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Doubt the *Analects*: An educational session using the *Analects* in medical ethics in Japan

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1. Introduction: Confucius and the *Analects*

The *Analects* is a collection of the sayings of Confucius, one of the most influential thinkers of Eastern philosophy and a representative of Eastern culture (1). The traditional dates for his birth and death are 551 and 479 BC, and he was born in Lu in eastern China (2). Jaspers (3) regards Confucius, together with Socrates, Gautama Buddha, and Jesus Christ, as the four paradigmatic individuals, based on their influence on all philosophy (1, 4). The *Analects* is highly regarded in the history of philosophy, and have been read by one generation after another for two and a half millennia in the Asian cultural sphere as well as in China.

Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shintoism are deeply rooted in the Japanese psyche, and have influenced behavior and governed Japanese spirituality, especially human relationships, for centuries (5). As in China, the *Analects* have been long read in Japan and have influenced many Japanese; it is the classic of the classics among the Japanese people (6). The *Analects,* as well as Confucius, is well known and very popular in present Japanese society, and books concerning the *Analects* continue to be published (7). It can be said that some of Confucius's sayings constitute valuable mottos regarding a way of life for modern Japanese people.

The key virtue of Confucian ethics is humanity (*ren* in Pinyin, *jen* in Wade-Giles, *jin* in Japanese). It has a variety of translations, such as perfect virtue, kindness, goodness, human-heartedness, and benevolence, and summarizes how a human being should ideally behave towards other human beings. It embraces all the social virtues (2). In the *Analects*, humanity is regarded as a supreme virtue or central principle. It has loyalty and compassion at its core, i.e., following the dictates of one's conscience and being compassionate to others (8, 9). When asked about humanity in the *Analects*, Confucius refers to courtesy, tolerance, good faith, diligence, and kindness as five characteristics for achieving humanity (2). It is also argued that humanity, righteousness, and rule of propriety comprise the most fundamental thoughts and principles of Confucian ethics (1).

The aim of the present paper is to examine the present-day implications and potential utility of the *Analects* in medical ethics education, especially in Japan. First, we describe current worrisome situations concerning medical ethics and professionalism among healthcare professionals, especially physicians in Japan, and argue that further educational attempts using the *Analects* with healthcare students and professionals may be meaningful. Second, we consider how to teach medical ethics and professionalism using the *Analects* and propose conducting a session called, "Doubt the *Analects*." For healthcare students and professionals to acquire appropriate principles of medical ethics and professionalism, becoming convinced of the significance of Confucius' sayings through initial skepticism is essential. Finally, we describe three hypothetical "Doubt the *Analects*" sessions and deliberate their potential implications.

At the outset, we would like to make it clear that we are not concerned here with the details of Confucian ethics such as the Decree of Heaven, what "Gentleman" (the superior man, a man of virtue, a true gentleman) means in Confucianism, the concepts of the Way, or political statements found in the *Analects*. These themes have already been discussed extensively elsewhere and are not the points in question in our arguments.

2. Further educational attempts are necessary in Japan

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in Japan recently announced that 44 physicians and dentists were subject to administrative disposition in 2012 and 24 in 2013, and that five had their licenses revoked in 2012 and one in 2013 for crimes such as rape and fraud (10, 11). It was also reported that a physician in his fifties was arrested because he raped a woman in her twenties after giving alcohol and possibly sedatives (12). The wrongdoings of medical scientists repeatedly make headlines, including fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, and inappropriate use of national research funds. Such misconduct has been demonstrated by both individual researchers and organizations (13-15).

There is concern that rapid infiltration of commercialism into healthcare might lead healthcare institutions or professionals to prioritize financial benefits over the best interests of patients. It is commonly said in Japan that medicine is a humanitarian profession (I ha jin-jutsu), implying that healthcare is socially expected to serve the public regardless of loss or gain by the professionals involved. However, medicine is often criticized nowadays as an arithmetic profession that is aimed at making money. Distrust of medicine and healthcare professionals has continued, with no sign of improvement. At the same time, devoted and conscientious healthcare professionals have faced various and frequent ethical dilemmas in the clinical setting (16). In addition, as life science and technology advances make possible the clinical uses of enhancement rather than treatment, the goals, legitimate boundaries, and central value of medicine become less certain (17). Thus, it is highly necessary for us to consider what true medical ethics is and what defines an appropriate attitude of healthcare professionalism. Similarly, it is more necessary than

ever for us to develop effective education for healthcare students and professionals regarding biomedical ethics and professionalism.

