Chapter 13
Three Political Confucianisms and Half a Century

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13.1 Introduction

Modern Chinese intellectual history was dominated by rejection and criticism of much of Chinese traditional culture and thought in general and of Confucianism in particular (Lin 1979). "Down with the Confucian school" (*dadao kongjiadian*) was one of the slogans of the all-powerful May Fourth Movement in which Chinese intellectuals embraced Western science and democracy and saw China's Confucian heritage as an obstacle to its modernization and quest for power and wealth in competition with the nations of the world. Chinese communism, which was subsequently triumphant in giving rise to the People's Republic of China, was one of the products of the May Fourth tradition of radical anti-traditionalist thought. So was Chinese liberalism, which however failed to exert significant influence on Chinese politics and society in the mainland, or on the island of Taiwan during the authoritarian era of one-party rule by the Nationalist Party.

In the early 21st century, the fates or prospects both of Confucianism and of liberal democracy in China seem to be changing. In mainland China, there has been a revival of interest in classical learning (*guoxue*) in general and in Confucianism in particular. In Taiwan, the transition from authoritarianism to liberal democracy that was initiated by the Nationalist Party in the late 1980s has been successful, as evidenced by the second democratic handover of power from one political party to another in May 2008 with Mr. Ma Ying-jeou assuming the presidency of the Republic of China. The case of Taiwan, as well as the progress made in the democratization of Hong Kong (though much more limited than Taiwan) and the successful practice of liberal democracy in South Korea, raises the spectre of "Confucian democracy" – can a Chinese society with a Confucian heritage become a liberal democracy in which civil liberties and human rights flourish and top government leaders are

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elected by universal suffrage in free periodic elections in which multiple political parties can freely compete? And if this is possible, is it desirable? This can be and should be one of the central issues of contemporary Chinese political philosophy.

Jiang Qing, our subject in this book, opposes the introduction of Western-style liberal democracy in China (Jiang 2003 [abbreviated hereinafter as "PC"]; Jiang 2004 [abbreviated hereinafter as "LF"]). So does Kang Xiaoguang, another influential contemporary Chinese thinker who advocates Confucian benevolent governance (*renzheng*) instead of democracy (Kang 2005 [abbreviated hereinafter as "RZ"]). On the other hand, the most well-known neo-Confucian philosophers of the 20th century fully embrace liberal constitutional democracy in the form that has developed in the West. In the *Manifesto to the World of Behalf of Chinese Culture* published in 1958,[1] they argued that not only are there seeds of democracy in the Confucian tradition, but "constitutional democracy is required by the internal development of the moral spirit in Chinese culture" (Tang 1974, p. 166). Xu Fuguan, who was one of them, wrote as follows: "I often say that whoever really understands and respects Chinese culture will believe that the efforts to build democratic politics today . . . are a development mandated by Chinese culture itself" (Xu 1980, p. 126).

This chapter first introduces the key elements of Jiang Qing's political thought (Section 13.2). It then (in Section 13.3) compares it with that of Kang Xiaoguang, whose thought demonstrates that Jiang is by no means a lone voice in contemporary Chinese political discussion. It then (in Section 13.4) introduces the political thought of Xu Fuguan, probably the most insightful thinker on political philosophy among the neo-Confucian scholars of his generation. The chapter concludes (in Section 13.5) by arguing that Xu's version of Confucian political philosophy, though half a century old, is more persuasive to us in China today than that of Jiang Qing's.

