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The Currency and Relevancy of Confucian Pedagogy in Doctoral Supervision

Vai Io Lo*

Nowadays, the proverb of ‘moving with the times’ resonates among various circles in society. It is important for individuals, entities, and governments to keep abreast of the times because insistence on traditional practices, refusal to make necessary changes, or absorption in the past is not conducive to personal, organizational, or societal advancement. In the field of education, this forward-looking attitude has been translated into the concept of ‘innovation’. To innovate higher education, university administrators and academics formulate and revise policies, strategies, and measures to enhance student learning experience and to move ahead in an increasingly competitive environment. Three examples of innovation in various areas are the introduction of micro-credentials for people who want to attain the necessary qualifications in a shorter period of time (curriculum design), the imparting of knowledge to students through multimodal delivery and blended learning (pedagogical method), and the exploration of means other than a summative examination to measure the performance of students (assessment approach). Even so, there are enduring educational principles and practices that stand the test of time. For instance, knowledge acquisition and character education are the fundamental objectives of education, while teaching and learning, whether it is of knowledge or ethical values, should be achieved gradually (scaffolding education). Hence, it is sensible to discern what should be abandoned and what should be continued among the trend of innovation.

The training of future academics and researchers is part of higher education. Doctoral studies consist of both teaching and research.¹ Numerous studies have been conducted on the theory and practice of

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¹ Although the completion of an in-depth research project is the mainstay of a doctoral degree, the supervisor’s mentoring involves some form of teaching, such as how to formulate the appropriate research design and how to produce a coherent and evidence-based dissertation. US universities also require the completion of coursework as part of the doctoral study.

doctoral studies in and across various disciplines.² Basically, the central questions of doctoral supervision are why, what, and how. It is imperative for a prospective supervisor to understand why he or she would like to undertake doctoral supervision. This is because the underlying aims will affect the quality of the intellectual and research training experience for both the supervisor and the supervisee.³ Once the underlying reasons are identified, the next question is what the supervisor wants to achieve. In essence, what a supervisor would like to accomplish in doctoral supervision is a value judgement because to what he or she attaches importance determines the intended outcomes.⁴ Towards the specific goals, the supervisor must determine how to materialize them. In fact, what approach or style as well as what policies and strategies should be adopted to cultivate research and scholarship skills in doctoral students constitute a significant portion of existing literature.⁵ Given that the ‘how’ is the most challenging element, this study attempts to draw inspirations from the Confucian pedagogy.

Confucius, who lived about 2,500 years ago and whose philosophical thoughts have been influential in Asia for centuries, is also venerated as a model teacher. The pedagogy of this legendary teacher has been referenced by numerous generations of instructors. Accordingly, this study aims to ascertain the salient features of the Confucian pedagogy and examine their currency and relevancy in contemporary doctoral supervision. To this end, the following discussion is composed of three sections. The first section outlines the salient features of the Confucian pedagogy that are most relevant to doctoral supervision. The second section explores the application of these features against the backdrop of existing literature on doctoral supervision and with reference to supervisory experiences in Australian law schools. At the end, the third section draws conclusions.

² For example, a search of ‘doctoral’ in *The Journal of Higher Education* has yielded 2,043 results (online at 7 May 2022) <<https://www.tandfonline.com/action/doSearch?AllField=doctoral&SeriesKey=uhej20>>.

³ In the current university setting, doctoral supervision is undertaken for various reasons. Two common reasons consist of: (1) academics are interested in research topics that fall squarely within their areas of expertise, and this kind of ‘meeting of the minds’ will likely generate collaborative research; and (2) academics feel that doctoral supervision is part of their job, and that the lack of doctoral supervision will be a drawback when they apply for promotion and external research grants.

⁴ The specific goals to be achieved can be: (1) to help doctoral students develop critical thinking and analytic skills; (2) to improve doctoral students’ research competency; and (3) to make the supervisory relationship mutually beneficial in terms of research output and professional networking.

⁵ See Wendy Bastalich, ‘Content and Context in Knowledge Production: A Critical Review of Doctoral Supervision Literature’ (2015) DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2015.1079702 for a critical review of journal articles on doctoral supervision published in a period of 20 years within Australia, Sweden, the Netherlands, and the UK.