3. Why the *Analects*?

Some may ask why the *Analects* is suitable teaching material for current education in medical ethics and professionalism. Others would question why we focus on the sayings of Confucius, who was born 2500 years ago. Present-day healthcare students and professionals might reject the *Analects* or Confucius, claiming that they are very old-fashioned, irrelevant to modern medicine and life science, and have been replaced by contemporary biomedical ethics. We expect some skepticism of the utility and value of the *Analects* in such educational attempts, but in the following, we demonstrate that there are plenty of good reasons for our proposal.

First, as previously mentioned, the *Analects* is highly regarded historically and philosophically, and it is worthwhile for anyone to read it once. Second, the *Analects* is relevant to Japanese medicine and healthcare. Humanity (jin) is a central virtue in Confucian philosophy and historically in Japan, there is the public expectation that medicine is a humanitarian profession. Thus, it is fair to say that the spirit of Confucianism has been deeply rooted in Japanese medicine, its ethics, and the public who are potential patients. At the same time, some of Confucius's statements are about ideal relationships among people, which naturally have some impact on what is considered right or wrong, and what is good or bad in human relationships in health care. Furthermore, important principles of contemporary biomedical ethics can be found in the teachings of Confucius in the *Analects* (1).

Third, the ideas and teachings in the *Analects* are not based on teachings and thoughts of gods with consciousness and emotions similar to humans, and this may make the *Analects* more familiar and approachable for Japanese people, who seldom have faith in monotheism. It is said, "The Master did not speak of prodigies, force, disorders, or spirits (chapter 21of Book 7)" (2), and Confucius said, "If one does not yet understand life, how does one understand death? (chapter 12 of Book 11)" (2). Confucius does not mention either gods or nature, but is strongly concerned with actual people. He repeatedly addresses various perspectives of how people ought to live and act in actual societies (8). Fourth, as mentioned above, Japan has a long history of reading the *Analects*. They were imported from China in the early sixth century and formed the foundation of some parts of the first Japanese Constitutions by Shotoku-taishi. Since then, through its massive acceptance by people, regardless of class, during the Edo Era, the *Analects* have molded the mentality and culture of the Japanese (6, 18). We think that even now, the *Analects* is one of the most popular philosophy books in Japan.

The fifth reason is the impact of simple short sentences on our thoughts and reflection. Unlike long and abstruse philosophical works that include puzzling passages, Confucius's short and direct sayings are often easy to read, memorize, and remember. For instance, we think that "If by keeping the old warm one can provide understanding of the new, one is fit to be a teacher(chapter 11 of Book 2)" (2), and "Do not inflict on others what you yourself would not wish done to you (Chapter 24 of Book 15)" (2) are among the many perfect examples. His remarks in the *Analects* resonate with those who are living 2500 years later (6). These sayings have considerable influence on our way of thinking and living, similar to the very essence of Kantian ethics, "Act in such a way to treat people as ends and never as means", or that of utilitarianism, "The right thing to do is that which is likely to produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people" (19). Whether or not one regards these sayings as useful ethical guidelines in one's actual life depends on an individual's perspective and attitudes, and some might have considered them completely irrelevant to their life when they learned them. Nevertheless, it is possible that those who did not appreciate the worth of Confucius's statements at first may be convinced of their significance later in life. Therefore, it is worthwhile for one to have a chance to study and appreciate the *Analects*.

4. Incorporation of the *Analects* into medical ethics education for healthcare students and professionals: "Doubt the *Analects*"

Here we consider the strategy for conveying the messages of Confucius to the hearts of healthcare students and professionals who study medical ethics and professionalism. Attempting to teach the learners what a great scholar thinks is right as established knowledge or "the correct answer" is an undesirable method. Such an attempt might bring about rapid rejection without any appreciation in some learners and superficial memorization without real understanding in others. In either situation, the likely outcome is that nothing is really learned.

