

TRACING CONFUCIANISM IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA

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*Abstract: With the reform and opening policy implemented by the Chinese government since the late 1970s, mainland China has witnessed a sustained resurgence of Confucianism first in academic studies and then in social practices. This essay traces the development of this resurgence and demonstrates how the essential elements and authentic moral and intellectual resources of long-standing Confucian culture have been recovered in scholarly concerns, ordinary ideas, and everyday life activities. We first introduce how the Modern New Confucianism reappeared in mainland China in the three groups of the Chinese scholars in the Confucian studies in the 1980s and early 1990s. Then we describe how a group of innovative mainland Confucian thinkers has since the mid-1990s come of age launching new versions of Confucian thought differing from that of the overseas New Confucians and their forefathers, followed by our summary of public Confucian pursuits and activities in the mainland society in the recent decade. Finally, we provide a few concluding remarks about the difficulties encountered in the Confucian development and our general expectations for future.*¹

Introduction

Confucianism is not just a philosophical doctrine constructed by Confucius (551-479BCE) and developed by his followers. It is more like a religion in the general sense. In fact, Confucius took himself as a cultural transmitter rather than a creator (cf. Analects 7.1, 7.20), inheriting the Sinic culture that had long existed before him.²

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¹ We should confess at the outset that both authors of this chapter are Confucian scholars. However, we attempt to offer a primarily descriptive rather than evaluative account of the Confucian development in mainland China in the recent decades. Although a completely neutral account is impossible, we attempt not to appeal to our own Confucian perspective to examine the figures and events covered in the chapter. Due to space limit, it is impossible for us to include as many important Confucian scholars and activists as we like, much less the details, nuances and complexities of their views, arguments and activities. We must apologize to them for our limitations. Finally, among the huge amount of recent Chinese Confucian literature, we can only offer a brief list of references covering the works that we have directly or indirectly quoted in the chapter.

² Confucius and his disciples recompiled the cardinal Confucian classics. The original versions of the classics recorded the Sinic culture that had existed for at least two thousand years before Confucius. Moreover, Confucius wrote the first Chinese historical book about his own dynasty, the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, which was immediately taken as another major Confucian classic upon its completion. Among numerous early Confucian works written by Confucius' disciples, four books were selected by a Neo-Confucian master, Zhu Xi (1130-1200) in the

Accordingly, Confucianism is best understood as a cultural system, including distinct familial, social, moral, and political ethos as well as relevant rituals, practices, and institutions. It is also embedded with prominent spiritual and religious concerns, which make Confucianism both similar to the Abrahamic religions in some respects and dissimilar from them in other. In short, Confucianism is a way of life shaped in light of Confucius' teaching around the notion of the Dao (way) of Heaven. It has been a deeply rooted cultural tradition in China and other societies of the Pacific-rim.

Since the demise of China's last dynasty, the Qing, in 1911, Confucianism has lost its dominant political and legal strength in its homeland. During the New Culture Movement (including the May Fourth Movement in 1919) in the early 20th century, Confucianism became the symbol of backwardness and was severely criticized by Chinese intellectuals. After the Chinese Communists came to power in 1949, Confucianism speedily faded away in the society. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Confucian scholars were ruthlessly insulted, and Confucian temples and other historic relics were insanely destroyed. During the most time of the 20th century, Confucianism was taken as the ultimate source of all evils in China's past.

Nevertheless, Confucianism has not been eradicated in China. The elements of long-standing Confucian culture have been retained in ordinary Chinese ideas, familial ritual or quasi-ritual practices, and everyday life activities. With the reform and opening policy implemented by the Chinese government since the late 1970s, mainland China has witnessed a sustained resurgence of Confucianism first in academic studies and then in social practices. This chapter traces the development of this resurgence. In the second section, we introduce how the Modern New Confucianism reappeared in mainland China in the 1980s and early 1990s. In section III we describe how a group of innovative mainland Confucian thinkers has come of age since the mid-1990s. Section IV includes our summary of public Confucian pursuits and activities in the mainland society in the recent decade. Finally, we provide a few concluding remarks about the difficulties encountered in the Confucian development and our general expectations for future.

I. The Return of the Modern New Confucianism to Mainland China in the 1980s and Early 1990s

With Mao's death in 1976 and the advent of the era of reform and opening policy adopted in the late 1970s, the overwhelming anti-Confucianism political atmosphere began to mitigate. A few scholars proposed for re-evaluating Confucius and

Song dynasty, to represent essential Confucian readings. Thus, the Chinese have had a commonly used phrase, *si shu wu jing* (four books and five classics) – referring to *the Analects*, *Mencius*, *the Doctrine of the Mean*, and *Great Learning* as the four books, and the *Classics of Poetry*, *Documents*, *Rituals*, *Change* and *Spring and Autumn Annals* as the five classics – to constitute fundamental Confucian materials. For the English translation of these classics and books, see Legge 1970.

Confucianism (Cf. Chen, 1978; Pang, 1978; and Li, 1980). Under the orthodox Marxist account of historical materialism (which roughly holds that social relations, values and politics are determined by the basic economic forces of society), Confucianism had been taken as the produce of the ancient economic conditions and class struggles and had been serving the interests of the ruling classes for oppressing the people throughout the history of China. Now some scholars started to reevaluate the complicated nature and function of Confucianism without rigidly sticking to the Marxist dogma. Dozens of such research articles appeared in the early 1980s. Of course, the dominant Marxist ideology and methodology remained unshakable in the intellectual circle at that time. While affirming some positive effects of Confucianism, most scholars had to provide an overall negative view on Confucianism. The slogan of “discarding the dross and selecting the essence” (according to the Marxist standard) was the principle to direct their studies.

From the mid-1980s, there arose a so-called “culture fever” in China’s intellectual world – a great number of scholars and students became interested in cultural studies in pursuing new roads to a free, civil and democratic China. This was a reaction to the totalitarian Chinese political reality of the past several decades. The in-flooding fresh air of Western thoughts of various brands brought in needed intellectual resources for the fever. Modern Western theories, such as liberal and democratic ones, were the predominant stream among such resources. However, there were also imported voices for traditional Chinese culture: the voices of the Modern New Confucianism that had been developed in Taiwan, Hong Kong, North America and other oversea areas in the 20th century.