I The Confucian Pedagogy

Confucian philosophical thoughts can be discerned in several Chinese classics.⁶ How Confucius taught his students can be glimpsed from *The Analects*, which is a collection of dialogues between Confucius and his students.⁷ Since the Confucian pedagogy cannot be satisfactorily presented in a short article, the following highlights salient features that are most relevant to doctoral supervision in law schools.

A. *Non-Discriminatory Admission and Personalized Instruction*

Whether or not Confucius had three thousand students is beyond the scope of this study, but it is clear that he accepted students regardless of their economic, political, and social backgrounds. As Confucius said, ‘There is no categorization in instruction’.⁸ During his times, most commoners were not able to receive education. Confucius, however, advocated equality in education. He admitted students from diverse backgrounds and without any differentiation between the aristocrats, the bureaucrats, and the commoners. This kind of open admission rendered his student body very diverse. Evidently, his belief and practice were very similar to the contemporary notion of universal education.

Nonetheless, Confucius did not employ the same pedagogical approach in teaching his students. In imparting knowledge, ethics, and principles of state governance to his students, Confucius taught in accordance with their respective aptitudes. As Confucius said, ‘One can discuss advanced knowledge with those who are above average, but one cannot do so with those who are below average’.⁹ Besides, Confucius said, ‘Those who are born with knowledge are at the highest level. Below them are those who become knowledgeable through study. Further below are those who turn to study after encountering difficulties. Those who refuse to study even after encountering difficulties are at the lowest level’.¹⁰ In other words, there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to instruction, and how and what an instructor should teach depends on the aptitude of a particular student. This personalized approach to instruction can be exemplified by two instances.

⁶ See, eg, *The Great Learning* [《大学》] and *The Doctrine of the Mean* [《中庸》].

⁷ *The Analects* has been translated into several English versions, which are readily available for perusal in libraries or online. In this article, the quotes from the *Analects* are translated into English by the author.

⁸ *The Analects* [《论语》], Book XV, 39. The original text is 子曰：有教无类。

⁹ Ibid Book VI, 21. The original text is 子曰：中人以上，可以语上也；中人以下，不可以语上也。

¹⁰ Ibid Book XVI, 9. The original text is 子曰：生而知之者，上也；学而知之者，次也；困而学之，又其次也；困而不学，民斯为下矣。

In the first instance, Zi Lu [his student] asked, 'Should one act on what has just been heard?' Confucius said, 'If the father and elder brothers are still alive, how can one act on what has just been heard?' Ran You [his student] asked, 'Should one act on what has just been heard?' Confucius said, 'Yes, one should'. Gongxi Hua [his student] then said, 'When Zi Lu asked, "Should one act on what has just been heard?" You said, "If the father and elder brothers are still alive, how can one act on what has just been heard?" When Ran You asked, "Should one act on what has just been heard?" You answered, "Yes, one should." I am perplexed. Would you please explain this to me?'. Confucius replied, 'Ran You holds himself back, so I tried to urge him on. Zi Lu is bold and energetic, so I tried to hold him back'.¹¹ Hence, when two students asked whether they should put into action something which they had just learned or were supposed to do, Confucius provided different answers, depending on their respective abilities and personalities.

In the second instance, Yan Yuan [his student] inquired about benevolence. Confucius said, 'Overcoming one's self to conform to propriety is benevolence. If one can overcome oneself to conform to propriety for one day, then the whole society would consider this benevolence. To be benevolent depends on oneself. How can it depend on others?'. Yan Yuan said, 'Please list the concrete steps'. Confucius replied, 'Do not look at, listen to, speak, or do anything that is in contravention of propriety'. Yan Yuan then said, 'Although I am not sagacious, I will do whatever you have said'.¹² Nevertheless, when Zhong Gong [his student] asked about benevolence, Confucius said, 'Go out to behave as if you were meeting important guests. Employ the services of the common people as if you were officiating at grand sacrificial ceremonies. Do not impose on others what you do not want. Work without complaining in vassal states or fiefs'. Zhong Gong said, 'Although I am not sagacious, I will do whatever you have said'.¹³ Similarly, when Sima Niu [his student] raised the question of benevolence, Confucius said, 'A benevolent person speaks cautiously'. Sima Niu asked, 'Is benevolence simply speaking cautiously?'. Confucius replied, 'If it is difficult to act, how can one not speak

