “passivity” in Dao is not the same as “nihilism”, which denotes “doing nothing” due to extreme pessimism, but “doing nothing for things to happen by its natural course”, to preserve the balance between man and its surrounding by the cultivation of self-spirituality. Both Confucius and Dao philosophy contains pragmatic contextualism, which cultivates “yin” and “yang” characteristics in human-societal dimensions. Further, in finding the qualitative verification, a deeper understanding of its conceptual thinking is needed to construct a “unified axis of “truth” within “possibilities” of knowing in intuitive senses (without dependency

on “quantified” verification), which is formed by its qualitative characteristics and practiced in varied dimensions. Then, the questions of this study are: 1) What are the characteristics of pragmatic contextualism, and 2) What are the dimensions that pragmatic contextualism is practiced? Therefore, pragmatic contextualism is explored deeper in this paper to identify the “qualitative reasoning” verification through its dimension and characteristics, which cultivates a socio-cultural-spiritual process as an approach to construct truth or false verification based on the purpose of “greater good”.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The paper conducts a literature study from two “different but complementary” schools in Chinese Philosophy: Confucianist and Daoist (Gao, 2021). These two “schools” contain different attitudes toward reaching morality and wisdom, one is active (Yang) and the other is passive (Yin) (Gao, 2021). Confucianist emphasizes the “active” side: the importance of human efforts to cultivate himself to achieve the moral quality of Sage. Meanwhile, the Daoist set the “passive” attitude to cultivate self-internal wisdom through “tenderness”, spontaneity, intuitions, and self-experiences, rather than rigid norms and rules. Because of two different but complementary attitudes, these two philosophical thoughts provide a diverse range of contextualism thinking and practice, which is exercised in multiscale dimensions.

The literature study utilized book references, articles, lectures, and journals from 1963 to 2021 for finding the basic thinking and ideas of contextualism in Chinese Philosophy and further development of Confucianism and Daoism in the current time. The literature study aims to find the dimensions and characteristics of Contextualism from different development of Confucianism and Daoism. The literature study of Confucianist focuses on Confucius himself and his prominent disciple, Mencius, but also refers to later disciples, Neo-Confucianist. From Confucius himself to later development, Confucianism has a long period of development

which provides diverse and rich material of Chinese Philosophy itself, which is suitable for the research study. Meanwhile, literature study from Daoist refers to Lao Zi himself and Zhuang Zi, as the later prominent Daoist after Lao Zi. Daoist has experienced the “rise and fall” period and survived until today and spread to the world, which also suggests the suitability of material richness and relevancy in present. From both philosophers, the literature study explores, extracts, and identifies the dimension and characteristics of Pragmatic Contextualism in Chinese Philosophy.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Dimension of Pragmatic Contextualism

Derived from the pursuit of justified truth between right and wrong, contextualism has been criticized as an unreliable method to validate the truth of knowledge. However, the existential being of human is constructed by social structure, driven by the socio-political contextual condition (Wijanarko & Saeng, 2022), rather than objective-based social structure. This subjectivity-based social structure is nurtured and utilized in Chinese philosophy as the cultivation of virtuous human conduct and the creation of harmony of self and society. Confucius uses antiquity events and personalism (of legendary sage as a role model of Virtue) as the paradigm of ethics, which set a subjectivity-based verification standard.

Moreover, in Dao, the pursuit of happiness comes from finding internal wisdom within the inner self. Dao tends to pursue the spiritual wisdom of individuals through attitudes of “passivity”, rather than an active effort on “improving” external quality of character and order in society and government/state. However, the submissive attitude of Dao still “demands” each person's “internal self-cultivation”, which shows that Dao believes in subjectivity attitude to achieve the Way itself: reversion attitude, moderation, submissions, and intuitions. The practice of moderation means lessening desires, for example, the need of one to use “intuitions”, to be free from the “limitation of knowledge” since knowledge itself is the object of desire as in Chapter 18, Lao Zi says: *“when intelligent*

