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**NO. 25**

ACTA ASIATICA VARSOVIENSIA

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# Contents

ROMAN SŁAWIŃSKI, Social Functions of Contemporary Confucianism; A Comparative Analysis of Philosophical Concepts in Taiwan, Hong Kong and the Mainland China .....	7
MAGDALENA CZECHOŃSKA, Body Linguistic “visibility” and “retrieved bodies” of the 20 <sup>th</sup> and 21 <sup>st</sup> Century in Chinese Women’s Literature and Art .....	21
IZABELLA ŁABĘDZKA, “Taiwanese Trilogy” of Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan: in Search of Taiwanese Identity .....	33
BOGDAN ZEMANEK, War on the Empire’s Periphery: Asymmetric Conflict in South-West China .....	57
KARIN TOMALA, China: Neuer Machtfaktor in der Welt. Innenpolitische und außenpolitische Implikationen .....	71
TERUJI SUZUKI, Some Characteristics of Corporate Culture and Governance in Japan .....	89
BEATA KOWALCZYK, ‘Travelling’ between <i>Sakaribas</i> in Contemporary Tokyo .....	107
MICHAŁ MOCH, Memories and Identities of the Lebanese Maronites: The Interdisciplinary Research .....	119
BILAL GÖKKIR, The Role of State Policies in Modern Qur’anic Exegesis in Turkey: Case of Elmalılı Muhammed Hamdi Yazır (1878–1942) and His Exegesis .....	133
AGNIESZKA AYŞENKAİM, <i>Sema</i> Ceremony – between Ritual and Performance .....	147
HAIFA ALANGARI, British Policy Towards King Hussein of Hijaz after the Arab Revolt .....	157
DOROTA RUDNICKA-KASSEM, The Ḥaram Collection and It’s Importance for Studying the History of Jerusalem during the Mamlūk’s Days. <i>Ḥaram 102: Study of the Document</i> .....	169
Notes on Contributors .....	183



ROMAN SŁAWIŃSKI

## Social Functions of Contemporary Confucianism; A Comparative Analysis of Philosophical Concepts in Taiwan, Hong Kong and the Mainland China

### Abstract

*Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia*, issues 23 and 24, contained presentations of basic issues of contemporary Confucianism that attempts, usually successfully, to use Confucian tradition, particularly ethics, to improve social management and the prevention of social unrest. These two articles dealt with history<sup>1</sup> and an evaluation<sup>2</sup> of a specific solution in several East Asian countries. In the present article we would like to focus primarily on a comparison of concepts and experiments aimed at re-introducing Confucianism into social life, especially the earliest ones that still could be active in social practices of the largest country in the region (and the birthplace of classical Confucianism) – mainland China. Some of these concepts were already successfully tested in social engineering, and supporters of Confucianism's re-introduction can use this as an argument to apply this innovation and to defend it against staunch critics of Confucianism. The critics still perceive this philosophical and religious movement as an ideological foundation of quasi-feudalism that was erased in China and which should not be propagated but condemned the same way that it was denounced during the heyday of Maoism.

### I. Theory

#### a) Taiwan and Hong Kong

Let's start with Taiwan, a country that had two reasons to refer to the Confucian tradition:

- 1) The Post-war Kuomintang government (exiled to Taiwan after losing the mainland in 1949) which quite justifiably considered it an historical mission to maintain traditional Chinese culture. Confucianism has been an integral part of this culture for millennia.
- 2) Taiwan was under a Japanese occupation for half a century and the Japanese influence was very destructive to national Chinese culture. After the war, the country was westernized, particularly by American influences. Therefore a reconstruction of Chinese culture through a Committee of exactly this name was additionally motivated by nationalistic reasons.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Sławiński, "Function of the 'New' Confucianism in the Countries of East Asia", *Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia*, No. 23, 2010, p. 25–44.

<sup>2</sup> R. Sławiński, "The 'New' Confucianism vs. the Development of East Asia", *Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia*, No. 24, 2011, p. 7–21.

There is an additional reason for popularization of Confucian ethics in post-war Taiwanese society. Alongside the government and cultural institutions that moved from the mainland to Taiwan in 1950's, there was a large portion of Chinese *intelligentsia* who continued their cultural efforts there. The more "feudal" Chinese culture was being destroyed on the mainland, the more diligent they were.

So-called "New Confucianism" is rooted in neo-Confucian philosophy represented by Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming (also known as Song and Ming Dynasty philosophy, i.e. 11<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century A.D.). These ideas spread to Korea and Japan and formed a foundation of local Confucianism there. In the case of Japan, this did serve as the best cause, since it supported the cult of the emperor and a military expansion in East Asia that to this day inspires fear of their dominance amongst the majority of the countries in the region.

Precursors of modern Confucianism include the whole pantheon of Chinese thinkers: Liang Shuming, Ma Fu, Zhang Junmai, Xiong Shili, Qian Mu, Mou Zongsan, and Xu Fuguang. Although they originally were active in China, their theories were popularized in Taiwan. Let's take a closer look at their social views.