Modern New Confucianism originated in mainland China from the 1920s to the 1940s. Although many Chinese intellectuals callously accused Confucianism during the New Culture Movement, a few thinkers, especially Xiong Shili (1885-1968), Liang Shuming (1893-1988) and Ma Yifu (1883-1967), held the Confucian life line and developed Confucian thought in defiance of the intellectual fad. Their disciples, including Tang Junyi (1909-1978), Mou Zongsan (1909-1995), and Xu Fuguan (1903-1982), fled to Taiwan and Hong Kong when the communists seized power over China in the late 1940s and early 1950s. From the 1950s to the 1970s, they managed to recast Confucianism in a new vision in response to modern Western thought. From the 1970s on, a younger generation, represented by Tu Weiming (1940-), Liu Shuxian (1934-) and Cheng Zhongying (1935-), carried on Modern New Confucian thought in North America. They were able to do so because they had received their PhDs from American universities and got settled in the US. The version of Confucianism developed by this group of three-generation Confucians – from Xiong to Mou and to Tu - is usually referred to as “Modern New Confucianism” in the English literature. As John Makeham describes it, “[this version of Confucianism] is characterized by a mission to carry on the ‘interconnecting thread of the Way,’ to revive Confucianism, and by its belief in the idealist philosophy of the Song and Ming dynasties, especially Confucian moral metaphysics” (Makeham 2003, 92). In political philosophy, the Modern New Confucianism emphasizes the consistency of Confucianism with modern Western liberal democracy.

More and more overseas intellectuals were allowed to deliver lectures and attend conferences in China in the 1980s. Tu, a representative Modern New Confucian, was one of them. He made the first introduction to the Modern New Confucianism into China when he taught a course “Confucian philosophy” at Peking University in 1985. His lectures and public speeches and presentations, coupled with the academic activities of other overseas Confucian scholars such as Cheng Zhongying and Liu Shuxian, along with the efforts of some mainland Chinese scholars who came to be interested in Confucianism in the “Culture Fever”, created a Confucian discourse in China’s academia in the mid-1980s. The influence of the Modern New Confucianism steadily proliferated and deepened, resulting in the “National Learning Fever” beginning in the early 1990s.³

As of the mid-1980s, the study of Confucianism (including the New Confucianism) had become a spectacular nation-wide phenomenon. Numerous scholars, essayists, journalists and officials talked about Confucianism. A number of local, national and international conferences on Confucianism were held. A large amount of publications on Confucianism turned out, including studies on the lives of Confucius and later Confucian masters, their philosophies and ethico-political thoughts, exegetical studies of and commentaries on Confucian classics, and comparative studies in relation to Western thinkers. Moreover, several Confucian or traditional-culture-oriented associations and organizations were established, including China Confucius Foundation (the first nation-wide Confucian institution since 1949) set up in 1984, the Chinese Culture Academy (a very active and influential Confucian academic association) formed in 1984, Chinese Confucian Academy founded in 1985, and the International Confucian Association established in 1994.

Chinese scholars in the Confucian studies in the 1980s and early 1990s could roughly be divided into three groups. In the first group were those scholars, such as Fang Keli and his followers, who intended to criticize and reject Confucian thought based on the orthodox Marxist position. The second group was made up of a number of knowledgeable and influential scholars, such as Li Zehou, Pang Pu and Chen Lai, who manifested a sympathetic and respectful attitude to the certain features of Confucianism, although they did not have faith in the core teachings of Confucianism as a culture or religion. Finally, figures in the third group, instead, unambiguously embraced fundamental Confucian principles and showed considerable spiritual concerns with and commitments to Confucian values. Thus, these figures could be classified as the genuine present-day followers of Confucius. Although there were not many scholars belonging to the third group in the 1980s and early 1990s, it is worth introducing a few of their representatives here, leaving the case of Jiang Qing to the next section.

Lou Yijun (1944—) was presumably the first and firmest follower of the Modern New Confucianism in mainland China. As a fellow at Shanghai Academy of Social

³ Regarding the Modern New Confucianism and its place in the “culture fever”, see Song Xianlin, “Reconstructing the Confucian ideal in 1980s China: the ‘culture craze’ and New Confucianism” (Makeham 2003, 81-104).

Sciences, he got access to some New Confucian writings through reading historian Qian Mu's works in the late 1970s. Mou Zongsan's ideas came to take dwelling in his heart. Before Mou's death in 1995, Luo travelled to Taiwan and Hong Kong several times to attend international conferences on the New Confucianism and got close personal contact with Mou and his disciples. Indeed, Lou was probably Mou's only formal disciple on the mainland.⁴ In the three decades since 1979, Lou exerted extraordinary efforts on researching and propagating the New Confucianism in the mainland. Among his well-known edited works about the New Confucianism are the *Comments on the New Confucianism, Reason and Life: A Selection of the Essentials of the New Confucianism (I)* (1994) and *The Existence of Life and the Realm of Mind* (2009). He also managed to have Mou's bulk of works published in the mainland. Especially praiseworthy was Lou's courage to spell out his New Confucian thought on public occasions regardless of the pressure from official political authorities.⁵

Deng Xiaojun (1951-), a professor at Beijing Normal University, is another follower of the New Confucians. In 1978, he entered Southwest Normal Institute (now the Southwest University) as an undergraduate student majored in Chinese language, where he became a student of Cao Mufan (1912-1993), a disciple of Xiong Shili and Liang Shuming, the New Confucianism's founding fathers as we mentioned above. Directed by Cao, he read Xiong's *New Doctrine of Consciousness-only* and Liang's *Human Mind and Human Life*.⁶ Such reading "rendered his mind a trembling experience like an earth quake" (Deng 2004, 8). He also devoted himself on studying the works of the second-generation New Confucians for many years. Deng, always keeping a low profile in public, harbors Confucian thought and sentiment deeply in his heart. His main viewpoint, as indicated in his *The Logical Combination of Confucianism and Democracy* (1995), is that Confucianism should incorporate democracy into itself, echoing Mou Zongsan's proposition that democracy is the logical development of Confucianism.

