Dialogue Between Confucius and Socrates: Norms of Rhetorical Constructs in Their Dialogical Form and Dialogic Imagination.

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DIALOGUE BETWEEN CONFUCIUS AND SOCRATES
-- NORMS OF RHETORICAL CONSTRUCTS IN THEIR
DIALOGICAL FORM AND DIALOGIC IMAGINATION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

Bin Xie
B.A., Jiangsu Teachers College, 1982
M.A., Soochow University, 1989
May 1998
To my mother,

Mme. Xu Zhenyu, whose power of orality,
though not accompanied by that of literacy,
has much sharpened my sensitivity
to human dialogue
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Abstract

The present dissertation consists of six parts: an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion. It is intended to recapture the rhetorical norms governing the Confucian and Socratic dialogues—their voice of credibility, proto-scientific attitude, tragic consciousness, and use of irony—so as to demonstrate how rhetoric enables them to carry out their political, philosophical and epistemological pursuits; my research aims at the description of similarities and differences between Socrates’s and Confucius’s rhetorical methods, which are shaped by their respective historical and cultural contexts.

Specifically, my major objectives are to foreground, in accordance with Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, the significance of the “dialogical rhetoric” and dialogic imagination of the two cultural giants in their own rhetorical contexts, and also to illuminate how their application of dialogue contributes to our understanding of orality and literacy in an era of electronic revolution. As a final goal, I attempt to facilitate an intercultural dialogue between Confucius and Socrates so as to help set up a bridge of communication between the East and West through my delineation of Confucius’s rhetorical vision of harmony among human beings and between nature and human society, and also through my description of Socrates’s true rhetoric of philosophy that has inspired numerous admirers in the East for its persistent efforts to seek truth and knowledge. I am convinced that a better understanding of their rhetorical activities will help reconcile some conceptual conflicts between Western and Eastern cultural traditions instead of intensifying a possibly sharp confrontation that some cultural historians have predicted for the twenty-first century.
Introduction

In the Western world much has been contributed to the exploration of rhetoric ever since the word “rhētorikē” first appeared in Plato’s Socratic dialogue *Gorgias*, though Socrates himself is often kept out of the domain of rhetorical criticism. When we turn an eye to the comparative rhetoric, it becomes clear that Western historians of rhetoric virtually ignored the Eastern rhetorical tradition, the Chinese tradition in particular, until the publication of Robert Oliver’s *Cultural and Communication in Ancient India and China* in 1971. This work provides a general examination of ancient rhetoric in the two cultures. As a student of rhetoric from China, I have been wondering about the following questions: Why have Socrates and Confucius, representatives of two great civilizations, often been neglected in rhetorical studies? Could these two cultural giants be rhetorical dwarfs only when the conception of “rhetoric” is generally understood, according to the Aristotelian definition, as “the power of perceiving the available persuasives (pisteis)” (Conley, 14)? What do Socratic and Confucian dialogues contribute to the history of rhetoric? These questions have served as a starting point for my explanation of rhetorical constructs in Socratic and Confucian dialogues.
Through the present dissertation, I hope to recapture the rhetorical norms governing the Confucian and Socratic dialogues—their voice of credibility, proto-scientific attitude, tragic consciousness, and use of irony—so as to demonstrate how rhetoric enables them to carry out their political, philosophical and epistemological pursuits. My research aims at the description of similarities and differences between Socrates’s and Confucius’s rhetorical methods, which are shaped by their respective historical and cultural contexts. Specifically, my major objective is to highlight the significance of the “dialogical rhetoric” and dialogic imagination of these two rhetors in rhetorical history, and to illuminate how their application of rhetoric contributes to our understanding of orality and literacy in an era of electronic revolution. As a final goal, I attempt to facilitate an intercultural dialogue between Confucius and Socrates, and hope to set up a bridge of communication between the East and West through my delineation of Confucius’s rhetorical vision of harmony among human beings and between nature and human society, and also through my description of Socrates’s true rhetoric of philosophy that has inspired numerous admirers in the East for its persistent efforts to seek final truth and knowledge. I am convinced that a better understanding of their rhetorical activities will help to reconcile some conceptual conflicts between Western and Eastern cultural traditions instead of intensifying a possibly sharp confrontation that some cultural historians have predicted for the twenty-first century.³

My rhetorical study of Confucius and Socrates is based on some historical understanding of their life experience, and an exploration of their verbal activities in the
form of dialogue, either with individuals or in a small group. Sima Qian (145?–90? A.D.),
a “Chinese Herodotus,” provides the most comprehensive biography of Confucius, who
was born of a poor but once-prominent family in Lu state in 551 B.C., and died in 479
B.C. He was a descendant of the Duke of the state of Song. When he grew up,
Confucius was first put in charge of the granary of the house of Baron Ji, and then was
offered a position to take charge of cattle and sheep. At the age of about thirty Confucius
found himself ready for the realization of his political and philosophical ideal of Ren (仁,
human benevolence) and Li (礼, holy ritual system, rites). Being aware of the social
disorder, especially the wars among the dukes of separated states under the symbolic
control of King of the Eastern Zhou dynasty (770–256 B.C.), Confucius committed
himself to a teaching career which lasted more than forty years and continued to the end of
his life. Thus, he became the first educator in Chinese history to open a private school on
a comparatively large scale. The total number of his students was said to have reached
about three thousand, and among them there were seventy graduates distinguished for
their achievement in political, military, business, educational or literary fields (Sima Qian,
1968). Confucius did not leave any of his writings, though many of the ancient Chinese
classics were said to be either composed or edited by him.

Confucius’s rhetorical activities, in fact, occupied a major part of his educational
practice, and what he said was written down by his disciples in a book later entitled Lun
Yu (The Analects), which indicates that dialogue assumed a dominant role in the process
of his passing on knowledge. Among more than five hundred sayings in *The Analects*, there are about three hundred dialogues in question and answer form. More than one hundred of Confucius’s or his disciples’ sayings may serve as statements on the topics of discussion or as direct answers to questions omitted in the text. Due to the basic form of dialogue, some scholars feel justified in arguing that “The Analects” is not an appropriate translation for the original Chinese term *Lun Yu* (鲁语), and that the most accurate rendering should be “discussions and dialogues.”

Confucius’s rhetorical claims are reflected in his educational practice with an emphasis on the relations between learning and thinking, between observing and questioning, and in the interaction between rhetors. And his rhetorical activities are often reflected in his dialogues that took place during his tours in different states. These dialogues are with dukes, literati, scholars, hermits or farmers. They touch upon the issues of government administration, rites, benevolence, history and social injustice. The dialogues mainly expressed his humanist concern, his perseverance in philosophical pursuit, and his attitude toward face-to-face investigation. His rhetorical contact with various audiences or interlocutors also revealed his consciousness of the power of orality in promoting social reform. These sometimes seemingly contradictory oral events indicate a true understanding of the function of face-to-face dialogue in ancient times, when the means of transportation and communication put a limit to the exchange of ideas.
The Confucian dialogues have long been observed for their stylistic elements. F.S.C. Northrop demonstrates that Confucius "ambles along in an informal conversational style with concrete, common-sense examples. There is little of technical terminology, the formal definitions, or the logically connected reasoning which characterized practically all of the scientific and philosophical treatises of the West" (Northrop, 322). However, it is Robert Oliver who first made a brief study of Confucius as a rhetorician. Oliver lists seven purposes of Confucius's Yan (言, word) and about fourteen persuasive methods used in The Analects. The Confucian concepts of the importance of speech and the manner of speech are also explained. Finally, Oliver emphasizes the two indispensable guides to effective communication—Ren (benevolence) and Li (rites)—on which Confucian rhetoric rests. Oliver's exploration of Confucian rhetoric, though an initial survey of modest scope, offers a comparatively rich source of alternative views to the Euro-American rhetorical tradition.

Vernon Jenson, a scholar of East Asian rhetoric, has also called attention to the growing importance of Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist teachings in interpersonal communication, and outlined a course of rhetorical study in Asian speeches. In the past few years, an awakening of interest in Confucian rhetoric has also produced some useful studies of The Analects. Among them are A.S. Cua's "A Possible Rhetoric of Confucius," Donald V. Etz's "Confucius for the Technical Communicator," Christoph Harbsmeier's "Confucius Riddens: Humor in The Analects," and Guo-Ming Chen's "A Chinese
Perspective of Communication Competence.” These essays have shed some light on the rhetorical aspects of Confucius—interpersonal communication, technical composition, persuasiveness, implicit assumption and humor—and they have further broadened the rhetorical vision of Confucius’s discourse.

There are some biographical similarities between Socrates and Confucius. The accepted date of Socrates’s birth is the year 469 B.C. His execution took place in 399 B.C., when he was seventy years old. Socrates was born in a sculptor’s family. His poverty, at least in the later part of his life, was certain, which may result from his carelessness about seeking money and his passion for and unceasing pursuit of philosophy. Socrates left nothing in written form, and knowledge of his life and work is drawn from the Socratic works of Xenophon (Apology, Memorabilia, Symposium) and the dialogues by Plato, who, like Xenophon, was a young disciple of Socrates in his later years. Other sources come from the incomplete Socratic dialogues by Aeschines; some comments by Aristotle, who was a student of Plato; and also a comedy, Clouds, produced by Aristophanes in 423 B.C., when Socrates was about forty years old. Among all these “Socrates,” the Platonic Socrates, particularly the Socrates that emerges from the early dialogues of Plato, is usually accepted by historians of rhetoric and philosophers (e.g., Guthrie, Vlastos, Kennedy), though with reservations, to be the most accurate portrait of Socrates. It is through Plato’s dialogue form that Socrates has become one of the major sources of influence on Western civilization for more than two thousand years.
Beginning with the major effort of Schleiermacher in the nineteenth century, scholars have tried to determine the authenticity and chronology of the Platonic Socrates's dialogues and finally classified these dialogues into three periods:


From the above Socratic dialogues, we are convinced that Socrates shared with the leading Sophists of his time an emphasis on the significance of thinking and arguing for oneself, and that his verbal activities encouraged argument and dialectic as a way of discovering truth. Philosophically, Socratic dialogues helped his interlocutors increase their self-knowledge by making them aware of their ignorance. By unceasing attempts to reflect on and rearrange their ideas in the progress of oral cross-examination, Socrates vigorously led them to arrive at real and final knowledge.

Socrates's rhetorical efforts are also dramatically reflected in the speech activities related to his trial, which eventually led him to suffer a death penalty. At his trial, Socrates insisted on receiving a reward for the services he had made to the Athenians in examining their opinions and clarifying his philosophical claims. At the sacrifice of his life,
Socrates reached the goal of confronting the Athenians and arousing again through dialogue their consciousness of self-knowledge. Thus he left us a portrait as the very personification of philosophy itself, and as a last representative of orality during a historical period in which Greek civilization was moving from the stage of orality to that of writing.

Socratic dialogues have been studied in thousands of books, monographs and essays in different languages. However, owing to the anti-"rhetorical" attitude expressed in some of his dialogues, and also owing to the Aristotelian distinction between "Philosophy" and "Rhetoric," Socrates is seldom studied in accordance with rhetorical criticism. To the best of my knowledge, only a few scholars like Rossetti (1984, 1989), Farness (1987), Seeskin (1989), Carter (1991), Vincenzo (1992), Lewis (1993) and Easterbrook (1995) point to the rhetorical maneuvers in the Socratic dialogues. Among these critics, Rossetti views the rhetoric of Socrates as "anti-rhetoric rhetoric," which is characterized by its particular conversational practice and preference for allusive communication. Vincenzo argues that Rossetti fails to perceive how the true rhetoric of Socrates is different from Sophistical rhetoric and argumentative speech, a rhetoric that is the language of philosophy itself. In accordance with the perspective of Heidegger, Farness reviewed Era Brann's and Thomas West's interpretation of Socrates's *Apology* and tried to highlight how Socrates uses his particular rhetorical methods to martyr himself so that he could glorify his philosophical self with his final verbal activity. In some
more recent studies, Carter emphasized the epideictic rhetoric that functions in Socrates’s funeral oration, while Lewis traced the pathological element in Socrates’s defense speech. Easterbrook’s study in 1995 analyzed how Kierkegaard employs Socrates as the image of the concept of irony and as the historical founder of concepts, and demonstrated the role irony and indirection play in the rhetorization of philosophy in Socratic dialogues.

Now let us have a brief review of how the comparative study of Confucian and Socratic dialogues has long been a research interest for those who attempt to facilitate East-West communication. The Chinese philosopher, Feng Youlan, may be one of the first scholars who pointed to a possible comparative study of the form and content of Confucian and Socratic doctrines. In a book published in 1938, Feng observed briefly the similarities between the teaching activities and research methods of Confucius and those of the Greek Sophists, and between the influence of Confucius on Chinese history and that of Socrates on Western history (Feng, 76-9). Another well-known Confucian scholar, Lin Yutang, also mentioned the Greek rhetorical aspects of ethos and pathos in his study of Confucian sayings. Antonio Cua’s exploration has made a breakthrough in the comparative study of Confucius and Socrates. Cua presented a general characterization of Confucian, Socratic and Zen uses of dialogues for understanding moral experience, and his examination focused on the principal features of role-playing, reasoning and argumentation in a speech situation for exploring a source of models. Maurice Cohen’s re-interpretation of comparable aspects in Confucian and Socratic conversations explained
the reason that the two philosophers remained so attached to intimate discourse—face-to-face conversation—for the clarification of the social, political and ethical concepts that concerned them most. The preceding comparative works, however, have just expressed a general concern for philosophical or ethical issues, and they seldom touched upon the theoretical aspects of rhetorical criticism. Moreover, they are often confined to general comparisons in the light of Aristotelian classifications when engaged with rhetorical issues.

The rhetorical exploration of Socratic and Confucian dialogue has to face two major challenges. First, Socrates’s attitude toward rhetoric often leads his critics to consider that his discourse could hardly be constructed with rhetorical strategies conventionally characterized by Sophists’ “knack.” Second, the denial of the existence of an ancient Chinese rhetoric (Murphy, 100) and the partial description of Confucian rhetorical application of argumentation and logical reasoning have actually marginalized this Eastern cultural giant and active rhetor to the position of a muted thinker who paid little attention to the oral aspects of a philosophical activity. These challenges have certainly followed their rhetorical standards. The traditional and classical definitions of philosophy and rhetoric partially characterize Socrates as a philosopher as opposed to a rhetorician. And the Western tradition of rhetorical theory has ruthlessly reduced Confucius to the status of an Eastern moralist or educator rather than a rhetor by Western standards. Thus, these two historical figures are alienated from their rhetorical context, for the continuous research interest in their dialogues or sayings concentrates on their
philosophical claims rather than rhetorical strategies. Both Socrates and Confucius are often kept in the position of the “oppressed” in Freire’s sense in rhetorical studies. To have their voices heard and their dialogues mediated calls for a breakthrough in theoretical interpretation and also a methodological innovation.

Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of rhetoric, based on his dialogic imagination encourages a new approach to the study of Socrates’s and Confucius’s dialogues. To begin with, Bakhtin criticizes the traditional, agonistic sense of rhetoric by defining it as monologic and polemic, inasmuch as the commonly discussed rhetoric posits a writer or a speaker directly addressing a reader or an interlocutor, anticipating their responses and exposing the defects in their opposition in order to “persuade” by every possible means. In monologic discourse, one assumes dominance and privilege, and deliberately suffocates a possible dialogue (verbal or non-verbal exchange and heteroglossia—a multitude of voices that insures the primacy of context over text) by ignoring the existence outside oneself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities. This rhetoric is attached to authority and ownership. As Bakhtin points out sharply:

In rhetoric there is the unconditionally innocent and the unconditionally guilty: there is complete victory and destruction of the opponent. (And) the destruction of the opponent also destroys that very dialogic sphere where the word lives. This kind of rhetoric, according to Bakhtin, exhibits the monologic quality of the word. It produces a vision of a glory that word or speech act could temporarily ensure in its uni-directional penetration of the other’s discourse while denying the bi-directional function of
the discourse—to penetrate and to be penetrated. And this is the reason Bakhtin directs intense criticism at rhetoric characterized by monologue and polemic verbal activity.

What then is Bakhtin's understanding of the word? Bakhtin's basic scenario of human communication is based on the assumption of two actual participants talking to each other in a particular dialogue at a particular time and a place. However, these two participants need not face each other, because utterance and response can be sent to each other through a space envisioned by the interpreter or reader who illuminates the "sender" and "receiver" (of utterance) relations in communication. In a broad sense, each of these two participants could be "a consciousness" at a moment of history that defines itself through a choice it has made out of various "languages" available to it—a particular discourse form to clarify its intention in a particular form of communication. These "two consciousnesses" or "two voices" (as Bakhtin defines them) are active participants in a dialogue that produces utterance and presupposes response. Moreover, this response could either be the utterance of the other voice or consciousness or the utterance of oneself. This is the understanding of the dialogic property of the word in its synchronic sense. In its diachronic sense, each of the utterances, spoken or written, is always responsive to some earlier utterances or voices by ourselves or someone else. Through this dialogue between voices we articulate our role as part of the dissemination of the social discourse which enables us to be in a position "to know what comes next." By contrast, the "monologue as speech is addressed to no one, and does not presuppose a
response," although Bakhtin, unlike Mukarovsky, does not regard the role of participants as either active or passive, and he insists that in a discourse the two subjects constantly influence each other even when one speaker keeps absolutely silent.

Among artistic discourses, Bakhtin privileges novels as an exemplary model of discourse which constantly evolves a mode or model, the culture in which it is produced. To be accurate, it deals with its form-shaping ideology in terms of a particular type of understanding of language that combines dialogue with a new concept, "heteroglossia." Language or a dominant language is thus demonstrated to be composed of countless extraliterary languages, each the product of a particular type of experience and each providing a new way of understanding the world. We—the users of language (speakers or writers) all take part in the countless "languages of heteroglossia," and meanwhile we also experience the struggle of these languages, for each of them claims a privileged individualized expression. Such linguistic contention brings out the possibility for dynamic interaction in the process of construction as a novel.

Heteroglossia also designates a linguistic stratification (i.e., genres, levels of speech, social ideological or professional features) in various spheres and directions, and results in an intentional linguistic diversity. Thus the fictional world is presented as diverse rather than uniform, contextual rather than textual. In Bakhtin’s classification, the novel represents the heteroglossia of an era and various strata of discourses. Traditional rhetorical discourse becomes one of these. Bakhtin further divided traditional rhetorical
texts into two categories in his "Discourse in the Novel" (375). One is the discourse outside of novels which functions as "dialogizing background in which the language of the world and of the novel is polemically and forensically implicated and marked for the absence of heteroglossia." The other "incorporates heteroglossia into a novel's composition" (375). Apparently Bakhtin insists that the ancient rhetorical discourses by Socrates, Cicero, Augustine, Boethius and Petrarch belong to the second category. In other words, these discourses are dialogic and open-ended rather than monologic and dogmatic. Irony lies in the fact that Bakhtin did develop a negative perception of rhetoric, yet simultaneously he acknowledged the significance of rhetorical discourse in his system of novelistic theory. His attitude toward this contradiction is to categorize the practice of the above rhetoricians into "pre-novelistic forms." Some rhetorical critics attached Bakhtin's negative attitude to rhetoric to the political-ideological circumstances and historical limitation imposed on Bakhtin.  

Other critics argue that Bakhtin's unfavorable view of rhetoric responds not only to Soviet politics but also to a contemporary formalist rhetorical theory. However, no matter what contributes to Bakhtin's criticism of rhetoric, one thing remains clear: his novelistic theory is closely related to rhetorical history, and he never does and does not have to exclude the diversity of linguistic activities of human society. More importantly, Bakhtin's description of the rhetorical practice itself does broaden our vision and provide us with the new perspectives which shed light on a topic both ancient and contemporary.
Bakhtin’s arguments for a “dialogic” rhetoric will be most useful if they help us to rethink and redescribe Socratic and Confucian dialogues. We are able to see how the type of verbal activities popular in the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. gained vitality for its dialogical form and dialogic imagination. I may further demonstrate how Socratic and Confucian dialogues function synchronically as communal activities in small groups or with an individual interlocutor as well as an individual activity—a conversation with the innerself, and also function diachronically as dialogized heteroglossia in their idiosyncratic cultural situation and in our contemporary world. Moreover, the Bakhtinian notion of dialogic imagination also encourages the interaction between Socratic dialogue and Confucian dialogue, and between Socratic acceptance and Confucian acceptance in our time. I hope that this comparative study of dialogues by these ancient thinkers will help encourage a mutual understanding between the East and the West in the field of rhetorical theory.

My dissertation consists of six parts. Chapter One will deal with a major rhetorical aspect of Socratic and Confucian dialogues: the creation of a voice of credibility. It traces how Socratic dialogues, *Gorgias*, *Phaedrus*, *Symposium* and *Cratylus* in particular, are presented to achieve credibility at two levels: at one level, Socrates in each dialogue is anxious to establish his personal integrity, dependability and influence; at the other level, these dialogues argue for the superiority of Socrates’s dialectic method. Socratic dialogues, *Phaedrus* in particular, set up a standard for a true rhetoric of discourse: the
rhetorical methods, the matter-of-fact narration, the logical arrangements and the
emotional appeal are all employed in his texts to illuminate a psychological approach.
Confucius's rhetorical practice in his dialogues is marked by his belief in the ordering of
Ming (Names) so as to achieve credibility and reputation in one's performance of
verbal communication and political administration. His conception of "ethos" is based on
virtue, tested by deeds, functioning in accord with Li (rites) and realized in a harmonious
relationship, the "Way." This chapter will also demonstrate how Socratic and Confucian
voices of "ethos" penetrate and are penetrated in their rhetorical and social contexts.
Chapter Two will explore how the Socratic and Confucian dialogues demonstrate a proto-
scientific attitude in a particular rhetorical structure, and embodies a combination of oral
practice and written convention. The Socratic type of face-to-face examination of others'
views through question-and-answer sequences will be examined so as to illuminate a
scientific approach which aims at general definitions or theoretical frameworks,
methodological innovation, and moral and technical knowledge. On the other hand,
Confucian rhetorical practice in his teaching career is guided by a theory of "enlightenment
and inference" which emphasizes the exchange of ideas between participants, values
different voices in a joint search for the truth--Way, and displays pragmatic spirit that
contributes to technical communication.

Chapter Three will center on how the voice of tragic consciousness is created in
Socratic and Confucian dialogues to enhance an analytical as well as an emotional power,
and to exhibit dialogic relations in their respective rhetorical and social contexts. As a practical pessimist, Socrates's tragic voice will be traced through his continuous effort in persuading those whom he can never persuade to accept his opinions, through his justificatory self-defense which constructs the danger of the death-penalty, and through his attitude towards life, death, faith and love. Confucius's voice of tragic sense is expressed in his embarrassment at the misunderstanding of his ideals, in his communication with Heaven by singing to express his disappointment with the reality of ritual and moral collapse, in his silence as a sign of protest against social disorder, and in a life-long bitter struggle for social reform rather than seeking hermitage.

Chapter Four will compare the use of irony in Socratic and Confucian dialogues, and explore how their irony, as a dynamic rhetorical method, helps to facilitate their dialogue with the outside world and with their inner world. My comparative study will reveal the similarities between the two forms of irony in three aspects: first, the philosophical paradoxes expressed in their disavowal of knowledge versus their claim of wisdom/ability in seeking and acquiring knowledge; second, Socrates's and Confucius's confession of piety and their acceptance of the supernatural versus their reluctance to affirm the existence of gods; and third, ironical implications that activate their democratic spirit.

The last part, my conclusion, will explore the implications drawn from the preceding comparative examination of the norms of rhetorical structure in Socratic and
Confucian dialogues. Their “dialogical rhetoric” will be defined. Their rhetorical contribution to their philosophical mission, communication principles, cultural heteroglossia and contemporary information theory will be discussed. In addition, a critical study will be made of the elements of the Socratic and Confucian dialogues that are still responsive to today’s liberal education and also to the expanding electronic revolution. As a final object of my dissertation, the dialogic imagination of Confucius and Socrates will be highlighted, for it points to the right way of a cross-cultural conversation, helps to encourage East-West contact, and contributes to the communication theory of the twenty-first century.

Notes

1. See Edward Schiappa’s “Did Socrates Coin Rhêtorikê?” Schiappa believes that the surviving instances of the word “rhêtorikê” in Gorgias are novel, and that this new word is also in agreement with Plato’s penchant for coining terms with a word ending like this.

2. Robert Oliver, past president of the Speech Association of America and the Speech Association of the Eastern States, began his twenty years of participation in the research of Asian problems in 1942, and he became interested in the cultural foundations of Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Mohism, Legalism and Taoism. His books, particularly Communication and Culture in Ancient India and China, cover the field of speech and contributes greatly to the understanding of the roots of Eastern rhetorical and communication theory.

3. Guy Alitto lists some viewpoints about the upcoming cultural conflicts between the East and the West raised by some Eastern and Western scholars in the 1990s. See his Chinese essay “Will the 21st Century World Culture Become Confucian Culture?”
4. See Chapter 17, v47, “Family History of Confucius.” in Sima Qian’s *The Historical Records*. 1905—47. Although the most comprehensive record, Sima Qian’s biography has been criticized for its inconsistencies and arbitrariness in some parts by later Confucian scholars like Cui Shu (1740—1816) and Qian Mu (1895—1990). My description here is based on some generally accepted historical records. See also Cui Shu’s *Zhushi kaoxinglu* in *Cui Dongbi yi shu* and Qian Mu’s *Xianqin zhuzi xinian*.

5. There is no agreement on the exact year Confucius began his teaching career. I tend to accept Confucius’s own claim “at thirty I took my stand,” which suggests that Confucius thought he was then well prepared for his career, the teaching career in particular.

6. Jay G. Williams, critic of Confucianism, regards the translation “The Analects” as a western misinterpretation which ignores the Confucian design of the rhetorical format for communication. Williams’ argument is also in agreement with the definition of *Hanshu yiwenzhi* by Bangu (62-92 A.D.): “Lunyu (The Analects) consists of Confucius’s answers to questions of his disciples and contemporaries, and also his conversations with his disciples.” Besides, there was a translation by William Edward Soothill entitled *The Analects or The Conversations of Confucius with his Disciples and Certain Others*.

7. We have to acknowledge that Socrates is both a historical figure and a character created by Plato. It is mainly Plato’s figure as represented in the dialogues that we now, not the man of history. That is the reason that scholars (e.g., Havelock, Kennedy, Brickhouse and Smith) discuss Plato or Platonic Socrates rather than Socrates, because Socrates is not simply recorded by Plato but drawn by him. It is almost the same case with Confucius. We come to know Confucius mainly through the dialogues written by his disciples of his time or those of the following generations. And great efforts have been made in the past two hundred and fifty years to trace the historical Confucius but no generally accepted conclusions have been reached on the first authors of the Confucian dialogues in *The Analects*.

8. I generally follow Gregory Vlastos’s classification in his *Socratic Studies* (135).

9. Vlastos believes that *Meno* marks the point of transition and that it should be put neither in the transitional period nor in the later period. I tend to regard *Meno* as a beginning of the transitional period.

10. *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus* in particular.
11. Zen (禅) is a Buddhist sect whose emphasis is upon enlightenment by means of direct, and intuitive insights.

12. For instance, even Oliver’s description overemphasized Confucius’s contempt for Bian (辯, refutation or argumentation) and overlooked the communicative function of “silence” in his verbal activities.

13. See Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. With the help of Freire’s pedagogy, we are able to see how Socratic and Confucian rhetorical practice is submerged in the “culture of silence” among the oppressed, and how their practice functions in a dialogical encounter with the practice of the others.

14. See Bakhtin’s “Notes” in “Speech Genres.” Bakhtin. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*.

15. I have borrowed the concepts of “synchronic” and “diachronic” from Saussure’s structural linguistics (1966) within which synchronic linguistics refers to the study of a language at one particular point in time, and diachronic linguistics refers to the study of how a language changes over a period of time.

16. See Bakhtin’s *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (117).

17. Mukarovsky believes that monologue is an utterance with a single active participant who articulates a point of view “regardless of the presence of other passive participants.” See his *The Word and Verbal Act: Selected Essays by Jan Mukarovsky*.

18. For instance, Halasek believes that Bakhtin’s rhetoric is not ours. It is a rhetoric of oppression in his own time. See Halasek, Kay. “Starting the Dialogue: What Can We Do About Bakhtin’s Ambivalence Toward Rhetoric?”

Chapter One

A Voice of Credibility in Confucian and Socratic Dialogues

This chapter will first make a brief review of the previous studies of “ethos,” “credibility” and “voice” in the rhetorical domain. Then, through an exploration of Confucius’s and Socrates’s understanding of the relation between Word and De (ethics, morality) or Good, I attempt to present a dialogic interpretation of how Confucius established a voice of credibility in his representation of a rhetorical or linguistic conceptualization of oral practice, and how Socrates contended with other voices in order to defend his moral philosophy and true rhetoric. Finally, my comparative analysis intends to get their ethical claims and rhetorical visions mutually defined, and to demonstrate the dialogic nature of their voices responding to their own situation and to our contemporary society.

I. A Brief Review

The concept of credibility, or a speaker/writer’s credibility, derives from the traditional rhetorical topic—ethos. Ethos originates from the Greek word “ηθός” and means “habit, custom, usage, disposition, character, moral,” which emphasizes a moral atmosphere of a person or a community (Kein, 547). Ever since Plato’s Socratic
dialogues (Gorgias and Phaedrus in particular) and Aristotle’s synthesis, there have been two different definitions of ethos: one is the Socratic mode of persuasion that relies on the ethical or moral grounding of a speaker, and the other is the Aristotelian mode of persuasion that is activated by the character of a speaker as it comes across in the course of speech. Socrates insists that only an orator who is intrinsically virtuous can instruct others in moral values. And this orator must be a philosopher himself in order to convey a knowledge of the good to audiences, for Socrates sets it as a major task of a philosopher-orator to improve the character of a state. As is proposed in the Gorgias, an orator should always put "moral good" in the first place and should not take persuasion as an end in itself. This stance of Socrates is further demonstrated in his criticism of the sophistic rhetorical claim that oratory aims to produce gratification and pleasure instead of knowledge of good and evil.

Aristotle’s definition is based on a more pragmatic and relativistic consideration. Rhetoric is viewed as a means that brings about persuasion affecting civil life. The three sources that fall within the purview of the art of rhetoric are ethos, “the personal character of speaker”; pathos, “putting the audience into a certain frame of mind”; and logos, “the proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself” (On Rhetoric, 24-25). When explaining the “ethos” or the “personal character” in speech, Aristotle emphasizes that it is speech itself rather than the speaker’s reputation and morality that creates credibility among audiences.
The difference between Socrates's idealistic view of the speaker's character and Aristotle's relativist concept of ethos as a role is evidenced in the later different definitions of ethos by Cicero and Quintilian (Johnson, 98-114). Cicero's pragmatic attitude to ethos is similar to Aristotle's, and he defines ethos in the De Oratore (55 B.C.) as a strategic role used to win the good will of an audience and to direct their inclinations wherever the speaker wishes. Quintilian's discussion of the speaker's character in the Institutio Oratoria shares the view of Platonic Socrates, and he takes the development of the "loftiness of soul" as the goal of oratory. So, his book is produced for the "education of the perfect orator."

In twentieth-century speech and composition studies, there are still some rhetorical theorists like Richard Weaver and Wayne Booth who attempt to revive the Socratic idealistic view of ethos. In his Language is Sermonic, Weaver has criticized the "practical" literary tendency and "flowery" political urgency, and foregrounded "the order of values in the ultimate sanction of rhetoric," and the rhetorician as a preacher who "direct(s) our passion toward noble ends and base" (225). The majority of rhetorical studies, however, no longer regard ethos as a necessary virtue of rhetoricians. As Nan Johnson observes, "In treating the principle of ethos, today's rhetorical education offers a range of alternatives narrower than that typically related to students in early periods."

Current rhetorical studies tend to cover the implications of ethos under the terms of "voice," "tone," "stance," "appeal," "persona" and "credibility," often within the range of stylistics.
The term “voice” in rhetoric usually refers to the representation of the speaker or the writer in discourse. That contemporary rhetoricians favor a study of “voice” may result from two major concerns: first, “voice” covers the concept of “ethos” pertaining to a speaker/writer’s character in discourse; second, “voice” encompasses a more extensive topic of human subjectivity that is reflected in the issues of presence, control and discourse-ownership (Brook, 405-17). Moreover, Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism has generated a dialogic reading of “voice” as refined by Don H. Bialostosky: “Voice is never something speakers have before they speak but something they create by defining a relation to the other voices that have already opened the discussion and to those that wait to enter into it” (Bialostosky, 1991, 12). Thus, “voice” is no longer an absolute, static and separate notion, but a dynamic, dialogic and open-ended concept.

This brief review of studies of ethos and voice reflects how the concepts have maintained a basic concern with the relation between speaker/writer and audience, and between ethics and speech in the transition from classical rhetoric to modern rhetoric. My attempt to explore a voice of credibility in Socrates’s and Confucius’s dialogue is not only for the purpose of adapting my research interest to changing attitudes in the western world about ethical dialogue and daily communication, but also for the purpose of responding to an increasing awareness in the eastern world of the Confucian concept about the relation between De (德, ethics, morality) and Yan (言, speech, language). A comparative study of a voice of credibility may help to represent Confucius’s and Socrates’s art of persuasion and to locate the similarities and differences between their attitudes about what constitutes an oral or written communication. Such a study has to be conducted in
accordance with Bakhtin’s interpretation of a dialogic imagination, because a speaker’s or an author’s voice should not be viewed within a monologic frame. Instead, it should be explored in the light of its interaction with the other voices striving for dominance in a particular rhetorical situation and in a given historical moment. Besides, a dialogic voice addresses its previous topics, and also directs itself to a future self-representation.

Socrates’s and Confucius’s dedication to a voice of credibility is first motivated from a dissatisfaction with the moral atmosphere of their time. A major part of Confucius’s rhetorical practice points to the moral degradation and political corruption of his time, the Eastern Zhou dynasty. Confucius’s sage-king as a model of the ideal ruler is always aware of the function of his moral behavior, for he believes that “The virtue of the gentleman is like wind, the virtue of the small man is like grass. Let the wind blow over the grass and it is sure to bend” (Ch. 12.19). Similarly, Socrates’s ideal ruler of the state, the philosopher-king, also believes in the power of morality and strives for the moral education of civil society.

In Confucius’s rhetorical activities, he always regards virtue as the origin of memorable and moral speech activities. On the other hand, he is critical of the “glibness of tongue” that harms virtue and morality of both the rulers and the common people. As a practitioner of moral speech and dialogue, Confucius always conducts his verbal activities under a super-virtue concept--Li (禮, rites, propriety). And his dialogues respond to and are defined by both concrete virtue standards and the ritual system of the period of the sage-king, King Wen of the Zhou. As far as Socrates is concerned, his life-long refutation
of sophistic rhetorical claims is carried out in defense of his concepts of the Good and the Virtuous. With *Phaedrus*, *Gorgias*, and *Symposium*, he makes persistent efforts to present as credibly as he could the superiority of his dialectical methods over the sophistic rhetoric.

In light of the first goal mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I will explore how Confucius established his voice as a moral philosopher and also a master of language in a continuous verbal contact with those who either make an abusive use of speech or an under-estimation of the power of the speech act. And I will foreground how Confucius sometimes attempts to raise a voice of credibility so as to establish a harmonious relation between speaker and virtue, and between human speech and rhetorical situations, which makes it possible for his voice to be always responsive to and interactive with other elements in such a harmonious order.

As a second goal, I will demonstrate how Socrates displays a dialogic imagination in “contending with” other voices and “exposing the corresponding attempts” of sophists “who disguise what they are doing” (*Phaedrus*, 260-61) in *Gorgias*, *Phaedrus* and *Symposiums* so as to create his credibility, integrity, dependability and influence. Besides, I will focus on how his processes of definition and classification are employed to get his voice defined by that of either his disciples or his opponents in order to plant the seeds of love and true rhetoric in the souls of his interlocutors.

Finally, a comparative study will further maintain that both the Confucian voice of *Xinyan* (信言, speech of sincerity) and the Socratic voice of true rhetoric rely on the
moral standards of the speaker, and thus can be mutually defined in an era when orality is
more favored than literacy for the elements of being participatory, situational and
aggregative.⁴ Such a comparison also points to Confucius’s stress on social harmony as
the goal of verbal activities, and Socrates’s reliance on the argumentation that helps to
shape moral standards of the speaker as an individual.

II. A Voice of Credibility in Confucius’s Ethics,
Naming, Rites and Word

Before undertaking our study of Confucius’s voice of credibility, it is essential to
make clear that The Analects resonates with a multitude of voices, those of Confucius, his
direct disciples, relatives, acquaintances, rulers, and his disciples of succeeding
generations, although Confucius’s own voice is often heard in major dialogues. Some
voices, as Jay G. Williams observes, are “singing in many part harmony”(105), some
contending with each other to realize their representation. This textual reality has thus
made The Analects exemplary of the Bakhtinian concept of heteroglossia, a way of
perceiving the world as composed of various voices or languages reflecting particular
social and discursive forces. Besides, it is also significant to consider that Confucius’s
philosophical concept, Dao (道, Way), is built on a comprehensive ethical or moral
category—De (德, ethics, virtue) with benevolence at its core, and with an abstract
idealized personification Junzi (君子, superior man, gentleman) as its highest model.
Now, let us analyze in detail Confucius’s voice of credibility represented in his dialogic
interpretation of De (morality) and Yan (Word), of his naming theory, and of his ritual
system.
Confucius's rhetorical theory reflects his interpretation of the dialectical relations between *De* and *Yan*. He believes that "A man of virtue is sure to be the speaker of memorable sayings, but the speaker of memorable sayings is not necessarily virtuous" (Ch. 14.4). Confucius's own "memorable sayings" here first clarify a causal relation between the possession of virtue and the capability of a good speech. It is the former that determines the latter, and not vice versa. In addition, Confucius foregrounded an active process of *You* (取, to acquire, to possess). The individual as a producer of a voice of virtue and a good speech is by no means free from his social and rhetorical situations. He has to undergo a certain uni-directional process before he is eventually able to establish a voice of credibility. That is, he must put personal cultivation of morality in the first place, and to be *Youdezhe* (有德者, a possessor of virtues) is characterized by having an inner voice of virtue that defines an outer voice and empowers its possessor to deliver a memorable speech. Therefore, when he confessed that "To fail to cultivate virtue ... is what I am worried about" (Ch. 7.3), Confucius expressed a deep disappointment with those who always placed a political ambition and rhetorical competence before a moral knowledge and personal cultivation.

What then are the basic elements that constitute Confucius's *De* (德, virtue) in his rhetorical theory? *Zhong* (忠, reverence, conscientiousness) and *Xin* (信, trustworthiness, sincerity), according to Confucius, play predominant roles in one's verbal activities. Once his disciple, Zizhang, asked about how to go forward in society without
obstruction. Confucius said, “If in word you are conscientious and trustworthy and in deed single-minded and reverent, then even in the lands of the barbarians you will go forward without obstruction. But if you fail to be Zhong (忠, conscientious) and Xin (信, trustworthy) in word or to be single-minded and reverent in deed, then can you be sure of going forward without obstruction even in your own neighborhood?” (Ch. 15.6)

In this dialogue, Confucius again attaches moral values to Yan (言, Word) in its social context by placing a stress on Zhong and Xin. His concept of Zhong is a prerequisite of good and appropriate rhetoric, which can function differently in its dialogical relations with different audiences. In the Spring and Autumn period (770-476 B.C.), Zhong connoted an attitude of both reverence and conscientiousness, and is represented in an intellectual’s relations with the ruler, with friends and with Min (民, the people in the lower social ranks). Word with the ruler is required to express one’s reverent attitude and a sense of responsibility; Word with one’s friends is expected to reveal the speaker’s trustworthiness; and Word with the people in the lower ranks should show one’s concern for their moral education and help them to acquire the quality of working hard for their own benefit. One of Confucius’s purposes of Word is apparently centered on a high sense of social responsibility, though the definite connotation of this responsibility is attunable to its dialogical relations with a particular audience.

Confucius’s own voice in the dialogue (Ch. 15.6) is also defined and responded to by his statements concerning the relation between virtue and speech on other occasions. Elsewhere, Confucius insists that only a “superior man” and a “virtuous man” can produce
a good speech. Once, his disciple, Nangong She, demonstrated the truth in his presence that the ancient sages Yu and Ji won the hearts of the people by leading them to tame rivers and showing them how to grow crops instead of involving them in bloody wars. On hearing Nangong’s speech, Confucius never hesitated in pouring out his praise. “How gentlemanly that man is! How he reserves virtue!” Nangong’s “good speech” expresses a true understanding of De (virtue) in Confucius’s sense, and displays the intrinsic quality of a “superior man.” This anecdote is consistent with Confucius’s standard for “good speech” and “virtuous man.” In contrast, the so-called “good speech” of those “Chinese sophists” makes no sense, because without virtue there is no genuinely “good speech.” Confucius often refers to those high-sounding speeches as Qiaoyan (狡言, cunning words, artful words). From Qiaoyan he infers that the speaker lacks benevolence and ethics. Furthermore, he concludes that “Artful words will ruin one’s virtue” (Ch. 15.27). Thus, when Confucius declared that the producer of memorable sayings is not necessarily virtuous, his comments elsewhere had already specified that the “memorable sayings” mentioned here are nothing but “artful, cunning words” which have no true moral value, and are merely empty talks for pleasing listeners or for the self-gratification of the speakers only.

