

# TEACHING COMMUNITARIAN ETHICS FROM SYSTEMIC PERSPECTIVES

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## ABSTRACT

This paper describes and examines a theoretical and empirical proposal for systemic research and practice that appreciate ‘communitarian ethics’ that come from a holistic ways of thinking and acting. We explore the nature of the process of action-based learning that examining one’s own actions and learning about the complexity of educational practice from both Western and Eastern systemic perspectives. As a virtual life regards as the good life from MacIntyre’s ethical perspective, we offer a theoretical basis for our approach to communitarian ethics that takes place from an experiential approach to reflective social practice, the narrative unity of a human life, and the systemic inquiry to the nature of a social practice where it needs to reassess where it is going, and how we will build our good life that communicates and shares with ‘others’ in society. Based on critical Eastern thoughts, we appreciate and present Zhuang Zu (Chuang Tzu)’s theory of Daoism in order to understand reflective social practice. It allows participants to be ‘critical thinkers’ in the given situations.

**Keywords:** Communitarian ethics; Western and Eastern systemic perspectives; Zhuang Zu (Chuang Tzu)’s theory of Daoism

## INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we appreciate action research for understanding a social practice using systems thinking and practice. We evaluate the contributions from systems-based approach to explore the nature of community business in the context of Korean society from both Western and Eastern perspectives. In particular, we explore the nature of social research by proposing Alasdair MacIntyre’s account of a social practice and Zhuang Zu (Chuang Tzu)’s theory of Dao and ethics of becoming others to understanding the nature of a social practice. On one hand, we identify the novelty in the work of MacIntyre as a critical thinker, who is characterized by efforts to understand what might be called the ‘communitarian’ approach to appreciate a social practice. On the other hand, we examine action research and action learning from Eastern perspectives which are made from the application of Zhuang Zu (Chuang Tzu)’s theory of Daoism (or Taoism) in order to explore a holistic way of thinking and practice through developing the agonistic systems approach to open up new possibilities in a practice.

## UNDERSTANDING ACTION RESEARCH AS LIVING INQUIRY IN A SOCIAL PRACTICE

Action research is a living inquiry in which action researchers are involved in developing their own understanding in the real-world situations and a readiness to use their experience itself in particular socio-historical contexts as they response to the question of “how we should live our lives” in society (Wicks, Reason and Bradbury, 2008: 24). Action research should be carried out according to two following criteria in order to identify the nature of social reality and generate ‘experiential and practical knowing’, unencumbered by intervention or so-called expertise of scientists and elites. A first is the importance of a social practice and life experiences and these as

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integrated with philosophical, political, and intellectual underpinnings. A second is the webs of relationships, events, influences and role models which underpins within the practice of action research (Wicks, Reason and Bradbury, 2008: 15). Having with these criteria of action research, the aim of action research is to generate the awakening of the consciousness and emancipation of participants and group of people who are influenced by action research project through the processes of communication and participation (Gustavsen, Hansson and Quale, 2008). Action researchers appreciate that their interest in participate action research comes from a dissatisfaction with the research tradition in which social inquiry follows the philosophy of natural science ('positivism') and research methods (e.g., quantitative and nomothetic methods) of natural sciences in order to search for the scientific knowledge (Coghlan, 2011; Yu, 2013). In systems science, the soft system thinking tradition has been developed to overcome the limitation of a hard tradition of scientific research which is based on the philosophy of positivism (Ison, 2008). Within the soft systems tradition, systems-based methodologies and techniques are largely considered epistemological with the concept of being 'purposeful' behaviour, which Checkland (1981) describes as willed behaviour that allows some sense of voluntary action. In this sense, Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) made a first epistemological break in system thinking and practice (Flood, 1990: 91-92). SSM has developed as a 'learning system' which is based on Vickers' concept of 'appreciative system' or 'appreciation' (Checkland, 1981, 1991, 1999; Checkland and Casar, 1986). In SSM, action researcher values the humanistic and qualitative aspects of systems ideas rather than technological ones as Vickers (1965) re-humanised the word system in the concept of 'appreciation'. Vickers (1965) argues that the humanised notion of appreciation is useful for understanding human system persistence and change of the reality judgment and the value judgment. In this sense, the Vickers' notion of appreciation or appreciative process rests on "two pillars of ethics and epistemology" for making sense of social and historical process (Adams and Carton, 1994: 58).

Brydon-Miller (2008: 202-203) argues that practitioners might challenge the assumption that research ethics orients towards the purview of institutional-base analysis within an action research context. She suggests that community-based analysis or social intervention which happens through the engagement of members of community or other citizen-based processes of oversight would better reflect what members of the community or other stakeholders consider an acceptable 'options' and desirable benefits. This would be happened as ordinary people tend to define the broader institutional, social, and cultural contexts of action research (see Yu, Moon and Kim, 2008).

### UNDERSTANDING MACINTYRE'S THEORY OF A SOCIAL PRACTICE

#### **MacIntyre'a account the nature of human learning in a social practice**

The basic tenet of Alasdair MacIntyre (1984)'s view on the nature of social reality is based upon the notions of a social practice as he delineated his arguments with the nature of virtues and 'tradition'. Seeing the social reality in this way, a new way of understanding the nature of social reality is possible as it give a way of searching for the communitarian values, ethics and even an alternative way of looking at the mode of cooperative human existence in social life. His account of the nature of social reality raises a cogent question, "what is social research?" In systems sciences, social research is very much influenced by phenomenological perspectives that have been developed by Schutz and German tradition of rationalism that has been followed by the Enlightenment. The phenomenological tradition is found in the work of action research and 'soft systems thinking' in management science (Checkland, 1981, 1991; Checkland and Poulter, 2006). MacIntyre (1984) explained well why the Enlightenment project had to fail to justifying morality in pursuing a good life in a society. The Enlightenment project originates from a tradition of