Differing from Deng, the late professor Yang Zibin (1932-2001) at Lanzhou University was an especially active and intrepid Confucian. In his college days of the 1950s, he, like many other Chinese youths at the time, cherished a sincere, candid and ardent communist dream. Beyond his expectation, however, his warm blood brought his life nowhere but only misery. Soon after becoming a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences after graduation from Peking University, he was branded as "an extremist rightist" in the Anti-rightists Movement in 1958, and was exiled first to the Great Northern Wilderness and then to Dunhuang (a wild area in the Northwest of China) to receive reformation through forced manual labor. He spent 19 years in this harsh and bitter life. During the Cultural Revolution, with his sincerity and

⁴ In his private correspondence with the first author of this chapter, Lou discloses that he requested to become a disciple of master Mou, and Mou gladly accepted it. In Lou's opinion, "Master Mou is a contemporary Confucius."

⁵ As an official Chinese Marxist scholar Fang Keli puts it, Lou "criticized Marxism publicly" and "embraced Hong Kong-Taiwan New Confucianism unconditionally" (Fang 1996B, 32, 37).

⁶ In fact Liang's book was not published yet at the time, and Deng gained access to its manuscript privately kept by Cao.

perseverance unchanged, he wrote five long letters to Mao Zedong and other Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders to question the correctness of the Cultural Revolution. Through so much frustration and reflection, Yang gradually lost his confidence in communism and got on his way to Confucianism in the 1980s. At a conference in 1992 Yang openly and challengingly claimed that he “is deeply convinced by the New Confucians,” a voice unheard-of publically at that time (Fang 1996A, 13). In 1993 he published an article, “Reviving Confucianism,” in the influential and popular journal *Du Shu*, in which he asserted that “up till now Confucianism is the first comprehensive and profound system of humanitarian thought ever appeared in human history,” and that “today the way of Confucius and Mencius has caught the great best opportunity of fulfilling its grand ambitions” (Yang 1993, 150). Yang’s conception of Confucianism is akin to that of the overseas New Confucians in that it incorporates considerable liberal and democratic ingredients in it, though, unlike Lou, he did not have much personal connection with overseas Confucians. As a Confucian, Yang was more of a practitioner than of a system builder. He established Gansu Research Society of Traditional Culture, created the journal *National Learning Review*, and exerted great efforts on Confucian education in his last years.⁷

II. The Emergence of Innovative Mainland Confucian thinkers and Campaigners since the Mid-1990s

With the publication of Jiang Qing’s first monograph on political Confucianism in 1995 (see below), this year can conveniently be marked as the emerging time of the innovative mainland Confucian thinkers and campaigners in mainland China. Before this time the mainland Confucians were busy learning, digesting and propagating the thought of the overseas New Confucians and their forefathers, whereas after this time they have come of age in developing new versions of Confucian thought and launching new campaigns for Confucianism. Their innovative ideas have been accomplished through their engagement and dialogue with other world-wide spiritual traditions or intellectual systems, including Christianity, liberalism, conservatism, Marxism, phenomenology as well as the New Confucianism.

Among these innovative mainland thinkers, Jiang Qing (1953-) has undoubtedly been a leading figure. After a long trudge of intellectual and spiritual engagement with Marxism, liberalism, existentialism, Daoism, Buddhism and Christianity, Jiang first came to rest his mind on the New Confucianism in the late 1980s. In companion with Lou Yijun and Deng Xiaojun, Jiang proved himself one of the staunchest followers of the New Confucians. This is well illustrated in his long article, “the

⁷ It should be noted that a few more mainland Chinese scholars can also be characterized as Modern New Confucian followers in a loose sense, such as Huang Kejian (1946-), Guo Qiyong (1947-), and Du Guangjian (1956), who have in various degrees expressed their commitment to Confucianism and helped to magnify the pitch of the Confucian discourse in contemporary China.

meaning and problem of revitalizing Confucianism in mainland China,” published in a Taiwan-based New Confucian journal, *Ehu Monthly*, in 1989. This article was taken by Fang Keli as “the political manifesto and theoretical program of the New Confucians for ‘reviving Confucianism in the mainland’” (Fang 1997, 39). In this article Jiang claims that confronting mainland China’s heaps of moral, political and economic crises, the real solution to them is to substitute Confucianism for Marxism as the “state religion.”

In the early 1990s Jiang began to develop an authentic system of political Confucianism in deviation from the New Confucian strategy. That strategy, from his new understanding, had been overly recast by modern Western liberal democratic view. In his first political Confucian work, *Introduction to the Gongyang Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals* (1995), Jiang distinguishes “mind Confucianism” from “political Confucianism,” showing the insufficiency of the New Confucian focus on the former. He contends the priority of the latter for a proper Confucian mission for the future of China. His subsequent work *Political Confucianism* (2003) details the fundamental principles, mechanisms and institutions of political Confucianism. His later publications, *Faith in Spiritual Life and Politics of the Kingly Way* (2004), *A Sequel to Political Confucianism* (2011), and *A Confucian Constitutional Order* (2013), provide further arguments and defenses for his basic viewpoints, bringing his whole system of political Confucianism to fruition.

The core of Jiang’s political Confucianism lies in his theory of political legitimacy. He argues that from the wisdom of the Confucian classics in general and the *Gongyang Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals* in particular, a fully legitimate and stable Chinese political system must meet three conditions: first, it must be at one with and sanctioned by the *Dao*, the way of Heaven; second, it must be in accordance with the mainstream of national cultural heritage; third, it must comply with the will of the people at the present time. In line with this principle of “three-dimension legitimacy,” Jiang puts forward a legislature composed of three chambers as a mutually checked and balanced political system, with each chamber representing one dimension of legitimacy. To strengthen the first dimension, he proposes to establish an extra Academy of Confucians endowed with the task of supervising the running of the whole government. Moreover, to highlight the cultural identity of the state throughout history and stress the second dimension of legitimacy in China, Jiang proposes to appoint a symbolic monarch as the head of the Chinese state. Finally, he advocates that Confucianism should be announced as China’s state religion. By this he does not mean that other religions should be restricted in China, but is to affirm the mainstream cultural status of Confucianism for augmenting the solidarity of the Chinese people and safeguarding the cultural and moral fiber of the society. In short, Jiang’s entire system integrates Confucian religious, ethical and political thoughts into a reconstructed comprehensive political Confucianism for contemporary China. Not surprisingly, Jiang’s innovative political Confucianism has not only offended the Chinese Marxists and displeased the New Confucians, but also exacerbated Chinese

liberal and democrat scholars. Jiang's thought has stimulated great controversy in the current intellectual world of China.⁸