Another Confucian concept, Xin (trustworthiness), also serves as a starting point for his rhetorical theory. Shuowen Jiezi defines Xin as sincerity (诚, Cheng). This helps to us to understand the rhetorical claim expressed in the Yijing (Book of Change):

“Polishing the expressions in order to establish sincerity.”

This statement also suggests
how trustworthiness and sincerity are valued in the communication of the early Chinese.

In actuality, Confucius’s *Xin*, like his concept of *Zhong*, is interactive with different dialogical relations. To begin with, *Xin* from the people will guarantee the existence of the government and state. When discussing the significance of *Xin*, Confucius stresses that “Death has always been with us since the beginning of time, but when there is no trust (*Xin*), the common people will have nothing to stand on” (Ch. 12.7). Confucius intends to explain that arms and food are less important than the trust of people in their government and state. So, if the governors fail to win the trust of the people with virtuous words and deeds, the government and state will exist no more. Thus, *Xin* on the side of the governors will help uphold the moral standards of the common people. Confucius believes that “When those above love trustworthiness, none of the common people will dare to be insincere” (Ch. 13.4). In other words, the governors’ *Xin* will be exemplary in effecting the moral education of their people.

Besides, *Xin* is the foundation of true friendship. Zixia, a disciple of Confucius, once argued that a man of learning, in dealing with friends, is trustworthy in what he says (Ch. 1.7). Following Confucius, Zixia regards it as a sign of knowledge and of morality to be sincere to one’s friends. Finally, *Xin*, trustworthiness, will enable one to assume high responsibility or to be employed in a high position. Confucius declares that if one is trustworthy in words, his fellowmen will entrust him with responsibility. Thus, the quality of *Xin* penetrates every aspect of a speaker’s social life, both public and private, self and other, appearing in one’s verbal activities and in his moral conduct.
The seemingly discursive and casual dialogues of *The Analects* constitute a rather comprehensive description of the rhetorical function of *Xin* in his theory of *De*, a Confucian concept comparable to the Greek concept of ethos. Then, how can the Confucian *Xin* be established in its rhetorical situations? Confucius chiefly emphasizes two dialogic relations of *Xin*. One is to put *Zhong* before *Xin*: “approach your duties with reverence and be trustworthy in what you say” (Ch. 1.5). That may imply that *Zhong* is the precondition for *Xin*. In his verbal encounters, or administrative work, a speaker has to express his reverence for the addressee or discussant, and reveal professional ethics in his duties, if he intends to have his sincerity felt by others. The other is to understand the relation between speech and “sparing of speech” (Ch. 1.6) in order to remain trustworthy in what is said, because “the gentleman is ashamed of his word outstripping his deed” (Ch. 14.27). Confucius insists that practice of morality should always go before words, and one’s deeds should match his words. Being “sparing of speech,” as a precaution in communication, keeps the speaker vigilant against high-sounding words and empty talk. Thus defined, *Xin* becomes dynamic in its response to *Zhong* within the domain of rhetoric, and in the meantime, *Xin* sets a moral criterion in Confucius’s theory of uniformity between word and deed.

After an analysis of the basic elements that make up Confucius’s concept of *De*, let us observe how his voice of credibility in oral and written language is convincingly defended by his theory of “Naming” (正名, rectification of names), which expresses his understanding of the power of orality over the government administration and moral
cultivation. The following is a dialogue between Confucius and his disciple, Zilu, on the topic of "naming":

Zilu said, "If the Lord of Wei left the administration of this state to you, what would you put first?"
The Master said, "If something has to be put first, it is perhaps, the rectification of names."
Zilu said, "Is that so? What a roundabout way you take! Why bring rectification in at all?"
The Master said, "Yu, how boorish you are. Where a gentleman is ignorant, one would expect him not to offer any opinion. When names are not correct, what is said will not sound reasonable; when what is said does not sound reasonable, affairs will not culminate in success; when affairs do not culminate in success, rites and music will not flourish; when rites and music do not flourish, punishments will not fit the crimes; when punishments do not fit crimes, the common people will not know where to put hand and foot. Thus when the gentleman names something, the name is sure to be usable in speech, and when he says something, this is sure to be practical. The thing about the gentleman is that he is anything but casual where speech is concerned." (Ch.13.3)

Confucius is the first Chinese scholar who raises such a theory of naming, which dominates his statesmanship, and moral and legal conceptualization, and also provides a logical and rhetorical foundation for the verbal activities of a gentleman.

To begin, this theory of naming has distinguished Confucius's voice as a political idealist regarding a question about his proposal for political administration. However, in view of a multitude of measures (political, economic, military or agricultural) he might take as a statesman, Confucius's focus on "naming" dumfounded his disciple, Zilu, who felt quite disappointed with such an unexpected answer. Zilu's criticism of Confucius being pedantic makes it more urgent for him to clarify his concept of "naming." Certainly, Confucius did not fail to point out Zilu's ignorance before expounding his theory of naming. And this speech proves to be not only the longest but also the most concise
speech Confucius ever made in his dialogues. The whole speech emphasizes the following issues: Confucius first addressed the significance of "naming" in a particular social context. As "No Way is prevalent" in Confucius's time, and the dukes and viscounts are struggling to consolidate their own status or territory with an ambition to seize the whole empire, the essential "names" Confucius attempted to "rectify" are Jun Chen (君臣, the relation between lord and subject, and between duke and viscount), and Fu Zi (父子, the relation between father and son). To establish a generally accepted ethical relationship between ruler and subject in the public domain, and between father and son in private life is to lay a foundation for sociopolitical order, because power struggles in a state and quarrels in a family are major sources of social disorder. Unfortunately, the hidden voice behind this theory of naming is often narrowly interpreted. As Hsiao Kung-ch'uan explains, "what he called the rectification of names meant readjusting the powers and duties of ruler and minister, superior and inferior, according to the institution of the Zhou feudal world's most flourishing period." And Hansen's latest reading of Confucius's "naming" has also observed a tradition-oriented aspect: "The social hierarchy had the duty to model the correct use of names. That done, the traditional guiding codes could correctly guide people in their physical movement" (59). The critical view represented by Hsiao and Hansen seems to accept the Confucian theory of naming at its face value, and neglects Confucius's own voice of "naming" in re-articulating a set of "names" for desirable social relations. The implication of Confucius's "naming," if examined in the rhetorical context of Confucius' dialogues, lies within his theory of Dao.
(道, Way) and Ren (仁, benevolence). In other words, the authentic voice of
“naming” is produced by Confucius instead of being generated by the tradition of the
Zhou. Students of Confucianism tend to examine his dialogues and sayings with a narrow
interpretation of his self-confession that “I transmit but do not innovate. I am trustful in
what I say and devoted to antiquity” (Ch. 7.1). Actually, in his philosophical
exploration and in his numerous rhetorical activities, Confucius did refine and “innovate” a
set of ethical standards for ruler, subject, father and son with the purpose of maintaining a
cooperative social structure based on a stable family unity and supported by shared moral
values. According to his process of reasoning, Confucius’s naming-centered political and
rhetorical claim becomes the priority of the state administration and family maintenance,
which is responsive to the tradition of the Zhou and adaptive to his own social context. In
this sense, Confucius’s theory of “naming” is highly innovative, for its goals were to build
an ethical system for society as well as individuals, and meanwhile, to obtain a power for
his interpretation of the Junzi (君子, superior man) and Renren (仁人, benevolent
man).

A rhetorical study of Confucius’s naming theory may, if conducted in a manner
attentive to the power of orality, also reveal a relation between speech and social
construction. David Hall and Roger Ames have already observed a dynamic aspect of
Confucius’s naming process. They write that, “naming and attuning of names is a dynamic
enterprise in which the existing structure and definition is qualified by the understanding
that names and their achieved harmonics are always fluid within the parameters of a
context, and are in continual need of attunement. The challenge that this fluidity of names and their patternings represents to a purely logical, referential explanation of Zheng ming is reinforced by the performative force of naming" (274). Here, Hall and Ames emphasize the performative function of language in rectifying "names" in a changing contextual situation and in educating and "performing" people by constructing the meaning of ethics. This interpretation reflects a pragmatic reading that accounts for the illocutional and perlocutional effect performed by "naming" as a speech act.

This reading is, however, different from Bakhtinian dialogism in that it does not follow the internal dialogue of Confucius as a reflection of and response to the words and ideologies of the other. In a pragmatic reading, both the relation between the attunement of names and a context, and the relation between naming and its performative force are characterized by a uni-directional and monological flow. Even within Confucius's own intertextual context a critic may gather some evidence to question such a monological interpretation. Confucian texts themselves can at least demonstrate a "double-voiced" interaction--the interaction between the voice of the self and that of the other--in the following relations: the necessity of naming and the benefit for the people; the language of naming versus the practice of "doing"; the individual activity of naming versus the social norms of rites and music; and the benevolence-orientation of naming versus the establishment of law and punishment. In the above relations, it is clear that the voice of naming in its performance is always responded to and defined by the voices of the other. Moreover, this dialogic nature is also reflected in an intertextual context. For instance, as
recorded in another text, *Zuozhuan*, Confucius also recommended the use of names to bring benefit to the people, which touches upon the purpose of naming and is consistent with his dialogue with Zilu. It seems that the voice for the benefit of the people through the language of naming always helps shape his political and philosophical configuration of an ideal society. And this explains why “benevolence” (or Love for the people) is forever at the center of his system of ethics.

With regard to the voice of language, Confucius’s theory of naming insists that what one says should be consistent with his behavior (doing, deeds), for “The gentleman does not allow his word outstripping his deed” (Ch. 14.27). Furthermore, Confucius, unlike some western philosophers, believes that doing is never voiceless. It has its linguistic function. “A superior man can speak with his deeds while a small man can only speak with his tongue.” In Confucius’s imagination, a true gentleman may have his voice heard not only by his words but also by his deeds, for the voice of a speaker is situated in a dialogical relation between words and deeds. The two elements contribute to the establishment of a voice of credibility either in one’s internal dialogue with a moral self or in one’s external dialogue with the other. Here, Confucius never undercuts the value of words. Instead, he alerts his listeners to the fact that words are often defined by deeds.

In addition to the above dialogical relations in the process of naming, we may also discern how the social norms of rites and music define and raise a voice in the Confucian texts to enhance a rite-oriented system of naming theory, and how the measures of law and punishment are presented as a secondary method to guide the behavior of the people.
As a last but not the least dialogical relation affecting the theory of naming, Confucius has also situated his theory in a context where personal reputation works as a motivation for the rectification of names as a social act, for Confucius once emphasized the significance of "name" for a gentleman: "The gentleman hates the prospect of arriving at the end of his life without having made a name for himself" (Ch. 15.20). Having explored all the above clear-cut dialogical relations in the Confucian theory of naming, we may feel justified in saying that "naming" is not a monological process. Its dialogic nature has helped to strengthen the credibility of the speaker's voice and the validity of his ethical theory.

A rhetorical study of Confucius's dialogues has also convinced us that Confucius's voice of credibility is intrinsically guided by the principle of Li (禮, rites, propriety), which provides a new path for people to reach their self-cultivation (正人) and to fulfil the rectification of others (正人). Once, Confucius warned his disciples not to "speak unless it is in accordance with the rites" (Ch. 12.1), and his constant recourse to Li displays a rich imagination of the rhetorical activities of the speaking individuals in their relations with society, tradition, and their surroundings—earth and Heaven in general.

Herbert Fingarette states: "One has to labor long and hard to learn Li. The word in its root meaning is close to ‘holy ritual,’ or ‘sacred ceremony.’ Characteristic of Confucius' teaching is the use of the language and imagery of Li as a medium with which to talk about the entire body of the moves, or more precisely, of the authentic tradition and reasonable conventions of society. Confucius taught that the ability to act according to Li and the will to submit to Li are essential to that perfect and peculiarly human virtue.
or power which can be man’s” (6). Fingarette’s statement touches upon the issue of how

*Li* is taught as a moral act and a binding power in a perspective of linguistic pragmatics and stylistics that stresses the relationship between Confucius and his audience. A dialogic reading, however, may help clarify how Confucius’s *Li* defines, addresses or questions particular “languages” characteristic of different ideologic orientations like those of Legalists or Daoists. Confucius says that “Guide them by edicts, keep them in line with punishments, and the common people will stay out of trouble but will have no sense of shame. Guide them by virtue, keep them in line with the rites, and they will, besides having a sense of shame, reform themselves” (Ch. 2.3). Here, Confucius attempts to account for the discrepancy between the Legalists’ political assertions and his own. A focus is on which is better in the administration of the state and the education of the people: edicts or ethics, punishment or rites. The different measures do, in effect, result in differences in the moral status of the common people. In the former circumstances, they are forced to act in accordance with authority for fear of possible punishment, physically or financially, and in the long run they grow apathetic to the high moral criteria they are expected to meet. But in different circumstances, they gain the power of human dignity from their moral education, and develop a strong motivation to personal cultivation. By this comparison, Confucius seems to prove that the above contradictory attitudes in administration are defined by each other, and responded to with entirely different outcomes. The effect of the education of rites and virtue is easily felt, even if it is not intended to objectify the assertions of the Legalists.
The intrinsic relations among Destiny, the rites and rhetorical activities are also elaborated in Confucius's philosophical reasoning, which provides a dialogical interaction between social norms and linguistic exploration, and between the self and the other. Confucius once said "A man has no way of becoming a gentleman unless he understands Destiny ( 禰 ); he has no way of taking his stand unless he understands the rites ( 禨 ); he had no way of judging men unless he understands words ( 一字 )" (Ch. 20.3). The above statement draws a picture of how a dialogic process of human understanding extends from Destiny to the Rites and then to one's rhetorical practice, and the other way round, as the following:

![Figure 1: Dialogic Relations of Destiny, Rites and Word](image)

This diagram helps explain dialogically Confucius's understanding of a value system and a social existence. Being a "gentleman" ( 君子 ) is the ultimate goal of an individual, which is characterized by an understanding of Destiny ( 禰 ). To take a stand in society implies the configuration of an independent personality which is guided by the Rites, a series of accepted social conventions. Appropriate judgment of others has to be made through rhetorical activities, Word ( 一字 ), with them. Confucius put Word as a foundation of his epistemology, and Rites as the guideline which exerts influence on the main body of the society—individuals with independent personality ( 自立 ) and moral integrity ( 有德 ).

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who are bound to realize Destiny in order to “return to the observance of the rites” of the Zhou (Ch. 12.1). Attention should also be paid to the interaction between the self and the other, which is actualized in the relations between Gentleman and Destiny, independent personality and the rites, and personal judgement and verbal activities. It is important to observe that the process of understanding is not monologic or uni-directional, but dialogic or bi-directional, because the realization of Destiny, in turn, arouses a passion for learning the rites, and the acquisition of the rites guarantees one’s verbal activities in accordance with appropriate social norms. Similarly, a gentleman values his stand (ji) in society, and pursues a moral judgement of others (ren) through rhetorical contacts, and in turn, it is the practice of understanding others, and the cultivation of one’s personality, that finally constitute an image of Gentleman. In conclusion, a dialogic reading of Confucius’s rhetorical activities pertaining to epistemology highlights the dynamic and interactive aspects of his definitions of the Rites, Destiny and Word (rhetorical performance).

III. Socrates’s Establishment of Good, Names and True Rhetoric

Compared with Confucius, Socrates’s voice of credibility, as discussed in my “Introduction,” is often focused on the establishment of a standard for a true rhetoric of discourse. Socrates’s ethical argument is premised on the moral, and inevitably, theological inseparability of the speaker from his speech in the dialogue. Like Confucius, his argument is often carried out in a rhetorical context of different contending voices, for which Bakhtin discovers Socrates’s dialogic spirit in establishing his credibility through a verbal contact without imposing his opinions upon others. Keeping in his mind the two
general goals of his argument: to exhibit his personal integrity and dependability, and to illuminate the superiority of his moral philosophy, Socrates makes continuous efforts to distinguish his voice from that of his opponents, the Sophists. My analysis of Socrates’s voice of credibility will be centered on a dialogic imagination represented in his interpretation of the Good, the names, and a true rhetoric, in his reformed rhetorical practice, and in his argumentation with the Sophistic rhetoricians.

Let us first examine how such a dialogic imagination works in Socrates’s delineation of the relation between his ethical standard, the Good, and the nature of his true rhetoric. To uphold his principle of morality, Socrates has successfully presented himself to be a real master of ethics exploring a method of creating a personal character so that his audience is more likely to find his arguments believable. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates maintains that “rhetoric, taken as a whole, is an art of influencing the soul through words, not only in courts of law and other public gathering” (261b). As far as the power of persuasion is concerned, Socrates’s efforts may be observed in three aspects: good intention, virtuous character and rhetorical strategy of dialogue. In the *Apology*, Socrates repeatedly claims that his philosophical pursuit and his personal defense are all carried out for the good of his listeners, the Athenian people. He exclaims:

“Athenians, I am not going to argue for my own sake, as you may think, but for yours, that you may not sin against God, or lightly reject his boon by condemning me. For if you kill me you will not easily find another like me, who, if I may use such a ludicrous figure of speech, am a sort of gadfly, given to the state by the God; and the state is like a great and noble steed who is tardy in his motions owing to his very size, and requires to be stirred into life. I am that gadfly which God has given the state and all day long and in all places am always fastening upon you,
arousing and persuading and reproaching you. And as you will not easily find another like me, I would advise you to spare me....”

This speech in the Apology displays Socrates’s good intention through his dialogic imagination. Socrates’s argument focuses on his innocence as a gadfly who acts upon the God’s will and makes persistent efforts through his dialogue to stir the State to life, but who repeatedly annoys the State by his persuasion and is eventually forced to defend his virtuous character and make an apology to get spared. Aware of his vulnerable and dangerous situation, Socrates remains responsive to and interactive with the divine God on the one hand and his accusers and the general audience on the other. So, his good intention has to be read in the consideration of such dynamic relations.

Strategically, the Socratic defense of his intention largely relies on a transference between the self and the other, the subject and the object, the defense and the accusation, and the present and the absent. To realize such a transference, he tries to bring into his apology a whole set of various “languages” in Bakhtin’s sense, and put them into communication with one another. The Athenian audience are at the very beginning invited to take part in the reasoning in order to get their voice heard. Their language of dissatisfaction with Socrates’s verbal activity is fully represented when they are supposed to risk themselves by condemning and executing a man with a divine mission, although they make judgements as the jurors, the other. Should they make such a decision as to punish Socrates, the Athenians themselves would be the victims of their wrong decision. Socrates’s timely warning helps transfer his role as an object of the accusation to that as a subject of the real judgement. Consequently, he is in the position to predict that the
Athenians’ neglect of the presence and the language of God would put themselves beyond God’s protection and blessing. The defense is further directed to a would-be replacement of “this”—Socrates—with “that”—another philosopher, which is destined to be a failure, because by their sin against God’s will, God would not give the State another man of wisdom to express His language and to bring enlightenment to the Athenian people in illusions. And the speaker seems to argue that “this” man is the “only one,” and that he can be addressed and argued with, but he is not replaceable. Metaphorically, Socrates’s good intention is also expressed in his figurative speech comparing the whole State to a noble steed that “has to be stirred to life” by words, by true rhetoric. By this simile, Socrates employs a new language to highlight the dialogic function of rhetoric in influencing souls with the will of God. Through such a display of diverse “languages,” Socrates creates a dialogue among the morally specific ways of “conceptualizing the world in words” (Bakhtin, 1986, 150) and represents them as they co-exist with, or address one another in the situation of a boisterous trial.

In her discussion about ethos and aims of rhetoric in the *Phaedrus*, Nan Johnson argues that Socrates’s statement suggests a “reformed rhetorical practice” which points to an ethical orientation of “words,” the spoken discourse. The traditional criticism of the *Phaedrus*, however, just emphasizes that the dialogue is “an example of dialectic in the highest sense” (Helmbold and Robinowitz, xii-xvii), which provides the scientific method of discovering first the true nature of things and expressing them correctly in the oral form so as to find a unity between “the soul” and rhetoric. This analysis clarifies a static
relation between the soul and rhetoric, but it neglects a dialogic nature in the *Phaedrus* that facilitates such a relation. Actually, rhetoric, in Socrates’s sense, should participate in the Good by teaching the public what is beautiful and excellent through knowledge of Ideas. As Socrates elaborates his rhetorical practice, “if we are to adopt this method, it must be on condition that we regard ourselves as rivals in the attempt to distinguish truth from falsehood” (*Gorgias*, 458). In order to establish a voice of credibility, Socrates not only regards his interlocutors as rivals, but also regards himself as an assumed rival of his own argument in a philosophical exploration of the rhetorical function in instructing “the souls” of the audience. After Phaedrus read the speech by Lysias, Socrates was immediately inspired to deliver a speech of his own, which aroused Phaedrus’s admiration for its complete rhetorical form and credible composition: a preoemium, narration, proof, and epilogue. In discussing Socrates’s first speech, Kennedy believes that “Plato is at pains to demonstrate Socrates’ rhetorical ability” (Kennedy, 1960, 78). It seems, on the contrary, that Socrates’s first speech is to oppose a rhetorically good one to a bad one, or in Bakhtin’s term, to “address” a speech that is much inferior even in the aspect of rhetorical studies, because the co-existence of the two speeches provides dialogic circumstances for his interlocutors or audience to make a contrastive analysis themselves. Certainly, Socrates is quite aware of the immoral basis for his first speech, and that is why that speech is regarded as a rival to his second speech which demonstrates the nature of the soul and his reverence for the god of Love. Using a dialogic imagination, Socrates is able to hear his voice being responded to by a divine voice “which forbade me to go away
until I made atonement for an impiety to heaven” (242). He is keen on the otherness in his own voice too, because he does experience a “heteroglossia” both in and out of his discourse. Socrates explains in a friendly way that Phaedrus is responsible for his first speech, the one Phaedrus “forced me to deliver” (242). By such an explanation, his first speech has become a deviated voice of his own. After he shifts the moral responsibility to Phaedrus, Socrates is determined to purify his soul for such a sin “with a fresh and drinkable discourse.”

So far we have no difficulty understanding Socrates’s smooth transference from his “otherness” in his first speech to a true “self” in his second speech, which is, contrary to his first one, built on sincerity and solemnity, and aims at truth and divinity. My dialogic reading is intended to explore whether there is any oratorical significance in Socrates’s first speech. Traditional reading branded the first speech to be a merely rhetorical challenge to sophistic rhetoric. This interpretation still holds water in terms of the rhetorical context in which the speech is generated. But, this observation may sound somewhat reductive and superficial if we turn an eye to the dialogic relations between Lysias’s speech and Socrates’s first speech, and between his first and second. Socrates’s first speech may be used to establish the rhetorical inferiority of the sophistic “knack,” but it also serves as an object of Socrates’s self-criticism and spiritual purification. It is clear that the juxtaposition of his two speeches helps to make a distinction between lover and non-lover, morality and immorality, truth and falsehood in an oratorical practice, and we are thus invited to imagine an endless journey of a philosopher-orator whose life goal is to
influence the public with the knowledge of love and science through a proper use of rhetoric. More importantly, by presenting his first speech, Socrates succeeds in displaying a “reformed” spirit and in revolutionizing the sophistic rhetorical practice which attempts a “destruction of the opponent” only. By so doing, Socrates is enabled to establish the “very dialogic sphere where the word lives” (Bakhtin, 1986, 150), that is, to create a dialogue between different rhetorical claims. He himself never acts to destroy the sophistic rhetoric, though he believes it is detrimental to moral purification. The oratorical significance of Socrates’s first speech also lies in his understanding of the persuasive power of the sophistic rhetoric and his capability of such a skill, which can be proved by his excitement with Phaedrus’s “wonderful and sublime” attitude towards his first speech. So, the first speech seems to suggest that the Socratic true rhetoric is not a closed system, and it is open to sophistic achievements and never attempts to gain its credibility by destroying its opponents.

Another point worth noting in Socrates’s transfer from his first speech to his second speech is his response to “an ancient rite of purification” “for those who have sinned by lying about gods or heroes” (243), which sets up the relations between speech and rite, and between his discourse and those by Homer and Steisechorus, and as a result, facilitates his transfer to the second speech. Socrates attempts to stress that oratorical practice should proceed in accordance with truth, morality and reverence for the god of Love, that otherwise an orator could be punished for his abusive use of discourse. This realization naturally helps Socrates to obtain confidence and credibility, for his second speech is delivered in honor of “a generous, decent love” (243).
With enthusiasm surprisingly similar to that of Confucius, Socrates also touches upon the topic of naming theory in his dialogue, *Cratylus*, in order to demonstrate that the dialecticians have the real knowledge needed to assign names to things well. Socrates agrees with Hermogenes that convention and agreement are the only determinants of internal correctness of naming. But, he differs from both Hermogenes and Cratylus in thinking that there is a further question of external correctness of naming. Socrates implies that there is one question about what a name for a given item is, and another question of whether or not the convention that assigns a name to the item is correct itself. This interpretation puts the process of naming in a position that it is defined and determined by both the internal and external elements of a given item—the named. Furthermore, such an interpretation reinforces Socrates’s rhetorical claim that names must correspond to the reality or the natures, because Socrates states that “a name is an instrument of teaching and of distinguishing natures, as the shuttle is of distinguishing the threads of the web” (388c). Here, Socrates, like Confucius, also points to the significance of naming in dividing up the reality as a whole in order to develop both an individualized recognition and a general understanding of the world. For instance, people learn to recognize “sun” and “moon,” and they may also come to an understanding of “heaven.” In social domains, naming plays far more complicated functions. When discussing the etymology of Hermogenes’s name, Socrates asserts that, despite the original meaning of the name (“of the race of Hermes”), Hermogenes “is no true son of Hermes,” because he is “always looking after a fortune and never in luck” (384b-c). Hidden in this joking...
tone, we may also distinguish Socrates's voice of a philosophical connotation, for he may imply that a human name, apart from its nature as the result of a conventional conduct, suggests a diversity of implications, historical, mythical, metaphorical or moral, which go far beyond the intention of the namegiver and the identification of the named, and inevitably put "this name" in a position interactive with endless interpretations.

As a great part of "the knowledge of the good" (384b), naming, according to Socrates, exerts a tremendous influence on the teaching process and moral education. The instruments of teaching, in fact, are not the names per se (435d). It is the process of testing the names by questioning and answering that provides applicable instruments for teaching and educating people. Therefore, a critical question that faces us is what is the appropriate relations among the namegiver (legislator), the teacher (user of names) and the dialecticians (director of the legislator). Some critics argue that Socrates actually suggests that teacher, namegiver and dialectician should be the same person in three different roles, that is, the philosopher-king. Such an argument could be meaningful only when we are convinced that Socrates really denies the roles of a teacher and a namegiver in his configuration of naming. This is, however, not the case with the Cratylus. What we can discern in the dialogue is Socrates's intention to establish a dialogic relation among namegiver, teacher and dialectician, namely, to make the naming process a dynamic one in which each of the three assumes his own role, and names are defined, and redefined, taught, tested and corrected so as to be consistent with reality. This might be the credibility Socrates attempts to achieve for his naming theory through the Cratylus.
Another rhetorical intention that may be observed in the *Cratylus* is Socrates's unclaimed superiority of the oratorical power in naming over the written language. The Socratic dialogue works hard to explore in what way it is right for Homer's text to call the bird *chalcis* rather than *cymindis*, to call the river *Xanthus* rather than *Scamander*, and to call Hector's son *Astyanex* rather than *Scamandrius* (392-3). The conclusion is clearly that it is easy to understand the correctness of the names in the Homeric texts, but it is hard to explain why one name is better than the other. As Socrates hints, one reached the true understanding of the names in Homer when he imagined that he had found some indication of the opinions of Homer about the correctness of names. Instead of criticizing the vagueness in the Homeric written representations of names, Socrates points to the right way to interpret the truth of naming through one's oral exploration and dialogic imagination of how one name gains more interpretative strength than another in its reflection of reality, its interaction with the namegivers, and its exposure to the scrutiny of the dialecticians. In an iconoclastic manner, Socrates seems to encourage his interlocutors not to rely on the written word for its potentiality to destroy one's ability of thinking, but to resort to the oral method, the dialogue in particular, to develop the knowledge of names. With such a rhetorical persuasion, Socrates further defends his rational understanding of the naming theory.

Compared with Confucius, Socrates devotes far more argument to justifying the superiority of his moral philosophy and true rhetoric in his direct encounters with sophistic
rhetoricians. Apart from the Phaedrus, his dialogues, Gorgias and Symposium, are also conducted to meet the rhetorical challenge of the sophists. From the perspective of morality, Socrates in the Gorgias places his philosophical exploration with the True, the Good and the Just, and the sophistic rhetoric with the false, the evil and the unjust. In light of epistemology, Socrates aligns philosophy with health and knowledge, and rhetoric with disease and ignorance. Some contemporary critics (e.g., Vickers, 110, 127) have thus pointed out the exaggerated dichotomies in these dialogues and argued that Socrates himself does have recourse to each of these rhetorical methods (e.g., appeals to the audience, arousing emotions, etc.). The scrutiny of either the dichotomies or the blend of the methods, however, does not account for Socrates’s success in creating his own voice of credibility in a dialogue with his opponents. It is his dialogic imagination that enables Socrates to push forward his argumentation with Gorgias, Polus and Callicles on the issues of rhetoric, real power and real statesmanship. Ever since Socrates starts his (also Chaerephon’s) question and answer process with Gorgias, he makes efforts to set their argumentation in a context in which their voices are interactive with each other, and also with the voices of those absent from their dialogue. The initial topic they concentrate on is “What is the profession of Gorgias?” Gorgias’s pupil, Pollus’s explanation seems to contradict the professional criterion by which people call themselves physician, painter, etc. When Gorgias states that his profession is rhetorician and that rhetoric is the art of how to produce persuasion, Socrates once again places his debate in a social situation where an arithmetician or a teacher of law courts is also recognized as a producer of
persuasion. This definition from the standpoint of social reality challenges the validity of Gorgias’s profession. It is in the moment that Gorgias is induced to make the admission that an ignorant man with the skill of rhetoric may be more persuasive than a doctor on the subject of health that Socrates raises the question of whether rhetoricians really know the distinction between justice and injustice, beauty and ugliness, good and evil when he is engaged with persuasion. By such a step-by-step questioning and analytical process, Socrates successfully gets Gorgias’s voice defined by various other contending voices so as to prove that rhetoric is not an art of persuasion, but a knack of flattery. And meanwhile, Socrates seizes whatever opportunities present to remind the audience of the addressivity of Gorgias’s statement to his former statement, and to reveal the incredibility of sophistic rhetorical claims. One such prominent instance is to place Gorgias’s statement that an “orator might make use of rhetoric for unjust purposes” in comparison with his previous claim that “rhetoric could never be anything unjust” (461). Socrates’s listing of such an inconsistency is not simple, and he intends to claim that Gorgias’s lengthy monological speech based on the theory of probability and relativity, though sounding convincing, does not always address the question; and it is a dialogic imagination generated from his dialectical method that points to the conclusion that Gorgias’s rhetoric is not conducive to the good life, and useful rhetoric must aim at its demonstration of injustice and its protection of the innocent (481).

The aspect of the later part of the Gorgias that has received the attention of critics is Socrates’s frustration in developing his critical studies of Gorgias’s brand of rhetoric.20
before he shifts to a different topic. This third part (481-527), however, suggests that the
issue of the relation between rhetoric and the good life always lies at the center of the
dialogue, although Socrates is fully aware of Callicles's hostility and non-cooperation.

Certainly, Socrates's realization that he can hardly persuade Callicles to accept his
argument does not prevent him from his further exploration of the topics of happiness,
pleasure, good and evil, rhetoricians and politicians, because he does not deem it a victory
to "compel" anybody to an agreement. Instead, he keeps the voices of his and his
opponents complementary, and he enjoys having a listener and having his argument
responded to, approvingly or critically. His encouragement of questions from his
interlocutors, and his patience with their counter-argument seem to indicate that he never
deems it "un"harmonious and discordant for him to face any philosophical or rhetorical
challenge, and that argumentation becomes a dynamic part of his dialogue and exploration.

This attitude reflects Socrates's understanding of a true dialogue—to question and to be
questioned so as to develop a knowledge of the absolute truth, and reach an agreement
between the mortal souls and the divine god. Very few readers can deny that it is his
continuous dialogue itself that enables Socrates to force from his interlocutors the
irresistible conclusions. The credibility of Socrates's argument also comes from his
delineation of the evil statesmen who mirror "those who call themselves sophists." When
Socrates creates a dialogue between these two groups of professionals, the audience are
brought to see how the politicians who brought destruction to the state complained about
the harsh treatment they finally face, and how the sophists who "pretend to teach virtue
finally accuse their pupils of misdeeds" while "defrauding them of wages or showing no
gratitude for the benefits they have received" (521). Furthermore, Socrates makes use of
the dialogic nature of the practice of sophists and orators, and illuminates how these
professionals "closely approximate one another" and corrupt the state. These pungent
comparisons are used to draw a clear picture of the dark side of the contemporary
Athenian political and rhetorical situation and to launch a severe attack on the pragmatism
and sophistry still popular in the state.

While emphasizing the dialogic nature of Socrates's verbal activities, Bakhtin
presents Socrates as the hero of a new genre, which helps modern readers to distinguish
his true rhetoric of Love and Good, tragedy and comedy in the dialogues like the
Symposium. Bakhtin believes that Socrates "is an outstanding example of heroization in
novelistic prose (so very different from epic heroization) ...Socratic laughter...and Socratic
degradation...bring the world closer and familiarize it in order to investigate it fearlessly
and freely..." (Dialogic Imagination, 11-13). The Symposium may well serve as such a
process of "heroization" for Socrates to gain the right to the definition of moral and
rhetorical concepts in a "heteroglossia" of voices struggling to provide their own
interpretations. The dialogue proceeds in the situation of a drunken banquet. The comic
circumstances, and the reverence for Socrates from those present encourage free speeches
on the topic of love and the casual exchange of disparate viewpoints. Our reading may
prove how the speeches bring to the audience or the reader an encyclopedic knowledge of
the issue of Love.22 Phaedrus's beginning speech generates "a self-image"23 as an object
of love, and the second speech by Pausanias may be deemed as a "declaration of independence" for the pederasts to whom he belongs. Eryximachus gives an account for his conclusion that the god of Love is actually a physician like himself. Then, Aristophanes, in the light of an explanation of mythical origin, interprets Love as the desire for copulation and harmony with its primordial other half originally separated by Zeus. From these self-centered speeches, we are convinced that the speakers do not make utterances on the basis of philosophical reasoning but merely out of their rich imagination and in their own interests. With those melodramatic voices resonating in the party, Socrates feels obliged to make known his philosophical understanding of Love as the desire for Good, for what an individual lacks (198b–201c). What I intend to illuminate is not the content of the Socratic argument, but his dialogic imagination in manipulating such a complicated topic as Love, and in making his voice theologically and philosophically responsive to his otherness and to the half-somber rhetorical context. The basic structure of such an imagination may be represented as follows:

Figure 2: The Dialogic Structure of Symposium
Diotima, a female priest and prophet, is a myth-making image in the center of Socrates's communication. She is also the source from which Socrates claims to get instruction. This half-goddess, half-human authority is, however, a figure without historical basis. It is reasonable for us to infer that Diotima’s statement constitutes a divine voice that is both dialogic with Socrates’s innerself and alienated from his own voice. By introducing a female prophet into the discussion, Socrates may reflect that his understanding is consistent with the mythical account of the origin of Love as presented by Aristophanes. Though his speech addresses all the participants at the banquet, it is through his direct dialogue with Agathon that Socrates is able to expound to the rest at the level of morality that Love is intended for the beauty of souls and happiness of the individuals, and at the level of philosophy, to reveal how Love in the form of beautiful interior is defined by the ugly exterior, and how “the Love of wisdom” is defined by “the wisdom of Love.” Furthermore, in the light of his moral philosophy, Socrates’s contribution also responds negatively to the preceding speakers on the topic of Love, and his dialogic relations penetrate the object of Socratic Love, Alcibiades, because Alcibiades’s encomium of Socrates advocates that Love may be pursued in the real world, but cannot be experienced and appreciated in the spiritual domain. Alcibiades, presented as an epitome of a passionate lover, is observed as a sharp contrast to Socrates, a philosopher of reason. But, these two extremes, in terms of Love, are still complementary when Love is understood to be both the origin of the human longing for a physical pleasure, and the motivation for spiritual exploration of truth and knowledge.
Socrates's dialogue also points to the rhetoric of Gorgias and its influence on the speakers in the banquet. By drawing a distinction between flattery and praise, the beautiful encomiums of Love and the truth about Love, the imitation of Gorgias's rhetoric and the dialectical exchange, Socrates is able to defend a philosophical attitude toward Love. The last but the most significant point is that the *Symposium* functions as a convincing refutation against the charges of creating new gods and corrupting youth. His philosophical exploration of Love is contradictory to the preceding speeches that do create new gods, and his moral emphasis on Love is also opposed to the pleasure-seeking tendency of the rest of speakers present. Indeed, Socrates is a lonely philosopher among those participants who exhibit a pragmatic attitude. And it is his dialogic imagination that keeps him awake in the gathering of those drunken with wine. This is why we in the audience can often trace his voice of credibility among a heteroglossia of voices struggling to represent themselves. And this also reminds us of the same role Confucius often assumes in his dialogues to defend his moral philosophy.

IV. *Yan* / True Rhetoric versus *De* / Good: Dialogue between Confucius and Socrates

In the above discussion, I have described the basic understanding of Confucius and Socrates about the relation between Word and *De* or Good, and provided a dialogic reading of a voice of credibility in their dialogues. Now, my comparative study is intended to get their ethical claims and rhetorical visions mutually defined so as to
emphasize the dialogic nature of their voices interactive with their own context and also ours.

Both Confucius and Socrates have developed a rather systematic understanding of the self-representation in one’s verbal activities. They emphasize the close relation between the speaker’s self-representation and his discourse. For Confucius, a speaker must be a possessor of \textit{De} (virtue) before he engages himself in a speech or a dialogue, because speaking ability is basically an instrument with which the gentleman (or exemplary man) educates or influences the “small man” (or common man) in the way the wind blows over the grass (Ch. 12.19). On the other hand, Word is not only a carrier but also a reflection of virtue, and that is why Confucius stated that “he has no way of judging men unless he understands words” (Ch. 20.3). Thus, Confucius emphasized the dialogic nature of virtue and Word. The former may lead to the latter, and the latter, in turn, defines and cultivates the former. For Socrates, word or speech ensures a process, a dialectical exchange for the speaker to tell the truth and discover the truth, which compels the speaker to encounter and contend with different voices in order to have his own voice heard. So, word itself is highly valued in Socrates’s doctrine,\textsuperscript{27} for his philosophical life would be put to an end once he was denied the right to word.

In their idiosyncratic interpretation of virtue and word, the two great thinkers contributed to different configurations of rhetorical activities for their moral philosophy. Confucius provided, though not intentionally, a comparatively more systematic description to define the oral practice of a “gentleman.” Within this system, a speaker has to take care of the various relations of his word with the “rectification of names,” performance of
action, rites and music, with legal enforcement, and also with the compliance of the common people. Apart from his focus on verbal activity as a means of social construction, the Confucian rhetorical theory also insists on oral practice as a process of self-cultivation. Accordingly, Confucius’s standard of Yan (word) is a verbal activity under the principle of De (virtue) that consists of two essential elements: Zhong (reverence, conscientiousness) and Xin (trustworthiness, sincerity). However, these moral standards are not monological and uni-directional. They are dialogical and bi-directional in the sense that the word with virtue, according to Confucius, reflects both the speaker’s spiritual purification and his intention for the moral education of the common people. Word as a rhetorical performance is elaborated by the value system of the speaker himself and responded to by its audience. In sum, Confucius’s concept of word deals with the individualized spiritual cultivation and the socialized moral elevation, for Confucius’s rhetorical vision is for the realization of a harmony among the people, and between human beings and their social environment (e.g., the state administration, cultural tradition, and the natural world).

