

“We are all democrats now”
Confucian Political Theory in the Face of the Future¹

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“In the long perspective of history this great dialogue is only just beginning” John
Dunn (2007, *Taking Unreason’s Measure-Facing the Global Challenges of Politics*, p 26)

Introduction-the end of history versus clash of civilisations

Joseph Levenson in his magnum opus trilogy, ‘Confucian China and its Modern Fate’ argued that as a corollary of the collapse of Qing dynasty (1644-1911) and the manner by which it crumbled, it had rendered any future attempt to justify Confucianism or to resurrect Confucian state irreversibly shifted from universalism to particularism, specifically, nationalism, and from politics to culture. This is of some detrimental consequences; it either makes Confucianism an anachronism or Confucian politics a parody. This penetrating insight was further accentuated with reference to global politics by John Dunn in his seminal book in 1979 (1993 with a new conclusion) proclaiming, not without profound intellectual trepidations, that “we are all democrats now”. While demonstrating the conceptual imperative and pervasiveness of Western political notions, he also cautioned and elucidated why this was not necessarily a cheerful thing at all. Permeating with more optimism and Reganean confidence, Francis Fukuyama (1989 and 1992) wrote most timely, just before the fall of the Berlin Wall that triumph of market liberal democracy was imminent and when it came, it would symbolise the end of history. It is fair to say the consensus was that Western political theory had come to rule the world for better or worse. In Dunn’s words, ‘as a resource for understanding the political history of the world western political theory has no effective surviving rival. Since 1989, it has come to dominate that history as never before’ (Dunn, 1993, p130).

Around the same time, Samuel Huntingdon (1993 and later, expanded to a book-length monograph in 1996) challenged this view by predicting the coming clash of civilisations after the end of the Cold War. While the tragedy of September 11th in 2002

¹ Draft only, please do not quote without the author’s permission.

might have vindicated his foresightedness to some extent, especially his criticism of complacency about the world security, it remains less obvious if the new world disorder is being caused by the clash of civilisations let along the subversion of the supremacy of Western political theory as a normative principles of, and cognitive resources for understanding political activities and institution around the globe. His discussion on each civilisation, say for instance, Sinic and Japanese Civilisations is rather eccentric or inconsistent by most accounts except on the current geopolitical configurations. Few would seriously argue for an independent Japanese civilisation separate from 'Sinic' civilisation, not even Huntington's former colleagues, Edwin Reischauer, John Fairbank and Albert Craig would acquiesce to it. They wrote a widely popular textbook on East Asia in which not only Japan was grouped together with China and Korea, but also Vietnam. Moreover, in their narrative, China was the centre of this universe from which other East Asian countries derived from. While the generation after them had tried to modify this Sino-centric view of East Asia somewhat, the most recent scholarships have returned to affirm the centrality of China in the formation and history of the East Asian world (Holcombe, 2001). Consequently, the demarcation that Huntington attempts to draw appears only to conform to the current geopolitical fault-lines in East Asia. His discussion on what characterises a civilisation is even more problematic, because it merely reiterates many stereotypical descriptions of a civilisation in question and fails abjectly to provide any in-depth account of political thinking within any particular civilisation. His thesis as a colourful travelogue of world politics does provide certain insights in the aftermath of the Cold War, but it is far from undermining the normative reign of Western political theory in the world. Fundamentally, he inadvertently confuses the dominance of the might with the normative prowess of the norms.

In this paper, I will provide an account of the hegemony of Western political theory in China since the end of Qing dynasty (1644-1911) by looking into how Confucianism, previously the philosophical and moral foundation of Chinese politics (as well as Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese politics), has been reacting and adapting to it. The contemporary Confucian responses can be roughly divided into two periods; the first, between 1920's, immediately after the May Fourth movement in 1919 and the 1980's, when the greatest New Confucian philosophers were dead or near the end of their lives. The second period began from the 1960's in the US where mass exodus of Chinese intellectuals had escaped to after the communist takeover of China in 1949, and continues to this day. The first period can be succinctly described as the retreat of

Confucianism from politics, and the second as Confucian attempt to re-enter politics. In the subsequent sections, I should demonstrate that while undeniably Confucianism has come back to mainland China, it remains to be seen if Confucianism will eventually supplant Western political theory as a normative political values in China as well as in other East Asian countries.

It must be stressed that the modern fates of Confucianism in China and Japan respectively follow very different trajectories, whereas Levenson was right about Confucianism in China, in Japan, Confucianism successfully becomes fabrics of modern Japan and survives the American dismantling of the pre-war Japan system². While variances in their fortunes, certain similarities emerge when they are posited in relation to nationalism, Confucianism in modern China has for most part been either denounced violently or justified feebly on the ground of nationalism, whereas in Japan, Confucianism has been made to be subject to *raison d'etre*, specifically, the State-Shinto system, furthermore, it served as Japan's political rhetoric during Japan's invasion of Asia in the 1930's and 1940's-it helped to deliver some credence to the notion of Japan liberating Asia from the Western imperialism. Therefore, the struggle to overcome the hegemony of Western political theory has thus far been quite distinctly apart. What is most disconcerting is, given post-war geo-political fault line and the rise of nationalist sentiment in both China and Japan, especially during former Japanese PM Koizumi's repeated visit to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine and its backlash in China and Korea, it would not aid Confucianism in China and Japan to coalesce for a concerted effort without further improvement in the Sino-Japan relationship.

