



**Ancient Chinese Political Thoughts:  
Some Reflections on Confucian Political Thoughts**

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**Abstract:**

China's rapid rise after 1990 is one of the major international political economic developments. Studies on modern China provide different explanations to understand the modern China. The current scholarships in China, however, do not explain enough about political Confucianism despite the fact political Confucianism has been the noticeable trend in China with a revival of Confucianism and traditional culture. This study attempts to understand Confucian political thoughts. The study primarily uses secondary sources to explain the historical trends related to political Confucianism.

**Key words:** China, Politics, tradition, Confucianism, Nationalism, Authoritarian, and Democracy

**INTRODUCTION**

China's economic development suggests that the country has eradicated absolute poverty. Available data from China's National Bureau of Statistics for the year 2018, suggest that "against an international poverty line of \$1.90 per day, the poverty rate had declined to below 0.5 percent. This suggests China has reduced the number of poor people by close to 800 million since 1980" (Lugo, Raiser & Yemstove, 2021). China's economic modernization stories challenge the western theory that political democracy creates better opportunities for economic development. Scholars such as Milton Friedman argued that a higher degree of rights fostered economic development (1962), and a wealth of other studies suggest that democracy promotes economic liberalization (Peev and Murrler, 2012), and that democracy is preferable for long-term and sustainable growth (North, 1990; North, 1993; Olson, 2000).

While the Chinese communist party (CCP) claims that its economic policies and leadership effectively contributed to the current positive economic development, noted Confucian scholars such as Zhang Hongliang from Nanjing, China argue that Confucian tradition of hard working and meritocracy energized Chinese people to work hard when the opportunity was created by the CCP (Personal communication, Zhong Hongliang, June 21, 2021). For modern Confucians, China's progress was made possible due to inherent connections between Han-Chinese people and capitalism as Confucians consolidate their power while demanding common people to work harder to realize so-called

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Chinese dreams. In this historical evolution and development, it is important to examine Confucian political thoughts to understand modern China. This essay, therefore, would attempt to examine Confucian political thoughts to understand the dynamics of ancient or pre-modern China.

In the development of human civilization, political thoughts play crucial roles in shaping societies. That basic trend triggered different socio-political thoughts. Asian societies have produced wave of political thoughts at different stages of economic development from the different corners of Asia, from India to China. These political thoughts reflect the nature of society and its struggle, and quest for peaceful and harmonious society. Chinese history records complex and complicated political thoughts.

In the development of human civilization before the 5th and 6th centuries, China's achievement is second to none in the world. But the achievement is widely different from that of any other country. China has none of the religious fervor of the Hebrews or Indians, China takes little interest in mystic or metaphysical thinking, in which the Greeks and Germans excel; China makes no claim to a development of objective science. In what respect, then, may China claim a place in the history of human civilization? China's great thinkers, past and present, have concentrated their energies on problems in this one field, in the field of Political Philosophy and of the Philosophy of Life. Consequently, the conclusions of Chinese thinkers often reveal deep insight, surpassing the conclusions of other peoples in the world. These they may well bring as their contribution to the World Exposition of Civilizations.

These things are true of the past. However, Chinese people changed their course of history with the development of nation state in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Only in the last hundred years has China meet a world in which nationalism is a ruling passion. It has been swimming against the current and has almost been submerged. In her distress and travail, she has frequently complained against her forefathers because of the lack of nationalism. So, for us to-day the important question, only to be answered when the schools of philosophy are re-evaluated, concerns the place which the doctrine of super-nationalism shall hold in the China of the future. Super-nationalism, the characteristic attitude of the thinkers of China, advocating universal peace, world brotherhood against the nationalism of the Western world, must be re-thought under the conditions of our own day.