Corresponding to Confucius’s concept, Socrates, in the Western world, also produced a rather systematic theoretical description of his “true rhetoric.” Since Socrates established his conception upon the understanding that true rhetoric is employed to express and discover truth (Phaedrus), to redefine “names” so as to teach people (Cratylus), or to awaken the souls of the audience (Symposium) while purifying the soul of the speaker himself (Phaedrus), he located the self in the context of dialogue--a
dialogical exchange— while presenting before us an internal harmony among word
(rhetoric), character, truth and divinity, which can be illustrated in the following diagram:

![Diagram showing relationships between Word, Character, Divinity, Truth, Internal Harmony, External Harmony, Orator, Interlocutor]

Figure 3: Word, Character, Divinity and Truth

In Socrates's ethical dialogues, the speaker's character is always embodied in his good
intention, and good will is always expressed in his word that is employed to discover and
describe truth. Such truth is in accord with the divine or spiritual voice that communicates
with the speaker, and kindles his inspiration on his further exploration. This harmony in
the inner world of the self is simultaneously defined by an external harmony of the
speaker's dialogical activities with his interlocutors. Once he could persuade his
interlocutors to participate in his question and answer exchange toward the final goal of
the absolute truth, Socrates would always enjoy some harmonious relations with the
other—his interlocutors and then the absolute truth. Though it is often the case that
Socrates is heatedly refuted, for instance in the Gorgias or the Symposium, he seldom
feels hesitant in his continuous efforts for a divine cause. On many occasions, he seems
gratified with two rhetorical visions he has already achieved: one is to make effective his
dialectical method, as in his dialogue, the Gorgias, by exposing the fallacy of the argument
of his opponents and demonstrating the superiority of his philosophy, and the other, as my
discussion of his Apology indicates, is to make clear to the public how their souls can be
awakened in such a process of verbal and spiritual confrontation so as to get nearer to the
god of Love, and the god of truth. In this sense, Socrates is often commended for his
epistemological optimism in his belief that Man can finally reach the truth so long as he is
conscious of his ignorance and responsive to the divine voice of the god.

In general, Confucius's rhetorical vision aims at an internal harmony between Yan (word) and De (virtue, morality) within the self, which is extended to a harmony among people, between human beings and society, and between human society and the natural world. The framework of his ethical claims for rhetoric may be expressed in the following structure:

Figure 4: Confucius's Ethical Claims for Yan (Word, rhetoric)

Within this framework, we may discover how Confucius internalized his ethical claims in
his rhetorical theory. The Gentleman (Junzi) is both the exemplar of virtue (De), and the
producer of Word (Yan) in the form of a speech or a dialogue. The virtuous Word mainly consists of two elements: Zhong (reverence, conscientiousness) and Xin (trustworthiness, sincerity). These ethical elements enable the gentleman to develop harmonious rhetorical relations with rulers, family members, friends, and to carry out moral education among the common people. The rhetorical activity of the gentleman, however, is always contextualized in terms of its relations with Time, Place, and Heaven, because Confucius insists that the gentleman has to decide whom to communicate with, when to speak, and on what occasion or at what place to make his utterance. More significantly, the gentleman has his own way talking to Heaven. The purpose of rhetoric, for Confucius, is first of all self-oriented, for oral ability generates a favorable self-image and may contribute to one’s success in life. As his disciple, Zigong, points out, “One word from a gentleman reveals his wisdom or ignorance” (Ch. 19.25). So, speech can not be too careful. The second purpose of rhetorical activity is to produce Word that upholds the rule of virtue (Ch. 9.24), because “The rule of virtue can be compared to the Pole Star which commands the homage of the multitude of stars without leaving its place” (Ch. 2.1). Undoubtedly, order and harmony are found in this imagined structure of the state administration. Once the rhetorical activities reach such a stage of the successful self-representation and benevolent administration, the supreme ideal of Confucius, Dao (Way), will be realized both in the self and the other. Worthy of discussion is the “golden thread,” Shu (reciprocity), that connects the whole structure of Confucius’s rhetorical claims. By Shu, Confucius implies that in rhetorical activities or ethical education, the
gentleman should, on the one hand, learn to discipline or overcome the self in its relation with the other,\textsuperscript{34} and on the other, address or treat others as you would treat yourself, namely, never impose on others what you yourself do not desire.\textsuperscript{35} The Confucian theory of reciprocity helps to activate his dialogic imagination for a gentleman to carry on with his verbal activities to achieve both internal and external harmony.

Although both Confucius and Socrates might attempt to establish a voice of an authoritative \textit{Zheren}/man of wisdom through their dialogues, they seemed to realize eventually, after many setbacks and frustrations, that the strong passion to dominate an otherwise cooperative verbal exchange could undermine the "ethos" or \textit{De} of the participants. Accordingly, they developed their own strategies in their ethical dialogues. Confucius's attitude toward a successful dialogue among friends and students is to encourage "everyone present to speak out his mind" (Ch.11.26). He is reluctant to impose his opinions upon others, for he believes that "The three armies can be deprived of their commanding officers, but even a common man cannot be deprived of his purpose"(Ch. 9.26 ). In other words, Confucius insists that it is essential to develop a mutual understanding when people are engaged in a conversation or a discussion, because the rhetorical activity itself is a process of learning for all the participants. For Socrates, the purpose of a dialogue is "to reach an agreement which must be recognized as valid by everyone" (Jaeger, v2, 63). True to his word, consensus in Socrates's dialogue also becomes instrumental to the maintenance of a constant contact between discussants. Though the Socratic dialogues could sound highly argumentative, the argumentation itself
usually proceeds in a situation where agreement on certain ideas is often reached. Socrates seldom takes his debates as a conflict of antagonistic utterances. Instead, he believes that a dialectical exchange can submit the opinions of his interlocutors to the scrutiny of his critique. That is why Socrates often starts from some practical statements and minuscule propositions in order to introduce gradually his interlocutors to general concepts of his moral philosophy. The consequence Socrates has to face is often the general opposition to and final disagreement with his moral claims as a whole. But, who can deny that Socrates does arrive at a certain consensus with his interlocutors, which often enables him to complete his argument and to get his voice of morality heard?

The intercultural dialogue between Confucius and Socrates also suggests that both thinkers value the dialogic relations between the concepts of harmony and argumentation. Setting social harmony as the goal of his verbal activities, Confucius never overlooks the function of argumentation, especially on the occasions he attempts to get his own propositions across. His argumentation with his disciples (e.g., Ch. 6.1, 17.7, 17.21) and interlocutors (e.g., Ch. 12.18, 12.19) indicates that he does not avoid the clash with the other participants in a dialogue, because a speaker should not echo others (Ch. 13.23), and argumentation can lead him to uphold the principles of De. What Confucius criticizes is not the employment of argumentation, but the "glibness of tongue" that undermines the principle of De (ethics, virtue). Actually, Confucius’s idea of De is sometimes defended in a course of argument. By contrast, to Socrates, harmonious relations in oral activities have to be guaranteed for the speaker to carry out his argumentation which eventually
leads to the truth. Therefore, argumentation marks Socrates's peculiar way of shaping a
dialogical display. The difference between Confucius and Socrates lies in the fact that, in
order to raise a voice of sincerity and credibility, Confucius takes social harmony as the
goal of his rhetoric, and of his argumentation while Socrates takes harmony as an
instrument to push forward his argumentation. This difference, however, never prevents
us modern readers from experiencing the power of credibility in their dialogues.

Notes

1. Nan Johnson is certainly right to point out that the pragmatic attitude has led to the
tendency of putting ethical concern outside of the sphere of pedagogy. She has,
however, failed to observe that the issue of professional ethics is gaining significance
in technical and professional communication. See Johnson's "Ethos and Aims of
Rhetoric."

2. The textbooks of composition or speech published in the past two decades reveal such a tendency. Representative texts include Frank D'Angelo's *Process and Thought in
Composition.* 20-21, and John Lannon's *Technical Writing.* 62-87. Worth mentioning is Roger D. Cherry's effort to overcome the conceptual terminological confusion between "ethos" and "persona". See his "Ethos Versus Persona."

3. According to the theory of dialogism, the author, text, the characters, and the reading of them by an audience together produces a situation in which meaning is pursued by all participants--to achieve meaning (rather than monologically produce it) requires a shared dialogic awareness or dialogic imagination. Given this situation, when I speak of Socrates's dialogic imagination I mean Socrates, as a speaker, is aware of his addressing other voices in and out of his dialogues so as to get his own concept defined or responded to.

4. I borrowed the term "aggregative" from Walter Ong to emphasize the aspect of Confucius's and Socrates's dialogues of being occasionally cumbersome, redundant and seemingly unorganized. See Ong's *Interfaces of the Word.* 188-212.

5. D.C. Lau's translation here becomes arbitrary when he renders "有言者" (literally meaning "the producer of good speech") into "the author of memorable sayings," because he emphasizes the written language. Yang Buojun explains that Confucius's
Yan (言) refers to Yanyu (言语, language, speech) or Shuo (说, speak) (Lunyu Yizhu, 246). Here is my interpretation for Confucius’s saying: A virtuous person is bound to deliver a good speech, but those who can make a good speech are not necessarily virtuous. Another recent translation is made by Xing Lu: A good person should speak well; but those who speak well are not necessarily good persons.

6. Xu Shen’s (58-121 A.D.) Shuowen Jiezi defines Zhong as reverence and the loyalty of trying one’s best.

7. My own translation from “Xiuci li qi cheng” (修辞立其诚). Yijing (The Book of Change) is a book written in the Zhou dynasty. According to The Historical Records, Confucius made such a thorough study of Yijing that the book written on the bamboo slips was worn out in several places. Yijing was also used by Confucius as one of the textbooks in his school. However, even today, we still have difficulty in finding correspondence between Confucius’s rhetorical claims and Yijing.

8. Confucius’s concept of “naming” is further defined in his dialogue with Duke Jing: Duke Jing of Qi asked Confucius about effecting sociopolitical order, and Confucius replied, “The ruler ought to be ruler, the subject subject and father father, and son son” (Ch. 12.11).

9. Hsiao’s interpretation suggests that Confucius’s political views were rational but extremely conservative. See Hsiao, Kung-chuan’s A History of Chinese Political Thought. 519. Makeham also insists that the standard interpretation of “naming” is that “the names of various social, political, and ethical institutions were rectified so as to accord or conform with certain immutable standards inherited from tradition.” See John Makeham’s Name and Actuality in Early Chinese Thought. 44.


11. See Zuozhuan in Chunqiu. Confucius’s comment in Zuozhuan is translated into English as “Names are used to generate credibility, credibility is used to protect the ritual vessels, ritual vessels are used to embody ritual action, ritual actions are used to enact significance, significance is used to produce benefit, and benefit is used to bring peace to the people.”

13. Li (rites) is mentioned more than seventy times in The Analects.

14. Feng Youlan insists that in the Confucian doctrine “Rites” refers to the social system, and is the art of man. Feng’s definition emphasizes the otherness of “Rites”. See Kongzi yanjou lunwenji.

15. Nan Johnson argues that in the Phaedrus ideal truth and absolute goodness are central issues which are intended for reformed oratorical practice, and rhetoric, in fact, functions as the instruction of ideal truth. See Nan Johnson’s “Ethos and Aims of Rhetoric.”

16. This is comparable to Confucius’s understanding of the relation between Word and Li (Rites).

17. Some critics tend to take this joking and dramatic tone at its face value. See James A. Arieti’s Interpreting Plato: The Dialogues as Drama. 64.

18. Timothy M. S. Baxter makes such an inference with the textual evidence that Socrates never assumes that there is only one namegiver who is responsible for names. See his The Cratylus: Plato’s Critique of Naming. 46.

19. Robert Brooke has summarized how Socrates uses each of the following four rhetorical methods excluded from dialectics: appeal to the crowd; arousing emotions; ridicule and flattery. And Brooke concludes that Socrates is not playing fair for he demands his opponents to play by the rules within a system of dialectics while he himself relies on a mix of methods, both dialectic and rhetorical. See Robert Brooke’s “Trust, Ethos, Transference.”

20. Thomas M. Conley states that Socrates carries the dialogue to a description of the judgement of souls when he finds that his methods of interrogation does not work with Callicles. See Conley’s Rhetoric in the European Tradition. 9.

21. In the Phaedrus Socrates is also so anxious to make sure that Phaedrus remain a faithful listener to his second speech about Love.

22. Randall Craig depicts the basic structure of the speeches in the Symposium, which fall into two complementary groups: one defines Love pragmatically, and the other defines Love artistically or philosophically. See Craig’s “Plato’s Symposium And The Tragicomic Novel.”
23. In her comment on Phaedrus’s speech, R. Burger writes, “In his identification of the response of the beloved as the sign of the power of Eros, Phaedrus in fact betrays the projection of his own self-image as passive beloved.” See Burger’s *The Phaedo: A Platonic Labyrinth.* 11.

24. K.J. Dover argues that if Diotima is a historical figure who postponed a plague she should be mentioned by other writers too. See the *Symposium* (trans. K.J. Dover). 137.

25. I suppose that Socrates reveals a heterosexual orientation, though in a number of dialogues he is often presented as a homosexual seducer.

26. M. Nussbaum has observed in the *Symposium* a love “overweening of reason” on the side of Socrates and a love “overweening of the body” on the side of Alcibiades in her article “Speech of Alcibidae: A Reading of Plato’s *Symposium.*”

27. Natural spoken word, according to Socrates, different from writing, is human and strengthens memory. And it is active, espousive, and it can be used to defend oneself in a form of give-and-take between responses. See Walter Ong’s summary in *Orality and Literacy.* 79.

28. James S. Baumlin offered an insightful description of the inner harmony among language, character and truth in Platonic fashion, and Baumlin’s discovery starts me on the further exploration of the dialogic nature of such a harmony in its rhetorical context. See Baumlin’s “Introduction: Positioning Ethos in Historical and Contemporary Theory.” *Ethos, New Essays in Rhetorical and Critical Theory.*

29. Confucius taught his disciples that “To fail to speak to a man who is capable of benefitting is to let a man go to waste. To speak to a man who is incapable of benefitting is to let one’s word go to waste” (Ch. 15.8). Here, Confucius emphasizes the right persons to talk with.

30. Zilu praises Confucius by saying that “Master knows when to talk, and his listeners never feel tired of what he says” (Ch. 14.13).

31. Chapter 10 of *The Analects* vividly records how Confucius had dialogues on different occasions. For instance, “In the local community, Confucius was submissive and seemed to be inarticulate. In the ancestral temple and at court, though fluent, he did not speak lightly” (Ch. 10.1).

32. Confucius’s communication with the Heaven will be discussed in Chapter Four in detail.
33. Phillip Ivanhoe has presented the interpretations of the “golden thread” by four representative scholars. See his “Reweaving the ‘one thread’ of the *Analects*.”

34. Confucius once expressed his political ideal as “To return to the observance of the rites through overcoming the self constitutes benevolence” (Ch. 12.1).

35. Confucius expressed this idea two times in the dialogues with his disciples (Ch. 12.1, 15.24). My understanding of this assertion is that the gentleman (仁者) can guarantee a harmonious relation with others in communication only if he always keeps in mind the common interests shared by (him)self and others. Therefore, we are justified in saying that Confucius highly values the aspect of dialogic imagination of the speaker.

36. J. Vernon Jensen observed in Asian rhetoric a tendency of “the avoidance of clash of opinions in order to preserve harmony.” However, this conclusion is not always applicable to Confucius’s rhetorical practice. See Jensen’s “Teaching East Rhetoric.”
Chapter Two

A Proto-scientific Attitude in Confucius's and Socrates's Dialogues

A review of Confucian and Socratic studies concerning their scientific attitude and method has started me thinking of some questions from rhetorical theory. Does either Confucius or Socrates propound a proto-scientific attitude? What are the basic characteristics of their representations of science in the dialogue form? What does a dialogue between Confucius and Socrates contribute to today's rhetoric of science and communication theory? With these issues, Chapter Two will demonstrate how the Confucian and Socratic dialogues reflect a proto-scientific attitude and scientific methods in their particular rhetorical structure, embody a combination of oral practice and written convention, and might contribute to our contemporary theory of technical communication. The chapter consists of a general survey of scientific thinking in rhetorical studies, a detailed analysis of the scientific elements in Confucius's and Socrates's texts, and a comparative analysis of their attitude toward scientific/philosophical inquiry through rhetorical activities.
I. A Brief Review

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989), the word “science” originally referred generally to the state or fact of knowing, and its adjective form “scientific” originates in Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics* (71b), indicating a theoretical property of being able to “produce knowledge.” Today, in a more strict sense, “science” usually refers to the intellectual and practical activity encompassing those branches of systematic study that apply an objective method to the phenomena of the physical universe, that is, the “natural” sciences. Modern discussions of the exploration of scientific knowledge and methods in the West, however, often start from the Socratic tradition. Early in the 1950s, the American scholar, James B. Conant, president of Harvard University, made the following comments on the spirit of scientific inquiry:

For the burst of new ardor in disciplined intellectual inquiry we must turn to a few minds steeped in the Socratic tradition, and to those early scholars who first recaptured the culture of Greece and Rome by primitive methods of archaeology. In the first period of the Renaissance, the love of dispassionate search for the truth was carried forward by those who were connected with man and his works rather than with inanimate or animate nature. During the Middle Ages, interest in attempts to use the human reason critically and without prejudice, to probe deeply without fear and favour, was kept alive by those who wrote about human problems. In the early days of the Revival of learning, it was the humanist’s exploration of antiquity that came nearest to exemplifying our modern ideas of impartial inquiry. (23-24)

Conant’s understanding of the humanistic scientific inquiry and method emphasizes its love for truth, critical reasoning, and impartiality, and provides us with a useful basis for a rhetorical analysis of Socrates and Confucius. With the help of Conant’s theoretical study, the Chinese scholar, Hu Shi,¹ in the 1960s argued for the scientific aspects of Chinese philosophy that originated with the Confucian tradition. In response to the challenge that
Eastern science "has never progressed for long beyond the initial natural history stage of
development to which concepts by intuition restrict one" (Northrop, 223), Hu vigorously
argues for the Confucian tradition, the Chinese "Socratic tradition," which has encouraged
philosophical inquiry and molded the orthodoxy of Chinese intellectual life for twenty-five
centuries (Hu, 203-4).

Both Conant's and Hu's claims, however, only centred on the humanistic aspects
of the scientific attitude and method of ancient philosophers. Contemporary scholars like
John Ziman, Thomas Kuhn, Stephen Toulmin and Charles Bazerman have developed a
much broader understanding of the philosophy and rhetoric of science and have suggested
its particular relevance for rhetorical study.

Based on his study of the Western heritage, including the Socratic dialogues,
Ziman emphasizes that science is a collective human enterprise and is founded on social
consensus (31-32, 96, 101). Kuhn's model of the history of science hinges on its
periodically successful achievement of paradigmatic consensus within a scientific
community, and his theory, though separating mature science from philosophy and other
social sciences, acknowledges the Socratic tradition in knowledge-making. Toulmin has
further observed that the knowledge of science has to be interpreted within the conditions
and agreed-upon ideals of a particular time and also against competing contemporary
claims. Bazerman's scrutiny of the shaping of scientific knowledge has also pointed to
the fact that the Platonic Socrates's preference for living dialectic over dead wisdom
expressed in writing is preserved in "modern valorization of oral over written" in social
sciences, and the Socratic distrust in the correspondence “between scientific formulation and nature” has been rearticulated “with persuasive empirical evidence” (293). All these four scholars have described scientific knowledge and communication as a process of joint exploration aiming at social consensus, but tolerating different voices. Their studies, though concentrated on the modern rhetoric of natural sciences, have also broadened our vision of the ancient rhetors like Socrates and Confucius.

Presumably it is in Bakhtin’s theory of dialogic imagination that Socratic dialogue has enjoyed a revived reputation for its scientific attitude. Bakhtin portrays Socrates as a philosopher who converses with many voices and proceeds in a carnivalistic world of everyday experience. And Bakhtin shows that Socrates’s method of inquiry exhibits “scientific thinking,” for his ultimate goal is to seek truth by questioning and testing the ideas of his interlocutors rather than by imposing opinions on them. So, Bakhtin’s Socrates is an open-minded, “scientific” explorer. Bakhtin’s sense of Socrates’s scientific thinking and a dialogic method are rightly echoed by Julia Kristeva. She believes that “Socratic dialogues are characterized by opposition to any official monologism claiming to possess a ready-made truth” (81), because truth is the product of a dialogical relation of the participants in the dialogues. Methodologically, Socratic dialogues, according to Kristeva, are expressed by two devices: one is syncrisis, i.e., the linguistic network has to confront different discourses on the same topic; the other is anacrases, i.e., one word prompts another in this network. Therefore, the Bakhtinian reading contributes to a translinguistic science by demonstrating to us certain intertextual relationships, or “intertextuality” in the Socratic dialogues.
Consistent with the Bakhtinian portrait of Socrates, detailed analysis has also been made about Socrates's scientific attitude and method in the past twenty years. Vlastos\(^5\) has expressed a continuous interest in Socratic elenchus of the early oral stage as a philosophical method, in Socrates's epistemic certainty in "seeking knowledge elenctically" and also in his mathematical exploration. Brickhouse and Smith's research also focuses on the "Socratic Method" used to obtain a correct understanding of the subject matter with his discussants, thus presenting Socrates as a figure who speaks and listens to different claims while dismissing "the appeal of false beliefs" (1-29).

In essence, then, Socrates has been seen increasingly as a precursor of the systematic skepticism of Francis Bacon, considered the father of the "scientific method."\(^6\)

Among contemporary scholarship on Confucius's scientific attitude, Joseph Needham has developed a dialectical understanding of Confucius's ambivalent attitude toward science.\(^7\) He believes that Confucius is basically rationalistic and stands against superstition in any form, and that his skepticism and critical thinking contributed to the development of the science of ancient China. However, his "concentration on human life and exclusion of non-human phenomena negated all investigation of Things, as opposed to Affairs." More recent study of Confucius has been made by Kuang Yaming,\(^8\) a Marxist critic. Kuang's systematic and historical inquiry has shed much light on the Confucian "humanistic science" concerning his political theory and strategies, economic thought and claims, and more importantly, his educational philosophy and pedagogy. Kuang's research represents the most comprehensive and insightful Marxist critique of Confucian
philosophy since the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), a counter-cultural movement that totally denied any theoretical and pragmatic value to Confucianism as a major heritage in Chinese civilization.

In recent comparative studies of Socratic and Confucian dialogues, much effort has been made to reveal the considerable humanistic scientific attitude of these two early philosophers. Maurice Cohen's contrastive research (159-68) explains how Confucius and Socrates remained attached to a method of analysis rooted in the clarification of concepts and how Confucius's subtle elenchus or examination is comparable in purpose to Socrates's request for a definition. And A. S. Cua's analysis (131-47) stresses a conflict between two irreconcilable conceptions—Socrates's primacy of rationality versus Confucius's primacy of practice, or theoretical knowledge versus practical knowledge. G. E. R. Lloyd, a prominent philosopher of science, has also observed that the pluralism of ancient Chinese cosmologies during the Warring States period resembles that of the Greek (141-45). Although the Chinese philosophical schools like those of the Confucians, Daoists, Mohists, Logicians and others differ on the question of the possibility of developing understanding and on the significance of the investigation of nature and of human society, they hardly made a clear distinction between nature and culture. So, the Greeks were ready in their scientific and philosophical work to follow "wherever the logos or argument leads" (144) as was manifest in Socratic dialogues, whereas the Chinese valued the pragmatic usefulness of reason, and tended to reject a view that ran against ordinary experience or was purely theoretical.
These observations and conclusions by recent scholars are generally based on detailed comparative studies of Confucius's and Socrates's dialogues and illuminate to modern readers the characteristics of "scientific thinking" represented in a dialogical form. However, this kind of bifurcation of "theoretical versus pragmatic" or "rationality versus practice" monologizes or polarizes otherwise the more originally pluralistic and open system of philosophy in the Socratic and Confucian traditions in terms of their scientific attitude and method. One of the most obvious examples to refute the simplicity of bifurcation might be that of Socrates's "logos" and Confucius's "Way." These two basic concepts themselves have to be interpreted or decoded in the context of a heteroglossia of "languages." "Logos" points to "practical usefulness" apart from its theoretical implication while "Way" theorizes both the natural and human philosophy in the situation in which practical knowledge is highlighted for the maintenance of social order.

Using the Bakhtinian dialogical approach, however, we can demonstrate that their scientific attitude is often reflected in a rhetorical practice based on their theoretical claims, their method of investigation and interaction designed to open the mind of the interlocutors/participants to the pluralism of the self and the other, and their contribution to technical communication. Specifically, I hope to emphasize that Confucius and Socrates are important in the history of science because they were most distinguished early thinkers who sought truth by an open dialogue which tested all accepted ideas, who used the dialogue form to achieve social consensus and often move systematically from idea to idea, and who taught that the truth is more important than authority of the speaker.
The present chapter will first explicate how Confucius’s dialogue is devoted to an open system of the earliest Chinese ethical theory with “benevolence” at its centre, and with the harmony between humanity, heaven and nature as its goal; then, it will demonstrate how his rhetorical practice is generally guided by his theory of “enlightenment and inference” (Ch. 7.8) which emphasizes the interaction between participants, values different voices in philosophical inquiry and rejects glibness in Ci (辭, words and rhetorical devices) isolated from the context of communication; finally it will demonstrate how Confucius’s scientific attitude that contributed to Chinese agricultural administration, food culture, travel and technical communication.

With regard to Socrates, this chapter will explain how his scientific attitude helps to establish a series of concepts or definitions which construct his knowledge about an ethical science through a continuous pursuit of “human goodness” and ultimate truth; also, it will analyse the Socratic “true rhetoric” itself as a scientific method that starts a face-to-face examination of the soundness of the diverse viewpoints through a question and answer sequence, and moreover, that generally denies authoritarianism and polarities in a philosophical search; and the chapter then attempts to manifest the relationship between Socrates’s dialogue and technical communication concerning the basic principles of his theoretical claims.

In the last section of Chapter Two, a comparative analysis will be made of Confucius’s and Socrates’s scientific attitude in opening the human minds to the world of knowledge, in providing a method to challenge the self-imposed restrictions and limits on
their imagination, and also in preparing us modern readers for the real world communication in an era of information explosion. In the meantime, this study also points to Confucius's rhetorical devotion to communal or joint search for knowledge, his sense of practicality or a pragmatic attitude in communication, and also his philosophical understanding of the aspects of daily life as opposed to Socrates's passion for knowledge as an individual inquirer, his inquisitiveness in the examination of people and thought, and his sensitivity to matters of practicality and instrumentality in communication.

II. Toward Knowledge: Confucius's Theoretical Claims and Rhetorical Practice

Confucius’s scientific attitude is best represented in his dialogical rhetoric that established the earliest open system of ethics in the East, a system that aims at a true and impartial reflection of human nature and provides some general moral principles to model the behaviour of intellectuals as well as common people and to keep the balance of the society. Once Confucius summarized his ethical theory in the following words: “I set my heart on the Way, base myself on virtue, lean upon benevolence for support and take my recreation in the arts” (Ch. 7.6). Here, “Way” refers to a general goal of human society, which is expressed in the practice of virtue ( ), the basic principle for daily behaviour; and the core of this principle is “benevolence” ( ) which is generally rendered as the “love for others” and embodied in the acquisition of “six arts”: ritual ceremony, musical study, archery, carriage driving, reading and mathematics. Why does the Confucian

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rhetoric attach so much importance to “benevolence”? Let us first trace the original meaning of his concept. Xu Shen (58-121 A.D.), in his *Explanation of Chinese Characters*, defines the word, *Ren* (仁, benevolence), as *Qin* (勤), meaning the extending of love to those around oneself, because the left part of the word stands for “human” (人) and right part “two” (二), the whole word implies “benevolence” or “love for those around you.” Xu’s definition helps to explain Confucius’s basic understanding of “benevolence”: his decoding of humans as being kind and close to each other by nature when they are born, and his dialogic concept of the relationship between self and other, between this and that.

With regard to human nature, Confucius once stated to his disciples, “Men are close to one another by nature. They diverge as a result of repeated practice” (Ch. 17.2). Though he does not make clear whether human nature is benevolent or evil, Confucius tends to believe, from his repeated analysis of “benevolence,” that to be benevolent is human. It is because of the differences in their life practices that people begin to develop different standards of morality. Thus defined, moral education under the principle of “benevolence” becomes a necessity to perfect human nature and to maintain ideal human relations in accordance with his doctrine of “loving the multitude at large” (Ch. 1.16). In a form of dialogic thinking, Confucius explicates two major moral practices in his ethical theory. One is that “the practice of benevolence depends on oneself alone, and not on others” (Ch. 12.1). This observation implies that to practice benevolence is fundamentally an “inner,” “private” or “secular” self-oriented activity, though this “self” is
not an undividable and self-closed whole, for Confucius’s sense of “self-cultivation”
(修己) is not only suggestive of a process of self-contemplation and self-discovery to
establish a belief that it is I myself who desire benevolence (我欲仁, Ch. 7.30), but
also dialogic, for its purpose is to “discipline oneself” (克己, Ch. 12.1),11 or to be exact,
to try to achieve self-cultivation in response to a multitude of voices and the desires of self
that are in discord with benevolence.

The other and more significant moral practice is “loving others” or “loving your
fellow men” (Ch. 12.22). So, to be benevolent is also a “public,” “altruistic,” and open-ended activity and depends on a continuous and others-oriented participation in social life.
To love others is actually a starting point of Confucius’s life goal, because his rhetorical
activities are generally resulted from his humanistic concerns—the concerns for those
around you in your family, in your neighborhood, in your village, or in your state.
Confucius believes that if a governor knows how to demonstrate benevolence to others
people will come to him with children and relatives from far away and they will be glad to
build a new life of their own, and simultaneously they will make the state prosperous and
strong. So, loving others is always the core of his political and philosophical exploration.
Since the practice of benevolence displays the characteristics of being relational and
interactive with others, Confucius makes much effort in his dialogues and discussions with
his disciples to reach a definition and promote a gradual extension from one’s affection for
his parents and brothers to that for his neighbours, community, and then to his lords and
country, Gods and ancestors, and finally to his ultimate truth, the “Way.” Therefore, his
theory of benevolence may be expressed in the following figure:

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Figure 5: Confucius's Theoretical Structure of "Benevolence"

In this structure, benevolence consists of two parts: self-cultivation and loving others. The former is subdivided into self-contemplation and self-discipline while the latter is extended into a more complicated system. The objects of loving start from the very roots, the family members, then to the community, or from the closest relatives to the remote social relations, from particular persons to human beings in general, and from the concrete observance to the abstract truth, though Confucius never indicates explicitly that equal
amount of benevolence should be extended to all these entities. In addition, Confucius’s understanding of benevolence has specific implications in terms of the moral practitioner’s relations with others. For instance, with one’s parents, Confucius highlights the quality of “being filial” (孝); with one’s friends, he values “trustworthiness” (信); with one’s lords, he expounds “loyalty” (忠); with Gods and ancestors, he focuses on “respect” (敬); and with the ideal, “Way,” he expresses passion and belief. From a general examination of Confucius’s major ethical pursuit — the doctrine of benevolence, it is not hard for us to trace his exploration of the ethical issues that concerns him most, and more accurately, his logical thinking and inquisitive investigation.

In view of Confucius’s scientific attitude to an ethical pursuit, more attention should be paid to the dynamic relations displayed in his representation of some specific topics that have led to much misinterpretation in the Confucian studies. The first is his investigation of the ethical relation between man and woman. The traditional portrait of Confucius’s observation of women’s status focuses on his partiality and prejudice because of his well-known saying, “In one’s household, it is the women and the small men that are difficult to deal with. If you let them get too close, they become insolent. If you keep them at a distance, they complain” (Ch. 17.25). Since Confucius identified women with “small men” (小人), a term that refers to either children or morally inferior humans, modern readers tend to be critical of his negative evaluation of women, which was codified in the later moral standard of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.) that subjected women to men, and hindered the improvement of women’s political and
economic status. However, scrutiny of Confucius’s rhetorical situation indicates that his statement on women reflects the general opinion of women as an “inferior” sex and the unfavourable treatment imposed on them because of their subordination to men economically. Confucius’s observation here is defined by the social ideology and dominant voices of his time, for women, as a whole, were actually kept at the lowest level of society in early China. In other words, Confucius’s statement is based on the social consensus of his time. Even so, it is still premature for us to characterize Confucius’s ethical idea from a single statement on a certain occasion, because Confucius’s ethical pursuit often proceeds systematically from idea to idea and his true understanding of women and the relation between men and women is represented in a far more comprehensive “heteroglossia” of voices. In discussing one’s attitude to his father and mother, he admonishes that one should not go too far in his travel if his parents are alive (Ch. 4.19). Shiji (The Historical Records) describes vividly how much trouble Confucius took to find his father’s tomb so as to bury his mother and let them rest together underground peacefully. On the subject of how to treat one’s sons and daughters, Confucius stresses kind-heartedness (Ch. 2.20). He expressed due respect for the mistress of a lord in accordance with Li (rites) even if the lady enjoyed no good reputation (Ch. 6.28). Moreover, gender issues are incorporated in his naming theory. For instance, in one of his moral discussions, Confucius corrected the “name” (女) for women in domestic, public or diplomatic occasions (Ch. 16.14), thus confirming, though indirectly, the social role of females. Besides, Confucius is also among the first Chinese
philosophers who discussed openly the topics of sexuality with his disciples. And his dialogues (Ch. 3.8, 3.20, 9.31) vehemently defended true love between man and woman, which forms a sharp contrast with late Chinese moral inquiry that usually shuns direct conversation about love affairs and sexuality. Considering his liberal-mindedness in the context of a rigid feudal society about twenty five hundred years ago, we can hardly deny the scientific consciousness in Confucius's ethics of sexuality, which is based on his knowledge of sexual psychology (Ch. 9.31) and physiology (Ch. 16.7). Such a panoramic reading of Confucius's oral expressions concerning the issue of women, gender, and sexuality exhibits his impartiality in reporting his ethical exploration in many voices, and suggests a dialogic decoding of women as a topic that refuses to surrender to one definition.

Similarly, Confucius's rhetorical approach to the relation between lords and subjects also reflects his scientific approach to examining the relations between society and individual, between moral principle and political strategy, and in establishing his moral standards by testing the accepted ideas, authoritative or non-authoritative. It is generally acknowledged that this Confucian discussion fostered a tradition of loyalty of subjects to lords and helped to consolidate a long-lasting authoritarian system in China. This kind of reading overlooks Confucius's scientific passion in placing the quality of loyalty in the context of different, even conflicting voices or views. For instance, Confucius is in opposition to blind loyalty and he believes that benevolent administration should be open to the monitoring of the people. This is why he regards those who dare to remonstrate
with their lords as "benevolent men" (是人，Ch. 18.1). This demonstrates Confucius’s critical attitude to the practice of blind loyalty. If such a practice prevailed, he would stand up to defend his principles. When his disciple, Ran Yu, failed to persuade his lord to stop the non-benevolent practice of bullying others, Confucius criticized him for his neglect of duty (Ch. 16.1). On the other hand, Confucius insists that one should not argue about what is already accomplished and should not condemn what has already gone by. Here, he displays an attitude against the remonstration or argument that can hardly play the function of persuasion (Ch. 3.21). Then, if the lord turns a deaf ear to any remonstration, and the Way does not prevail in the state, a gentleman, according to Confucius, should hide himself away and concentrate on his own moral cultivation (Ch. 8.13). Here, Confucius’s scientific exploration of morality and politics leads him to a dialogic reading of the relation between social participation and personal cultivation.

Methodologically, Confucius’s life-time curiosity about and exploration of the unknown (不知 ) helped to open the mind of his discussants by emphasizing a dialogue form of question and answer, valuing different voices of critical thinking, and presenting an interaction between self-exploration and enlightenment from the other. In modern terms, he sought open testing of concepts and objectivity. To begin with, the-question-and-answer dialogue is a major Confucian rhetorical method to gain knowledge rather than simply to maintain mundane communication, to continue his philosophical exploration rather than to develop the rhetorical fluency of the participants. The simple fact that the participants in his dialogue and discussion range from high officials to common people,
from scholars to rustics, from men to women, and from old to young suggests that his oral exchanges with others work to test the thought of all present and broaden their views of an unknown world. *The Analects* records how Confucius asked so many questions about everything during his visit to the Grand Temple that he was suspected to be completely ignorant of *Li* (禮, rites) in spite of his reputation as a master of *Li* (Ch. 3.15).

Moreover, Confucius advocates consulting those who are beneath you (Ch. 5.15). In a volume entitled *Question and Answer between Confucius and Xiangtuo*, there is a vivid dialogue between Confucius and a seven-year old boy concerning popular scientific knowledge of mountains, rivers, trees and life. Surprised at the scope of the boy's knowledge, Confucius exclaimed that "it is fitting that we should hold the young in awe," because they are quick to learn, can catch up with and surpass the grown-ups sooner or later. Benefiting from such a method of exploration, Confucius often encouraged his disciples to question themselves as well as others about ways to enrich their knowledge, and this scientific attitude also accounts for the reality that in *The Analects* alone there are more than one hundred records of Confucius's sayings beginning with questions to his discussants.

Confucius's proto-scientific attitude may be further traced in three ways he uses the rhetoric of dialogue to test assumptions: the first is his dialogic approach to a relation between learning and thinking. He believes that "If one learns from others but does not think, one will be bewildered. If, on the other hand, one thinks but does not learn from others, one will be in peril" (Ch. 2.15). To Confucius, learning from others in the oral or
written form is just one channel through which to acquire knowledge; however, the mastery of knowledge or the clarification of one’s bewilderment depends on thinking, particularly critical thinking. It is the interplay between “learning” and “thinking” that qualifies one for his social responsibility, and prepares him for an independent personality. Conversely, even if one is profound in learning, he can not necessarily appropriate his knowledge to make it applicable for specific occasions and opportunities. Similarly, thinking without the acquisition of knowledge leads to a failure in one’s life because this kind of thinking is not based on a shared knowledge of one’s community, and it is neither critical of the existing value standards nor creative for a possible contribution to the development of cognition. The understanding of the complementary elements in learning and thinking distinguishes Confucius’s dialogical activities in teaching and exploration. He is strongly against the attitude of following one’s teacher blindly, and simultaneously, he articulates nine ways of thinking (Ch. 16.1) to facilitate the process of learning both as knowledge-seeking and as personal cultivation.

The second aspect is Confucius’s scientific method of “enlightenment and inference.” Confucius once stated his method of teaching: “I never enlighten anyone who has not been driven to distraction by trying to understand a difficulty or who has not got into a frenzy trying to put his ideas into words” (Ch. 7.8). This method is established upon the realization that cognitive development for a learner is a gradual progress, and an educator has to demonstrate the ability to instruct and enlighten his learners step-by-step. Such a method refuses to regard the learners as separate “containers” that have to be
“filled in” with knowledge by their instructors. Instead, teaching itself is a dynamic process, which involves strong motivation, critical reasoning and accurate expression on the side of the learner, and also meticulous observation, appropriate allusion and individualized instruction on the side of the teacher. Specifically, Confucius upholds the principle that a learner has to arrive at a conclusion himself after a discussion with the teacher. For instance, Zixia once asked about the implication of the following lines in the Book of Poetry:

Her entrancing smile dimpling,
Her beautiful eyes glancing,
Patterns of color upon plain silk. (Ch. 3.8)

Instead of making a detailed interpretation, Confucius reminds Zixia of the philosophical inference in the poem: the colors are put in after the white, which helps Zixia to discern the ethical meaning signified in the lines. Therefore, when Zixia points out the truth that “rites” come after the possession of “benevolence,” the poetry study becomes a pleasant and wisdom-stimulating connection between teacher and student. Besides, Confucius’s scientific method of enlightenment pays special attention to the intellectual diversity among the learners and the specific methods for individual learners. For instance, Confucius divided his learners into two levels, average and above average (Ch. 6.21), so as to decide what to converse about. Furthermore, even to the learners at the same level, Confucius was careful about topics and discussions in accordance with the different characters, psychological status, or the family backgrounds of his disciples in order to achieve the effectiveness of teaching and learning (Ch. 11.3, 11.8, 11.22).
The third aspect is Confucius’s scientific attitude embodied in a dialogical joint search for the truth\textsuperscript{15} of a philosopher’s life. Now, let us listen to one of Confucius’s most wisdom-inspiring dialogues:

When Zilu, Zeng Xi, Ran You and Gongxi Hua were seated in attendances, the Master said, “Do not feel constrained simply because I am a little older than you are. Now you are in the habit of saying, ‘My abilities are not appreciated,’ but if someone did appreciate your abilities, do tell me how you would go about things.”

Zilu promptly answered, “If I were to administer a state of a thousand chariots, situated between powerful neighbors, troubled by armed invasion, and by repeated famines, I could, within three years, give the people courage and a sense of direction.”

The Master smiled at him.

“Qiu, what about you?”

“If I were to administer an area measuring sixty or seventy \textit{li} square, or even fifty or sixty \textit{li} square, I could within three years, bring the size of the population up to an adequate level. As to the rites and music, I would leave that to abler gentlemen.”

