ALASDAIR MACINTYRE ON MODERN MANAGERS AND THE REVIVAL
OF CONTEMPORARY CONFUCIANISM *

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This essay takes MacIntyre’s critique on modern managers as the starting point and then examine whether managers’ expertise is only a “moral fiction” or a practice. One particular insightful analytical approach is to follow MacIntyre in drawing lessons from the rivalling moral traditions in contemporary Western society. Then we are confronted with the challenge of how to articulate a dialogue of truth and the conversation between cultures. This paper has its utmost interest in the revival of Confucianism-oriented culture.

Keywords: MacIntyre; Manager; Incommensurability, Confucianism.

* First Draft. We welcome your comments.
I. Introduction

To investigate MacIntyre’s complete “enterprise and its development”\textsuperscript{1} would be too big a project to achieve solid findings. This essay takes MacIntyre’s critique on modern managers as the starting point and then examine whether managers’ expertise is only a “moral fiction”\textsuperscript{2} or a practice. One particular insightful analytical approach is to follow MacIntyre in drawing lessons from the rivalling moral traditions in contemporary Western society. Then we are confronted with the challenge of how to articulate a dialogue of truth and the conversation between cultures. This paper has its utmost interest in the revival of Confucianism-oriented culture.

Methodologically speaking, we take incommensurability among rival traditions and the potential of a dialogue as a problematic of the current project. There is also plenty implication regarding the “practice”. A practice is

\ldots 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.\textsuperscript{3}

Whereas MacIntyre addresses practices concerning the construction of a moral philosophy situating in a narrative-relevant and tradition-aware manner, we look for the application of this practice-narrative-tradition approach to Confucianism, in its intact form and its contemporary form possibly plagued by post-modernity and/or


\textsuperscript{3} \textit{After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory}, Second edition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984, p.187
diluted by Capitalism. Indeed, as MacIntyre depicts,

Within that culture conceptions of the virtues become marginal and the tradition of the virtues remain central only in the lives of social groups whose existence is on the margins of the central culture.⁴

Traditions, marginalized or neutralized by the dominant “bureaucratic individualism”⁵, may observe their adherents who are not belonging to the dominant social order. The existence of them is nonetheless capable of initiating challenges toward the current social order. Hence it is a sensible project for virtue ethicists with an interest in economics and management of business to examine these traditions, albeit marginal in current forms, so as to offer virtue-based ethics contributing to human flourishing.

⁴ Ibid, p. 225.
⁵ Ibid.
II. On Modern Managers

MacIntyre’s diagnosis of the “grave disorder” in the West today is an undisputable symptom of Emotivism. He has defined, “Emotivism is the doctrine that all evaluative judgements and more specifically all moral judgements are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character”\[^6\]. More importantly, according to MacIntyre, the modern manager is a character in today’s emotivist society. The manager, represents in his character the obliteration of the distinction between manipulative and nonmanipulative social relations. . . . The manager treats ends as given, as outside his scope; his concern is with technique, with effectiveness in transforming raw materials into final products, unskilled labor into skilled labor, investments into profits. . . . Neither manager nor therapist, in their roles as manager and therapist, do or are able to engage in moral debate. They are seen by themselves, and by those who see them with the same eyes as their own, as uncontested figures, who purport to restrict themselves to the realm in which rational agreement is possible . . . the realm of measurable effectiveness.\[^7\]

Characters of such are “the moral representatives of their culture and they are so because of the way in which moral and metaphysical ideas and theories assume through them an embodied existence in the social world”\[^8\]. Whereas non-character social roles accommodate some discrepancy between the public function and the private personality, a character such as the manager demands “fused” social role and personality.

However, this observation also conceptualizes two conflicting moral beliefs.\[^9\] First,

\[^6\] MacIntyre, \textit{After Virtue}, pp. 11–12.
\[^7\] Ibid, p. 30.
\[^8\] Ibid, p. 27.
the emotivist manager excludes values from the realm of reason. In other words, the manager is a principle character in an immoral emotivist context. The context rests upon an immoral “modern economic order and more especially its individualism, its acquisitiveness and its elevation of the values of the market to a central social place”\(^{10}\).

