

Modernity and Confucian Political Philosophy in a Globalizing World

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The pressure of modernity and globalization on Chinese society in the last century has been unprecedented in all dimensions. The preservation and the establishment of its contemporary legitimacy of Confucianism depends on whether it can provide effective responses to the problems that have been generated by modernization and globalization. The responses should not be confined to pure academic study, but should also be a process of realizing its ideals in practice.

I believe that Confucianism faces an onerous task of providing solutions to three major problems of contemporary Chinese society, namely, political reconstruction, cultural identity and religious faith. These are actually the major issues that the field of Chinese contemporary political philosophy has to address.

The so-called Confucian political philosophy is the scholarship that embraces a set of political ideals that are indigenous as distinguished from liberalism and the New Left when confronting these three important problems. Before I start discussing this field, it is necessary to make a brief comparison between Confucianism and Western political philosophy.

The comparative perspective: the *polis* and the kinship community

The term 'political philosophy' is a Western concept, deriving from the Greek word *polis*, which is very different from the historical and sociological environment where Confucianism originated. Zheng Zhi, the Chinese equivalent phrase of politics, consists of two different characters, Zheng and Zhi. According to the Chinese classic *The Book of History*, the word Zheng refers to various activities like the preservation of material well-being, ancestral worship, foreign affairs and military expedition. The word Zhi means governing, which is close to the contemporary Western meaning of the word politics. It is important to compare and distinguish the Chinese terms for

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politics with the Western political philosophy that is derived from the affairs of the *polis*.

The main reason is that Western political philosophy is derived from the *polis*, yet the Confucian political philosophy is derived from kinship community. The *polis* is based on a contractual agreement which is a man-made reconstruction, but the kinship community is based on blood lineage, which is an extension of nature. Therefore, in his *Politics*, Aristotle begins with the statement that 'the construction of all social entities is to accomplish some common good'.¹ To construct a social entity depends on the construction of institutions. Institution is in fact a system of rules and laws specifying rights and obligations. It is pertinent to ask the following questions: Under what conditions will the need to construct rights and obligations become necessary? Under what conditions will these rights and obligations become normative? Under what conditions will different bearers of rights and obligations seek to cooperate in order to fulfill their own goals? The *polis* that Aristotle described seeks to address these questions. The *polis* is an independent unit consisting of many citizens who perform different rights and obligations. The so-called citizens are defined in terms of birth and property; slaves, masons, foreigners and even merchants are excluded. In contrast to the units of family, these people who perform different functions come together for a common purpose to comprise the political entity known as the *polis*. The military force and blood lineage are not part of the building blocks. Therefore, the establishment of a contract or constitution was necessary. In other words, so-called political science refers to the art of accomplishing the common good of the *polis*. This may have something to do with Aristotle basing his political philosophy on the teleological view that politics originates from family which is then transformed into village and the *polis*.

While Aristotle acknowledged that political power originates from patriarchy, *polis* originating from family structure, his conception of the *polis* totally excludes blood lineage. He believed Plato made a grave mistake by not differentiating patriarchal power and political power. He not only linked the origin of politics with the *polis*, but also believed that men are by nature political animals. This laid the basis for legal and moral foundation for Western political philosophy.

From the perspective of cultural anthropology, this Greek political development is quite unique, rather than universal. But the concepts of patriarchal power and political power are helpful for us to understand the characteristics of Confucian political philosophy. On the basis of archeologists Su Bingqi (1999) and Elman R. Service (1962) we can modify Aristotle's evolution of 'family-village-*polis*' to the historical evolution of 'chiefdom-kinship community-empire'. This model can help us understand where Confucianism originated in the historical evolution from chiefdom to kinship community and empire.

Man as the basic unit in the *polis* is referred to as citizen; man as the basic unit in the kinship community is referred to as a member of family. According to the Chinese historical records, the system of kinship community was designed and created by Zhou Gong. It established the king of Zhou as the universal king under heaven, and he is called the son of heaven. The family of the king is the primary clan. The vassal lords who shared the family name of the king owing to their blood lineage are called secondary clans. This clan system which was based on blood lineage

was extended to the governing structure of the whole country when the King of Zhou conquered the whole country. Likewise, every noble family is constructed on the same clan principles. Such a system is designed to combine the king, lords, high officials, intellectuals and commoners into a moral entity. In some sense, the discourse of Confucian political philosophy revolved around the question of how to interpret, justify and adjust such a system.