“Ci, what about you?”

“I do not say that I should like to assist as a minor official in charge of protocol, properly dressed in my ceremonial cap and robes.”

“Dian, how about you?”

After a few dying notes came the final chord, and then he stood up from his lute.

“I differ from the other three in my choice.”

The Master said, “What harm is there in that? After all each man is stating what he has set his heart upon.”

“In late spring, after the spring clothes have been newly made, I should like, together with five or six adults and six or seven boys, to go bathing in the River Yi and enjoy the breeze on the Rain Altar, and then to go home chanting poetry.”

The Master sighed and said, “I am all in favor of Dian.”

When the three left, Zeng Xi stayed behind. He said, “What do you think of what the other three said?”

“They were only stating what they had set their hearts upon.”

“Why did you smile at You?”

“It is by the rites that a state is administered, but in the way he spoke You showed a lack of modesty. That is why I smiled at him.”

“In the case of Qiu, was he not concerned with a state?”

“What can justify one in saying that sixty or seventy \textit{li} square or indeed fifty or sixty \textit{li} square do not deserve the name of ‘state’?”

“In the case of Ci, was he not concerned with a state?”
“What are ceremonial occasions in the ancestral temple and diplomatic gatherings if not matters which concern rulers of feudal states? If Qiu plays only a minor part, who would be able to play a major role?” (Ch. 11.26)

Lurking behind such a peaceful discussion of statesmanship and life goals, we can experience how different voices added to a dialogue about the true meaning of an intellectual life. What strikes us modern readers most is Confucius’s method for starting a collective search. Obviously, Confucius never intended to force an argument among the participants. But he was tactical enough to lead to an otherwise mundane discussion with two challenging conclusions concerning the outside world. The first question is that the young scholars should display a greater ambition for their future. And the second is that a real statesman, instead of engaging himself with empty talk, has to justify himself with true knowledge and methods suitable to the responsibility of a professional administrator.

With such an understanding of the use of dialogue for knowledge-making, Confucius enabled his disciples to take the opportunity for self-expression. The whole dialogue thus turns into a “carnivalistic” (Bakhtin) type of verbal activity, for the five participants, including Confucius himself, get their individual voices heard in order to share a common concern for knowledge of the operation of the real world.

My focus here is on Confucius’s own contribution to this knowledge-making process and his manipulation of dialogic interaction. Throughout the dialogue, Confucius made no comments except when Zeng Xi finished his utterance, the one that exhibits no direct relation with the state administration. Why should he prefer Zeng’s opinion?

Because of his scientific approach to the dialogic relation between human society and its
environment, and between personal cultivation and social participation. To Confucius, the ideal administrator is one who always situates himself in a natural contact with the other living beings, and more significantly, finds himself in harmony with the natural world. Such an administrator puts personal cultivation prior to anything else, for he discovers the truth not to impose anything he does not desire himself upon “the others” (Ch. 12.2), he knows how to “enrich his people” and develop his state, and he reminds the listeners of the issue of the co-existence of human beings and pleasant, un-exploited natural surroundings. Here, Confucius’s scientific attitude is reflected not only in his deep concern for the true knowledge of statesmanship, but also in his clear awareness of the power of the natural environment that helps shape one’s knowledge and enhance one’s moral cultivation. Above all, Confucius’s rhetorical method encourages a joint effort for and social consensus in knowledge-making. He never denies any contribution to the topic. With the free exchange of individual philosophical exploration and Confucius’s logical comments, we are able to read a theoretical framework of an ancient political discussion which touches upon economic, military, diplomatic, ritual as well as moral aspects of state administration.

Finally, my analysis will focus on Confucius’s scientific contribution to technical communication—the rhetoric of the scientific method that enables one to inform his audience through an objective presentation of facts.16 Since his mission was to seek the truth of Way and to enlighten his audience, a great part of Confucius’s life was spent in his tours in different states and the essential form of his communication was dialogue. The
Confucian dialogue itself thus becomes instrumental in expressing directly his concern for issues of popular science and technical problems. Confucius might be one of the first scholars who recorded the progress in technology—the application of specific techniques to solve problems—in ancient China. When he mentioned that “The great inventors (among the Chinese ancestors) were seven in number” (Ch. 14.37), Confucius obviously referred to the “sages” who invented the plough, the cart, the gate and so on. Perhaps the most marvellous contribution he made is to appropriate diet and public health, which helped to produce a global cultural phenomenon—Chinese restaurants. Confucius established standards for Chinese cooking: “color” (food served should look fresh and pleasant), “smell” (it smells delicious and arouses an appetite), and “taste” (it is finely sliced or cut up, and properly cooked with corresponding sauces, vinegars, wines or ginger) (Ch. 10.8). Simultaneously, Confucius raises exact diet precautions for health, for instance, having reasonable proportions of drink, meat and main food, and taking measures to prevent food contamination. With regard to physical education, Confucius recommends recreational activities like swimming, bathing, wind-bathing (Ch. 11.26), archery (Ch. 3.16), travel along a river or in mountains (Ch. 6.23), and meanwhile, he presents effective ways to keep fit, i.e., to guard against obsession in sexual activities when young, against bellicosity in the prime of life, and also against acquisitiveness (often in the form of insatiable greed for money or property) in old age (Ch. 16.7). From the perspective of the modern fashion industry, Confucius is among the earliest scholars who made detailed descriptions of design, tones of colors, fabric or fur materials (Ch. 10.6,
In regard to his attitude to regenerable natural resources, Confucius also displays some knowledge of "ecology" in its early stage. For example, he refused to catch fish with a net that would let no fish, big or small, escape, and he never shot birds that flew back to their nests (Ch. 7.26). The above topics of Confucius's dialogue or speech, though generally presented within a moral theory under a principle of Li (rites), do suggest his scientific consciousness even in light of modern standards.

Confucius's dialogue is thus characterized by its practicality, not "some mundane and bread-and-butter activity of character" (Bernstein, x), but rather practicality as scientific principles that have nourished the spirit of modern pragmatism and pointed to the dialogic relation of human conduct active to the life of particular communities. In this sense, we may say that the Confucian dialogues are often usage-oriented. For instance, Confucius's ethical principles are highly verifiable and applicable in the area of work-site cooperation. He insists on nine standards for state employees: be careful in observation; be acute in listening; be warm in expression; be appropriate in manner; be honest in speech; be serious in work; be modest in consulting others; be predictable of the consequences before you lose your temper, and be worthy of your pay (Ch. 16.10). These principles are not only intended to guide professional ethics in technical communication, but also help to lay some foundation for decision-making in today's Chinese business management. Confucius's sense of practicality is also reflected in his interest in information-gathering. He studies how to seek information through reading, listening to and discussing with others, and independent field work. Moreover, he relies on methods
in processing information through induction and deduction, through comparison and critical thinking. All these have strengthened the applicability and operatability of Confucius's general principles for technical communication.

A more general but profound aspect of his theory of communication is his understanding of rhetorical/linguistic activities as a social production that generates social relations between communicators and effectuates social reforms. Confucius's dialogue is first directed to establish a link among those who follow the same political, philosophical or technical pursuit (Ch. 15.40), because it is common interest and cooperation that finally lead to the realization of the Way. This belief accounts for the fact that Confucius's rhetorical activities are usually open to those who are always ready for the topics of the discussion, though often the perspectives from different participants present "carnivalistic" interpretations of a common concern. And this also partly explains Confucius's indifference to any direct communication with those who can hardly contribute to his philosophical inquiry (Ch. 11.4). Second, Confucius tends to believe that discourse and teaching are both inseparable from the political institution and organizational structures, so they are generally conducted to shape the personality of a gentleman and actuate a social reform. With double purposes in his mind, Confucius understood technical communication in the same way as modern rhetoricians, that is, from the perspective of social constructionism. Word ("word", rhetorical activities in either oral or written form) can both advance personal cultivation by starting an interaction between the
speaker himself and others, and help to bring out social reform by making such reform the common goal of community with the power of persuasion.

III. Socrates's Ethical Science, Elenctic Method and Craft Knowledge

After an exploration of Confucius's dialogues, let us examine how Socrates, a philosopher active in the same historical period as Confucius, displayed a scientific attitude in his dialogue which anticipated all subsequent science and rhetoric of sciences in the West. Such a scientific attitude is first expressed in Socrates's representation of the basic concerns of humans versus that of divinity, therefore setting up a framework of moral philosophy based on the assumption of multiplicity, intertextuality and interpersonality. Presumably, it is easy for us modern readers to take for granted Aristotle's conclusion that Socrates's method is a scientific method designed to yield certainty in ethics, because this conclusion is drawn after a logical synthesis of Socrates's application of inductive argument and his inquisitiveness that inevitably leads to the later exploration for a universal definition. The Bakhtinian reading, however, presents Socrates's scientific attitude in a different light, namely, that the early Socratic dialogues argue against a monologized reading that pretends to possess "a ready-made truth" of ethics, and argues that the juxtaposition of different voices by various parties makes it possible to search for truth. Now, I would like to demonstrate with the following diagram such dialogic thinking in his structure of ethics:
Happiness (eudaimonism) ———— Human goodness

Virtue ———— Happiness   Life ———— Death
Good ———— Evil   Benefit ———— Harm
Human virtue ——— Gods’ help   Spiritual sufficiency ——— Material poverty
Justice ——— Injustice   Supremacy ——— Inferiority
Health ——— Disease   Ignorance ——— Moral knowledge
Body ——— Soul

Figure 6: The Structure of Socrates’s Ethical Issues

Socrates’s ethics is established on a series of concepts or definitions which structure his search for scientific knowledge about ethical meanings. Aristotle is the first who points out in his Metaphysics Socrates’s scientific methodology:

...But Socrates is rightly said to have examined the question What is? For he tried to think syllogistically, and the principle on which syllogisms are based is the attempt to state what is. In his day dialectic was as yet not sufficiently developed to enable men, even apart from the question What is? to analyze contraries and to include the knowledge of contraries in a single science. But there are two contributions which one justly credits to Socrates: inductive arguments and general definitions, both of which are scientific principles (epistēmē). (1078b23-30)

Aristotle believes that definition in the form of inductive argument is instrumental in Socrates’s science of ethics. Moreover, this type of definition, unlike conventional normal definitions, reaches the essence of scientific knowledge. What interests me most, however, is not the relation of Socrates’s definition with the then contemporary science, but how his definitions are made through dialogic thinking, which reflects his understanding of the principles of ethics.
In the center of Socrates's theory of ethics is eudaimonism—happiness, the importance of which is presented in the Symposium: "Of one who wants to be happy there is no longer any point in asking, 'For what reason does he want to be happy?' This answer is already final" (205a). So, happiness becomes the ultimate goal, because it reflects the human nature which denies any further explanation or exploration, and to seek happiness is, according to Socrates, indisputably human goodness. What posits a problem for human beings is the relation between happiness and virtue, for an appropriate understanding of such a relation provides the standards with which one is judged to be happy or not. In considering this problematic relationship, Socrates finds himself saying in the Gorgias, "So there is every necessity, Callicles, that the temperate man who, as we have seen, will be just and brave and pious, will be a perfectly good man, and the good man will act well and nobly in whatever he does, and he who acts well will be blessed and happy; and that he who is wicked and acts badly will be miserable" (507b-c). In this definition, we are convinced of a dialogic interpretation of the relation of virtue to happiness. That is, virtue is instrumental in obtaining happiness, and wickedness is instrumental in destroying happiness. Conversely, to be happy signifies the possession of virtue, and to be miserable the absence of virtue. A conclusion is reached if the two inductive arguments are put together: virtue and happiness are independent of and interactive with each other. Thus this double-voiced claim for a scientific definition encourages a further exploration of other ethical issues pertaining to virtue and happiness.

Among the subordinate ethical structures in Figure 2, Socrates's delineation of justice and injustice also displays much of his scientific attitude through his inquisitive
inference and continuous investigation of accepted concepts. In the *Crito*, Socrates displays a dialogic understanding of a relation in happiness and justice, and in response to Crito’s argument against his choice to stay in prison, he claims his principle of justice. He infers that living well and living justly are the same thing (48b8-9). Thus, a just agent is living a happy life. And in the *Apology*, Socrates further insists that any man worth anything should take an account of danger or even the risk of his life (28b5-9). Now, a single problem facing Socrates’s definition is whether justice may bring a shadow over one’s otherwise happy life. Aware of a possible counterargument against his apparently reductive definition, Socrates attempts to make clear a process of the mutual definition of the concepts of health and disease in the body in comparison with that of justice and injustice in the soul (47d7-48a1). In Socrates’s opinion, when one’s body is ruined with disease, then the body becomes worthless. Similarly, when the soul is destroyed with unjust action, then life becomes meaningless. So, to uphold justice, one secures a superb and good life, but to follow unjust action, life is reduced to nothing but the diseased body without a soul. Such an inference also defines Socrates’s concept of life and death. He never admits the accepted idea that the execution of his physical being can destroy his life, because the soul nourished with the human good--justice--can never be destroyed. This powerful defence of his justice/injustice definition demonstrates his broad knowledge of life, both its physical side and its spiritual side. Moreover, it suggests that the existence of the human soul can hardly be falsified even in view of the eternity of the human search for justice and truth.
One of the most memorable characteristics of Socrates’s scientific approach is its dialogized relativism in his ethical doctrine. His relativism is not a pure Sophistic argument, but a way of critical thinking about moral issues. Some critics believe that the Socratic theory of ethics reflects “an adaptive attitude,” because Socrates thinks that the good person tends to adapt to the circumstances around him, as when he tells Callicles in the *Apology* that “the good person must do whatever he does well and nobly” (Irwin, 114-17). But, this interpretation of “adaptability” is inadequate to account for Socrates’s principle of a relativist and dialogic representation of some touchy ethical issues. Here, I would like to demonstrate this Socratic principle in his reasoning concerning “harm.”

Socrates was found declaring in the Athenian court, “Neither Meletus nor Anytus could harm me—that is not possible—for I do not think it is permitted for a better person to be harmed by a worse” (30c8-d1). Obviously, the Socratic concept of harm starts, in Bakhtin’s sense, a dialogue of two voices, one representing common-sense knowledge referring to “physical, financial damage,” or even worse, “physical extinction,” the other philosophical knowledge referring to vicious intention/activity to destroy one’s soul, or to produce an evil soul as described in the *Gorgias* (480e5-481b1). In Socrates’s understanding, the harm in the first voice only incurs physical or financial penalties, such as imprisonment, exile or fines, and just deprives one of a few advantages, or external goods as he listed in the *Euthydemus* (467e4-6), so that is the only “harm” according to common sense. Even if this type of “harm” reaches its extreme, the death penalty, it could
hardly bring real damage to a good man, for physical life is not a necessary condition for happiness. It is the goodness of one’s soul that composes a sufficient condition of happiness. Then what is the scientific approach of Socrates toward the harm? His critical reasoning in the *Gorgias* deems harm as the vice that appears to be a great evil to do wrong (469c1-2, 474c4-475e6), because to avoid suffering the penalty and to survive with an evil soul prove to be the greatest evil (480e5-481b1). In the *Crito* and *Phaedo*, Socrates argues continuously against any attempt to do wrong-- to escape from the penalty of being deprived of all his possessions or his life, instead of suffering the death penalty enforced by the Athenian laws. With his consistent presentation of the relativity of “harm,” Socrates was able to falsify the generally accepted concept of “harm,” and to verify its true meaning through a double-voiced discussion or argument, which broadens the vision of the participants of an ethical science.

Socrates’s scientific thinking— an attitude against partial, absolute, and mechanical reasoning in philosophical exploration—is further developed by bringing into his dialogues a historical sense of time and space in the light of his relativity. For example, Socrates tried to concede that although Meletus and other prosecutors might bring some physical damage in the form of unjust treatment to his existence for the time being, they could never harm his soul in the long run, let alone have any evil impact upon an inquiry with his interlocutors in his afterlife. By the same token, from the perspective of space, even if his moral opponents could put an end to his physical life in Athens, they could not stop his rhetorical activities with his followers in the Underworld (*Crito*, 112b-114b), which would
be guaranteed by the laws of the Hades. Such a relative understanding of “harm” affects all his early dialogues, and displays before us a vivid picture of his dialogic imagination. Moreover, in his dialogues on issues like goods, benefits or evil, we can also experience Socrates’s scientific attitude in an open system of ethics.

Next, my discussion will focus on Socrates’s dialogue as a scientific method. To begin with, Socrates’s dialogue, like Confucius’s, is also a process of knowledge-making, which is usually focussed on certain philosophical topics, rejecting any accompanying interest in popular opinions or the authorities. As we know, the so-called “Socratic method” is “έλενχος” (elenchus), which is generally translated as “critical examination” or “refutation.” Socrates, in his dialogues, never attempts to make a definition of elenchus. But his Apology has drawn a general picture of his method. When he was imagining how his moral opponents intended to suffocate his voice by saying, “You shall no longer engage in this search nor philosophize” (29c), Socrates distinguished his philosophical method as “a search,” a process to discover truth. Then how did he search? Again in the Apology, we hear his response: “The god has commanded me...to live philosophizing, examining myself and others” (28e). So his method is to search by examining himself and others, and such a mission was given by God, namely he was keeping a communication with God while conducting his own examination. The final question is: what does Socrates search for? Again, we find the answer in the Apology—he searched for and engaged himself in an “examined life” to persuade people to change their wrong values (29d7-30a2) and to join him in a continuous examination so as to secure the
greatest good for human beings (38a1-6). It is with such an understanding of the method, participants, and the purpose of elenchus that Socrates maintains that an elenctic examination denies any appeal to popular opinion or to authorities outside of the process of examination (Meno, 71d). In the Gorgias, Socrates tells Polus, “If I do not produce in yourself a single witness who agrees with what I say, in my view I have accomplished nothing of value in regard to whatever we might be discussing. Nor, in my view, have you accomplished anything of value if you do not produce me as your sole witness and forget all the others” (472b-c). Here, in this statement Socrates raised at least three principles that directed an elenctic investigation: first, something of value, to be exact, something of philosophical and moral value has to be discovered; second, such a scientific search has to be done with the joint efforts of the participants; third, and the most significant, the accomplishment of philosophical exploration is a process of critical reasoning, which, different from the Sophistic rhetoric, discourages any attempt to follow, imitate or quote the popular viewpoints or certain figures of public reputation. These principles have laid a foundation for the Socratic scientific method, and they demonstrate a dialogic understanding of the interaction between a topic and examiners, between examiners themselves, and deny a single, established or authoritative voice that hinders an otherwise creative thinking, and above all, they value the goal of an elenctic activity: to persuade the individual interlocutors through a “double-voiced” dialogue. Such scientific method essential to elenchus can be experienced in Socrates’s other early dialogues like Euthyphro, Charmides, Laches, Lysis, Hippias Major, Hippias Minor, and Republic I
when the participants are all engaged in a dialogic activity to address the fundamental topic of the Socratic philosophy, “What is it?” so as to present a clear picture of his ethical theory.

Another purpose of my analysis is to account for the destructive and constructive elements of Socrates’s method. Some critics have already examined the destructive aspect in his effort to construct a moral theory. It has been observed that as a characteristic of Socrates’s conversational model more than half of his early dialogues close with an unanswered or undefined moral issue, leaving either examiners or interlocutors in a state of perplexity or confusion. It seems as though Socrates gives his interlocutors no hope to reach the final truth and that he himself is indulging in the pleasure of “dissimulation” and “insinuation.” (Rossetti, 225-38). It becomes natural for Socratic readers to question, “Is Socrates’s method constructive or destructive? If both, how are these two elements appropriated in his philosophical discovery?” My analysis, in the light of Bakhtin’s dialogic interaction, tends to account for Socrates’s method as a moral construction through deconstruction. Let me start an explanation from Aristotle’s conviction. As I mentioned earlier, Aristotle believes that Socrates’s method is designed to yield certainty in ethics (A987b1-4), and he catches the essence of the Socratic dialogues which have tremendously influenced the establishment of Plato’s Form and his own logic theory. Socrates’s method is first and foremost a process of discovery. In addition, it is also a process of deconstruction through dialogic verbal activities, for it is employed to search for the truth that “is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual” but
rather "is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their
dialogic interaction." It is through such a process that Socrates attempts to deconstruct
the Athenian religious beliefs and construct an ethical transformation of gods (i.e., the
transformation of gods into ethical beings) in his dialogue. In the *Euthyphro*, when
Euthyphro presents his supposition—a widely accepted Athenian myth—that the gods fight
and disagree, Socrates immediately expresses his doubt and confirms that such stories
about gods are hard to believe (6a6–8) because Socrates insists that gods are wise and
thoroughly moral. Any of the mythical and literary conceptions that portray gods as
beings who inflict the humans with disasters is in opposition to Socrates's own belief.
Here, fresh in Socrates's mind may be the works by Homer, Hesiod, Aeschylus or
Euripides, who present the mythical world as much the same as the human world: gods,
evil or good, are conflicting with each other out of motivations just or unjust, moral or
immoral. Socrates's method of deconstruction is chiefly directed to Euthyphro's reductive
presentation of the relation between gods and men. Through his elenctic examination of
Euthyphro's theological structure of holiness Socrates is able to rephrase Euthyphro's
"give and take" relation (14e) as the basic form of gods' relation with men, and we finally
hear Euthyphro confessing that holiness is nothing but an mutual art of commerce between
gods and men. In other words, Socrates tries to demonstrate that if holiness can be
interpreted as simply "asking from the gods and giving to them" (14d), then holiness loses
completely its moral connotation and is reduced to a business of buying and selling, and an
everyday subject of money and business. Such critical reasoning gains more profound
meaning when Socrates establishes consistency between Euthyphro’s belief and that of most of the Athenians. His refutation becomes at once destructive to the illusion of Athenian specific knowledge about divine things. Socrates’s deconstruction cuts further when he calls attention to the brutal fact that without accurate knowledge of holiness and unholiness a son like Euthyphro could even prosecute his father as a murderer who punished a criminal out of indignation but caused his death. Here, Socrates’s inference may well be read as a challenge to Sophistic rhetoric that employs argument in law cases in disregard of holiness and morality.

It seems that the dialogue, Euthyphro, ends up with confusion on the part of Euthyphro and with disappointment on the part of Socrates. Such an ending, like some other early Socratic dialogues, produces a sense of incompleteness, and also an effect of pure destructiveness—its destruction of Athenian piety. When we look carefully, however, we find that a constructive process going with Socrates’s deconstructive method. Then, what does Socrates construct through his elenchus in the dialogue? To begin with, holiness is a science of knowledge which leads to the wisdom of divinity but has to be gained through elenctic investigation. That is how Socrates, an examiner, purges Euthyphro of his pretense of wisdom, and describes to him a suitable pursuit for “an all-glorious product” that the gods hope to produce by involving one’s “attention to the gods” (11e-13e). Second, gods are moral and wise, which makes his ethical claim consistent with the “divine sign,” but destructive to any unholy action against the authority of justice (4e), and it also makes his elenctic method beneficial to human souls. Finally,
once again Socrates's dialogic relation with a private “divine sign” is confirmed by Euthyphro’s own communication with the Athenian gods, which helps to defend Socrates’s claim of piety and encourages a critical reasoning of the accepted religious belief based on a mythical interpretation of gods. By displaying Socrates’s scientific attitude in constructing his ethical issues in the *Euthyphro* through a course of deconstruction, we are enabled to experience the same spirit reflected in other early Socratic dialogues like the *Apology, Meno, Crito, Charmides, Laches, Hippias Major* or *Hippias Minor*.

Now, I would like to describe Socrates’s scientific thinking concerning technical communication. As a philosopher active in rhetorical activities, Socrates should be regarded as the first great Western thinker who devoted all his life to a divine mission of popularizing his moral philosophy. Socrates’s early dialogues portray him as a bare-footed, poorly-dressed scholar who brings philosophy from the domain of elites to the common people, old or young, learned or ignorant, rich or poor alike, and takes a great pleasure in examining and philosophizing about everyday life as well as about human souls. Moreover, such a philosopher who is depicted by Alcibiades in the *Symposium* as someone who “knows nothing and is ignorant of everything” (216d) deems oral communication not just as a basic element of human communication, but as an instrument in knowledge-making. Socrates’s understanding of his philosophical exploration is also expressed in his emphasis on voluntary and active participation in a free discussion. This process of participation is defined by the following five characteristics: first, honesty in
the communication has to be tested, as Socrates demands of Thrasymachus in the
*Republic* I: “my dear fellow, in order that we may reach some result, don’t answer counter
to your real belief” (346a), because the participants can get nowhere and reach no result if
honesty is not upheld; then, the general moral purpose of the communication has to be
focussed, that is, to persuade the participants to cease caring for money, property and
fame and not caring for the essence of human life—the virtue or the good (i.e., *Apology*,
29e-30a); third, the topic on time or participants for such a communication should not be
restricted, for Socrates claims to be ready for a dialogue with anyone on any topic at any
time (*Apology*, 29d, ); fourth, the communication is characterized by a mutual
enlightenment, as Socrates emphasizes in his refutation with Protagoras that the argument
and intention of both “you” and “me,” self and other have to be taken into consideration
(*Protagoras*, 331c) in an effective dialogue; last but most innovative in Socrates’s theory
of communication is his deep insight into the power of orality. While contemporary
scholars like Havelock and Ong have convincingly argued against the Platonic Socrates’s
occasional representation of writing as inhuman and destructive to memory (79-81), they
have failed to note that the subsequent prestige given to Socrates’s dialogues may
contribute to today’s managerial communication theory and perhaps to the increasingly
effective electronic dialogue. Since the Socratic dialogue is problem-focussed and values
real-world concerns, the question-and-response sequence, a strong motivation for a final
solution, active participation, and a dramatic manner in animating an otherwise mundane
topic, contemporary communicators often feel that they have benefited from such a
method or oral exchange. For instance, in the classroom environment, Socratic pedagogy is a long-standing method for educational communication. The even greater influence of the Socratic dialogue may soon be found in wave upon wave of an electronic revolution when simultaneous group chat (in the written form, though), oral message delivery over the Internet, and visual phone talk will become gradually prevalent, and research on the artificial intelligence of phonetic-identification (direct decoding of oral message into written message regardless of linguistic differences) is expected to make a breakthrough in a not too distant future.

Specifically, I am emphasizing that the concept of technical or craft knowledge is repeatedly articulated in Socrates's dialogues, though he maintains that this kind of knowledge or wisdom is inferior to moral knowledge. In fact, scholarship on Socrates generally concentrates on detailed study of how Socrates highlights moral insight and downplays technical skills. My argument is that Socrates's consciousness of technology and his classification of different technical skills themselves have already directed attention to the structure of human knowledge and scientific method in a theoretical understanding of technical communication. Let us make an exploration of the Laches, a dialogue that presents some principles and skills of technical communication. The professional morality in “taking counsels and advising with someone” (189c), according to Socrates, is the possession of expertise in a topic to be discussed. Socrates justifies this statement with an example of popular science, when he argues that only those who obtain knowledge about the dynamics of sight and hearing can offer helpful advice about the eyes or the ears.
(190a-b). And this epistemological principle is further articulated when Socrates claims that Laches, Nicias and he himself are all in the right position to probe the real meaning of "courage," because, as we know, both Laches and Nicias were the courageous generals who were later killed in the Athenian war with Sparta, and Socrates, too, served as a warrior with endurance of courage on the battlefield.

Then, how does Socrates present technical knowledge in his argument? He depicts at least six technical or professional skills he is familiar with. The first is that of a money changer who knows how to invest his money wisely in order to gain more profits in the end (192e). The second is that of a physician expert in curing his patients of certain inflammations. The third is that of an army commander who has a mastery of military arts. The fourth is that of a cavalryman who is skilled in horsemanship. The fifth is that of a peltast or a bowman who has some knowledge of how to use the sling or the bow. And the sixth is a sportsman who is good at diving. Socrates's depiction of the above six types of technical knowledge expresses at least two aspects of his scientific thinking. First, technical knowledge itself is represented in a diversity of human skills, or in Bakhtin's term, a "heteroglossia" of technical "languages," each contributing to a general sense of ancient knowledge while signifying its particularity and indispensability. Second, and the more important, it is from a study of technical knowledge that people come to understand the human pursuit of moral knowledge, which not only secures a harmony between words and deeds (193e), but also justifies and helps to develop some sensitivity to technical knowledge. For instance, a doctor's "courage" exists in his sophisticated skills in
treatment. Without that, a doctor could possibly endanger his patient’s life if his decision on a treatment is not based on his skills in diagnostics and prescription of medicine, but is made just out of “carelessness” or “rashness.”

Let us again take Socrates’s own life experience for example. He is always proud of his wonderful service on the battlefield for Athens. Without certain military skills in calculating, information-gathering and martial arts, how could he have built such a reputation? Socrates’s self-confession of his ignorance in moral knowledge rather than in technical knowledge does not imply that he disdains the latter. Instead, he is always conscious of the significance of technical skills in preparing an inquirer for a life-long search for virtues and goods, which secure humans a real “happy” life. My argument for Socrates’s unique insight into technical knowledge may also be supported by his choice of Laches and Nicias, who possess knowledge of military strategies and tactics, as his interlocutors, and thus they are better qualified for a philosophical exploration together with him. Finally, I attempt to emphasize that Socrates’s constant recourse to the topic of technical skills in his early and transitional dialogues also indicates his scientific understanding of the concepts of practicality and instrumentality, which distinguishes him from the sophistic rhetoricians, who generally focus on an eristic representation of the art of argumentation. We have reasons to believe that the knowledge of practical skills much facilitated Socrates’s dialogue with his interlocutors and enriched his moral theory as the result of a scientific exploration.
IV. Confucius’s and Socrates’s Dialogical Practice, Scientific Method and Technical Communication

So far I have provided a general account of Confucius’s and Socrates’s proto-scientific attitude toward a moral philosophy, their methods, and their tendency to practicality. Now, a comparative study will examine their dialogical practice as a method to open the human minds to both moral and technical knowledge, and will demonstrate the scientific element responsive to the particular content of their oral and written communication.

As is emphasized in the earlier analysis, the dialogue form works like a scientific methodology for Confucius and Socrates to involve and motivate all the participants/discussants and to develop an understanding of the truth/knowledge of a given issue because each of them realized or implied that knowledge is not inborn virtue but often has to be acquired in a dialogic and living moment. It is during a free discussion that people are enabled to approach a topic of interest, voice their own opinions, or give their ears to different viewpoints. As a consequence, they develop a better understanding of an issue that bears either some theoretical significance or some practical value. Though in Confucius’s time communication might be carried in some written form, it is the dialogue that proved to be the most popular and efficient form in people’s daily life. Similarly, in Socrates’s era, dialogue was also one of the most favourable form in academic life, and it functioned as a basic means for those who wanted to make a living with a power of persuasion. To Confucius and Socrates, dialogue is a way of learning and a way of scientific exploration, and their method of dialogue may be represented in Figure 7.
Lying in the center of both Confucius’s and Socrates’s dialogues is generally a scientific or moral issue concerning Truth/Way, which is to be discussed, articulated, or defined. The philosopher or the teacher is often the first examiner/speaker, and he may function as an organizer of a joint exploration. There are generally three dialogic relations: the relation between participants and a scientific/moral issue, that between the philosopher/teacher and individual participants/interlocutors, and that among participants/interlocutors themselves. Such a relationship is both dynamic and bi-directional, namely, it is established in an ongoing oral exchange, and the utterance of one participant is responsive to those of others. Even in the relation between participants and a topic, many voices resonate because a topic itself is charged with multiple meanings and interactive not only with “an alien word that is already in the object,” but also with the interpretation of a participant which
attempts to be influential. Again, take Confucius's dialogue, Ch. 11.26, for example. Confucius encourages his disciples to address 

\( Zhi \) (志, one's ambition, life goal). His dialogic understanding of \( Zhi \) has enabled him to discern a diversity in possible responses to such a philosophical issue, and his question therefore touches upon two aspects essential to a meaningful discussion. One is to get prepared for the interaction of various presentations of such a common concern, and the other is to be specific and individualized in one's own contribution (各言其志, to express what is in your mind). A philosophical exploration, according to Confucius, has no restrictions and limitations. As a consequence, the whole discussion should prove to be such a fruitful and pleasant exploration that it produces not only different innovative opinions resulting from persistent philosophical inquiry but also thoughtful and colorful conversations—the vivid presentations of ancient ceremony, military forces, poetic life style, musical background, etc. Also worth our attention is the Confucian open-mindedness in his expression, “Never feel constrained because of me (my life experience and learning)” (毋以予也), indicating that in a joint search for the true meaning of life an authoritative voice does more harm than good to a free discussion. It is such a scientific attitude toward an open discussion that facilitates one of the most memorable philosophical dialogues in only three hundred and fifteen Chinese characters.

Similarly, Socrates’s early dialogues are also opposed to any authority or “official monologism” (Bakhtin). As is discussed in my analysis of the \textit{Laches}, the Platonic Socrates is always ready to listen to different interpretations, certain or uncertain, of
“courage,” for an understanding of “courage” is a science “concerned not only with good and evil of the future, but of the present and past, and of any time” (199c), and it is worth a joint and continuous search. Compared with Confucius, Socrates shows an even greater passion for an examined life. The conclusion in the *Laches* is quite unexpected in that Socrates suggests all the three discussants, including himself, go to school to get further education, for the whole company exhibits much ignorance about the issue of “courage,” and moreover, “the unexamined life” is the most undesirable. In actuality, such perplexity at an incomplete exploration of a moral issue and such a zest for knowledge are displayed in other of Socrates’s early dialogues like the *Apology, Lysis, Charmides, Euthyphro* and *Gorgias*, too. All in all, Confucius’s and Socrates’s dialogical rhetoric is still actively reflected in today’s scientific study, for modern science itself is a dialogue among all researchers and “scientific community” always encourages free exchanges of ideas. Latour and Woolgar have observed, for example, that dialogues occurring over the laboratory bench or conference table bind scientists together for the goal of producing scientific statements accepted by a relevant audience. Moreover, such a dialogic spirit often inspires scientists to communicate with one another so as to “construct their own internal dialogues in the same language.”

Both Confucius’s and Socrates’s dialogues aim at the enlightenment of the participants through established methods of inquiry. Confucius attaches much importance to his method of “enlightenment and inference” and such a method, consistent with his ironic representation of “knowing” (知) and “not knowing” (不知) in the

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development of human wisdom, is directed to inspire a spirit to become “eager to learn”
(好學, Ch. 6.3), which may result in the “knowledge of benevolence” (仁), the
knowledge of Word (言) and the knowledge of humans (人). Confucius’s
“enlightenment” (發) emphasizes a persistency in defending moral truth (Ch.15.36),
an ability to infer (Ch. 7.8), and critical thinking (Ch. 2.15). Such a method exhibits a
scientific attitude to knowledge by insisting that both teacher and student, examiner and
examinee, questioner and questionee can benefit from the process of learning through a
sequence of question and answer. Confucius’s rhetorical practice seems to suggest that
both question and answer, and discussion and refutation start an interaction among the
participants in a dialogue, and enlightenment is achieved by both teacher and student
because creative reasoning often contributes to a better understanding of a philosophical
issue raised by the teacher. Confucius’s sensitivity to mutual enlightenment is vividly
expressed in his relation with his favourite disciple, Yan Hui. When the latter exclaimed to
other disciples that the Master (Confucius) “broadens me with culture and brings me back
to essentials by means of the rites. I cannot give up even if I wanted to, but having done all
I can...,” the former complained that sometimes “Hui (Yan Hui) is of no help to me at all”
because of his blindness in following whatever the teacher says (Ch. 11.4).

Comparatively, Socrates’s scientific attitude is likewise reflected through his
rhetorical practice, though his focus is on an elenctic dialogue—the one that examines
moral quality critically by way of refutation. His elenchus is founded on two
convictions: that “the unexamined life is not worth living” (Apology), and that truth cannot
be taught but must be sought through a dialogue in a question and answer sequence.

Thus, dialogue becomes a way of life and the best process of knowledge-making. Since Socrates's philosophical goal is to expose to his examinees/interlocutors their ignorance, his method, as is represented in my analysis, often turns to deconstructing any self-professed knowledge of truth even while he moves towards the construction of a moral theory. Both his deconstruction and construction are conducted in a dialogue form that features many voices, including different voices of Socrates himself. Socrates never resents such a diversity of voices. Instead he always feels enlightened from the interaction of many voices. What perplexes him is a manifestation of reluctance to contribute to his elenctic investigation or a monologized attempt to impose closure on a search for truth.

As Bakhtin vividly observes:

> The carnivalistic base of the Socratic dialogue, despite its very complicated form and philosophical depth, is beyond any doubt. Folk-carnival "debates" between life and death, darkness and light, winter and summer, etc., permeated with the pathos of change and the joyful relativity of all things, debates which did not permit thought to stop and congeal in one-sided seriousness or in a stupid fetish for definition or singleness of meaning—all this lay at the base of the original core of the genre.

This dialogic reading not only points to the nature of the Socratic dialogue, but also illuminates Confucius's philosophical claim against one-sidedness and an authoritative voice in a search for Zhi (知识, knowledge), though his dialogue, despite its openness to different voices, seldom proceeds in the form of "debates." Moreover, their dialogical practice seems to reveal that scientist/explorer is not important as an individual, and it is the joint search that incorporates the agreed-upon ideas and produces scientific
knowledge. Such a revelation is still essential in the scientific practice of our time.

The last but the most intriguing point to the modern mind may be the heritage of Confucius’s and Socrates's scientific understanding of technical communication. Each of the two philosophers throws new light on the field of popular science and on technical or craft knowledge, though their influences are intellectual rather than direct. Apart from their passion for moral theory, Confucius and Socrates display a sense of practicality or a pragmatic attitude in various aspects of technical communication. In Confucius’s case, popular science concerning diet, hygiene, sports, health, ecology, etc., is a constant topic of his dialogue and speech. Due to his pragmatic tendency, Confucius’s moral theory is both responsive and applicable to technical communication. His dialogues cover the topics (in the modern sense) of professional morality, information-gathering, negotiation, decision-making, rhetorical devices, and gender study in the environment of classroom discussion, political administration or everyday communication. Moreover, Confucius’s rhetorical claim of an oral exchange in the form of Wen (文, raising questions) and Jiehuo (解惑, clearing confusion with answers) seems to suggest clearly his scientific approach to knowledge-making as socially constructed because his focus is laid on knowledge from interpersonal activities (Ch. 7.22) and from participation in social reforms (Ch. 18.7). Similarly, Socrates’s dialogue displays his epistemological depth by a classification of moral knowledge and technical knowledge. His frequent references to technical skills not only demonstrate his familiarity with ancient science and technology, but also contributes to his stratification of human knowledge which puts a moral pursuit
above craft skills. The Socratic dialogues encompass geometry, medicine, military arts, law-suits, myth and folklore, finance, architecture, the discussion of which facilitates his process of examining and philosophizing ethical concepts. In the meantime, his elenctic dialogue itself functions as a popular philosophical activity in the streets, squares, law courts, or classroom, thus much enriching real world communication, and also bridging oral and written exchange, because his dialogue is, after all, passed to us modern readers in a written text. Like Confucius, Socrates also enhanced our understanding of knowledge-making as a social construct, for his philosophical life is always exposed in a social context with various interlocutors whose active participation enables him to shape his ethical doctrine.

Certainly, while discussing Confucius’s and Socrates’s understanding of technical communication, we have to be aware of their occasional theoretical confusion about technical knowledge. Confucius’s disdain for agricultural skills (Ch. 13.4) has encouraged a tendency to isolate book/theoretical knowledge from practical skills in Chinese society, and moreover, his criticism of business communication (Ch. 11.19) is indisputably one of the factors that accounts for the traditional Chinese prejudice against the business profession. Socrates, by the same token, occasionally depreciates technical knowledge. Though the unfavorable impact of some his theoretical prejudice was much modified during the Enlightenment in the West, we can still feel the influence of the Socratic separation of scientific philosophy from rhetoric (i.e., the Gorgias). These monologized conceptualizations of technical knowledge have, to some extent, led to some conventional
perspectives that take such a scientific category as *Mōji* (末技, the most trivial skills) in the East, or as some “knacks” in the West. However, the advance of science and technology in the later half of the twentieth century not only helped to distinguish the position of technical knowledge in our life, but also started a revival of academic interest in Confucius’s and Socrates’s scientific attitude, to be exact, their proto-scientific attitude reflected in their theory and practice of technical skills, and made possible a dialogue between two ancient philosophers whose communication theories might still contribute to an era of global information revolution.

**Notes**

1. Hu, Shi, Ph. D of Columbia University and former Chancellor of the National Peking University (1938-1942), is a major representative of the New Culture Movement of China.

2. Bazerman’s observation of Socrates’s preference for orality in public knowledge has also enabled him to demonstrate how the written texts of modern science are enmeshed in social activities and are closely related to four contexts: the object under study, the literature of the field, the anticipated audience, and the author’s own self. See his *Shaping Written Knowledge: The Genre and Activity of the Experimental Article in Science*. 21-24.