Second, the authority that the manager claims to be endowed with “possession of systematic effectiveness”\(^{11}\) is simply uncontested manipulative power over other people. To simply put, “Managerial expertise is an expression of arbitrary, disguised, will and preference”\(^{12}\).

There have been various arguments countering MacIntyre’s harsh critique toward modern manager. For instance, Paul Santilli believes that the manager’s expertise is not a “moral fiction” and the expertise is well defined in a Weberian sense. MacIntyre is absolutely right in that the manager necessarily hold the emotivist belief excluding values from the realm of reason; he is also right in that the authority derived from a non-law-like generalization is not well founded; however, this argument leaves room for whether non-law-like efficiency enhancing practice contribute to human flourishing. Specifically Santilli thinks managerial expertise does not find it roots in law-like generalizations, rather in “Weberian assumption of legitimacy through efficiency” which links to “the existence of rational modes of control”\(^{13}\).

Other commentators have tried to resort to empirical observation.\(^{14}\) Not-for-profit

\(^{10}\) Ibid, p. 254.
\(^{11}\) Ibid, p. 74.
\(^{12}\) Ibid, p. 107.
businesses are still visible and some virtue oriented business is still operating (although in smaller portion of the business world). While maintaining a critical view toward the market economy, Dawson and Bartholomew look for an alternative that accumulates the capacity to challenge the dominant social order. Echoing MacIntyre’s virtue theory, they believe that even marginal tradition can play roles in reviving business ethics in particular and virtue ethics in social setting in general. To this possibility, we turn to the discussion of dialogue among rival traditions.
III. Drawing Lessons from Rival Traditions

MacIntyre’s *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* is a further working and recollection of the Gifford Lectures he delivered in the University of Edinburgh in 1988. In addressing the nature and scope of moral enquiry, MacIntyre points to the rival versions as “three very different and mutually antagonistic conceptions of moral enquiry, each stemming from a seminal late nineteenth-century text: The Ninth Edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Nietzsche’s *Zur Genealogie der Moral* and the encyclical letter of Pope Leo XIII *Aeterni Patris.*”

i. Individual Characteristics

The Ninth Edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* was produced by congenial contemporaries of Adam Gifford in the last fifth of the nineteenth century and seen today as a recognizable descendant of the “Enlightenment Project.” In MacIntyre’s analysis, three features characterize this tradition. One, the encyclopaedists assumed “the assent of all educated persons to a single substantive conception of rationality.” Two, such rationality leads to the outcome which is “the elaboration of a comprehensive, rationally incontestable scientific understanding of the whole, in which the architectonic of the sciences matched that of the cosmos.” And three, in relation to history and progress, the encyclopaedists saw their whole mode of life, including their conceptions of rationality and of science, as part of a history of inevitable progress, judged by a stand of progress which has itself emerged form that history.

16 Ibid, p. 23.
Subversion took place, however. In 1887, the year of Adam Gifford’s death, Nietzsche published *Zur Genealogie der Moral*. The Genealogists radically broke away from the encyclopaedists conception of “a single framework within which knowledge is discriminated from mere belief, progress of towards knowledge is mapped, and truth is understood as the relationship of our knowledge to the world.”19 What Nietzsche distinctively developed was apparent in his 1873 work, *Über Lüge und Wahrheit im Aussermoralischem Sinn* I, as MacIntyre notes. Four key aspects have been identified as psychological, epistemological, historical and literary.20 His psychology claims that behind any apparent search for truth lies nothing but the will to power. In terms of his epistemological standing, he criticizes the Enlightenment position for its blindness to the alternatives. He retells the Western “progress” leading through the nineteenth century as one of psychological deformation and suppression. His preferred literacy forms, such as aphorisms, poetical and prophetical speech, were used to mock academic standards of rationality. Thus, Nietzsche presents his narrative as a superior one in *Zur Genealogie der Moral*.