13.2 Jiang Qing

One of the main themes of Jiang's book *Political Confucianism* is to highlight the inadequacies of 20th-century neo-Confucianism that led to its failure to provide a true Confucian political philosophy for China in the modern age. Jiang argues (PC, chap. 1) that this neo-Confucianism, which adheres to the tradition of the Song-Ming learning of the mind-heart and human nature, may be labeled "life Confucianism" (*shengming ruxue*) or "heart-nature Confucianism" (*xinxing ruxue*). He identifies at least two other strands of Confucianism in the Chinese tradition, which he labels "political Confucianism" and "politicized Confucianism" respectively (PC, chaps. 1, 2). Political Confucianism is exemplified by the *Gongyang* learning on *Chunqiu* (the *Spring and Autumn Annals*) and much of Han Confucianism; it follows Xunzi in recognizing the darker sides of human nature, emphasizes the rites (*li*) more than benevolence (*ren*),

and deals with the practical tasks of the reconstruction and maintenance of political and social institutions. It may also be called "institutional Confucianism" (PC 32). Jiang is of the view that while political Confucianism as an official ideology did serve a legitimizing function for the imperial state, it also provided standards for the critical evaluation of the exercise of political power. On the other hand, politicized Confucianism, as exemplified by the Ancient Text Classics school (*guwen jingxue*) of the Han dynasty, which emphasized the sacred status and absolute authority of the emperor, was an ideology serving only the interest of the rulers. Jiang also points out that political Confucianism was actually a dominant strand in Confucianism for most of the time after the Han dynasty.

The strength of life Confucianism lies in its theory of conscience and the heart-mind, the development of the human person, and moral self-cultivation. Jiang points out that life Confucianism is grossly inadequate in failing to generate any specifically Confucian institutional proposal for the construction of the political and social order in modern China (PC, chap. 1). Jiang criticizes the neo-Confucian scholars for their embrace of Western-style liberal constitutional democracy in an uncritical manner (PC 47). While the neo-Confucians suggest that the evolution of Confucian thought in modern times logically and necessarily leads to democracy, Jiang argues that it is neither possible nor desirable that Confucian thinking should lead to Western-style democracy (PC 91). In particular, he criticizes Mou Zongsan's famous theory that democracy may be achieved through the "self-negation of conscience" (PC 57–95).[2] Unlike Mou, Jiang does not consider democracy as it has evolved in the West to be universally applicable to all humankind (PC 46–47, 91). In his view, if China were to democratize in the same way as the West, China would lose her cultural identity and depart from the Confucian way (PC 3).

Although Jiang provides a critique of neo-Confucianism or what he calls "life Confucianism", his purpose is not to denigrate its importance, but only to point out that "life Confucianism" is not the whole of Confucianism, and that what he calls political or institutional Confucianism is equally important particularly in this day and age. He believes that both strands of Confucianism have their rightful domains of existence and can nicely complement one another (PC 5, 38, 117; LF 406). For example, "life Confucianism" when practiced by political leaders will ensure that they will be persons of virtue, integrity, and moral character, and will be genuinely qualified for the task of governance (LF 435). Political Confucianism constructs institutions, structures, and norms that are conducive to the realization of Confucian ideals and that ensure that such realization is not solely dependent on the moral self-cultivation of individuals. In his more recent writings (LF 407), Jiang also identifies a third positive strand of Confucianism – social Confucianism, which is preached and practiced in the community or what is today called civil society, as distinguished from the state or the government apparatus. And he theorizes that the full revival of Confucianism in China would entail the simultaneous development of all these three strands of Confucianism.

What, then, are the precise institutional proposals of political Confucianism for the purpose of political and social reconstruction in contemporary China? The answer was not clear from Jiang's book on *Political Confucianism* but becomes much clearer in his book on *Life Faith and the Kingly Way of Politics*. The central premise of the book is that China should develop a political order that is simultaneously rooted in three sources of legitimacy: transcendent-sacred legitimacy, historical-cultural legitimacy, and democratic legitimacy, or legitimacy based on the will of the people. Jiang then puts forward a proposal for a tricameral Parliament (LF 313–315), consisting of the House of Confucians (*tongru yuan*) (providing the first type of legitimacy mentioned above), the House of the Nation (*guoti yuan*) (providing the second type of legitimacy), and the House of the People (*shumin yuan*) (providing the third type of legitimacy). Some details of the proposed tricameral Parliament are provided in Daniel Bell's chapter in this volume, so they will not be repeated here.[3] The proposal relating to the House of Confucians seems to be derived from the Chinese tradition of governance by Confucian scholars-officials and also partly inspired by Islamic theocratic institutions in contemporary Iran (LF 316); that relating to the House of Nations seems to be inspired by the House of Lords as the Upper House of Parliament in English history (LF 316, 380); and that relating to the House of the People is apparently derived from Parliamentary institutions elected by universal suffrage in the contemporary world.