Western societies contributions to humanity are huge. Modern political developments in Europe gave birth to Liberty and equality. This suggests repression and oppression existed in western societies so there were movements for better polity. On the other hand, China had its own experiences. Chinese experiences would not mirror the western modern nation state development. However, it is incorrect say that people in China lived without any fundamental rights and spaces for pluralism. Except the Emperor alone, everyone in the state is equal in the sight of the law, with equal personal and public rights. Chinese authorities, according to Hongliang, believed that the power is there to serve people and this concept "advanced by our forefathers of 2,000 years ago, have sunk deep into the hearts of the people, and are accepted as unalterable as the laws of nature" (Personal communication, Zhong Hongliang, June 21, 2021). In practice, also, these things are true. A notable illustration of this is the fact that while slavery and class distinction have not entirely disappeared in the West, to the Chinese mind such things are like a fossilized stone of 2,000 years ago. Furthermore, the rights of man in Europe were won as the result of a class struggle: in China they come as a gift. So, it is natural they are more treasured in the West than here. But for a class

struggle to take place, there must first be a class system. In China the class system long ago disappeared; so, the struggle cannot exist. Again, we cannot consider that a class struggle is an admirable thing; were it continued, political development among men would sink lower and lower till all class distinctions were obliterated. But as in the development of China the people acquired a measure of rights without experiencing the cruel struggles of the West, it is nothing to be ashamed of, even if she were not proud of it. But, in short, the explanation is that the Chinese people have been taught to believe in the equality of men for so long that even the strongest of rulers has not been able to ignore it (Chi-Chao, 2001).

During the period (600-200 B.C.) the question of the wisdom of the policy of interfering with the liberty of the people formed a topic of the hottest debate among the scholars. The principle of non-interference exercised an irresistible authority over the emperors and their ministers of later ages. It is therefore an historical fact that after the Qin and Han dynasties, the liberty of the average man in China far surpasses that of the European before the French Revolution. True, incidents have not been wanting in which ambitious emperors have misused their power and corrupt officials have abused their office. The liberty of the people has been violated. But officials have been impeached, and sages of all times have recognized and taught the people's right to revolt against arrogant emperors. In this atmosphere of comparative freedom, the Chinese people have been able to maintain a free development of individual rights. This alone accounts for their professing existence as a people.

Democracies often defined by how political personalities win power and how system responds to people need (Bynander, & Hart 2006). The concept of "by the people" is the key marker in democracy because legitimacy is recognized by elections. The problem of government "by the people" lies, not in the theoretical conception, but in the practical application. What system offers a practical model? Does the forum of the Ancient Greeks, or the majority rule of the representative system of the West, or the new experimental Soviet organization? And if there is no practical solution in Europe or America to-day, what could one expect of historical China? For there the handicaps of social organization, geographical and otherwise, make it impossible to experiment with methods. So, the leading political thinkers of China attempted to carry out a spirit of democratic rule under a monarchical government. And though the ideal was not realized, yet it has sunk deep into the minds of the Chinese people. Despite the oppression of tyrannical rule, the democratic spirit has been undaunted. If we regard the birth of the Republic in China as a sudden outburst without historical background, our thinking is all wrong.

Regardless of the geographical nature of societies, it is important to note that societies breed different forums for views. In some societies, spaces were/are radically compromised. In ancient or pre-modern China, there were spaces for different schools of thoughts to exist peacefully: -a wide plain on which many kinds of people must live-has given the people a power of accommodating themselves to various schools of thought, so that even controversial and conflicting schools may develop side by side without injuring each other. The elastic nature of the people is such that incompatible views can be skillfully harmonized in a composite product. The value of this Chinese power, whereby different viewpoints may exist peacefully side by side, whereby incompatible views may be harmonized, is of inestimable value to mankind. In the realm of thought, scholars doubt the existence of absolute truth; in the realm of practice widely different policies emerge from

the various ideals. This can be seen by a consideration of the past two centuries of European political and economic theory. New theories are appearing with perplexing rapidity, some of which have found expression in definite and concrete systems. But with the rise of every new doctrine, defects are discovered, so many and so various that men are thrown into doubt or despondency and question every form of customary institution. Desperately reaching out for some new panacea, men are disillusioned as a mother who looks in vain for a lost child. The thoughts inherited from the forefathers of China may be immature or even fragmentary, but they cannot be altogether valueless to the present age.