For the present purpose, I shall confine myself mainly (but not exclusively) to narrating the fate and struggle of Confucianism in modern China for the following reasons; First of all, the Chinese case shows that by now Western political theory as normative political values is every bit as endogenous as Confucianism, if only with a

² There is little dispute over the fact that Confucianism exerts great influences over the creation of modern Japan and Confucian scholars played very active and prominent roles in nearly every respect-from Yokoi Shonan, Yoshida Shoin and Sakuam Shozan in anticipating the new Japan to Shibusawa Eiichi, Nakamura Keiu and Nakae Chomin in Meiji Japan. For instance, Shibusawa Eiichi, a translator of many modern financial terminologies, and founder of the biggest Kigyo-shudan (enterprise group) in the post war period, then Daiichi-Kangyo group and now Mizuho group, was a first rate Confucian scholar whose interpretation and study of the Analects (Shibusawa, 1975) in terms of reconciling the long standing tensions between commercial activities (or profit) and virtues remains original and insightful. See Dore (1987) for how Confucianism still regulates business conducts in modern Japan and see Sagers (2006) for how Confucianism came to underpin and direct modern Japanese economic policy. This is quite unlike Confucians in modern China whereas they were marginalised in politics, education and economy.

much shorter historical memory. Second, the Chinese failure to comply with the practices of Western liberal democracy has less to do with rival values or ideology; it is primarily down to what John Dunn (2000 and 2005) has so poignantly analysed the gap between hope and realising it politically, or his word, 'a misnomer' (2005, p155). What's more distressing is that we do not even remotely know why. Third, while Confucianism remains resilient in contemporary Japan, it has lost its intellectual vigour and political ambition. On the contrary, Confucianism has once again become very active and increasingly vocal in China and its popularity has recently soared to a dazzling height never witnessed before in modern China. So China is now unmistakably the scene of action. Last, if not most pertinently, the spectacular rise of China in the last fifteen years or so since Deng Xiaoping's well-publicised (and in retrospect, most conducive) Southern Visit has prioritised the Chinese case over Japan or Korea let alone Taiwan or Vietnam. It would definitely help us to see if the rise of China could instigate the clash of civilisations in the 21st century as so often feared. And if not, what it would possibly mean to the world, a merrier outcome or less enriched and diverse human political imaginations (Dunn, 2007, Discussion paper 2).

Lost in Translation-Conflation and Distinction³

How did Western political theory come to occupy such a towering position in East Asia and in China, especially? Why have people in East Asia become convinced of the intrinsic normative power of Western political theory? The clues lie in the period between 1840-1880. Though in the 16th and 17th centuries, China managed to learn a lot about Europe through the Jesuit missions in China, however, by mid-18th century, when Europe's understanding of the world including China had increased dramatically, China stopped learning from the West altogether (Okamoto, 2000). China's interest in Europe did not recur until China was roundly defeated by the Anglo-Franco forces in the second Opium War or Arrow War (1856-1860). By then, Chinese as well as Japanese⁴ had not only recognised the military superiority of the West but also, along with it, the merits of Western political institutions and ideas. Yokoi Shonan, a prominent Confucian activist

³ For an excellent discussion on conflation and distinction in political notions, see Condren (1994) Chapter 1 and 2

⁴ In 1853, Commodore Perry forced Japanese to open its door to external trade and it is known as the Black Ship incident. Before that, the majority view in Japan was in favour of expelling barbarians (joi-ron), but after the incident, the opinion swiftly shifted to opening up the country (kaikoku-ron).

in Bakamatsu Japan (1850-1868), in his *Kokuze Sanron* (Three Treatises on the State of Affairs), compared George Washington to Yao and Shun, the ancient sage-kings in China most revered by Confucians and he further regarded the United States of America as as good as Three dynasties, the golden age of the virtuous government. This analogy and equation of Western political figures and ideas with Confucian political ideals eased the way to appreciate Western political theory in due course. It reminded Neo-Confucian-trained intellectuals in East Asia then that “principle (*Li*, or 理) is of one but its manifestation is multifaceted (理一分殊)”. That is if Western political ideas are better, they are better not because of its foreign ancestry or its military superiority, but due to its faithful adherence to principle (*Li*).