The most important representatives of the so-called first generation of historians and philosophers include: historian Xu Fuguang (1904–1982), and philosophers Tang Junyi (1909–1978) and Mou Zongsan (Mou Tsung-san 1909–1995). Chun-chieh Huang, a noted Taiwanese scholar of Xu Fuguang writings, identifies this as reaction to 20<sup>th</sup> century crisis of values that resulted in an attempt to "rebuild the system of moral values with Chinese characteristics".<sup>3</sup>

In his writings, Xu Fuguang considered the key question: what is the future of Chinese culture? Similar to other 20<sup>th</sup> century intellectuals, he debated an issue of how to reconcile nationalism and democracy. According Chun-chieh Huang, the research conducted by Xu Fuguang was unique in the fact that he learned about Western culture through Japanese sources and he was comparing the two cultures.<sup>4</sup> In my opinion, this is why he perceives the Western culture in such a pessimistic light as deprived of love of humanity, 'inhuman,' "[...] leading to depths of nihilism".<sup>5</sup> At the same time he seems to be oblivious to the importance of Christianity in Western culture. He criticized "cultural aggression" of the West towards Asian peoples but at the same time he was a staunch critic of right wing and left wing authoritarian rule in China. His contemporaries considered him a fighter against any form of despotism which believed democracy to be the only option. He propagated those ideas for 30 years, especially during his stay in Hong Kong in a magazine *Minzhu pinglun* (*Democratic Review*) that was paradoxically supported by Chiang Kai-shek, even though it would be difficult to consider him a democrat, even if he was a virulent opponent of Maoist rule.

Xu Fuguang derived his concern for people's liberation from ideas of classic Confucianism – writings by Confucius and Mencius. It is therefore not surprising that contemporary extreme Confucianists prefer a return to the roots of Confucian classics instead of a "neo-confucianist" interpretation like that done between 11–17<sup>th</sup> century and which they now reject as an aberration. They mainly concentrate on the idea of "moral

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<sup>3</sup> Chun-chieh Huang, *Dongya ruxue shiyi de Xu Fuguang ji qi sixiang* (Xu Fuguang and his Ideas on East Asian Confucianism), Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2009, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

government” and a propagation of a canon of Confucian values, especially such virtues as humanitarianism (*ren*), loyalty (*zhong*) and the principal virtue of filial obedience (*xiao*). It is this set of virtues, tested throughout a long history of China, and not that which later were interpretations of classics and especially not those Western ideas leading to egoism and hedonism, that will lead to the ideal of a “harmonious society” i.e. to a social calm that is so desired by governments.

The second luminary of the older generation among philosophers who dealt with Chinese culture’s future was Mou Zongsan (Mou Tsung-san). He also left the Chinese mainland and was active in Taiwan. His writings included three books on the concept of an “external ruler” which was aimed at eliminating inadequacies of Chinese cultural life. This, in general, it would mean a democratization and a process of making knowledge more independent. There was also a concept of three authorities: morality, knowledge and political power, as well as an inevitability of democratic rule.<sup>6</sup> In his opinion, innately good wisdom (*liangzhi*) and self-improvement leads to an initiation of knowledge for its own sake. Knowledge *per se* creates objective scientific learning and a just liberal democracy.<sup>7</sup>

After the luminaries of the first generation, the next generation also included Chinese philosophers from diaspora: Antonio Cua, Chen Lai, Chung-yin Cheng, Tu Wei-ming, Fu Weixun, Jin Wulun, Liu Shuxian, Qin Jiayi, Tang Liquan, Ye Xiushan and others. It’s not possible to describe their achievements in a concise form considering they dealt with a large array of topics: from re-interpretation of texts and analyses of basics tenets, to detailed analyses of Confucianism of the Song-Ming era as well as disputes between Confucianists and liberals, and a comparison of Chinese, Japanese and Korean philosophers.

Contemporary Taiwanese philosophers are interested in similar research topics. What is new is that they show Taiwanese specifics and sources of transformation that led to the economic “miracle” as well as an abandonment of authoritarian rule in favor of democracy. As it turns out, Confucian ethics does not conflict at all with either a capitalist development or a democratic system. Therefore this creates an important argument in endless discussions over whether mainland China can become democratic. Numerous scientific symposia and current scientific literature resulted in, among others, a collection of forty publications *Dongya wenming yanjiu congshu* (series of studies of East Asian civilization). In the series, the most prolific author is professor Chun-chieh Huang whose nine books deserve particular attention. In order to understand a complicated post-war reality of Taiwan, it is important to study his writings on transformation and its perspectives.<sup>8</sup>

Generally speaking, Taiwanese theoretical studies on Confucianism are not limited only to a study of classical and medieval texts but they also boldly deal with current issues of social and political life of post-war Taiwan.

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<sup>6</sup> Wei-fen Chen, *Dzieje konfucjanizmu tajwańskiego* (History of Taiwanese Confucianism), in: *Kraje konfucjańskie. Dzieje nowożytne* (Confucian Countries. Modern Times), Roman Sławiński (ed.), Kraków: Krakowskie Towarzystwo Naukowe Press, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>8</sup> Chun-chieh Huang, *Zhanhou Taiwan de chuanxin ji qi zhanwang* (Transformation in Post-war Taiwan and Its Perspectives), Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2007; *Taiwan in Transformation, 1895–2005: The Challenge of a New Democracy to an Old Civilization*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2008; *Taiwan yishi yu Taiwan wenhua* (Taiwanese Mentality and Taiwanese Culture), Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2009.