*and knowledge appeared, the Great Artifice began"* and in Chapter 20: *"The difficulty of ruling the people is commensurate to the amount of knowledge"*. Zhuang Zi also provides moral practice through his fictionalism approach (Chung, 2017). In this view, Dao also provides a practical method of inner self-cultivation to achieve inner wisdom. Thus, contextualism has permeated ancient Chinese philosophy, expressed (appeared) in various dimensions within the doctrines, which contains the characteristic of Chinese thought, as follow:

## **2. Social Dimension: Multiscale Context Subjectivity**

The formation of "moral ethics" in Chinese philosophy shows the context sensitivity perception as the "judgment" to "determine" morally good behavior that creates a harmonious relationship in life and society. This "judgment" is based on the concrete case that presents the specific situational context, which encourages practices of conduct in actual daily life. For instance, Confucius in Analects 13.18:

*The Duke of She said to Kong Zi, " Among my people, there is one we call upright Gong, when his father stole a sheep, he reported him to the authorities." Kong Zi replied, " Among my people, those who we consider upright are different from this: fathers cover up for their sons, and sons cover up for their father. 'Uprightness' is to be found in this."*

In this passage, the context of father and son expresses the importance of kinship relationship and affection towards family members, rather than the justification of right and wrong from the legal perspective. Confucius centers his doctrine on people themselves (Chan, 1963), holistically promotes people's co-existence with Nature, and extends the perception in acceptance and acknowledgment of the relational nature between people and Nature (Universe) rather than finding the rational explanation of things.

In the chaotic era of Confucius and Mencius, both acknowledge the harmony of society is attained through social order. Social order could be attained if each person follows his



inherent “good” nature, which is learned and practiced in daily life. Since human, who is also part of the Universe or Nature, are interrelated and influence each other endlessly, each person's conduct influences the creation of social harmony or order from family to society as in Analects 4.1: *The Master said, “With regard to neighborhoods, it is the presence of those who are ren 仁 (benevolence) that makes them desirable [...]”*. He also believes that even the social relationship in the family unit expresses the participation in the larger scale of social function (government), for instance in Analects 2.21: *“[...] Thus, in being a filial son and good brother, one is already taking part in government [...]”*. Confucius believed harmony in society can be achieved through the social construction of the smallest unit of family to extend to society and governance.

Consequently, from Dao perspective, human beings should create and maintain a balance or harmonious relationship with Nature, self, and surroundings to attain “wisdom” and “happiness” in this secular world. From the perspective of Daoist, creating a harmonious relationship with Nature is following Nature itself with moderation and acceptance, as “passive” rather than active conduct, as Kuan Yin said: *“Establish nothing in regard oneself. Let things be what they are, move like a water [...]. Those who agree are harmonious [...]”*. From the text, the harmony comes from within to spread to the external. Even though Confucianism and Daoism differ in their method of attaining harmony, they both express that if each individual, cultivate his “good” inherent nature through intuitive (following nature) experiences (Liu & Wang, 2016), he will create a harmonious relationship with self and others and radiates his “virtuous” behavior towards the external world: society, country, and the world.

### **3. Educational Dimension: Plurality, Practice, and Moral Values**

Moreover, Confucius sets the universal standard of virtuous conduct based on antiquity reference to Sage Kings, but in practical education, he acknowledges each disciple's nature or characteristic

to provide education based on this nature. Confucius is aware of the plurality of human characteristics and recognizes each disciple's strengths and weaknesses to cultivate their talent and capabilities based on their nature itself. Analects 11.22 shows how Confucius gives different answers toward his disciples based on their nature:

Zihua, [having observed both exchanges], inquired, *"When Zilu asked you whether or not one should immediately put into practice what one has learned, you told him one should not, as long as one's father and elder brother were still alive. When Ranyou asked the same question, however, you said that one should immediately put into practice what one has learned. I am confused, and humbly ask to have this explained to me."* The Master said, *"Ranyou is overly cautious, and so I wished to urge him on. Zilu, on the other hand, is reckless, and so I sought to make him more cautious."*