4. *Intertextuality* (intertextualité) is a concept introduced by Kristeva, originally referring to transportation of one or more systems of signs into another, accompanied by a new articulation of the denotative and enunciative position. See her *La Revolution du language poétique*. 56-60.

5. See Vlastos’s *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*. 266, 269-73. Vlasto’s study focuses on Socrates’s elenchus in his early dialogues and his mathematical principles in his late dialogues. Worth mentioning is also his finding that the term (method), was a
coinage by Plato, which occurred after the early Socratic dialogues. See his “The Socratic Elenchus.”

6. Author of *Advancement of Learning*, *Novum organum*, and *New Atlantis*, Francis Bacon (1562-1626), displayed a totally sceptical attitude to the Aristotelian tradition and human learning of medieval period, and set his new scientific method and scientific rhetoric based on the understanding of human nature that “posits distinct capacities corresponding to each stage in the development and communication of knowledge” (Zappen, 74-88).


8. See Kuang Yamin’s *Kongzi pingzhuan* (A Critical Bibliography of Confucius). That I believe Kuang’s book reflects the latest in Confucius studies in mainland China is not only because of the scope of its research, its theoretical depth and critical conclusions of his exploration, but also because of the fact that this book is actually the product of a joint research of dozens of Chinese Confucian scholars. See his epilogue. 489-96.

9. “Logos” is a Greek term developed from one or both of its ordinary senses “reason” and “word.” As logical appeal, it is understood as something focussed on consistency and substantive reasons. As ethical appeal, it suggests something to do with logical validity. In the rhetorical domain, “logos” is a notion which is directed not only at the understanding of what is good and true but, more importantly, at the most possible means of persuasion. See George E. Yoos’s “Logos” in *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition*. Ed. Theresa Enos. 1996. 410-14.

10. This idea is further articulated by Mencius (390-305 B.C.), another great thinker of Confucianism who once said, “It is of the essence of man’s nature that he do good. That is what I mean by good. If a man does what is evil he is guilty of the sin of denying his natural endowment. Every man has a sense of pity, a sense of shame, a sense of respect, a sense of right or wrong” (Ch. 11.6). See *Mencius*. 113.

11. This is W.T. Chen’s translation. See his “Chinese and Western interpretations of ren (humanity).” Refer to D.C. Lau’s translation “to overcome oneself” and Herbert Fingarette’s “to master oneself” in his “The Problem of Self in the Analects.” And also see Arthur Waley’s “is able himself to” in his *The Analects of Confucius*.

12. Ever since the May Fourth Movement in 1919, much criticism of Confucius has been centred on his prejudice against women. Besides, some Western critics also regard Confucianism as a major source of Chinese misogyny. For instance, Julia Kristeva
fails to distinguish the original Confucianism and the Confucianism of a ritualizer of later feudalism, and insists that it is Confucianism that prevents the women's liberation in China. See her About Chinese Women. 66-99.

13. This volume of the Tang dynasty (618-907 A.D.) was discovered in Dunhuang Grottoes in Gansu Province, China early this century, and later was edited by Wang, Chongming in his Duanhuang bianwenji. 2vols. (《敦煌變文集》) (Dunhuang Collection of Essays). Also refer to Shiji. ganmuozhuan. (《史記-甘茂傳》) (The Historical Records).

14. A similar exclamation is made in Ch. 9.23 of The Analects.

15. Chad Hansen asserts that the Chinese language as well as the Confucian language is a "pragmatic" language, which lacks interest in "truth" and "falsity." This influential viewpoint in the West is established on the observation that the classical Chinese is different from most Western languages, not grounded in the propositional utterance, therefore the ancient Chinese philosophers depend on noun function which may not be judged true or false. This conclusion is, however, contradictory with the linguistic fact that the Confucian rhetoric always emphasizes the quality of "sincerity" (誠), "trustworthiness" (信) and "straightforwardness" (直) in language, and these concepts suggest the "truth" of language in one way or another. See Hansen's "Chinese Language, Chinese Philosophy and 'Truth'."

16. I follow John Harris's definition to emphasize the rhetorical aspect of technical communication. And I also accept Patric Kelley and Roger Masse's definition to highlight the characteristic of being objective in technical communication. See Harris's "On Expanding the Definition of Technical Writing." Also see Kelley and Masse's "A Definition of Technical Writing."


18. My belief that this interpretation partly explains the Confucian avoidance of oral communication on certain occasions results from the fact that Confucius's tragic consciousness also functions in his rhetorical activities. See my analysis in Chapter Three.

19. See Bakhtin's Problems of Dostoesvsky's Poetics.

20. Max Weber maintains that the concept is one of the great tools of scientific knowledge that was discovered consciously by Plato's Socrates. See his "Science as a
Vocation” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. 133-44.


22. Among them are Rorty, Brickhouse and Smith. See Rorty’s *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. 389-94. And also see Brickhouse and Smith’s *Plato’s Socrates*. 4, 16-17.

23. See Bakhtin’s *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*.

24. Brickhouse and Smith believe that Socrates’s questioning is intended to display that Euthyphro did possess the knowledge of holiness as he claimed. (*Plato’s Socrates*) 48. And Seeskin also insists that Socrates’s question shows that Euthyphro is not even close to mastering the moral knowledge his own behavior requires (*Dialogue and Discovery: A Study in Socratic Method*). 79. The above interpretations illuminate the epistemological aspects of Socrates’s refutation in the text of his dialogue. However, if put in intertextual contexts, Socrates’s question may also sound as a challenge to the Sophistic rhetorical practice which puts persuasiveness before matters of justice and injustice.

25. Socratic dialogue, as a scientific method, has been adopted in classroom instruction for both humanities and science studies, and in both the oral discussion and writing workshop. For further discussion, refer to Glenn M. Julian’s “Socratic Dialogue—With How Many?” Jack L. Uretsky’s “Using ‘Dialogue’ Labs in a Community-College Physics Course.” John F. Parker’s “To Workshop or Not to Workshop,” and Alan Hoffman and Jeannette B. Moon eds. *Linking Law to Learning: Instructional Strategies Manual*.

26. For instance, Vlastos believes that the Socratic dialogue, the *Laches*, is intended to present moral knowledge in pointed contrast to the technical knowledge possessed by those who have certain skills. See his *Socratic Studies*. 112.

27. *Laches* was killed in 418 B.C. at Mantinea and Nicias lost his life in 413 B.C. at Syracuse. See Thucydides’s *The Peloponnesian War*.

28. Ziman emphasizes that scientific attitude is not inborn virtue. See his *Public Knowledge*. 116. Also worth mentioning is that Confucius once said that some were born with knowledge, but he denied seeing any of them himself, and instead he repeatedly emphasized knowledge through learning. See my analysis in Chapter 4.

29. See Bakhtin’s interpretation of such a dialogic interaction in his “Discourse in the Novel.” 279-80.

30. Yang Baojun inappropriately puts this expression into plain Chinese as “nobody wants
to employ me as an administrator.” 120. It is D.C. Lau’s English translation that faithfully reflects a tone of encouragement in Confucius’s utterance.

31. See Bazerman’s *Shaping Written Knowledge*. 22.

32. A tentative analysis of this ironical structure is made in Chapter Four to demonstrate Confucius’s epistemology.

33. This idea of mutual enlightenment for teacher and disciple (敎學相長) is later summarized in the *Liji. xueji* (《禮記.學記》) and may be traced in *The Analects* in Ch. 3.8, 9.23, 11.4 too.

34. One has to bear in mind that elenchos represents a “Socratic method” in the early Socratic dialogues, but the same term is employed in the middle dialogues to express a Platonic method through which Plato’s own established categorical criteria are defended.

35. See my analysis of the different voices in Socrates’s use of irony in Chapter Four.

36. See Bakhtin’s *Problems of Dostoevsky’ Poetics*. 132.

37. Richard Bernstein believes there are “low” and “high” senses of being “practical” that paralleled the handbook and theoretical traditions of rhetoric. The low sense refers to “some mundane and bread-and-butter activity or character. The practical man is one who is not concerned with theory (even anti-theoretical), who knows how to get along in the rough and tumble of the world.” The high sense, derived from the Aristotelian concept of praxis, is representative of modern philosophical pragmatism and touches upon the human conduct that maintains the life of the community. See Bernstein’s *Praxis and Action*.

38. Thomas Kuhn has made a constructionist epistemological assumption and he insists that knowledge (or scientific knowledge) is “intrinsically the common property of a group or else nothing at all.” See his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. 201.

39. Some contemporary scholars still believe that science and rhetoric are mutually exclusive. For a detailed discussion, see Carolyn R. Miller’s “A Humanistic Rationale for Technical Writing.”
Chapter Three

Dialogized Tragic Consciousness in
Confucian and Socratic Dialogues

Chapter Three first makes a brief survey of contemporary representations of Confucius and Socrates concerning their tragic consciousness. Then, in accordance with Bakhtin's dialogism, this chapter describes how Confucius's and Socrates's dialogues with their interlocutors/discussants, and their internal dialogues as responses to their rhetorical and cultural situations reflect and shape their tragic consciousness. Finally, I attempt to make a comparative study of the two tragic heroes to account for a rationalized understanding of the world and its relation to our society.

I. A Brief Review

The tragic consciousness in Confucius's and Socrates's dialogues, different from that of tragic heroes in ancient mythology and literature, is basically represented in a conflict between a strong passion for a moral idealism associated with their social contexts and an experience of political frustration and personal unfulfilment. It is also reflected in a pessimistic understanding of their real-world philosophical exploration, which results in their dialogic relations with God/Heaven and Destiny. Moreover, their contemporaries'
misrepresentation of Confucius's and Socrates's divine mission and life-long verbal activities eventually led to these great thinkers experiencing a miserable end--Confucius's death in oblivion and Socrates's execution as a martyr of philosophy, and evoked a perpetual tragic consciousness among their followers and readers across the world over more than two thousand years. As a dynamic part of a rationalized reading of the world, both Confucius's and Socrates's tragic consciousness is often experienced in a dialogic relation with their own social and rhetorical contexts. Moreover, it remains active and responsive to the past and tradition, and also to our contemporary society and the future.

Upon his observation of a dialectic structure of understanding, Hans-Georg Gadamer once characterized a type of “hermeneutical experience” in which two self-involved persons encounter each other, and “each claims to express the other’s claim.” In search of truth, they struggle for mutual recognition and compete for “the complete dominance of the one person by the other” (322-32). Gadamer's characterization corresponds with Bakhtin's description of “discourse with an orientation to someone else's discourse.” However, Bakhtin's category of discourse, unlike Gadamer's, makes possible a range of discursive practices in which one voice defines itself in relation to another without surrendering itself or objectifying the other. It seeks no rhetorical conformity or discourse dominance, but articulates its difference in a dialogical interaction with the other or the others. Both Gadamer's and Bakhtin's concepts of discourse help us to understand better the dialogized tragic consciousness in Confucius's and Socrates's
dialogues, though Gadamer's definition has a tendency to produce a monological interpretation when dominance is emphasized in an interaction of discourses.³

Before we begin our journey to trace the tragic consciousness between the lines of the two philosophers, we have to address an interesting historical phenomenon: critical studies have basically overlooked the tragic aspect in Confucian and Socratic discourse. In the East, students of Confucius concentrate on either exegetical studies or the philosophical, educational and religious elements of his discourse. Few scholars have ever made a comprehensive rhetorical survey of Confucian discourse, not to mention a detailed analysis of the "pathos"⁴ in the emotional structure of his texts. It is also rare that comments are made on Youhuān yishi—the sense of anxiety and worries as a major characteristic of his verbal activities.⁵ Lin Yutang might be one of a few scholars who touched upon the character of Confucius. Lin presented Confucius as a generally "gay" and "cheerful" "real man" (26-28), but seldom made any comments on his spiritual frustration and occasional pessimistic discourse. One of the most recent comparative studies of Greek civilization and early civilization in China is made by David N. Keightley (15-54), who draws the conclusion that early Chinese philosophy differs from that of Greece in its "epistemological optimism." Keightley observes that "Confucian optimism about the human condition was maintained even in the face of Confucius's own failure to obtain the political successes that he needed to justify his mission," and that Confucius and Qu Yuan⁶ are two examples proving the "subversive thought that the best intentions might lead to chaos and regret." Keightley is right to point out that early China is generally lacking in the sense of tragedy, but he fails to discern that Confucius's personal experience
and his discourses do produce a sense of tragedy, that of a most controversial Chinese thinker being misinterpreted, fragmented, or condemned in his own time and also in our contemporary cultural situation.

In the West, Socrates is viewed in a way similar to Confucius. Nietzsche describes Socrates as a theoretical optimist because of his belief in reading the abysses of being and correcting it in the theoretical world by using the thread of logic, though he turns to being a pessimist in the practical world (91-96). Ever since Nietzsche, interpreters like Walter Benjamin have repeated the idea that Socrates represents the tradition of the sage as “untragic hero” that originates in Plato’s dialogues, and that Plato the poet destroyed his tragedies in order to become Plato the philosopher (149-50). To put it in plain words, Socrates is no longer a tragic hero when he talks as a teacher and a philosopher. The Nietzsche-Benjamin critique of the “untragic hero” has become so ingrained that critics have so far offered no practical criticism on the tragic character of Socrates. Socrates also is not a type of tragic hero in Aristotle’s sense of one who should be able to evoke both our pity and fear and who suffers a change of fortune from happiness to catastrophe because of his harmartia—“error of judgement.” Sticking to Aristotle’s criteria, we experience little tragic emotion in Socrates’s dramatized dialogues, for Socrates makes no explicit appeal for pity in his defense speech and his personal tragedy is not terror-striking at all. Yet, we can hardly deny that there is a different form of tragic consciousness in Socratic discourse, which strikes its audience with a strong feeling of failure and sacrifice, and establishes in rhetorical history an eternal image of a
passionate speaker and unflinching fighter for absolute truth even in the face of the death penalty.

II. You and Huan All His Life: Confucius’s Tragic Consciousness

What does dialogism contribute to our interpretation of Socrates’s and Confucius’s tragic consciousness? As I discussed in my “Introduction,” a dialogic reading of discourse aims to describe the relations of voices resonant in a given context. One of the primary tonal relations is between self and other, and between the speaker’s or the author’s voice and the response from historical and cultural implications of his time. In Confucius’s context, we have no difficulty identifying the interaction between his own voice and the cultural orientation of the Western Zhou dynasty (1100–771 B.C.). Throughout his dialogues and speeches, Confucius idealized the ethical, ritual and musical concepts of the Western Zhou, which resulted in his dissatisfaction with the social reality of his time. Confucius’s dialogized tragic consciousness is often explicitly expressed in two particular words: You (憂, anxiety) and Huan (患, worries).9 You, in ancient Chinese, connotes the emotions of anxiety and sorrow, and Huan entails the emotions of worry and disaster. These two words are employed by Confucius to reflect his pessimistic attitude toward social reality. Once, Confucius said:

“The gentleman devotes his mind to attaining the Way and not to securing food. Go and till the land and you will end up by being hungry, as a matter of course; study, and you will end up with the salary of an official, as a matter of course. The gentleman worries about the Way, not about poverty.” (Ch.15.32)

Here the “Way” refers to the harmonious social order,10 the highest goal of Confucius’s political pursuit. What Confucius says raises one of the major distinctions between the
"gentleman" or the "superior man" (士) and the "small man" or the "inferior man" (小人): one worries about the Way, the other poverty. In this tension-filled double-voiced interplay between two social groups, Confucius takes it as natural that each focuses on its own concerns for life. Since the Way "falls into disuse" (Ch. 15.7), the gentleman can never stop worrying about the destiny of a state, of his time. He is wandering about and pursuing the Way in his earthly and spiritual journey. Only when he devotes himself to learning, he becomes "so full of joy that he forgets about his worries" (Ch. 7.19). Here, Confucius actually confesses to his disciples that apart from his academic studies he always suffers from the endless worries about social deterioration in his role as a moral philosopher and social reformer who can find nowhere to realize his ideal. This Confucian consciousness of Youhuan has developed into a cultural tradition among Chinese intellectuals and literati, which is most prominently expressed in the motto of Fan Zhongyan (989—1052), a scholar of the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127): To be the first one to endure sufferings for your country and your people; to be the last one to seek happiness and pleasure for yourself. Fan's response to Confucius further elucidates the consciousness of You (憂, worries, sufferings) as contradictory to Le (樂, happiness, pleasure), and helps distinguish the nature of You as being tragic, voluntary, lofty and other-oriented.

However, Confucius's interpretation of "You" may also become dramatized when he states that "The gentleman is free from worries and fears" (Ch. 12.4). If his former definition refers to a sense of political responsibility, in this case he directs his attention to

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the “inward examination” of a gentleman (Ch.12.4), because the “gentleman” is a carrier of perfect personality and serves as an objective of any individual in a life-long process of personal purification. This voice of general classification also addresses another voice of confession from a painful and anxious philosopher: “There are three things constantly on the lips of the gentleman none of which I have succeeded in following: 'A man of benevolence never worries; a man of wisdom is never in two minds; a man of courage is never afraid'” (Ch.14.28). Confucius’s explicit self-consciousness of his weakness in three emotional aspects, namely, You (worries), Huo (hesitation, confusion), and Ju (fear) entails a true understanding of his moral self in contrast with the model of his established other. This double-voiced relation in his discourse is extended further when it is answered by Zigong. Confucius’s self-examination cannot anticipate its “inflection,” and thus it does start a new dialogue with his interlocutors in which his contribution is open to diverse interpretations. Zigong’s response that “What Master (Confucius) has just quoted is a description of himself” (Ch.14.28) represents only “an” evaluation of Confucius’s personality, that has no dominance over Confucius’s voice. And the latter suggests an intrinsic contradiction between the idealized personality of a “gentleman” and a real personality of a scholar who is keen on learning. On the other hand, Confucius’s self-evaluation generates a non-ending interaction between an “untragic sage” free from worries and a tragic man of wisdom whose pursuit of the Way originates from his consciousness of worries over the absence of the Way in his time. As his life experience proves, Confucius’s tragic consciousness of Youhuan works as a starting point
With his disappointment at the social chaos of the "disuse of Way," "the ruin of rites" and "the collapse of music" in his time, Confucius's tragic consciousness can often be read in its tonal relation with tradition and the past, especially with the tradition of the Western Zhou (1100–771 B.C.). Confucius once exclaimed that "The Zhou is resplendent in culture, having before it the example of the two previous dynasties (the Xia and the Yin). I am for the Zhou" (Ch.3.14). Confucius attempts to confront the social and moral disorder of his time with the ritual system of the Zhou. His belief in the rites encourages him to go on with his social reform in a vulnerable and difficult situation. In addition, to listen to the ancient music and to teach the songs and poems of the past dynasties together constitute a voice of dissatisfaction with and resentment toward the society in which he survives. Especially when he realizes his failure in a political career, he continues his editing of the books on poems, history, rites, and music in accordance with the rites of the Zhou. The constant recourse to a historical tradition becomes a dynamic part of Confucius's tragic consciousness. Although in a suppressed position, his voice can still be heard through his active participation in academic and educational activities. A careful reading of Confucius's relation with tradition also reveals that his following the tradition is always in a critical rather than a blind way. One example is his concern with the rites of the Zhou. Confucius raises his voice to defend the principles of the Zhou against the anti-ritual practice of his contemporaries like the Ji family who "use eight rows of eight dancers each to perform in their courtyard" (Ch.3.1), and the same family who...
“were going to perform the sacrifice to Mount Tai” (Ch.3.6).16 Regarding such pejorative behavior, Confucius exclaimed with deep sorrow, “Who could say that the God of Mount Tai is not as rite-abiding as Lin Fang and would accept Ji’s sacrifice?” (Ch.3.6)17

In Confucius’s interpretation, however, the ritual system of the Zhou should not be completely dogmatic and rigid, but be active and responsive to historical development. Such a system can be refined and reformed, and can be anticipated with the help of human wisdom (Ch.2.23), because this ritual system has kept its interaction with past dynasties and still maintains its interaction with the present and future for “hundreds of generations” (Ch. 2.23). As Shigeki Kaizuka insists, true knowledge, to Confucius, “consisted not in a blind acceptance of, but in a critical way of the tradition concerning the earlier dynasties” (124). Based on a dialogic reading of the tradition, Confucius criticized indirectly the practice of burying the slaves alive with their deceased masters with the following speech: “It is not benevolent to use the tomb figure as the sacrificial object”18 and “...to bury the dead with what the living use is equal to bury them with the living.”19 To Confucius, it is intolerable to bury the dead with anything that is suggestive of human life, not to say with living humans. Though the tradition of burying the slaves alive as sacrificial “objects” was once popular in the Zhou, it was, according to Confucius, against the principle of benevolence—the core of the ritual system of the Zhou, which was always dialogic in its interaction with the changing social contexts, and should never prevent his contemporaries from building their own society into a more harmonious and pragmatic whole.
basic concern for human life, and also for the materials human beings depend on. His bitterness and indignation over the extravagant and non-benevolent practice of burying the dead has helped to distinguish his own voice and to reconfirm the basic values of the Zhou tradition.

Confucius's tragic consciousness is also represented in his dialogic relations with Heaven, the imaginative vision of both an omniscient existence and his alienated self. His tonal relation with Heaven tells of the loneliness and depression of a philosopher at the bottom of his heart, and also of a rich imaginative world where the speaker contends bitterly with a heteroglossia of voices striving to present diverse interpretations of the Self. Simultaneously, the constant dialogic activities also enable the Self to address its otherness in this dimension, and provide a context in which the Self is allowed to realize its catharsis of emotions: fear, pity, anger, despair.... After about fourteen years' wandering in different states advocating his ideas of state administration and seeking an official position, Confucius felt completely frustrated, and finally he sighed, "There is no one who understands me." When asked about the reason, Confucius explained, "I do not complain against Heaven, nor do I blame Man. In my studies, I start from below and get through to what is up above." If I am understood at all, it is, perhaps, by Heaven" (Ch. 14.35). This dialogue of Confucius with his disciple Zigong reveals his dissatisfaction with but tolerance of the voices of misunderstanding and misrepresentation of his claims and practice by rulers, literati, hermits and even some of his disciples. If human beings, the other, can not understand him, then it is Heaven (Tien, 天) or Gods...
that can read his mind and communicate with him. The further exploration of the Confucian concept of Heaven will explain that Heaven often functions as an omniscient existence and also as his alienated self. This dialogic imagination works not only in the stream of his consciousness but also in that of his unconsciousness, his dream world. Once Confucius sighed to his disciples that “How I have gone downhill! It has been such a long time since I dreamt of the Duke of Zhou” (Ch.7.5). The Duke of Zhou was the founder of the Lu state where Confucius was born, and one of a few ancient sages his heart admired. Only during his old age did Confucius find that he seldom communicated with Duke of Zhou in his dreamland.

Confucius’s dialogic relation with the other, Heaven in particular, culminates when he was singing in tears seven days before his death:

“Ah! The Taishan (Mountain) is crumbling down!
The pillar is falling down!
The philosopher is passing out!”

Although using a tragic and desperate tone, Confucius never fails to glorify his mission which he compares to the Grand Taishan Mountain, the symbol of the Chinese cultural heritage, and his personality which is compared to the straight pillars of a palace. And he seldom hesitates, especially in his old age, to eulogize the wisdom of a philosopher, which produces a great voice of self-evaluation of his life-long philosophical pursuit. His last recorded public utterance repeats the theme that only Heaven understands his ambition, his desire to be a benevolent administrator of the state, his joy in pursuing a successful career as a scholar, a teacher and an editor, his sorrow of facing the cruelty that no rulers
have confirmed his political claims, and his lament that “I am done for this life” (Ch.9.9). Heaven, as a dominant power over nature and humans in his imagination, seems to be both the source and the end, subject and object of his dialogic relations in his spiritual pilgrimage. This final dialogue with Heaven reconfirms the Confucian belief in the inseparability of humans from Heaven. We are thus on safe ground in presuming that in Confucius’s dialogized tragic consciousness only Heaven shares joys and sorrows with the philosopher, communicates with him, and promises a continuous dialogue with him.

Confucius has opened a dimension of communication for later scholars who long for such a dialogue when in depression. That is the reason that Li He, a poet of Tang Dynasty (618–907), sighs in his poem that “Heaven is also growing old if it shares feelings with the human beings.” The Chinese intellectuals after Confucius seldom give up their conversation with Heaven. From Heaven they get their belief confirmed, and to Heaven they exposed their emotional world and divine pursuit. In the meantime, Confucius’s self-composed elegy is also a response to voices from opponents and followers, officials and laymen, the “superior man” and “inferior man,” and it suggests that the end of his life would not prevent his voice from being heard for “hundreds of generations,” for his ideal, like the ritual system of the Zhou, is also characterized by its predictability and addressivity.

Now, let us focus on the topic of how silence as a rhetorical behavior, works in Confucius’s dialogized tragic consciousness. The orientation of his silence to “an other” is obvious and persistent. It is never passive, and can be regarded as a silenced voice, and it
is an active participant amidst a heteroglossia of voices striving to represent the phenomena of social disorders. As a teacher who first established a private school on a large scale in early China, Confucius took conversation as a major form of his pedagogy, but sometimes he remained silent to maintain a particular communication with his disciples, the rulers and his society. Once he told his disciples that “I am thinking of giving up speech.” Zigong asked, “If you did not speak, what would there be for us, your disciples, to transmit?” Confucius said, “What does Heaven ever say? Yet there are the four seasons going round and there are the hundred things coming into being. What does Heaven ever say?” (Ch.17.19) To begin with, Confucius’s silence is pessimistic by nature, and it originates from his conclusion that no one really understands him. Being a moral philosopher aiming at a rationalized social order, the restoration of the essential ritual system of the Zhou, Confucius is fully aware of the moral degradation in his time: “I have never seen people attracted by virtuous scholars as they are by beautiful women” (Ch. 9.18). Confucius seemed to realize that a philosopher had to remain silent if people around him turned their eye and ear to the issues of power, money and women only. It is often the case that Confucius would leave a state silently after making sure that the ruler there had no interest in Way,24 because his silence itself sent out a message that “There is no point in people taking counsel together who follow different ways” (Ch.15.40).

Confucius’s silenced voice is also marked by its interanimation with the voices from his disciples who, according to Confucius, tend to interpret his messages uncritically. When he asserted that the four seasons go around without voiced engagement from...
Heaven, Confucius actually voiced his dissatisfaction with the passive attitude of some disciples in their participation in the dialogue; and instead of terminating the dialogue, Confucius illuminated his disciples with the inference that they could still hear their master’s voiced opinions and “transmit” them to the generation to come if they really “understand ten things after being told about one thing” (Ch. 5.9). Thus, his silence, as an indirect criticism, opens a new avenue for exchanging ideas between teacher and students. And it works as a type of “hidden dialogue, in its augmented and anxious inaudibility, perseveres in the inaccessible depths of ourselves” (Jabes, 93). On some other occasions, Confucius’s silence also works in contempt of either the narrow-minded rulers or those who are not appropriate for normal direct dialogical relations.25 Confucius’s silence, a particular voice from the oppressed, serves, above all, as a sign of protest against the abusive use of speech, which he criticizes as “cunning words” (Ch. 1.3) or “a glibness of tongue” (Ch. 5.5), and which may possibly put a state at risk. So to speak, Confucius’s recourse to silence represents his sense of suffocation, his anxiety to make the self understood and his strong intention to distinguish the self from the other, particularly the voice of the “oppressing.” This practice of a silent participation helps to shape Confucius’s tragic sense by laying a focus on the reciprocal relations between the expressed and the audible, silence and utterance, self and other, and meaning and context, and enriches his art of communication.

Confucius’s tragic consciousness is reflected in his rhetorical contact with Taoist hermits too. And the dialogic relation between them presents a tragic image of Confucius
as an estranged social reformer who was not only kept away from the mainstream of society, the powerful and the rich, but was also distanced by the groups of Taoist hermits. While wandering in different states to advocate his claims, Confucius often had encounters with Taoist hermits, some of which are reflected in *The Analects*. After leaving Yin, Confucius returned to the state of Cai. By a field they met two secluded Taoist philosophers who made sarcastic comments on Confucius's mission to his disciple--Zilu, and persuaded him to stop his journey with Confucius: “Throughout the Empire men are all the same. Who is there for you to change places with? Moreover, for your own sake, should it not be better, instead of following a Gentleman who keeps running away from men, you followed one who runs away from the world altogether?” (Ch. 18.6) Confucius felt quite disappointed on hearing this and responded, “One cannot associate with birds and beasts. Am I not a member of this human race? Who, then, is there for me to associate with? While the Way is to be found in the Empire, I will not change places with him.” Aware of the fact that the hermit addressed him indirectly, Confucius attempted first to resist the temptation in his voice while clarifying his stance as an influential social reformer with human society as his object. What strikes us contemporary readers is not only Confucius’s dialogic perspective in its denial of the dominance claimed by "an other," the hermit, but also its insistence on a “double-voiced” (Self and Other) dialogue at two levels. While refusing to change his place with the hermit, Confucius, at one level, makes available the self to be defined by the social context, which requires an active participation in public life; and at another level, to be further defined by the hermit’s
voice. The result of this continuous interaction seems to suggest fresh dialogues rather than ending them, although with silence the hermit denied a direct conversation with Confucius.

*The Analects* records another dialogue of Confucius with an old hermit. Once, in the presence of Zilu, an old man criticized Confucius for being "unable to toil with his limbs or to tell one kind of grain from another" (Ch.18.7). Catching the implied criticism of his rhetorical activities, Confucius immediately identified the speaker to be an old hermit, and he encouraged Zilu to go on talking with him, only to find that the man disappeared. From the mouthpiece of Zilu, Confucius's response is expressed that "Not to enter public life is to ignore one's duty. Even the proper regulation of old and young cannot be set aside. How, then, can the duty between ruler and subject be set aside? This is to cause confusion in the most important of human relationships simply because one desires to keep unsullied one's character" (Ch. 18.7). It is clear that Confucius was anxious to further his discussion with hermits to justify his opinion from the perspective of the ethical relationship which was acknowledged to be the foundation of early Chinese society. Confucius believes that it is the gentleman’s highest responsibility to participate in public service, and to engage himself in a relation with the ruler, which contributes to social harmony. If one shuns a political life in order to keep his personal cultivation unaffected by social disorders, he virtually neglects the most essential moral relation that he is expected to establish, and simultaneously he misses an opportunity to obtain his life goal. To uphold his moral standard, Confucius took no notice of the hostile tone in the
hermit's voice. Instead, he was active in maintaining a possible line of communication with him. Confucius's rhetorical behavior seems to suggest that he benefitted from this kind of verbal relation. Then, what is the strong motive lurking behind his dialogical enthusiasm? We might discern a tragic orientation in Confucius's ideological structure in his alienated self, an inner voice echoing the hermit's interpretation of a philosopher's choice, to run away from society. It is not hard to see Confucius's tendency to sympathize with some Taoists' argument for their attitude toward social chaos. In such a difficult social context, Confucius, more than once expressed his preference for seclusion. He admonished his disciples to "Show yourself when the Way prevails in the Empire, but hide yourself when it does not" (Ch. 8.13), and "If the Way should fail to prevail, then I were to put to sea on a raft" (Ch. 5.7). It may be true that the above utterances are no more than temporary complaints or self-sarcasm when Confucius's political and career ambitions are frustrated. But they are undercurrents that occasionally surface along with Confucius's spiritual journey with the destination of being a Superior Man. These voices from an implicit other, his alienated self, do enhance his understanding of his life as a failure and a tragedy, especially in the later part of his life. Simultaneously, they moderate or restrain his tone in a dialogic relation with an explicit other, a voice from the hermits, or the voice from the social reality from which he distinguishes his own. Later scholars are able to outline a particular cultural tradition in Chinese history, Confucianism's exterior and Taoism's interior, to represent a painful and an unusual spiritual journey of a large number of Chinese intellectuals. This construction of character, however, may well be
traced back to the dialogic composition of Confucius's own personality, vividly reflected in his rhetorical activities.

III. Socrates: A Tragic Hero in His Defense, Exploration and Execution

Socrates's tragic consciousness, much similar to that of Confucius, is also embodied in various dialogic relations of his philosophical pursuit, of his verbal encounters and his emotional structure as a tragic hero. In his attempt to recapture the power of Socratic dialogue, Gadamer writes, "Dialectic consists not in trying to discover the weakness of what is said, but in bringing out its real strength. It is not the art of arguing that is able to make a strong case out of a weak one, but the art of thinking that is able to strengthen what is said by referring to the object" (330-31). Gadamer's hermeneutical reading has spotlighted an essential rhetorical aspect of the Platonic Socrates--to articulate his voice in its interaction with those of his interlocutors. This dialogic relationship has been further explored by Bakhtin when he observes Socrates's "new artistic-prose model for the novel" and "scientific thinking" expressed in dialogized tonal relations with his interlocutors and with his own rhetorical contexts. Once we turn our eye to such a particular rhetorical emphasis, Socrates’s tragic consciousness becomes more readable and explicable.

Socrates's tragic consciousness is basically represented in a sense of failure and frustration engendered from his verbal encounters throughout his life. In actuality, Socrates can hardly persuade his interlocutors, friends or foes, academic opponents or philosophical disciples, unfamiliar jurors or life-long associates, of his definition of virtue
(e.g., in *Euthyphro*, and *Republic*), true rhetoric (e.g., in *Gorgias*), epistemological identification (e.g., in *Apology*), or political beliefs (e.g., in *Crito* and *Phaedo*). He is forever a lonely traveler "on the journey to the place" where he claims to "be happy both in life and death" (*Gorgias*, 527). Almost every one of the Socratic dialogues helps to conjure up an image of a non-fatigued speaker, who is often aware of his own failure, embarrassment, disappointment and ill-treatment, but never stops in his pursuit of justice and virtue. He always moves as a "solitary reaper" with a hope for knowledge in the theoretical world while leaving behind him his pessimistic understanding of the transient nature of life and his personal tragedy to be felt by his interlocutors and readers. When we read the early Socratic dialogues, we begin immediately to experience a sense of incompleteness and dissatisfaction with an abrupt ending.

In the *Euthyphro*, the young interlocutor is induced by Socrates to define the concept of "holiness." However, Euthyphro's statement originating from a myth brings to Socrates bewilderment rather than enlightenment. When a further general definition is made by Euthyphro, Socrates is able to find a logical problem with it, and takes the opportunity to offer his own explanation which is questioned by Euthyphro for its vagueness as a new concept. The relation between holiness and the gods aroused an argument between the two participants. Socrates suggests a fresh start to continue his cross-examination, which is, unfortunately, denied by Euthyphro who becomes resentful at this circulating and non-ending pursuit. Socratic enthusiasm seems to be frustrated, and he feels Euthyphro "dashing me from that great hope which I entertained," though he is oriented in the direction of his topic: holiness is knowledge one must keep seeking.
In regard to his encounter with Sophists, the *Gorgias* represents Socrates's major efforts to launch a severe attack on the Sophistic rhetoric and to give an account of what rhetoric should be. Concerning the description of Gorgias’s concession to debate in the dialectical mode, the contemporary scholar, Richard Leo Enos, feels justified to write, “It is difficult to imagine that the real Gorgias, noted for his elegant prose, would have agreed to such a format. It is also ironic that as the dialogue develops it is Socrates who elaborates his statements in details and Gorgias is reduced to virtually passive silence” (Richard Leo Enos, 94). However, even in such a favorable rhetorical situation, Socrates still fails to convince Callicles of his argument that Sophistic rhetoric is wrong in its most vigorous and dangerous form. The readers are led to believe that Socrates could hardly finish his lengthy and passionate final speech without generosity on the part of Callicles. Besides, it is Callicles who foretells the ominous prospect of Socrates’ trial and death at the hands of an “utterly vicious and debased creature” (521). Full of confidence in his “true art of politics,” Socrates declares his refusal to carry on his “habitual discussion with a view to gratification,” which explains that his continuous conversation with the interlocutors may sometimes be interpreted as “an old wife’s tale” or “a myth.” And it is his dialogic imagination of his speech being understood that enables Socrates to value a dialogic existence of his unwilling and impatient interlocutors. Theoretically, Socrates believes in the happiness both Callicles and he himself can seek from their argument, but a tone of embarrassment and bitterness is often heard in each of their contacts where no
consensus is ever reached and each of the participants just distinguishes his own rhetorical claim from the other's. If Socrates's unsuccessful confrontation with Meletus in the *Apology* is understandable because the later symbolizes an overwhelmingly powerful anti-Socrates's force, Socrates's dialogic relation with his life-long friend Criton in prison produces more bewilderment among the readers, and even greater pains in both of the participants. Neither of the speakers can persuade the other, due to his identification with a different value system. The dialogue arrives at such a deadlock that Socrates, for the first time in his verbal activities, hints at stopping their conversing.\(^3\)\(^2\) Their tonal voices in the *Crito*, though distinct in being heard to each other, are eager to emphasize in their interaction a different space and time orientation, as the following illustrates:

![Diagram](image)

Figure 8: Socrates's and Criton's Dialogic Relations in the *Crito*
The diagram indicates the dialogic relations in Socrates's dialogue with Criton. The topic about a possible escape from the prison remains at the center of their communication, because it is the argument between the participants that keeps their exchange on. However, within this routine channel, Socrates never stops his communication in his imaginative domain with the Laws in the house of Hades that empower him with a sense of justice/injustice and lawfulness/unlawfulness, and induce him to value the spiritual life in the next world in an infinite future. Similarly, Criton, the representative of all Socrates's friends, establishes his persuasion on the personal freedom of Socrates in this world, the standards of value of his time for friendship, family relations, and earthly life, chiefly through his tonal relations with his friends, the followers of the Socratic doctrine. In addition, Socrates often indulges himself in a dialogue with the next world in space, and directs his attention to the future time. By contrast, Criton always sticks to the moral and personal concerns of this world and seeks a response from the present time. In such a heated, passionate but friendly verbal encounter, their arguments develop in the same way as two trains driving in opposite directions along two parallel tracks. They can never meet each other. The further they communicate, the farther they get separated from each other. What can still link them is friendship. For Socrates, the tragedy lies in despair that his greatest friend should try to persuade him to violate the laws that he has obeyed all his life. For Criton, the tragedy becomes inevitable that they will forever lose Socrates, "the bravest and also the wisest and the most just in our time" (Phaedo, 118a). This reading of the Crito helps to sharpen a sensitivity on the part of the audience to a tragic conflict.
activated by Socrates and Criton across time and space in the domains of philosophy and rhetoric.

Presumably, it is the *Apology* that demonstrates most fully the inseparability of Socrates’s tragic consciousness from his dialogic imagination. The dialogic relations in Socrates’s defense may be illustrated with the following diagram:

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 9: Tragic Consciousness through Dialogic Imagination**

Socrates starts his most explicit dialogic relation with Meletus. Meletus is as much a prosecution witness as a prosecutor, because what he says is both affidavit and charge. Athenian law enables Socrates to cross-examine him and to oblige him to answer his questions. Some critics like T. G. West believe that Socrates’s arguments in regard to the charges by Meletus are irrelevant and ridiculous. In my opinion, Socrates’s defense is relevant to the charges, and his way to undermine Meletus’s credibility is both reasonable.
and intelligible. Socrates's examination reveals that Meletus has taken a frivolous attitude toward serious matters. He has irresponsibly brought Socrates into court, and he has never cared about what he has professed to be seriously concerned with. As a result, Meletus fails to provide adequate evidence for his charges and his responses are either being at a complete loss for words or simply arousing the indignation on the side of the members of the jury. Meletus's victory over Socrates simply tells that social prejudice against Socrates has real power no matter what kind of mouthpiece it chooses. Certainly, it is Socrates's dialogic relations with the jurors that decide his fate. Standing in the seat of a defendant, Socrates is always aware of his contact with the jurors, though this communication is realized in a particular form: the jurors keep open their channels of communication with the defendant and prosecutor with the help of voice and gestures. However, Socrates faces two choices: to defend himself for the sake of his ideal, or to moderate his tone in accordance with the response from the jurors so as to secure an acquittal. Apparently, he chooses the former, though he does appeal to the jury at the beginning of his defense, confessing his ignorance of the language of court. To make known his ideal and mission, Socrates can hardly prevent it from happening that the delineation of his life-long pursuit of a divine cause infuriates a large number of jurors. Moreover, to secure the time and opportunity for his defense, Socrates never hesitates to blame those who respond to his speech with an uproar. The difficult rhetorical context filled with a hostile attitude to Socrates foreshadows his destiny, and it is inevitable that his dialogic relation with the jurors will end in a disastrous vote.
Another two of Socrates's dialogic relations are implicitly maintained with a wider audience excluding those present at the court, and also with his innerself. In fact, Socratic scholars have long been studying the motive of the Socratic type of defense. As R.E. Allen states, "Socrates' aim was to gain neither conviction nor acquittal, but to tell the whole truth in accordance with justice." This conclusion does tell part of the story, but it goes too far in denying that one of Socrates's motives is to be acquitted with the force of his oral discourse, which is admittedly secondary to his purpose of defending his philosophical life. What scholars like Allen overlook is that Socratic passion in producing his ideas also comes from his imaginary dialogic relations with his family, friends, disciples and also all the Athenians absent from the court, and more important, his innerself. My argument is based on the following observations: first, Socrates is well aware of the possibility that this might be the last chance for him to speak to his audience in public; second, Socrates's mentioning of his refusal to haul his wife and sons into the court reveals both his reluctance to appeal for pity in usual form and his desire for understanding from his family; third, Socrates is confident of the human potentiality for reaching absolute truth and of enjoying a reputation among those who understand his philosophical pursuit; finally, the dialogic relations portray Socrates as a new type of tragic hero who walks to the end of his life with love but without hatred, with passion but without indignation, with a sense of sacrifice but without anxiety over the peacefulness of his soul.