The value of a political theory or of a social practice is never absolute. Different members of societies have different customs; but the customs are not of absolute validity. We must not be so presumptuous as to think that our way is the only way. Nor should one conceal his disease and shun the doctor. The hiding of shortcomings never leads to progress. On the other hand, the Chinese people should bear in mind that a study of the defects as well as the excellencies of their country's political thought has a value. For society to-day is the result of the social heritage of all past generations. This social heritage is the result both of customs and of thought. The thought of the past unconsciously influences the present generation, often with an indisputable authority derived from history. It is thus that the will of the people is produced. Without the sanction of the people's will, no political institution can be effective. It is true to say that no political institution will survive a day unless it grows out of a popular demand or receives the passive assent of the people.

#### **PRE-MODERN CHINESE POLITICAL THOUGHTS**

Though civilization and human activities for socio-political mobilization share very long history in China, there was no evidence to suggest that concrete socio-political were existed "BEFORE the coming of the great teachers, Confucius, Laotze, and Motze, under whose inspiration definite systems of philosophy were evolved and schools of thinking were founded" (Chi-Chao, 2001). Before these political thinkers China's political thought was fragmentary and unorganized. Yet no adequate conception even of the work of the great philosophers, is possible unless the background of their thought is understood; the earlier work is the basis of the later scholarship. All the great thinkers of China lived during the three hundred years between 530 and 230 B.c., the Golden Age of Chinese philosophy. It was preceded by a period of fragmentary thought and incomplete institutions, the precursors of the achievements of the age. But despite the height of the cultural development, and the fact that at that time history was first recorded, reliable source materials for study are scarce.

Feudal China was home to knowledge and innovations, but it was tightly restricted to elite circle. Though there was a movement to democratize the knowledge to the masses, an immediate improvement came in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with the collapse of the Qing dynasty. The post-Qing dynasty political authorities created spaces for Han-Chinese to learn from the west (Ramon & Haiiao, 2007). Confucius and Motze taught " Education without Discrimination ", and thus the spread of knowledge was greatly accelerated after 1911. It is important to note that both Confucius and Motze urged political rulers to treat scholars with respect and honor. Due to intervention from these political thinkers, there was a sea of changes in relations between rulers and scholars: "all rulers went out of their way to pay respect to lowly scholars" (Ramon & Haiiao, 2007). In important capitals scholars assembled in large numbers to study or to teach. So was facilitated the exchange of

knowledge and the development of learning. Books were common. Men were known to possess numerous books. Many books must have been in circulation, and private libraries not uncommon. There was therefore both material equipment and mental impetus for education.

Before Qin and Han dynasties, many schools of learning came into existence. After the Qin and Han dynasties, these schools are either grouped as the " Writings of the Hundred ", or classified as six schools and nine branches, according to the nature of their studies. But the distinct types of thinking were four, namely Taoist, Confucian, Motze (Pao, Ames, 2017), and the Legalist schools. Others were variations of these types:

(a) The Taoist School believes that Nature is all powerful and is perfection. Nature in contact with human efforts loses its original quality. The political philosophy of this school is therefore founded on the ideal of absolute freedom and rejects all forms of interference even to the extent of denouncing government as unnecessary. Taoism basically would not stand for big government that would seek both control and interference in common people daily life. Its ideal is anarchist society where there are not any regulations and controls from the above.

(b) The Confucian School believes that society is founded on the fellow-feeling of mankind which, arising from immediate contacts, can be extended to the remotest relationships. Politics is therefore constructed on ethical relations (Maspero, Henry. 2014). Since mutual respect and co-operation between individuals this human fellow-feeling should be fully developed possible in order to obtain relative freedom and relative equality. They believe also that enlightened politics must be built upon the foundation of an enlightened people. To enlighten the people, constant care must be taken of their physical and spiritual well-being. So, both Education and the Distribution of Wealth are tenets of this school. Their ideal is an ethical ideal.