Historically in Japan, the *Analects* have often been taught by the learner reading passages aloud in front of a teacher and memorizing them mechanically, without thinking about their meaning or content (Sodoku). However, according to Hasegawa, reading the *Analects* aloud imposes on the learner the teacher's opinion that the *Analects* is an unparalleled masterpiece full of edifying teachings of Confucius, and instills respect for the *Analects* without any judgments. He claims that today's students should be liberated from the traditional reading of text aloud and that it is essential for learners to respect the *Analects* spontaneously as an outcome of criticism, confrontation, and struggle (20).

We agree with Hasegawa's position. Books discussing the *Analects* tend to assume the correctness of the sayings in the *Analects* and the wisdom of Confucius. From an educational standpoint, however, the sayings and ideas of Confucius should be treated as targets for intensive discussion among learners, not as final answers. It is claimed that each saying of Confucius has to be examined in terms of its ethical validity and should not be regarded as an unconditional

predisposition or fundamental reason. It is not educationally appropriate for us to claim that something is right because Confucius says so. To make medical ethics education with the *Analects* effective, we should consider whether or not present-day healthcare students and professionals can learn something important or useful to begin with, but not what right answers they can learn. The educator has to question the learners about their responses and opinions regarding the ideas of Confucius. We argue that we should present sayings included in the *Analects* not as affirmative norms, but as one ethical perspective and encourage discussion regarding their appropriateness. Therefore, the long-established custom of reading aloud without thinking is inappropriate. Learners can often memorize many sayings without difficulty, but superficial knowledge without skeptical criticism, close examination, and final conviction in the learner's heart will simply produce a learned fool who does not understand the spirit of Confucius and can't make good use of the knowledge. In Japan, the saying, "a person who has read the *Analects* but does not know them at all (*Rongo yomino Rongo shirazu*)" indicates a sham scholar who understands the theory of the *Analects* but would not act according to it, or an individual who has long read the *Analects*, but does not understand its spirit at all (18). In addition, those who cannot initially be convinced of the ideas of Confucius will lose a precious chance to study the *Analects* deeply unless there is an opportunity to examine them closely and critically. If obedience to the sayings of Confucius is imposed, learners will have the impression that the sayings of the *Analects* are just preaching and presumptuous (17). Such consequences are clearly undesirable.

The basic concept of our proposed educational strategy using the *Analects* is, therefore, "Doubt the *Analects*." It can be argued that educators, as well as those studying medical ethics and professionalism should begin by doubting the ethical validity of Confucius's ideas and sayings. Is his idea right or wrong? If judged right, then what reasons can be given to support his position? The educator and learners have to deliberate until they reach a convincing conclusion. Naturally, some of Confucius's ideas will be judged wrong. Without real understanding, acceptance, and sympathy, the healthcare student or professional would be a learned fool. Those who respect the *Analects* would use them to teach medical ethics and professionalism from an ethically neutral point of view, and critical thinking is essential.

5. Hypothetical "Doubt the *Analects*" sessions

This section outlines hypothetical "Doubt the *Analects*" sessions and considers their potential implications. The critical point is that the educator creates clinical scenarios with ethical issues that are highly relevant to the ideas and attitudes of Confucius, and that he or she makes it possible for the learners themselves to critically deliberate the implications of Confucius' thoughts through realistic scenarios. Some criticize the *Analects* for teaching that people have to be obedient to their elders and for its family-centered approach. Confucius's teachings are also blamed for being rather oppressive or feudalistic (7, 21). Thus, the sayings that appear in the *Analects* and the decisions compatible with them may contradict those based on contemporary individualistic, autonomy-centered approaches. However, these tendencies should not be regarded as a reason to attack or ignore the *Analects*, but treated as a subject for discussion. It is very important for the educator not to unilaterally judge the ethical appropriateness of Confucius's sayings at the beginning. The "Doubt the *Analects*" session for healthcare students and professionals will consist of five parts.

1) The educator presents a chapter from the *Analects* and explains the meaning of the saying and its context.