Legitimacy is a modern Western concept and it is not clear why Jiang uses this concept as the basis of his political philosophy for the programmatic reconstruction of the political order for China's future. He stresses the importance of legitimacy for any political order, pointing out that no political order can rest entirely on physical coercion and every political order needs to win the voluntary acceptance and support of the people (LF 326–327, 438). He believes that his theory of triple legitimacy is not his own invention but can be derived from Confucian classical texts (LF 320–321, 350–352). A political order has transcendent-sacred legitimacy insofar as it is based on the Way of Heaven or expresses the will of Heaven. A political order has historical-cultural legitimacy insofar as it is rooted in the historical traditions of the people as evolved during a long time-span and is consistent with the culture and values of the people. A political order has democratic legitimacy insofar as it is consistent with the will of the people or public opinion. Jiang considers Western liberal democracy inadequate and inappropriate for China because it only has democratic legitimacy but lacks the two other kinds of legitimacy. Jiang claims that he is not against democracy, but considers that democratic legitimacy alone does not constitute a sufficient basis of legitimacy for the Chinese political order. He attempts to theorize on a political order that embraces and yet surpasses democracy (LF 430).

Jiang criticizes liberal democracy as practiced in the West as a system in which people's material interests and lower-order desires prevail and transcendent moral principles are disregarded (LF 295–296, 342). This is because liberal democracy has no built-in institutional safeguards to ensure that transcendent

moral principles will not be violated and that the political order has transcendent-sacred legitimacy (LF 299–300). As regards historical-cultural legitimacy, Jiang suggests that liberal democracy may have such legitimacy in the West because it is itself a product of the history of Western civilization (LF 358–359), but it lacks historical-cultural legitimacy in China (even if it is imported or transplanted from the West).

It is apparent from Jiang's writings that all three sources of legitimacy as theorized by him can be understood in Confucian terms. A political order that is consistent with the Way of Heaven is a Confucian political order that practices rule by virtue (*dezhi*) and benevolent government (*renzheng*) (LF 333). As far as China is concerned, a political order can have historical-cultural legitimacy only if it is Confucian, because (as interpreted by Jiang) Confucianism has been the dominant tradition in Chinese history and dominant force in Chinese culture (LF 324, 443–445). A Confucian political order also has democratic legitimacy, because Confucianism requires the ruler to govern in the interests of the people and in accordance with the wishes of the people (thus Heaven's will is understood as the will of the people, as in the saying "Heaven sees as the people see, Heaven hears as the people hear").[4] In modern times, democratic legitimacy is associated with the election of the government by the people. Jiang recognizes popular election as a vehicle of democratic legitimacy, and his tricameral Parliament includes one house that is popularly elected. It seems that Jiang regards both the Confucian *minben* (people-as-the-basis or government for the people or in the interests of the people) and *renzheng* tradition and the modern practice of electoral democracy or *minzhu* (people-as-the-master or government by the people) as instances of democratic legitimacy (LF 441–443).

