

**Cultivating Ethically Effective Students with
the Graduation Pledge of Social & Environmental Responsibility:
A Report from Chinese Culture University**

by

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Abstract

In this paper, the author describes how the Graduation Pledge of Social and Environmental Responsibility and the program of the Graduation Pledge Alliance (www.graduationpledge.org), begun in the USA, have assisted in developing, promoting and supporting effective ethical behavior among students at the Chinese Culture University in Taipei, Taiwan. The author realizes the aim of higher education as a learning community in Taiwan, a predominantly Chinese society, has been focused on students gaining and refining an understanding of values, ethics and ethical behavior based on Confucian principles. As is well known, Confucianism is a philosophy that has permeated the Asian societies for centuries. The author believes that in order for the Graduation Pledge and its goals – a movement founded in the West – to be effective in Asia, they must be rooted in an Asian experience. To indicate this, the author places in focus some Confucian principles to show how these traditional values are still very relevant not only for Asia but also globally.

Principally, this paper explores the impact that the Pledge and its chapter at the Chinese Culture University have had on its students by presenting examples of those who have committed themselves to the pledge since their graduation and from current students who are involved in the promotion of the pledge on campus. The author also reviews how some teachers have integrated various social issues into their classroom activities. Furthermore, the author gives some reflections on how presentations of guest speakers who are social activists in Taiwan have helped students obtain a better understanding of their own commitment to social and environmental responsibilities. Finally, she shares some of the challenges that face the Graduation Pledge Alliance in Asia in this consumer age.

Now the man of perfect virtue, wishing to be established himself, seeks also to establish others; wishing to be enlarged himself, he seeks also to enlarge others. To be able to judge of others by what is nigh in ourselves; - this may be called the art of virtue.

(Legge, *Confucian Analects*, VI, 28, 194)

I pledge to explore and take into account the social and environmental consequences of any job I consider and will try to improve these aspects of any organization for which I work.

Graduation Pledge Alliance¹

Introduction

An important aim of higher education as a learning community in Taiwan, a predominantly Chinese society, has historically focused on students gaining and refining understanding of values, ethics and ethical behavior. It is based on the Confucian ethics that have permeated Asian cultures for centuries and is seen in the official mottos of many of the island's universities as being central to their mission.

A new development of values or, perhaps, to put it more modestly, recovery of classical values, is of ever greater importance. This age may be seen not so much as the "Consumer Age" as the "Consequences Age". In other words, the actions of each person, in their personal and professional spheres, must be taken with great awareness and concern for the society and its well-being if any number of catastrophic outcomes is to be avoided and positive, lasting improvements in the world are to be brought about. The most obvious concern is climate change, but a multitude of other

equally challenging problems demonstrate why it is so important that people begin to turn – or return – their attention to ethics in order to live “ethically effective” lives that will make a tangible difference, in whatever circumstances they find themselves.

In Taiwan, regionally and internationally, the past half-decade has seen a seemingly unending series of scandals which have resulted directly or indirectly from the unethical and/or irresponsible behavior of a great number of individuals and organizations. This includes current accusations of corruption being lodged against the present political administration, which, ironically, came into power on an anti-corruption platform, and more than a few cases at universities around the country as well. The malpractice and corruption have been widespread to such an extent that universities have finally recognized the need to counter this trend by taking the initiative to once more direct attention toward ethical education. At the Chinese Culture University (CCU) in Taipei, Taiwan, there has been finally, the introduction of an ethics course offered in the College of Commerce as well as individual teachers giving ethics-related class assignments, and public service initiatives by student clubs and individual community members.

This paper is primarily about the Graduation Pledge of Social and Environmental Responsibility, so it is only appropriate to convey how it was first introduced to Taiwan, at CCU, just three years ago, in 2004. The Pledge originated

at Humboldt State University (HSU) in northern California in 1987 and has spread to well over 150 campuses, not only in the United States, but also in Canada, France, Singapore, Australia and India. The Graduation Pledge is voluntarily taken and is usually offered to graduating students at or around the time of commencement. It is entirely self-enforced, a commitment that the pledge signer makes only to himself. During the graduation ceremony, pledge signers and their supporters can show their pledge sentiments by wearing colored ribbons on their gowns.