Since the realisation of Western superiority, both Chinese and Japanese rushed to translate Western books and terms en masse. Translation has a few distinct characteristics: conflation, distinction and neologism. Conflation refers to one term in one linguistic context is conflated or equated with another term in a different linguistic context. It is less problematic if the terms in question have physical references or properties. It immediately becomes less straightforward when terms have no external physical references. For example, love is now translated as Ai (愛) in both Chinese and Japanese, but the term, Ai in East Asia has no comparable history to the word, love, in the West. In fact, the word, love, in the West has no comparable word in East Asia at all until the word, Ai, began to take on the connotations and nuances of the word, love, as it were in the West. This conflation is of little difficulty and in some sense, it can be argued, depending on your viewpoint, it transforms the vocabulary and experiences of people in East Asia for better or for worse.

Nonetheless, in the case of feudalism, it has devastating effects on the endogenous and original word, Fengjian (Chinese) or Hokken (Japanese) (封建). Fengjian in East Asia has a history of at least 2500 years old as the word first appeared in *Zuo-Zhuan* (*Commentary of Zuo on Annals of Spring and Autumn*). It later developed into a major, if not the most important, Confucian political theory (Zhang and Sonoda, 2006)⁵. It is therefore not exaggerating to say that if one fails to know fengjian political theory, one actually cannot be said to have adequate grasp of Confucian political theory (especially

⁵ The book edited by Zhang and Sonoda (2006) is by far the best book ever written on fengjian as Confucian political theory, as it rightly positions fengjian political theory as the loci of political, economic and social debates until the early 20th century. My recent lectures on Fengjian and Junxian at United International College in Zhuhai, China, forthcoming in an edited volume further elucidates the centrality and indispensability of the fengjian political theory in history of East Asian political thought.

since the Song dynasty, 960-1929 until the early 20th century) in the corresponding contexts

Since early 20th century fengjian was gradually being used to translate feudalism and with the advent of Marxism in China and Japan, fengjian (as feudalism) became a historical phase with a particular mode of production in the Marxist historiography. By the 1950's, the Marxist historiography had become the official history in China, fengjian had lost all its previous meanings, and was simply an appendage of a foreign term, feudalism (Feng, 2006⁶). In the case, of fengjian, in the process of learning from the West, the incredible fertile semantic and philosophical resources were greatly impoverished and finally were transfigured beyond recognition. This is of detrimental repercussion in China and elsewhere in East Asia, because regardless of one's own political predilection, this great fengjian tradition of political thought is still being denied to most today.

Modern Chinese classifications/terms such as zhengzhi (seiji in J), jinji (keizai in J), shehui (shakai in J) etc are all the translations of Western terms, politics, economy and society respectively, which in turn, were all translated by Japanese Confucians with Confucian-training in late 19th century. The list is long and has been exhaustively documented (Yamamuro, 2001). These classifications have replaced the traditional classifications, and rendered the traditional ones unintelligible not only to Foucault (1973, Preface), but also to Chinese today except those trained in classical Chinese with an un-preconceived mind.

For example, under the traditional Chinese classification, there was no books classified under zhengzhi (politics) and books written on politics were classified under many other categories. There are four general classifications, jin (classics), shi (history), Zi (philosophers or philosophy) and ji (monographs), under each general categories, there are many sub-categories and some sub-categories have further sub-categories. Books on politics can be found on any of the four general categories, and many sub-categories beneath the general four. The logic of the traditional Chinese classification is not based on the nature and fields of knowledge as we came to know it, but rather it is predicated on the *genres* of writing during the course of Chinese history in a descending order in terms of presupposed significance. Given the 'eccentricity', if

⁶ Feng (2006) provides the most detailed and comprehensive history of how fengjian became feudalism in East Asia.

not inexplicability, of the traditional classification and numerous books published and classified under such a system until the end of Qing dynasty in 1911, it has deterred, if not completely denied, modern Chinese from accessing to it, unless it is translated back to modern (Western) classifications and terms. What has not been pointed out so far is that the language used in the books written before 1911 are nearly all in classical Chinese. While the relation between classical Chinese and contemporary literary Chinese is unlike that of Latin and English, it still requires several years of training for gaining real ability in deciphering the texts.

The 'translation' or interpretation of Chinese books in modern/Western terms is very tricky and treacherous. It relies on many new distinctions previously absent in China such as politics and sociology, so unless one has the understanding of the traditional Chinese classification and its logic, one cannot hope to make sense of it let alone getting it out and getting it right in the modern terms. Simultaneously, to do it right, one also needs to acquire very good understanding of Western learning and scholarship. Naturally, for long time since the end of the 19th century, with the decline of Chinese power and the apparent backwardness in science and technology, Chinese have long seen Chinese culture and Confucianism in particular insufficient and scanty. For example, complaints about Confucianism do not have profound political theory or for that matter, does not have democratic theory. Therefore, the attempts (for those who remain somewhat sympathetic or allegiant to Confucianism) have been to discover quasi-democratic, scientific, socialist or communist ideas buried or embedded in some Confucian texts.