In Jiang's thought, not only is Confucianism privileged as supplying all three sources of legitimacy; Confucian scholars and personalities also have guaranteed roles in state institutions. For example, the House of Confucians consists of Confucian scholars nominated by the people and Confucian scholars who have graduated from a state-established Confucian college and been appointed by the state to the House. The president or chairman of the House of the Nation is a descendant of Confucius himself. In a controversial article published on the Internet in 2006 (Jiang 2006), Jiang advocates that Confucianism as a religion (*rujiao*) should be recognized as the official religion, and the state should confer privileges on a Confucian Association formed in civil society. Jiang expressly points out that this proposal has its parallels in some Western states that have established official churches, such as the Anglican Church in Britain (Jiang 2006). He points out that his proposal does not mean that the Confucian Association should be controlled by the state, for in the Chinese tradition, there exists a distinction between the tradition of the Way (*daotong*) (as developed by true Confucian thinkers) and the tradition of politics (*zhengtong*) (as developed by the state) (LF 428–429). He also clarifies that the proposed state endorsement of and support for the Confucian religion does not mean the suppression of freedom of religious beliefs and freedom of thought, and different religions and thoughts should be allowed to exist freely in civil society (Fan

2008, p. 37). But he also suggests that if the majority of the Chinese people were to become Christians, China's national and cultural identity would perish (Jiang 2006).

In his more recent writings (Jiang 2006), Jiang puts forward concrete proposals and strategies for the revival of Confucianism and reconstruction of China's political order. One set of strategies relates to the state, and the other relates to civil society. At the level of the state, Jiang proposes that Confucianism should be affirmed in the Constitution as the state ideology (in effect replacing Marxism-Leninism and the thoughts of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping which are affirmed in the existing Constitution of the People's Republic of China); officials should have received education in classical Confucian texts and passed examinations based on them (a modern *keju* [examination] system resurrected from the traditional Chinese system for the recruitment of officials). In the domain of civil society, Jiang proposes the establishment of a Chinese Confucian Association (*Zhongguo rujia xuehui*) which should be given a privileged status in the religious life of the nation (for example, the Association will design and prescribe the rites for official ceremonies), and the revival of social Confucianism (Confucianism as practiced in people's daily life), including the promotion of the study of Confucian texts among children and students.

It is apparent by now that Jiang is in effect proposing the substitution of Confucianism for Communism as the ruling ideology of the Chinese state. He also considers that the existing political system in China is grossly deficient in legitimacy (LF 294), particularly because the adherence to Marxism is now no more than lip service, unlike the case in the first few decades of the People's Republic of China. And if one applies Jiang's theory of triple legitimacy to the existing Chinese state, its legitimacy deficit is clear and obvious. This probably explains why some of Jiang's writings have apparently experienced difficulties in getting published in mainland China. His book on *Life Faith and the Kingly Way of Politics* was published in Taiwan but not in mainland China. Some of the articles in the book can however be found on the Internet.[5]

Although Jiang is critical of Western liberal democracy and criticizes neo-Confucian political philosophy for its wholesale Westernization, he is not against the borrowing of elements of the Western democratic tradition. Like the neo-Confucian philosophers, he recognizes that a primary weakness in the Chinese political tradition is that it has not developed adequate objective institutional and procedural safeguards to prevent the abuse of political power and to ensure the fulfillment of the requirements of triple legitimacy when rulers fail to practice rule by virtue, rule by the *li* (rites) and benevolent governance (LF 334–335, 374–375). He praises the Western institutional innovation of securing peaceful transfer of power by periodic elections as a great contribution to the civilization of humankind (LF 426–427, 429). He also affirms that there is much that China can learn from Western political practices such as separation of powers, judicial independence, parliamentary government, and constitutionalism (LF 378–380). However, he stresses that any borrowing from Western political institutions can be based purely on pragmatic

considerations, and there is no need to engage in the philosophical project (which he thinks the neo-Confucians engaged in but failed) of trying to integrate or synthesize Western political theories of liberal democracy with Confucian political philosophy (Jiang 1996, p. 123).