¹¹ Ibid Book XI, 22. The original text is 子路问：闻斯行诸？子曰：有父兄在，如之何其闻斯行之？冉有问：闻斯行诸？子曰：闻斯行之。公西华曰：由也问闻斯行诸，子曰：有父兄在；求也问闻斯行诸，子曰：闻斯行之；赤也惑，敢问。子曰：求也退，故进之；由也兼人，故退之。

¹² Ibid Book XII, 1. The original text is 颜渊问仁。子曰：克己复礼为仁。一日克己复礼，天下归仁焉。为仁由己，而由人哉？颜渊曰：请问其目。子曰：非礼勿视，非礼勿听，非礼勿言，非礼勿动。颜渊曰：回虽不敏，请事斯语矣。

¹³ Ibid Book XII, 2. The original text is 仲弓问仁。子曰：出门如见大宾，使民如承大祭；己所不欲，勿施于人；在邦无怨，在家无怨。仲弓曰：雍虽不敏，请事斯语矣。

cautiously?’¹⁴ From these conversations, it is evident that Confucius explained the concept of benevolence in light of the respective aptitudes, backgrounds, and personalities of his students.

Accordingly, Confucius’ student-oriented approach to instruction necessitated the ascertainment of his students’ attributes, interests, and aspirations. In regard to understanding an individual, Confucius said, ‘Analyse his motives and purposes of his actions, observe the path he takes, and examine with what he contents. In this way, how can a person hide his true character? How can a person hide his true character?’¹⁵ That is, apart from transmitting knowledge, a teacher should try to understand a student’s aptitude and personality through the observation of small clues. In doing so, the teacher can develop an individualized method to optimize the student’s learning experience and achieve the intended learning outcomes.

B. Heuristic Dialogue and Systematic Guidance

In *The Analects*, Confucius and his students discussed a variety of topics by means of questions and answers. Through this interactive approach, his students heuristically acquired knowledge and learned ethics rather than passively listening to lectures. Confucius said, ‘I will not enlighten a student who has not been frustrated in trying to understand a concept. I will not inspire a student who has not run out of words to express his ideas. When I exemplify a subject by pointing out one corner of a square, but the student does not draw inferences about the other three corners, I will not point it out again.’¹⁶ Therefore, Confucius would not ‘spoon-feed’ his students if they had not undertaken any efforts to understand or express the relevant ideas. Moreover, through learning by analogy, Confucius expected his students to develop an integrative way of thinking.

Relatedly, Confucius’ heuristic dialogues are different from the Socratic method used in contemporary law school. In US law schools, students are urged to read the assigned court cases beforehand. In class, the instructor will randomly choose students and ask them a series of questions about the facts, reasoning, and judgment of those cases. The underlying purpose is to help the students understand the substantive and procedural laws and the concomitant legal reasoning by ascertaining the similarities and differences among those cases. In doing so, the instructor helps the students develop the ability to think

¹⁴ Ibid Book XII, 3. The original text is 司马牛问仁。子曰：仁者，其言也讱。司马牛曰：其言也讱，斯谓之仁矣乎？子曰：为之难，言之得无讱乎？

¹⁵ Ibid Book II, 10. The original text is 子曰：视其所以，观其所由，察其所安，人焉廋哉？人焉廋哉？

¹⁶ Ibid Book VII, 8. The original text is 子曰：不愤不启，不悱不发。举一隅不以三隅反，则不复也。

critically. Throughout the teaching process, it is the instructor who poses the questions and directs the discussions in order to achieve what he or she intends, such as the students' understanding of the legal concept of unconscionability. Conversely, when Confucius taught, it often was his students who raised the questions. Confucius answered those questions in accordance with his students' respective aptitudes, personalities, and backgrounds. In that way, Confucius' student-oriented heuristic dialogues flexibly catered to the needs and interests of his students.