After Confucian China

In the last section, I discussed in some length how the humiliating encounter with the West in the 19th century and, against this background, the subsequent translation of Western terms has impoverished and decimated the integrity and self-referencing of Chinese culture in general and Confucianism in particular. In this section, I would like to focus on the second and third generations of New Confucians (Liu, 2002)⁷ and their

⁷ In his article, the list of three generations of New Confucians are First Generation, First Group: Liang Shu-ming, Hsiung Shih-li, Ma I-fu, Carsun Chang First Generation, Second Group: Fung Yu-lan, Ho Lin, Ch'ien Mu, Thomé H. Fang, Second Generation, Third Group: T'ang Chün-i, Mou Tsung-san, Hsü Fu-Kuan Third Generation, Fourth Group: Yü Ying-shih, Liu Shu-hsien, Ch'eng

endeavour to meet this overwhelming challenge or escape from predicament.

The first generation such as Xiong Shili (1885-1968), Liang Shumin (1893-1988), Ma Yifu (1883-1967) and Qian Mu can be seen as a transition between traditional Confucianism and New Confucianism. First, they wrote mostly in classical Chinese and the mixture of traditional Chinese classifications/terms and the Western ones abounded. Second, they still believed Chinese culture and Confucianism overall constituted a viable alternative to the Western one.

New Confucianism rose in the aftermath of the radical and iconoclastic May Fourth Movement in 1919, and the imprint of this radicalism was most pronounced in the second and third generations of New Confucians. The twin slogans of the May Fourth movement, Science and Democracy, were touted as the highest achievement of humanity and were used by many to discredit Chinese culture and Confucianism. The attack was fierce and total; it was possible, because according to Lin (1979) that the viability of Chinese culture and Confucianism hinged on the existence of the monarchy. The collapse of the monarchy in 1911 had disentangled the social, intellectual and political fabrics of China and thus produced a moral and intellectual vacuum never seen before.

Of the second generation, Mou Zongsan (Mou Tsung-san) is the most important, systematic and profound one. He single-handedly reinterpreted Chinese philosophy in terms of Western philosophic terms in a very idiosyncratic way. He re-wrote the history of Confucianism by assigning Wang Yangming (1472-1529), rather Zhu Xi (1130-1200), to the centrality and the orthodoxy in Confucianism. While this is philosophically interesting, this is simply historically unfounded. The educational curriculum in East Asia from 15th century to the mid-19th century that was universally based on *Four Books* edited and annotated by Zhu Xi is a case in point. Moreover, in the Confucius Temple, while both Wang and Zhu were canonised, Zhu's position was two ranks above Wang, being the only one, not taught by Confucius himself, in the highest two ranks of enshrinement (Huang, 1994, see "the list of enshrinement until 1919", pp 303-311).

The question then is why he did that and why many of his followers have since taken

Chung-ying, Tu Wei-ming. Please note in his article names are spelt in Wade-Giles whereas in my article are predominately spelt in Pinyin. While I do not dispute the list, I subscribe to it selectively.

it as an article of faith? As he saw Zhu Xi as Thomas Aquinas who utilised Aristotelianism to furnish his scholastic philosophy, Wang Yangming became his Immanuel Kant who set philosophy free from theology and established modern philosophy. The next question is why this particular narrative is critical to his philosophical enterprise? Because in his view, as in the West, Kant, the philosopher of the Enlightenment, who laid down the epistemological and moral foundations for modern science and democracy. China was unable to develop science and democracy, not because for the lacking of sound philosophy, but due to Zhu Xi's hold over intellectual development and political expediencies of the monarchy who saw Zhu Xi's philosophy as an effective tool to consolidate the power and to stifle the intellectual freedom.

Following this highly idiosyncratic history of Chinese philosophy and his rather stylised understanding of Western philosophy, he advanced to build up a theory of 'one mind unlocks two gates(一心開二門)'. The mind in Mou's formulation is essentially Wang Yangming's theory of mind and this mind (internal) precedes principle (external). In other words, mind can judge if the external rules are just or right. This is the crux of the issue, for Confucianism to have critical faculty or reason necessary for the development of science and democracy, mind must not be subject to principle external to oneself. In addition, he believes that Wang's formulation of theory and cultivation of mind is where Chinese culture and Confucianism has a clear advantage over the Western counterpart.

So an intricately elaborate theory at the end of the day was aimed to prove only two things, Confucianism could lead to the development of science and democracy, and Confucian moral theory of Wang Yangming was superior to Western moral philosophy. The first is a futile exercise, while an interesting philosophical counterfactual, it still see Confucianism as fundamentally inadequate and a failure (if it has failed, why bother with it). Given that, Mou salvaged what's left of it, Wang's theory of mind and moral cultivation. Whether Wang's theory of mind is superior to the Western moral philosophy is a moot point, what really matters here is he, like many May Fourth radicals, had ceased to view that Chinese culture or Confucianism could offer any political alternative to Western political ideals, especially democracy. He had unconditionally accepted the universality of Western political ideals and theory.