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thinking about human knowledge and human nature as it stems from the works of René Descartes and John Locke. It generates an individualist view of learning (Winch, 1998). Based upon the philosophy of individualism, learning is happened through the change of an individual mind, and it is purely happening through the functioning of a theoretical reason that generates propositional knowledge. There are problems with the individualist learning as the individual learner becomes a spectator who is not oneself in the world, but she is able to represent the image of world to herself via propositions. This individual learner appreciates her subjective experience and learning that her values rest on an individual choice whose justification is based on her emotivism. As a consequence, an individual learner becomes independent from the practice of a living tradition in sharing with others in community and society. According to MacIntyre (1984: 201-207), the nature of human learning is based on the relationships with others, and the ‘liberal individualism’ ignores a living tradition of community and society in which virtues (in the form of *phronêsis*) maintains the good relationships between the self and others, that is required for practices. In this sense, the learners have to develop a practice reason in order to generate the learning that is the participation of the complex dynamics of social practice within social groups and social settings (e.g. institutions) (Kim, 2008: 64).

MacIntyre’s communitarian view of human life is conditioned by a tradition and the individual realizes a good life as she performs her roles with this tradition. It seems that MacIntyre (1984: 211) sees that human learning is possible through the exercise of the virtues that sustains practice; increasing self-knowledge; and increasing knowledge of the good in the common world. In this light, human knowledge is constructed from the narrative of unity of a human life within community and society that are alien to the dominant individualist and bureaucratic modes of modern Western culture. In his own terms,

The virtues therefore are to be understood as those dispositions which will not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices, but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good, by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distraction which we encounter, and which furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good. The catalogue of the virtues will therefore include the virtues required to sustain the kind of households and the kind of political communities in which men and women can seek for the good together and the virtues necessary for philosophical enquiry for the character of the good. We have then arrived at a provisional conclusion about the good life for man: the good life for the man is the life spent in seeking for the good life for man, and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which will enable us to understand what more and what else the good life for man is (MacIntyre, 1984: 204).

This MacIntyre’s account of the nature of human learning helps us to know that the social practice does not exist within an individual mind which is independent from the social practice. Rather the process of creating the social practice through narrative unity of a human life makes a sense of a social practice that is created as social forms or communitarian views of learning. It is the social act of the narrative unity of a human life that creates the virtue which is *a fortiori* the authority of a tradition (MacIntyre, 1984: 181; Kim, 2008).

### **Creating the good life through the exercise of virtue within a social practice**

The idea of *eudaimonia* (it means the ‘good life’ in English) in Ancient Greek has been pivotal for the development of modern society, which happens through the exercise of *phronêsis*. In other words, the human development is possible through the virtue of a human society and the sustainability of a social practice. The notion of virtue in terms of the application of a practical

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reason to the development of good societal practice is drawn from the work of MacIntyre (1984). MacIntyre (1990) argue that moral development occurs because the person wishes to pursue ethical, esthetic and intellectual life within a society rather than seeking his own freedom which is solely depend on maximizing economic utility. In this sense, the moral development or the exercise of the virtue can be viewed from the practice in social contexts and focused on good life which has its roots from Aristotle and his followers' philosophical thoughts. Such concept helps us to understand a social practice as a mediator of different ethical reasoning based on historical traditions and passed by previous understanding and explanation to the current situations in society (Horton and Mendus, 1994). Understanding of a virtual life in a practice, from MacIntyre's perspectives, Yoo (2000) argues the importance of the practical reason, which makes sense of it within social settings which contain the "narrative unity of a human life" in contingent contexts. He refers to the narrative unity of human life in terms of the relevance of an individual to the living contexts of social life in which an individual would exist in society associated with a tradition that sustains from the past to the present and to the future (MacIntyre, 1984: 206). A particular kind of rationality (e.g. practical reason) is dominant in understanding a tradition in the sense of MacIntyre. It is obvious that when MacIntyre (1984: 199-201) wants to suggest an alternative way of understanding the nature of a social practice when he stresses on the importance of human narratives produced by story-tellers and the practice resulted from the application of *phronêsis*. MacIntyre (1984: 175) explains,

By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. Tic-tac-tow is not an example of a practice in this sense, nor is throwing a football with skill; but the game of football is, and so is chess.

According to MacIntyre's definition of a practice as shown in his text, the meaning of a social practice is twofold. One refers to an abstract concept of a social practice (Tuner, 1994), which created by human understanding and values within 'dispersed practices' or 'integrative practices' (Schatzki, 1996). The other refers to the human activities or actions (with *telos*) which are socially created through the internal value of social practices in which Miller (1994) is described as 'self-contained practices' and 'purposive practices'. However, a cogent question is raised such as "how to create the good life through the exercise of practical reason via the narrative unity of a human life within a social practice?" This question is premised on the belief that the roots of moral development that is possible through the exercise of virtue and the sustainability of community is the match of expectation towards a shared vision of the 'common goods' and cooperative quality of social viability. MacIntyre (1999), Yoo (2002) and others argues that human qualities of virtues like justice, courage, and honesty or truthfulness can make the sustainability of society by generating the narrative unity of a human life and facilitating the conscious collective and coordinated actions amongst members of social groups within community (MacIntyre, 1984: 175, 178, 181, 209; Knight, 1998).

Having understood the MacIntyre's account of a social practice, the next question is how is it useful and applicable in other cultures and traditions, which are different from Western traditions and thoughts? We turn now on understanding of Zhunag Zu (or Chunag Tzu)'s theory of Dao (道), which is a natural way of approaching a social practice.