Today, the graduation pledge network is coordinated worldwide by the Graduation Pledge Alliance (GPA), which has just recently moved its headquarters to Bentley College, near Boston. In Taiwan, after the Pledge was initiated at CCU², Soochow University and Taipei American School joined the following year. Since then, the Pledge has spread onto the campuses of Fugen Catholic University, Taipei National University of the Arts and Tajen University of Technology.

One of the main motivating factors for the startup of the Pledge at CCU and the GPA-CCU's continuing work was the belief that these efforts would help to develop, promote and support effective ethical behavior among our students. The goals of GPA can only be achieved if each pledge signer understands that ethical action is possible, and that, in fact, ethical behavior should be the norm rather than the exception. Only when its members comprehend that the external problems they see

in society and its political arena are symptoms of deeper illnesses residing within us will they be able to most effectively carry out their ethical beliefs. The originators of the Pledge believed that nurturing of personal character and ethical principles go hand-in-hand with ethical behavior: “for students to truly understand what this pledge commitment meant, students would need more opportunities to think, discuss and develop their concerns and concepts of individual responsibility” (Graduation Pledge Alliance at HSU). This is consistent with what Confucians have always believed: that words and actions must correspond to one another. Our multi-component program of activity is designed not only to expose students to the real-world and the social-environmental ethical choices they will face both during their time in school and after graduation but also to assist them in exploring, developing, and cultivating their own personal ethical behavior. Initially, GPA-CCU’s role is to reestablish and strengthen value systems endemic to any society, which, in Taiwan’s case, would correspond primarily with the basic principles of Confucianism.

This paper explores some traditional Confucian principles already familiar to the youth of Taiwan. Furthermore, it will examine the impact that the Pledge and its other program components have had on students and non-students within CCU and other schools.

The GPA-CCU program goals are:

- to help CCU students develop extensively their understanding of ethical standards and system of values found in their own traditions, primarily the Confucian tradition, and how they relate to making socially and environmentally responsible choices in all aspects of their lives;
- to provide students with the training and confidence needed to become responsible leaders;
- to assist in building a campus-wide climate in which critical consideration of socially and environmentally ethical awareness is the norm;
- to provide useful resources to pledge signers and help build a continuing community of support;
- to offer a model of social and environmental ethics education that can inspire and be used by other institutions in Taiwan and abroad.

Core Asian concepts in developing students' ethical effectiveness

GPA-CCU bases much of its work on a number of predominantly influential Confucian concepts or tenets. Although many may believe that Confucianism is the only the philosophic ground of much of the culture in East and Southeast Asia, the world today is such that the ancient traditions and modern ways of thought are interacting and influencing each other nearly everywhere. As Robert C. Neville (2000) puts it in his book, *Boston Confucianism*, “We can no longer distinguish ‘us’ from ‘others’” (xxvi). By this, he means, among other things, that Asian societies have been deeply influenced by European and North American science, technology and economics. With such influences have come, inevitably, Western definitions of

what is important for life and society. At the same time, many European and North American societies have been enriched by significant numbers of Asian immigrants and the cultures they have brought with them. So what the presenter is about to delineate is not only for Asians in the East or the Asian diaspora, but for a worldwide culture, encompassing all peoples of the world

For Asians, in particular the Chinese, ethical inquiry is one area in which the Confucian philosophy of humanism has had a dominant influence. Confucianism is a philosophy based on the belief that the human person contains within him the necessary qualities and virtues to be a whole person. Generally, Confucians believe that man by nature is good, and that he carries within himself the roots of this inborn goodness which may be manifested in the basic Confucian virtues of reciprocity (*shu*), benevolence (*jen*), filial piety (*hsiao*), righteousness (*yi*) and propriety (*li*). If one were to cultivate these virtues perfectly, one would become a Confucian gentleman, what was been popularly called the “superior man” or, in Chinese, *chun tsu*. Of course, when Confucius was asked if he had attained the status of *chun tsu*, he denied it emphatically..

Here, in order to better understand the Asian concept of ethics, an explanation of the etymological derivation of the Chinese character for “ethics” is called for. It is significant to point out that the component Chinese character for ethics, *lun*, not only

stands besides but also comes under the *jen* (person) radical. Hence, from this, one can see how the person has always been fundamental in Chinese thought.

The author is intrigued by the revolutionary and relevant nature of Chinese tradition when concretely applied to the Graduation Pledge. Even the Chinese Mainland, a Communist society, has recently, after nearly 80 years of downright condemnation of Confucianism, begun to seriously engage in its revival, as seen in the news article of *China Daily* on the website (“Confucian studies return, hailed as relevant,” 2006).