In contrast to the systematic philosophical introspection, the most prominent third generation New Confucian scholar, Yu Ying-Shih (1930-) student of the first generation

New Confucian scholar, Qian Mu, is, by training, a historian. He is an author of many books and had taught at Harvard, Yale and Princeton. He is also one of the first New Confucian scholars who migrated to the United States via Hong Kong and Taiwan after the communist takeover of China in 1949. He and many others like him over years have created a small but growing following in North America, a story which will be told in the next section. He takes a very different approach. He tries to present Chinese culture and Confucianism to modern readers as accurately and empathetically as possible. He believes the attainment of correct, piecemeal historical knowledge is an ultimate safeguard of humanism and Confucianism.

It should be noted that Yu himself rejects the label-New Confucian for himself and his mentor. He sees New Confucianism as a contemporary variant of the Wang Yangming School, whereas, he and his mentor is more predisposed to the teaching of Zhi Xi (Yu, 1996, pp124-134). He further criticises the system building of New Confucianism, especially that of Mou. He correctly points out that Mou's philosophy of 'one mind unlocks two gates(一心開二門)' is a device to ensure that Confucianism is not to be viewed as an antithesis to science and democracy. He questions if this endeavour is necessary after all, because in modern society, religion should be separated from politics and philosophy should not reign over government and people. In his view, Mou's enterprise contradicts *principles* of modern society and thus potentially poses a threat to secularism and constitutional democracy. Furthermore, he is worried about the inherent elitism in Mou's theory, for his emphasis on the difficulties in fully cultivating and redeeming one's mind, except for a chosen few (ibid, pp145-158). He is also extremely uncomfortable with the personality of Mou and Mou's mentor, Xiong Shili, who often behaved like a religious leader or messiah. He attributes this to the teaching of Wang Yangming as many Wang's followers were also in the same mode in late Ming (16th century).

While Yu's criticism of New Confucianism, particularly that of Mou's, at times seems like an age-old sectarian quarrel between the Zhu Xi school and the Wang Yangming school, there is indeed one new element in it; it is his view of New Confucianism's political pretension as dangerous and dispensable. In other words, for Yu, Confucianism must not only retreat from politics, but also accept ungrudgingly liberal democracy more or less as it is (ibid 35-41). Instead, Confucianism should focus only on the cultivation of the self and should not even be concerned with the arrangements and ethics of family, since nowadays the structure of family is predominately nuclear family

which in turn is not really compatible with Confucian view of family, hence rendering Confucian family ethics anachronistic and undesirable (ibid, 39-43 and p164)⁸.

Despite the differences in their temperance, approaches, trainings and Confucian orientations, both Mou and Yu view Confucian political theory as nothing but obnoxious, totalitarian and anachronistic. For them, what needs to be cherished and developed further is Confucian theory of moral cultivation. The only great difference with regard to the relations between politics and Confucianism is Mou felt obliged to justify Confucian moral philosophy on the ground that it could have lead to science and democracy, and the younger Yu have no such compulsion and wants a clean break by severing politics from Confucianism altogether.

The Return of Confucianism

The return of Confucianism to China began not in China, Japan, Korea or Taiwan, but in North America⁹. In recent years, Confucianism has become a fad in China from government, business, and university to ordinary people. Official patronage of Confucianism becomes more frequent and high-level. Official references to Confucian ideas and passages have also become increasingly standard. Hu's talk of creating a harmonious society is a most prominent case in demonstrating how dramatically the fortune of Confucianism has reversed in the last twenty years or so. When the Chinese government launches overseas Chinese language education programs around the world, the name chosen for the program or school is Confucius Institute. CCTV's program on Confucius's Analects by Yu Dan was one of the most popular programs last year, and the book based on it has since been a bestseller in China. Even in a former cadets-training university, Renmin (People's) University, a Confucius research centre has been also set

⁸ Yu (2004) in his meticulous study of Zhu Xi situates Zhu Xi in the political culture and context of the Song dynasty and argues without this contextualisation, one would not understand Zhu appropriately. In vol 2 appendix, he was very concerned with the New Confucian scholar, Liu Shu-hisen's charge that he prioritises politics (*wai wang*) over moral cultivation (*neisheng*) in his interpretation of Zhu Xi and Neo-Confucianism. In his responses (ibid, 867-928) while insisting on the accuracy of his interpretation (that to understand Song Neo-Confucianism, it must be situated in political contexts and to recognise politics was higher than moral cultivation for Neo-Confucianism ultimately), he nevertheless reiterates that as for him, he has long given the political pretension of Confucianism and believes that Confucianism should focus only on the cultivation of the self.

⁹ Masataka Yasutake of Kansai University upon hearing this suggested to me that it is perhaps similar to Renaissance in Europe began from the recovery of Plato, Aristotle and others in Arabic before transmitted to Italy.

up and there are many such research centres or graduate programs under consideration everywhere in China. In short, superficially, Confucianism has indeed come back to the motherland. The questions remain is how far this jamboree will go, that is how far Confucianism will manage to exert influences over politics, economy, business, education and society in years to come? Put differently, has or will Confucian political theory become a viable alternative to liberal democracy now or later? In order to address these questions in some ways, the clock needs to be turned back to early 1990's.