### UNDERSTANDING ZHUANG ZU (CHUANG TZU)'S THEORY OF DAO: A NATURAL WAY OF APPROACHING A SOCIAL PRACTICE

#### Zhuang Zu (莊子)'s Philosophy

Watson (1996) introduced that Zhuang Zu (莊子) or Chuang Tzu's philosophy that much of his philosophy can be traced to his background in Daoism. Although Zhuang Zu was not mentioned the name of Lao Tzu (老子) in his original text (Kwak, 1993), it is conceivable to trace Zhuang Zu's thoughts to the Daoism of Lao Tzu (Watson, 1996: 8). Apart from the intellectual similarity of Lao Tzu over much of Chinese philosophy at the time, Zhuang Zu's ideas are unique and extraordinary amongst Ancient Chinese philosophers. Specially, his philosophy attempts to criticize the Chinese traditional thoughts which were mainly influenced by Confucius (孔子) and his follower, Mencius (孟子) by facilitating open discussions using the fables, splendid poets and imaginary and creative stories-telling and metaphors, with the creation of a unique notion of Dao (道). Zhuang Zu uses the word Dao to mean the natural Way as opposed to the artificial or human's intentional activities and value-ridden actions, and man becomes one with Nature, which means merges himself with Dao. It is the underlying unity that embraces man, the 'others' (他人; 人), and all that is in the universe (Watson, 1996: 6; Kang, 2004: 177). Zhuang Zu's brand of Daoism is unique as he identified the 'others' and created the notion of the emptiness (空) according to his understanding of Dao that makes human's good life which is possible through the mutual understanding (理解) with 'others'. Zhuang Zu's philosophical question starts with "how is man to live in a world dominated by chaos, suffering, and absurdity?" (Watson, 1996: 3). Put differently, "how could we maintain a good life with others within a shared society?" (Kang, 2004: 45).

Just as has been observed by some scholars countries with a Confucian tradition such as China, Korea and Japan have all manifested a wide-spread belief that the rules of human life based on the essence (道) and phenomenon (理) which are of paramount importance in one's life. Like China and Japan, it is a general belief that the rule of human life, which consists of the four human qualities of benevolence (*ren*, 仁), justices (*yi*, 義), ethics (*li*, 禮), and knowledge or wisdom (*zhi*, 智) are important for sustaining both the good life of individuals and the viability of society in Korea. However, Zhuang Zu insists that human languages, values and virtues are in the end inadequate to deal with the real situations in the world, and to understand the true Way or Nature (Kwak, 1993; Watson, 1996: 6-7). It is agreed among many scholars that it is necessary to developing 'community values' through groups' collaboration in order to achieve the good life in terms of the mutual understanding between the self and others (Kang, 2004: 143-144; Hansen, 1992). The concept of the mutual understanding have come to be used as a tool for making man to have the wonderful freedom who has realized his identity with the formless state (無形) which makes to become one with Nature, and lives himself with the harmony with Dao (Kang, 2004: 143-144). Such a state, people (e.g., individuals and social groups) enjoy the mindless and purposefulness mode of life as Zhuang Zu described as the 'freedom' of human life, using the metaphor of a totally free and purposefulness journey, as he introduced with the "Free and Easy Wandering" (逍遙游) of his book, *Zhuang Zu* (莊子) (Kwak, 1993; Watson, 1968). In short, the central theme of the Zhuang Zu's philosophy may be summed up in a single world, that is, the freedom (道) of (non) human life (Kwak, 1993: 386; Watson, 1996: 3).

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### Understanding the nature of human as the becoming 'selfless self'

Following a tradition of Confucianism, Han Yu (韓愈)'s thoughts with the Eastern way of approaching ethics or Dao in particular, we understand that our perception and behavior are fundamentally dependent within a 'Confucius tradition' (Lee, 2012). An individual should engage with the participative processes of social values and customs within a particular society which he or she lives on. Han Yu argues that an human agent should behave like 'the great man (大人)' who has two qualities of (*dao*, 道), which refers to a natural way of the exercise of a self-cultivation through benevolence (仁) and strict justice (義), and virtue (*dé*, 德), which is an effect from the exercise of Dao within a social practice (Lee, 2012: 49).

In Confucian tradition, a human being committed to a search for personal moral perfection or 'self-perfection'. The belief in the morally transforming power of learning is not limited to Confucianism. Rather, it is in this belief that the three main traditional schools of thoughts (e.g., Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism) echo each other. Whilst Buddhism and Daoism differ greatly from Confucianism in their thoughts and practice, they both also advocate learning for becoming the 'selfless self' (無我), which means the self becomes empty of self-nature, void of any graspable substantiality (Varela, 1999: 36). For instance, Zhuang Zu, the critical thinker of Daoism believed that the main evil that had befallen society was its quest for human-centered materialistic betterment from human perspectives. For this reason, Daoism calls on humans to forsake physical prowess, to acquire spiritual strength, and to abandon material well-being or wealth in order to have harmonious relationships with Nature, which is the greatest source of happiness and strength (Kwak, 1993; Watson, 1996). Developing capacity-building of individuals through learning for becoming the 'selfless self', Daoism (or Neo-Daoism that influenced by Buddhism<sup>1</sup> during the Sui (隋) dynasty which existed during 581 ~ 618 A.D. in China) affirms an extraordinary experience known as 'enlightenment', wherein all dualities such as good and evil, objects and subjects, mind or spirit and body are dissolved. According to philosophy of (Neo) Daoism and Zen Buddhism, it is only in a human consciousness that creates the idea of a moral reasoning in which universal values are established to consistent with the perceived purposes and values of human societies and states. Thus, human values and moral reasoning depend upon human consciousness within a particular time and space. Following the philosophy of Daoism, ethical values that makes good and evil are created by human values, which are dependents upon the language, tradition of communities. On the other hand, 'non-human' values are regarded as the useful or critical values for maintaining a good life of human beings within communities and societies. The non-human values regard as the thresholds of entering a perpetual process of pure becoming which gives a birth to a 'selfless self' that is a pure form of the heart of the formless state (無形) or the emptiness (空) which has a impersonality, which makes human to becoming-others according to the law of Nature or Heaven (道) (Kang, 2004: 216, 218).