Why has the author started by stressing Confucianism? Her strong feeling is that in order for the goals of GPA to take root on Asian soil and for the organization to grow and develop in a healthy and lasting manner, it is vital that these basic Confucian ideas, being central to the Chinese tradition and contemporary experience, return to proper prominence as a counterbalance to a heavily Western influence in our culture. As social critics have pointed out, in our times, many Asians have renounced Asian ways (Neville, 2000). They want to be modern, and some of us have even out-Westernized the West. The Chinese have so embraced the materialistic, consumerist way of life that, in the process, they have inadvertently allowed their interior lives to go largely unheeded.

Sometimes, it takes outsiders who appreciate Asians’ thought to bring us back

to an appreciation of our own remarkable traditions. Thomas Merton, a 20th-century Christian monk, was one who saw Confucianism as an exceptional philosophy of the person whose aim was to bring about a harmony between society and nature. He says,

The philosophy of Confucius aims at developing the person in such a way that he is a superior person. But what do you mean "superior"? It's not that he is a superman or any of this kind of nonsense, and it is not at all that he stands out over other people by winning....Confucius doesn't have a philosophy on how to be a winner....In contrast, the superior man in Confucius is the self-sacrificing man, the man who is formed in such a way that he knows how to give himself..., that in giving himself, he realizes himself. This is what Confucius discovered, and this is a great discovery....This is just as fundamental as anything can be. (*Merton AA2370, Side Two*)

One of the most important tenets of Confucian thought is that of *cheng ming*, or what is conventionally known as "rectification of names" (Legge, *Analects*, XII, 11). It was Confucius' belief that the root of all social and political ills is when no one quite knows for certain who he or she is supposed to be, that is, when we have lost our identity and understanding of our own values and ideas. By an investigation of things, in other words, gaining true understanding of a name, we can live up to what that name or idea suggests. There is the Confucian belief that the proper naming evokes proper action. "If language be not in accordance with the truth of things, affairs cannot be carried on to success" (Legge, *Analects*, XIII, 3, 264). Take, for example, the idea of a *student*. How does one define a student? Is a student one

who merely sits in the classroom, takes notes and exams and eventually gets a diploma? No, for a name, in this case, *student*, when rectified, has a more encompassing connotation. A student is more than a student, at least, more than its conventional, normal sense of the word. He is surely one who understands that rather than being a passive listener, he ought to be an active learner, participating and sharing with others in the exchange of ideas and experiences and thus gaining a better understanding of his own values and, as a result, learning where he stands on various social and political issues.

This same idea can be applied to those of us who are what we call “professionals”. Chinese in essence, Taiwan society, like all societies, puts professionals into categories, i.e., the teacher, the businessman, the historian, the artist and so on. So much has this become part and parcel of our way of life that we also begin to think of ourselves and who we are in terms of our jobs. The historian and irrepressible self-proclaimed anarchist, Howard Zinn (2001), laments that in such a situation, we have actually begun to think and work only within the narrow confines of what we define as a “professional.” Same here, we have left our humanity behind.

In the Confucian view, whether one’s profession is teacher, businessman or artist, he or she is still far more than just a teacher, a businessman or an artist. What is

meant by this? The traditional Chinese mind regards a worker as more than merely someone who works at his job. He is first and foremost a person, someone whose relationship with society is so deep that he looks at life in its totality, not in its parts, not only as a utensil to be used by anyone. The superior man, according to Confucius, is someone who thinks outside of the framework of what society has created or set for him. It is only by thinking in that way that he is able to ask such questions as what the world should be and not only what it is.

When one speaks of the Graduation Pledge as enhancing ethically effective behavior, one means that it helps to nurture the person with a sense of a social and environmental responsibility. He is therefore a human being with the ability to respond in a fully human way towards each and every person and situation. He is a student, a teacher, businessman or historian, but more than that, he is essentially a human being with all the potential to become a complete person, the embodiment of the Confucian *chun tsu*.

Here, Confucius did not mean a person who differs from other people by being superior or at the top of the corporate ladder. In contrast, the superior man in Confucianism is a man of humanity and humility, one capable of loving and respecting everyone. In that deep love for others, his words and his actions complete each other. Confucius said, "Now, my way is to hear their words, and look at their

conduct” (Legge, *Analects*, V, 9, 176). So, knowing what is right and doing what is right is one and the same thing for the *chun tsu*.