Consequently, Confucius put importance on learning by heart, as in Analects 17.8: *"One who loves humanity but not learning will be obscured by ignorance. One who loves wisdom but not learning will be obscured by lack of principle. One who loves faithfulness but not learning will be obscured by heartlessness."* Besides, Mencius expresses the heart-mind as the moral compass in thinking and conduct, which control the excessive desires and "free" from the constraints of perceptions of senses as in Mencius 6A:9: *"[...] One cannot learn it unless he concentrates his mind and devotes his whole heart to it [...]"*. Heart-mind is also a unified expression of human nature, which is a collaboration of feelings and physical body (Bloom, 1997). Therefore, the person should first find his "heart-mind" or moral mind to be able to practice moral cultivation.

Further, Confucius also put importance on the practical implementation, as in Analects 17.2: *The Master said, "By xing (性), 'nature,' people are similar; they diverge as the result of xi (习), 'practice.'"*. Confucius encourages the students to be "more" than a "vessel", and develop themselves as nobleman with refinement and culture. Besides, Mencius also uses concrete cases, rather than abstract

principles (Ivanhoe and Van Norden, 2001). He tries to cultivate his student skill beyond simple tools or techniques: *“seek in your heart what you do not get from doctrines.”* (Mencius 2A:2). Thus, Confucianist teaching expresses the varied pragmatic nature of people to “adjust” self-cultivation based on contextual sensitivity to attain the “highest potential”.

Further development by Neo-Confucianist, both Chu and Wang schools agreed on the doctrine of Great Learning that the person needs to understand the basic principle of first and last, the internal and external (Chan, 1963), which suggest the importance of ethical knowledge as the fundamental doctrine in practice. The knowledge of the principle of things is the beginning of the man to be able to rectify his heart (heart in this context refers to the heart-mind or consciousness, as the mind of conduct “relies on” in the heart) and after the rectification of heart, the person can rectify his wrongdoings.

In Neo-Confucianism, the way to achieve the nobleman's quality in life constitutes three components that are interrelated with each other: knowledge, sincerity, and heart-mind. *First*, the person needs to understand the principle of things or ethical knowledge, for him to have a clear mind, percept Virtue (ren), and follow his Nature, as in Mencius 6A:15: “[...] *After the person has understood the principle of the Nature, he will find sincerity, truth in his inherent nature*”. In Doctrine of the Mean, sincerity is the inherent human nature that has the quality of uniting humans and Nature, acts as the active force, rather than a mental state, providing the capability for transformation and completion. When a man finds sincerity in his inner self, he then can rectify his heart-mind through ordinary practice in daily life with earnest effort and strenuous learning.

#### **4. Spiritual Dimension of Learning and Practice: Self-Awareness and Limitation of “Knowing”**

The educational aspect of one person covers not only the physical and psychological aspects as mentioned through

Confucius and Mencius teaching but also the spiritual cultivation of the inner self, as can be seen in the teaching of Dao:

In Dao, Lao Zi exerts the “non-action” philosophy in following the Way as a response towards “become one” with Nature. He expresses the need to return to the earlier ideal (Nature), in form of “spontaneous”, “moderation”, or “temperance” through the intuitive and experiential way. Daoist believes that the Forces of Nature occur simultaneously in constant changes and motions of duality, and co-exist parallelly, one cannot exist without the other. From this perspective, Lao Zi believes that the way to follow the Way is by reversion or returning, as in *道德经* (Daodejing) Chapter 58: *“It is upon calamity that happiness leans; it is upon happiness that calamity rests [...]”*. The text also expresses the need for the human being to be constantly aware and prepare for challenges in his life. As Mencius also states the obscurity that comes from perceptual sense and biological instinct, the things that are not “Natural” should make a man aware and alert.