Another active Confucian thinker and activist is Chen Ming (1962-). After overcoming enormous financial and managerial difficulties, he established a Confucian-study journal named *Yuan Dao* (Searching the Way) in 1994. This has been the first private-run periodical aiming at exploring and promoting traditional Chinese thought independent of the swaying of the dominant Marxist ideology in China ever since 1949. The journal has since become the very headquarter of Confucianism-reviving movement in the mainland. Chen is a pragmatic and action-directed Confucian. Although his thought has not been systematized and completed, a group of his ideas, especially the proposition of “finding substance (*ti*) in function (*yong*),” has gained considerable attention in the Chinese media and intellectual arena. Briefly, “substance and function” is a pair of categories in traditional Chinese philosophy, with “substance” referring to fundamental ontological being or entity, while “function” the manifestation or actualization of the substance in the flux of the empirical world. Chen, while appropriating these terms, gives them rather peculiar new interpretation in light of his own understanding. For him, “substance” means the will of the Chinese nation to life and existence in the anthropological sense, and “function” the environment or situation in a historically conditioned context. For current China, Chen emphasizes that its national “substance” must be fulfilled in the “function” of the modern world, namely suitable advanced technology, economic system, socio-political structure and ideas and values that are already radically different from those of the traditional world (Cf. Chen 2012,122).

Given such new “function” of modern society, Chen holds that Chinese political “substance” can only be realized in a democratic system to meet the need of modernity and globalization. On the other hand, from his view, Confucianism can be restored and promoted as civil religion of China in the sociological sense – as the concept of “civil religion” is expounded by Robert Bellah regarding Protestant Christianity for the United States, in order to deal with the problem of value erosion and life banality in modern Chinese society. For Chen, Confucianism is necessary for contemporary China because “while providing the government with the indispensable legitimacy of its politics as well as a standard of moral restriction on the government,” Confucianism also “helps lay the foundation of Chinese cultural identity, cultivate a sense of nationality, and augment the cohesion of the people” (Chen 2012, 127). Like Jiang, Chen regards Confucianism as a religion and has made many efforts on reviving it in Chinese society. But he follows Chinese liberals to take the separation of state and religion as the cardinal principle of modern politics, and is thereby strongly against Jiang's idea of establishing Confucianism as state religion in

⁸ There are great amount of Chinese literature addressing Jiang's political Confucianism, e.g., Fan (2008) and Ren (2013). For an English version of Jiang's three important papers, see Jiang (2013). For a succinct English introduction to Jiang's political Confucianism, see Wang Ruichang, “the Rise of political Confucianism in Contemporary China” (Fan 2011, 33-45). For more discussion of Jiang's work in the English literature, see Bell (2008), Fan (2011), and Elstein (2013).

China. From Chen's view, Confucianism should not be established as an official state religion, but should only be restored as civil religion of Chinese society. And this latter task, he thinks, could be achieved in two steps: first to campaign for the official recognition of Confucianism as a religion in the mainland of China, just as the religious status that is currently enjoyed by Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Christianity and Catholicism, and secondly, to manage to make Confucianism play a role of civil religion in Chinese public life (Cf. Chen 2012,124).

Kang Xiaoguang (1963-), originally a specialist on rural science, turned to Confucianism after the June-Fourth political tragedy in 1989. To put in his own words, before 1989 he was "a simple-headed economy determinist, believing the doctrine of historical materialism that 'economic basis determines everything.'" That tragic event made him aware that "culture and politics constitute a kind of force that is independent of economy and is decisive in determining the course of social development" (Kang 2003, 9). Recognizing an important part that culture plays, Kang began to read Confucian classics in the 1990s. On entering the new millennia, Kang had become a Confucian. His first Confucian writing, and perhaps the most widely known of all his writings, was "on the essentials of cultural nationalism" published in 2003. In this article he observes that "culture is the basis for the identification of a nation state, and a unified nation or state would not be able to subsist without a common culture." He further argues that for an underdeveloped country like China, modernization is not the same as westernization. In the present time of globalization, culture constitutes one of the essential factors of a nation-state's international competitiveness. Indeed, as he sees it, culture is "the most important 'social capital' supporting the economic development of a nation state." In traditional culture lie the resources of expectations, values and morality of the people as well as the ideal, dynamics and cohesiveness of the nation's continued development. Kang emphasizes that his proposed cultural nationalism is "not intended to create a lofty theory of traditional culture, but to establish a forceful ideology to launch a comprehensive and lasting social movement," i.e., "the movement of traditional Chinese culture" (Kang 2003, 9-10).

With this mission in mind, Kang has proved himself a zealous and tenacious campaigner for Confucianism. As to China's political future, he is opposed to liberal democratic ideas. He proposes to establish an authoritarian but humane regime, with Confucianism in place of Marxism as the favored ideology.⁹ In regard of the question of Confucianism as a religion, his view has much in common with Jiang's. On the other hand, his approach to Confucianism for contemporary China is akin to Chen's in that the interests of the Chinese nation are of top priority, while Confucianism as the mainstream of Chinese culture should be brought to the fore mainly as an indispensable means of rejuvenating the nation.¹⁰

⁹ Kang's political view is yet to be fully developed. In the early 2000s he was strongly for authoritarianism and against democratization (cf. Kang 2004). In a recent article (Kang 2012), however, he considerably revised his previous view and integrated democratic elements into his account.

¹⁰ Concerning the similarities and differences among Jiang, Chen and Kang, see Chen, 2009.

Zhang Xianglong (1949-) is originally from the academic background of phenomenology. From his view, there is much affinity between Heidegger's phenomenological approach and Confucius' way to human existence. For many years he has done a great deal to explicate Confucianism from a phenomenological perspective, thereby shedding new light on Confucianism. Importantly, in his course of philosophizing, he has personally transformed from a phenomenologist to a Confucian, developing "phenomenological Confucianism" in China. His transformation is best explained in his own words:

As modern Chinese, our background is heavily inlaid with Western philosophy and education. But we are usually called back from the West to China, from phenomenology to Confucianism, and from alien bourn to homestead. This return is by no means regulating Confucianism with phenomenological rules. It is rather searching for the re-entrance of original and primordial experience to Confucianism. Once you really get into the inner part of Confucianism, you will be transformed and moved by the vitality of the Confucian classics and original Confucian experience, and your understanding will be deepened. With Confucian experience gradually awakens in your heart, you will come to realize that all philosophies you have perceived, including phenomenology, fall short of your expectation. You will notice that considerable part of philosophy is not well-placed; philosophy is actually pale or deficient of liveliness, originality or profundity (Zhao and Zhang 2011, 359).