Moreover, Confucius systemically and patiently instructed and guided his students. As Yan Yuan [his student] sighed and said, 'The more I look upwards the higher it appears. The more I bore it the firmer it becomes. I see it in front of me, but suddenly it is behind me. The Master graciously guides me step-by-step. He enriches me with culture and restrains me with propriety. I cannot stop learning even though I want to quit'.¹⁷ Since haste makes waste, patience is an essential attribute of a good teacher. Yan Yuan's reflection reveals that Confucius' students admired his intellect, found it difficult to attain his level of knowledge, and persevered due to his patience and systematic guidance.

In fact, systematic guidance can be achieved not only through verbal inculcation but also exemplary conduct. Confucius said, 'If a ruler is rectitudinous, there will be obedience even though no orders are given; however, if a ruler is not rectitudinous, there will be no obedience even though orders are given'.¹⁸ Moreover, 'If a person is rectitudinous, what difficulties will there be for him to engage in state governance? How can a person ask others to behave well if he does not behave uprightly?'.¹⁹ Furthermore, Confucius remarked, '[Yan] Hui [his student] is not helpful to me. He is pleased with whatever I say'.²⁰ Consequently, Confucius pointed out that instructors can teach by example, the deeds and words of an instructor must be consistent, and an instructor can improve by being receptive to student feedback.

C. *Knowledge Review and Critical Thinking*

Confucius once said, 'A craftsman who wants to produce good craftwork must first sharpen his tools'.²¹ In the context of learning and teaching, the question is what 'tools' an instructor should help the

¹⁷ Ibid Book IX, 11. The original text is 颜渊喟然叹曰：仰之弥高，钻之弥坚，瞻之在前，忽焉在后。夫子循循然善诱人，博我以文，约我以礼，欲罢不能。

¹⁸ Ibid Book XIII, 6. The original text is 子曰：其身正，不令而行；其身不正，虽令不从。

¹⁹ Ibid Book XIII, 13. The original text is 子曰：苟正其身矣，于从政乎何有？不能正其身，如正人何？

²⁰ Ibid Book XI, 4. The original text is 子曰：回也非助我者也，于吾言无所不说。

²¹ Ibid Book XV, 10. The original text is 子曰：工欲善其事，必先利其器。

students to forge. Based on *The Analects*, it can be argued that Confucius employed a two-pronged approach—the review of existing knowledge and the development of critical thinking.

When Confucius taught his students, he stressed the indispensability of re-examining existing knowledge. Confucius said, ‘Review the old to know the new. Then you can be a teacher’.²² Simply stated, a teacher is someone who knows the hitherto and can envision the future in a specific field. To acquire knowledge, students should not skip reviewing existing information or established knowledge on the ground that it is outdated and thus not useful. Confucius asked his students to review existing information and established knowledge because such a review would enable them to obtain new understandings of familiar information, generate new insights about difficult or unresolved issues, and acquire new ideological or theoretical guidance for future endeavours. Analogically, the re-examination of existing knowledge allows the reviewer to collect the necessary building blocks and to discern the room for improvement in terms of future construction.

Apart from being conversant with existing information and established knowledge, the learner must also develop critical thinking. As Confucius said, ‘If one studies but does not think, one will be bewildered. If one just thinks but does not study, one will be in peril’.²³ In other words, a person who only reads but does not think about what has been read, or a person who accepts everything the teacher has taught without questioning, will still be baffled, while a person who only thinks but does not study, or a person who thinks discursively without reading the basics, will be jeopardized by abstract reasoning. Confucius once remarked, ‘Am I knowledgeable? No. I am not. A peasant asked me a question, but my mind was blank. I kept thinking from the two opposite sides of the question until I could fully understand’.²⁴ That is to say, a person must engage in rigorous thinking from different perspectives if he or she wants to understand an issue or master a subject comprehensively. In this sense, the review of existing material and the development of critical thinking are complementary in the acquisition, application, and retention of knowledge.