In *Ancient Society*, Morgan proposed the two plans of government. As he stated, sequentially, the first type of government is based purely on individuals and can be called society; the second type is based on geography and property and can be called the state. While Morgan's characterization of the state as the benchmark of civilization reveals some sense of ethnocentrism, his distinction between the society and the state parallels the distinction between the *polis* in Western political philosophy and the kinship community in Confucianism. For the sake of easy understanding, we can call the naturally formed society the primary institution, and the state that defines the political relationship between men, the secondary institution. This may help us understand Confucianism better.

With a different focus – the *polis* focusing on individuals and Confucianism focusing on family – the two different schools of thought are concerned with different questions. The *polis*-centered political philosophy focuses on how to organize the relationship between individuals in order to realize individual goals and achieve social justice. Confucianism is more interested in the question of political legitimacy and how the government or the king as the representative of the collective interest should perform its role and obligations effectively. While both schools of thought are concerned about how to pursue the common good, Western political philosophy tends to focus on law – the passionless wisdom – to pursue human happiness, and Confucianism tends to emphasize the government by virtuous king and ministers to maintain social order and world peace. In terms of normative value, one stresses individual rights and freedom, the other stresses the obligations and collective interests over individual rights. In terms of reasoning, one emphasizes the importance of public will as the basis of political legitimacy, the other often refers to the will of heaven as the basis of political legitimacy. For example, the phrases like 'heaven sees through the eyes of the people, heaven hears through the ears of the people', 'heaven gives birth to the people, and gives them the king and the teacher'. These insights can help us have a better grasp of the difference between Western political philosophy and Confucian philosophy which come about due to different historical evolution.

One last point to add is that Confucius, the first sage-cum-scholar who transmitted a body of classical thought from antiquity that came to be known as Confucianism, was born in the era of disorder. He merely transmitted and reinterpreted the Chinese tradition in the hope that virtuous kings will come about to keep peace for all under heaven, rather than pursuing self-interest. But the political system adopted by the Chin and Han dynasties was centered around the kingship and based on material power as preached by the Legalist school of thought, another school of thought in ancient China that stressed the use of naked force to rule the country. Confucian political philosophy mainly existed not in the government, but in the society where Confucian scholars played an important role in balancing the

influence of the Legalist government. As a philosophy that existed to check the government, Confucianism evolved into a kind of anti-statist political philosophy. As the contemporary Confucian scholar Mou Zongsan (2007: 170–2) also pointed out, China is not a country, but a civilization, it has the concept of all under heaven, but does not have the concept of nation-state. The Chinese people can be said to be a moral entity in the ethical sense, but not a political entity.

Jiang Qing and his political Confucianism

The onslaught of modernization and globalization has put great stress on cultural diversity and national integrity. As part of modernization and globalization, the spread of Western individualism, the market economy, democracy and rationalism have posed great challenge to the Chinese traditions. It is against this background that a number of forms of so-called contemporary neo-Confucianism represented by Jiang Qing, Kang Xiaoguang and Chen Ming have emerged in mainland China to respond to the challenge of modernization and globalization in recent years.

Jiang Qing is mainly concerned with the loss of Chineseness and the reconstruction of Chinese identity. He states that Confucianism has historically been the cultural foundation defining the Chinese identity, which is characterized by *ren* (benevolence), *yi* (justice), *li* (rites) and *zhi* (wisdom) in the moral dimension and by the kingly government (*Wang Dao*) in the political dimension. Confucianism is derived from the teachings and the revelations of the Confucian sages. Their teachings and revelations come directly from heaven or the law of heaven (*Tian Li*). This is why he firmly believes in the sanctity and validity of Confucianism. His view of Confucianism in an ontological sense has made it impossible for him to appreciate the Western concepts of liberty, democracy and rationalism. It would rather lead him to appraise the question of modernity and globalization from the vantage point of East–West cultural differences and of the destiny of human society. Therefore, his political philosophy can be summarized in several aspects, including the critique of Western culture, the preservation of Confucian tradition and the reconstruction of Confucian politics.

As he believes, ‘the Westernization of politics is the core of Westernization’ (Jiang Qing, 2003: 3). His critique of the Western political system concentrates on the concept of human nature as developed by Western liberals, the conception of liberal democracy and the effect of social Darwinism. The following are some excerpts of his writings:

If liberty is the defining basis for a man to really become a man, then it is to suggest the complete abolition of morality and ethics for human being . . . From the perspective of Confucianism, to be a man is not to realize his liberty, but to manifest his conscience, to restore his original or natural property. Such conscience and property exist in the human nature a priori. They define a man as a man and distinguish a man from an animal. (Jiang Qing 2003: 352)

In the guise of modernity, men become animals full of desire . . . My understanding of tradition as opposed to modernity is that human desire must be somehow restricted by

heavenly law (*tian li*). The Western scholarship of politics, economics, law, ethics, religion, arts, history and philosophy that emerged in the modern era have been developed to serve the gratification of human desire. Western intellectuals are unaware of this fact and think they are pursuing truth through rationalism. But in fact they confuse gratifying human desire with the meaning of life.