### Creating social practice through the exercise of Dao

According to Zhuang Zu, a human community is a 'closed system' which contains human language, the purposeful self and her knowing or cognition. Zhuang Zu tells us that an ordinary person can be transformed herself with the nature of an 'impersonal' entity who is open to the

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<sup>1</sup> In China, Buddhism was popular during the Six Dynasties (Chinese, 南北朝) period (222-589 AD) that preceded the Sui Dynasty (581-618 A.D.), spreading from India through Kushan Afghanistan into China during the period of Late Han Dynasty. Buddhism created a unifying cultural force that uplifted the people out of war and into the Sui Dynasty. In many ways, Buddhism was responsible for the rebirth of culture in China under the Sui Dynasty (Wikipedia, 2013)

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others, and constantly changing and sustained herself in order to reach a state of the true Way (道) within a social practice. In this sense, an individual can be transformed into a 'selfless self' who will reach in the enlightened state of mind and body as a whole unity through the exercise of Dao. This is also what Zhuang Zu's thought of a way of liberating individuals or enjoying the freedom of life in a practice. The approach to making difference in a practice from Zhuang Zu's perspectives, Kang (1987: 232-309) shows us to how an individual agent can develop through the transformational process of 'becoming-others' in a practice. From Confucian's perspective, the practice is created by a human tradition that is governed by human values and the rules of human life; whereas for Zhuang Zu, a practice is a domain governed by neither human values (e.g., virtues) nor the rules of human life in which a practice is governed by the human qualities of benevolence (*ren*, 仁), justices (*yi*, 义), ethics (*li*, 礼), and wisdom (*zhi*, 智).

For Zhuang Zu, the practice does not merely exist from human's perspectives, but develops through the 'communicate' with the others in a practice. As Zhuang Zu and his followers focus their attention on strategies for initiating the transformation of self and social change, and hence on the processes of transformational change that makes possible the invention of something new, which leads to explore a new value system for the 'unknown common world'. Zhuang Zu's own words,

In the Northern darkness there is a fish and his name is K'un. The K'un is so huge I don't know how many thousand li he measures. He changes and becomes a bird whose name P'eng. The back of the P'eng measures I don't know how many thousand li across and, when he rises up and flies off, his wings are like clouds all over the sky. When the sea begins to move, this bird sets off for the southern darkness, which is the Lake of Heaven. The Universal Harmony records various wonder, and it says: When the P'eng journeys to the southern darkness, the waters are roiled for three thousand li. He beats the whirlwind and rises ninety thousand li, setting off on the sixth month gale (Watson, 1968: 29).

We refer to the 'unknown common world' as the common space in which human's understanding transcends the boundary of his 'closed systems' and extends to the domain of others so that it necessarily involves a becoming-other whereby human closed systems is set within the state of chaos (混沌) (Watson, 1968: 97). In order to explore the 'chaos', which is possible through the mutual understanding between the human actors and the others (e.g., socially marginalized groups, birds, fishes, animals, trees and so on), the human actor should open to others' value systems and languages, and create the mutual understanding between the human and others. In this sense, human understanding may be extended to the meta-level of learning, which happens through a systemic inquiry on the 'chaos' that exists within the outside of the boundary of human community, value systems, and tradition. The following is a good example of Zhuang Zu's imaginary and creative story.

Haven't you heard this story? Once a sea bird alighted in the suburbs of the Lu capital. The marquis of Lu escorted it to the ancestral temple, where he entertained it, performing the Nine Shao music for it to listen to and presenting it with the meat of the T'ai-lao sacrifice to feast on. But the bird only looked dazed and forlorn, refusing to eat a single slice of meat or drink a cup of wine, and in three days it was dead. This is to try to nourish a bird with what would nourish you instead of what would nourish a bird. If you want to nourish a bird with what nourishes a bird, then you should let it roost in the deep forest, play among the banks and islands, float on the rivers and lakes, eat mudfish and minnows, follow the rest of the flock in flight and rest, and live any way it chooses... Fish live in water and thrive, but if men tried to live in water they would die. Creatures

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differ because they have different likes and dislikes. Therefore the former sages never required the same ability from all creatures or made them all do the same thing. Names should stop when they have expressed reality, concepts of right should be founded on what is suitable. This is what it means to have command of reason, and good fortune to support you (Watson, 1968: 194-195)

Through the exercise of Dao, the good life of the human actors depends upon the development of the ethics for the others through a social practice. To do so, it is useful to becoming the ‘heart’ of impersonal or nonhuman nature that was discussed by Kang (2004: 298-358). In order to becoming the heart of impersonal emptiness (□□), the human actors should search for possibilities or alternatives from the others’ value systems and their language, and create critical awareness which will produce a multiplicity of alternatives through the means of the openness of a ‘questions’ and the determination of a ‘problem’ in given contexts. In this sense, Zhunag Zu’s thought can link with Deleuze and Guattari (1987)’s thoughts of appreciating the ‘minoritarians ethics’ (Yu and Lee, 2008). Based upon their vision of ‘the ethics of becoming-minorities’, Yu and Lee (2008) argued that a new value systems was necessary for exploring the unknown common world in which Deleuzian sense of events took place to ‘make difference’ within a social practice (Yu, 2013).