(c) The Motze School believes, as the Confucian, in human sympathy, but denies human discrimination. It insists that every man should abandon self and submit to a supreme ruler. Its political philosophy is founded on the ideal of absolute equality, but it denies absolute freedom. This verges on ecclesiasticism and may be called neo-theocracy (McEvoy, 2007).

### **Some Reflections On Confucian Political Thoughts**

Confucius (551 -479 BCE), according to Chinese tradition, was a thinker, political figure, educator, and founder of the *Ru* School of Chinese thought (Ames, & Hall, 1987). His teachings, preserved in the *Lunyu* or *Analects*, form the foundation of much of subsequent Chinese speculation on the education and comportment of the ideal man, how such an individual should live his life and interact with others, and the forms of society and government in which he should participate. Fung Yu-lan, one of the great 20<sup>th</sup> century authorities on the history of Chinese thought, compares Confucius' influence in Chinese history with that of Socrates in the West.

### **Confucius Ethics**

Confucius' teachings and his conversations and exchanges with his disciples are recorded in the *Lunyu* or *Analects*, a collection that probably achieved something like its present form around the second century BCE. While Confucius believes that people live their lives within parameters firmly established by Heaven—which means both a purposeful Supreme Being as well as 'nature' and its fixed cycles and patterns—Confucius argues that men are responsible for their actions and

especially for their treatment of others. This hinted an establishment of humane political authority and order where rulers would work hard to improve the lives of common people.

Confucius represented his teachings as lessons transmitted from antiquity. He claimed that he was “a transmitter and not a maker” and that all he did reflected his “reliance on and love for the ancients” (Creel, 1949).

Confucius pointed especially to the precedents established during the height of the royal Zhou (roughly the first half of the first millennium BCE). Such justifications for one's ideas may have already been conventional in Confucius' day. Certainly, his claim that there were antique precedents for his ideology had a tremendous influence on subsequent thinkers many of whom imitated these gestures. But we should not regard the contents of the *Analects* as consisting of old ideas. Much of what Confucius taught appears to have been original to him and to have represented a radical departure from the ideas and practices of his day.

Confucius also claimed that he enjoyed a special and privileged relationship with Heaven and that, by the age of fifty, he had come to understand what Heaven had mandated for him and for mankind. Confucius was also careful to instruct his followers that they should never neglect the offerings due Heaven. Some scholars have seen a contradiction between Confucius' reverence for Heaven and what they believe to be his skepticism regarding the existence of ‘the spirits.’ But the *Analects* passages that reveal Confucius' attitudes toward spiritual forces (Creel, 1949) do not suggest that he was skeptical. Rather they show that Confucius revered and respected the spirits, thought that they should be worshiped with utmost sincerity, and taught that serving the spirits was a far more difficult and complicated matter than serving mere mortals.

Confucius' social philosophy largely revolves around the concept of *ren*, “compassion” or “loving others.” Cultivating or practicing such concern for others involved deprecating oneself. This meant being sure to avoid artful speech or an ingratiating manner that would create a false impression and lead to self-aggrandizement. Those who have cultivated *ren* are, on the contrary, “simple in manner and slow of speech.” For Confucius, such concern for others is demonstrated through the practice of forms of the Golden Rule: “What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others;” “Since you yourself desire standing then help others achieve it, since you yourself desire success then help others attain it” (Creel, 1949).

The devotion and respect to older or top hierarchy is one of the crucial teachings of Confucianism philosophy. This requires devotion to parents and older siblings as the most basic form of promoting the interests of others before one's own. For Confucius, social harmony occurs through the balance relationship between different social hierarchies. Individualism was deeply rejected as societies need shared ethics and responsibilities within a lineage where their generational position had imposed on them and what obligations toward those senior or junior to them were associated with those roles. The extended family was at the center of these hierarchies and could be regarded as a microcosm of their workings. One who behaved morally in all possible parallel structures extending outward from the family probably approximated Confucius's conception of *ren*.