While appreciating Jiang's proposal of establishing Confucianism as state religion, Zhang thinks that this is, at least in the foreseeable future, unrealistic. Instead, Zhang mapped out a blueprint for creating a "Confucian culture reserve" in China in 2001, in which a local authentic Confucian society of the traditional pattern will be established and preserved intact, in the hope of evoking a nation-wide restoration of the Confucian way of life in the future (Zhang 2001). This proposal embodies the ideal of a Confucian philosopher such as Zhang with strong affection for idyllic rural life brimming with primordial Confucian consanguineous love. Zhang's proposal has drawn wide attention and generated much discussion among Chinese scholars.

The above thinkers, whose Confucian identity has become unequivocal since the mid-1990s, together with some other intellectuals who also came out as Confucians in public in recent ten years, such as Guo Qiyong (1947-), Sheng Hong (1954-), Huang Yushun (1957), Yu Zhangfa (1964-), Yao Zhongqiu (1966-), and a cluster of others, constitute the main force of what is currently referred to as the "contemporary mainland Confucianism."¹¹

¹¹ In the summer of 2004, Jiang hosted a meeting with Chen Ming, Kang Xiaoguang, and Sheng Hong (a Confucian-minded economist) in Jiang's private-run Yangming Academy in Guizhou Province, discussing Confucian development in mainland China and a series of problems faced by mainland Confucians. This meeting, from Fang Keli's observation, signifies a new stage of the development of Confucianism, "a stage in which mainland Chinese Confucians represented by Jiang Qing, Sheng Hong, Kang Xiaoguang, and Chen Ming will play a leading role" (Fang 2006, 6).

In their different approaches to and interpretations of Confucianism, mainland Confucian thinkers take on various looks. However, in comparison with overseas Modern New Confucians, there are still discernible common features among the mainland Confucians. First, they tend to go back to the classic Confucianism and the Confucianism of the Han dynasty, rather than the Neo-Confucianism of the Song-Ming dynasties favored by the Modern New Confucians, to find starting point and inspiration for their proposals and disquisitions. Moreover, while the overseas New Confucians' main attention is paid to moral metaphysics and ultimate spiritual pursuits, the top concern and discourse of the contemporary mainland Confucians are predominantly focused on social and political issues: problems in politics, law, administration, social justice, education, familial matters, rituals and folk customs, economy, technology, environment, national interests, and international relations. Finally, while they differ from each other in their reconstructed political Confucian philosophy, ranging from a substantively liberal and democratic version like Chen Ming's to a fundamentally conservative and meritocratic version like Jiang Qing's, they have all performed more sophisticated reflection than the Modern New Confucians on the relation between Confucian thought on one hand and modern Western liberal democratic view on the other in relation to Chinese reality.

III. The Unfolding of Confucian Culture in Society

With the emergence of the above-mentioned cohort of mainland Confucian thinkers and activists, there has been the revival of Confucian culture in all walks of life in mainland society since the end of the 1990s. While the "national learning fever" of the 1990s was confined to the academia and its influence on society was superficial, this recent revival of Confucianism has proved solid and robust. As Kang Xiaoguang observes,

On entering the 21st century, dominated by civil groups and supported by the government, a "phenomenon" [movement] aimed at reviving traditional culture has quietly turned out and taken on a rapid development in a few years. The number of its participants is legion; its manner of mobilization is varied; its units are independent from each other and thereby there is no headquarter. However, they are by no means "a loose sheet of sand," for they share the same [cultural] convictions on which the foundation of their cohesion and solidarity is hinged. What is of pivotal significance is that the participants have posed a critical challenge to the mainstream ideology, calling for re-shaping the axiological criteria of the society. Evidently, this "phenomenon" has on the whole possessed for itself the hallmark of a "social movement." Since the objective of this "social movement" is distinctively clear, i.e. to revitalize the traditional culture of the Chinese nation with Confucianism as its core, we call it "the movement of cultural nationalism" (Kang 2010, 247).

Not all Confucians would agree with Kang in calling this movement “nationalism” – they would rather stress its state-independent nature of Confucian civility. It is also a very complicated story regarding whether it was really supported by the government (see below). In any case, Kang’s above conclusion is made of the movement that took place during 2005-2007. He further investigated the movement in its 2008-2010 period. From his discovery, more and more participants from various social strata have engaged in the movement since 2008. At the beginning traditional culture was mainly the appeal of a group of scholars. Now it has become the goal almost of all the people, encompassing even some of those from its antagonist camps. Ever-increasing elites from the academic, economic and political circles have joined in the movement one after another and constituted the main force. As China has become a world power in economy, the participants have gained more confidence in and stronger admiration for their national traditional culture. From Kang’s view, traditional culture has now taken root in all soils, proliferating in every direction. In a word, what was “abnormal” has now become “normal,” and what was “destructive” now “constructive” (Kang *et al* 2010, 5).

Kang’s conclusion might be over optimistic. But it is no doubt that after the unfolding process of recent three decades, Confucianism has significantly infiltrated into the Chinese society again. This is perhaps best epitomized by the “reading-classics movement” that has swept over the whole country, such as the one led by Wang Caigui (1949-), a Taiwanese disciple of Mou Zongsan. In fact, Wang launched his classics reading campaign in Taiwan in 1994. From 1996 on, he has been frequently invited to the mainland to propagate his ideas, thus activating the movement by setting up part-time schools (and even a few full-time schools) for classic learning in many places of the mainland. His effort has resulted in remarkable achievements. It is believed that in 2001 more than one million and two thousand children in mainland cities joined in the classics reading schools as part-time students (Hu 2006, 14). The movement reached a climax in 2004 when the estimated participating children numbered ten million in that year (Zhang 2011, 34), and we have not seen its momentum abate ever since. The main texts read and recited at the schools are Confucian classics such as *the Four Books*, traditional children’s textbooks such as *the Three-character Book*, *the Thousand-character Book*, and *the Disciplinary Instructions for Children*, and other traditional literatures such as *the Three-hundred Poems by the Tang Poets*. Such schools have generally followed Mr. Wang’s pedagogical method: “boys and girls, please follow me to read aloud.” They emphasize the method of repeated loud reading and rote memorization, believing that when the pupils come of age with matured comprehension, they will fully understand the texts by themselves. In addition to reading classics, the pupils at such schools also learn Confucian rituals, calligraphy, traditional Chinese music instruments, singing, dancing, martial arts, and even folk handicrafts.