Rooted from Confucius in Doctrine of the Mean, developed further in Daoism, Confucius has warned that each person should be aware of limited knowledge capacity to reach spiritual wisdom. Mencius also expressed a similar idea of being aware of perceptual judgment and desire that could obstruct the Truth of Nature. Further, Zhuang Zi also thinks that the person's understanding can be inhibited through the knowledge limitation or rational judgment that leads astray from the “nature” of self. The limitation of knowledge is caused by the particularity of contextual conditions and emotional bias, which influence people’s capacity to “embracing the wholeness, the completeness of duality of things” as in Autumn Flood: *“You can’t discuss the ocean with well-frog – he’s limited by the space he lives in. You can’t discuss ice with summer insect – he’s bound to a single season. You can’t discuss the Way with a cramped scholar – he’s shackled by his doctrines. Now, you have come out beyond your banks and borders and have seen the great sea – so you realize your pettiness”* (Yang, 2016). From this text, the contextual condition obstructs the “truth” in the form of time, space, and place context.

Further, Zhuang Zi reminds the person not to blindly regard himself highly towards the capacity of quantified knowledge and behave in moderation practice to gain spiritual wisdom. Also, each individual breaks down the limitation and continuously searches for “bigger” and “greater” knowledge (Jiang, 2019). Thus, following the Way means following the course of Nature through the “humbleness” of our own limitations to free or liberate our minds from unnatural constraints.

### 5. Possibility of Knowing: “In-Between” State or Things

Synthetical response of learning and practice is developed further in the text of Zhuang Zi, in his story of Cook Ding Cuts Up an Ox:

*“Cook Ding laid down his knife and replied, ‘What I care about is the Way [Dao], which goes beyond skill. When I first began cutting up oxen, all I could see was the ox itself. After three years I no longer saw the whole ox. And now, I go at it by spirit and don't look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop and spirit moves where it wants. I go along with the natural makeup, strike in the big hollows, guide the knife through the big openings, and follow things as they are. So, I never touch the smallest ligament or tendon, much less a main joint.’”*

The learning and practice in daily life sharpened one’s spiritual “skill” beyond the material particularity or tangible skill. In Dao, the wisdom relies on moderation or “in-between” of two opposite polar of things or states or events, as the case of Cook Ding, he reaches the state of balance, which is metaphorically expressed as the “gap between joints and tendons”. The “gap between joints and tendons” is the complex space, reserved as the achievement of Cook Ding to understand the “invisible force of nature” or Dao, through his “neglected” rational knowledge of the Ox: “I no longer saw the whole ox”, but let the Dao guide him intuitively and experientially, for him to cut on the right place, as expressed in his capability to “find” the “big openings” between tendon and joints of the Ox. When a person has reached the equilibrium state, he has

followed his inherent nature and finds harmony in a spiritual state. Thus, Zhuang Zi suggests the need to return to the intuitive approach, free from the “known” to explore the “possibilities” of “not knowing” for finding the “truth”.

## **6. Political Dimension: Multiscale Behavior Code**

Confucius, as developed further by Mencius, believes that the morally correct government is a humane government, which is achieved through social harmony. Social harmony is constructed by multiscale social order: family, society, and extended in the realm of governance of the state. The social order is created by Rectification of Names, which suggests each individual behavior is corresponding properly and correctly with each role and position (as individual context) in different social functions and structures from family to the scale of country or state, as in Analects 13.3: *The Master answered, “It would be, of course, to assure that 名, ‘names’ were being applied zheng, 正 ‘correctly!’”* and Analects 6.25: *The Master said, “The cornered vessel has no longer corners! What a ‘cornered vessel!’”* The corresponding behavior follows the moral conduct of benevolence in actual practice, expressed in the practice of propriety, kindness with loyalty and sympathy (Fung, 1952; Chan, 1963). Further, the Rectification of Names applies to all people, from common people to the ruler, as in Analects 12.11: *Kong Zi responded: “Let the ruler be a true ruler, the minister’s true minister, the father’s true fathers, and the son’s true sons.”* With the practice of Virtue, each person will attain the character of a nobleman (superior quality of man), which will create the harmonious relationship in the social realm because there will be no resentment or dissatisfaction between people, as Confucius said: *“Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire.”* Thus, the Rectification of Names implies the contextual position or status and role of each person as the basis to behave correctly in a different social situation.