Subjecting oneself to ritual does not, however, mean suppressing one's desires but instead learning how to reconcile one's own desires with the needs of one's family and community. Confucius and many of his followers teach that it is by experiencing desires that we learn the value of social

strictures that make an ordered society possible (See *Lunyu* 2.4.). And at least for Confucius' follower Zi Xia, renowned in the later tradition for his knowledge of the *Book of Songs*, one's natural desires for sex and other physical pleasures were a foundation for cultivating a passion for worthiness and other lofty ideals (*Ibid*).

### **CONFUCIOUS POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY**

Social Confucianism is rather hierarchical to build a humane society where top authorities would seek respect and control from the below. Political Confucianism is continuation of social Confucianism.

Political Confucianism acknowledges “a politics of virtue that can be understood in two ways. First, politics in Confucianism aims to promote certain virtues and social relationships it defines as good; second, Confucianism conceives that politics can be successful only if the people in power are virtuous” (Chan, 2006). Therefore, legitimacy of the political authority comes through the set of good virtues at the top level. Moreover, Confucius' political philosophy is rooted in his belief that a ruler should learn self-discipline, should govern his subjects by his own example, and should treat them with love and concern. “If the people be led by laws, and uniformity among them be sought by punishments, they will try to escape punishment and have no sense of shame. If they are led by virtue, and uniformity sought among them through the practice of ritual propriety, they will possess a sense of shame and come to you of their own accord” (Vogelsang, 2010). It seems apparent that in his own day, however, advocates of more legalistic methods were winning a large following among the ruling elite. Thus, Confucius' warning about the ill consequences of promulgating law codes should not be interpreted as an attempt to prevent their adoption but instead as his lament that his ideas about the moral suasion of the ruler were not proving popular.

The political institutions in Confucius confronted instability and thus people suffered. He attributed this instability and tensions to the fact that those who wielded power as well as those who occupied subordinate positions did so by making claim to titles for which they were not worthy. When asked by a ruler of the large state of Qi, Lu's neighbor on the Shandong peninsula, about the principles of good government, Confucius is reported to have replied: “Good government consists in the ruler being a ruler, the minister being a minister, the father being a father, and the son being a son” (Vogelsang, 2010). For Confucius, societies will face challenges and tensions when hierarchies were compromised.

Confucius says to his disciple Zilu that the first thing he would do in undertaking the administration of a state is *Zhengming*. In that passage Confucius is taking aim at the illegitimate ruler of Wei who was, in Confucius' view, improperly using the title “successor,” a title that belonged to his father the rightful ruler of Wei who had been forced into exile. Xunzi composed an entire essay entitled *Zhengming*. But for Xunzi the term referred to the proper use of language and how one should go about inventing new terms that were suitable to the age. For Confucius, *Zhengming* does not seem to refer to the ‘rectification of names’ (this is the way the term is most often translated by scholars of the *Analects*), but instead to rectifying the behavior of people and the social reality so that they correspond to the language with which people identify themselves and describe their roles in society. Confucius believed that this sort of rectification had to begin at the very top of the government, because it was at the top that the discrepancy between names and actualities had

originated. If the ruler's behavior is rectified, then the people beneath him will follow suit. In a conversation with Ji Kangzi (who had usurped power in Lu), Confucius advised: "If your desire is for good, the people will be good. The moral character of the ruler is the wind; the moral character of those beneath him is the grass. When the wind blows, the grass bends" (Vogelsang, 2010).