One obvious reason for the up-surge of such schools is that Chinese parents have been fed up of the compulsory curriculum of the state-run public schools in which there is little or no Chinese classic being taught but is full of unavailing Chinese Marxist ideological messages and clichés. They have recognized the worthiness and merit of the Chinese classics *per se* for the future of their children’s

lives. Accordingly, numerous independent-minded parents prefer to send their children to such traditionally-patterned schools at weekend to receive part-time classical education. Some of them have even enrolled their children in such schools for full-time education. In huge demand, such schools have multiplied at a great speed over the whole country in spite of the palpable enmity and vigilance of the authorities.¹² Among the most noticeable ones are Shaonan Promotion Center for Classics Reading (in Xiamen, founded in 1997), Huaxia School of Traditional Culture (in Xuzhou, founded in 1998), Yidan School (in Beijing, founded in 2000), Sihai Education Center for Children's Classics Reading (in Beijing, founded in 2002), and Qufu National Learning School (in Qufu - Confucius' hometown, founded in 2005).

Although Wang is a Confucian, his pedagogy carries a tincture of liberalism. His recommended textbooks go beyond Confucian classics, covering some Taoist and Buddhist texts. Some schools have even included Shakespeare's plays. Disapproving of this "impurity", Jiang Qing, as the most tenacious classics-reading advocator in the mainland, made his own selection of the classics in 2004 and produced a 12-volume textbook consisting entirely of Confucian classics, from Confucius' *Analects* down to Wang Yangming's *Instructions for Practical Learning*. Jiang's idea is not that children should only learn Confucian classics; given that children are already learning a lot of other things in their full-time schools, Jiang emphasizes the focus of this classic learning on Confucian material. Still, Jiang's unreserved voice for "carrying on the silenced teachings of the past sages" was criticized as obscurantist by some progressivists, thereupon engendering great controversy among Chinese intellectuals from 2004 to 2005. This controversy has been taken as a virtual resurgence of the prolonged debate over the similar subject in the Republic China from the 1910s to the 1930s.¹³

In addition to children, many adults – such as university teachers and students, entrepreneurs, and officials – have also engaged in classical learning. Since 2005, Peking University in Beijing, Fudan University in Shanghai, Wuhan University in Wuhan and a dozen other universities have established their "classical learning classes" for interested persons from outside of their universities to enroll. The booming market in this area indicates that traditional culture has become a fashionable subject for the middle class people to study. A great number of university

¹² On inquiring, Mr. Wang informed the first author of this chapter that due to the fear of interdiction by the government, a great amount of such schools are run in secret in private dwellings. For example, the Mencius' Mother School was opened in Shanghai in 2002 but was compelled to withdraw into secret household running after the interdiction in 2006. Nevertheless, from Mr. Wang's estimation, there are about one thousand such schools in current China that are publicly known.

¹³ Of the controversy over classics reading, see Hu 2006. Of the debate in the Republic China, see Lin 2010.

teachers and students have organized and joined in their own national or Confucian learning societies on campus for the promotion of traditional culture.¹⁴

Since the 1990s, Chinese business companies and government at various levels have shown increased enthusiasm in promoting traditional values among their personnel and citizens, although they have inevitably selected some values to emphasize for practical or utilitarian purposes. In order to enhance team cohesion and work ethic, many companies are inclined to frame and forge their enterprise culture with Confucianism, and some bosses even spare a fixed interval from the working hours for their employees to recite Confucian classics.¹⁵ All levels of the Chinese Government have been appropriating Confucianism – this has been done for the sake of elevating contemporary Chinese “spiritual civilization” as officially announced, or inspiring Chinese patriotism as otherwise believed, or pacifying swelling popular discontentment with the regime as suspected by many. Such use of Confucianism by the government has rendered a great push on the evocation of Confucian awareness in the popular mind, albeit in the perverted way of integrating certain selected Confucian values into the official Chinese socialist system. Beginning in 2005, high-rank officials of the central government have taken part in the annual ceremonies at the Confucius temple in Qufu (Confucius’ hometown) on Confucius’ birthday every year, and many local governments have also, often to a greater extent, involved in such ceremonies at their extant local Confucius temples.

As a rule, Chinese mass media is playing its unequalled role in spreading relevant information, although the media is exclusively state-controlled in China. The “Yu Dan phenomenon” is a prominent example. Yu, a government-media-favored scholar, delivered a series of lectures entitled “Yu Dan’s insights into the *Analects*” on CCTV’s popular primetime show in 2006, and instantly attracted broad attention. Roughly, her “insights” into the *Analects* concentrate on personal psychological matters, without touching on any serious political issues with which typical Confucian scholars would take the *Analects* to be genuinely concerned. A month later, she put her lectures together and published them in book form. This so-called “chicken soup book” by some commentators were sold extremely well. It is reported that on its first day sale, some 12,600 copies were sold out at one bookstore in Beijing. Up to April 2009, the book had sold 4.7 million copies, “creating a wonder of best-sellers” (Song 2009, 70).¹⁶

In addition to the advent of Confucianism into the spheres of education, business, politics, and media, the surfacing of clusters of sincere, ardent and active Confucian volunteers has genuinely bespoken the warming of Confucian culture in mainland

¹⁴ For example, the first author of this chapter organized an “oasis seminar” at his university in 2011 and has been guiding teachers and students interested in traditional culture to read the *Analects* and other classics since then.

¹⁵ A friend of the first author of this chapter is a company head, who informed that under his decision, all his staff are required to recite the Confucian classic of *the Great learning* for half an hour during the work time everyday.

¹⁶ Yu’s book was published in English with the title of *Confucius from the Heart*, Zhonghua Book Co / McMillan, 2009.