I believe the major problem of liberal democracy is that it treats the pursuit of selfish human desire as the first priority of politics. But the traditional Chinese view about politics is that 'the reason politics is legitimate is because it embodies certain transcendental value or ethics.' From the Confucian perspective, the sum of selfish individual desire is still selfish individual desire. A selfish aim is a selfish aim regardless of whether it is based on an individual, or a group, or a nation, or the world. Selfish interest will not become a just interest just because many more people are involved and served.

The major problem of liberal democracy is that it totally separates politics from ethics. Liberal democracy deals only with procedural legitimacy and has nothing to do with ethical value.

Social Darwinism will ultimately destroy the human race. Confucianism placed its ultimate hope of human salvation on the reemergence of a sage king . . . Only the reemergence of a sage king can rekindle human conscience and bring the human race out of the Social Darwinist dilemma.

That Confucianism survives the onslaught of modernity is not only fortunate to the Chinese people, but also to the people of the world . . . Only Confucianism can rescue the world from the detritus of Social Darwinism. (Jiang Qing and Sheng Hong, 2003: 184, 187, 189, 56, 59, 58, 161)

Jiang Qing believes that Confucianism consists of two parts: political Confucianism developed on the basis of the Gong-Yang Scholarship in the Han dynasty, and ethical Confucianism developed by neo-Confucianism in the Song dynasty. Political Confucianism is the crux of Confucianism. But people have gradually forgotten political Confucianism and have mistaken the ethical Confucianism of the Song era as political Confucianism and have tried the impossible task of developing a political system out of ethical Confucianism. Hence the modern attempts to build a Confucian political system have been based on the acceptance of Western science and democracy, which is tantamount to the de facto Westernization of China. Jiang Qing thinks the Gong-Yang scholarship of the Han era represents the orthodoxy of Confucianism because Gong-Yang scholarship relies on the interpretation of major classics of Confucianism (such as *Chun-Chiu* and *Analects*) to build political institutions. The following is Jiang Qing's view of Confucian political philosophy based on the Gong-Yang Scholarship:

The kingly government (*Wang Dao*) refers to the conduct of political affairs by the rule and laws set forth by sage kings in the ancient time. To be more precise, it refers to the rule and laws of governing the country and pacifying the world as practiced by the sage kings of the three ancient dynasties (Xia, Shang and Zhou) which were transmitted by Confucius to the people of the later age. (Jiang Qing, 2003: 202)

The crux of the idea of kingly government is that its political legitimacy derives from its compliance with rules and laws in three dimensions: the will of heaven, the will of the earth, the will of the people (Jiang Qing, n.d.a). Or to put differently, a kingly government must know how to please the wills of these three elements. Only by complying with the wills of these three dimensions can a government be called a kingly government, and only such government can be called a legitimate government. The will of heaven refers to the transcendental and sacred will of heaven or God. The will of the earth refers to the rules and laws of historical and cultural legitimacy because historical and cultural rules and laws are created in particular time and space and must be respected. The will of the people refers to the will of ordinary people, which is similar to the notion of popular will in the context of Western political philosophy.

Jiang Qing considers this political system of three-pronged legitimacy to have been put into practice in the Han era and has been evolved into a unified political ideology for the Chinese political system since then. Thus, he has proposed a three-chamber legislature in correspondence with the three-pronged political legitimacy of the ancient system. They include the *Su Ming Yuan* (the House of Commons), which represents the popular will; the *Guo Ti Yuan* (the House of National Polity), which represents the will of the Chinese aristocracy; and the *Tong Ru Yuan* (The House of Confucian Scholars), which represents the transcendental and sacred will of heaven or God. By creating the *Tong Ru Yuan*, Jiang Qing thus elevates Confucianism to the status of a state religion.

As he writes, 'The restoration of Confucian religion can restore China's historical and cultural destiny, or Chineseness . . . Confucian religion has performed three functions historically: first, it provides political legitimacy for Chinese government by laying a transcendental and sacred foundation for politics; second, it provides ethical norms to regulate the social conduct of the Chinese people on the basis of rites; third, it provides religious faith for the people on the basis of transcendental and sacred values as interpreted by the Confucian sages. These three functions are not obsolete in the contemporary world' (Jiang Qing, n.d.b). He made it clear that it is important to integrate Confucian religious faith with Confucian politics and to use the political system as a carrier to promote Confucian faith.