Socrates's consciousness as a tragic hero in the *Phaedo* culminates in his talk with Crito, Phaedo and other followers gathered in the cell on the day of his death:
“You will make your several journeys at some future time, but for myself, e’en now as a tragic hero might say, ‘destiny doth summon me’: and it’s just about time I made for the bath. It really seems better to take a bath before drinking the poison, and not to give the women the trouble of washing a dead body.” (114c-116c)

Socrates’s talk about “destiny” forms a contrast with his “divine god.” His rhetorical activities and philosophical pursuit are consistent with “divine god,” but are in odd relations with “destiny,” because to interpret human life in terms of destiny is to emphasize some unexpected or unfavorable aspect in the course of life. Destiny is often irresistible and inevitable, so when destiny “summons,” Socrates has to answer it, even if it is against his will. That Socrates hears the destiny’s summons also enhances his consciousness of the transiency of human life—life is short and is determined by trans-human existence. To admit the transient nature of life is apt to reflect a tragic understanding of life in this world, although a human individual may take death as a natural separation of soul from body. As a hero, Socrates faces death calmly and bravely, and he regards “drinking the poison” and “washing the dead body” as indispensable tasks given by destiny. His tonal relations are oriented from the present to the future when he is imagining the rough female laborers washing his dead body, and he shifts his topic from life-related ones to death-related ones (e.g., poison, and procedures to undergoing the penalty). He purportedly estranges himself from the present with a possible intention to calm his intellectual passion permeating his whole life, and also to extinguish gradually his desire for and anxiety over this earthly world. Socrates’s future-oriented speech is also addressed to his fellow-philosophers concerning their “several journeys at some future time.” Socrates
encourages them to set themselves free at the end of their journey “from imprisonment in those regions of earth” so that all those who “have purified themselves sufficiently by philosophy live thereafter together without bodies” (112b-114b), and owing to the immortality of soul they will be able to follow Socrates in the next world. Thus Socrates opens a new space of imagination for himself to continue a dialogue with his fellow philosophers.

Socrates’s death as a tragic event is characterized by its projection on the vision and hearing of the Others—his friends and the prison officer at his last moments. Socrates’s courage and somber-mindedness before his execution form a sharp contrast with the melancholy and sorrow of the others present. When he expressed his admiration for Socrates’s nobility during his long imprisonment, the prison officer burst into tears. He felt sorrowful for the departure of such a man of character. After Socrates’s tragedy was thus interpreted by a man who was accustomed in his daily work to numerous deaths, Socrates began to put an end to his life path. As soon as he drained the hemlock in one drought, all his friends there could no longer keep back a flood of tears. They either covered their faces or went out of the cell to cry. They felt sad for their “own calamity in losing such a friend,” but not for Socrates. Why not? Because they deemed it to be greatly respectful to Socrates not to misunderstand his attitude toward death, and because they felt convinced that for Socrates the departure of an immortal soul from its habitation in the body is nothing painful. But, Socrates’s last words are still open to our discussion: “Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius; please pay the debt, and don’t neglect it” (116d-
118). He still felt indebted to this world and he was obviously thinking of his unfulfilled responsibility before his departure. Socrates left behind himself the eternal joy he sought from his human communication, which is consistent with his uncertainty about the next world where only “God leads the way” (Criton, 53b-54e).

IV. Dialogue between Confucius’s and Socrates’s Tragic Consciousness

So far I have discussed about how Confucius’s and Socrates’s direct dialogic relations with the others, and their internal dialogues as responses to their rhetorical and cultural situations have reflected and developed their respective tragic consciousness. Now I attempt to make possible an intercultural dialogue between these two passionate speakers and truth-seekers so as to account for how such a mutually-illuminating encounter helps to describe the shaping of a dialogized tragic consciousness at the birth of Eastern as well as Western civilizations.

To begin with, both Confucius and Socrates as moral philosophers have to meet the dilemma in their own rhetorical situation: they take it as their life-long mission to advocate and defend their ideals (for Confucius, it is “Way”; and for Socrates, it is the “Final Truth”), but their thoughts are often misinterpreted or misrepresented either by those in power (in Confucius’s case) or by the majority (in Socrates’s case). Moreover, their voices are threatened with being silenced by death. Once Confucius had to pass through Song state in disguise, because his oral criticism of Heng Kui, a high-ranking official of that state, for his extravagance in making a grand stone coffin, had infuriated the officer who thus plotted to murder him on his way.37 Then, when Confucius went to Wei
state with his disciples, they were surrounded on their way by armed mobs of the Kuang state, and were almost killed (Sima Qian, 1919). Socrates's execution is an even more prominent example of how an individual voice is suffocated. The tragic experience of the two philosophers in the East and the West indicates that the ancient philosophers may often endanger their lives in order to get their ideal heard. What impresses the audience of their time and still of the present-day is Confucius's and Socrates's attitude toward the issue of death. To Confucius, the truth he seeks from the Way is more significant than life, so “I would not live in vain if I should die the day I’m told about the Way” (Ch.4.8).

Here Confucius points out that the value of his life lies in his continuous search for the truth about the harmonious social order, and he feels greatly satisfied once he reaches the truth. Confucian scholars have often neglected the dynamic word, Wen (文, to hear about or to be told about), in his confession which emphasizes an oral and dialogic relation with the Way rather than a written or monological approach to the truth. Besides, Confucius believes that one often has to fight for his ideal at the risk of his life. That is why he demonstrates the relations between life and death in accordance with the core of his thought Ren (benevolence):

“For Gentleman of purpose and men of benevolence while it is inconceivable that they should seek to stay alive at the expense of benevolence, it may happen that they have to accept death in order to have benevolence accomplished.” (Ch.15.9)

Here Confucius distinguished the “gentleman” from the “small man” by his moral practice --to always put his ideal of “benevolence” (love for others) before his own life. This Confucian idea was further developed by Mencius, and has become so deeply rooted in
Chinese society and other Eastern societies that numerous people have accepted it as their life principle and died for their political ideals without complaint or regret. This kind of tragic heroism is apparent in Socrates's defense in the *Apology*, too. Socrates is determined not to give up his divine mission of "conferring in private the greatest benefit on each citizen" (56c) even if he "is to die many times over." If he is deprived of the freedom to go on with his philosophical enquiry, his life would be reduced to an "unexamined life" that is "not worth living for a man" (38a). That is why Socrates, like the Homeric tragic hero, Achilles, has enough courage to "belittle danger and death" (27d). Confucius and Socrates, though in a similarly vulnerable and endangered position, have both gained the power for their philosophical inquiry, for they are among the first thinkers who get their tone rationalized and defined in their continuous encounter with other voices, sympathetic or hostile, in a cultural situation where human society is taking pains to seek a "self-knowledge" (Socrates), or the knowledge of "cultivating self" (Confucius) (Ch. 14.42).

The tragic consciousness is also reflected in their hesitation and perplexity when Confucius and Socrates were compelled to respond to their unfavorable situation and disastrous destiny. Different from tragic heroes in ancient mythology and literature, they are far more conscious of the inability of human beings in presenting a proper interpretation of a tragic experience, and they are far more eager to seek some self-consolation and self-transcendence in one way or another. In one of his interactions with the hermits, Confucius's pessimistic understanding of his political trips to different states is
expressed through Zilu who sadly murmured to himself, "As for putting the Way into practice, he (Confucius) knows all along that it is hopeless" (Ch. 18.7). The confession that they are actually trying something hopeless and impossible presents an adequate explanation for their constant setbacks and failures. Thus, here is Confucius's own comment:

"It is Destiny if the Way prevails; it is equally Destiny if the Way falls into disuse...." (Ch.14.36)

Confucius comes to the realization that either the accomplishment or the destruction of the Way is independent of the will of the human beings. He seems to suggest that Destiny (Ming, 明) determines the realization of the Way. Human beings are not expected to stand in defiance of Destiny, for it is irresistible and uncontrollable. This also accounts for the fact that Confucius once emphasized that the gentleman is in fear of Destiny (Ch. 16.8). So, when Confucius makes a self-evaluation that "at fifty I began to understand Decree of Heaven" (Ch. 2.4), it suggests that he knows how to behave in accordance with destiny rather than exerting any personal influence on an inevitable course of social development, though it never entails that one should go against Way if it is in discord with destiny. From this standpoint, Confucius enables himself to feel justified for what he has done for social reform, and his tragic experience is thus rationalized, for he is prepared for setbacks and failures in a philosopher's life, which are part of his destiny. It is not totally by coincidence that Socrates also turns to Destiny when his divine mission is frustrated and his life is doomed. In his spiritual world he hears that "the destiny summons me." His tonal relations with the divine god who has been with him ever since his boyhood now tell
him peacefully that it is the very time for him to put an end to his earthly sojourn. Without
worries and complaints, Socrates's wandering in a visionary world conjures up in our
mind a picture of an elderly philosopher who starts his journey to the next world, leaving
behind him all his worldly concerns.

If inquiring further, we may find that neither Confucius nor Socrates can satisfy
himself with a merely spiritual sustenance from Destiny. They go even further to find their
own "dreamland" when feeling tired of this world. Our re-reading of Confucian dialogues
helps to reveal his seemingly contradictory attitude toward Taoist hermits who value a life
of self-purification and secluded meditation away from a society of corruption and
disorder. Confucius, on the one hand, distinguished his own position as a social reformer
from that of hermits who do nothing for society. On the other hand, he ranks those
shunning society as the men of good quality (Xianzhe, 贤者) (Ch.14.37). And in the
meantime, he has made great efforts to exchange ideas with the hermits in order to
develop some mutual understanding between the two philosophical schools characterized
by Rushi (入世, active participation in worldly affairs) and Chushi (出世, standing
aloof from the earthly world). Actually, at the deep structure of his consciousness,
Confucius is now and then enticed to follow the hermit's way of life, though he dreams of
a space not only far away from society but also far away from the land—sailing aimlessly in
the infinite sea (Ch. 5.7). The dialogic imagination that possibly results from different
voices interacting with each other in his innerself helps to present a real image of
Confucius—a man wandering painfully in his spiritual world. So, the Confucian tradition
remains a mirror image of Chinese intellectuals who often find themselves laboring along their spiritual pilgrimage in a transition from a “yeller” (one who keeps advocating his political and philosophical claims in opposition to the existing social reality) to a “wanderer” (one who feels frustrated and tends to stand aloof from the society). Then, where does Socrates find a home for his soul? It is in the next world, where he should “find staying there a wonderful thing” (Apology, 41b) and where he will go on cross-examining people without being disturbed by “an unjust judgment.” The philosopher’s free association of his death with an immortal soul springing from a dead body and with the eternity of spiritual happiness does fill his dialogues of his last days with consolation and hope, though an awareness of an uncertainty about the unknown world sometimes shadows his dialogic imagination across space and time. Socrates is, after all, a real man of learning who establishes his philosophical understanding upon his practice of cross-examination. Like Confucius, he does not have to hide his limitation in extending his knowledge to the understanding of an unfamiliar and unexamined world. And he seems only to care about whether such a dialogic imagination can secure him a spiritual sustenance and satisfy his ambition.

Unlike that of the traditional type of tragic heroes, Confucius’s and Socrates’s tragic consciousness does not result from their “wrong judgment” (Aristotle), and it has never been accompanied with regret or self-criticism. As wisdom-lovers, their full commitment to learning of human knowledge and to dialogic rhetorical activities often overwhelmed a tragic consciousness of social injustice and personal unfulfillment. It is
because of their optimistic attitude about life that later scholars often portray them as "untragic" or "joyful" thinkers. However, comedy and tragedy are, as Nietzsche observes, often two sides of the same story. Tragic and untragic voices may often be mutually defined in the consciousness structure of the Self, which is always responsive to and interactive with the Otherness of a world characterized by its diversity and heteroglossia. Confucius once made some comments on three tragic figures in the Yin dynasty (1700-1100 B.C.): The Viscount Wei was forced to leave King Zhou (one of the most notorious tyrants in early Chinese history), the Viscount Ji was debased to be a slave (because of his criticism of tyranny) and Bi Gan (uncle of King Zhou and also an high-ranking official) was killed for remonstrating with King Zhou. They were three benevolent men in the Yin dynasty (Ch. 18.1). While expressing his admiration for these tragic heroes, Confucius has no intention of following their suit, because he believes that "Superior Man" ( 子 ) should not serve the state or the country where the Way fails to prevail. That is the reason Mencius calls Confucius "sage of the time," implying that Confucius is keen on the diversity of the Otherness and takes into his consideration the proper time, place and situation when he strives for his ideal of the Way. Even in the most miserable situation, Confucius never loses his interest in the study of poems, music and rites. Once he offered a self-portrait as "a man who forgets to eat when he tries to solve a problem that has been driving him to distraction, who is so full of joy that he forgets his worries and who does not notice the onset of old age" (Ch. 7.19). This portrait best describes how Confucius's
optimistic and comic consciousness enables him to “forget about” his tragic experience when he is indulging in his search for knowledge.

A similar event happened in Socrates’s consciousness structure. Because of Socrates’s attempt to make existence appear comprehensible and thus justified, Nietzsche has discovered in Socrates an essential conflict between an optimistic element and a pessimistic element, and between passion and knowledge, and eventually a victory of “theoretical man” over the “tragic world view.” Nietzsche feels justified in regarding Socrates’s rationalism as a form of cowardice before a reality that is actually incomprehensible. Nietzsche’s attack seems to have oversimplified Socrates’s far more complicated perspective of tragic and comic consciousness. Socrates’s rationalized passion had always prepared him for his continuous dialogic relations with a world that is theoretically comprehensible and interpretable to him. However, Socrates never puts an end to a tragic view of existence which has already been demonstrated in his uncertainty about the difference between life and death, body and soul, and this world and next world. His unclosed eyes and mouth after the execution are symbolic of a desire to cast an eye into a new world of knowledge and to start another dialogue of philosophical inquiry.

Both Confucius and Socrates opened an epoch of rationalism in their own cultural contexts. And the structure of their tragic consciousness becomes a dynamic part of such a rationalized understanding of the world. Surprisingly interesting to the modern mind, their tragic consciousness still remains dialogic with our society. When Confucius was ruthlessly criticized for his alleged sympathy for the restoration of a feudalist slavery system and for his diminishing of the historic function of the people at lower social levels
during Mao Zedong’s Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in China, could we not experience a refreshed tragic consciousness for such an ideological system that has undergone its ups and downs for two thousand and five hundred years? When the re-reading of Socratic dialogues repeatedly dismantles the “authority” and “dominance” of Socrates in the fields of philosophy, rhetoric and literature, could we not hear Socrates’s own open-ended defense of such questioning at work?

Notes

1. Georgia Warnke made such a comment in Gadamer, Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason. 100.

2. See Bakhtin’s The Dialogic Imagination. 128.

3. Bialostosky insists that Gadamer’s category is primarily dialectical and monological though it could be developed to entail a dialogic conversation. My understanding is that Gadamer’s category could become monological only when dominance is achieved in an otherwise dialogic interaction of different discourses. Refer to Bialostosky’s “Dialogic, Pragmatic, and Hermeneutic Conversation: Bakhtin, Rorty and Gadamer.”

4. In her discussion about the “pathos” in Chinese rhetoric, Mary M. Garrett argues that Confucius emphasized the hypocrisy and deceit entailed in an “instrumental” approach which advised a speaker how to “analyze the audience’s psychology and then tailor his appeals to whatever happened to be the audience’s values, desires, and feelings.” See Garrett’s “Pathos Reconsidered from the Perspective of Classical Chinese Rhetorical Theories.”

5. Youhuan yishi has become a deeply-rooted cultural tradition among Chinese intellectuals. This concept is defined in Xu Fuguan’s Zhongguo sixiangshilunji (Essays on the History of Chinese Thought).

6. Qu Yuan (340-278 B.C.) was a great poet and civil official of the Warring States period, and also a tragic hero who drowned himself in the river as a protest against social corruption and national betrayal on the 5th day of the 5th month by the Chinese lunar calender. The day has since then become the Dragon Boat Festival in memory of
Qu yuan. During the festival, people row dragon boats and throw dumplings wrapped in reeds into the river to feed fish lest Qu Yuan’s remains be eaten.

7. Aristotle defines tragedy as a form of narration which incorporates “incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish the catharsis of such emotions.” See Aristotle’s Poetics.

8. I agree with Thomas Lewis that Socrates tries to claim credit for not using the appeal for pity when he implicitly turns to the appeal, though I tend to reject Lewis’s labeling of this practice as an art of deception. See Lewis’s “Identifying Rhetoric in the Apology.”

9. According to my statistical study, these two words are used for more than thirty times in The Analects.

10. Yi. Shuogua, divides the Way into the Way of Humans (人道), the Way of Heaven (天道) and the Way of Earth (地道).

11. See Fan Zhongyan’s essay “Yueyanglou Ji” in Fan Wenzheng Gong Ji.

12. “Benevolence” (仁) in Confucius’s doctrine is a primary quality for a gentleman to acquire. So “a man of benevolence” (仁人) is equal to “a gentleman” (君子).

13. “The Zhou” is elliptical for the Zhou dynasty. Here it refers to the Western Zhou. (1100-771 B.C.)


15. According to the rites of the Western Zhou, only the King can enjoy performance on such a scale. Dukes are allowed to have a performance by forty eight dancers, and barons thirty two dancers. Ji is a baron, and his violation of the ritual system poses a challenge to the authority of King.

16. This is again a violation of the rites because only the King is entitled to perform the sacrifice to Mount Tai.

17. My own translation. Mount Tai is a grand mountain in northern China and was symbolic of Heaven. Lin Fang was a scholar of Confucius’s time who once consulted Confucius about the rites.

18. Tomb figures are earthen, wooden or pottery models of human figures buried with the dead in ancient times.
19. *Mencius. Lianghuiwang Shang* records Confucius's sharp criticism of such a cruel practice of burial: “Could those who initiated the practice of burying the dead with human figures have descendants?” Confucius implied that those who started such a burying practice should be punished by Heaven. “No descendants” was regarded in ancient times as the most severe punishment for evil doing.

20. Here D.C. Lau’s translation of “下學而上達” is a little vague in meaning. Huang Kang offers his interpretation in *Lunyu Yishu* that “下學” refers to learning the essence of human life while “上達” refers to the understanding of the destiny determined by Heaven. Since human beings have their ups and downs, one should not complain about others; since destiny entails both fortune and misfortune, one should not complain about Heaven. The contemporary scholar Yang Buojun attempts to interpret “下學” to be the learning of common sense, and “上達” to be the understanding of some profound truth.


22. Li He (790–816) is a well-known poet of the Tang Dynasty (618–907).

23. Bakhtin’s concept of addressivity insists that to understand existence as addressed to Self does not mean that Self is a passive receptacle, but instead, that Self constantly responds to utterances from the different worlds it passes through.

24. See Ch. 15.1. of *The Analects*. Duke Ling of Wei state asked Confucius about military matters. Being aware of Duke Ling’s indifference to the ritual system, Confucius left Wei the following day silently.

25. Mencius, in talking about Confucius’s teaching activities, emphasizes that there are different methods in teaching. One of them is to teach by refusing to teach. See *Mencius. Lilou*.

26. Here the original phrase *Wuran* (無然) is used to describe Confucius’s tone and facial expression on hearing the argument of the hermit. According to *Shuowen Jiezi* (Simple Explanation of Chinese Characters, 121 A.D.), “Wuran” means the facial expression of feeling lost and embarrassed. Confucius was stricken with a sense of tragedy because the hermits, a group of learned philosophers he had respect for, told some truth about his dilemma of constantly “running away from the rulers who turn a deaf ear to his Way.”

27. These comments are made in the name of Zilu. Actually the similar ideas are found elsewhere in Confucius’s sayings (e.g., in Ch. 9.16). So I think that they are either
directly produced by Confucius or are expressed through the mouthpiece of Zilu.

28. See Chen Yinke’s “Tao Yuanming zhi sixiang yu qingtan zhi guanxi” (The Relations between Tao Yuanming’s Thought and “Pure Talk”), in Jinmingguan congcao chubian (Chen’s Essays, First Series). 205.

29. See Bakhtin’s Epic and Novel. 24.

30. See Euthyphro in The Last Days of Socrates. I want to emphasize the tone of disappointment in the last paragraph of the dialogue, though traditional interpretation may insist on its ironic implication.

31. See Richard Leo Enos’s Greek Rhetoric before Aristotle. 94.

32. See Crito in Great Dialogues of Plato. 118. In regard to his attitude toward death, Socrates said to Criton, “As far as I can see, you may be sure that whatever you may say contrary to this, you will say in vain” (54E). Obviously, Socrates here intended to put an end to their dialogue.

33. West insists in his Plato’s Apology of Socrates (1979) that the examination of Meletus is really a comic competition between Socrates and Aristophanes, and he presupposes that Socrates’s arguments are simply ridiculous.

34. I believe that Plato would not have liked to describe the response of jurors, if there was any, in detail for the purpose of always keeping Socrates in the center of the court scene.

35. R.E. Allen maintains in Socrates and Legal Obligation that the Apology is not a defense, and a similar view is expressed by F. Cornford in his “The Athenian Philosophical Schools, I: The Philosophy of Socrates.”

36. Many scholars have accepted Socrates’s refusal to appeal for pity at its face value. Thomas Lewis offers a different reading in his essay “Identifying Rhetoric in the Apology: Does Socrates Use the Appeal for Pity?” He argues that Socrates’s refusal is consistent with his choice of words from Homer “To quote the very words of Homer, even I am not sprung from an oak or form a rock,” and he is reminding the jurors that he, like Odysseus, also has relatives. Actually he is disguising his appeal for pity so that he can both employ the appeal and claim credit for not employing the appeal. Lewis’s argument sounds convincing. But he has neglected how Socrates keeps his dialogic relations with his relatives by the explanation of his disavowal of the appeal for pity. Socrates gets along well with his wife and cares about the moral behaviour of his sons. His public refusal to turn to the appeal also sends the message to his
family that he loves them and has no intention to bring shame on them by hauling a
tearful family before the public.

37. See Li Ji. Tang Gong Shan in Li Ji Zhu Shu, Vol.8, Sibu Beiyao. Ed. Chen Degang. It is recorded in Li Ji that on seeing Heng Kui's men spending three years preparing a luxurious coffin for his future use Confucius commented that “His dead body would be better decaying as fast as possible if he has to be so extravagant in making such a coffin.”

38. My own translation.

39. See Mencius. Gaozi shang. Mencius (372-289 B.C.) believed that one should accomplish righteousness at the sacrifice of his life if he has to make a choice between the two. In the past two thousand and five hundred years, many Chinese sacrificed their lives for their own political ideals. It is also the case in the contemporary history of China. Both Mao Zedong, the Communist leader, and Jiang Jieshi, the Nationalist leader, regarded their heroes who died during the Anti-Japanese War and China’s Civil War as “gentlemen of purpose and men of benevolence” ( 至 國 慈 人 ).

40. Confucius’s concept of Destiny (Ming, 明 ) is not always consistent in The Analects. He seems aware that it is beyond his knowledge to give a definition to Destiny. This issue will be further discussed in Chapter Four.

41. The most learned and famous contemporary Chinese writer Lu Xun (1881-1936) takes a negative view of Confucianism, but his vivid description of the painful experience of Chinese intellectuals as first “yellers”—those who call for radical social reforms in China, and then “wanderers”—those who feel hopeless for themselves and for Chinese society, often reminds us of a long cultural tradition originating from the Confucian mode of tragic consciousness.

42. When Socrates closes his defense on trial, he demonstrates an ambivalent attitude toward a world of death by addressing his audience “... I to die, and you to live; but which of us goes to a better thing is unknown to all but God” (Apology, 41a).

43. My own translation. Bi Gan is one of the greatest tragic heroes in the Chinese history. As a punishment, his heart was cut out because King Zhou wanted to prove the saying that there are seven holes in a sage’s heart.

44. See Mencius. Wangzhang Xia.
Chapter Four

The Use of Irony in Confucian and Socratic Dialogues

Irony is a traditional and challenging topic of study, and a cross-cultural study of irony is an even more complicated task for the students of rhetoric, for rhetorical criticism has yet to search for an explanation of all that we call ironical in discourses that produce particular cultural implications. Chapter Four will compare the irony in Confucius’s and Socrates’s dialogues, and explore how their irony, as a dynamic rhetorical method, helps to facilitate a dialogic imagination by representing an understanding of the confluence of two or more viewpoints potentially working in their discourse of philosophical exploration and in their verbal communication with the society. My initial purpose of this chapter is to trace the major development in the concept of irony. Then I will investigate how irony functions as a marked rhetorical element in Confucian and Socratic dialogues in the second and third sections. Finally, I attempt to make a comparative study and indicate how a dialogic reading of Confucius’s and Socrates’s irony may produce something of rhetorical significance and broaden our vision of their philosophical inquiry.
I. A Brief Review

The word “irony” originates from the Greek word *eirêneia* that referred to the underdog who, both clever and weak, often defeated the stupid and arrogant *alazon* in Greek comedy. The rhetorical image of irony (Socratic irony) was created in the Platonic Socrates’s speech and dialogue to represent a noble-intentioned speaker who seeks truth with his interlocutors while denying any moral or intellectual virtues of his own. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle defines irony as “the mockery of oneself”: “the jests” of the man which are practiced “at his own expense: the buffoon excites laughter at others” (1419b7). Cicero presents irony as the “wholly admirable urbane pretense of Socrates” (1.30.108). Quintilian’s formula of irony seems to have stood the test of time. He regards irony as a trope “in which something contrary to what is said is to be understood” (9.22.44). Until the mid-eighteenth century people could still find a similar definition of irony in Dr. Johnson’s monumental dictionary: the “mode of speech in which the meaning is contrary to the words” (1755). This definition has passed intact down to our time. Here is the entry on irony in the *Webster’s Dictionary of English Language* (1985): “Irony is the use of words to express something other than, and especially that opposite of, (their) literal meaning.”

Today the concept of irony has been further classified into Classical Irony, Romantic Irony, Tragic Irony, Cosmic Irony, Dramatic Irony and Poetic Irony, although the major theoretical development may be better traced through the contributions by the prominent ironologists Friedrich Schlegel, Connop Thirlwall, Donald Muecke, Paul de
Man, Wayne C. Booth, David S. Kaufer, and Richard Rorty. The German scholar, Schlegel, believes that irony is a form of paradox, and he sees irony as the "recognition of the fact that the world in its essence is paradoxical and that an ambivalent attitude alone can grasp its contradictory totality." An ironic performance, according to Schlegel, suggests that "everything should be playful and serious, guilelessly open and deeply hidden." Schlegel’s notion of irony develops a consciousness of literary modernity because of his understanding of the relationships of illusion and reality, self and world in terms of artistic playfulness.

The contribution of another German scholar, Thirwall, lies in his concept of a "dialectical irony," which, different from verbal or rhetorical irony, emphasizes that irony may exist without an ironist, and may function in an attitude of the observer or in a situation that leads to an ironic observation by the reader (483-537). Muecke, in response to the German Romanticism of the eighteenth century, classifies two types of irony, verbal and situational (232-33). Verbal irony is created by an ironist intentionally while situational irony reflects the concept that life itself is fundamentally ironic, making all of us victims of an impossible situation. Accordingly, Muecke’s analysis of verbal irony points to the techniques of the ironist, but with situational irony the focus of his analysis is on the observer’s ironic sense and attitude.

Paul de Man’s rhetorical reading of irony is based on the consideration that reading arises from the rhetorical character of any text: its possibility of producing a figurative as well as a literal meaning. de Man describes irony as a discrepancy between
sign and meaning, and an absence of coherence among the components of a discourse, and an inability to escape from a situation that has become intolerable.

Scholars like Booth and Kaufer have further enhanced the concept of irony as a rhetorical phenomenon. In his *A Rhetoric of Irony*, Booth argues that to judge a text to be ironic or not depends on the authorial intention, and the reader’s ironic interpretation of a text becomes possible only when the author produces such a textual feature as to induce an ironic reading. Booth seems to define a causal relation between author and reader, text and reading in his attempt to elevate verbal irony over situational irony (33-44).

Richard Rorty’s theory suggests how literature, such as in works by Orwell and Nabokov, succeeds in awakening the readers to the humiliation, prejudice and cruelty of certain social practices and individual attitudes. This ironic perspective on the human condition is achieved “not by inquiry, but by imagination, an imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers” (xvi). Rorty’s interpretation of the power of the literary irony comes from his understanding of the literary imagination which helps readers to “form a beautiful mosaic” of rich and diverse classical texts and to present access to “commonly accepted general moral principles” (81).

The major part of modern theories of irony pays attention to its rhetorical function in reconstructing the reader’s consciousness of the authorial intention in his local and finite situation, although the theorists present diverse pictures of such a process of reconstruction. Rorty’s stress on “an imaginative ability” suggests to me the possibility of a dialogic reading, in Bakhtin’s sense, of the ironic implications of Confucius’s and
Socrates's dialogues. Dialogism emphasizes that any utterance is a link in a very
complexly organized chain of other utterances, namely, each utterance, demarcated by its
articulating voice, contributes to the ongoing, never ending dialogue, and the author's
voice of irony not only interacts with his own voice elsewhere in his texts, but also with
the situation and the audience (in his own time and in our time). The Bakhtinian reading
may prove that "irony" can shed light on the plurality of its functions and implications. As
Linda Hutcheon observes, "Under that deceptively comprehensive label (of irony) is
included a complex and extensive range of tones, intentions, and effects" (44). With such
a dialogic reading, we are able to discuss how the use of irony in Confucius's and
Socrates's dialogues demonstrates the plurality of their philosophical exploration and
enables a cross-cultural communication.

Modern scholarship, however, so far has produced only a few critical studies on
Confucius's ironical representation. Confucius's irony was first observed by the Chinese
scholar, Lin Yutang, in the 1930s, and was studied by the Norwegian critic, Christoph
Harbsmeier, in the 1990s. Both of the critics have portrayed Confucius as an emotional,
informal and humorous man, a man capable of subtle irony, though they never touch upon
the aspect of irony as a dynamic rhetorical method in his dialogue. In contrast, Socrates,
as "a lifelong ironist" ( Symposium, 216e4), has been studied in numerous works for his
invention of irony, which makes it possible for us to use Socrates as a mirror image to
present a clearer picture of Confucius's irony.
My comparative study will reveal the similarities between Confucius's and Socrates's irony in three aspects. First, irony is expressed in their disavowal of a claim to knowledge versus their claim to wisdom/ability in seeking and acquiring knowledge. Confucius admits more than once that he is not born with knowledge and he possessed no knowledge. But his dialogues present him as different from others in that he is curious about everything, keen on learning and knows how to acquire knowledge and how to enlighten others. Such an ironical presentation of Confucius's epistemology actually accounts for the process of knowledge-making from different angles. Similarly, the Socratic sense of wisdom is well attested in the *Apology*. The principal lesson of the oracle story for Socrates is that he proves to be the wisest of men, because only he realizes the extent of his own ignorance. Such an ironical confession of ignorance and wisdom is also common in other Socratic dialogues like the *Gorgias*, which may be interpreted from the perspective of its dialectical spirit and ironic implications: true knowledge lies in the realization of one's ignorance, and ignorance does not necessarily mean the lack of wisdom.

Second, both Confucius and Socrates confess their piety and acceptance of the supernatural, but ironically they avoid justifying the existence of gods, which seems in discord with their continuous search for knowledge. In regard to the topic of religion, Confucius states that “the gentleman is in awe of the Decree of Heaven” (Ch. 16.8), which assumes, though not in a clear picture, a theoretical existence of “the Decree of Heaven” (天命) that exerts much influence on the fortune of individuals. And in the meantime, he follows all regular sacrifices to gods and ancestors. But he himself, as a knowledge-seeker,
never attempts any explanation of the existence of gods, and his understanding of the ritual practice of sacrificing to gods seems to suggest that the existence of gods is subject to human consciousness in terms of time and situation (Ch. 3.12). This stance may also be suggested by the evidence that he often refused to discuss gods with his disciples, and on certain occasions he even doubted the possibility of a safe and healthy life through pious blessing (Ch. 12.5). By the same token, Socrates never hesitates to respond to Melletus’s charge of impiety against him in the *Apology*. However, his claim that the gods’ inspiration and sermons reach him through extra-rational channels—dreams or a personal “divine sign” (e.g., in *Phaedo*, *Ion*, and *Euthyphro*)—can hardly prove that he is not a “god-maker” himself. Eventually, Confucius and Socrates, as practitioners of their moral philosophy, display some proto-scientific attitude in getting true knowledge of their world, and general skepticism of those finalized presentations of the supernatural, which form an intrinsic irony in their religious attitude.

Third, there is also irony in the political theory of both philosophers’ works. Confucius and Socrates often appear to be the opponents or enemies of democracy, but their political and rhetorical activities might contribute to modern democracy. Confucius’s lifelong efforts to restore the *Zhou Li* (the ritual system of the Western Zhou dynasty) result essentially from a motivation to reconstruct and consolidate a feudal autocratic administration, which has affected the development of Chinese society for two thousand years. Yet, Confucius’s rhetorical claims and activities are still intriguing to the practice of Chinese and East Asian intellectuals striving for political and academic democracy. In
Socrates’s case, the irony lies in the fact that Socrates stands against Athenian democracy at the expense of his reputation (of being labeled as a people-hater) and eventually his life, but his philosophical exploration and dialogical activities convincingly suggest some essential elements which helped to shape the Western conception of democracy.

The above general survey of irony in Confucius’s and Socrates’s dialogues is intended to present the basis for a cross-cultural study between the two ancient philosophers. Through the application of Bahktin’s concept of dialogism, we are able to perceive their irony as a discursive practice that registers ideological oppositions represented within the text and also in the process of negotiation between the listener/reader and the text. Besides, irony in their dialogical rhetoric determined by the relation of “two voices” sometimes serves to decode the text by revealing its authorial voice, a voice hidden behind the narrator’s voice. The significance of a comparative study may also be achieved when it reveals that one of the results of irony in Confucius and Socrates is to oppose a meaning that claims its own completion.

II. The Confucian Irony in Dialogue

Confucian use of irony is both a rhetorical strategy and a philosophical presentation. It is generally characterized by seemingly paradoxical utterances over some epistemological issues (e.g., knowledge, belief, state administration, etc.) without explicit authorial intention, namely, Confucius often does not sound like an ironist. To gain the power to recognize the Confucian irony in his dialogue, one has to, in the first place, realize that Confucius’s emphasis on sincerity and conscientiousness in one’s rhetorical
activities often directs the reader/listener’s attention to the coherence (or the golden thread) in his exploration rather than to the ironical implication hidden in his discourse. This partly accounts for the Karl Kao’s observation: “Sarcasm or irony has never been prominent in the Chinese tradition. When criticism is called for, it is the fēng (風) mode, or ‘indirect criticism’, that is normally preferred, for it avoids affronting the addressee.”

More importantly, the Confucian mode of irony, as a dialogic dynamic of his text, has to be interpreted in the process of negotiation between the voices in different rhetorical situations, between the narrator and speaker, and between Confucius and the readers of our time.

Let us first explore the irony expressed in his utterance concerning the topic of knowledge. As an inquirer of moral philosophy, Confucius realized the extent of his own ignorance. Such a confession of ignorance is reflected in two forms: the disclaiming of knowledge, and the disavowal of being born with knowledge. The latter displays a more sophisticated rhetorical strategy and is worth more attention from modern readers. Once Confucius told his disciples, “Do I possess knowledge? No, I do not. A rustic put a question to me and my mind was a complete blank. I kept hammering at the two sides of the question until I got everything out of it” (Ch. 9.8). While denying his possession of knowledge, Confucius here implies that he knows how to attain knowledge. Moreover, this disclaimer is further elaborated in his discussion about how human beings become knowledgeable:
Those who are born with knowledge are the highest. Next come those who attain knowledge through study. Next again come those who turn to study after having been vexed by difficulties. The common people, in so far as they make no effort to study even after having been vexed by difficulties, are the lowest (Ch. 16.9).

Here, with regard to the relation between human beings and knowledge, Confucius classifies people into four groups: those born with knowledge; those gaining knowledge through learning; those seeking knowledge when vexed with ignorance; and those seeking no knowledge in spite of their ignorance. What confuses modern readers is Confucius's description of the first group of people without further articulation. A question is naturally raised, "Who are those born with knowledge?" From his own confession, it is clear that Confucius himself does not belong to this group of people, because he admits, "I was not born with knowledge, being fond of antiquity, I am quick to seek it" (Ch. 7.20). Neither does Confucius mention that he has ever known anyone of this group personally. He tends to identify this group of people with the "sages" whom he once admitted that he would not be able to meet.

Obviously, Confucius's distinction of such an entity in his conversations about knowledge reflects the "contradictory totality" (Schlegel) of knowledge. As always expressed in his pragmatic statements, Confucius shows contempt at the tendency to draw a conclusion without careful thinking (e.g., his criticism of Zilu in Ch. 13.3), and he emphasizes, "To say you know when you know, and to say you do not when you do not, that is knowledge" (Ch. 2.17). Inferring from this statement, we are led to think that the Confucian irony in presenting those who "are born with knowledge" with those (including
himself) who are born without may express his true understanding of knowledge. And it can be used to serve his seemingly discursive and unsystematic exploration of a process of knowledge acquisition for the following reasons. First, the Confucian rhetoric of knowledge suggests a dialogic understanding of a topic, namely, it encourages an open-ended dialogue and denies a completion of a discussion. With a concept of attaining knowledge through learning in his mind, Confucius first assumes the possibility of making oneself knowledgeable without purposeful learning, especially the learning from others. Although not evidenced with any historical record or personal experience, Confucius's abstract confirmation of such sage-like knowledgeability helps to carry out the imagination of learners about the superiority of human cognitive ability, and establishes an idealized persona that illuminates the hearts of those who could not always follow Confucius so as to cultivate themselves morally or intellectually through learning. Furthermore, this idealized persona may be employed to help his disciples realize their own limitation—they, like their master/teacher, have to attain knowledge through hard learning of six arts: rites, music, archery, chariot-riding, reading and mathematics, because they are not born with knowledge.

In addition, the purpose of Confucius's classification of four groups in regard to their relation to knowledge is also to lay a foundation for his continuous exploration of the source of human knowledge. If the first group can not be actualized, and the third and fourth groups are not desirable to follow, the only way for people to become learned is
through the practice of learning. Therefore, Confucius feels justified to further his
dialogues on the ways of learning.

A careful examination of his discussions can provide at least three basic ways to
seek knowledge: to begin with, Confucius regards the ancient literature as the major
source of one's knowledge. *Shiji Huaji lizhuan* (The Historical Records) (《史记·滑稽
列傳》) recorded Confucius’s brief account of why he chooses and edits six ancient books
as textbooks: *Li* (Rites) may regulate one’s behavior, *Yue* (Music) develop one’s sense of
harmony; *Shangshu* (Collections of Ancient Essays) explain historical events; *Shi* (Poetry)
express poets’ ambition; *Yi* (The Book of Change) deify things and *Chunqiu* (Spring and
Autumn) teach righteousness. And this account is consistent with the Confucian
comments in *The Analects* (i.e., Ch. 7.17, 7.18, 13.22).

Another way to gain knowledge, according to Confucius, is to learn from others.
Confucius told his disciples, “Even when walking in the company of two other men, I am
bound to be able to learn from them. The good points of the one I copy; the bad points of
the other I correct in myself” (Ch. 7.22).¹⁰ This statement reveals a simple but often
neglected truth: anyone else could be your teacher so long as you are aware of your
ignorance and ready to learn. What distinguishes Confucius’s opinion is its dialogic nature
that signifies the active response of the learner to his companions. Thus, learning from
others is interpreted to be a critical process in which a learner copies the Other into the
Self, while perfecting the Self by deconstructing the unacceptable or “bad” concepts of the
Other (Ch. 7.22).
The third way to seek knowledge is through self-practice. In his dialogue with Zigong, Confucius recalled that he was of a “humble station when young” and that is why he was “skilled in many menial things” (Ch. 9.6). Confucius’ colorful life experience enabled him to have a great exposure to both book knowledge and social knowledge. He was engaged in physical labor at an early age. Then he was put in charge of a granary by Baron Ji, and of cattle and sheep by others. Later he served as a police commissar for several years. For about fourteen years, he traveled in different states advocating his moral philosophy, making investigations and running continuously a private school. Social practice made him skilled in so many things, in the fields of agricultural production, state governance, military strategy and educational administration. He is certainly the greatest practitioner of social reforms in early China.