## **7. Family: Filial Piety and Brotherhood**

In the context of family, Confucius believes that participation in the government is reflected in the practice of Virtue in the family,

filial piety and brotherhood is the action of participation in government creating social order. The family unit is the first self-cultivation on how to behave in society, as in Analects 1:2: *Yu Tzu said, "Few of those who are filial sons and respectful brothers will show disrespect to superiors, and there has never been a man who is not disrespectful to superiors and yet creates disorder. A superior man is devoted to the fundamentals (the root). When the root is firmly established, the moral law (Dao) will grow. Filial piety and brotherly respect are the roots of humanity ."* Mencius also believes that the practice of Virtue will radiate towards the larger scale of the social realm, from self to family, to neighborhood, society, to the realm of the state. Further, in Analects 2:7: *Tzu-yu asked about filial piety. Confucius said, "Filial piety nowadays means to be able to support one's parents. But we support even dogs and horses. If there is no feeling of reverence, wherein lies the difference?"* Confucius emphasizes the importance of love and affection (respect, kindness) towards parents (and other family members in general, which reflects the "humane" characteristic as the core of Confucius's doctrine. Thus, the practice of Virtue begins from the smallest unit of social relationship, which is the family unit where the person "learns" how to behave according to propriety and kindness as the preparation for becoming a member of society.

#### **8. Government: People's Welfare and Epitome**

In the context of the statesman, the ruler becomes an outstanding example for the subordinate and the people. The ruler himself practices Virtue in his conduct, which exercises the fulfillment of public needs: basic needs (welfare), happiness, and puts the public good above self-interest (altruism). The "compassions" as the feeling constitutes the benevolence, as the foundation of Virtue, towards the people (McRae, 2011). The ruler who practices the Virtue will make his people and subordinates follow him sincerely, naturally, and voluntarily, which will create a moral-based government, not based on law and punishment that brings fear to people as in Mencius 2A:3: *"[...] When force is used to overcome people, they do not submit willingly but only because they have*

*not sufficient strength to resist. But when Virtue is used to overcoming people, they are pleased in heart and sincerely submit [...]*". The practice of virtue in politics and economy for the ruler to bring equal welfare for all common people is expressed in Mencius 1A:5: *Mencius answered [King Hui], "Even with a territory of a hundred li, it is possible to become the true king of the empire. If Your Majesty can practice a humane government to the people, reduce punishments and fines, lower taxes and levies, make it possible for the fields to be plowed deep and the weeding well done, men of strong body, in their days of leisure may cultivate their filial piety, brotherly respect, loyalty, and faithfulness, thereby serving their fathers and elder brothers at home and their elders and superiors abroad [...]"* In the text of Mencius, the people are the most important/fundamental foundation of the government and their needs and welfare should be the priority of the ruler/government. Therefore, the political decision should be examined from the actuality of the people's benefits. Once the people's needs and welfare are fulfilled in the proper (morally correct) way, the state will be in a state of harmony. Further, the statesman behaves properly according to his rank, to serve, respects both his superior and subordinate, and practices self-cultivation to develop himself. He also conducts without short-cut or alternative ways to gain fame, wealth, or power, but uses strenuous effort to achieve his highest potential of self, as in Analects 14:37, stated: *"The superior man does what is proper to his position and does not want to go beyond this. If he is in a noble station, he does what is proper to a position of wealth and honorable station. If he is in a humble station, he does what is proper to a position of poverty and humble station. [...] In a high position, he does not treat his inferiors with contempt. In a low position, he does not court the favor of his superiors [...]"*

#### **9. Environmental Dimension: Nature Conservation**

The text in Mengzi 6A:8 stresses the acute observation of nature exploitation of Ox Mountain (changes and effects), which promotes the importance of nature conservation from Mencius perspective (Hughes, 1989): *"The trees of Ox Mountain were once*