Jiang Qing's work is very significant, but it has some problems also. Its significance lies in Jiang Qing's astute understanding and appreciation of ancient Confucian scholarship and of its direct relevance to understanding contemporary practical problems in China and the world. He reminds people that the ancient sages' deep understanding about heaven, human nature and politics continue to have strong relevance in the contemporary world and that the issues and questions that have concerned the ancient sages are the same that continue to concern our people in the contemporary world. The problems of Chinese cultural identity, political reconstruction and religious faith which have confronted contemporary Chinese people have been cleverly addressed by Jiang Qing. Without a doubt, he opens up a completely new perspective for the modern Chinese people to look at and understand the world and politics. For this reason, Jiang Qing has established himself as the leading Confucian scholar in contemporary China at the turn of the century.

But Jiang Qing's writing is not without problems. They can be approached from the perspectives of epistemology, cultural value and practicability.

From the epistemological aspect, it is a historical fact that the Chinese political system after the early Han era directly inherited the legalist system of the Chin Empire and therefore the system had a mix of Confucianism and Legalism. The Confucian influence existed superficially in the administrative dimension in order to reduce the operational cost of government. The system is otherwise known as the legalist system with a Confucian cloth. If the Han system was designed according to the Confucian principles as suggested by Jiang Qing, then how do we explain the usurpation of power by the maternal relatives of the emperors and the eunuch with the suppression of Confucian scholars in the late Han dynasty which lasted for a long period? One wonders how Confucius would think of this, and whether this epoch of history will help to inject more confidence in Confucianism or make the people lose confidence in Confucianism. Jiang Qing also relegated the famous Confucian ethical principles of cultivating virtues, managing family affairs, governing the country and pacifying the world as recorded in the classical text *The Great Learning* to the status of a political and administrative strategy. This challenges the mainstream consensus view that had been formed since the Song dynasty. This tendency to emphasize the paramount importance of Gong-Yang scholarship while downgrading the long recognized mainstream classics only creates confusion in the study of Confucianism and cannot lead to the healthy development of new scholarship.

Confucian political philosophy promises to find heavenly destiny for the common people. This necessitates meeting the common people's material desire for survival. The principle of people's material needs as heavenly needs is the oldest political wisdom. Likewise, Confucius put the material nourishment of people before education. Huang Zhongxi, the famous Confucian scholar in the early Qing period, also wrote that the people are concerned about their own self-interest and self-benefits. Thus, Jiang Qing's suggestion that democracy is problematic because it puts people's own interest as the top priority of politics is ambiguous. What democracy is about is to seek the citizens' maximal participation in politics and the maximal realization of the citizens' self-interest. It has no direct relationship with human nature. From the perspectives of sociology and political science, the crux of the kingly government is to respect social forces, institutions and the expression of ethical values in political institutions. The richness of democracy and the pursuit of justice cannot be covered or subsumed by the concern of moral teaching.

If it is so important to moralize human nature and entrust the hope of social salvation to the emergence of sage-kings, one wonders what is the point of using the institutions of checks and balances to achieve justice as embodied in the liberal democratic system. What is the difference between this kind of political Confucianism and ethical Confucianism?

The neglect of basic historical facts and important modern values has made people very critical of this kind of political Confucianism and made it very difficult for it to become practical and operational. The design of making Confucianism a state religion should be based on the existence of a corresponding Confucian culture in civil society. Yet when such precondition is absent, it is very difficult to talk about a Confucian state religion. In my opinion, the fact that Jiang Qing is trying to elevate

a Confucian culture that had historically existed in civil society to form an integral part of the state structure may lead to the danger of creating a anti-societal super-state; in the end, society may be hollowed out and the Confucian culture that provided the basis for cultural identity and religious functions for such society may also collapse. The modern society is characterized by civil society; the reforming direction of 'small government and big society' should be in correspondence with the modes of modern production and the modern mode of thinking. The opportunity of reviving Confucianism and Confucian politics should be found in this direction.

Chen Ming: cultural politics

Chen Ming approaches Confucianism from its historical role in ensuring Chinese national survival and creativity in particular historical contexts. The relationship between Confucianism and the Chinese nation is the relationship between cultural molding and expression. As a cultural expression, Confucianism represents the will and desire of the Chinese nation as well as its cognition of the world. As the cultural molder, it represents the mastery and adaptation and creation of national self-consciousness. Thus, Confucianism is not a priori, self-sufficient, or fundamental. On the one hand, it is the expression of national will and desire; on the other, it is the construction of historical and social contexts. From the viewpoint of cultural construction, Confucianism is the molder of the Chinese national ethos. From the viewpoint of cultural expression, Confucianism is the Chinese national pathway to realizing the meaning of life.