The rivalness between these two traditions is captured by MacIntyre as the following,

> From the standpoint of the encyclopaedist the genealogist is reproducing familiar irrationalist themes and theses; so the genealogist’s perspectivism is characteristically understood as merely one more version of relativism, open to refutation by the arguments used by Socrates against Protagoras. From the standpoint of the genealogist the encyclopaedist is inescapably imprisoned within metaphors unrecognized as metaphors.21

The conflict generates MacIntyre’s attention toward the “incommensurability” of the

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19 Ibid, p. 42.
20 Ibid, p. 35.
21 Ibid, p. 43.
rival versions of moral enquiry. There is also an interconnected dimension of
“untranslatability”,

[w]e have two radically different alternative and rival conceptual schemes, recognizable as such only by those who have leant the language of each and of both as two first languages and who are able to speak each as those who inhibit that scheme speak it, but necessarily unrecognized by those who insist that to understand the language of the other it must be translatable into their own.22

Putting the conflict aside, both traditions were charging to the concept of “rational teaching authority internal to the practice of the craft of moral enquiry.”23 This brings MacIntyre to Aquinas’ reworking of Augustine and Aristotle. The tension is a seemingly unresolvable one since,

Aristotle provided accounts of what a science is, of what enquiry is, and of the telos of all enquiry that were notably at odds with Augustine’s version of Platonism, more especially in leaving no place and in having no need, in its account of the genesis of knowledge, for divine illumination. So that in certain respects it seemed to be the case that the Augustinian scheme could be true only if the Aristotelian was false, and vice versa.24

To bring about Aquina not only, as an intellectual example, moves the incommensurable rivals into originally-thought impossible conversation, but also demonstrates the possibility that one of the rival traditions may emerge from the engagement as recognizably superior. When rivals who do not construe truth, the self, community, morality, or philosophy with similar terms start this type of engagement, they are more likely to observe the flaws in each system that it is in the self-interest of proponents to correct. The opportunity arises when a tradition running into difficulties and finding its insufficient resources within to understand those difficulties to resolve

22 Ibid, p. 43.
23 Ibid, p. 63.
24 Ibid, p. 103.
them. To engage with a rival may then offer a practice-narrative-tradition analysis and solution. As an exemplary developing thinker, Aquina was “as himself a continuously developing thinker, transforming and correcting his own initial positions in a variety of instructive ways.”  

And if this were the whole story of Thomism it would at least appear as, and perhaps be, a story of defeat. But happily *Aeterni Patris* also generated a quite different set of intellectual enterprises, those which, in retrieving stage by scholarly stage the historical understanding of what Aquinas himself said, wrote, and did, recovered for us an understanding of what is distinctive about the mode of enquiry elaborated in its classical and most adequate form by Aquinas.

In concluding, MacIntyre proposes a revised concept of the university challenged by this incommensurability. His vision is to take the Thomistic contribution one step further in the re-creation of the university – “the university as a place of constrained disagreement, of imposed participation in conflict, in which a central responsibility of higher education would be to initiate students into conflict.”

Whereas MacIntyre addresses practices concerned with the construction of a moral philosophy situating in a narrative-relevant and tradition-aware manner in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, the following section aims to look for the application of this Practice-Narrative-Tradition approach to a possible dialogue between Aristotelians and Confucians.

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26 Ibid, p. 77.  
27 Ibid, p. 231.
III. Incommensurability when East meets West

i. MacIntyre on Conversation between East and West

The above analysis has shown incommensurability between Western rival traditions and its implications. This is a familiar theme in MacIntyre’s work already, for instance: “to produce a characterization of this antagonism from some external, third vantage point is doomed to failure; there is no idiom neutral between the encyclopaedist’s affirmations and distinctions and the genealogist’s subversions.”28 Will the findings be carried through to another arena where the element of subversion is absent but the factor of untranslatability comes to play? In MacIntyre’s view, a theory of the virtues, whether in the form of Eastern or Western philosophy, has to account for “the excellences and perfections of human activity and achievement as such.”29 On reflecting upon his own *A Short History of Ethics (1966)*, MacIntyre issues a negative comment toward construing a potentially universal theory depicted above,

> There is just no neutral and independent method of characterizing those materials in a way sufficient to provide the type of adjudication between competing theories of the virtues which I had once hoped to provide and to which some others still aspires.30

When it comes to make meaningful comparison across and between cultures and traditions, MacIntyre believes that the only meaningful comparisons are “modes of comparison.”31 The right questions have to be structured as such,

