

Introduction

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The present issue of *The Journal of Asian Studies* is dedicated to problems linked to the specific features of Chinese modernization, as viewed through the lens of Modern Confucianism. It contains selected contributions from the international symposium, *Contemporary Confucianism and Chinese Modernization*, Reykjavik, 7–8 September 2013, which was organized by Geir Sigurðsson, in cooperation with the Northern Lights Confucius Institute and the Chinese Studies Department of the University of Iceland.

In international Sinology, this current of thought has been translated with various, sometimes colourful terms, which range from *Neo-Confucianism*, *Contemporary* or *Modern Neo-Confucianism*, to *New*, *Modern* or *Contemporary Confucianism*. The first group, which includes the term “Neo-Confucianism”, is impractical because it is often confused with the term that, in Western sinology, generally denotes the reformed Confucian philosophies of the Song and Ming periods (*li xue* 理學 or *xingli xue* 性理學). A similar confusion can be found in Chinese discourses, which commonly designate this current with one of the following expressions: 新儒學, 現代儒學, 當代儒學, 現代新儒學, 當代新儒學, etc. In our view, the Chinese expression 現代新儒學 is most appropriate, given that in China (as opposed to European sinological discourses), the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties has never been associated with the concept of New Confucianism 新儒學, and thus the character that signifies “new” in this phrase is not problematic. Instead, for the English translation, given that we are dealing with philosophies, social theories and ideologies that belong to Chinese modernity we have decided to use the term *Modern Confucianism* in the title of this special issue.

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Modern Confucianism arose in China at the edge of the previous century and was later developed further by theorists from Taiwan, and, to a lesser degree, from Hong Kong. Unlike the People's Republic of China, where Confucianism was considered to be the "ideology of outdated feudalism" and therefore silenced (at least formally) until the 1980s, in Hong Kong and Taiwan, both of which were defined by post-colonial social discourses, a number of intellectuals began opposing the growing Westernization of their societies already in the 1950s. Due to the multilayered cultural, national and political situation in Taiwan, intellectuals from that country played an important role in developing this new philosophical current from the very outset.

However, the last two decades have seen intense research and an increasingly open debate regarding the postulates and discourses of the new Confucianism philosophy also in the People's Republic. Academic groups such as *Research into the intellectual current of Contemporary New Confucianism* (Xiandai Xin rujia sichao yanjiu 現代新儒家思潮研究), which was founded in November 1986 by the philosophy professors, Fang Keli 方克立 and Li Jinqun 李錦全, have been especially active and influential in this area. Some Modern Confucian scholars in the PRC (e.g. Jiang Qing 蒋庆) have criticized Taiwanese Modern Confucianism for deviating from the original Confucian principles and being overly influenced by Western liberal democracy. These scholars have proposed Constitutional Confucianism (also known as Political Confucianism, or Institutional Confucianism) as an alternative path for China, within the trilateral parliamentary framework.

Despite these controversies, the revival of Confucian philosophy in the PRC, together with increasing interaction among philosophers in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, have the potential of contributing enormously to the reintegration of Chinese philosophical life after the politically conditioned divisions of the latter half of the 20th century. Furthermore, Confucian thought, from its origins to contemporary interpretations, offers both new areas of possible convergence or fusion with Western thought, and a platform from which Western philosophy can be constructively criticized. Indeed, the Modern Confucian current primarily grew out of the search for a synthesis between Western and traditional East Asian thought, in order to elaborate a system of ideas and values capable of resolving the sociopolitical problems of the modern, globalized world. The scholars belonging to this stream sought to reconcile "Western" and "traditional Chinese" values in

order to create a theoretical model of modernization that would not be confused or equated with “Westernization”. Because they viewed modernization primarily as a rationalization of the world, they explored their own tradition for authentic concepts that were comparable to certain Western paradigms deemed essential for modernization.

As one of the most influential and important streams of thought in contemporary East Asian theory, while also representing a crucial part of the new, dominant ideologies in the P.R. China, the so-called Confucian revival is considered by many scholars in Chinese studies to be of utmost importance in terms of research and investigation. However, while many books and articles on this topic are available in Chinese, Western academic studies remain few and far between.

In taking this situation as their point of departure, the authors of the present collection analyze the central values of Confucianism, and interpret them within the very different Chinese and Taiwanese socio-political contexts in order to evaluate their impact on the dominant, contemporary ideologies. The authors also examine the main elements that enable the amalgamation of traditional Chinese values into the framework of capitalistic ideologies and axiological contexts. The present special issue thus not only examines the main Modern Confucian philosophical approaches, ideas and methods, but also explores the political, social and ideological backgrounds of the current revival and its connections with the ideological foundations of East Asian and, most especially, Chinese modernity.

The contributions to this special issue address four different research areas. The volume opens with a foreword in Chinese by Prof. Lee Ming-Huei, member of the Academia Sinica in Taiwan and an internationally recognized authority on Modern Confucianism. The Chinese text is accompanied by a short abstract and a longer summary in English. In focusing on Modern Confucian political theory, the author explains the significance of the theory of the “Development of Democracy from Confucianism”, as elaborated primarily in the works of the Taiwanese Modern Confucians.

The second section, entitled *Modern Confucianism as a New Chinese Ideology*, consists of articles by Geir Sigurðsson (University of Iceland) and Bart Dessein (Ghent University). Sigurðsson’s article analyses the debates surrounding Confucianism as a stimulant for economic activity and the recent attempts to rehabilitate Confucianism in the PRC. Bart Dessein’s contribution instead

addresses the issue of whether Modern Confucianism can be regarded as a “civil religion with Chinese characteristics”, and focuses on how politico-religious narratives that reiterate China’s Confucian tradition serve to create a sense of belonging and sharedness in a community.

The next section is entitled *Philosophical Approaches*, and consists of articles by Jana S. Rošker and Tea Sernelj (both from the University of Ljubljana), who explore a number of concepts crucial to Modern Confucian theory. In her essay, Jana Rošker explains how the third generation of Taiwanese Modern Confucian philosophers changed the framework within which traditional Chinese philosophical inquiry had been carried out, and the importance of the concept of immanent transcendence within this process. Tea Sernelj’s article instead focuses on one of the leading representatives of the second generation, Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 (1903–1982), and elucidates some of the key concepts in his philosophical thought.

In the final section, entitled *Confucian Values and the Contemporary World*, Loreta Poškaitė (Vilnius University) and Monika Gänßbauer (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg) introduce some of the multifarious connections within this specific area of inquiry. In her article, Loreta Poškaitė discusses the role of *xiao* 孝, one of the central Confucian virtues, in contemporary intercultural dialogue, while Monika Gänßbauer explores Zhang Xianglong’s 張祥龍 idea of a “Special Zone for Confucianism”, and its controversial significance for experimental areas in contemporary Confucian discourses.

Although the authors of the present collection often hold very divergent views regarding many aspects of the Confucian revival, they all share a complex intellectual culture which enables them to explore the Revival and its manifold issues with variety, subtlety, dynamism and an openness to dialogue with Chinese philosophy. We hope that the collection before you will contribute to the realization of our common goal and that Chinese philosophy will finally assume its rightful place in world philosophy. Because Modern Confucian efforts to revitalize and reconstruct traditional Confucian thought can also be seen as an attempt to counter the dominant ideological trends and preserve Chinese cultural identity, the present collection will hopefully also contribute to the development of theoretical dialogues between “China” and “the West”.

Jana S. Rošker, Chief Editor