Chen Ming (2005a) aims to reconstruct Confucianism and make it adaptable to modern political reality on the basis of the historical role Confucianism had hitherto played. He borrows the words 'foundation' (*Ti*) and 'use' (*Yong*) from ancient philosophy and proposes the idea of 'practical use as foundation' (*Ji Yong Jian Ti*) as the criterion to reconstruct Confucianism. Chen Ming cites many examples from cultural anthropology, cultural phenomenology and existentialism to support his views.

Chen Ming has for a long time paid much attention to the political aspect of Confucianism and opposes the classification of the neo-Confucianism of the Song-Ming era as the main foundation of Confucianism as proposed by the new Confucianist scholars of Hong Kong and Taiwan. As he believes, the problem of collective action is the first problem that Confucianism set out to deal with. This suggests that the issue of creating a kingly government (*Wai Wang*) to deal with collective action is the foremost question of Confucianism. The cultivation of inner sanctity (*Nei Sheng*) is the instrument or pathway to the realization of the kingly government. The creation of the kingly government is the ultimate goal of Confucianism. The cultivation of inner sanctity can only be realized through the creation of a kingly government.

According to Chen Ming, the traditional society is based on the agrarian economy, and the common interest of the agrarian economy is larger than the sum of individual interests. Thus, there was less competition but more cooperation in the traditional society and the social relationships were stable. But modern society is characterized by the commercial and industrial economy whereby individual rights and interests form its basis. Moreover, there is much more competition and less

cooperation, and the social relationships are less stable but more fluid. These new conditions in modern society require new methods of political governance. The political philosophy of Confucianism which is based on personal relationship should adapt itself to the impersonal relationships of modern society. While Chen Ming is vigilant about modern culture, he is cautiously receptive to the modernization of politics. Concretely speaking, he thinks that the Western ideas of human rights and individual liberty should be incorporated into the discourse of Confucian political philosophy.

He believes this does not contradict the Confucian tradition. While the saying that the 'sage has no fixed mind, but is based on the minds of all people under heaven' comes from the Taoist tradition, he believes that this is consistent with the Confucian saying that 'whoever gets the hearts of all people under heaven gets to rule over people', or the saying from the *Analects* that 'a ruler should do what the people likes, but avoid doing what the people hates' and: 'do not do to others what you do not like others to do to you'. All these ideas suggest that people have some fundamental rights and interests that rulers need to pay respect to. This traditional Chinese emphasis on the practical needs (*shi shi*) and the human relationships (*ren qing*) of ordinary people is consistent with the Western ideas of individual liberty and human rights and the modern liberal institutions that seek to protect these rights.

To put it differently, if the political philosophy of Confucianism wants to return to modern mainstream political life, it is necessary to develop a new set of political concepts out of Confucianism that suits modern society. The main characteristic of Confucian political philosophy is to restrict the role of the state to providing welfare (food and material supply) to the common people. In other words, it judges the legitimacy and justice of political governance on the sole criterion of political effectiveness, rather than on the basis of institutional design and principles as modern Western political philosophy does. Modern society faces a multitude of complex issues and needs, which the traditional society never experienced. Such difficult issues cannot be dealt with by Confucian political philosophy which was derived from blood lineage and the clan system. While the Confucian concepts of 'love the parents and respect seniors' are compatible with the modern concept of harmony and order and provide a counterbalance to the overemphasis on rationality and efficiency by modern people, it is important to focus on the institutional aspects of ethics, on the improvement of the legal system and on the building of a fair and just political system for political competition if one wants to make Confucianism adaptable to modern society. In building institutional ethics, Chen Ming (2004) focuses on the concept of 'yi' (justice) in the Book of *Great Learning* and interprets it to mean fairness in the institutional dimension, rather than interpreting it to mean virtue in the traditional sense. He sees the Western political theoretical approach as the pathway to realizing the reinterpretation of Confucian political philosophy (Chen Ming, 2005b).

Nonetheless, Chen Ming (2007a) believes Confucianism can perform some kind of active function in modern society. As he writes, 'Constitutional institution needs to be built on a concrete historical tradition. This tradition can only be Confucianism.' First of all, as a local body of cognitive knowledge and the embodiment of national ethos, it provides linkage for the foreign ideas to settle in China; secondly, as the foundation of Chinese culture, it can provide a supplementary function in support-

ing the practice of Western liberalism in China. Lastly and most importantly, it provides a cultural and national foundation for the construction of liberal institutions in China, rather than treating the individuals as the foundation of the liberal institutions as originally proposed by liberals. Therefore, the principles and wisdoms of Confucianism can provide a counterbalance to the extreme individualism that has become a problem in Western liberal democracies. Thus, the Confucian principle of the Mean as the pathway to the realization of eternal peace becomes embedded in the liberal institutions to be constructed (Chen Ming, 2007a).