## b) Mainland China

An orthodox Maoism precluded any research on Confucianism, be it classical or a medieval Song-Ming version, since Confucianism was treated as a fundamental ideology of a “feudal” system that was being demolished. In practice, not only it was forbidden to study Confucianism but also all artifacts of a cultural past were treated as antiquated junk that should be confiscated (and it was better to do it voluntarily, just to be safe) and destroyed. Simplification of Chinese characters practically cut off younger generations from any contact with original philosophical texts, which were all written in non-simplified characters, and which are still used in Taiwan and among Chinese diaspora. A wake-up call came a while after the death of the Great Leader when the then ‘cultural revolution’ was recognized as a “lost decade.” In reality, Confucian studies lost two decades.

A policy of “openness and reform” introduced by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 resulted not only in a rejection of the concept of China’s economic development in isolation from the rest of the world but also it allowed for the rebuilding of private capital and attraction of foreign capital into China. Excellent economic results are evident for everyone to see but not necessarily accepted by everyone. A Maoist nostalgia still lingers. Its followers do not wonder how much earlier China could achieve such incredible development (currently the second position in global economy) if Mao Zedong’s dreamy convictions of self-development (*zili gensheng*) could be rejected earlier. Let’s leave alternative history to historians, though, because obviously an earlier change was not possible. However, it is still puzzling why studying modern Confucianism after dozen of years of “detente” and free Confucianism research is still being justified as “Mao’s ideas” or a “convergence of Confucianism and Marxism-Leninism” (sic!).<sup>9</sup> Let’s leave aside this political hedging to focus instead on the fact that China changed for the better in its treatment of theoretical Taiwanese writings.<sup>10</sup> Scientists from both sides hold meetings and symposia together. Chinese scientists use abundantly Taiwanese theoretical achievements and they even study forgotten Confucian folk customs. This of course does not mean that there is a full unification of views in the mainland that were so pursued half a century ago.

There are some reasonable proposals of using Confucian ethics to organize Chinese social life, but there are also some extreme concepts, e.g. those of Jiang Qing<sup>11</sup> who make anachronistic calls to bring back Confucianism everywhere including in politics and to establish “religious Confucianism” as “state religion” etc. Fortunately, these utopias are criticized in mainland China.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Zhu Ruikai, *Dangdai xin ruxue* (Contemporary New Confucianism), Shanghai: Xueling Publishing House, 2006, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> The example could be Zhang Wenbiao, *Ruxue yu dangdai Taiwan* (Confucianism and Modern Taiwan), published by Huaxia Chuban Faxing Jituan Corporation (ed.), Fuzhou: Fujian Renmin Publishing House, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Newer work: Jiang Qing, *Ruxue de shidai jiazhi* (Cardinal Importance of Confucianism), Chengdu: Sichuan Remin Publishing House, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Fan Ruping (ed.), *Rujia shehui yu daotong fuxing – yu Jiang Qing duihua* (Confucian Society and Restoration of Moral Rule. Discourse with Jiang Qing), Shanghai: Publication Huadong Shifan Daxue, 2008.

## II. Practice

### a) Taiwanese practice

A huge Taiwanese contribution to Chinese culture is its preservation of Confucianism during half a century of orthodox Maoist rule in mainland China. Various factors contributed, e.g. Kuomintang rulers who emigrated to Taiwan needed to continue the activity they led on the mainland. Academia Sinica and other universities were recreated on the island, preserving their original names and with the staff evacuated from the mainland. This applied to Gugong Museum with its vast collection evacuated from Beijing even before Japanese invasion. Traditional Chinese writing was preserved, while it got simplified in China. The government supported various initiatives aimed at preserving Confucian legacy. A new, beautiful Confucian Temple – Kongmiao – was built in place of an old one that was destroyed by the Japanese and whose murals attest to its previous beauty and size. This is where annual offerings are made on the master's birthday on September 28 which is rightly considered a teachers' day. Confucius, more than anyone else, contributed to this profession. Of course, this ceremony always takes place in the presence of the highest officials. VIP's are also the ones who allocate funds for reconstruction of Confucian buildings, as opposed to Buddhist or Taoist temples, which are renovated from followers' offerings.

Confucianism is considered a state religion, although arguments never cease whether Confucianism can ever be considered a religion. Some want to consider it only a philosophy and they are happy to point out that Confucius himself was reluctant to talk about deities, saints etc., which was duly noted by his students. Some however point out that he used a concept of Heaven (*tian*) considered as a higher power that provided a ruler with a mandate to govern. Additionally, Confucianism became intrinsically joined to a cult of ancestors and no one was more eager to preserve ceremonies from the Zhou Dynasty than Confucius. Assigning such an importance to a cult of ancestors, or rather their spirits, most likely is caused by the fact that Confucianism was superimposed into earlier animist beliefs. This is why home altars or Confucian temples mainly hold so called name tablets with names of departed beloved ones. There is a partial solution to this religion versus philosophy dilemma by naming one "*ruxue*" (Confucianism as a science) and the other "*rujiao*" (Confucianism as a belief); there is also an unofficial term "*kongjiao*" (Confucianism teachings). In any case, the most convenient is a formula, popular outside China, which treats Confucianism holistically as a philosophical-religious system.