Today, in this consumer age, one witnesses *knowing* what is right and *doing* what is right are often two very different things. According to the Confucius, “The man of perfect virtue, wishing to be established himself, seeks also to establish others; wishing to be enlarged himself, he seeks also to enlarge others.” (Legge, *Analects*, VI, 28, 194). This suggests the famous Golden Rule: what one wishes for oneself, one wishes for others, too. The *chun tsu* is the self-sacrificing person, the person who is formed in such a way that he knows the significance of love of humanity and acts by giving himself to others.

The Confucian *chun tsu* suggests a person who has knowledge of who he is and what his values are, and someone free of all external coercion, political or commercial. In his great humility, Confucius said the following: “The way of the superior man is threefold, but I am not equal to it. Virtuous, he is free from anxieties; wise, he is free from perplexities; bold, he is free from fear.” (Legge, *Analects*, XIV, 30, 286). So, in trying to achieve the goals of the Graduation Pledge in Asia, our task is to remind our students of this very fundamental characteristic of the superior man, that is, we must never fear doing what is right, and we must not act contrary to the virtue of *jen* (benevolence, love of humanity), which is regarded as the *virtue of*

virtues in Confucian thought (Legge, *Analects*, IV, 5, 166). A person of *jen* is one who has gained knowledge of his identity and lives by goodness and humanity.

A closer examination of this “virtue of virtues” is needed. Looking at the etymology of the character for *jen*, we find that it is made up of two components, *person* and *two*, denoting that which is common in two human beings. As in genuine virtues, *jen* is innate; it is not a quality some have while others do not. It is not arrived at through the intellect or reason. From *jen* comes deep empathy for others. It was Mencius, a later exponent of Confucianism, who maintained that *jen* is part and parcel of human nature, that is, it is found in each person (Legge, *Works of Mencius*, 202). His famous story of a poor child about to fall into the well speaks of how impossible it is for one not to experience a feeling of alarm and distress on seeing this happening to the child. Mencius maintains that no one can bear to witness the sufferings of the child, and this is not because he may gain the favor of the child’s parents or the praise of his neighbor and friends, or even because he may obtain a bad reputation for having not been moved by such a thing. The person, according to the Confucian tradition, has the seeds of *jen* in him. GPA’s principle task at Chinese Culture University is to give students the opportunity to extend and develop such innate qualities through consideration of and commitment to the Graduation Pledge.

Another fundamental concept of Confucianism is *hsiao*, or filial piety. What

influence has filial piety had on Chinese society as a whole? What influence can filial piety have on a society stuck in materialism? Why should filial piety be preserved? What is the relationship between filial piety and the principle of *jen*?

When we look at *hsiao*, the Chinese character for filial piety, we note that the “child” radical, *tsu*, is placed under the “elder” radical, *lao*. Hence, for thousands of years, the Chinese have believed that it is essential to follow the lead of one’s elders, one’s parents. Taking this literally, one may mistakenly conclude that the person must be subordinated to the family, that he must submit to the family and work for it. However, if we understand it at a deeper level, *hsiao* can be interpreted as the child coming into completion as a person both because he gets his life from his parents and because he grows up in the family.

The philosopher Hsieh Yu-wei (1967) pointed out the importance of the family as a vehicle for realizing the human person, that is, the family serves as an incubator for the seeds of *jen* to grow into full maturity. These seeds of *jen* come directly from the family. Confucius considered the rudimentary instinct of loving one’s parents to be the root of *jen*. This cultivation and development of *jen* (love for humanity) begins within the family. And how is this possible?

By being filial and carrying out one’s duty to the family, the children learn to love and respect first their parents (*hsiao*) and then their siblings. In order to cultivate

and develop the virtue of *jen*, which is innate in man, the young person is taught the doctrine of filial piety and the virtue of brotherliness. Having been taught to love and respect one's own parents and siblings, the obvious extension of this love and respect is to love other human beings, too. It is in loving others that one's own humanity comes into fruition, and in so doing, the state, the nation and the whole world benefits. One can see the necessity of preserving and practicing filial piety at such a time as ours, a time of consumerism when the only important thing appears to be the life of "having" rather than "being." Both the young and the old have become nearly fully conditioned to a life of possessions rather than an existence based on fulfillment of the self in serving others.

GPA-CCU's program of activity

CCU has been fortunate in that, from the beginning, it has had the unstinting the support of the chairman of CCU's Board of Regents, Dr. Chang Jen-hu, and the president of the University, Dr. Lee Tien-rien.