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We have to ask not how do Japanese differ from Americans in respect of the social and individual aspects or components of morality, but rather how does a Japanese view of the difference between American and Japanese differ from an American view of that same difference, and in what ways do the concepts in terms of which the Japanese approach this question differ from the concepts which the Japanese approach this question differ from the concepts which Americans employ.32

Clearly this is already a concept of incommensurability in the making. However, being aware of the different implications resulting from different concepts of incommensurability, MacIntyre employs a definition in dealing with comparison between Eastern and Western philosophy, that is, “incommensurability is a relationship between two or more systems of thought and practice, each embodying its own peculiar conceptual scheme, over a certain period of time.”33

ii. Dialogue of Truth and the Conversation between Cultures

The problems that challenge the revival of contemporary Confucianism, as identified from MacIntyre’s self-asserted Aristotelian point of view, exhibit striking resemblance to what Aristotelians have experienced in the times of Aquina,

Confucianism appears to face a recurrent type of dilemma: either it retains its highly specific and concrete character, thus tying itself to particular Chinese forms of social relationships of a traditional kind and, while not necessarily exempting the concrete embodiments of these forms altogether from moral criticism, rendering its moral standpoint inseparable from loyalty to these now often radically changing forms, or it makes itself relevant to types of social order in which these forms of social relationships do not or no longer exist, but in so doing it empties itself of specific moral content and so diminishes its doctrine of

the virtues by specifying them only in barren generalities.  

[emphasis in italics]

It is certainly relevant to survey the “practice” of contemporary Confucianism in contemporary reality. The cultural landscapes have changed dramatically in the last half century. Take Taiwan as a primary example. For the past five decades of the post-WWII period, although Taiwan has engineered an economic miracle, it has confronted problems associated with globalization. As a result, traditional family structure has also undergone dramatic changes, with widening generation gap, increasing number of separated families, rising divorce rate and serious juvenile delinquency problems. The societal changes and the impact of globalization have deformed Confucianism in Asia. This is unearthed from a recent study examining young educated adults’ endorsement of traditional Confucian values in four East Asian cultural contexts (i.e., China, Korea, Japan and Taiwan). Confucian values of interpersonal harmony, relational hierarchy and traditional conservatism are surveyed for their respective endorsement. Interpersonal relationships, in Confucius’ terms *li* and *ren*, deal with father versus son, husband versus wife and other social interactions. These are well-defined roles to be played. Hierarchy is understood in Confucianism as Confucius wrote that “Rulers should employ their ministers by observing ritual propriety, and ministers should serve their lord by doing their utmost loyalty”, and “The ruler must rule, the minister ministers.” Traditional conservatism, generally interpreted as being content, is best illustrated by Confucius’ comment on a very worthy man named Hui: “Hui was indeed a worthy man! With a single bamboo bowl

\[34\] Ibid, p. 120.
\[37\] Ibid, p. 69.
of rice and a cup of water he lived in a back alley. Others could not have endured his misery, but Hui never changed from his happy disposition. Hui was a hsien (worthy man) indeed!”

Findings showed that young people endorsed values of interpersonal harmony the most. It is then followed by the relational hierarchy and traditional conservatism respectively. This selective detachment from the fundamental sets of Confucian values is seen to be related to the degree of economic globalization.

MacIntyre alludes us to an analogy in regard to the dilemma faced by contemporary Confucians. Given that Aristotle defined the specificities of the virtues in terms of the social relationship of the polis, therefore in societies in which there is no longer a polis the Aristotelian theory of the virtues would have been sentenced to be empty and irrelevant. The revival hinges upon an approach which fulfils two conditions set forth by MacIntyre. One, a tradition acknowledges the “admission of fallibilism.”

And two, the comparisons of rival traditions are only meaningful in the sense of “comparison of comparisons.”

It was Aquinas who, following the example of his Islamic predecessors, undertook the task of recasting the Aristotelian doctrine of the virtues so that it might retain specific requirements for social relationships and yet be a doctrine of the virtues for human beings as such and not just for Greeks inhabiting a polis. Did Aquinas succeed or fail? There is as much at stake for contemporary Thomistic Aristotelians in answering this question as there is for contemporary Neo-Confucians in responding to their own parallel dilemma.