Institutions are constructed on the basis of competition. In competition the greater number always prevails over the smaller number. Therefore, in contrast to Jiang Qing's top-down approach, Chen Ming stresses the importance of the bottom-up approach, that is to rely on the societal influence on the state, to reconstruct and promote Confucianism. In his article 'Promoting Confucianism as Civic Religion', he writes that civil religion plays an important and sacred role in facilitating the effective operation of a political system. 'While religious sacredness as embodied in the *Doctrine of the Mean* and the *Great Learning* is well-known, its relevance for modern political life is also self-evident.' 'The modern society emphasizes small government and a big society. The autonomy of society plays a significant role in modern political life because society has tremendous amounts of social capital. Confucianism is just such an important social capital because Confucianism develops out of the feudalistic clan-based society' (Chen Ming, 2007b). Thus, Chen Ming is different from Jiang Qing in his emphasis on the bottom-up approach to reconstruct Confucian politics and religion.

The dichotomy of state versus society is central to the liberal discourse on politics. While Chen Ming uses the state-society dichotomy as the analytical framework in his first book *The Historical and Cultural Function of Confucianism*, he goes further to use the state-society dichotomy as the basis for the reconstruction of Confucianism.² By stressing Confucianism as originating from the clan-based society, he attempts to graft liberalism onto Confucianism while preserving the historical and cultural continuity of Confucianism.

This accordingly raises the issue of cultural identity. As Chen Ming defines it, cultural identity is a collectively shared set of values and beliefs in a given nation that are used to make sense of the world and to guide national behaviors. Historically, the tradition of Confucianism had been ingrained in the minds of the Chinese people, and the issue of cultural identity was not an issue. But in the recent past, several causes have resulted in the Chinese cultural identity becoming an acute issue. First, the Chinese encounter with the West and the subsequent military defeat in the 19th century led many Chinese elites to blame Confucianism as being a backward culture and responsible for the defeat. Second, through many political movements such as the Cultural Revolution, the ruling party targeted Confucianism as the main ideological rival to be removed. Third, the liberal-oriented Chinese intellectuals have also sought to destroy Confucianism from the perspective of universalism and modernization and ignored the importance of cultural identity. We Chinese, who have had a rich and proud culture, finally got lost in the onslaught of globalization and modernization. We do not know who we are, where we are from and where we are going.

As Chen Ming believes, the political aspect of cultural identity is an objective reality. This is determined by its culture, people and blood lineage. The function of cultural identity is to forge national unity while excluding those who do not share the same cultural traits and blood lineage. This is why there was a popular saying in ancient times: those who are not from our own clan must have a different heart. Nonetheless, Confucianism does not emphasize the exclusiveness of cultural identity but stresses unity among all under heaven. This Confucian view of harmony and universalism may be a better choice for China which is in a weak position in contemporary world politics. The Confucian view of universalism and inclusiveness is also a better choice to promote national unity for a multinational country such as China. But in the world where the clash of civilizations prevails, Chen Ming thinks it is necessary to emphasize the clan-based and blood lineage-based origin of Confucianism and that Confucianism represents the ethos of the Chinese nation. He admits that by doing so he has revised the idealistic worldview of Confucianism. But he insists that the emphasis on blood-based human relations is consistent with the Confucian view of graded love. He believes that culture is the ideology of a nation. Therefore, it means every country should consider national self-interest as of primary importance, and the common interest of the world as of secondary importance. Again, this is consistent with the Confucian view of graded love.

As Chen Ming believes, the successful recovery of Confucianism as the main foundation of Chinese cultural identity also depends on the success of reconstructing Confucianism politically and the recovery of its function as the foundation for anchoring Chinese religious faith. Historically, Confucianism was not the most important religion in China compared with Taoism and Buddhism. This has to do with Confucian rationalism. But Confucian religious ideas are closely connected with the popular religions that existed in the society. Traditional worship of heaven and earth, ancestors and sages, which are shared both by Confucianism and popular religions, have been well preserved in Chinese society till this day. While it can be said that the religiousness of Confucianism is weak, it can also be said to be strong if one takes into consideration its impact on the secular lives of ordinary Chinese. Therefore, Chen Ming thinks it is more precise to regard Confucianism as a civil religion.