If we take the Graduation Pledge seriously, the Pledge will be a kind of awareness that relates to your own future and the condition of body and soul. It also means that you need to be responsible for your own words because the Pledge is expectation and constraint on yourself. Actually, it's a very important part of the process of the education. It's just like asking yourself why you take education, or what you get in the education process. The most valuable and meaningful part of the Pledge is that you do a self-examination before graduation or make a wish for your future, no matter whether you pledge to yourself or other people. (Lee, 2006)

Thus, with the backing of the administration, it has been much easier to establish GPA-CCU and conduct its program on campus. In the next section, what follows are some activities that have been held at our university in our brief two-year history:

Past and continuing activities:

- **Presentations by teachers about the Pledge and ethical, social and environmental responsibilities in the classroom.**

Back in late 2004, in the initial stage of the pledge program at CCU, the university invited Matt Nicodemus, co-author of the original HSU Graduation Pledge and executive director of GPA's Asian regional office, to introduce and speak about the Pledge. Present at the lecture were teachers from several departments: English Literature and Language, Natural Resources and Economics. Since then, these teachers and others have brought the ideas of social and environmental responsibility (SER) developed by Nicodemus³ (see Appendix) and other relevant readings into their classrooms. Other instructors have assigned related speech topics and panel discussions to be presented by students themselves. One asked her students to report on unethical behavior they observed on and off campus and conduct exchanges in the classroom on what could be done to improve the situations. Another teacher has initiated a values

clarification survey in the classroom and gotten his students to present their findings.

An English professor at CCU tells his class this story about his recently employed daughter. One day at work, she saw an elderly man cleaning office windows. Her compassion went out to the man, and she offered to help him. Just as she was about to lend a hand to him, her boss came by and told her not to. He said he had not hired her to do that kind of work. The old man was being paid to do his work, so it was not necessary for her to help him. She really felt quite bad about the incident, for she wanted very much to assist the window cleaner. Later, the advice that her father gave her was: “You should still offer to help those to whom you can lend a hand, but next time, just be sure not to let the boss see you.”

The advice given by the professor to his daughter is significant. From an early age, the young in Taiwan are taught what is right and what is wrong. Unfortunately, the ethics taught is often of a narrow variety, and the young end up being more moralistic than moral, with an ethics that is passed down from one generation to the next in a formulaic manner, not the root of ethics that contribute to continual growth of the person. At the workplace, again unfortunately, the person who goes out of his/her way to help others is regarded as a “busybody.”

We are not very good at giving the benefit of the doubt to others, and one can see that the professor, even though he attempted to effect a compromise on behalf of his daughter when he said, “next time, just be sure not to let the boss see you,” went along with this present social taboo of “minding one’s own business” when, perhaps, ethics would have been better served if the entire question as to what option should be taken in the future had been left an open question for the daughter.

One purpose of GPA is to encourage the young to bring a more humanistic attitude to the work place. In Taiwan, though it would be too strong to describe the workplace as authoritarian, rigid, bureaucratic practices persist that prevent it from becoming a more human environment. It is amazing how few people are truly content with their jobs, a crisis that seems to have reached epidemic proportion, even in academic circles.

Yet, the preceding anecdote about the professor and daughter can be instructive. What the professor was suggesting to this daughter was that, despite being caught in a bureaucratic web, it is not only possible but necessary to bring one’s humanity or human kindness to bear in the workplace, that all human action, no matter how small, is personally and socially transformative. This, to me, is Confucian at its very moral and spiritual core, and the sort of

lesson that the GPA attempts to inculcate. In fact, the lesson is closely related to the practice of the virtue of *chung yung* (the middle path), for as Wing-tsit Chan (1967) in quoting Confucius, said, “To be central (*chung*) [in our moral being] and to be harmonious (*yung*) [with all] is the supreme attainment in our moral life” (p. 35).

When stories like the one above are told to students, they see that in fact there are other alternatives other than the ones they have been conditioned to follow. They are encouraged to learn that, in real life, conventional ways of thinking or doing are not necessarily the only ways. There is no need for us to feel powerless if only we can be open to possibilities and to cultivate the courage to act in ways that open creative and ethical vistas. The hierarchical structures in school and the workplace are not as formidable or impregnable as we tend to think they are.