This of course does not preclude further arguments whether Confucianism can be treated as a state religion (*guojiao*) or not. A crowning argument in favor of Confucianism being a state religion in the past was its special position at the imperial court during the times of Confucianist Dong Zhongshu. This is a role that some modern, extreme supporters from the mainland would like Confucianism to play. However, its opponents are pointing out that even during the most privileged period in the 1<sup>st</sup> B.C., other religions were not excluded. In any case, Confucianism in Taiwan was considered a state religion for a reason and Chiang Kai-shek himself boasted of having developed his own (?) diagram of Confucianism. This included a sharp controversy over previously mentioned luminaries of Confucianism who criticized Chiang Kai-shek's authoritarian rule and preferred to express their views out of Hong Kong.

A long period of authoritarian rule by both Chiangs (which was regarded as the longest martial law and caused an isolation of the island) was, despite everything, a period of

continuation of Chinese culture. This was reflected in education programs that contained electives of Confucian ethics connected with patriotism. Democratization of Taiwan brought further successes in this matter, even though democratic rulers tended to accentuate (perhaps excessively) a local culture, a separate history of China etc. Kuomintang's return to rule in 2008 initiated a non-confrontational approach to the mainland and an aim to extend cooperation with the other shore of Taiwanese Strait's. This provides an expansion of scientific exchange, new Confucianism included.

### b) Hong Kong practice

Hong Kong was this particular place in the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century where numerous Chinese scientists, including Confucian philosophers and historians, could find understanding and opportunities to publish. Their dramatic voices in defense of Chinese culture under threat were expressed in a Hong Kong Manifesto written by four Confucian scholars to world leaders in early 1958. Although at a time this cry of despair had no echo, however, after many years, the signatories were proven right by life events. Chinese culture is reviving in the mainland after years of nihilist treatment, nourished by achievements of Hong Kong and Taiwanese scientists. A particular role was played by Chinese University in Hong Kong that is particularly distinguished in the preservation of Chinese culture.

### c) Mainland practice

Contemporary continental practice has many similarities with Confucianism's social function in the Chinese society, except that it is half a century behind Taiwan. It includes academic discussions, national and international symposiums, publications of countless articles and texts. Finally, it also includes practical instruction on promotion of Confucian knowledge in schools. One example of such a practical, teaching approach is the work of Zhu Ruikai *Dangdai xin ruxue* (Contemporary New Confucianism).<sup>13</sup> Apart from key theoretical issues, this work provides practical overview of lectures on reading *The Analecta* on the basis of experiences by Shanghai Pedagogical University.<sup>14</sup>

Zhu Ruikai's work was divided into 11 parts. After an ideological introduction which is cleverly alluding to current ideological tenets of the ruling party, the work aims at a detailed discussion with pedagogical students of the following concepts: 1. Humanitarianism, 2. Self-improvement, 3. Confucius and marriage and family, 4. Relations with neighbors and friends, 5. Ceremonies and music, 6. Progressive political ideas of Confucius, 7. Ideal Confucian society, 8. Evolutionary approach of Confucius to Chinese history, 9. Confucius' ideas of Heaven (*tian*) and demons and spirits (*gui shen*), 10. Confucius and learning, 11. Confucius about himself and opinions of his contemporaries.

At the first glance, the most important issues that should be taught are those of family and society relations according to Confucius. However, the internal structure of the primer clearly suggest which values are truly important to the organizers of study of *The Analecta*, the key work written by master's disciples. For example, in chapter 3. Confucius and marriage and family, there are two issues to be taught: a) marital duties (*fufu youyi*) and a union of respect and love (*jing'ai jiehe*) and b) Confucian culture of filial obedience (*xiao*) and hierarchy (*ti*).

<sup>13</sup> Zhu Ruikai, *Dangdai xin ruxue* (Contemporary New Confucianism), Shanghai: Xueling Publishing House, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184 et passim.

In the first issue, the interpretation refers to a preference for spiritual values of a partner and not a commentary on the external attributes. However, it ignores such issues as a male domination of women, so characteristic of Confucianism. In the second issue of filial obedience, obviously the accent is on children's duties toward their parents. After half a century of destruction of Chinese families in the mainland, the indifference towards elders is not surprising and at the same time the state is unable to provide decently for the old. The only option is therefore to return to a form of a Confucian relationship with elders in order to replace the state in elderly care. At the same time, there is a complete silence on the subject of ceremony, ritual, etiquette and connected matters of the cult of ancestors, and especially the cult of ancestors' spirits. Let's add that such a selective approach to tradition is presented as "development of advantages of Chinese culture of virtue *xiao* and the development of elderly care" which in turn is a "new input by the Chinese nation in solving of a global problem".<sup>15</sup>

There are attempts to reform some of the basic Confucian tenets, both on the mainland and in Taiwan. For example in Taiwan, professor P'ei-jung Fu explains that the well-known Confucian saying *Ke ji fu li* (to overcome oneself and to bring back ceremonies) as means "to be able to decide oneself about applying norms of etiquette." The argument for using the second meaning of the word *ke* (first one is "to overcome" *kezhi* or "to limit" *yuesu*), i.e. "to be able to" (*nenggou*) is that Yan Yuan, a disciple of Confucius, first got rid of any desires.<sup>16</sup> It seems that these are simply nuances of interpretation and even though Confucian texts have been studied for more than two and half thousand years, we cannot always be sure what interpretation is the right one and what Confucius really meant. Especially that the doctrine's most important work, *The Analecta*, was created by Confucius's disciples who only after his master's death wrote down his teachings in a form of questions and answers. Despite any reasoning, re-interpretation in a social context may prove secondary to the simplest interpretation imposed by a general understanding of the text at the present moment.