This is how Chen Ming approaches the restoration of Confucianism on the basis of the historical development of Confucianism as a religion. He believes that by looking at Confucianism as a civil religion, it brings Confucianism back to the politics of society where it originated and allows people to examine the societal function of Confucianism as a religion, transforming the Confucian religion into something like Zen Buddhism or Protestantism that exist in the society independent of the state. Civil religion is the symbol of the restoration of Confucianism and it is also the pathway to that restoration.

Chen Ming tries to distinguish himself from fundamentalist Confucianism in his emphasis on national life or living as having higher priority than Confucianism. He also differs from the liberals who advocate total westernization of China in the stress he places on the relevance of Confucianism to contemporary society. Therefore, his idea of 'practical use as foundation' and Confucianism as civil religion were criticized by both the conservative Confucian scholars and the liberals.

Conservative Confucian scholars criticize Chen Ming for treating Confucianism as if it had no foundation, thus eroding the most fundamental values of Confucianism and reducing Confucianism to nothing more than a body of truncated symbols. Some even label him a pseudo-Confucian scholar. Liberals criticize Chen Ming as being too pragmatic by transforming Confucianism into the main basis of Chinese nationalism, which is in contradiction with the liberal concern about individual rights and liberty. In fact, some liberals even label him as the most extreme westernizer. Others think his pragmatic treatment of Confucianism to suit nationalist goals represents not just a logical contradiction, but more importantly, the intense conflict between nationalist passion and scientific reason which has been a tragic problem for many modern Chinese intellectuals.

Kang Xiaoguang: benevolent government and cultural China

The main concern of Kang Xiaoguang is how to maintain social and political stability as China goes through rapid transition and how to improve China's economic efficiency, social justice and international competitiveness. He discovers the relevance of Confucianism in the midst of China's modernization and globalization.

Kang Xiaoguang is an empiricist as he believes the Western experience cannot be used to chart China's future development. As a nationalist, the importance of national restoration is his ultimate yardstick to accept or reject certain theories. Basically he believes China should reject Western liberalism but should create a benevolent government on the basis of Confucianism in order to maintain long-term social stability. To achieve a benevolent government, it is necessary to confucianize China. The hallmark of confucianizing China is to turn Confucianism into a state religion, which becomes his basis for sketching out the picture of a cultural China.

As a sociologist, Kang Xiaoguang believes that contemporary China is characterized by the separation of state from society with the society controlling a huge part of national wealth and resources, in contrast to the political system of the recent past. Hence the legitimacy of government and the question of social stability become acute issues. Kang is against the liberal formula to establish constitutional democracy in China. He thinks the Western model is not useful for China because of its decadent values. This is also because China's performance in economic growth, social justice and integrity of governance is not inferior to the Western governments. Liberal democracy also tends to promote national division. Even if liberal values are good, they have not been realized in the Western countries because of the hypocrisy of the Western governments.

As Kang Xiaoguang believes, the ruling party in China has been trying very hard to gain its political legitimacy in order to meet the requirement of the new circumstances due to rapid economic transformation. In the early years of the reform, the ruling party's legitimacy came mainly from what Samuel Huntington calls performance legitimacy. The most immediate problem that the ruling party faces right now is how to establish a new theory of political legitimacy to justify its continued political rule. To be more precise, he is concerned with the question of what kind of authoritarianism is most legitimate, or the so-called substantive legitimacy, rather than pro-

cedural legitimacy. That is to say, it is more important to know how political power is used, rather than to know how political power is acquired in the first place.

Kang Xiaoguang thinks Confucian political philosophy treats collective interests, rather than individual interests, as the first priority. Confucianism is also against equality of men and popular sovereignty. He thinks that Confucian political philosophy is consistent with modern authoritarianism. Hence he concludes that Confucianism can become a new source of political legitimacy for China's authoritarianism.

As he believes, benevolent government is a mixed polity with elements of monarchy, oligarchy and democracy. Every social class has an institutional channel to express its needs to the government. It is a structure of social stratification, but not a class-based dictatorship. The system Kang Xiaoguang proposes includes benevolent authoritarianism, market economy, corporatism, the welfare state and Confucian state religion. It is a coordination and cooperation with checks and balances among different social classes. He cites the executive-directed political system in Hong Kong as his ideal type of government and believes such a system can promote efficiency and social justice as well as political legitimacy.