II Application of the Confucian Pedagogy

Currently, the challenges facing doctoral studies are multifold. According to one study that examined papers written on issues relating to doctoral studies from 1971 to 2012, there are six central themes: teaching, doctoral program design, writing and research, employment

²² Ibid Book II, 11. The original text is 子曰：温故而知新，可以为师矣。

²³ Ibid Book II, 15. The original text is 子曰：学而不思则罔，思而不学则殆。

²⁴ Ibid Book IX, 8. The original text is 子曰：吾有知乎哉？无知也。有鄙夫问于我，空空如也。我叩其两端而竭焉。

and career, student-supervisor relationship, and the doctoral student experience.²⁵ More recently, other issues have emerged, including how to ensure academic integrity, how to safely store and retrieve research data, and whether applied research should take precedence over pure research in light of various requirements under government- or industry-funded grants. Where the award criterion of government funding has shifted from the number of enrolled postgraduate students to the actual outcomes derived from the training of researchers,²⁶ the completion and attrition rates feature prominently on the agenda of many doctoral programs.

Although the successful completion of doctoral degrees depends on a multitude of factors, the determinants of completion rate can be subsumed under the categories of relational, structural, and organizational.²⁷ This study focuses on the relational aspects because the supervisor-student relationship and the supervisory approach play a significant role in the success of any doctoral pursuit. One study has identified five non-independent approaches to doctoral supervision: functional, enculturation, critical thinking, emancipation, and developing a quality relationship.²⁸ This study, however, will not discuss or recommend any particular supervisory approach. Instead, this study explores how Confucian pedagogy can be applied to present-day doctoral supervision.

A. Multifaceted Admission and Personalized Supervision

Confucius accepted students regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds, so his student body was very diverse. At present, discrimination in employment and education based on race, gender, religion, age, and so forth is prohibited in many countries. However, people can make decisions based on personal preferences without breaching anti-discriminatory laws. In the doctoral recruitment and admission process, applicants with high grade point averages in their bachelor or master's studies are often admitted because their previous academic performance displays their potential for success in doctoral

²⁵ Michael Jones, 'Issues in Doctoral Studies—Forty Years of Journal Discussion: Where Have We Been and Where Are We Going?' (2013) 8 (6) *International Journal of Doctoral Studies* 83-104.

²⁶ Bastalich (n 5) 1.

²⁷ Radosveta Dimitrova, 'Ingredients of Good PhD Supervision—Evidence from a Student Survey at Stockholm University' (2016) 10(1) *Utbildning & Lärande* 40, 44.

²⁸ Specifically, supervision is an issue of project management (functional); the supervisee is encouraged to become a member of an academic discipline (enculturation); the supervisee is encouraged to question and analyse his or her work (critical thinking); the supervisee is encouraged to question and develop himself or herself (emancipation); and the supervisee is enthused, inspired, and cared for (developing a quality relationship). Anne Lee, 'How Are Doctoral Students Supervised? Concepts of Doctoral Research Supervision' (2008) 33(3) *Studies in Higher Education* 267-281.

programs. Nevertheless, the grade point average is only one of the predictors for the successful completion of a doctoral degree. In selecting prospective supervisees, supervisors should adopt a multifaceted approach by taking into consideration factors other than previous academic performance, such as relevant work or industry experience, research potential, level of maturity, commitment to PhD study, international exposure, and the significance of the proposed research. This is because diversity in the student body will enhance contributions to existing scholarship and generate stimulating intellectual exchanges from various perspectives, thereby enriching the overall environment for learning and research.

In his teaching, Confucius adopted a personalized, student-oriented approach. This approach is also applicable in contemporary doctoral supervision. A personalized approach is advisable for several reasons. Doctoral students are of different ages (supervisees can be aged from late 20s to over 70), have different personalities and aptitudes (some supervisees are relatively passive and need step-by-step guidance while others will take advice only after the supervisor's repeated attempts), come from various walks of life (some supervisees may have recently graduated from bachelor programs with honours, but some supervisees have extensive industry or practical experiences), and have had different amounts of preparation before they enter the program (some supervisees have prior research experience, while some supervisees whose English proficiency is below expectation). As a result, it is crucial for the supervisor to get to know the doctoral student prior to determining what strategies should be adopted in each case.