*beautiful. But because it bordered on a large state, hatchets, and axes besieged it. Could it remain verdant? [...] Hence, it was as if it were barren. People, seeing it barren, believed that there had never been any timber there. Could this be the nature of the mountain?!"*

The text suggests that human beings should cultivate and nurture the environment. Besides, the text also suggests the importance of nature conservation because it relates to the fulfillment of people's basic needs. Mencius thinks that most people will be unable to develop their nature without having their basic needs for things such as food met (Ivanhoe & Van Norden, 2001). Moreover, the text above also emphasizes the importance of land management for the ruler to ensure land cultivation and maintenance (Hughes, 1989). He also urged his contemporary emperors to restrict their materialism, resources must be consumed rationally and attention must be paid to production growth (Singh, 2013) as in Mencius 1A:3: *Good cultivation and less tax will make the common people rich. If lands are cultivated at proper times, grains will not be eaten up; if dense fishing nets are not used in pools, fish and tortoises will not be eaten up; if bushes and trees are chopped at proper times, wood will not be used up.*" Thus, the importance of self-cultivation and nature security (ecology conservation, rational, efficient consumption, and land management) holds strong relation in the creation of a conducive (fulfilled) environment for humane government.

Moreover, Daoist also shares the same value with Mencius regarding environmental protection, they believe that human being and the world share not only the same origin and nature but also the same structure and law, which advocate that man's activities should follow the law of the universe and then harmony between Heaven and Earth (man) will be achieved (Yin, 2012). Zhuang Zi also stresses the attitude of respect towards Nature, following it is own "nature" as for creating harmony between self and other living creatures". Therefore, human understands the law of Nature and behaves according to Nature to be integrated with Nature and attain harmony.

### **10. Environmental Context in Moral Cultivation**

Mencius believes the original nature of humans is good, but it entails the need for a correct environment, long-life learning, and practice to achieve the man of Virtue. He stresses that a bad environment (and failure to cultivate oneself) can almost destroy one's original nature (Mengzi 6A:8) (Ivanhoe & Norden, 2001). He believes that "evil" is the obstruction for the human being to cultivate his moral mind (rectification of heart-mind), which comes from external and internal condition and create excessive desires and sensual pleasures. In Mencius's thoughts, "evil" comes from the circumstantial context that distracts people from their true nature (the great part; the moral mind) and obscures their clear mind through the "obsessed" perceptual sense or small part. As in the metaphor of the flowing water, the true nature of the water flows downward, but the disruption of the nature of the water, for example, the water is kept at the top of the mountain, as analogically same with the person, whose inherent nature is being inhibited because of the environment or situational condition (Gao, 2021). Therefore, in Mencius's expansion on the humanity of Confucius, the circumstantial condition creates an obstruction for the person to follow his true nature.

### **11. Temporal Dimension: Philosophy of Change**

The I Ching philosophy is the Confucian Classic, which reflects the philosophy of Confucius on the temporal (time) dimension of human life. Underlying the philosophy of change is the notion that the Cosmos is an organismic process without a beginning or end. As a process, the Cosmos resembles a continuity of flow in constant movement, in which "all of the parts of the entire cosmos belong to one organic whole" and all the parts "interact as participants in one spontaneously self-generating process" (Hon, 2019; Tu, 1985). In this view, dynamic changes, which contains changing challenges and context, are continuously occurring as the force of inspiration and "evolution".

Consequently, in the philosophy of change, the lifelong learning and practice of Virtue are shaped and challenged through the changing environment (or situation). The person is “recreating themselves by maximizing their own potentials in response to changing environments,” as Chang and Kalmason (2010) stated in “Confucian in Person Making.” The nature of changing Cosmos in the Book of Changes expresses various interpretations of the situation and conducts that a man should follow. For instance, Kun, Hexagram 2, consists of three lines, depicted as the receptive, the Earth, where a person should be a follower in quiet and calm perseverance rather than become the leader (Li, 1997). Also, the person should practice uprightness, righteousness, and seriousness in internal and external life to attain wisdom, the guidance in his way (Chan, 1963), which reflects the Confucius doctrine on practice benevolence and developed further by Neo-Confucianist as moral cultivation in internal and external self. By practicing Virtue, man shall receive blessings and avoid ill luck, as coherent in the divination of the Book of Change. Therefore, the philosophy of change is reflected in Confucius's teaching as also preparedness for a man to face challenges and situations in his life.