### The ethics of becoming-others

According to Kwak (1993), Zhaung Zu’s notion of the emptiness or void (□) is so much appreciated when we consider the self who is willing to transform herself as an ethical agent through becoming-‘others’ in which the others refer not only human beings (e.g. women, mentally and/or physically handicapped and ‘low-ranking’ peoples in a society) but also non-human beings (e.g., birds, fishes, trees and other natural beings). We interpret the term ‘others’ that mean as human and non-human beings who have an impersonal quality that leads to a multiplicity that can ‘communicate’ and interact with the heterogeneous elements in an open social field (Kang, 2004: 298-307). Zhuang Zu’s point is not that a whole is chaotic, but that it combines forces of formation and deformation within a process of constant transformation (□) within a practice. It can function as the movement or change towards becoming-others within a social practice. Through the transformation of becoming-others which is based on the continuous variation by ‘deterritorialization’ in the terms of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), we can overcome the system of domination which is based on dualism of mind and body, human and nonhuman (or nature), and Ying (□) and Yang (□).

Clearly, Zhuang Zu’s understanding of a social practice delineates the concept the ‘world of life’, bounds together through an impersonal sympathy, a becoming-multiplicity in which each individual becomes “everyone else” according to the law of Nature, but also, in the literal sense of others (□). Zhuang Zu’s understanding of the processes of “becoming-others”, and as Kang (2004: 75-76) points out, those processes take place according to Zhunag Zu’s pragmatic ontology that is all about the relation of Dao (□) and others (□). Through the exercise of Dao in a practice, all becoming implicates the transformation of identity. Processes of realizing Dao continually play through a constant flow between the order and chaos, including the domains specific to human life, and the domains the outside of human community in which Zhuang Zu regards as the domains of chaos (Kim, 2010: 219-220). When the self refuses becoming-others and remains in herself, there cannot be becoming.

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It is indeed that becoming-others is the transcendental condition of a 'political' movement called the movement "toward nature". Then, what are the values of becoming-others precisely? It can be summarized as follows. Firstly, the ethics of becoming-others is not intended to consolidate of a certain identity, but construct the new possibilities through a liberation from the already-existing human values and tradition. Secondly, it is transform the prevailing discourse into a new one through the challenge the prevailing beliefs, human values and the rules of human life (e.g., moral principles, ethical standards, and virtues set by Confucianism) in a society. Lastly, it creates the transcendental condition of universal 'political' movement called the movement "towards nature or a natural way of Dao" that must be practised on the basis of the mutual understanding between the human self and others, which leads to the deconstruction of the binary structure between human and non-human in a social practice. In sum, Zhunag Zu's ideas makes a contribution to develop 'the ethics of becoming-others' as a means of resistance to cultural dominance through human values and the rules of human life that are influenced by Confucianism and other thoughts.

In the context of systems-based approaches to problem solving in a practice, Zhuang Zu's ideas can be applied in the form of problematization as Yu and Jung (2013) suggested. In similar vein, Yu and Lee (2008) argued that the proposal of the minoritarians ethics could be applied to the higher level of learning processes were the outcomes of the process of problematization, which extended to the meta-level of learning through the critical reflection on the problem-solving process of systems methodology. The process of problematization takes place by the means of the openness of a 'questions' and the determination of a 'problem' in given contexts. In this sense, participatory approach is needed to making 'problems' through an inquiring process of social intervention (Yu, 2004; Yu, Moon and Kim, 2008).

Having understood MacIntyre's account of a social practice and Zhuang Zu's ideas of exploring the selfless self, the natural way of appreciating Dao, and ethics for becoming-others within a social practice, the question is how their ideas are useful and applicable in a social practice? We will evaluate the ideas of Macintyre and Zhuang Zu within the process of educational practice in the case of Korean university in a next section.

### CASE STUDIES: EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES AT KEIMYUNG UNIVERSITY

In order to explore the usefulness of participatory action research and learning for exploring a social practice, we apply systems approach into the understanding the community business in Korean contexts. The study was carried out through the courses of the organizational development and the modern society and ethical management, at the college of business administration in Keimyung University which locates at Deage, South Korea.

#### The agonistic systems approaches to exploring a social practice

As Yu (2004) argues that participatory action research is possible using Foucault (1984)'s concept of problematization, we demonstrate how systems-based approach with the use of problematization is applied in a practice. To do so, we explore the management and operational activities of the community business through the exercise of action learning programmes at the college of business administration in Keimyung University. According to Tsouvalis (1995: 285)'s agonistic method, the systems methodology is divided into three phases. Phase I is called the phase of 'invention', Phase II is the phase of 'discovery' and phase III is the phase of problematization. In the agonistic method, the phases I and II are 'problems-situations' orientated phases while phase III is concerned with a 'problem-solving practice' orientated phase. In phases I and II, systems-based methods and methodologies (e.g., SSM, SODA, System Dynamics, Viable

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System Model) can be used to provide a diagnosis and ‘solutions’ to problematic situations, or the means by which ill-defined problematic situations can be transformed into well-defined ones. In phase III, the ‘questions’ and ‘problems’ can be made in the form of Deleuze (1990)’s notion of an event or a series of events in order to deal with the problem-solving practice by introducing problematization (Yu, 2004).

### **The processes of participatory action learning using systems approach**

This study draws on data from an action learning programme that was carried out during the courses of organization development and the modern society and ethical management at the college of business administration in Keimyung University from September 2012 to May 2013.

### **Background information: Understanding social transformation in Korean society.**

In traditional Korean society, Confucianism becomes a study of human relationships through ethical and moral behaviours, these relationships can create a good society with peace and harmony. The author and participants were engaged with the projects of the areas under management of borough office of Dalseo district at the city of Daegu. The majority of population in Dalseo district, who live in rural areas specifically in villages, are characterized by primary modes of production namely agriculture and livestock keeping, minimal secondary processing, limited accessibility to market and social services and above all, the existence of poor economic infrastructure compared with city. Rural development in South Korea is a deliberate transformation process that involves a series of state interventions taking place in village for the aim of creating jobs for local people in order to reduce poverty, raising the standards of living of the masses and improving welfare of the village communities. Recently, Asian immigrants have greatly increased through the arranged marriage between spouse and a marriage agency as Korean spouse (specially husband) wants to find his partner from neighboring countries like Vietnam, Philippines, Thailand, China and so on. We call these families as the “multicultural families”, and these families undergo the cultural transformation through the complex processes of ‘social learning’, which refers to the self-learning activities within community as people transforming themselves through complex interaction between external environments and community. There are five core activities for social learning within community, namely, developing holistic perspectives for self-learning; developing group formation through natural relationship; developing emotional sensation and sympathy through group collaboration; creating social capital through connection and networks; developing capacity-building of individuals through social learning.