China. Such Confucian zealots entertain heart-felt commitment to Confucianism as a religious faith. Hence, their voluntary Confucian work has not been motivated by any personal career concern or political ideological consideration. Following Jiang Qing's pioneering struggles in the 1990s and early 2000s, a cohort of Confucian volunteers surfaced in the mid-2000s, and their number has been ever in growing. With facilities brought about by popular electronic communications, they have exerted great efforts to propagate Confucian ideas and attempt to re-institutionalize Confucianism in mainland China (see below). In this regard they have tried various ways, including establishing webs, opening forums, delivering speeches, organizing summer camps, producing publications, creating academies, lodging public appeals, and conducting demonstrations.

Here are a few examples. First, with deep faith in Confucianism and extraordinary patience and industry, Duan Yanping (1969-), a technician growing up and living in Qufu, Confucius' hometown, has devoted himself to the task of consolidating the mass of Confucian volunteers scattered over the country. In 2005 he formed the "Qufu Union of Confucians," and since then the Union has been organizing the non-official Confucius-worshipping ceremonies held four times every year in Qufu, in distinction from the official ceremonies held by the government. From his view, the official ceremonies were spectacular but deficient of real Confucian spiritual commitment. Through his persistent and tactic maneuvering, the Union was successfully registered as a legitimate civil organization in 2007. Duan is also the founder and headmaster of the non-profit-making Qufu National Learning School, in which authentic Confucian lessons are taught and traditional Confucian rituals are practiced.

Zhou Beichen (1965-), a disciple of Jiang Qing, resigned from his university teaching post to help Jiang construct the Yangming Academy in the mid-1990s. He cherishes Jiang's conviction that Confucianism is the religion that buttresses up the Chinese civilization, believing that the crux of restoring Confucianism in modern society is to create new preaching mechanisms attuned to the industrialized urban life. In 2006 he left the remote Yangming Academy in the hope of blazing a new trail in cities. After many twists and turns, he triumphed in establishing the Sacred Confucius Hall, something of a "Confucian church," in the metropolis of Shenzhen in 2009. Through struggling for several years, Sacred Confucius Hall has gained a stronghold with increasing social impacts in Shenzhen, and the anticipated "new preaching mechanism of Confucianism" has come into form. Zhou calls it the "Sacred Confucius Hall model of Confucianism restoration." His long-term objective is "to extend this model to every city in China, even to overseas areas inhabited by the Chinese" (Peng and Fang 2011, 103).

Renzhong (1972-) and Wang Dasan (1974-) are two Confucian friends. Neither of them majored in Confucian studies at university, but their heart-felt concerns fell on the Confucian cause. With enormous Confucian sincerity and vitality, they have been the agitators and coordinators of several collective Confucian actions in recent years. Backed by several distinguished Confucian thinkers, they have attempted to contact all domestic and international sympathizers of Confucianism and mobilize all possible resources to promote Confucianism in mainland China. They have also

attempted to make the best use of internet facilities for the Confucian cause. For instance, Wang created the website “Confucian Religion of China” in 2006, turning out as one of the most influential Confucian websites in China. Renzhong’s website “Confucian China” appeared in 2008, becoming another famous Confucian station.

In the last decade, they activated a series of public actions, which have greatly uplifted the Confucian consciousness in the populace. In 2006 Wang Dasan drafted the “Petition for instituting Confucius’ birthday as ‘the Teachers’ Day,’” collected fifty-four cosigners of famous Confucian scholars, and publicized it on several websites before Confucius’ birthday in that year. This letter caught wide public attention. Since then Wang and Renzhong have reiterated the petition every year, and there is evidence to show that the authorities are proceeding to accept the appeal. In addition, Wang and Renzhong played a pivotal role in the so-called “Qufu cathedral event,” in which the impact of Confucian voices was made more evidenced. In December, 2010, a 40-meter-high Christian cathedral with a capacity of three thousand people was about to be built near Confucius Temple in Qufu, Confucius’ hometown. This new cathedral had been designed not only much larger but also much taller than the long-standing, traditional Confucius’ Temple. Wang Dasan, on behalf of Confucians, penned a protesting letter cosigned by ten influential Confucian scholars, and posted it on ten Confucian websites with the support of ten Chinese and international Confucian associations. The Confucian view on this event is not that Christians do not have a right to build a cathedral at Confucius’s hometown. Rather, to embrace a civil and polite attitude to other major religions in the world, Confucians insist that it is inappropriate for Christians to set up their new religious building larger and taller than Confucius’ Temple in the very location of Confucius’ hometown. This Confucian public action, while incurring big controversy, also gained wide social support, including receiving sympathetic online comments from some Chinese Christians. Consequently, the construction project of the cathedral came to a standstill.

Apart from going hand in hand with Wang in many public actions, Renzhong devotes himself more on editing contemporary Confucian literature. In 2011, he created a Confucian Journal, *the Confucian Practitioners*, addressing contemporary practical issues. He is also in charge of editing contemporary Confucian writings, “Serial Collections of Confucian Practitioners.” Moreover, he established the *Electronic Newsletter of Confucianism* in 2006, and has single-handedly edited it for nearly ten years now. This electronic newsletter has produced more than two hundred issues since its birth, and has been widely accessed and acclaimed by Confucian scholars. In short, the work of such enthusiastic Confucian volunteers as Renzhong and Wang Dasan is testifying to the vitality of Confucianism in contemporary China.

Concluding Remarks

Evidently, the development of Confucianism is faced with many difficulties and adverse forces in contemporary China. The foremost and immediate barrier lies in the officially imposed Marxist and Maoist ideology on the nation. There are fundamental conflicts between this ideology and Confucianism regarding basic cultural, historical, ethical and political issues. Indeed, there has been a feud between the Modern New

Confucianism and Chinese Marxism since their concurrent births in the wake of the New Culture Movement.¹⁷ For instance, Chen Duxiu, the founder of the Chinese Communist Party, made the fiercest attack on Confucianism in the 1920s; new Confucian Mou Zongsan condemned Communism with unreserved indignation from the 1940s on. Communist chieftain Mao Tse-tung humiliated what Guy Alitto called “the last Confucian” Liang Shuming in most acrimonious words in the 1950s, and launched an unprecedented anti-Confucianism campaign in the 1970s.¹⁸ In the 1980s, the leading mainland Confucian Jiang Qing sharply criticized Marxism. For the approximately four decades from the ending of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 till now, Chinese society has witnessed an escalating rejuvenation of Confucianism on the one hand and a gradual weakening of Maoism and Marxism on the other hand.