One of the most attractive ways of propagating Confucian moral values is through a publication for Chinese sinology students (*guoxue*) so called moral Confucian stories *diangu*. I am providing some examples in translation from the Chinese original. Here they are:

### **1. There is no two Suns in the sky (*Tian wu er ri*)**

Liu Bang, when he became the Emperor Gaozu of the Han Dynasty, he was still treating his father with great reverence. Following the virtue of filial obedience, he still visited him every few days and each time he would kneel down for a ceremonial bow. After a while, the father's servants decided that it was not appropriate for an emperor to make such bows to anybody. Therefore, unofficially, they advised the father that "the same way as there are no two suns in the sky, there are no two emperors on earth. Although the emperor is your son, sir, but this is a ruler and even though you are his father, how can you accept his bows as a courtier towards your ruler?" Liu Bang's father recognized their arguments and decided not to accept his son's bows anymore. When Liu Bang visited again, the father was standing modestly at the door not daring to look up. When he saw his son, he hastily withdrew inside the house. Liu Bang was surprised and when he learned the reason for his

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>16</sup> P'ei-jung Fu, *Kongmen shi dizi* (Ten Disciples of Confucian School), Taipei: Lienching Publishing, 2011, p. 8.

father's behavior, he issued an edict naming him the Highest Emperor (*Taishanghuang*) and he continued bowing ritually to his father.<sup>17</sup>

## **2. It's better to see it once than to hear a hundred times (*Bai wen bu ru yi jian*)**

During the Han Dynasty there were tribes called Western Qiang (Xiqiang- proto Tibetans) who lived west of Huangshui River. They became less rebellious after emperor Wudi conquered Xiongnu tribes. The next emperor Xuandi sent his General Liang Anguo with a mission to bring peace. He learned that some tribes are asking for amnesty but peace was still not settled. Soon after some Xiqiang tribes crossed the Xijiang River and joined forces with Xiongnu, winning a battle against an expedition led by general Liang Anguo. The emperor Xuandi did not know what to do and asked an old General Zhao Tingguo whom should he send to assess the situation. The old general said that it is best to go oneself. The emperor asked him again how many people and horses he should assign against West Qiangs but the general again answered that "it is better to see once than to hear a hundred times. From the back lines, it is hard to assess correctly so the best would be to send me to the front so that I could figure out the best strategy." The emperor did so and sent Zhao Tongguo who analyzed the situation on the spot and then, playing one tribe against the other and weakening others, he finally brought peace to Western Qiang.<sup>18</sup>

## **3. Seat of power – within four seas (*Si hai wei jia*)**

In 199 A.D. Liu Bang as Emperor Gaozu from Han Dynasty achieved a unification of China after many years of battles. When he arrived in Chang'an he saw a magnificent palace and many buildings built by Xiao He. He was very upset and cried out: "How is this possible that in a country that does not yet have peace, the people live in poverty and a defeat is a very real possibility, you are building a palace for me!" Xiao He was not moved: "It is precisely because there is unrest in the country that we have to build a palace. Son of Heaven is of course guaranteed an abode anywhere within the four seas but what harm would a beautiful palace do to his authority? Besides, all his vassals from four corners of the land will be able to come here for an audience and future generation will save money on construction." Hearing that, Liu Bang cheered up and decided to move the capital from Luoyang to Chang'an.<sup>19</sup>

## **4. To bring a wrapped horse on a horseback (*Ma ge guo hu*)**

There was a very distinguished General Ma Yuan during the Eastern Han Dynasty. When he turned 62, there was an uprising at the edge of the country so he was asking to be sent again to Wuling mountains. Long ago, the emperor had sent his army there but it was defeated. The Emperor Guang Wudi was debating sending a general of such an advanced age. The general was ignoring his age and was chomping at bits to go into battle: "I can still put my armor on and go into battle so I am begging your Highness to let me lead the army again." The emperor agreed and made him the leader of the expedition. Ma Yuan used to say "a man's duty is to die in a battle and to return as a corpse on a horseback." A year after starting out on the expedition, Ma Yuan died of hardships and an illness. So, his saying came true that he returned as a corpse on a horseback.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Zhang Chenghua (ed.), *Guoxie diangu quan zhidao* (Compendium of Confucian Tales *diangu*), Beijing: Zhongguo Gongren Chubanshe Publications, 2011, p. 40.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

### **5. The most important thing – everything under Heaven (*Yi kuang tianxia*)**

Confucius was once deliberating a value of humanitarianism with his disciples. Zilu said: “once Prince Huan from Qi principality killed his elder brother named Jiu. When his teacher learned of this deed, he committed a suicide. However, a different teacher named Guan Zhong not only lived on but also helped Huan prince to rule the land. Can such a man be considered a humanitarian?” The master said: “Guan Zhong was virtuous and humanitarian. Because he exhibited an unusual courage, Qi principality became prosperous, its people became valiant and feared by all other peoples and prince Huan from Qi became a top ruler.”