Dealing with the current issues within community business the village enterprise called ‘rainbow cafe’ with a participants-driven manner, five key phases of participatory action research were identified. These phases are described as follows.

### **Phase 1: Invention**

In the agonistic systems approach, this phase is identical with the way Checkland’s SSM’s Analyses One, Two, and Three (Checkland and Scholes, 1990), and building root definitions and conceptual models. The basic process of the systemic intervention using SSM is summarized by the following stages.

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### Stage 1. Carrying out Analysis One (the Intervention Itself) of SSM

#### Stage a. Finding out “key issues”

The methods of finding out a ‘rich picture’ of the rainbow cafe were conducted by the study of the written documents, official records, questionnaire-based survey, social network analysis, observation and informal and formal interviews. It was identified that a centralized decision-making process was formed through a top-down hierarchy of the rainbow cafe. There was a tendency for poor communication, lack of trust and understanding between managers and workers throughout the divisions in the cafe. In an actual study, the archive of ‘information’ collected can include written documents and records, notes taken from formal and informal interviews with the members of staff within the cafe. Only the facts which are considered to be of relevance for collecting events data and analyzing events data being collected in stage b are given as follows. In addressing any messy problem situations by SSM, the first step was to find out the current situations within the café from the various perceptions as possible in order to draw a ‘rich picture.’ These perceptions were expressed as follows.

Person A:

“How can we create a vision for improving our quality of life through creating business opportunity within the local community?”

Person B:

“Taking into consideration the benefit of our communities, what can we create a good business model that produces a profit through business activities?”

Person C:

“The managing director (MD) focuses mainly on the operational performance in terms of the financial criteria. There are no trust and norms amongst the MD and other workers in the rainbow cafe. Communication flow is top-down and managers exercise a directive leadership within the rainbow cafe”

There were still some concerns about the ‘vision systems’ that should be taken into account to affect both the operational, managerial, ethical aspects of the organization and psychological issues of employees in the rainbow cafe. As the cultural and psychological issues of employees were influencing the management and operation of the rainbow cafe, the political could not be exercised based on a particular single person or a powerful group within the rainbow cafe.

#### Stage b. Model Building

The model-building was concerned with the preparation of ‘root definitions’ and building conceptual models of the perceived reality. Having clarified the root causes of the problem contexts, root definitions were formulated, which seemed ‘relevant’ to the problem situations within the rainbow cafe. These were the ‘the vision system’ and the ‘effective business system,’ which are described as follows.

#### Root definition 1: The vision system

A rainbow cafe owned system aiming to create a vision amongst the managing director (MD), senior workers, and temporary staff, and seeking to build trust between managers and workers in order to increase understanding and cooperation amongst MD, employees and temporary staff within the rainbow cafe.

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### Root definition 2: The effective business system

A rainbow cafe owned system aiming to recruit funds and have a good business model in order to generate a profit that makes the sustainable business within the local community.

Having the root definitions of the relevant human activity systems of the rainbow cafe, the purpose of building conceptual models was to understand the purposeful behaviours of multiple perceptions of 'human activity systems' within the cafe. The conceptual models contain ideas about the purposeful human activities which are concerned with the nature of the perceived reality in carrying out problem-solving activities within the rainbow cafe. Conceptual models ('ought to be') were generated which seemed to be relevant to the problematic situation at the rainbow cafe. These models were used to generate debate amongst participants in order to bring about desirable changes within the rainbow cafe.

### Stage 2. Carrying out Analysis Two (Social) of SSM

In SSM, Checkland and Poulter (2006: 31-34) suggest that analysts or participants find out their 'feeling' or 'flavour' of the problematic situation and its social texture. To do so, we identified those three elements of social texture within the rainbow cafe, namely roles, norms and values that continually interact one and another in the given situation as follows. *Roles* refer to the formal roles of MD, other senior workers, and particularly the informal role of MD was described as a 'dictator' within the rainbow cafe. *Norms* were not identified as a conflict was happened between the MD's expected behaviours associated with his roles and other group's norms within the rainbow cafe. *Values* were not identified because conflict and contradiction took place within the rainbow cafe as MD wanted to use his power and authority to promote his self-interest of making the rainbow cafe to be a profit-oriented company.

### Stage 3. Carrying out Analysis Three (Political) of SSM

The focus of Analysis Three is to find out the disposition of power in a situation and the processes for containing it (Checkland and Poulter, 2006: 35). We identified the 'commodity' of power as Checkland and Poulter (2006: 37) clearly made that "there was an unstated but very real hierarchy here" such as what are the commodities of power in a given situation. In the rainbow cafe, obviously, the Managing Director (MD) had greater power on the basis of his authority and social position so that he can recruit new members of staff and dismiss workers if they disagree with his ideas on the community business which has an explicit aim to make a profit and receive grants from the government rather than creating benefit to the local community. On these issues, participants concerned with how to distribute or relinquish power within the rainbow cafe.

### **Phase 2. Discovery**

In the agonistic systems methodology, this phase is identical with the way Checkland's classical model of stages 1, 2, 5, 6, and 7 is described (Tsouvalis, 1995: 289-90). It is concerned with the real-world activities in order to apply the 'ethical and normative' values of the conceptual models into a practice, which aims to create an 'open space' which generates interactions between participants and others (including local government, an advisory organization, temporary workers who are not full-time employees of the organization) within the rainbow cafe. This approach was focused on more on the organizational process that facilitates to form informal groups and

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communities which were initiated by voluntary and participatory approaches that created and shared visions, interests, desires, belief and the common values of MD, administrative staff, workers, investors and others within the local community.