For Confucius, what characterized superior ruler was the possession of *de* or 'virtue.' Conceived of as a kind of moral power that allows one to win a following without recourse to physical force, such 'virtue' also enabled the ruler to maintain good order in his state without troubling himself and by relying on loyal and effective deputies. Confucius claimed that "He who governs by means of his virtue is, to use an analogy, like the pole-star: it remains in its place while all the lesser stars do homage to it" (Vogelsang, 2010). The way to maintain and cultivate such royal 'virtue' was through the practice and enactment of *li* or 'rituals'—the ceremonies that defined and punctuated the lives of the ancient Chinese aristocracy. These ceremonies encompassed: the sacrificial rites performed at ancestral temples to express humility and thankfulness; the ceremonies of enfeoffment, toasting, and gift exchange that bound together the aristocracy into a complex web of obligation and indebtedness; and the acts of politeness and decorum—such things as bowing and yielding—that identified their performers as gentlemen. In an influential study, Herbert Fingarette argues that the performance of these various ceremonies, when done correctly and sincerely, involves a 'magical' quality that underlies the efficacy of royal 'virtue' in accomplishing the aims of the ruler.

Generally, Confucianism is being divided into two categories. They are mind Confucianism and political Confucianism. "Mind Confucianism" and "Political Confucianism" are a pair of terms first coined by Jiang Qing, an exponent of Mainland China New Confucianism, to denote two traditions recognized in Confucianism after Confucius. These traditions contrast with each other in many respects. First, the former is created out of "existential concern", or "concern of life salvation", while the latter is out of "institutional concern", or "concern of political legitimacy". Second, the former holds that human nature is innately good and therefore approaches the issue of elevating the human mind and human nature almost wholly by means of self-cultivation. The latter, on the other hand, takes a realistic point of view of human nature and deems it empirically bad. It holds that rituals, institutions, and penalties are critically important for improving human nature and for keeping men and women from moral degeneration. Third, the former is aimed at purifying one's personal life to become a sage or saint, while the latter is directed towards the construction of a desirable and stable political system and the betterment of society. Mind Confucianism generally deals with inner stability and spiritual prosperity while political Confucianism is oriented to the outer political structure of social realism (Jiang, 2003).

Political Confucianism is mainly focused on society and social relations while Mind Confucianism primarily concerned with the spiritual life of individuals. It holds that in order to create a harmonious and orderly society, it is not sufficient just to cultivate individual virtues. Necessary institutions must also be built to correct people's behavior and to establish healthy social relations. As pointed "political Confucianism cares about social-political reality. It differs from Mind Confucianism, which is concerned mostly with metaphysical and philosophical concepts and reasoning. It recognizes the constant change in the social-political reality and stresses the importance of establishing concepts and names to correspond with the changing reality. It accepts the necessity and legitimacy of transforming the social-political reality and seeks to serve such



needs. For example, prevalent in the Kung-Yang scholarship are the ideas of the restoration of forms and substances and the newly anointed king's reforming old institutions and creating a new political system. As one can see, the scholarship of Political Confucianism advocates social and political reform instead of resisting it" (Jiang, 2003).

To be specific, Mind Confucianism is a tradition consisting of the teachings of Zeng Zi (505–436 BCE), Zi Si (481–402 BCE)<sup>6</sup> and Song-Ming NeoConfucianism. In a sense, modern overseas New Confucianism can also be included in this tradition. Political Confucianism refers to the School of Gongyang Studies, which flourished chiefly in the Han and late Qing Dynasties. Xunzi (c. 313–238 BCE), a pre-Qin philosopher, Dong Zhongshu (179–104 BCE), the Early Han Dynasty scholar who successfully promoted Confucianism as the official ideology of the Imperial state, He Xiu (129–182), a major scholar of the Gongyang School in the late Han Dynasty, and Kang You Wei (1858–1927), a leading Confucian reformist at the end of the Qing Dynasty, are the chief exponents of this tradition.

Though political Confucianism guided ancient Chinese political societies, it Political has been long ignored till the Qing dynasty despite the fact Qing dynasty was primarily led by the Manchus. Modern Confucian scholars took efforts to bring the isolated school of thought to the mainstream during the Qing period. Political legitimacy is the central part of Political Confucianism. As a matter of fact, political legitimacy is the central question of any political thoughts, and political legitimacy is the prerequisite to, all political systems, political processes, political activities and tactics, without which everything political loses its meaning and value. For political Confucianism to be legitimized, a political power or regime must simultaneously meet three conditions: (1) it must be at one with, or sanctioned by, the holy and transcendent Dao (i.e., the Heavenly Way) as expressed or implied in the Confucian Scriptures and as interpreted by the prestigious Confucian Scholars; (2) it must not deviate from the mainstream of a national cultural heritage or break the historical continuity of a nationality; (3) it must comply with the will or endorsement of the common people (Jiang, 2003).