2) The educator presents a hypothetical clinical scenario by which the learners can deliberate the ethical validity of the ideas of Confucius in a concrete and realistic way.

3) The learners divide into small groups and discuss the ethical appropriateness of the ideas in the given scenario.

4) Representatives of the groups present their arguments and conclusions about the ethicality of the Confucian saying, and exchange opinions with learners in different groups and the educator.

5) The educator summarizes the session by referring to arguments for and against the ideas of Confucius. The necessity of further consideration should be addressed regarding its implications. In addition, we believe that the educator may express his or her own position and arguments concerning the sayings of Confucius.

Through the five steps above, healthcare students and professionals can deliberate the thoughts of Confucius in a critical manner and search for the implications and worth of the *Analects* in the present-day world. The following section describes three sessions, including the sayings of Confucius and relevant hypothetical scenarios.

Hypothetical session 1

This session considers Chapter 24 of Book 15. In the chapter, Zigong (one of Confucius's apprentices) asks, "Is there a single word such that one could practice it throughout one's life?" The Master (Confucius) says, "Reciprocity perhaps? Do not inflict on others what you yourself would not wish done to you" (2). The educator presents the following hypothetical scenario: Suppose that a terminal male patient in critical condition is admitted to your hospital. You are designated to take care of him. For some reason, the patient has not been informed of his diagnosis, and neither a further treatment plan nor code status is determined yet. In this situation, on what grounds should you decide his treatment plan? Confucius would tell us not to inflict on others what we ourselves would not wish done to us. The educator asks the learners their opinions about Confucius's idea

in this particular situation. The discussion would focus on the ethical validity of the "Golden Rule." Similar sayings of Jesus Christ and Emmanuel Kant may provide useful information.

Hypothetical session 2

This session introduces Chapter 18 of Book 13. In this chapter, the Duke of She tells Master Kong (Confucius), "In my locality there is a certain paragon, for when his father stole a sheep, he, the son, bore witness against him." Master Kong says, "In my locality, those who are upright are different from this. Fathers cover up for their sons and sons cover up for their fathers. Uprightness (honesty) is to be found in this" (2). In this case, the educator presents a hypothetical scenario where the characters in the case would prioritize the interests of their family members or intimate individuals over legal rules or social justice: Suppose that a physician overstates an honest man's physical disabilities in a report for a public office so that the patient obtains more subsidy than due to him and his financial predicament is relieved to some extent. The main question here is what to do in the face of conflict between justice and care/compassion/friendship. Confucius might suggest that we should not condemn the physician's act.

Hypothetical session 3

This session uses Chapter 14 of Book 8. In this chapter, Confucius says, "If one is not in a certain office, one does not plan the governance involved in the office" (2). The chapter has no background information or dialogue. The educator presents the following hypothetical scenario: There is a critically ill and dying female patient. You, the first year resident, together with your supervisor, are in charge of her. There is no hope of recovery despite every possible intervention. The patient's condition deteriorates into a deep coma and her family waits for her passing in sorrow. Then you find that your supervisor tries to decrease the dose of oxygen supplied to her so that she passes away sooner without telling anyone. In this situation, what should you do? Confucius might suggest that the first year resident, who is not in the position to decide the final treatment plan for her, should not question or challenge the senior physician's decisions. The educator asks the learners their opinions about Confucius's idea in this particular situation.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, we proposed using the *Analects*, the sayings of Confucius, as an educational tool for teaching medical ethics and professionalism to healthcare students and professionals. The "Doubt the *Analects*" approach can be used not only for the sayings of Confucius, but for many famous sayings in ethics and philosophy. The crucial point of the approach is that the learners arrive at their final convictions through doubts and critical thinking. It can also be argued that educational approaches using historical sayings or maxims are suitable for busy healthcare students who have to learn a lot of medical information or professionals in the first line. Reading a whole book about ethics or philosophy may be impossible for them. Therefore, we expect that the "Doubt the *Analects*" sessions that encourage discussion and mutual communication between the educator and learners is an effective way to teach medical ethics and professionalism. In conclusion, the most important consideration for ethics education is that we do not produce a healthcare professional "who has read the *Analects* but does not know them at all (*Rongo yomino Rongo shirazu*)."

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