### Phase 3: Problematization.

As Yu (2004) argued that the process of problematization was developed using Deleuzian sense of events, participants were actively involved with the process of “debate and negotiation”, which led to generate *a series of events* in a practice. However, different perceptions and values amongst different groups of participants and other stakeholders led to “conflict and contradiction” situations amongst the MD, advisory organizations (e.g., The Consulting Centre for Social Enterprises at Daegu, the Community and Economy (the consulting organization) at Daegu) and participants within the rainbow cafe. Dealing with this situation, the researcher (Dr. Jae Eon Yu) advised an action learning team to problematize the identified problem context, which would allow them involved to pose a set of ‘problems’ and ‘questions’ within the given context. During this process of problematization, participants engaged with dialogue to reveal their appreciation of the coercive nature of power, which issued by the MD and government’s policies on the community business in Korea. For example, participants realized that most people have some power over others. So the senior workers, officials of local government and a consultant (Dr. Jae Eon Yu) had power over MD of the rainbow café when they attended formal meetings and made formal and informal communication one and another within the rainbow cafe. In this sense, participants believed that an active form of discourse or dialogue could have a transformative capacity in which participants would convert the present situation into a new state. This proved that it had positive and productive effects on existing power and knowledge relations within the rainbow cafe. Thus, it is certain that the narrative unity of discussions and actions amongst the participants emerged from the problematization of situational contexts within the rainbow cafe. The process of problematization occurred due to multiple relations of the truth, power and ethics amongst participants (Foucault, 1984)

#### Stage 1. Entering the process of problematization

By entering the process of problematization, participants appreciated the possibilities of all forms of new ideas that can be derived from the virtual possibilities within the problematizing field. Then, a new thought begins to address ‘problems’ of the existing rules and regulations within the current ‘system’ in the cafe. The process of problematization can be divided into two distinctive stages in which participatory learning has happened within the problem-solving practice. These stages can be summarized as follows.

#### Stage a: Collecting events data and analyzing them

To observe and appreciate “what happens” in terms of a series of Deleuzian sense of events within the practice, events data is collected and analyzed. The analysis of events data collected is based on a need for further development of making ‘problems’ that leads to the new possibilities within the rainbow cafe. Events data collected during the process of problematization are given as follows.

- Event 1: Dealing with various issues within the rainbow cafe, the participatory and democratic approaches are necessary. These approaches will lead to facilitate democratic decision-making process that is a collection of policies and practices linked in relationships with MD, senior workers, administrative staff, temporary workers and other stakeholders within the community in order to create the shared communitarian values and social capital amongst them (

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1<sup>st</sup> March 2013).

- Event 2: The success or failure of the community business depends on the development of the good business model, which creates value for people and community that makes “problems” of current operation and management of the organization to facilitate the processes of organizational changes within the rainbow cafe (12<sup>th</sup> April 2013).

### Stage b: Exploring new possibilities

From the events data collected in stage a, and a number of issues were highlighted by analyzing the events data collected, which will be used for exploring the new ‘possibilities’ within the practice. It leads participants to consider the inclusiveness of ‘others’ such as unemployed youths, old pensioners and female workers from the ‘multi-cultural families’ who regard as the socially marginalized groups of people in the local community. In this sense, becoming-others is taken place through the creative and open discussions with ‘others’ when participants acts as the changing agents in order to discover the possibilities through the selection and affirmation of future event (“what will be happened?”). In this sense, the relationships with others are crucial for achieving the ‘ethics of becoming others’ that aims to create new values towards the natural Way of the long-term sustainability of the multi-cultural society, the preservation of traditional heritages, and the happiness of human life within the society.

### Stage 2. Making a new problem

Having the appreciation of new possibilities within the problem-solving practice, participants were engaged with a form of self-reflecting inquiry to get the collective way of learning process by making a new problems. Through participation and negotiation, participants were contributed to make an ideal event that will be created within the virtual fields of a social practice. As a consequence, a ‘problems’ is selected and affirmed according to the conditions under which generates a narrative unity of a good human life that will be happened in the future. In this sense, an ideal event is made through the social appreciative process of problematization as follows.