The first condition is of the divine foundation of a political power, which can be symbolized by Heaven. The second is of the historical foundation of a political power symbolized by Earth, since national culture and civilization are closely connected with regions on Earth. And the third is of the human or secular foundation of a political power, symbolized by Human. These are the so-called "*three dimensions of political legitimacy of the politics of the Kingly Way*" a political idea rooted in traditional Chinese political culture.

Jiang in his work on Political Confucianism provides some key thoughts on Political Confucianism:

"The three dimensions of the legitimacy of political power constitute the central content of the politics of the Kingly Way; it pertains to the fundamental question of determining the validity of a political regime. The Gongyang Scholars held that "the King is he who penetrates the three of Heaven, Earth and Human", and that "the Kingly Way combines the three into one" — these words mean that a political regime cannot be valid unless it conforms simultaneously to the tri-dimensional legitimacy of "Heaven, Earth and Man". Heaven refers to the dimension of transcendence and divinity, for in Chinese culture Heaven can be understood as a quasi-personalized being with supreme ruling power or a sacred, transcendent, moral principle. Earth refers to the dimension of historical continuity of cultural tradition, for history and culture usually appear and develop in a specific territory on earth. Man refers to the dimension of human will and

their desire, for peoples' pro or con towards a political power directly determines whether a political regime or authority is obeyed or not. The Doctrine of the Mean reads: "He who attains to the sovereignty of the world has three important things": "the Way of the true ruler is applied before Heaven and Earth and found to be without contradiction in their operation, laid before spiritual beings without question or fear" — this indicates the legitimacy of transcendence and divinity; "it is tested by the experience of the Three Kings and found without error... and can wait a hundred generations for a sage to confirm it without a doubt" — this indicates the legitimacy of historical continuity of cultural tradition, and "it is rooted in his own personal life and has its evidence in the following of the common people" — and this is directed to the legitimacy of human will and desire. From the perspective of the politics of the Kingly Way, the ruling authority depends on the approvals of the Heavenly Way, national tradition and the peoples' will. In other words, the politics of the Kingly Way embodies the Way (or Dao), the historic tradition and the peoples' will, and it can thus, to the maximum extent, make the power to rule the qualification to rule and make citizens' obedience a duty due to them. If a political power fails to simultaneously meet the qualifications of the tri-dimensional legitimacy...it would be frequently pushed to the verge of turmoil or collapse. Therefore, the Confucian politics of the Kingly Way aims at finding an all-round and comprehensive solution to the problem of the legitimacy of political power, with a view to establishing a stable and harmonious political order of long-duration" (Jiang, 2003).

The third element of political Confucianism deals with legitimacy of political power from common people. This concept meets the political dynamics of modern political idea of political pluralism and democracy. However, Jiang argues that this democratic dimension of legitimacy should not have superiority over the other two dimensions. A political system is legitimate if and only if all three dimensions of legitimacy are properly balanced, with no one dimension being superior to the others. Jiang argues that it is the ancient Chinese "moderate and harmonious" way of thinking anchored deeply in the Book of Changes and the Springs and Autumns Annals that makes this non-linear and understanding of political legitimacy possible (Jiang, 2003).