Ideally, an educational institution is set up to help students learn to think for themselves. The university should teach us that it is possible to resist social conventions that do not adhere to human rights, to oppose unfair practices, and to question possibly destructive ideas, such as capital punishment, abortion and war, have long been regarded as “normal” or acceptable.

- **Regular bi-monthly meetings are held, with GPA members and guests discussing various social and environmental concerns.**

- **Lecture series and panel discussions covering a wide range of life experiences aimed to educate and inspire students, particularly the graduating class, and others in the CCU community.**

These events have included leaders in charity/service organizations and social activists and concerned teachers in and around Taipei. In December 2005, Professor Hsu Shou-feng from *Initiatives of Change, Taiwan*, a branch of *Moral Rearmament, International*, gave a talk on “The Road to be Taken: Building an Awareness of Social and Environmental Responsibility”. Then, in April, 2006, GPA-CCU sponsored a forum called “GOOD WORK: They’re Passionate and Successful” with guest speakers Wang Fang-ping, an active advocate of the rights of sex workers in Taiwan, Father Matteo Gao, who works for the welfare of lepers in Taiwan and China and Yang Tsu-chun, social activist, folk singer and professor of Mass Communication at CCU. In early November of 2006, a few graduate students were also invited to speak, including a philosophy student who described her summer volunteer experience with the Missionaries of Charity – the Catholic organization founded by Mother Teresa – in Calcutta, India and two students from the Graduate School of International Public Health Department at Yangming University, who spoke to undergraduate students with regard to building meaningful careers in the service field of public health. This latter lecture helped some of juniors and graduating seniors who had begun to

look for graduate programs to better focus their searches.

- **Cooperation with the Phoenix Club, a volunteer civic leadership class on campus.**

This group, led by Professor Yang Chung-li from the Political Science Department, consists of sophomores from various departments who meet on a weekly basis to explore their personal ethics and value systems. Having conducted interviews at leading companies in Taiwan about the social and environmental responsibilities to companies' clients, the students gained greater understanding of what civic leadership is all about.

- **Cooperation with the Human Rights Program⁴ at nearby Soochow University to explore ways to promote the ideas of the Pledge.**

With the assistance of GPA-Asia, a discussion with the staff of the Human Rights Program (HRP) at Soochow University was held to explore how information about the Pledge could be integrated into various HRP classes already being taught at the school. Also, invited, pledge-related papers by GPA members were presented in May 2006 at an international conference co-sponsored by HRP, "Human Rights Education in a Diverse and Changing Asia."

- **Outreach to students and faculty at other Taiwan universities by promoting GPA concepts and providing pledge campaign consulting through our own students and faculty members.**

Just before students return to their hometowns for their winter and summer breaks, one of the regular GPA-CCU meetings focuses on preparing them to

meet up with their former high school classmates and teachers to speak of the ideas of the pledge and GPA's goals. Packets of GPA outreach information are distributed to attending members. There were follow-ups for any successful outreach connections to other schools with offers to provide consulting assistance to their pledge campaigns.

- **Distribution of pledges to graduating students and opportunities to sign them after the graduation ceremony.**

CCU President Lee Tien-rein, in his 2005 commencement speech to the graduating students, reminded them to follow through in their lives with the ideas of the Graduation Pledge, which are so intimately related to the university motto of "Character, Simplicity, Strength and Perseverance" (*Hua Hsiao News*, June 3, 2005). Following both the 2005 and 2006 June commencement ceremonies, tables with pledges, GPA information and sign-up sheets were set up at various sites on campus. GPA undergraduate volunteers were on hand at the tables to explain the Pledge to graduating students and their parents who were not so familiar with it. Some volunteers also conducted video interviews of pledge signers, their family members and other guests, professors and administrators.

- **Support for a group of students and teacher to embark on a trip to New Orleans to participate in rebuilding the city after Katrina destruction.**

Coming from a relatively middle-class society, these students from Taiwan hopefully gained new social and environmental awareness when they assisted the

poor, elderly and predominantly black community in New Orleans; some of these members were GPA members.

- **Development and maintenance of GPA-CCU's website (www2.pccu.edu.tw/pledge).**

Many of the articles found on the website of the Graduate Pledge Alliance (www.graduationpledge.org) have been translated so that the GPA-CCU website has both English and Chinese versions. Although there is still much work to be done, the students have taken initiative to make the website more accessible to the entire student body and to visitors from around Asia.