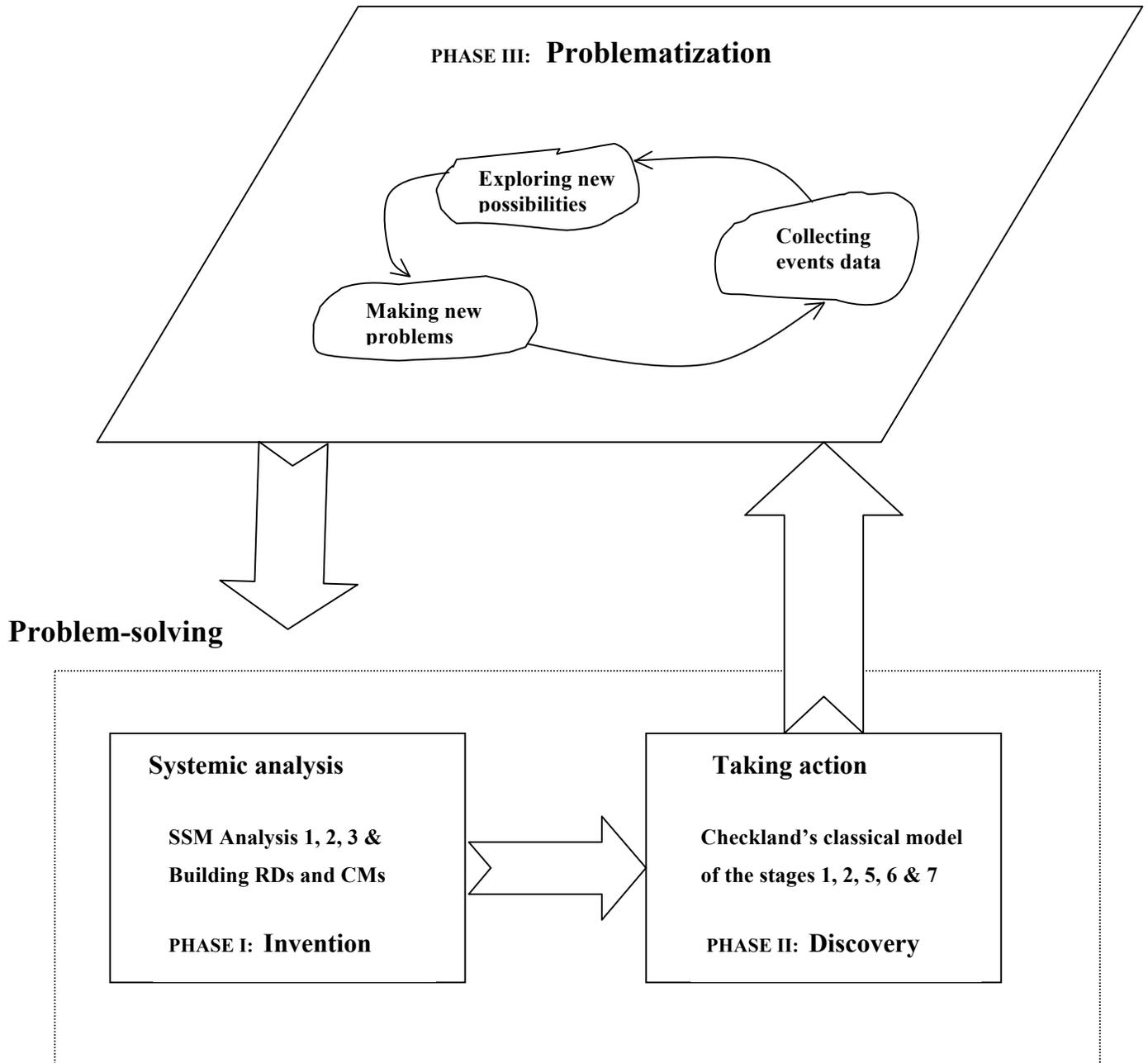
- Event 3: We have to recruit volunteers who are willing to work through a good governance and the transparency of financial systems in the rainbow cafe, which create and maintain a social network within local community at Daegu (22<sup>nd</sup> May 2013).

### Critical reflections on action learning

Action research is best carried out by people in the problematical situation itself, not left to an outside expert (Checkland and Poulter, 2006: xvii). To be problem owners (and solvers sometimes) in the process of action research and learning, it is realized through participants’ engagement with the micropolitics of becoming-others in the practice. During the transformational process of becoming-others, activities typically includes uncovering of its taken-for-granted assumptions (e.g., the individualistic and authoritative behaviours of the MD, the Confucian Asian culture of contextualized beliefs within the café) through the building conceptual models of SSM, often by drawing on alternative discourses, considering a plurality of questions and the narrative unity of the others’ stories. The ethics of becoming-others links with the philosophy of action learning, where “there needs to be a learning process which addresses the subjective world of the learner, challenges the taken-for-granted which maintain the power horizon and thereby problematizes the dominant framework, rather than the individuals within it” (McGill and Brockbank, 2004: 115). In sum, we explored the systems approach from both Western and Eastern perspectives, using MacIntyre’s account of a social practice and Zhuang

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Zu's theory of Dao. A revised version of the 'agonistic systems approach' was developed from the previous systemic research and practice (Yu and Lee, 2008). The proposed agonistic systems approach contains three distinctive phases of action learning and research activities. Phase 1 and 2 are concerned with "real world" activities necessarily involving people in solving the problematic situation. Phase 3 is concerned with the reflection process of problematization, which collects and analyzes 'events data', building new possibilities and making 'problems' within a social practice. The overall process is shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. The three phases of the agonistic systems approach**

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### CONCLUSION

As our research was carried out within a social practice in which the community business was assessed using the systems approach that focused to deal with organizational and social changes under the principle of “inclusiveness” in civil society (Koh and Shim, 2009). In particular, we used Eastern philosophy of Zhuang Zu, which concerned with understanding human actions, which need to open up the ‘unknown common world’. It was not concerned with what is right or wrong based on consequence-based reasoning, but was concerned with what is good or bad for the good life of individuals and the sustainable societies in terms of the values of ‘communitarian ethics’ or the ethics of becoming-others. In this study, proposing the ethics of becoming others, we explore the problematic nature of the community business that operated for the benefit of the socially marginalised or disadvantaged group at the local community in Korea that we have demonstrated in this paper. Applying from MacIntyre’s concept of a social practice into the understanding the nature of the community business in the context of Korean society, our contention is that the MacIntyre’s theory can help us to explore some degree appreciation of the critical questioning of a ‘tradition’ of Korean society, dominant discourse, and identities that are assessed to be predominant with the aim of inspiring organizational transformation and social reform towards a virtuous society. We argue for alternative reasoning that happens through the process of problematization, and it is necessary for enhance ‘ethical discourse’ of the Zhuang Zu’s ideas of becoming-others in order to changing the complex nature of the community business for the sustainable future. It will create an open space to rethink the problem-solving practice, towards critical thinking that is a natural way of Dao (Kang, 2004). Further research will then be necessary to appreciate the Zhuang Zu’s theory of Dao for understanding a social practice in other contexts in order to make a new connection between the human values and the freedom of non-human life from the critical perspectives.

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