Kang's theory of benevolent government includes the following. First, the benevolent government is based on Mencius's principle of the people as fundamentally important. He argues that Confucianism values elitist politics but treats the people's interests as the first priority, with its corresponding form of paternalistic politics. To put it differently, Confucian politics is about the nourishment of the people and the education of the people. Second, the benevolent government takes good care of the people by providing material abundance. Third, it practices the ancient principle of rotation for the succession of political power by selecting talented and virtuous officials on the basis of the will of heaven and the people. Fourth, it believes in the ideal of the world being united. The Confucian notion of benevolent government is the present goal. The unity of the world is the idealistic goal of the future (Kang Xiaoguang, 2005). The benevolent government is founded on the dictatorship of Confucian scholars (*shi*), because only Confucian scholars know the will of heaven.

While Kang does not believe that benevolent government has ever been practiced in Chinese history, he thinks, importantly, that it can be a point of reference or provide a yardstick to evaluate contemporary politics. The confucianization of China is the pathway to realizing his ideal of benevolent government. The process of confucianization consists of two parts: 'To confucianize the Chinese Communist Party and to confucianize Chinese society. When Confucianism replaces Marxist-Leninism as the state ideology and the Confucian scholars replace the communist cadres, the process of creating a benevolent government is complete' (Kang Xiaoguang, 2005: vii–xlix). He also advocates the elevation of Confucianism to be the essential part of national education, since he believes the key to the creation of benevolent government is to make Confucianism a state religion and at the same time the embodiment of new values and ideals of the Chinese people in the new era. He accepts that the ancient Chinese political system is an integration of state and religion, and believes that what needs to be done now is to create a new polity to integrate state and religion.

Kang Xiaoguang believes cultural nationalism not only performs the traditional role, but also helps a nation to enhance national unity and gain competitiveness in a

globalized world. He strongly admires both Kang Youwei, the famous Confucian reformer of the late Qing dynasty, and Harvard Professor Samuel Huntington. As he believes the clash of civilizations may become the major source of international conflict after the Cold War, he calls for the restoration of Confucianism to build a cultural China transcending the physical boundary of political China.

The supporters of Kang Xiaoguang commend the insightfulness and persuasiveness of Kang's argument. They think Kang is proposing an entirely new solution to China's problem which is different from the Western solution but rooted in cultural conservatism and authoritarianism.

Nonetheless, Chinese liberals are very critical of Kang's proposals. Here is not an appropriate place to take issue with the intense debates between the liberals and Kang, but the liberals seem to think that only institutional reform can determine the national destiny of China, which is really a myth. But conservatives who totally deny the value of human rights and democracy are also wrong. Rather than being a hindrance, the ideas of liberty and democracy, if they take root in China, may actually be a pre-condition for China's national restoration.

Moreover, while Kang is concerned about the changing social conditions of China and the expansion of the market economy and wants to propose new political institutions to suit such changes, the Confucian ideas which he cites as solutions are exactly the same as those of classical Confucianism. How can he ensure that the unchanged classical Confucian ideas can adapt to the rapid changes in social and economic conditions in China?

Conclusion

Without a doubt, the scholarship of Confucianism in China is in the process of restoration. Its historical missions are twofold. It should become the preserver of the Chinese national character; it should also become the promoter of China's modernization. These objectives are to a greater or lesser extent in conflict with each other. To realize the former objective, it is necessary to stress historical continuity and consistency – and this requires us to re-examine and justify the preservation of classical Confucian ideas and values in order to provide spiritual support for Chinese cultural identity and social cohesion. As to the latter objective, it is necessary to reinterpret some part of the classical ideas and values and link them with the modern values such as liberty, justice and democracy. In some sense, Jiang Qing is concerned with the former objective in his efforts to justify the continued relevance of classical Confucian values for modern society. Chen Ming is more concerned with the latter objective with his emphasis on linking up classical Confucian values with modern and Western values. Kang Xiaoguang is somewhere between the two. Kang's understanding of Confucianism is closer to that of Jiang Qing, but Kang's methodology of studying Confucianism (such as his instrumental use of Confucianism) is closer to Chen Ming.

In a similar fashion to the predicament that Judaism faced when confronting the European Enlightenment, we can see the traces of Confucian orthodoxy, conservatism and reform through the writings of Jiang Qing, Chen Ming and Kang

Xiaoguang when they confront the challenge of modernization and globalization. While their writings are still rudimentary, there are reasons to expect them to grow more mature as they are rooted in a rich and ancient culture with five thousand years of historical continuity, and also rooted in a huge population of one billion people who are eager to embrace modernity and globalization.

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Notes

1. Aristotle writes that 'the polis consists of citizens . . . when some citizens assemble into a political unit, it becomes a polis'.
2. Chen Ming's treatment of state–society relations is built on John Locke's view that society is more important than the state.

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