Political Confucianism seeks to establish historical continuity of national characters. The dimension of historical continuity of nationality is the most controversial one among the three, but Jiang insists that this dimension is indispensable. He cites Edmund Burke's view to support his stance. As we know, from Burke's perspective the state is an organic body, politics is the outcome of historical evolution, and thus social heritage, or even prejudices, should be taken with due respect:

"To avoid, therefore, the evils of inconstancy and versatility, ten thousand worse than those of obstinacy and the blindest prejudice, we have consecrated the state, that no man should approach to look into its defects or corruptions but with due caution, that he should never dream of beginning its reformation by its subversion, that he should approach to the faults of the state as to the wounds of a father, with pious awe and trembling solicitude. By this wise prejudice we are taught to look with horror on those children of their country who are prompt rashly to hack that aged parent in pieces and put him into the kettle of magicians, in hopes that by their poisonous weeds and wild incantations they may regenerate the paternal constitutions and renovate their father's life" (Burke, 1987).

Though Political Confucian scholars such as Jiang would emphasize on the historical continuity, Jiang is cautious not to slide to the extreme of bluntly advocating absolutism. Political Confucianism

encourage rulers to listen to common people so the legitimacy can be earned to consolidate political power.

Political Confucianism is deeply concerned with historical reality. Its leading scholars have had very strong historical and political missions and have striven to realize Confucian socio-political ideals. That mission is why Confucius traveled to many different states attempting to disseminate and actualize his ideals despite many difficulties. Likewise, Xunzi, to realize his political ideals, went to the State of Chi to persuade its prime minister to establish institutions and to serve as a great minister of the states of Zhao and Qin. Dong Zhongshu's three principles of unity between Heaven and man and his restoration of ancient ideals through the adaptation of the institutions of his time marked the final realization of the political ideals of the Kung-Yang scholarship (Dong, 1968)

Political Confucianism embodies the political ideal of Confucianism and its ethical concern for socio-political practice. More specifically, Political Confucianism considers the following political questions: How can a legitimate government be established? How can a political system obtain its legitimacy through the divine and heavenly source? And how can political power be transformed into authority through the system of rites? In addition, Political Confucianism emphasizes both morality and politics, while Mind Confucianism only emphasizes morality because it expects political problems to be solved through purely moral exploration and development.

Finally, Political Confucianism can develop socio-political institutions based on Classical Confucianism. As a matter of fact, it has developed legitimate and effective socio-political institutions based on theoretical Confucian principles in its history. As the Chinese history teaches, during the period of Spring– Autumn (Chan, 2006), China collapsed into chaos due to the rampant warring among states. During this time creating an orderly political system became the main concern of all Chinese intellectuals, but Confucius offered solution to address this most pressing problem.

Mohism did not appreciate the importance of active human intervention within society and therefore could not contribute to the reconstruction of an orderly political system. Legalism completely ignored the importance of moral education and relied on blatant force to create political order. While legalism allowed the state of Qin to unify China, its sole reliance upon power undermined the legitimacy of the Qin Dynasty. As a result, the Dynasty collapsed within two generations. The Daoist school of Huang-Lao may have contributed to the economic prosperity of the early Han Dynasty and the stabilization of the political system, but its acceptance of a naturalistic and fatalistic order likewise caused it to ignore the importance of moral education and the legitimacy of political order. Consequently, Confucian scholars who regarded the task as a historical and heavenly mission shouldered the onerous task of resolving political conflicts and creating a new political order. They advocated the creation of a socio-political order through the Confucian system of rites.

## **CONCLUSION**

This article attempted to provide some basic thoughts to understand the Confucianism in general and political Confucianism in particular. It is important to note that political Confucianism does not advocate totalitarian state and governance as commonly understood. Confucius taught of how one is to govern themselves, and how the state is to govern society. The ways of governing can be seen

in the traditions of forefathers. By returning to these, society can be virtuous and harmonious. Government is seen as a tool to help bring out the best of its people. Confucius saw it as responsible for the wellbeing of its citizens but insists that they not forget their individual roles themselves. In order to properly carry out its role, government must be looked upon by its people for leadership and be respected. The current Chinese society and state should seek inspiration from the Confucian political thoughts so China can prosper better while providing stable socio-economic order while allowing people to express their views and perspectives. Faith of people can be achieved by negotiating with people and opening window for people opinions and aspirations.

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