Zigong could not accept a view of his master and said: “How can you ever consider Guan Zhong humanitarian if, according to customs, his pupil’s murderous deed warranted a suicide?” Confucius smiled patiently and explained to his disciples: “A man should not be judged by small actions or events. This would be unjust. Just think, could the Qi principality gain power without Guan Zhong? Could prince Huan become the first ruler without Guan Zhong? We owe the order we have in the country to Guan Zhong and we should be grateful to him to this day. If he was not around, the Qi people would probably still walk around with unkempt hair, poorly shod and dressed like wild people. How could such a man with vast knowledge and talent be compared with with simple self-destruction and a waste of talent...”

Zilu and Zigong hung their heads and started nodding to their master’s words.<sup>21</sup>

### **6. To limit oneself and to are about public good (*Ke ji feng gong*)**

The following story is included in a biography of Ji Zun in “Chronicle of Late Han Dynasty:” Zun was very careful and modest, he self limited and cared about public good, he lived his entire life as a simple scholar and he left no inheritance. “Ji Zun, whose second name was Disun, lived during eastern Han Dynasty in a city of Yingyang. He sought learning since he was a child, he lived very modestly, and after his mother died he carried earth to her grave with his own hands.” In the year 24 A.D. the commander Liu Xiu departed with an army against Yingyang. Ji Zun failed to escape a conscription and he was called in to be an army judge. He was always a just judge but one day he condemned to death a man from Liu Xiu’s entourage. The commander got angry and attacked him, crying out that “when you hit a dog, you are not paying attention to who is his master.” However, his faithful courtier replied: “Lord, you wanted severe discipline in the army. Therefore, if the judgment was just and people praise him and you would want to punish him for this verdict, people will start minding only their own good. How will then he maintain an authority in the army?” Liu Xiu saw the reason behind his courtier’s words, hanged his anger into joy and named Ji Zun his general. May years after his death, the Emperor Guang Wudi created a aphorism: to limit oneself and to care for public good “which describes someone who makes great demand on oneself and serves wholeheartedly the public cause”.<sup>22</sup>

### **7. In Lu principality – not many Confucians (*Luguo shao ru*)**

Once the prince Yuan from Lu principality received Taoist Zhuangzi and said: “there are quite a lot of Confucians in the land these days but I have not heard of that many following your teachings. There are really so many Confucians?” – Zhuangzi replied. “I have not noticed that many.” The prince insisted: “Impossible. In Lu almost every man wears Confucian

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

robes – is it so hard to notice?” Zhuangzi explained: “I heard that Confucians wear round hats to stress their knowledge of the Heavens, they also wear square shoes to stress their knowledge of Earth and their jade and sumptuous robe are to attest that their judgment is correct. However, a noble man who gained wisdom does not have to dress so well so I doubt that those people have really understood Confucian teachings. If you doubt my words Your Highness, please command that those in Confucian robes who cannot prove understanding of the doctrine get condemned to death.” The prince did just that and it turned out that Confucians in fancy robes disappeared. But there was still one left who was parading in his robes in front of palace gates. He was then called in front of the prince. The man answered all questions with ease. Zhuangzi stated: “Lu is a large land but only you are worth of a Confucian name. Can we still claim that there are a lot of Confucians?”<sup>23</sup>

### **8. It's not a shame to ask (*Bu chi xia wen*)**

Kong Yu, a scholar from Wei country, was known for his love of knowledge and amazing modesty. After his death, the ruler of Wei gave him a title of “Prince of Writers” (*wengong*); therefore he was subsequently called Kong Wenzhi.

Zigong, a Confucius disciple who was also of Wei origin, decided that Kong did not deserve his title. Therefore he asked his master: “There are many similar scholars, even better ones, so why was this one given a title of Prince of Writers?” Confucius laughed and said: “Kong Yu, despite being smart and clever, he studied hard and if he did not understand he would shamelessly ask people who were in lower rank or had less knowledge than himself. He had therefore a trait that is hard to come by. This is why he was named a ‘Prince of Writers’.” Upon hearing Confucius words, Zigong finally accepted it.<sup>24</sup>

### **9. Confucius lost a horse (*Kongzi ma yi*)**

Once Confucius went for a journey with Zigong and other disciples. They got tired of a long travel and sat down by the roadside but they lost master’s horse. They were looking for his horse for a half a day until they finally found it foraging in a peasant’s field. Zigong volunteered to recover the horse and Confucius agreed. He was gone for a long time and when he finally came back, he was still without the horse. This is what happened. Zigong presented his reasons to the peasant but he ignored that and did not return the horse. However, there was another peasant who paid his respects to the master and offered to go and convince the villager to return the property. He went to him and this is what he said: “You work a field in the east and I work one in the west. The crop looks the same in both fields so how can the horse understand that it is not supposed to eat yours?” The peasant cheered up and said: “Now when you are talking, I can understand, unlike that weirdo before you, who was impossible to understand.” He untied the horse and returned it.<sup>25</sup>

### **10. Zilu attends teachings (*Zilu shou jiao*)**

Zhong You, called Zilu, lived during the times of Spring and Autumn and he hailed from Lu principality. He became one of the “seventy two venerated” disciples of Confucius. He was brave and understood state issues. However, at the beginning of his apprenticeship with Confucius, he did not appreciate his teachings. This came out during one of his conversations with the master.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 152–153.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

## Confucianism: Past and Present



Confucian Imperial Academy in Beijing (Guozijian 国子监), built in 1302. View of a Hall (photo: A. Slawinska)



Confucian temple (Kongmiao) in Beijing (photo: A. Slawinska)