However, Marxism, as the state ideology on which the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist regime hinges, has been steadfastly maintained by the ruling bloc of China as the dominant ideology. It is true that the Communist regime has significantly adjusted its wholly hostile attitude to Confucianism as seen in the Cultural Revolution, and has even gone so far as to take considerable positive measures to communicate with Confucian culture in society, but this seeming conciliation seems only strategic. This government strategy is indeed opportunist and precarious. The authorities are manipulating and exploiting Confucianism for reinforcing their rule in the contemporary time: to inculcate docility in the people by distorting the Confucian doctrine of virtue cultivation, to enhance authoritarianism by exploiting Confucian emphasis on social order, and to enhance “national soft power” by appropriating Confucian cultural symbols.

The opportunist mentality of the Chinese Communist Party in respect of Confucianism cannot be better informed than the following embarrassing facts. On the one hand, from 2004 to 2013 the government appropriated the name of “Confucius Institute” to set up 440 training centers for promoting the Chinese language learning in many counties in order to boost China’s “national soft power.” On the other hand, it failed to secure enough confidence and sincerity to keep a mere statue of Confucius in the public area of Beijing (see below). Neither was the government able to make up its mind to institute Confucius’s birth day on September the twenty-eighth as the national Teacher’s Day to replace the meaningless date of September the tenth. When Guo Qiyong and others called for including the *Four Books* into the curriculum of secondary schools, the government simply lent them a deaf ear. Yu Dan’s soothing lectures could be broadcasted on the state’s central

¹⁷ The Chinese Communist Party was founded in 1921, and in 1922 one of the Modern New Confucian founders Liang Shuming published his *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies*. A conservative Chinese journal *the Critical Review* was also created in 1922.

¹⁸ For Mao’s personal attack on Liang, see “Criticism of Liang Shuming’s reactionary ideas” (Mao 1978, 121-130). Mao also launched the “criticizing Lin Biao and Criticizing Confucius” campaign in 1973-1974.

television station in primetime over the entire people, whereas Jiang Qing's frank voices could not be heard in public, nor could his books be published unabridged.¹⁹

The purpose of the government in using Confucianism was laid bare by a high official, Gu Mu (1914-2009), the late honorary president of government-sponsored China Confucius Foundation: "it is for the purpose of serving today's reality that we should research on Confucius, a figure of more than two thousand years ago; this utilitarian purpose we never conceal. Confucius' doctrine had always been used by the ruling classes in the past feudal societies, and a lot of elements among them can also be used by the party of our working class today. We venture to make this point open now" (Gu 2009, 453). In addition, a portion of hard-boiled Maoists (so-called Maoist Leftists) from both inside and outside the ruling bloc constitutes an anti-Confucianism force in current China. The event of the Confucius statue is a telling snapshot. In January 2011, the National Museum of China erected a thirty-one-foot high Confucius statue in front of the entrance of the museum near the east side of Tiananmen Square in Beijing. Three months later the statue was removed under the government's order without any convincing explanation. Many take this piece of unconfirmed information is actually true: the removal was urged by a petition cosigned by one hundred veteran Maoist cadres.

Since 1949 the policy of the Chinese Communist party on Confucianism has undergone various changes, but one thing has never changed: Marxism and Maoism must be taught as compulsory courses in Chinese schools and colleges, whereas Confucianism is always branded as a feudal ideology, and the Confucian religion is always denied of its legal status. Indeed, traditional Confucius temples across the country are still in the control of the government. In this predicament, mainland Confucians cannot pursue their mission with access to sufficient social resources, and neither can they, in many circumstances, convey their Confucian message and conduct their Confucian activities in necessarily frank and straightforward manners.

However, although confronted with many difficulties, mainland Confucians have now become more confident in their future than ever before in modern Chinese history. They believe that Confucianism will eventually get the better of Marxism and Maoism in China. In addition, the momentum of anti-Confucianism forces has been much reduced for another reason. Chinese liberals used to blame Confucianism for China's backwardness and supporting a whole-sale westernization for China's future, as were seen in the New Culture Movement in the late 1910s and the 1920s as well as in the "culture fever" in the 1980s. However, since the 1990s more and more Chinese liberals have come to realize that a national tradition like Confucianism is not something that can be disposed of at will; instead they have come to understand that Confucianism can and should play a positive part in China's modernization. Some liberals, notably Yu Zhangfa and Yao Zhongqiu, have even whole-heartedly converted to Confucianism and become ardent Confucian activists in recent years. On

¹⁹ Most of Jiang's books published in the mainland were abridged versions. The twelve-volume textbooks for classics reading edited by Jiang were later restricted for circulation. In his indicting letters to the authorities, official-scholar Fang Keli more than once accused Jiang of offending socialism (cf. Fang 2006, 4-9).

the part of Confucians, many of them hold that some liberal democratic ingredients, such as rule of law, constitutionalism and even democracy, can be incorporated into Confucian politics. So there has appeared a salutary interaction between the two strands of thought that formerly seemed two foes of uncompromising hostility. It is reasonably expected that in the foreseeable future, China will witness a more profound development of Confucianism.

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Glossary

儒家 现代新儒家 宋明理学 心性儒学——mind Confucianism 政治儒学——political Confucianism 即用见体——finding substance (*ti*) in function (*yong*) 王道 道统 《大学》 《中庸》 《论语》 《孟子》 《春秋》 《国学论衡》——National Learning Review 《儒家邮报》——Electronic Newsletter of Confucianism 文化热——Culture fever 国学热——national learning fever 新文化运动——New Culture Movement 文化大革命 曲阜大教堂事件——Qufu cathedral event 天安门孔子像事件——The event of the Confucius statue 阳明精舍——Yangming Academy 曲阜儒者联合会 Qufu Union of Confucians 曲阜国学院——Qufu National Learning School 深圳孔圣堂——Sacred Confucius Hall 熊十力 梁漱溟 马一浮 唐君毅 牟宗三 徐复观 曹慕樊 杜维明 刘述先 成中英 罗义俊 杨子彬 邓小军 蒋庆 郭齐勇 陈明 康晓光 张祥龙 王财贵 李泽厚 庞朴 陈来 方克立 段炎平 周北辰 任重 王达三