The second most important figure in the third generation of New Confucians is Tu Weiming of Harvard University. He received undergraduate education at Tunghai University in Taiwan and was taught by a very well-known second generation New Confucian scholar Hsu Fu-Guang¹⁰. Tu was the first New Confucian philosopher touring Chinese universities since China opened up in 1979 and he made repeated visits to China to promote Confucianism. He was very deft in taking advantages of his affiliation with Harvard University, so that Chinese government was often hesitant in harassing him back in the early 1990's before Confucianism was rehabilitated somewhat before the end of the millennium. In China, his lectures are not sectarian; he doesn't advocate any particular school of Confucianism though his preference is for Wang Yangming School. He is committed to raise the interest in Confucianism generally and to beseech a place for Confucianism in modern China. Therefore, his public lectures (1996)¹¹ are very eclectic and engages with many contemporary issues. So rather than making any original contribution to the development of Confucian political theory, he ably demonstrates Confucianism can engage contemporary issues, and thus its relevance for modern China¹². Notwithstanding, it should be highlighted that Tu refrains from advocating any discernable Confucian vision of politics, instead, like Mou and Yu, he takes modern liberal democracy as a given and a condition albeit with a more critical mind.

The real serious efforts in resuscitating Confucian political theory comes from Theodore de Bary of Columbia University, as early as in early 1980's after 30 years of

¹⁰ Though Tu was taught by Hsu, his Confucianism is closer to that of Mou. Hsu was very much a historian like Qian Mu and Yu Ying-Shih, and not unlike Yu, he was a self-proclaimed liberal-meaning he also agreed Confucian political theory had little value. Hsu's most interesting contribution is his study of aesthetics and art in which he deemed as integral part of Confucian moral education.

¹¹ This book is a collection of his lectures at National Taiwan University in Taiwan, but content-wise, it is little different those he delivers in China.

¹² Yu is very different from Tu; to this day, he has not yet returned to mainland China once since he left some sixty years ago.

studying the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and the Ming, he (1983) argues that Confucian notion of moral cultivation and gentleman is actually very compatible with liberalism. He contends Confucianism has a long 'liberal' tradition against the tyranny, unlike many has asserted otherwise. He continues his rethinking of Confucian political theory in 'The Trouble with Confucianism (1991)' in which Confucian theory of gentleman, sage-king and people is thoroughly examined and appraised. He acknowledges the democratic deficit in Confucian political thinking, but he does not regard this as a sufficient reason to discredit Confucianism, because Confucianism has deep care and strong sense of responsibility for people's welfare. In relation to it, Confucian notion of the sage-king and nobleman inspires high standard of code of conduct in public life. Furthermore, when his translation of *Waiting for the Dawn* by Huang Zongxi (1610-1695) was published in 1993, in the introduction he (1993) praises Huang as Chinese Rousseau and hails the book as a vindication of Confucian protest against tyranny and monarchy¹³.

In his 1998 book 'Asia Values and Human Rights-A Confucian Communitarian Perspective', he weighed in the then very hot topic 'Asian Values' and offered his own take on what really constituted Asian Values. By then liberalism had fallen out of favour and communitarianism was seen by many as a corrective to liberal atomism¹⁴. Relying on his knowledge of the Neo-Confucianism, he finds many ideas and practices such as community pact and school proposed by the Neo-Confucians of the Song and the Ming period not dissimilar to communitarian thinking. In the Afterward of the book (1998, pp158-167), he defends that his borrowing of 'liberalism', 'constitutionalism' and 'communitarianism' is not to say these values are intrinsically higher than Confucian political values and he merely hoped to draw attention to the fact that Confucian political theory has a very rich and complex tradition and is not alien to these Western ideas. Despite his strenuous exertion to return the political to Confucianism, de Bary has never contemplated Confucian political theory as a possible alternative to Western political imagination, the fact, he continues to use Western political terms, despite his caveat, is a good indication. At any rate, it is fair to say de Bary is the first one since the collapse of Japan's Shinto-Confucian state, to take Confucian political theory seriously again.

¹³ He also reiterated the main points about Huang's book in his 1998 book and accentuated Huang's main arguments as akin to constitutionalism, representative government and the autonomy of civil society.

¹⁴ Walzer, Sandel, MacIntyre and Etzioni just to name a few and it important to recall many of their works were published in the 1980's and 1990's.

Daniel A. Bell goes further than de Bary in his commitment to reinventing Confucian political theory. Bell was trained in Western political theory and had written on communitarianism¹⁵ before his dabbling in Confucianism. Over time it proves his interest is very authentic; he taught first in Singapore and then moved to Hong Kong, and is now teaching at Tsinghua University in Beijing, one of the two most prestigious universities in China. He has also learnt to speak and read Chinese. Since the mid-1990's, he has written profusely on Confucianism with regard to contemporary political and social issues, as well as has edited a couple of books on the subject matter.