From the above discussion, we come to realize that Confucius’s attention falls on knowledge through learning. Then, what is the implication of his ironical or paradoxical juxtaposition of different types of knowledge acquisition—knowledge gained after the realization of one’s ignorance, knowledge sought through a process of learning, and knowledge that is innate? I tend to believe that Confucius’s irony here is only a verbal and dialogical consequence of his attempt to merge the finite and infinite into acceptable metaphors of learning practice. To Confucius, knowledge is an infinite entity, and learning is an infinite process, but the pleasure of the learner makes it finite, and his assumption of human potentiality makes it reachable; ignorance (or in Confucius’s words, “not knowing,” 不知 ) becomes wisdom once you admit it; but knowledge/wisdom without loving learning makes one dissolute and unrestrained. Therefore, Confucius’ knowledge
(知) and ignorance (不知), though seemingly opposed to each other, are appropriated in an ironical structure and are interpreted as fluidity in their relation to each other, which accounts for his understanding of knowledge as a process-centered concept.

Confucius's irony is also expressed in his acceptance of the supernatural and his refusal to affirm the existence of gods and spirits of ancestors. It is generally believed that Confucius is "neither theistic nor atheistic." Actually, his dialogues suggest that he is both theistic and atheistic, because his moral philosophy gains its credibility from the established religious belief, but his scientific consciousness prevents him from a blind identification with the theological tradition. This ambivalent attitude results in his ironical representation of the supernatural. Here, I do not attempt to explore such a Confucian irony from the perspective of theology. Instead, I hope to articulate how his rhetorical strategy animated by a dialogic imagination helps to appropriate and rationalize his attitudes toward spiritual matters.

Although he never claims a positive knowledge of gods and spirits, Confucius admits in public the existence of the supernatural. Such an admission is reflected in two aspects of Confucian dialogue. One is Confucius's piety in sacrificial ceremony. The Analects records Yao's prayer to “God” (上帝) that vividly indicates the pious attitude of the ancient kings as well as Confucius and his disciples. Personally, Confucius also believes in the effectiveness and protection of the prayer. Once, when he was seriously ill, his disciple, Zilu, asked permission to offer a prayer, and he also justified his suggestion with a formal prayer. Confucius responded, “I have long been offering my
This dialogue seems to imply that Confucius followed the conventional religious ceremony faithfully to ask gods for blessings, though he began to doubt whether or not the gods could help him get rid of illness. As to the required procedures in sacrificial ceremony, Confucius's statement that "Sacrifice as if present" is taken to mean "sacrifice to the gods as if the gods were present." Therefore, he insists that "Unless I take part in a sacrifice, it is as if I did not sacrifice" (Ch. 3.12). Thus articulated, Confucius values the personal participation in the ceremony, which also implies that Confucius only takes part in the ceremony that is in accordance with the ritual system of the Zhou dynasty. The other, presumably more significant aspect of Confucius's dialogue is centered on a dialogic imagination of a person at prayer which may facilitate his dialogue with the gods.

By imagining the presence of gods and spirits, the prayer-sayers or the sacrificers are expected to enhance the heretofore impersonal relationship with the gods and spirits. Accordingly, the ceremony itself becomes a private mediatory event in which the praise of the gods and spirits is rewarded, the prayer-sayer himself is blessed and his best wishes are responded to, and above all, his soul and conscience are purified and elevated (Ch. 1.9).

Some Marxist critics have drawn a reductive conclusion that Confucius just displays a materialistic atheistic tendency by this statement, because they believe his conditional clause implies that gods and spirits could only exist when and where the sacrificial ceremony is being held. This Marxist stance has neglected the consistency of the Confucian rhetorical strategy in repeatedly strengthening the relationship between
individual and gods and spirits (or the blessed and the blesser). This consistency explains Confucius’s sorrow in lamenting: “It has been such a long time since I dreamt of the Duke of Zhou.” The Duke of Zhou is a god-like sage or a personified god, the ancestor of Confucius’s homeland. Confucius regarded it as a great misfortune that he could no longer communicate with Duke of Zhou in his dreams.

By expounding Confucius’s pious attitude toward gods and spirits, I, however, do not intend to present Confucius as religious in the modern sense. In actuality, Confucius, as a practitioner of his moral philosophy, displays much scientific attitude in attaining true knowledge of his world, and general skepticism of the dominant power of the supernatural, which forms an intrinsic irony in his religious attitude. Even Lu Xun, an iconoclastic rebel of Confucian tradition, once offered a positive evaluation of such a pragmatic attitude: Master Confucius is really great, for he refused to follow the convention to concentrate on the issue of gods and spirits, though he lived in an era in which the worship of the supernatural was generally dominant. Confucius’ pragmatic attitude of “keeping the gods and spirits at distance” (Ch. 6.22) can be further explored in his skepticism of the overwhelming dominance of gods, his tendency to personify the concepts of gods and heaven so as to meet his needs of moral education, and also his reluctance to discuss the afterlife.

Confucius’s dialogue sometimes raises a differing tone against the conventional belief in the dominance of gods. Once, in defense of his decision to maintain silence in a social chaos and moral corruption, he questioned, “What does Heaven ever say? Yet
there are four seasons going round and there are the hundred things coming into being. What does Heaven ever say?" (Ch. 17.19) Apart from his emotional dissatisfaction with his disciples that I have mentioned in Chapter Three, Confucius raises through this rhetorical question an issue of the relation between the existence of heaven or the gods and the natural law of the material world. Although this questioning is not addressed with any further demonstration, Confucius seems to realize that circulation of the seasons and biological development in nature are not always independent of the power of the supernatural. A further inference may lead to Confucius's implied meaning that heaven or the gods are not almighty, they have their emotional preference (Ch. 6.28, 7.23) and their own limitations (Ch. 17.19). Any over-emphasis on the dominance of heaven or gods may prove problematic because of its inability to explain daily happenings in the real world.

Confucius's personification of gods and heaven also distinguishes his intention to confine the abstract theological entities in the context of his rhetorical activities, thus strategically softens (consciously or unconsciously) his ironical representation of a theoretical domain he is unfamiliar with. Heaven or the gods, to Confucius, though hard to be envisioned, can often be reached by human beings through a dialogical contact. That accounts for his optimistic confession that "at fifty I understood the Decree of Heaven," which implies that Confucius's mission is consistent with and authorized by Heaven through a verbal or non-verbal communication. As discussed in Chapter Three, Confucius's tragic consciousness is sometimes expressed in his dialogue with the gods or heaven. And in his imagination, gods or heaven are personas that possess human
emotions. Once infuriated by humans for their non-benevolent words or deeds, gods are sure to punish them no matter whether they pray or not. Thus, Confucius has promoted the communication between gods and humans by bringing down gods from heaven to the human world. By so doing, he never has to face the dilemma of delineating gods or heaven as a theoretical existence, because that proves to be an issue of "the unknown" to him, and a gentleman is always ready to admit his ignorance of the unexamined world.

Confucius's reluctance to discuss the gods, spirits and afterlife is recorded on several occasions by his disciples in The Analects. Yet, this indisputable point about his attitude toward the supernatural presents much irony and humor that display both his intelligence and rhetorical art. The following is an interesting dialogue:

Zilu asked about how the spirits of the dead and the gods should be served. Confucius argued, "You are not able even to serve man. How can you serve the spirits?" "May I ask about death?" "You do not understand even life. How can you understand death?" (Ch. 11.12)

Obviously, Confucius's refutation is first directed to the irrationality of the questioner himself. Confucius believes that what one should care about is how to serve his parents, his lords and states. As to the service of the gods and spirits, that can be fulfilled once you serve man satisfactorily. For instance, if you are filial to your parents, according to Confucius, you simultaneously express due respect for the spirits of your ancestors (Ch. 11.12). With regard to the question about death, Confucius's argument focuses on the ridiculousness of the question itself, for the afterlife cannot be explained by living beings who have no such experience. Shuoynan bianwu (《説苑·辨物》) by Liu Xiang
has further detailed a similar argument of Confucius in a humorous manner. When Zigong asked about the consciousness of the dead, Confucius answered in an ironical tone, "You will find out whether the dead has his consciousness or not after your own death. It won't be too late." We are justified to say that Confucius is keen on the paradox in the frequently-asked questions about gods, spirits and afterlife. However, his negative attitude toward such questions simultaneously forms an ironical contrast with his self-confession of the knowledge of a divine decree (天命) and his imagination of the existence of gods and spirits, for it is generally accepted that with knowledge of divinity one will not shun these questions. Although Confucius's rhetorical strategies partly reflect his ironical and rational understanding of the supernatural, they are hardly adequate to present a valid interpretation that might be used to mediate the relation between knowledge and intuition (Ch. 11.12), existence and ideology (Ch.3.12) from the perspective of epistemology. Confucius is, after all, a philosopher of an early undeveloped civilization. He was unable to fulfil his mediation of the above relations. That is why he himself was also ridiculed when he ridiculed those who attempted to explore the theological issues that concerned them most.

Now, let us discuss irony in Confucius's life-long pursuit of an ideal feudal society under the rule of benevolent lords and rulers, as well as the democratic spirit in his philosophical, ethical and educational claims. My focus will be placed on how Confucius's rhetorical strategies mitigate these theoretical conflicts with an ironic interpretation of his concept of benevolence (仁), an appropriate relationship between lords and subjects,
fathers and sons ( 父子 ). Once, he told Duke Ding that "The ruler should employ the service of his subjects in accordance with the rites. A subject should serve his ruler by doing his best" (Ch. 3.9). Here, Confucius’s statement enables the rulers to feel legitimate in demanding loyalty and service from their subjects. This stratification of superior and inferior, and noble and humble has served the interests of the rulers in successive dynasties in Chinese history, and virtually laid a theoretical foundation for the authoritarian state. This is the reason some later critics have declared Confucianism to be the soul of Chinese dictatorship (Cai Shangsi, 1950) and its ritual system to be a "man-eating" doctrine. The negative response to the Confucian statement in which loyalty to and respect for rulers take a dominant place has, however, neglected how Confucius’s democratic ideas and rhetorical practice have from the opposite side addressed and defined such a statement. In his dialogues, Confucius repeatedly encourages his disciples to be engaged in reforming and running the government so as to meet the needs of the people. These new rulers may, in Confucius’s own words, come from "the low ranks" (Ch. 9.6), and are "benevolent persons" who "love their fellowmen" (Ch. 12.22), to be exact, "love the multitude at large" (Ch. 1.6). Thus, there occurs a contradiction between Confucius’s defense of an appropriate and unchanged relation between lord and subject, and his attempt to set this relation within a theory of benevolent administration which functions as a double-edged sword that may be employed to strike any bad administration either by lords or by subjects. In addition, Confucius’s own rhetorical practice also embodies this intrinsic irony. On the one hand, he followed all the traditional standards of etiquette to express his
respect for the rulers (Ch. 10) and his indignation against any attempts at the replacement
of “legitimate rulers”—those who gained power due to the hereditary system (Ch. 14.12).
On the other, he criticized those who follow others blindly as “the ruin of virtue” (Ch.
17.13), and he advocated that a minister could take issue openly with his ruler (Ch.
14.22), because spinelessness would lead the state to ruin (Ch. 13.15). At the surface
level, Confucius’s irony seems to produce an absence of coherence among the statements
of his dialogues and displays an inability to escape such an embarrassing situation. At the
deep level, Confucius’ tone of irony, facilitated by his dialogic imagination, does suggest
that he, as a philosopher born in a lower rank, was keen on the deficiency of authoritarian
powers in various states, though he stood firm against any form of violence aiming at the
replacement of these powers, and that Jian (jian, correction or criticism), as a remedy,
should be encouraged to carry out open discussion and evaluation in the court in
accordance with interests of the state or moral standards (Ch. 18.1).

Confucius’s irony is also reflected in his continuous efforts to set up an ethical
model—the gentleman (Junzi, 子)—for all rulers and the educated, and in his belief
that everyone could become a gentleman. It is estimated that “gentleman” is mentioned or
discussed more than one hundred times in The Analects. Confucius’s concept of
“gentleman,” different from that of previous times,24 is in general an ideal persona with a
perfect character. For the purpose of moral education, Confucius’s dialogues have
shaped an ideal image that always upholds moral principles. The gentleman is first a
practitioner of benevolence all his life, and “never deserts benevolence, not even for as
long as it takes to eat a meal" (Ch. 4.5); the gentleman is an observer of the ritual system, and he is “widely versed in culture but brought back to essentials by the rites” (Ch. 6.27); the gentleman is a performer of righteous ( throws ) acts too, and his capacity in applying his own moral judgement and flexibility to “interact with and integrate into ever new situations” (Hall and Ames, 95) stands out against the “small man’s” obsession with his own profits (Ch. 4.16); the gentleman possesses the potentiality for political and social leadership. He can be, as Confucius’s disciple, Zenshen, says, “entrusted with an orphan six chi tall,” and the fate of a state one hundred li square, without his being deflected from his purpose even in moments of crisis” (Ch. 8.6); as far as his personal cultivation is concerned, the gentleman “helps others to realize what is good in them” (Ch. 12.16), and to think about how to develop his personal ability (Ch. 15.19), but he is never expected to be in contention with others (Ch. 3.7). Therefore, the gentleman is “easy of mind” (Ch. 7.37) and never in anxiety and fear (Ch. 12.4). Then, can a gentleman err? Yes. However, as Zigong argues, “The gentleman’s errors are like an eclipse of the sun and moon in that when he errs the whole world sees him doing so, and when he reforms the whole world looks up to him” (Ch. 19.21). With such a perfect image in his mind’s eye, Confucius always encourages his disciples to follow the model, because his “gentleman” is a moral being, and everyone can reach such a status, no matter what social rank he is from and how much knowledge he has obtained.

Confucius’s verbal description and discussion of the “gentleman” have produced a profound irony in terms of the feudal hierarchical orders he himself accepted and
defended. Its ironical connotation is evident in three aspects: first of all, it ridicules in a mild tone a necessary relation between ruler and gentleman; namely, a ruler is not necessarily a "gentleman" (Ch. 6.13, 16.8), and that is why Confucius persistently persuades the lords and subjects to practice the Way of the Gentleman (君子之道); second, his discussion raises a new voice to challenge the conventional distinction between the superior and the inferior. Comparatively, the scholars are inferior to the rulers and administrators in social ranks. But Confucius has regarded two scholars, both his disciples, as "gentlemen" for their moral supremacy (Ch. 5.3, 14.5), which suggests that they are morally superior to anybody else; finally, though Confucius has openly disclaimed being a "gentleman" himself (Ch. 7.33, 14.28), his disciples and those who were familiar with him always regarded him as the embodiment of the gentleman, because his philosophical pursuit and rhetorical activities qualified him to be a true gentleman. Moreover, here Confucius's irony aims at constructing a sense of moral equality, and it reminds us of the fact that his idealized persona of a gentleman as a moral being has encouraged Confucians of many generations in the East. Who can deny its power, originating from the democratic spirit of the Confucian dialogues?

The most remarkable irony of the Confucian dialogues is expressed in his statement regarding the purpose of education and the democratic spirit of his educational practice. In fact, Confucius never intended to be a teacher, and he is basically an ardent social reformer and a versatile scholar. His engagement in opening the first Chinese private school came as a result of his failure to win a commanding place in administration.
Naturally, education became a method for him to train qualified administrators, to help eliminate social chaos, and to make his dream of bringing out the benevolent administration under the rule of a sage-king come true. For such a purpose, Confucius in his dialogues insists on intense study, hard training and persistent personal cultivation of his disciples. His criticism of the laziness, stupidity and narrow-mindedness on the part of some of his disciples demonstrates his understanding that only a few people can finally assume the high responsibility of state administration. In general, Confucius's social and educational reform attempts to develop the sensitivity of his disciples to moral corruption and political disorder, and also to enhance their loyalty and sincerity for the aristocratic bureaucracy represented by the Western Zhou dynasty. This moral education helps maintain stability, cooperation and harmony, but such a moral tradition has often been employed to suffocate and obstruct personal development, individual freedom and social democracy in the following historical period of China, for it cements the accepted hierarchical stratification and discourages any verbal or ideological challenge to the existing social system. In this sense, Confucius's educational theory is in accordance with political conservatism. Ironically, Confucius's educational practice in the form of dialogues and classroom discussions displays much democratic spirit, which may be represented in the following three aspects.

To begin with, Confucius declared that “In education there is no separation into categories” (Ch.15.39). With this declaration, Confucius implies that everyone has the right to education, regardless of his birth, age and economic status. That is why he
enrolled students not only from the aristocratic families, but also from poor families. As he admitted, he “never denies instruction to anyone who, of his own accord, has given me so much as a bundle of dried meat as a present” (Ch. 7.7). Such a principle of enrollment follows from Confucius’s belief that he would undertake to make his disciples into gentlemen through education so long as the disciples themselves are ready to seek knowledge and to practice self-cultivation. This Confucian practice is actually at odds with then current education, because in Confucius’s time only those from the families of the aristocracy could afford to have tutors at home. Children from poor families were denied the right to basic education, to say nothing of the advanced learning of literature, history, philosophy, music and mathematics. The irony lies in the fact that this education of commoners marks the first appearance of democratic ideas in early China, although Confucius’s practice is intended to provide the authoritarian states of the time with a few morally and intellectually qualified administrators or elites. His advocacy of educational democratic practice, in turn, facilitates his use of irony, for the more students he taught from poor families, the more interests of the lower classes could be represented, and the closer the society would move toward his ideal of Way.

Second, Confucius encouraged a dialogic interpretation of philosophical and moral exploration among his disciples, which has also been described as an “intellectual democracy.” Confucius makes efforts to get the moral issues mutually defined in discussions with his disciples in order to broaden their vision of moral knowledge, and eventually, to learn to “speak their own mind” (Ch. 11.26) and to attune their thinking to
the changing situation. In fact, Confucius himself is exemplary of such an exploration. For instance, "benevolence" ( ) is a kernel topic of his moral education. When discussing this topic with his disciples, Confucius provides different answers and interpretations. He posits Li (rites) as the major method to achieve "benevolence" in response to Yanyuan's question (Ch. 12.1). To Fanchi, he explained "benevolence" from the perspective of "love" (Ch. 12.22). When Zizhang expressed his curiosity for the same topic, Confucius stressed the five qualities—respectfulness, tolerance, trustworthiness in word, quickness and generosity—as the characteristics of "benevolence" (Ch. 17.6). In his answer to Zigong, Confucius focused on the quality of Shu ( , reciprocity) that would facilitate interpersonal relations for the common goal of "benevolence" (Ch. 17.6). The above theoretical inconsistency and discursive interpretations actually aim to promote the dynamic responses of his disciples and suggest the rich implications of a concept of humanism that can hardly be confined to one "authoritative" description, because "benevolence" as a moral ideal of Confucius has to be reflected in "different languages" (Bahktin) for its addressivity to different occasions, persons and times. On the other hand, in giving different answers, Confucius is also attuning himself to the needs and capabilities of particular disciples of his. So, his exploration of "benevolence" displays some democratic spirit in his intellectual activities. However, such spirit is discouraged in the political context where non-benevolent administration is pervasive, because Confucius argues for "non-dialogical contact" with those who hold different moral standards (Ch. 15.40). Confucius's ironical representation is again appropriated in a dialogic reading of
his rhetorical situation, and he seems to suggest that intellectual activities can hardly proceed wherever an "authoritative" voice is intended to acquire its dominance.

Last but not least, Confucius's democratic ideas are expressed in his understanding that moral exploration is an inward process of contemplation and purification, which stands against any imposed forces from the outside. Therefore, the dialogue in the form of questions and answers proves to be most effective in moral education, for it helps the participants to develop a sense of equality, to clarify their confusions about the moral issues concerning the task of "rectifying others" (正人) and "purifying the self" (克己), and more importantly, to increase the awareness that moral elevation for an individual, although a task for personal development, is always consistent with social advance, and should be in dialogue with the interests of community. Intriguing to the modern mind, Confucius's democratic spirit in his educational practice presents an enduring irony in view of his political claim of a totalized feudal kingdom, for his moral theory can hardly provide an explanation about how the current feudal social system, based on the hierarchical order, may secure an inward process of moral purification that values moral equality. On the other hand, the ironical effect of the Confucian moral equality is manifest for its claim to both a sense of social responsibility and a passion for self-moral elevation in contrast to that of early Western philosophers who are usually focused on the democratic right of individuals.
III. The Use of Irony in Socratic Dialogue

Compared with Confucius's dialogue, Socrates's dialogue is also presented in the form of irony, and is generally referred to as the first manifestation of an ironic rhetorical device in the West. As a master of ironic language, Socrates revealed his wisdom in a paradoxical presentation of the topics of knowledge, piety, life and death, and his philosopher-king in opposition to the Athenian democracy. My exploration will first study how Socrates's confession of ignorance is employed to illuminate his true knowledge of human limitation, but is never paralleled by admission of moral inadequacy. Then, I will concentrate on Socrates's claim of piety in contrast to his refusal to prove the existence of the supernatural and his reluctance to identify himself with the rest of the god-believers among the Athenians. Finally, I will touch upon a rarely discussed topic concerning Socrates's historical attitude toward the concept of democracy and the ironical effect that highlights the democratic spirit in his rhetorical performance. A dialogic reading of the above ironical aspects in Socrates's dialogues is intended to argue that Socratic irony, similar to that of Confucius, presents not only the seemingly contradictory elements of moral issues, but also functions as a reconciling power that fuses the paradox and ambiguity into wholeness; it addresses the rhetorical situations of his verbal activity and also responds to the philosophical or moral exploration of his soul.

Let us start our discussion about the irony in Socrates's dialogues on knowledge and ignorance. The principal revelation of his life-long investigation, according to Socrates, is that he proves to be the wisest man, because he is the only person who
realizes his own ignorance. Such an ironic confession of ignorance actually starts from the *Apology* and other Socratic dialogues. Having examined a politician, Socrates concluded:

> ...At any rate it seems that I am wiser than he is in just this respect; that I do not think that I do know what I do not know. (21d)

Then, he examined poets and craftsmen, and identified what makes him wiser than them with what makes him wiser than the politicians. The conclusion is that the people he examined all lack the knowledge about “the thing of supreme importance.” What is “the thing of supreme importance?” The following is Socrates’s explanation:

> If any of you dispute this and professed to care about these things, I shall not at once let him go or leave him; but I shall question him and test him; and if it appears to me that in spite of his profession he has made no real progress toward goodness, I shall reprove him for neglecting what is of supreme importance, and giving his attention to trivialities. (30a)

So, the thing of supreme importance is goodness—virtue, because it is goodness that “brings wealth and every other blessing, both to the individual and to the polis.” Here, Socrates, like Confucius, emphasized the moral aspect of knowledge. Socrates is wiser that the poets, politicians and craftsmen who falsely believe that they knew about the most important part of knowledge—goodness. Socrates’s argument makes visible the ambiguity in the knowledge structure of his examinees. The edge of his irony cuts further when he hints that even these people do realize their ignorance of the knowledge of goodness. They are not yet as wise as Socrates himself, for their recognition might well be the result of general skepticism. In the meantime, the Socratic type of ignorance is ironically reflected in an awareness of his lack of the expert knowledge rather than craftsman
knowledge, that is, the knowledge of how to arouse the moral consciousness among the
people, of how to call attention to the god of Love whose wisdom is far superior to that of
the human beings, and of how to bring to light the limitation of human cognition, in order
to help people seek truth and goodness. Only in this sense can people truly understand
that Socrates's apparently "audacious" profession of being the wisest aims at the goodness
and benefits of his interlocutors and audience. His claim for wisdom is, by nature,
altruistic rather than egocentric. Thus, due to his dialogic understanding of a relation of
his discourse to audience, the seemingly conflicting elements, such as ignorance and
wisdom, craftsman knowledge and expert knowledge, men and god, self and other, are
eventually fused in his on-going philosophical exploration, the process of which is
appropriately represented in an irony that denies any monologized or partial description of
an otherwise "double-voiced" dialogue.

What still confuses modern readers is the question of why Socrates should
humiliate his examinees by denying their wisdom in developing self-consciousness. The
answer may be found in Socrates's dialogic interpretation of different stages of human
cognition. That is, human wisdom starts from a basic understanding of human ignorance.
This recognition is not a static existence. Instead, it is responsive to the process of human
intellectual activities, for it stimulates those who seek human wisdom to overcome
"ignorance" and get nearer to "knowledge" through continuous verbal encounters with
others.

By describing the Socratic ignorance as an active process, I intend to point out
two significant implications of this concept. First, at different stages of human cognition,
it is with the realization of being ignorant that the man becomes highly motivated for being knowledgeable and moves toward a higher level of intellectuality. In other words, wherever a man develops some true knowledge in a certain field or on a certain topic, he may possibly become more aware of his ignorance of something new. Second, ignorance and wisdom/knowledge are, in Socrates's philosophy, not two distinctly separated domains; they are mutually defined, and on certain conditions they are interchangeable, functioning the same way as Confucius's concepts of "knowing" (知) and "not knowing" (不知). To be exact, the confession of one's ignorance is an indication of his wisdom, but the unawareness of one's ignorance leads to the poverty in one's wisdom. Here, Socrates's irony lies in a logical inference that the wisest man is often the one who is the most sensitive to human ignorance, and who is never afraid of having it pointed out. By the same token, his examinees who deny their ignorance actually deny a continuous philosophical exploration that may lead to true knowledge and wisdom, and eventually make themselves the victims of ignorance and prejudice.

Certainly, for a moral philosopher, it is a much harder task to bring to light the ignorance of others than to make a self-confession of his own ignorance, for true wisdom is achieved in the process of clearing the ignorance, confusion and ambiguity of the moral issues and moving along the divine cause of the god. And it is even more embarrassing for Socrates to display his "supreme" wisdom in the face of a group of people who are forced to identify themselves with those unable to recognize their own ignorance. Such a
philosopher needs courage and wisdom. For Socrates, he needs the courage to face the
negative response from the Athenians who would make a life-and-death decision on his
trial, and simultaneously, he is expected to reveal his wisdom to handle a situation in
which he was already in a vulnerable position.

To help himself out of the dilemma and to defend his moral philosophy, Socrates
takes irony as a rhetorical strategy to ensure a dialogue between himself and his audience
and between a profession of wisdom and a disavowal of knowledge. That is the reason
Socrates often denies being a teacher by profession. His divine mission to seek the moral
truth with his interlocutors has prevented him from any practice in the form of instruction,
and he is led to the method of provocation. As Vlastos observes, “as instrument of
Socratic teaching this irony” is “to tease, mock, perplex” a learner “into seeking truth.”
This observation reaches the nature of Socrates’s moral dialogues in the form of questions
and answers, but it obscures a distinct relation between Socrates and otherness, that helps
himself to overcome “ignorance” and reach wisdom. The rhetorical power of Socratic
irony lies in its complexity. The question and answer, argument and counter-argument in
Socrates’s *Apology* and other moral dialogues are not only provocative to the
understanding of his interlocutors, but also provocative to his own imagination and
exploration. This bi-directional function of Socrates’s irony helps defend the sincerity in
his disclaimer of knowledge and gain credit for his wisdom.

The rhetorical power of Socratic irony here also comes from his paradoxical
representation of his mysticism. It is in view of divine wisdom, the transcendence of the
god, that Socrates is often kept conscious of his ignorance, his limitation in moral
knowledge, and that he values the knowledge-seeking in this world and longs for his
continuous philosophical exploration in the afterlife with his followers. So, my next topic
will be on Socrates's ironical attitude toward piety and his indifference to the Athenian
god-believers.

Throughout his dialogues irony is often heard in Socrates's confession of piety and
his refusal to identify himself with the religion of the rest of the Athenians. Piety, as we
know, refers to human reverence for God or devout fulfillment of religious obligations.
Being a philosopher himself, Socrates, like Confucius and many other ancient
philosophers, has to respond to the concepts of gods and the mysterious power of the
universe. He is, to a modern eye, a believer in gods, though in his own way. However,
based on his recognition of ignorance, Socrates does not find himself in a good position to
express plainly and accurately what his god and his piety really are and why his religious
claims sound in discord with those of other Athenian believers. This seemingly
paradoxical structure is obscured and moderated in his ironic presentation, which reflects
Socrates's wisdom, but unfortunately, drives him to a disastrous end, for he was
convicted, tried and executed on the charge that he was impious by the conventional
criteria of the Athenians.

Let us once again listen to the last words of Socrates before he concludes his
defense in the Apology:
I stand charged with impiety by Meletus here. Surely it is obvious that if I tried to persuade you and prevail upon you by my entreaties to go against your solemn oath, I should be teaching you contempt for religion; and by my very defense I should be virtually accusing myself of having no religious belief. But that is very far from truth. I have a more sincere belief, gentlemen, than any of my accusers; and I leave it to you and to God to judge me in whatever way should be best for me and for yourself. (35d)

In the above speech, Socrates carried out a defense\(^3\) for his piety in a dialogic imagination of different voices striving for a judgement over the dispute. He first presented a contradiction between his innocent, true “self” and an alienated “self,” a distortion of his image generated by his accusers. His belief in God is not only reflected in his lifelong practice of a religious mission assigned by the gods of Delphi (20e-23c) but also in a repeatedly voiced claim of his communication with the divinity ever since his childhood. This kind of spiritual contract with God can be traced in the *Apology* (31d), *Phado* (242c), *Euthydemus* (272e), *Republic* (I. 496c), *Phaedrus* (242b) and *Euthyphro* (3b).

Contrary to his true “self,” the distorted “self” of Socrates as portrayed in the formal charge against him should discourage his audience from following any true religious belief. Besides, such a charge against Socrates is apparently nowhere to be proved. Thus demonstrated, Socrates was able to further address the accusation of his impiety with a religious plea for a fair judgement of his case by God. It is clear that his plea itself is a strong verbal defense of his obedience to God’s will.

Finally, his imagination attempted to create a dialogue between God and the jurors by reminding the latter that their judgement should be responsive to God’s intention in order to justify their own piety. Such a defense actually displays Socrates’s ironic
intention of exposing a discrepancy between his pious religiousness responsive to God’s voice and the Athenian illusion of their piety influenced by the ancient mythology, and also of using the concept of piety as a double-edged sword which points to the religious attitude of both the accusers and the jurors in the process of the trial.

By emphasizing the aspect of Socrates’s piety, I do not imply that Socrates successfully freed himself of the two formal charges against him, namely, he did not believe in “the gods recognized by the State” and that he believed in new “supernatural things of his own invention” (*Apology*, 24b). According to recent studies by Vlastos and Connors, a certain national and naturalistic tendency to reconstruct the divinity started in Ionian *physiologia* and also found its echo in Socrates’s philosophical exploration. What attracts the interest of a rhetorical study is, however, not the revolutionary spirit in Socrates’s moral philosophy, but his ironical strategy, which enables him to stand on his own in his divine mission and also to ridicule the conventional and rigid interpretation of piety. Actually, Socrates’s own understanding of piety itself constitutes an ironical structure, as Kierkegaard states, “Socrates’ ignorance was a kind of fear and worship of God so that his ignorance was the Greek version of the Jewish saying: the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Here, Kierkegaard seems to suggest that it is not a lack of information or evidence, but a mixture of worship and fear of God that accounts for the irony of Socrates’s piety. Such an ironical presentation in the form of paradoxical passion rejects any argument about evidence or nature of God and sheds some light on Socrates’s self-knowledge of a moralistic interpretation of God. In the *Euthyphro*, Socrates
demands of Euthyphro, “Show me what benefit for the gods eventuates from the donations which they receive from us. It’s clear to anybody what they contribute, because nothing is good for us except what comes from them . . .” (15a). We are convinced that gods are virtuous and benevolent because they give human beings everything good and never care about how they can benefit from their benefactees. So, Socrates’s gods are the supernatural force of virtues and that is the reason they are worshiped by the god-believers.

In the *Meno*, Socrates again praised the “divine influence, inspired and possessed by divinity,” that guaranteed the virtuous words and deeds of the priests, prophets, poets and statesmen, and stressed the communication between man and god in the form of divine inspiration and dispensation (99b-100b). While expressing his admiration for the omniscience of God, Socrates also reveals man’s fear and anxiety as the result of a failure to know himself, to admit his self-deception and to possess an ability of imagination. In the *Apology*, Socrates has convinced his listeners that his self-knowledge of God makes it possible for him to act “in obedience to God’s commands given in oracles and dreams and in every way that any other divine dispensation has ever impressed a duty upon man” (33c), and such a God’s command possesses power to make people virtuous by developing their wisdom, because Socrates, like Confucius, tends to perceive God (Providence) as a moral force in one’s self-knowledge that is superior to any human wisdom and human virtue. This acknowledgment of the existence of gods is rational enough to keep a mortal soul in a dilemma when he is experiencing a confused feeling of
admiration and awe for the god, and when he is seeking the channel to reach the god through “the inwardness of self-activity” in opposition to the temptation to identify himself with the rest of the Athenian god-believers.

As I mentioned earlier, Socrates’s irony is also directed at conventional religious beliefs. Socrates is forced to meet the challenge of his accusers, and to defend himself for not believing in the gods “the State recognizes.” Socratic wisdom has been well tested and fully expressed through his ironical approach in his argument. On the one hand, nowhere in his dialogues has Socrates confessed that he is in agreement with the Athenian traditional conception of the gods. On the other hand, Socrates makes inexhaustible efforts to display a type of piety in his own definition. Specifically, Socrates presents the gods as “wise,” “practical” and “moral” beings (Brickhouse and Smith, 1994, 182) in order to prove that he is the last person who wants to corrupt or destroy the youth of Athens. Instead of making any direct comments on the Greek mythical portraying of “civil war among the gods, and fearful hostility and battles, and so on—the kind of thing described by the poets and depicted by fine artists” (*Euthyphro*, 7b-c), Socrates moves headfirst toward a moralistic transformation of the gods. According to Socrates’s dialogical exploration (in the *Apology, Euthyphro, Meno, or Republic*), the gods are omniscient and benevolent supernatural beings, and any irrational presentation of the gods (to create disagreements between the gods and man) brings nothing beneficial to moral education, and also shakes the foundation of true piety, for “ordinary people do not know” these “wonderful things” (*Euthyphro*, 6b) and philosophers like Socrates “find it very
difficult to accept” (6b). Socrates’s cross-examination in the *Euthyphro* further suggests that the traditional or sophistic interpretation of the gods can hardly account for some reasonable relations between the gods and believers, between the holiness of the divinity and the “science of sacrifice and prayer” of human beings (14b-16a). And it becomes inevitable that Socrates began to challenge this kind of mythical presentation of the gods and the narrow articulation of piety in his later dialogues. The ironical tone of Socrates over the issues of divinity and piety does not aim to launch a severe attack on the religiousness of the Athenians. Instead, it makes clear his reluctance to identify himself with the Athenian god-believers, and helps to glorify his “service to the gods” rather than “the gods of the State” by awakening a consciousness among the ordinary people of the moral force of the gods.

Now, as the last goal, my rhetorical study will demonstrate irony in Socrates’s dialogues, which reconciles his statements sympathetic to the oligarchic faction and his hostile attitude toward a constitutional democracy in an atmosphere of partisan politics and constant foreign and civil wars, with his democratic ideas in favor of the Athenian law, the freedom of verbal activities, and equality in the discussion of his moral dialogues. For a long time, there has been a scholarly debate over the topic of Socrates’s anti-democratic viewpoints supported by the textual evidence of his dialogues, which enticed the critics to classify Socrates among those against the Greek democracy. This classification is, however, often refuted by other textual evidence and Socrates’s own philosophical and rhetorical claims, which display Socratic irony in representing his understanding of democracy.
Did Socrates express any hostility to the democratic practice of the Athenian polis? The answer is positive, for Socrates's arguments were often directed against the principles of the democratic constitution of Athens. In Socrates's time, the government of Athens was operated by "the many," and judicial decisions were made by a simple majority of hundreds of jurors, citizens who were selected by lot, regardless of their wealth, education, capability or experience. Socrates, as an advocate of a government ruled by the moral elite, is certainly contemptuous of this uneducated motley crowd. In the Crito, he bitterly attacked the claim "that we must consider popular opinion about what is just and honorable and good, or the opposite" (48a), and he ridiculed those "ordinary people, who think nothing of putting people to death, and would bring them back to life if they could, with equal indifference to reason" (48c). With a stress on the topic of justice/injustice, Socrates becomes absolutely conclusive in his dialogue with Crito upon the argument that a moral philosopher should always take expert advice rather than majority advice, and a man with wisdom should not value all the opinions that people hold, but only some on a selective base. Upon a discussion of Socrates's hostile opinion of the democratic principle of rule by "the many," one should also be keen on the ironical effect of his argument. Socrates points to the absurdity of a blind support of "the many" by raising another democratic principle: valuing and protecting "the few," even in the critical situation when his own life is endangered because of the Athenian prejudice against the opinion of the few. Through his ironic representation of a rhetorical encounter...
between "the many" and "the few," between "all" and "some," Socrates was able to make visible to his interlocutors and modern readers not only the significance of the democratic right of "the few" but also the partiality of the Athenian concept of democracy that suffocated the voice of the few, and obscured the standards for justice/injustice.

Another question needs to be addressed: whether Socratic dialogue expressed any preference for the Athenian democratic constitution. In view of the contradictory responses to the question, I tend to follow Vlastos’s argument for Socrates, mainly because of his insight into Socrates’s self-address, "You will depart, wronged not by us, the laws, but by men" (Crito, 54b-c). Socrates’ defense points to his accusers and jurors rather than the laws, and his rhetorical practice under the principle of "defend or obey" has further evidenced his favorable attitude toward the Athenian judicial system, though he never once idealized this system. Differing from Vlastos, I would like to point out the consistency in Socrates’s dialogic imagining of the Athenian laws, and the authority of justice as a moral being in one’s spiritual world and one’s afterlife. It seems, to Socrates, that the Athenian laws, the form of the Athenian democracy, are connected with and defined by "the Laws of Hades," and that is why if Socrates attempts an escape from the jail, he not only destroys the authority of the Athenian laws, but also violates moral principles in the form of the Laws of Hades. Accordingly, he would be rejected by the divinity, and presumably be punished in the court of morality and justice, because his dialogic imagination of a divine voice has convinced him that the Athenian laws are both a political being that maintains social justice, and a moral being that tests obedience and
fidelity to his state. Moreover, the Athenian laws are used to judge the prosecuted and the
prosecutor, and meanwhile, also to test those law-executors. Though he values his right
for a public defense, Socrates never intends to stand against the authority of the laws—the
symbol of the Athenian democracy. His choice to be executed rather than to be helped
out of the jail also indicates that he is morally justified to face the judges of the
Underworld in his afterlife, for he has not only followed all the legal procedures of the
Athenian laws, but also maintained his moral integrity by displaying a consistent loyalty to
the state in his life and afterlife. Here, Socrates’s irony in expressing his attitude to the
Athenian democratic constitution once again presents him as the victim of an impossible
and inevitable situation.

Not totally by coincidence, Socrates’s democratic spirit, like that of Confucius, is
most fully reflected in his theory and practice of moral education. To begin with, the
Socratic dialogues, as I mentioned earlier, aim at the promotion of human wisdom, an
awakening of moral consciousness among the ordinary people. Being a street
philosopher, Socrates engaged himself in discussions with all kinds of people, scholar and
craftsman, aged and young, friend and enemy alike. Ironically, Socrates always disclaims
his function as a teacher, and he maintains in the *Pratagoras* (319a-328d) and *Meno* (92d-
94e) that virtue is not teachable, because no one possesses expertise in virtue. This
understanding of moral education is directly opposed to the popular democratic belief of
Athens that all people teach virtue to their children. Yet, this apparently arbitrary
conclusion is drawn on the basis of Socrates’s democratic assessment of the potentiality of
human cognition. Like Confucius, Socrates regarded moral education as chiefly a process of self-knowledge and self-education. This revolutionary spirit in establishing self-confidence points to the true moral value of the oracular statement to “Know Thyself.”

When he and Polus were involved in a debate over the topic of the function of rhetoric and orators in the Gorgias (466a-480e), Socrates interpreted the saying “Know Thyself” to mean that human beings should not only recognize through a philosophical examination what they really believe and feel, but also, what is a good, virtuous and happy life. Therefore, to know oneself is far from merely a course of development of cognitive ability; rather, it is a course of moral cultivation and personal perfection. We are able to infer that the freedom of human beings is to be obtained through such a self-discovery, and the seed of democracy is planted in the people who follow Socrates’s belief that everyone can grasp philosophical truth if they can use their innate reason to reach the “correct insight.”