Some of our planned future endeavors:

- **Holding regular meetings of small, informal peer discussion-support groups for students and others who wish to explore social and environmental ethical issues.**
- **Establishing a career development and counseling student association/club on campus.**
- **Holding a short-length documentary video competition for students with a theme of social and environmental ethical concerns on campus.**

Winners will be encouraged to post their videos on YouTube as an outreach for the pledge.

- **Interviewing pledge-signer alumni and writing up their stories for publication in various on- and off-campus newspapers, magazines, and online publications, to inspire their underclassmen still in the university and inform the wider society.**

Some examples of students' authenticity for ethical effectiveness

Unless the young have knowledge of the kind of persons they want to be, significant values they want to live by and the society they want to live in, they will not be able to empower themselves to create and/or promote remedies for their own lives and the society they are entering into as part of the work force. The following are brief examples of graduates of our university who have taken the pledge, showing how their authentic personal ethics and their value systems were affected by that simple act and commitment.

Nell Lee, a graduate of the CCU Class of 2004, told me that taking the Pledge had made her much more aware of what she wanted to do with her own life. She wrote the following: "I want to find a career in which I can serve society. That's why I want to study environmental science some day. I'm not sure that I'll be able to make my dream come true, but certainly, I do know that I want to help others in some capacity." The Pledge, if nothing more, offers students a vision of a meaningful goal and what they want to do with their lives. Nell is one of many students who has at least indirectly been reminded by the Graduation Pledge of their traditional Confucian roots; that is, to grow and learn in order to serve others one day (Legge, *Analects*, VI, 28).

The following is a case of a former student and recent CCU graduate who,

despite strong odds against her, achieved her desire to help students from a nearby poor community in Yangmingshan, the mountainous area of Taipei where CCU is located.

When Charlotte Tsai was a junior in college, she wanted to set up a free after-school English tutoring program for students from relatively financially-strapped backgrounds. Having previously taught in language schools in Taipei, she knew that studying in such institutes (also referred to as “cram schools”) was a privilege usually given only to children from middle-to wealthy-class families. However, she felt that kids from the lower economic classes also had the right to be given a chance to study English outside of the classroom. Charlotte, though she had to cope with a good deal of bureaucracy, was able, with an award from the National Science Council rarely given to undergraduates, to set up a tutorial program at a middle school near CCU. Where most people her age would have thought the goal unattainable, Charlotte had a personal vision and a desire to give to others the opportunity to study that she herself never had as a middle school student. The odds against individuals effecting positive social-environmental change are frequently overwhelming or at least appear to be so; therefore, it is good to see when a young person can by sheer willpower initiate something productive and meaningful.

Many students, through participation in civic and service activities sponsored

by GPA, are influenced by their upperclassmen, as in the above example of Charlotte Tsai, who certainly has served as a role model for others.

Challenges involved in promoting GPA in Asia

In reviewing previous research on factors motivating young adults towards social responsibility, Scott Seider at Harvard University found that college students who engaged in community service were often already involved in some kind of community service prior to college. Furthermore, in many cases, students who were committed to service work came from families whose parents themselves were activists. Their parents had played an important role in raising the next generation of committed service workers (Seider, 2005). In Taiwan, when asked if their parents do volunteer work, most students say that their parents already work very hard at their jobs. Consequently, it appears few young adults have parents who can serve as community service role models.

One function the GPA has at Chinese Culture University is to facilitate student participation in volunteer programs where students can not only have upperclassmen as exemplars of volunteer work but also have easy access to opportunities to serve. Another function is to support service clubs and various other socially and environmentally concerned clubs at the university. It has always been

the case that service clubs have provided an initial opportunity for young adults to participate in community service. The GPA can gradually help reinforce such a commitment for students entering the workforce.

Conclusions

My concern about the indifference, secularism and materialism found in the young today was the main reason for my regarding student participation in the Graduation Pledge Alliance as part of an alternative lifestyle. On hearing about any social or environmental problem, we often hear Taiwanese students say, “Mei yo ban fa,” which loosely translates as, “It’s useless to try to remedy the situation.” The young in Taiwan and most other Asian societies have always been told what to do and, more often than not, even criticized for trying to make changes. Because of such a negative orientation towards life and society, few students have any idea that they *can* initiate things. We academics in Taiwan, I feel, are a part of the problem, for we often feel it is nearly futile to change the perception in Asia that education is nothing more than a means to a higher salary. And, it would seem that this too is increasingly the perception in the United States, too.