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40 MacIntyre, A., “Incommensurability, Truth, and the Conversation Between Confucians and Aristotelians About the Virtues,” p. 121.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid, p. 121.
In MacIntyre’s view, Aquinas “immersed himself in both the Aristotelianism and the Augustinianism…, not only of his intellectual enquiries, but of his existence, that of how what he took, or at least was to come to take, to be the truth in each could be reconciled with that of the other. This profile of Aquinas may serve as a prototype of Confucian philosophers who are challenged to revive Confucianism.

IV. On Confucian Managers: Wei-Ming Tu converses with Peter Drucker

_Tu Wei-Ming in Dialogue_

Tu Wei-Ming of Harvard University has been named by MacIntyre as the leading scholar in the revival of Confucianism. It is then worth investigating how Tu addresses the issue at stake within the current wave of global economy.

Tu depicts that “the person as a center of relationships, the more one penetrates into one’s inner self, the more one will be capable of realizing the true nature of one’s human relatedness”. The gradual enlargement of (possibly a business) community is founded in Confucian thought which calls “to establish others for the sake of establishing oneself, to enlarge others for the sake of enlarging oneself”. The emphasis on mutuality and harmony contributes not only to self-cultivation but also to transform the even larger community. Tu points out that the Confucian family serves as an important institution for capital formation and networking that are instrumental to business and economic growth. In a much broader perspective, Tu tries to revitalize Confucianism not just in a regional or ethnical confine but also in a global community. In addressing implications of the global ecological issues, Tu refers to “unity of Heaven and Humanity” as a the most significant Confucian traditions’ contribution to global ethics.

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44 MacIntyre, “Incommensurability, Truth, and the Conversation Between Confucians and Aristotelians About the Virtues,” p. 120.
**Peter Drucker in Dialogue**

In one respect, Klein (2000) asserts that “Drucker not only invented modern business management, but that he embodies, more than any other business management theorist, Aristotelian practical wisdom”\(^49\). With respect to the understanding of Confucian ethics, Drucker has been one of the most recognizable proponents for linking Confucian thought to management of business.\(^50\)

To account for Drucker's conception of the ethical and socially responsible manager, Bowman et al. (2000) summarizes,

> such a person must be professional in her interactions with stakeholders, always holding to the basic principle of "no intentional harm". Moreover, the manager must be accountable for the social effects of the organization and responsive to the need for regulatory action. The good manager must demonstrate social leadership in addressing important social issues, while always remaining committed to performance of her organization and humble about one's competence and authority.\(^51\)

In particular, Drucker praises Confucian ethics highly as a guide for organizational ethics and credits it as “the most successful and most durable ethics of them all: the Confucian ethics of interdependence”\(^52\). The principle guiding these relationships is to conduct oneself "sincerely", meaning appropriately to the situation in ways that will "optimize benefits for both parties", and in conformance with the norms of civil society (Drucker, 1981a, p. 30). Wrong behavior abuses or exploits the relationship by violating its trust and integrity. Examples cited are sexual harassment (which misuses power) and whistleblowing (which violates trust). Ethics, then, is fundamentally about

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\(^51\) Ibid.

managers understanding the interdependence of basic relationships and acting in ways that are respectful and encourage mutual obligations. Harmony and trust become the basic values that require each party to the relationship to help fulfill each other’s goals (Drucker, 1982).

What does this thought conversation lead us to? Highly consensual arguments have been distinctly proposed by Tu Wei-Ming and Peter Drucker. If MacIntyre is correct in that post-modernity is the underlining context (even a false one) that drives modern managers out of moral pursuit, then both Tu and Drucker think that it is the corporate organizations and business environment in general have the potential to restore the moral priority of managers. Tu’s view of a Confucian community is that society “is not an adversary system consisting of pressure groups but a fiduciary community based on trust.” And Drucker places the continuity as the priority for business to truly flourish so as to contribute to social goods. He believes ethical management provides continuity for the organization and but should definitely not be a “fashionable chic”. In terms of institution, he affirms that “Business and other institutions of our society of organizations cannot be pure, however desirable that may be. Their own self-interest alone forces them to be concerned with society and community and to be prepared to shoulder responsibility beyond their own main areas of task and responsibility”.