Thus, Socrates’s understatement of his function as a teacher helps intensify his ironic intention to foreground the concept of self-knowledge and self-teaching in moral education.

Besides, Socrates’s rhetorical method itself comprises a democratic understanding of the freedom of a philosophical inquiry. Critics of high repute never fail to call attention to the Socratic irony in the form of “Socratic deception,” but few of them have observed the democratic spirit of his dialogic intention to encourage the interaction between speakers and interlocutors, between interlocutors themselves, and also between a problem and its solutions. Instead of deceiving his interlocutors, Socrates encouraged the
participants in his dialogue to discuss, listen, clarify or question the thinking of others. For instance, Socrates used to say that he functioned as a “midwife of ideas” (Gorgias), for a midwife does not herself give birth to a child, but she is present to help during its delivery. He places emphasis on the practice of the moral issues raised by all the other participants or himself, because philosophical inquiry, to Socrates, is such a divine mission that is carried out in the interests of all the participants and of the Athenians as a whole. This is why Socrates often shifts the attention from the interpersonal conflict to the exchange of viewpoints about common concerns. As a result, such an intellectual democracy has generally guaranteed that the arguments are clarified and tested. The interaction becomes highly knowledgeable and morally illuminating to all the participants, even in the situation where those interlocutors are basically his philosophical opponents. It is my hypothesis that one of the purposes of Socratic dialogues is to confront the Athenian tradition of democracy—the rule by the many—with his democratic interpretation of moral education—to improve the moral status of the general public through free dialogues and discussions.

IV. A Comparative Study of Confucius’s and Socrates’s Ironic Representation

So far I have made a brief survey of the theoretical studies of irony, and presented a dialogic reading of irony in Confucius’s and Socrates’s dialogues about the concepts of knowledge, piety and democratic spirit. My comparative study of the two ancient ironists is intended to demonstrate how a tone of irony enables them to realize their philosophical representation and rhetorical strategy at the early stage of Chinese and Greek civilizations,
and how an ironic structure creates a cross-cultural dialogue about general moral principles that most interest them, and finally how such intertextual comparison, in accordance with the Bakhtinian dialogic imagination, responds to moral dilemmas we still face and denies a monologized meaning that claims its own completion in an era full of irony.

It is surprisingly illuminating that both Confucius and Socrates have used a tone of irony to represent a mosaic of rich and diverse interpretations of their world. They have developed a dialogic reading of discursive social and ideological representations as a "heteroglossia" of discourses—a philosopher or Zeren (智人, literally meaning "man of wisdom" or "philosopher") has to negotiate not only different audiences, but also the variety of meanings striving for expression. Irony, as a rhetorical method in their verbal activities, facilitates, in one way or another, their philosophical inquiry. In Confucius's case, an ironical approach is often an implicit application of his rhetorical strategy, for he highly values the moral principle of being sincere and conscientious in a speech or a dialogue. His search for knowledge (Zhi, 知) starts from two major premises: few men were born with knowledge and true knowledge is obtained in human recognition of "knowing" and "not knowing." As a moral idealist, Confucius extends his imagination to establish a "zero category" of the superiority of human knowledgeability. This category addresses conventional worship of the "superman" or the sage as a spiritual existence, and it also points to the ignorance of learners in general, because his interlocutors are thus urged to realize the gap between a superior knowledgeability and their own limitations. In
view of such a use of the irony in knowledge, Confucius displayed an attitude against agnosticism. With his second premise, Confucius emphasized the addressivity (Bakhtin) of two seemingly contradictory concepts of “knowing” and “not knowing,” and this philosophical inquiry of the dialogical (or verbal) activities of the learning process expressed Confucius’s understanding of a moral principle in one’s quest for knowledge, and real knowledge that comes from a learner’s recognition of what he does know and what he does not. The dramatic effect is achieved through the double meaning of the same word, *Zhi* (*知*), for it conveys both the meaning “to seek, to realize” and the meaning of “knowledge, wisdom,” and thus foregrounds both the process and purpose of the learning process. This is where Confucius’s wisdom lies.

Comparatively, Socrates’s ironical representation of knowledge also starts from a recognition of human ignorance, and his concept of ignorance is similar to Confucius’s “not knowing,” for both are articulated through a verbal claim, based on self-knowledge, and used to stimulate the human passion for seeking and realizing something unknown. However, Socrates’s irony in representing human ignorance is also intended to account for the superiority of his philosophical and dialogical method, and to prove that he is the wisest man. Though he is able to negotiate the two contradictory claims, being ignorant and being the wisest, within his framework of epistemology, he is destined to affront and victimize his interlocutors and audience, for his distinction between wisdom and knowledge, between craftsman knowledge and expert knowledge, mocks the commonly accepted moral principle that wisdom is obtained in an accumulative process of search for
knowledge, and that craftsman knowledge and expert knowledge are complementary rather than conflicting elements in the building of human wisdom. Consequently, Socrates himself is ridiculed and victimized when he infringes on the basic rule in verbal exchange that values wisdom in identifying the rhetor with his interlocutors and audience in intellectual activities, and that also insists on a broader comprehension of human knowledge.

This dialogic representation of Socrates's irony also throws light on Confucius's ironical reflection on knowledge. Once, his disciple, Fan Chi, asked to be taught how to grow crops and vegetables. Confucius immediately disclaimed any knowledge of crops and vegetables. In addition, he denied the usefulness of such knowledge for a gentleman, and criticized Fan Chi as a "small man" who should concentrate on "craftsman knowledge" only (Ch. 13.4). In an era when human survival was entirely dependent on agriculture, Confucius's indifference to such basic knowledge is ironically defined by his self-claimed enthusiasm for Zhi (知, knowledge), for he portrayed himself as a life-long seeker for knowledge regardless of poverty, hardships and old age (Ch. 7.19). His verbal irony is further responded to by those hermits who criticized him as both lazy and ignorant of knowledge of grains (Ch. 18.7). The display of an ironical structure in Confucius's and Socrates's self-knowledge does not, however, diminish the power of their epistemological concepts. Instead, irony as a rhetorical strategy not only facilitates their dialogues about knowledge, but also helps demonstrate the reconciling effects resulting from an intertextual dialogues between them, and from an interaction between their dialogues and our acceptance.
If we regard Confucius's and Socrates's opinions in their construction of knowledge as an intentional verbal irony that begins with human ignorance but ends with general knowledge and wisdom of philosophy, we may frame their dialogues concerning their piety and democratic spirit in terms of a situational irony where the authorial intention of irony is defined and completed by the contexts and situations. Certainly, here I intend to extend the situational irony to include the dialogic relations between rhetor and text, discourse and imagination, and text and situation. In the situation of an early civilization of about two millenniums ago, Confucius and Socrates could hardly avoid a dilemma: on the one hand, they were confined by an epistemological inability to provide a satisfactory explanation of the power of nature and the supernatural; on the other, their philosophical exploration made it hard for them to follow the conventional description of the supernatural. Therefore, they have to address a topic which was actually beyond human knowledge ancient or modern, and which situated their dialogues in an intrinsic irony. In Confucius's case, he generally accepts conventional belief in the gods and spirits, but instead of teaching and discussing anything theological, he tries to transform the traditional religious belief into his moral philosophy (Ch. 5.13). In other words, the religious belief in his philosophical and rhetorical structure functions as moral existence that helps to cultivate "the virtue of common people" (民德，Ch. 1.9), and to facilitate the communication between the supernatural and the human beings through imagination. Specifically, Confucius's piety addresses three components of the supernatural force: gods, spirits, and heaven. Since his dialogical practice leads him to the
conclusion that one could hardly prove the existence of the supernatural (Ch. 11.12), Confucius tends to interpret the supernatural as moral existence or moral force that denies the meaning of a detailed investigation, but can be described and understood in the situation where it conducts, as an omnipresent power, the moral education of the ordinary people and encourages, as a means of communication, the dialogic imagination for the gentleman in his spiritual purification.39

Similarly, Socrates also refuses to prove the existence of the gods of the State. Moreover, his dialogic reading of the divinity as a virtuous force prevents him from any possible identification with the rest of Athenian god-believers, which puts his philosophical inquiry and rhetorical activity in a situation entirely different from that of Confucius. Socrates’ defense of his piety has been ironical, for his confession of a dialogic imagination of the divine force always portrays him to be a non-believer of the Athenian gods. So, Socrates’ rhetoric of piety is basically ego-centric and results in the distinction of the revolutionary spirit of a tragic hero, because he never sought any compromise with his interlocutors and audience. His defense of piety only perfected his dialogic imagination and fulfilled his spiritual journey, but found him a tragic ironist as a victim of the Athenian piety. Comparatively, Confucius’s interpretation of piety, although somewhat contradictory with the conventional belief, is generally society-oriented, and ends in a harmonious unity between the supernatural force and moral elevation of humans. That is why his rhetorical approach to religious topics often produces both ironical and comic effects,40 which certainly much enhances his persuasive power.
As to Confucius’s and Socrates’s attitude toward democracy, irony in their
dialogue is also defined and completed by their situation, and moreover, it is highly
responsive to the democratic movement of our time. Confucius’s democratic spirit in the
dialogue about his political, ethical and educational claims has long been misrepresented
either in the interests of the later feudal rulers or due to the prejudice of a large number of
Confucian scholars in and out of China. Ever since the May Fourth Movement in 1919, Confucius’s theoretical system has often been portrayed to be in opposition to the
democratic movement of modern China. A rhetorical study of his dialogues and
speeches, however, demonstrates that Confucius’s presentation of the government based
on the principle of “benevolence” (仁 ) and dominated by the “gentleman” (君子 ), and
his educational theory and practice tremendously contribute to the democratic ideal of the
Eastern world, though his democratic spirit is reflected in an ironic tonal relationship with
his lifelong struggle for a social system characterized by the rule by a few elites and also
by its hierarchical stratification. Comparatively, Socrates’s dialogues have also been
misrepresented for his hostility to Athenian democracy, which prevents a dialogic
representation of an ironical structure of his democratic spirit in his challenge to the rule
by “the many” at the expense of “the few,” in his argument for the moral elevation of the
Athenians through self-knowledge, and also in his defense sympathetic with the
constitutional democracy--the Athenian Laws.

A dialogue between Confucius and Socrates seems to suggest that these two giant
moral philosophers help lay a foundation for modern democracy in both the East and the
Confucius' rhetorical activities are intended to achieve a "subjective freedom" in the Hegelian sense by his moral education of benevolence for all the people, while Socrates's verbal encounters encourage the freedom of speech in philosophical exploration, and an unconditional obedience to constitutional democracy. That is why 20th century readers in the East, both representative neo-Confucianists and Marxist critics, are all engaged in the study of Confucius's democratic spirit in his verbal activities. And in the West, scholars also make efforts to challenge the traditional interpretation of Socrates as an anti-democratic philosopher. Ironically, as Easterners turn an eye to the individual exploration of Socrates for his moral truth, some Westerners begin to examine the value of Confucianism in democratic society. This revival of interest in the democratic rhetoric of the ancient philosophers may produce even greater ironical effects when one is reminded of the fact that Confucius's rhetoric has long been regarded as a source of Eastern oligarchic systems and Socrates's dialogues actually led to his execution by the Athenian democracy.

Notes


2. Paradox, as a literary figure, unites seemingly contradictory elements but proves to have unexpected meaning. Schlegel followed Aristotle's definition of irony and put irony under the category of paradox—a basic form of human experience (See Friedrich Schlegel's *Fragments*. v2, n42. 152). However, contemporary theories of irony have gone far beyond the classical definition by Aristotle, and irony is rendered as a rhetorical structure that produced not only its verbal implication, but also its situational (Muecke), dialogic (Bakhtin), semiotic (de Man), authorial (Booth), receptional (Kaufer), or neo-
pragmatic (Rorty) meaning. I tend to understand "paradox" as a type of irony, and irony itself represents a basic form of human experience, signifying human dilemma in a continuous interaction, with the other, both individual and communal.

3. For detailed discussion, See Muecke's *Irony*. 66-77.

4. In his most influential essay on irony, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," Paul de Man insists that irony could be read as collapsed narrative, the narrative moves between two moments whose structures are mutually contradictory. See his essay in *Interpretation: Theory and Practice*. Ed. Charles S. Singleton. 173-209.

5. See Lin Yutang’s *Wisdom of Confucius*. 1938. Also see his "Lun Kongzi de youmo" (On Confucius’s Humor) in his book of the same title. 45-52.

6. Christoph Harbsmeier has made a detailed study in his "Confucius Ridens: Humour in the Analects.”

7. The revival of interest in Confucianism goes hand in hand with the democratic movement in the East Asian countries like Korea and Singapore. And in China the discussion of Confucius’s democratic spirit also contributes to the political configuration of a slow but on-going democratic reform.

8. Here, Kao limits his description of irony within the concept of a rhetorical figure rather than the concept of a rhetorical method. See Kao’s “Rhetoric.” *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*. 134.

9. It is recorded in *Liji. Yueji* (《禮記·樂記》) that “Innovation (of knowledge) makes one a sage. And transmission (of knowledge) makes one achieve wisdom.” Similarly, Wang Chong, in *Lunheng* (《論衡》) states, “Sages make innovation (of knowledge), and Good men make transmission (of knowledge).” See Wang Chong’s *Lunheng*.

10. When asked about the source of Confucius’s knowledge, his disciple, Zigong, emphasized that Confucius is good at learning from the past, and from others, and he does not have a constant teacher for him. See *The Analects*. (Ch. 19.22)

11. Tu Wei-ming states, “It is commonly assumed that Confucius was neither theistic nor atheistic, but to characterize his attitude towards God as agnostic is misleading.” See his *Way, Learning, and Politics: Essays on the Confucian Intellectual*. 8.

12. D.C. Lau believes that this recording may not have much to do with Confucius except that it may have been used as teaching material in Confucius’s school. If this argument is valid, we may at least take for granted Confucius’s positive opinion of this kind of ancient
prayer. See Lau’s notes in *The Analects*. 158.

13. Another provocative interpretation is that Confucius’s statement implies his disclaiming of the existence of gods and spirits. See Yang Baojun. 12.


15. Religiousness in the modern sense is described as a persistent pursuit of a full comprehension and appreciation of “holiness,” and the “sacred of all the existing things, natural and supernatural.” See Alfred North Whitehead’s *Modes of Thought*. 120.


17. This idea was further articulated and developed in Xun Zi’s (313-238 B.C.) *Tianlun* (On Heaven). Also worth our attention is Confucius’s term of *Tian* ( 天 ), which may either refer to heavenly principles as is in Ch. 3.13, or refer to the gods. I believe that *Tian* in the dialogue of Ch. 17. 19 means the god or gods, because here *Tian* is a personified speaker, situated between humans and nature.

18. Confucius once talked to a subject of the state of Wei, “When you have offended against Heaven, there is nowhere you can turn to in your prayers” ( Ch. 3.13 ). Here, Confucius emphasizes the participation of gods or Heaven in the judgement of moral behavior in human society. Elsewhere Confucius also insists that gods would refuse to take care of those who fail to behave in accordance with the rites (e.g., Ch. 6.28 ).

19. In Zilu’s question, the word “death” ( 死 ) actually refers to afterlife.

20. It is hard for us to find in *The Analects* a systematic representation of Confucius’s epistemology concerning theological issues. Here, also worth mentioning is that the ironical contrasts in Confucius’s dialogues may be interpreted as a matter of textual stratification, as well as of rhetorical strategy.

21. “Democracy” in the West traditionally emphasizes government by the people in the form of free election. But in modern use, “democracy” often denotes a claim for equal rights and an attitude against arbitrary differences of ranks or privilege ( OED, 1989). It is in the light of this idea of modern democracy that we are enabled to discern a democratic spirit in Confucius’s dialogue.

22. This idea is further developed in Confucius’s theory of naming. See my analysis in Chapter One.
23. This is the term used by Lu Xun in his short story, "Kuangren riji" (Diary of Madman).

24. Before Confucius, "gentleman" (君子) generally referred to aristocrats and high officials. See Shangshu yin-i (An Interpretation of the Documents of Antiquity).

25. Six chi is equal to about one hundred and thirty eight centimeters.

26. H.G. Creel has raised such an original idea to describe Confucius's contribution to the higher education of early China. See his Chinese Thought from Confucius to Mao Zedong. 27-29.

27. Paul de Man has observed such a reconciling power in literary works, which helps to constitute the modes of a work. See his "Semiology and Rhetoric."

28. In the Apology, Socrates made such a confession three times, and he made the same confession in Gorgias (509a4-6), Charmides (165b4-c2), Euthyphro (5a7-c5, 15e5-16a4), Laches (186b8-c5, 186d8-e3, 200e2-5); Lysis (212a4-7, 223b4-8); Hippias Major (286c8-e2, 304d4-e5); Meno (71a1-7, 80d1-4); and Republic I (337e4-5).

29. Vlastos insists on the complexity of Socratic irony, and he maintains that in Socrates's saying concerning knowledge and wisdom what is said is and isn't what is meant. See his Socratic Studies. 65.

30. Such a defense of his piety in Plato's Socratic dialogue is responded to by Xenophon's defense of Socrates when he writes that Socrates "...never did anything impious against the gods, neither by word and deeds of one who deserves to be recognized as a most pious man" (Memorabilia, 1.1.20).

31. See Vlastos's Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher. 280-97. See also Connors' "The Other 399: Religion and the Trial of Socrates."

32. See Kierkegaard's The Sickness unto Death. 99.

33. Johnanne Climacus defines such knowledge vividly when he writes, "(God) is in the creation, and present everywhere in it, but directly he is not there; and only when the individual turns to his inner-self, and hence only in the inwardness of self-activity, does he have his attention aroused, and is enabled to see God." See his Concluding Unscientific Postscript. 218.

34. Representative of these scholars are A.E. Taylor (1933) 103, Guthrie (1971) 61-64, and Stone (1988) 117-39. But, I can hardly agree with Brickhouse and Smith who
classify Vlastos into this group of scholars because of my observation that Vlastos insists on the Platonic Socrates’s preference for the Greek democratic constitution. See Brickhouse (1994). 157.

35. For example, Wood and Wood state that Socrates was active “in a conspiracy against the democratic constitution of Athens.” See their *Class Ideology and Ancient Political Theory: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle in Social Context*. 97. However, later studies by scholars like Vlastos argued for the Platonic Socrates’s preference for the Athenian democratic constitution with the textual evidence in his early dialogues. See Vlastos’s “The Historical Socrates and Athenian Democracy.”

36. Zero category in generative transformational linguistics often refers to “zero article” when a noun or a noun phrase is used without an article, and I have borrowed this concept to distinguish Confucius’s ironical representation of his rhetoric of knowledge.


38. D. C. Muecke attempts to distinguish verbal and situational ironies by the formulae that “He is being ironic...” and “it is ironic that....” See his *The Compass of Irony*. 42.

39. In Chapter Three, I have presented a description of the dialogic relation between Heaven and Confucius as a tragic hero.

40. See my analysis of his dialogue with Zilu on death and afterlife. Also, refer to Harbsmeiers’s essay.

41. The May Fourth Movement (1919-1921) was a new cultural trend by Chinese youth, which aimed at a criticism of Confucianism and making a break with China’s “feudalism.”

42. One of the representative modern neo-Confucianists, Mou Zhongsan, has provided a historical and philosophical approach to Chinese culture, which leads him to the conclusion that Confucianism, in the form of “a moral being” and “an artistic being”, has achieved its “subjective freedom” in the light of the Hegelian theory. However, this freedom can hardly bring Chinese society into a modern democratic politics, because Confucianism is never “a political being” that aims at the political and legal restriction over the Chinese rulers, the emperors. See his *Lishi zhexue*. (Historical Philosophy). 189-93.

43. See Tu Wei-ming’s description of the modern Chinese intellectual quest for the interaction between Confucian humanism and democratic liberalism in his book *Way, Learning and Politics*. 161-78.
Representative is Kuang Yamin's Marxist analysis of Confucius's democratic spirit. See his *Kongzi pinzhuan. (Criticism of Confucius)*. 316-20.
Conclusion

In the preceding four chapters, I have made an exploration of Confucius's and Socrates's dialogical rhetoric from the perspectives of a voice of credibility, proto-scientific attitude, tragic consciousness and irony. The present study rejects the conventional polarized stances that either exclude the Confucian and Socratic dialogues from the domain of rhetorical criticism or confine an otherwise fruitful study of their dialogues to a set of traditional rhetorical/cultural norms. As Wayne C. Booth observes, "The worst enemy of good reading as of good criticism is the application of abstract rules that violate the life of particular works" (227). We need some approach or method to reflect a particular rhetorical practice of these two ancient giants whose philosophical endeavor has made its influence felt in the past two millennia and a half. Their anxiety over a new theoretical representation leads to my discovery in Mihail Bakhtin's dialogism of a powerful method that illuminates the shared aspects of Confucius's and Socrates's rhetoric, that is, their dialogical form and dialogic imagination. It is a dialogic reading that enables us to discern double voices or sometimes a multiplicity of voices that compete for would-be solutions for particular philosophical problems but never reduce such a rhetorical situation to the "chaos" of divergent moral or political claims. Moreover, dialogism which encourages plurality as opposed to polemics helps to locate a "rhetorical
unconsciousness" in Confucius's and Socrates's moral dialogues, because these dialogues often convey an "anti-rhetorical" attitude, and their philosophical implications turn out to be so manifest that their rhetorical norms are much overshadowed. Even so, we are still enticed to make, in the light of Bakhtin's critique, a tentative definition of Confucius's and Socrates's "dialogical rhetoric," a verbal exchange in an informal conversational style that focuses on scientific and philosophical issues, values divergent voices in a process of ongoing interaction, and is characterized by a use of irony and a high sense of emotion, tragic or comic.

The essential and foremost element of such a rhetorical practice is its proto-scientific attitude and philosophical concern. Pervasive through Confucius's dialogue and speech is an open, though not comprehensive, system of ethical theory that attempts to represent the true nature of an ideal social construction and human relations—Way (道), to highlight a set of moral principles with Ren (仁, benevolence) as its core and Li (禮, rites) as its guidance. Simultaneously, Confucius's pragmatic attitude also results in his contribution to popular science and technical communication for ancient Chinese society. In Socrates's case, his dialogue, as a scientific method, is always centered on a moral philosophy to seek the final truth of eudaimonism (happiness) and the functions of ethical issues essential to the improvement of a human soul. His philosophical exploration usually proceeds through an elenctic investigation, a process of refutation. Socrates's dialogue, like that of Confucius, also throws new light on Greek science and technical communication. Illuminating to the modern rhetorical theory is also Confucius's deep
insight into a dialogic interpretation of the relation between De (德, morality) and Yan (言, word), or between a moral truth and a true rhetoric (Socrates). Though Confucius differs from Socrates and takes harmony as the objective of his rhetorical activities, Socrates's recourse to argumentation is by no means counteractive to the concept of harmony, for his elenctic refutation is based on a positive evaluation of consensus between interlocutors of a dialogue. Moreover, the Confucian rhetorical practice, as my analysis indicates in Chapter Three, never totally excludes the method of argumentation even if he repeatedly presents a negative attitude to Ning (忬, empty talk and glibness of tongue) and Zheng (争, contending with each other). What Confucius rejects seems to be high-sounding words and empty talk which undermine the De (德, morality) of a speaker and destroys the credibility of an utterance. So, the over-emphasis on Confucius's negative opinion of argumentation may lead to a misrepresentation of his dialogical rhetoric which sometimes does sound antagonistic in the defense of his moral principles. Through a comparative study of Socrates's and Confucius's dialogues, I tend to believe that argumentation, no matter how it is presented and to what extent it reaches, proves to be instrumental in rhetorical activities of both the East and the West.

Another rhetorical vision my dissertation attempts to highlight is Confucius's and Socrates's dialogized tragic consciousness which is reflected in their pessimistic understanding of a real world philosophical exploration, in their dilemma of being forced to address an unfavorable rhetorical situation, and also in a perpetual tragic response evoked by their miserable end of life among their followers and readers, ancient and
modern. Both Confucius and Socrates felt frustrated in life, for their divine missions are often misrepresented and their moral claims are often ridiculed. Worse still, they had to struggle hard to get their own voices heard in a rhetorical context where even their life was threatened with a death penalty (in Socrates's case) or a murder (in Confucius's case), because the power of their orality posed a challenge to the voice of either the authority or the majority.

Certainly, Confucius and Socrates are not conventional types of tragic heroes of ancient mythology or drama. Their dedication to the exploration of human knowledge and to a continuous rhetorical activity displays now and then an optimistic attitude to an otherwise disappointing social reality—social disorder, injustice, and personal frustration. What makes their dialogues lasting works of rhetoric is a subtle interaction between two opposite emotional tendencies. When Confucius's speech conjures up a carefree journey in the boundless ocean (Ch. 5.7) and when Socrates's defense for his choice of staying in the prison brings out an eternity of spiritual happiness after his mortal extinction (Apology, Crito), the listeners or readers feel a great relief from a suffocating tension resulting from a brutal destiny ranged against these two philosophers. Tragedy and comedy are thus melted or fused into a peaceful intellectual conversation, though actual conversation does not always produce such an imaginative power. Presumably, what characterizes Confucius's and Socrates's tragic consciousness is also its power of persuasion which evokes a tragic response of the listeners/readers to a passion for knowledge inquiry and self-examination/personal cultivation. In Bakhtin's terms, such tragic consciousness is
always "addressive" to its readers not only with a sense of historical reality about the speaker’s personal experience but also with a humanistic concern for intellectual enlightenment of the other—the reader or the listener. To trace a tragic tendency in their dialogues should not, however, obscure the distinction between the connotations of Socrates’s and Confucius’s emotional structure. Socrates’s tragic understanding of the Athenian social reality tends to prevent him from undertaking rhetorical confrontation in the political arena while Confucius’s dialogue suggests that only a political participation leads to the realization of Way (Ch. 18.6). Besides, in regard to the issue of death, Socrates insists that he would rather die than to stop his elenctic investigation, while Confucius claims that a "gentleman" is ready to lose his life only in a practical cause of "benevolence" (Ch. 15.9), which implies that a gentleman values his life and is not prepared to die for certain philosophical or rhetorical activities. The difference between our tragic heroes obviously helps to shape differing attitudes toward political participation and life-and-death issues in the West and the East.

Like many previous works of scholarship on rhetoric, this dissertation also touches upon the topic of irony, though my focus is on how a use of irony, as a rhetorical strategy, helps to configure the concepts of knowledge, piety and democratic spirit in Confucius’s and Socrates’s dialogues, and demonstrates the reconciling effects of their dynamic relations with audience and situation, and also with our contemporary acceptance. Both Socrates and Confucius start their exploration from a recognition of human ignorance or "not knowing" ( ἐγκεφαλίζω ), but their dialogues often make audience or readers convinced
that they possess genuine knowledge, for they know how to seek knowledge and they have a method. The difference lies in the fact that Socrates’s interaction with his interlocutors is directed to questioning and finding error with any statement that claims to the knowledge or final truth, while Confucius’s rhetorical activity generally relies on a continuous contact with anything, oral or written, that reflects tradition or legacy, and with anyone, educated or rustic, who possesses knowledge and is ready to join him in a discussion. Though Confucius’s tone in discussing his personal wisdom is much softened, both of the philosophers attempt to suggest that every statement may be questioned by their interlocutors/discussants or people of the following generations (Ch. 9.23), thus pointing to the ironic nature of philosophical inquiry of proceeding forward without being finalized.5

In terms of Confucius’s and Socrates’s attitude toward piety, we may discern an even more profound sense of irony. Their self-professed piety in accordance with a divine mission and their skepticism of any human endeavor to prove the existence of the supernatural put themselves in a vulnerable position. The true meaning of irony is their transformation of conventional religious belief into a moral philosophy, which enables Confucius to concentrate on a dialogic interpretation of moral education of the common people and enhances Socrates’s dialogic reading of the divinity as a virtuous force that sheds light on his spiritual journey. Since piety was a much less touchy issue in early China than in early Greece, Confucius never had to defend openly his piety as Socrates was forced to, and his religiousness still continues its dialogue with both a neo-Confucian...
interpretation of early Chinese science and a Marxist acceptance of a “plain materialistic” viewpoint in Confucius. Comparatively, Socrates’s piety, apart from its revolutionary spirit, is less warmly accepted in the Western world where religion, as both a way of life and a means of moral education, is still passionately defended as was the case with the Athenian god-believers.

In view of Socrates’s and Confucius’s dialogue concerning democracy, irony exists between a traditional misrepresentation of their attitude and a rediscovery of their democratic spirit, which presents a dialogized mode of modern acceptance. Democratic or oligarchic, Confucius’s and Socrates’s verbal activities simply deny any definite or monologized reading, for both of the thinkers contribute, in one way or another, to the configuration of the doctrine of democracy, though their political claims are often sympathetic with the oligarchic systems of their own time, which, once again, confirms a general belief that any great work can be supremely and intrinsically ironic, consequently encouraging a dialogic reading.

As has been repeatedly highlighted in my explication, both Socrates and Confucius regard dialogue as a way of philosophical life, because they envision a genuine rhetorical practice that relies on interaction between examiner and examinee, and questioner and questionee, thus making a great contribution to rhetorical culture. In his heated attack on Sophistic rhetoric in the Gorgias, Socrates scored sophistic handbooks for the absence of intellectual activity of active participants. Consistent with this rhetorical stance, he again focused his attack in his transitional dialogue, Phaedrus, on the negative use of rhetoric
that denies the dialogical exchange of ideas and emotions. Similarly, Confucius’ rhetorical vision not only takes dialogue as a method of knowledge-making and learning (Ch. 7.22), but also negates the verbal activity that is characterized by high sounding words and empty talk (Ch. 11.25).

In regard to the twentieth-century acceptance of classical rhetoric, the strength of their dialogical rhetoric is generally reflected in two aspects: one is the understanding that it is the process of dialogue that makes human knowledge communicable (Ch. 7.1, 11.43). Socrates, as a central figure of his dialogue, makes possible the earliest philosophizing of human knowledge while Confucius, as a major contributor to the conversations and speeches in *The Analects*, enables us to follow the process of his philosophical exploration as a most influential Eastern thinker; the other is the understanding of Word or Yan (言, word) as individual voices that have to be defined in their relations to others, or in Bakhtin’s words, the individual voices address and are simultaneously defined by not only the voices of others but also by the voices of themselves in a rhetorical context of “heteroglossia.” To emphasize these two aspects of Confucius’s and Socrates’s rhetorical contribution is to indicate the vitality of their dialogical rhetoric in today’s liberal education and also in the increasing expansion of electronic information. In the classroom of composition or speech communication, rhetorical activities are encouraged to engage both teacher and learner in a joint effort in composing process, which is appropriately represented as “contending with words” in Socrates’s expression (Harkin and Schilb, 5). And in the contemporary theory of communication, such a “contending” process is
extended, in accordance with the Confucian rhetorical vision, to display an interaction between individual voices and also among human voices, time and space.⁶ We are convinced that the evolution of the twentieth-century orality and literacy is calling for the recapture of the oral process and written convention embedded in the Confucian and Socratic dialogues because of the fact that although dialogue, as a major rhetorical form, was dying in Plato’s Athens and the similar rhetorical activity became less popular after the Warring States period (475-221 B.C.) of early China, the interiorization of computer science and global electronic communication in our lives has tied classical rhetoric with our contemporary period. The changes in the means of communication have gradually compressed our globe into an ever-diminishing village, and meanwhile, revolutionized our concept of verbal exchange with dialogue embedded in written form. Furthermore, the coming generation of communication marked by visual-aid talks and phonetic identification transformation systems (spoken messages will be automatically transformed into written ones in different languages) will greatly reduce our dependence on writing skills in the near future, and face-to-face dialogue will presumably become once again the major form of our verbal activities. What is more important, such a dialogue will be actualized regardless of cultural differences and linguistic barriers. It might not be a premature inference that an interest will be further revived in oral culture and our study of Confucius’s and Socrates’s dialogical rhetoric will gain more weight in terms of its theoretical as well as its practical value.

After drawing a picture of future forms of human communication, I attempt to call attention to the issue of how Confucius and Socrates contribute to a cross-cultural
dialogue between China and the West. As is stressed in my introduction, a comparative study of the Confucian and Socratic dialogues may function as bridge between the Eastern and Western civilizations. To establish such bridge is not only necessary but also possible. My argument is based on the following considerations. To begin with, both Confucius’s and Socrates’s dialogical rhetoric derives from their humanistic concern for the human condition. Put in a philosophical tone, it deals with the problematic and the questionable, and their rhetorical vision exhibits questions or moral issues and puts forth arguments for or against the chosen solutions. Socrates’s rhetorical practice is almost exclusively directed to questions concerning human confusion with ethical knowledge. Taking the *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus* for example, Plato’s Socrates is found saying that in the true art and science of rhetoric the purpose of joining in a face-to-face discussion is to raise a voice to promote either justice or truthfulness among one’s discussants. Similarly, that is the reason that Confucius’s dialogue and speech are always morality-ridden and pragmatism-oriented. In fact, his utterance is often directed to the phenomena of social disorder or moral degradation. A dialogue between these two ancient philosophers once again alerts modern readers to almost similar problems and questions in our rhetorical context at the turning of the twentieth century, though these issues are closely related to very sophisticated material civilizations and are often branded with the distinct cultural values of the East or the West. In a deeper sense, it becomes much harder for us to argue for a chosen solution. For instance, the issues about the relationship between individual and society, between the human condition and environmental ecology have presented a
great challenge to our time and required us to resort to the wisdom of ancient philosophers like Confucius and Socrates, and to adapt their dialogic interpretations to meet our needs.

Second, Confucius’s and Socrates’s rhetoric, as is explored in Chapter Two, has developed a high sense of tolerance to different voices and viewpoints and encouraged a harmonious rhetorical situation for a common philosophical exploration. To Socrates, this tolerance often comes from a human virtue of temperance. A temperate person, according to his examination with Critias in the *Charmides* (167a), is one who knows himself and is able to examine what others know and what they do not. Certainly, this knowledge should take itself as its object. This understanding is also consistent with human knowledge expounded in the *Apology* (20d). Here, temperance signifies again the honesty to admit one’s own limits and sincerity in exploring the limits of others, therefore preparing oneself for a life-long investigation with others to seek knowledge, particularly the knowledge of the soul. Confucius’s tolerance in his dialogical rhetoric displays the spirit of “not imposing on others what you yourself do not desire” (Ch. 12.2). His tolerance raises a moral principle for dialogical interaction between self and other, which is based on the recognition of what one does not desire. It seems that Confucius’s and Socrates’s attitude to such a moral issue in communication are complementary rather than contradictory. While Confucius’s dialogue often starts from one’s own moral standard so as to use it to guide human relations, Socrates’s exploration generally begins with the self-
knowledge of one’s ignorance so as to help others to realize the similar weakness in themselves. Confucius emphasizes that due respect for each other in word and behavior is the key to a cooperative search for knowledge, whereas Socrates seems to claim that common recognition of human limits is the key to a constructive dialogue. As far as cross-cultural communication is concerned, both of their attitudes contribute to a meaningful exchange of ideas. For how could a dialogue be guaranteed as an ongoing contact without due respect for the interests and value standards of all the participants, and how could a joint philosophical/moral exploration achieve anything without the shared virtues of courage and temperance to face the truth, which could bring shame or frustration for one participant or another? When appealing to dialogue between the East and the West, we cannot ignore the fact that a true dialogue is often a rhetorical and linguistic activity in form but a cultural conflict in meaning. Such a dialogue calls for tolerance of cultural and moral differences between the participants before a common goal is raised for the benefit of all those involved. Since no rhetorical, linguistic or cultural tradition can claim its hegemony over others, no participant in a verbal exchange is encouraged to practice a kind of “rhetorical imperialism.” In this sense, the dialogic imagination of Confucius and Socrates points to the right way of a cross-cultural conversation which aims at an ongoing interaction and a mutual enlightenment in favor of all the rhetors/discussants. Such a democratic spirit is also highly constructive in the human effort to reduce tension in East-West contact and is repeatedly justified to be the most efficient communication practice.
Finally, the Confucian and Socratic dialogues have become new sources for rhetorical exploration with the emerging awareness of second orality.\textsuperscript{10} The recent rapid development of electronic communication technologies have much revived academic interest in classical oral rhetoric.\textsuperscript{11} As is emphasized before, electronic revolution is greatly changing the face of today's communication, and the conversational technique will possibly once again come into the center of the twenty-first century's rhetorical culture. This relatively fragile territory of communication may be further cultivated for a better understanding of the conversational arts originating from the ancient rhetoricians like Confucius and Socrates.

What then are the essential elements that have animated their dialogical practice for more than twenty centuries? It is their voiced message in an artificial text-composition, or a combination of orality and literacy. And also its "miracle" in initiating the power of word and particularizing its potential in real situations where people are engaged with either a scientific inquiry or merely daily communication. In other words, Confucius and Socrates demonstrate a new mode of communication—dialogical rhetoric. It is both dialogue and rhetoric. Being dialogue, it takes into view the dynamic relations between participants/discussants, and between human agents and divergent topics. Being rhetoric, it not only resorts to rhetorical conventions like credibility or \textit{Xin} (誠, sincerity), emotional appeals of tragic consciousness and a use of irony, but also values a scientific attitude of seeking truth or \textit{Way} (道). Following the lead of Bakhtin's dialogism, we are able to discern the interdependence of the dialogical practice and rhetorical norms in their
invention, because such a complementary relation is animated in the contextualization of a continuous interactive process of their rhetorical conduct. Due to this dialogic openness, Confucius’s and Socrates’s dialogue has provided modern communication with a practical choice to go on their scientific search or everyday exchange of ideas with the help of the sophisticated electronic media. Thus, our ancient philosophers remain responsive to our time, and to our questions and discussions. Simultaneously, the dialogue also continues between Confucius and Socrates themselves, for the norms of their rhetorical culture need to be articulated, defined or moderated by each other in a global communication that aims at an accountability for both the general norms and particular applications of their dialogical rhetoric.

Notes

1. See the analysis in my “Introduction.”

2. In his recent research, Carl Becker has made a detailed analysis of ancient East Asian rhetoric and addressed the question why the Chinese and Japanese lack a tradition of argumentation from social, linguistic and philosophical perspectives. See his “Reasons for the Lack of Argumentation and Debate in the Far East.”

3. For instance, when explaining why he never ventures to address the Athenians in the public sphere and advise on the state administration, Socrates gives the reason as “If I had tried long ago to engage in politics, I should long ago have lost my life, without doing good either to you or to myself” (Apology, 32d). Vlastos also maintains that this self-confession indicates that Socrates pleads guilty for his failure in advising the Athenians so as to serve his city. This argument does not sound convincing, for Socrates later defends his silence in the public sphere with the reason that it is the Athenian democracy that suffocates the different voices (Apology, 32a). See Vlastos’s Socratic Studies. 128-29.

4. It is obviously part of the Western tradition to advocate sacrifice for the freedom of
speech. By contrast, the sacrifice of one’s life for a political cause gains more weight in the Eastern civilizations.

5. See also Mueckes’s discussion on the ironic nature of scientific knowledge in *The Compass of Irony*. 152-58.

6. In his paper, Chen Guo-ming discusses five Confucian concepts that help to develop a harmoniously interdependent relationship in the Chinese communication process: *Bian* (change), *Shi* (time), *Wei* (environment), *Ji* (the trace of movement) and *Zhong Dao* (appropriateness). See his “A Chinese Perspective of Communication Competence.”

7. Samuel Huntington convincingly argues for his hypothesis that the conflict of the future world will be among the eight major civilizations: Western, Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and African ones. I can hardly agree, however, to his West-centered rhetoric that may do more harm than good to an otherwise constructive dialogue between the West and the East, or “the West and the Rest,” and that is also in discord with his argument that each of the different civilizations “will have to learn to co-exist with the others.” See his “The Clash of Civilizations.”

8. I have borrowed the term “imperialism” from “linguistic imperialism” which refers to the dominance of a language that is asserted and maintained by establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between this language and other languages. See Robert Phillipson’s *Linguistic Imperialism*. 47.

9. Only a few recent examples may illustrate the vitality of such a democratic spirit in Confucius’s and Socrates’s dialogues: the fruitful conversation between ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and WEU (Western European Union) in 1996, the solution to the trade conflict resulted from a consultation between the U.S.A. and Japan in 1996, and the gradual improvement of Sino-American relations through a constructive strategic dialogue (including a planned presidential hot-line) ever since 1995. When highlighting the function of dialogical rhetoric, I certainly do not intend to exclude the economic, political or military factors that motivate dialogue between the East and the West.

10. In a collection of essays published in 1977, Ong studied the evolution of the word in relation to a wide range of subjects and raises the term “second orality” in order to indicate his belief that the basic orality of language is permanent. See his *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture*.

11. For detailed discussion, see Richard Lanham’s *The Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology, and the Arts*.
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