Entrance to Confucian Academy Yuelu (Yuelu Shuyuan 岳麓书院) built in 976. Changsha, Hunan province (photo: A. Slawinska)



Statue of Confucius teaching, Yuelu Academy (photo: A. Slawinska)



**An annual ceremony held on Sept 28 to make offerings on Confucius birthday in his temple. In Taiwan, this day is also celebrated as Teacher's Day (photo: Taipei Kongmiao)**



**R. Slawinski meeting Mrs. Chen, a Kongmiao representative (photo: Taipei Kongmiao)**



Confucius insignia: a fan (*shan* 扇) and a parasol (*san* 繖)  
(photo: Taipei Kongmiao)



A symbolic offering of "five animals"  
(photo: Taipei Kongmiao)



Confucian orchestra instruments (from the left) Chinese Bamboo Panpipes or Multiflute (*paixiao* 排箫); Far East litofon (*biansheng* 编磬); Time Bell (*zhuanli* 铸钟), and Lyng Tiger – idiophon non-metallic (*wu* 敔) a wooden instrument with a 27 teeth comb (photo: Taipei Kongmiao)



A choir and dance troupe during a Confucian ceremony (photo: Taipei Kongmiao)

When they met for the first time, Confucius asked: “What is your favorite occupation?” Zilu did not fully understand the question and said: “I like sword fighting.” Confucius became more clear: “This is not what I mean. I heard that you are talented and that your gift from Heavens and hard study could provide for a great future, could they not?” Zilu was doubtful. “Can learning give power?” Confucius replied: “Of course. For example if a ruler chooses not to employ talented officials, it will be hard for his country not to fail. If a student does not gain his friends’ help, his character can go bad. The same way you cannot whip an unruly horse, the same way you cannot be straightening a strong bow. If people are willing to accept somebody’s opinion, they will perfect their character. It is enough to study and there is no learning that cannot be learned. People who turn their backs on humanitarian values and morality, can get into conflict with state law any minute. That’s why we say that a noble man cannot stop studying.”

Zilu was still not convinced and he asked again. “In southern mountain there is a type of bamboo that is very straight and it does not require any straightening to make arrows that can pierce a buffalo skin. That’s why they say that some things are inherently perfect. Why one should always learn?” Confucius replied: “You are right but if you add to the arrow some feathers, a sharp tip in the front and you smooth the arrow, will it not travel farther?” Upon hearing these words, Zilu thanked him saying that he profited a lot from this discourse.<sup>26</sup>

### **11. Important visit in the city (*Zhaoyao guo shi*)**

Once Confucius undertook a journey to spread his views in the lands of Zhou kingdom. On the news of his arrival in the principality of Wei, Lady Nanzi, the wife of Prince Ling, advised his entourage that if they want to visit the prince, they have to visit her first. Confucius was therefore forced to visit her. When he entered the reception hall, lady Nanzi was hidden behind a curtain and when Confucius bowed to her, she bowed back, shaking her bracelets to announce her presence. Later, Confucius was saying that he did not really wanted to visit her but since he was received, he had to give bow to her ritually as if she was the prince. Zilu was not very pleased with that and thought that the master did not have to do it. Confucius was however of a different opinion: “I visited Nanzi to spread my teachings. Let the Heavens crush me if there was a different reason.” Confucius spent over a month in Wei principedom. One day, Prince Ling and Nanzi went on an outing outside the palace. A trusted eunuch was with them inside a carriage and Confucius was following in a second one. They were crossing the streets of a city with a great pomp and circumstance but the inhabitants were ignoring them. What’s more, some were even demonstrating their ill will and disgust. Confucius was very moved: “Truly, I have not seen here any people who would love morality more than they love women.” He was disgusted with the land of Wei and he left it for a principality of Cao.<sup>27</sup>

### **12. Three moves for learning (*San qian zhi jiao*)**

Mencius was still a child when his father died. He lived with his mother near a cemetery, where children often parodied funeral ceremonies. Their mother frowned upon such inappropriate child play and she decided that this was not a good place to raise her son. They moved then to the center of the city but they found themselves near a market. Of

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 168–169.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 228–229.

course the young Mencius, who had a gift of comedy, now liked to play seller haggling. A caring mother decided that again that this is an inappropriate location for a youngster who needed to study and should not learn trading. They changed abode again, this time near a school, and this was considered an ideal neighborhood by the mother.

One day the young Mencius came back from school while his mother was weaving cloth. “How’s school?” she asked. “Fine, as usual,” said Mencius lightly. Such nonchalance got her mad. She grabbed a pair of scissors and she cut up her cloth in anger. Now the careless student got really scared. And her tirade started. “You are wasting a chance to learn something the same way I wasted this cloth! If you do not study now, you will have to take any lousy job later!” And so on... Mencius, really scared, started studying hard, he became a disciple of Zisi (Confucius’s grandson) and thanks to exceptional hard work he became the second Confucianist in the land.<sup>28</sup>