Bell is very different or *sui generis* from Confucian scholars aforementioned so far in that his grasp of Western political theory and contemporary political debates has raised the dialogue between Confucianism and Western political theory to a new height. Though his citation of, and access to Confucianism remains very limited to the 'greats' in the classical period (550B.C.-300B.C.) i.e. Confucius's Analects and Mencius and Xunzi¹⁶, he has made a very good use of these texts in responding to contemporary issues, such as just war, citizenship and active participation, migrant workers in China, ownership, democracy and capitalism (2000 and 2006).

He argues that Confucian political theory is not just compatible with democracy, liberalism, communitarianism and human rights, but moreover a possible and respectable alternative to Western political model. It should be stressed that he does not write off Western political theory in favour of Confucianism, what he is doing is to enrich human political imaginations and preserve global cultural diversity by bringing Confucianism back in. In other words, for Bell if there are legitimate grounds for social democracy, Christian democracy and liberal democracy, for him, why not also a political space for an equally plausible Confucian democracy?

If Bell has already shrugged off the baggage of New Confucianism or never carried the cross over New Confucians, he also has not suggested that China or East Asia needs to reconstruct its politics according to Confucian principles. And nearly all of the newly converted Confucians in China can be categorised into any one of Confucian approaches

¹⁵ See his *Communitarianism and its Critics* (1993)

¹⁶ It should be pointed out while he has been reading de Bary, he has not quoted or mentioned Neo-Confucian masters such Zhu Xi or Wang Yangming let alone any other important Confucian philosophers. In addition, He has made extensive use of Mencius, more than Confucius and Xunzi. It also seems that he has not encountered New Confucianism other reading a few books in English by Tu Weiming (see Bell, 2000 and 2006).

to politics as delineated above, and for this reason alone, Jiang Qing in his *Political Confucianism* (2003) stands out for his unequivocal advocate for the reconstruction of Confucian state in China as well as in other East Asian countries¹⁷. In my view, the book is perhaps the most significant milestone in Confucian political theory since Japanese Confucians in the mid-19th century such as Rai Sanyo and Aizawa Seishisai who furnished Japan and by extension, East Asia with a distinct form of modern state.

The book deals with a bewildering wide range of theories and issues in a systematic manner, so this is not the place to illuminate every aspect of it. Here I will only hope to underscore the significance of his Confucian political theory. It is no surprise that he opens his arguments by criticising New Confucianism for misinterpreting Confucianism in history, especially Confucius. For him, Confucianism is fundamentally, originally and ultimately political, because that's what Confucius actually intended and thought. The moral cultivation so much stressed by New Confucians is a later development in the history of Confucianism and would only have served its purposes if right political institutions were enacted. He considers New Confucianism's debunking Confucian political theory or 'Political Confucianism' in his word, would render Confucianism totally irrelevant in any society let alone in China. Furthermore, the expulsion of politics from Confucianism also incapacitates Confucianism to be critical of social ills and problems of modernity. This would have ironic consequences for New Confucians, because it would make New Confucianism politically docile and indifferent, totally opposite to what they labour so hard to avoid (ibid, Chapter 1).

His Political Confucianism is based on the Kongyang commentary tradition of *the Annals of Spring and Autumn*, since Kongyang commentary is believed by some to have contained the direct verbal transmission of Confucius's teaching. Furthermore, in his view, the Kongyang tradition is most resourceful in tackling political and social challenges, though he also points out that there are many other strands in Confucianism very fertile for developing Political Confucianism. Interestingly, unlike Kang Youwei (1858-1927) in the late Qing period who also invoked the Kongyang learning stressed Kongyang's propensity to drastic political reforms and Kongyang's theory of various historical stages, instead he chooses to elaborate on Kongyang's interpretations of historical events in *the Annals of Spring and Autumn*, which are

¹⁷ The book was scheduled to be published by Peking University Press, but it was pulled out in the last minute, (Jiang, 3003, Preface) perhaps for his not-so-implicit denunciation of the communist rule in China, and it was subsequently published in Taiwan. He now operates his own private college in Guizhou teaching Confucianism.

better equipped to grapple with issues in politics, law and society (or routine politics) nowadays (ibid, Chapter 2)¹⁸.

He claims that the Kongyang learning can build a modern Confucian state capable of dealing with the 'global challenges of politics' and he also disputes if democracy is really the best form of politics or better than Confucian visions of politics since both are premised on different set of assumption, have divergent historical experiences and excel in different areas. However, he does not say China does not need modernisation and civil society or even democracy, on the contrary, he simply argues that China or East Asia's modernisation should be guided by Political Confucianism if East Asia would like to remain on its own terms (ibid, Chapters 3 and 4). Therefore, he lambastes Chinese nationalism as nihilistic and a source of instability-'a rootless nationalism'. Therefore, in his view, Chinese politics since 1911 has been on a totally wrong track and Sun Yat-Sen should bear responsibilities for it (ibid, Chapter 5).