The phenomenon of change is also the main theme in Dao doctrine as preparedness on how to deal with challenges in the secular world in different contexts and situations. Lao Zi encourages the attitude of “following” and “understanding” the principle of Nature to avoid “consequences” as in Chapter 16: *“if we do not understand the general laws underlying the changing phenomena of the universe and merely rely on our caprice for the conduct, the harmful result must be consequence [...]”*. The general law that is underlying in the changing phenomenon is the reversion of movement or opposite manner, as Lao Zi in Chapter 58: *“It is upon calamity that happiness leans; it is upon happiness calamity rests [...]”*. This chapter also expresses the continual change of states or situations, in the governed law of nature, everything is always in constant motion endlessly, and the duality of things or states is constantly changing, and exist together or inseparable. The person, living in this secular

world, is part of the Cosmos, developing himself internally and externally in constant changing of duality, changing situational context, to attain for himself wisdom through his inherent nature of the self.

## 12. Aesthetic Dimension: Ritual and Music

Confucius' moral cultivation is also expressed in ritual and music, as the artistic practice that organizes the proper conduct of man. Rituals provide normative guidelines for action by demarcating what kind of behaviors are appropriate for specific roles and situations (Mullis, 2005). Ritual in Confucius's mind is the normative guidelines of personal behavior and etiquette as a social responsibility towards others in various social contexts. Ritual or ceremony has a procedure or step and purpose for each occasion, which create a certain "norm" of conduct for each occasional context: the funeral ritual expresses mourning, and the harvest ritual expresses gratefulness for the harvest of the year. Each occasion provides a different context of behavior, which exercises the propriety in daily life as the external self-cultivation towards others to create harmony in social relationships. Each ritual also exercises the appropriate attire for each occasional theme, which nurtures the sensitivity of becoming "fitting in" social function. Not only the attire, but also the tone of speaking depends on one's position and role in his surrounding social circle, as Confucius says in *Analects* 10:2: "*At court, when speaking with lower officials, he was congenial, and when speaking with higher officials, straightforward and yet respectful.*" The ritual or propriety contains the aesthetic aspects of role-based practice to behave in the appropriate manner in social interactions. The role determines the propriety of the person, which is "expressed" in a ritual manner. Furthermore, ritual is the reflection of propriety and practice sensitivity to situational context, exercises altruism towards others to attain refinement and high-cultured person for creating a harmonious society.

Meanwhile, in music, Confucius's musical evaluation does not mean to improve one's taste or appreciation of music, but they are

meant to be filled in by the rich concrete contextuality of experience, whose enhancement in practice is also the purpose of musical theory (Shusterman, 2009). Music is not the theoretical appreciation of the private self, but also the expression of social function. Through music, Confucius suggests a graceful, sensitive, and flexible attitude toward harmony in society and government, rather than the rigidity of law and punishment. He promotes the refinement of demeanor, which is the moral code of benevolence itself, as he stated in *Analects* 12.24: *“The exemplary person attracts friends through refinement, and thereby promotes virtuous conduct.”* The conduct of a man of Virtue expresses its elegance in nature, practice his sensitivity, and critical observation towards other, to percept the situation of others and practice proper conduct in certain situation or context.