### **13. Su Xun burns his texts (*Suxun feng gao*)**

A famous writer and his sons, Su Shi and Su Yu, created “one of the eight schools during the end of the Tang and a beginning of the Song Dynasties.” However, when he was young, Su Xun did not like to study, did not like reading books and he led a careless life. Only when he turned 27 years old, did he start forcing himself to read. He became more knowledgeable after 10 years. After a year of preparations, he decided to take upon a challenge of imperial exams but he failed twice. He was stubborn though and he decided to persevere. One day, a black smoke started coming out of his house. When his neighbors ran in, they were surprised to discover that it was Sun Yu himself who was burning his own texts, over a hundred works that he deemed unworthy. He decided to write them again. In eight years he did indeed write his most important works: “Chronicle of Han,” “Theory of Balance,” and “Strategy.” They all gained an approval of Ouyang Xiu, the member of Hanlin Academy who admitted that his style is better than Liu Xiang’s and he presented Su Xun to the Chancellor’s Board. In this way, after so much perseverance in gaining knowledge and writing ability, Su Xun in one decade became a great man.<sup>29</sup>

As we can see, the choice of Confucian tales is not accidental. Some of them have always been popular (e.g. number 1 and 2) and the quoted text serves only a reminder. Some others are clearly addressing desired qualities: self-limitation (6), modesty (8), good expression (9), appreciation of learning (10), creating good condition for learning (12), or finally, overcoming laziness and achieving success due to one’s hard work (13).

We are therefore dealing again with a selective approach to Confucian tradition to advance certain social attitudes.

### **III. Conclusions**

1. Research on various interpretation of texts, looking for similarities between Song-Ming Confucianism and Kant philosophy, studying various influences of other doctrines on modern Confucianism and an analysis of Confucianism applications in other countries (Japan, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan) – all this will continue (despite advanced research and digitization), perhaps till the end of the world. This proves an exceptional durability of classic Confucianism as well as a relativity of interpretations. There is a

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 164.

particular demand for a system of values that would enable social engineering aimed at prevention of negative social attitudes (egoism, hedonism, life on credit, social indifference) and a propagation of social attitudes that would replace the state's role in elderly care.

2. Ideas that will probably eventually get marginalized include: a promotion of political Confucianism by extreme Confucianists (Jiang Qing) and an invitation to return to classic tradition without later additions or "aberrations." This is because it is too politicized and it ignores huge social changes after 1978, creating a potential competition for governing people's souls by the current system. The nouveau riche may perhaps be socially minded and participate to certain degree in social initiatives (e.g. supporting NGO's) but they will not necessarily support a system of self-improvement, which is treated as an element of Confucian domination, a new "state religion." Followers of other faiths (Buddhists, Taoists, Christians, Moslems) will not be satisfied with scrap offerings of the Confucian table allowing them to exist under an umbrella of Confucianism as a state religion.
3. A grand-scale, optimistic project of creating all over the world a thousand Confucian Institutes of which half already exist will most likely fulfill its role of preparing cadres of people who know the Chinese language and who are so indispensable for economic purposes. It would however create a better understanding that would profit both China and the world if these Institutes had a role to strengthen Chinese culture *par excellence*. And even then, one should not expect that popularizing Confucian values and Chinese philosophy will establish Confucianism as an equal partner with other values already existing in the West. Despite Singapore's success as a multinational society or many examples of "Asian values" in business, and even if Confucius Institutes double in number, a modern Confucianism cannot replace on a global scale neither Christianity, nor Islam, nor Rights of Man nor liberal democracy. Confucianism will remain in highest regard – as a local phenomenon of East Asian societies – and only in this way it will participate in global cultural legacy.
4. A further process of returning to a traditional Chinese culture on the mainland will largely depend on whether the ruling party in the period just prior to 2012 congress will decide that it is advantageous to strengthen their power and keep social order through further use of social functions of modern Confucianism (ethics, loyalty, harmonious society, self limitation and self improvement, elderly care). We must remember that those in power were mostly participants in the 'cultural revolution.' Today, they are middle-aged people in key positions and they may not necessarily be enthused by Confucian ideas and at the same time they may have a different perspective on Maoist orthodoxy than the rest of the world. Their memories of youth include seductive images of ignoring any authority, including a moral one.

Therefore, it seems plausible an appearance of a lasting compromise of rejecting any extremes: a "government of souls" would be given to Confucians (i.e. applying a political Confucianism) or a continuation of an authoritarian rule in a Maoist style. What could win is a symbiosis of Confucianism (in its pro-social version) and Deng Xiaoping's views (understood as a continuation of state capitalism, a continuous increase of China's role in the global arena, criticism of liberalism etc.). The effect would be an increase of China's power on the basis of Western technologies. This is what generations of thinkers from

Kang Youwei to Sun Yat-sen dreamed of exacting that. They supported a modernization of China and at the same time they were under a great influence of traditional Confucian culture.

It seems that in the long run, the future of Confucianism in continental China will be decided not by study of text supported by the authorities (this is recommended to various parts of the society, including prisoners during re-socialization) but it will be determined a slowly emerging relationship between the society at large to Confucian values. After all the society does not have other alternatives in absence or weakness of other beliefs and half a century of unattractive orthodox Maoism. With a selective approach to tradition and a universal acceptance of Confucian ethics of humanitarianism (*ren*) understood as decent treatment of fellow man and a cultivation of virtue of filial obedience (*xiao*) that requires elderly care – human relationships in China could get largely improved. At the same acceptance of virtue of loyalty (*zhong*) might satisfy the rulers' appetite for social peace – what is determined by a Confucian's term of “harmonious society” (*hexie shehui*).



## Notes on Contributors

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