Before closing his arguments, in response to the China threat thesis, he addresses Samuel Huntingdon's Clash of Civilisation, he questions the underlying assumption that the mere existence of different civilisations would necessarily lead to armed conflict and he retorts that this is an imperialistic form of Western or Euro-centric arrogance. He asks why China or East Asia has no right to its civilisation and he further explains there is no basis of Confucian-Islamic alliance as predicted by Huntingdon, because Islam is monotheistic and shares little in common with Confucianism historically. Moreover, in his view, the biggest error is while Huntingdon takes Confucian civilisation as a given, in fact when no state in East Asia now is a Confucian state, so how could the clash between Confucian civilisation and Western civilisation be a distinct possibility at all? (ibid, Chapter 5)

Precisely as Jiang says, while Confucianism has indeed returned to China, it is still far too early to say Confucian visions of politics have already become viable political

¹⁸ To really appreciate his arguments, one must discuss his use of Kongyang learning in great details. Kongyang learning is based on the Kongyang Commentary of The Annals of Spring and Autumn, one of the five most august Confucian Classics and it is said to be edited by Confucius himself. The Annals is a record or entries of historical events from the view point of Lu state between 772 B.C.-482 B.C. Kongyang is one of the three major survived commentary traditions of the Annals. Just to give some ideas about the three commentaries: they would debate what constitute legitimate peace treaty, what the sources of legitimation are and what actually happened with regard to one historical event or entry in the Annals. The three commentaries sometimes violently disagree with one another, and at times, two of the three would be in agreement.

alternative to the existing ones in China and elsewhere in East Asia¹⁹, let along the transformation of the current political arrangements in East Asian countries into Confucian states. Instead of viewing the current Confucian revival in China as a threat, perhaps it is best to see that people have moved on from one hundred year of humiliation and suffering, finally, the dust has settled down and it's time for a calmer reflection if not without some excessive enthusiasm. Besides, the current Confucian revival owes much to the North American Confucian contingent; therefore its cosmopolitan nature and international composition should not be overlooked.

Waiting for the Dawn
- By Way of Conclusion

Almost one hundred years ago, in 1911, the Qing dynasty was overthrown and several years later in 1919, China witnessed the first (of many) radical and iconoclastic movement. Confucianism, especially Confucian political theory was seen as the major sources of China's woes and this recrimination soon also abound among Confucians too. In the last twenty years, Confucianism has been gradually rehabilitated first in North America and then roughly a decade ago in China. Some have begun to take Confucianism and Confucian political theory seriously and have made various kinds of contribution to revitalise Confucian political theory. But it remains to be seen if the momentum of the current Confucian revival would continue, for one thing, whether the CCP would tolerate an increasingly politically vocal Confucianism is rather doubtful. While it is absolutely fine for the CCP to let Confucianism to fill up the spiritual and moral vacuum, better than Folun Gong and Christianity or even more indigenous Taoism or Buddhism, it is still quite inconceivable that the CCP would allow views like Jiang to take hold of the centre fold, not to mention endorsing his wildest dreams.

In addition, political relations between China and Japan would also determine how fast and how far the Confucian revival might go. Suppose China suddenly decides to go Confucian, and if the relations between the two are far from amicable, would that strengthen the talk of the clash of civilisation vis-à-vis the US-Japan-Australia-India encirclement? Against this, would Confucians get the upper hand in Chinese politics to

¹⁹ Besides, in my view anti-Confucian intellectuals remains in the majority in China and most Chinese intellectuals are illiterate or semi-illiterate in Confucianism and classical Chinese. The same can be applied to Taiwan. It would not be unfair to say the Confucian revival in China now is of more sound bites than substance.

get China to go Confucian? Moreover, Confucianism would benefit enormously from cultural reintegration and realignment in East Asia. Since the mid-19th century, culturally East Asia has steadily lost its previous integrity and commonalities, while with the advent of globalisation, the exchange and collaborations at pop culture level have increased dramatically in the last twenty years; Taiwanese watch Japanese TV drama, Japanese watch Korean TV drama, Chinese listen to Taiwanese pop songs and everyone watch Hong Kong movies, but at the intellectual level, the exchanges remain by and large superficial and for official purposes. Take Chinese characters for example, China uses simplified characters which are quite hard to discern for non-Chinese speaking Japanese, whilst in Japan and Taiwan, it's predominately in traditional Chinese characters (Japan has a bit of simplified characters, but more sensible ones), and in Korea and Vietnam, they stop using Chinese characters at all. So unless something is to be done, otherwise for the foreseeable future, the lingua Franca among intellectuals and elites in East Asia would have to be English, oral and written. So how to pull former Confucian and Chinese-characters using East Asia countries remains a daunting task and a drag on the return of Confucianism to East Asia.

Finally, the greatest tasks for Confucian political theory are how to respond to the intellectual and normative forces of Western political theory, especially democracy (there is no time better than now, since people are not doing it at gunpoint or with the gun boats in sight!), and how the traditional East Asian cultural resources and Confucian tradition can be recovered, reinterpreted and regenerated to meet not only the parochial routine politics, but also the global challenges of politics by taking unreason's measure in earnest. As John Dunn has most aptly pronounced "In the long perspective of history this great dialogue is only just beginning".

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