Additionally, doctoral supervision should be student-oriented or student-centred. That is, the supervisor should let the supervisee have the final say on the research topic, the research methodology, and the relevant research questions. In this connection, one study found that caring supervision of PhD theses has its own special features and presents a more student-centred approach than the concept of efficient supervision.²⁹ Although a supervisor and a supervisee often have similar research interests and the supervisor is more knowledgeable in the relevant field, the supervisor should remember that: the research project belongs to the supervisee; the supervisee often has more expertise than the supervisor in relation to the research topic, so the supervisee should decide on how the relevant issues should be examined and presented; and the supervisee may disagree with the supervisor based on well-reasoned arguments. This kind of student-oriented understandings can prevent the supervisee from being asked to re-draft chapters of the thesis to be in line with what the supervisor

²⁹ Kaarina Määttä, 'A Caring Supervisor—Ten facts of Caring Supervision' (2015) 8(9) *International Education Studies* 185-193, 185.

wants to argue and help the supervisee develop confidence in their scholarly work. Succinctly, the supervisor's main task is to evaluate whether the supervisee has conducted comprehensive research on a particular topic and whether he or she presents the research findings logically in a self-contained thesis. Put it another way, a supervisor should act more like a film critic than a director.

B. Heuristic Meeting and Progressive Guidance

Confucius' heuristic dialogue and systematic guidance can be replicated in doctoral supervision. In most cases, supervisor-supervisee meetings consist of an initial meeting and subsequent regular meetings. A well-organized initial meeting can set the stage for a successful supervisory relationship because the supervisor can explain to the supervisee what he or she is expected to accomplish prior to confirmation, discuss how often meetings will be held, suggest the relevant materials the supervisee should first examine in preparation for literature review, ascertain what needs or concerns the supervisee has, and highlight the importance of three basic principles—be prepared to work hard ('no pain, no gain'), strive for excellence but not perfection, and live a balanced life. Subsequent regular meetings allow the supervisor to use heuristic dialogues to help the supervisee brainstorm ideas, understand difficult concepts or theories, identify the overarching research question and relevant research sub-questions, develop critical thinking, and finalize the research project.

With respect to systematic guidance, Confucius stressed the importance of exemplary conduct. Although regular supervisor-supervisee meetings constitute the main avenue for the supervisor to provide guidance and feedback, supervisory guidance can also be given in other settings and through conduct. This is because how the supervisor behaves academically will have an impact, whether it is major or minor, on the supervisee. For example, how accessible and approachable the supervisor is, how good a listener the supervisor is, how the supervisor supports the supervisee to overcome obstacles, how the supervisor helps the supervisee develop academic networking, and whether the supervisor can accept criticisms open-mindedly will have an impact on the supervisee. In fact, one study found that the subsequent supervisory styles of the participants emerged as a reaction to both positive and negative experiences in supervision.³⁰ Regardless of whether guidance is given verbally or through conduct, the supervisor must be patient and work with the supervisee progressively and supportively in view of the latter's aptitude and pre-enrolment preparations. That is, the setting of short-term goals, the preparation for

³⁰ Simon Stephens, 'The Supervised as the Supervisor' (2014) 56(6) *Education and Training* 537-550, 547.

confirmation, the drafting of the doctoral thesis, and the provision of feedback on draft chapters must cater to the strengths and weaknesses of each supervisee.

For both heuristic meetings and progressive guidance, trust-based communication is essential. Where a doctoral supervision is built on trust, the supervisor is committed to helping the supervisee complete the degree while the supervisee is committed to spending the requisite amount of time and effort to attain it. Trust enables both parties to solve problems and overcome difficulties in the course of supervision. In particular, the supervisor should let the supervisee know what expectations exist in doctoral studies and honestly tell the supervisee what needs to be improved without lowering the latter's self-confidence. The supervisee should let the supervisor know his or her concerns or challenges, whether academically or personally, so that short-term goals and plans can be adjusted to reduce stress and long-term goals can be realistically set. Being partners working towards a common goal, the supervisor and the supervisee walk together on the path to doctoral completion.