It is inevitable that there indeed involves incommensurability in respective presentations such as Confucian construction of modern business organization is still

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unsubstantial. One analogy that MacIntyre alludes us to is that “those who are contemporary Confucians and also inhabitants of a modern state will be forced to lead a double life”. While as Drucker places the Confucian ethic of interdependence to be an important managerial practice, there is no sign that he subscribes to the Heaven and Earth type of harmony resulted from self-cultivation,

Only those who are the most sincere [authentic, true, and real] can fully realize their own nature. If they can fully realize their own nature, they can fully realize human nature. If they can fully realize human nature, they can fully realize the nature of things. If they can fully realize the nature of things, they can take part in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth. If they can take part in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth, they can form a trinity with Heaven and Earth.

Through this thought conversation between Tu Wei-Ming and Peter Drucker, we once again see MacIntyre’s points in reviving a tradition, especially a marginalized or neutralized one. Two features of meaningful cross-tradition conversation have to be embedded in the process. First, revival inhibits the “admission of fallibilism” whereas one tradition in reviving itself acknowledges the possibility of being defeated by other rival tradition. Second, the strongest assertion of comparative studies is the “comparison of comparisons”.

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58 Chung-Yung: XXII, Tu, Wei-Ming (trans.) in Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness, p.77.
60 Ibid, p. 120.
61 Ibid.
IV. Concluding Remarks

It is worth noting that MacIntyre and Drucker have been both criticised to making up a straw-man-type argument when examining business ethics.\(^{62}\) What then, is a Confucian argument for or critique to modern managers valid and not in a vacuum? Further research has to make inquire about whether Confucian managers being central characters in Confucianism relevant society. Hence it is also legitimate to ask if Confucian business a practice in our contemporary society.

It is no doubt “difficult to find a constructive opening for a conversation between Confucians and Western moral theorists”.\(^{63}\) To MacIntyre, the most important agenda for contemporary Confucians is not an external opening but rather an internal one because he sees “the failure of modern Confucians to debate adequately among themselves the crisis within Confucianism that should have been and sometimes has been generated by its encounter with modernity”.\(^{64}\)

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\(^{64}\) Ibid.
中文摘要
當代哲學家麥金泰爾在德行倫理上的研究成果非凡。雖然僅有少數文章論述當代商業倫理要素，卻仍然高度激發商業倫理學者探討德行倫理在商業倫理範疇的適性。麥氏認為個人主義，利欲導向以及市場價值至上等特徵界定了現代商業的脈絡（context）。麥氏進一步認為現代商業已造成了一個雙重面向的悲劇：第一，此種脈絡缺乏對一種基本倫理的認同；第二，此種脈絡缺乏對脈絡的自覺。麥氏觀察到經營管理人已演進爲現代社會的「中心人物」—中心人物在麥氏的團對裡帶來他自己的社會角色，一羣相信者和他的文化下的道德思想。這樣的觀察也鑑別出經營管理人所面臨的兩個道德矛盾：首先，情緒主義排除了理性論述的價值；其次，經營管理人的效率管理專才被合理化爲專業威權。在過往半個世紀中，台灣雖然創造並經歷了所謂的經濟奇蹟，經營管理人的倫理課題也自然更顯重要。而曾經是規範德行倫理的儒家脈絡，也因全球化的衝擊減損了在亞洲的影響。現代儒家振興所面臨的課題與麥氏論證現代商業倫理的困境有相似之處。麥氏以亞里斯多德學派的觀點論述了儒家困境：若儒家保留特定中式傳統的社會關係中的具體教條及角色調適，則不免要面對已過時的社會脈絡。若當代儒家選擇適應現代快速變遷的社會脈絡，則難免空虛原有的道德內涵且其空洞的普遍性必然減低其德行教義的適用性。綜此，本篇論文設想兩個目的。第一，引介麥金泰爾對經營管理人決策所面對的商業倫理議題；第二，應用麥氏之方法論評析受儒家影響之現代經營管理人的德行倫理困局及可能的新視野。