### **13. Characteristics of Pragmatic Contextualism**

Summarily, based on the dimension of pragmatic contextualism in Confucianist and Daoist, the characteristics of Contextualism in Chinese philosophy are:

- a) Personalization and relativity: the human context remains the central core in Confucianist and Daoist philosophy as they provide the “guide” on how to live in the secular world harmoniously. Confucius and Mencius present concrete case studies based on personal or subject-based context, circumstantial, and time-sensitivity context as guidance references for moral conduct and self-cultivation. For instance, Confucius teaching refers to each disciple's traits and characteristic, and determine their necessities in cultivating their best potential.
- b) Holistic, multiscale, and relationality: Confucianist and Daoist have the same views regarding the position of human beings in the universe, which is coexistence with the Universe or Nature. Therefore, in their guidance for moral cultivation, they always percept the “big picture” of the human relationship with surrounding or relationality

impact on self and others; how man practices his Virtue in the family reflects his behavior in society, how the man follows the Way as part of his role in the Universe, how the man maintains his relationship with nature, etc. The holistic perspective intersects strongly with the relationality from one thing to the other, as each component of Nature co-exists, co-dependes, co-influence, and constantly changes Heaven, Earth, and man. Therefore, the behavior of man will influence himself and others through his relationship with all components of Nature.

- c) Inter-spatiality and adaptivity: In Zhuang Zi's text about the Cook Ding Cuts Up the Ox, he expresses the inter-state wholeness of known and unknown between the tangible knowledge of the whole Ox and its particular space of tendon and joints. For Cook Ding, the achievement of spiritual wisdom comes from his daily practice which "frees" him from the constraints of tangible knowledge. Confucianist and Daoist also consistently refer to the constant and continuous change that "transcends" beyond space and time. The human being will constantly be in a different state of situations or places or spaces, which render and "demand" different attitudes to face and grow through these "changes". As in duality or two opposites of things are unity in the opposites and inseparable, the continuous cycle of change of place, time, and space consistently challenges and inspires people for evolution and growth, which are the self-moral cultivation itself. Balance or harmony is found within these constant changes of time and space.
- d) Plurality on self and knowledge: The varied individual dimensions (social, education, political, spiritual, aesthetics, temporal) determine the suitable approach to maximize the individual potential based on each character (strength and weaknesses), multiscale role (family to

society), job or assignment, situation, and responsibility. Besides, Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi also provide various kind of contextual situations in human life, which render the variety of “possibility” on acts based on challenges at the time and place. Dao philosophy also highlights the limitation of knowing by introducing the intuitive possibilities of the unknown based on contextual sensitivity to determine the appropriate acts for a certain time and place. In this view, plurality is a diversification of knowledge, to go beyond the “known” and explore the other “possibilities of knowing” in the “unknown”.

## CONCLUSION

Pragmatic contextualism in Chinese philosophy permeates varied human dimensions: social, education, political, spiritual, environmental, aesthetics, and temporal dimension with characteristics: personalization (subjectivity), relativity, holistic, multiscale, relationality, inter-spatiality, adaptivity, and plurality (diversity). The pragmatic contextualism provides truth and false verification by “creation-in-situ”, a local-based creation from specific sensitivity of place, time, and actions (people) as a unified “public sphere”, resulting in “agreed upon” codes and regulations for public-based purpose. Each person is being part of a complex web of interconnectivity from small scale (family), and community, to society, which assigned specific roles, responsibilities, and consequences, to work together as a “team” for a “public purpose”. The set of rules and codes is the essence of “local values”, practiced within a diverse personal “universe” (responsibilities, roles, consequences, characteristics) in daily life and “verified” by the community itself. The comprehensive understanding of the purpose, responsibilities, and consequences of individual actions provides qualitative paradigms of truth. Briefly, the local values, constructed by context sensitivity, are the differentiation “tool” of truth and false.

Consequently, in the high-speed knowledge exchange of the digital era, the scientific truth is easily countered by other scientific truths, which caused doubts and confusion in actions and decisions. However, from pragmatic contextualism, the human (local) values are not limited to the quantitative paradigm but exist originally from “qualitative” values, which are “intuitively” formed by contextual senses, from place (space), time, and people themselves. The understanding of self and others within the responsibility and consequences relationality to achieve a “public good” has formed a differentiation “tool” between truth and false. Thus, pragmatic contextualism provides a potential alternative to qualitative-based verification of truth and false.

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