Where the supervisee is an international student or a student whose native language is not English or the language of instruction, the supervisor must communicate more frequently and provide guidance patiently. This is because the previous academic training of international doctoral students could be quite different from that of domestic doctoral students, international doctoral students (and their families) need to adjust to new physical and cultural environments, and students whose native language is not the language of instruction need to overcome language barriers. Besides, the supervisor should facilitate interactions between international doctoral students and domestic doctoral students because not only will such interactions enable international students to adjust more quickly to the new academic environment, but also the consequential friendship lays the foundation for an international academic network.

Regardless of whether the supervisor is a mentor, coach, project manager, role model, or a combination of these, the successful completion of a doctoral degree requires the supervisor to work progressively and supportively with the supervisee. Moreover, since the emphases of caring supervision may change over time,³¹ the supervisor should flexibly adjust the amount and content of guidance so as to optimize the doctoral training of each supervisee.

³¹ Määttä (n 29) 186.

C. Literature Review and Independent Thinking

To generate new insights, Confucius encouraged his students to review established knowledge. In contemporary doctoral studies, literature review is required for all disciplines. The amount and rigor of literature review depends on the relevant discipline and the proposed research topic. In law schools, doctoral students are required to review existing statutes, treaties, cases, reports, scholarly articles, and academic books pertaining to the proposed research topic, and in the case of interdisciplinary research, the relevant materials in non-law disciplines. Some doctoral students think that the purpose of literature review is to find a niche or gap in current literature so that they can fulfill the requirement of making contributions to existing scholarship. Nonetheless, literature review is more than finding a niche or gap in current scholarship. Literature review enables doctoral students to obtain new understandings of familiar knowledge, challenge taken-for-granted assumptions, and generate new theoretical and practical insights. Therefore, it is important for doctoral students to conduct comprehensive and in-depth literature review. In this regard, some doctoral students have reported that they keep on revising the scope of their proposed research and refining their arguments as they delve more profoundly into existing scholarship.

In ancient times, Confucius emphasized the importance of critical thinking. At present, the ability to think critically is considered an attribute of anyone who has undertaken doctoral study. Doctoral students can easily regurgitate what has been read or heard, but the ability to think critically entails objective and rigorous analysis and synthesis of research material. On the one hand, the supervisor should help the supervisee transition from mere reporting to critical thinking. This often takes the form of raising challenging questions. On the other hand, the supervisor should ensure that the supervisee will not overdo it by criticizing everything. For example, an inexperienced doctoral student may enthusiastically find problems or point out trivialities in other participants' presentations at conferences. Even better, the supervisor may take a step further by helping the supervisee develop independent thinking, that is, the supervisee will not hesitate to disagree with the supervisor. Doctoral supervision is a two-way learning process because the supervisee receives advice and guidance from the supervisor while the supervisor can also learn from the supervisee. It can be argued that once the supervisee can think critically or independently and present the research findings logically in effective writing, the supervisor has completed his or her supervisory job.

III Conclusions

Doctoral supervision is a challenging but rewarding experience. The success of doctoral supervision entails not only effective pedagogical means, but also the meticulous handling of power dynamics and the cultivation of an educational partnership. To an extent, doctoral supervision is an 'art' because the supervisor must have a passion for supervision, the supervisor learns and enhances his or her supervisory skills from cumulative supervisory experiences, and the supervisor must be patient because each supervisee reaches the 'cross-over' point where he or she knows how to analyze and synthesize the research material and produce a well-written thesis at different times during the doctoral journey. Yet, to be able to contribute to the training of future researchers and academics is one way for academics to give back to society.

One may argue that there is nothing new with the Confucian pedagogy: non-discriminatory admission, personalized instruction, heuristic dialogue, systematic guidance, knowledge review, and critical thinking. Although these concepts are not unfamiliar in contemporary learning and teaching, it is notable that Confucius already employed pedagogical means similar to what present-day educators advocate about 2,500 years ago. Moreover, the existence of the same or similar pedagogical principles and methods in present times reflects the enduring value of the Confucian pedagogy. Given that the Confucian pedagogy stands the test of time, contemporary supervisors may want to adopt its salient features as 'pillars' to formulate innovative and individualized strategies for supervising doctoral students from diverse backgrounds.