GPA at CCU is still in its early stages. Many of our activities have been based on initiatives from the West. But GPA, in order to be of greater relevance to Asia,

must be rooted in the Asian experience. That is the reason why I have in this paper so heavily focused on basic Asian traditional concepts inspired by Confucian values. As an Asian-American with a Western education, I feel I am in a privileged position to help develop and strengthen my own ideas with regard to what ought to be the basis for GPA in Asia. In three decades as an educator in Taiwan, I have found it a herculean task to convince young Asians that, despite their penchant for Western lifestyles, there remain in their own cultures treasures that can revitalize the self and their society. With the arrival of the GPA on Asian soil, this is an opportune time for those of us in the East to realize that its basic goals can be found at the core of Confucianism.

This paper envisions an important role for the young in Asia, as well as for those in the West, to understand values, ethics and “ethically effective” behavior, and to refine what may be called character education, through the rejuvenation of a Confucian ethics that, I believe, can work closely together with the GPA program.

To my mind, one of the principle goals of the GPA is to help recover the best humanistic and religious traditions that lie in any country or society in which GPA is trying to have an impact.

In this paper, I have restricted my ideas to Confucianism and have not traversed into Buddhism and Taoism, the other great philosophical and spiritual traditions

associated with China and Asia. This is not an oversight but areas that I leave for future exploration. Another very large area I have only touched upon peripherally are the environmental concerns, which would certainly require an entirely new investigation going far beyond the scope of this paper.

The task of the GPA is to help students and young adults come to realize that we live not only in a consumer age where materialism runs roughshod and feeds our vanity at every turn, but we also live in a “consequences age,” where all of our ethical and unethical behaviors, small and large, affect all of us in one way or another. Hence, by taking full advantage of the total spectrum of the university’s excellent human and material resources and facilities along with the assistance of the GPA, student consciousness with regard to the social and the ethical, being raised, may hopefully be a lifelong guide to living a richer life beyond the material and the self-obsessive. Certainly, this cutting-edge program and others like it will help offer models for character education that can inspire and be used by other institutions in Taiwan and around the world.

Appendix

Questions to Explore in Social and Environmental Responsibility (SER) Work Discussions by Matt Nicodemus, Graduation Pledge Alliance-Asia (Nicodemus, 2005).

- What are my deepest values? What's most important to me, for myself, for my family, for my friends, for my organizations and for my community? For the wider world?
- What is the ideal world I'd like us all to live in? How would you describe it in detail? (Don't let your imagination be limited here! Pretend we *can* have a fantastic, ideal world to live in.)
- What are all of the problems getting in the way of me living in complete harmony with my deepest values? What's blocking others from doing the same?
- What are all the kinds of social and environmental problems I can think of? What problems are making our world not be my ideal world?
- How do different employers and individual workers contribute to social and environmental problems? How do/can they contribute to solving those problems?
- What would make an employer/job most attractive to me? Given my values and SER views, what about an employer/job with pluses and minuses.
- How can I balance the pluses and minuses when considering an employer/job?
- How could I choose a career/employer/job that would allow me to more fully live out my deepest values and SER beliefs?
- If I face SER issues/conflicts on the job, how can I resolve them satisfactorily?
- Which employers offering work in Taiwan are the best in terms of SER?
- How can I use my educational experiences to help me explore and answer all of these different questions?
- What other questions need answering if I am to be able to successfully pursue "good work?"

NOTES:

¹ **Graduation Pledge Alliance**, Prof. Neil Wollman and Zachary Burton, Co-coordinators, www.graduationpledge.org. Based at Bentley College in Waltham, Massachusetts, USA, this is the headquarters of the international graduation pledge movement.

² **Graduation Pledge Alliance at PCCU**, Taipei, Taiwan, Teresa L. Wu, Coordinator, terry0530@yahoo.com. Motto: "A Commitment to Enrichment."
www2.pccu.edu.tw/pledge.

³ **Graduation Pledge Alliance-Asia**, Taipei, Taiwan. Matt Nicodemus, Executive Director, mattnico8@yahoo.com

⁴ **Human Rights Program, Soochow University**, Taipei, Taiwan, www.scu.edu.tw/hrp. "Committed to the promotion of human rights idea, consciousness and values," the program was set up in 2004. Its mandates include "delivering human rights courses, organizing internships for students, collaborating with local and international NGOs in training human rights workers and supporting teachers and scholars in teaching human rights."

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