It is clear that Jiang rejects some of the main tenets of liberalism and democracy that are taken for granted by most contemporary Western thinkers. For example, his proposal that the state should adopt Confucianism as its official ideology is the exact opposite of the liberal principle of the neutrality of the state, although this is by no means original in the Chinese context, since both the contemporary Chinese state and the traditional Chinese state have embraced their own official ideologies – Marxism and Confucianism respectively. As Joseph Chan points out in commenting on Jiang's political thought (Fan 2008, pp. 37–38), drawing on Rawls' theory in this regard, adopting a "comprehensive doctrine" like Confucianism as the basis of political rule would mean disrespect to Chinese citizens who subscribe to other religious, philosophical, and political beliefs. Jiang's outlook seems to be out of place in a modern pluralistic and open society in which people with radically different values and lifestyles seek to live together in social cooperation. Whereas Max Weber's thesis of the disenchantment of the world seems to be increasing applicable to China, though it originally describes the conditions of Western modernity, Jiang expressly seeks the re-enchantment of the world through political reconstruction (Fan 2008, p. 60). However, even those who share Jiang's despair about the secularization and materialism of modern life and believe in the validity of transcendent-sacred principles will doubt whether Jiang is justified in assuming that as far as the Chinese people are concerned, Confucianism has an exclusive claim to the representation or interpretation of the transcendent and the sacred.

Jiang expressly rejects the principle, which is taken for granted since the Age of Enlightenment in the West, that all persons are equal and are the sovereign in the state (Fan 2008, p. 5). Jiang points out that according to Confucianism, although all persons equally have the potential to grow as human beings and to become sages, in practice people are different in terms of experience, learning, wisdom, and virtues (LF 384). Only the learned and virtuous are qualified to exercise political power; thus it is not true that all people in the state are equally qualified to participate in the running of the state. He therefore rejects the principle of equal rights of political participation on the part of all citizens of the state (Fan 2008, p. 6). He refers to the Confucian distinction between "the superior (or noble or cultivated) persons" (*junzi*) and "ordinary (or mean) people" (*xiaoren*), who are different in terms of learning, cultivation, and intellectual and moral caliber. Democratic politics based entirely on "one person one vote" is, according to Jiang, the politics of *xiaoren* (Fan 2008, pp. 9, 10, 27). It will only seek the satisfaction of the lower-level desires of ordinary people and ignore the claims of the transcendent and the sacred, and of history and culture. Thus Jiang openly advocates rule by the virtuous (*xianren zhengzhi*) or rule by scholars (*shiren zhengzhi*) rather than rule by all the people,

denies that rulers and the people (the ruled) should be considered equal, and defends paternalism to be practiced by rulers with regard to the people (Fan 2008, pp. 16, 61).

13.3 Kang Xiaoguang: By Way of Comparison

We now turn to Kang Xiaoguang, another leading advocate of the application of Confucianism in China's political reconstruction. Although he does not himself use the term "political Confucianism" which as mentioned above was coined by Jiang Qing, his theory can be regarded as another version of political Confucianism. Yet another version is Xu Fuguan's political philosophy, to be discussed in the next section of this chapter. In this section, we introduce the main elements of Kang's political Confucianism, drawing comparisons with Jiang's where appropriate.

Kang notes that many intellectuals in contemporary China consider liberal democracy a panacea to China's ills (RZ xlvii). He disagrees (RZ viii, xviii–xix). He argues that the introduction of Western-style democracy in China would not be able to solve the major problems that she currently faces, such as corruption, poverty, economic problems, and social injustice (RZ xix–xx). Problems such as corruption and poverty can only be gradually overcome as China achieves further successes in economic development (RZ xxi). Kang is of the view that democratization will not only fail to solve China's current problems but may give rise to new problems, such as political instability and risks of secession arising from ethnic conflicts (as the cases of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia demonstrate) (RZ xx, xxiii–xxiv).

Like Jiang, Kang believes that the current Chinese state suffers from a severe legitimacy deficit (RZ xv, 119–122). And like Jiang, he advocates the substitution of Confucianism – particularly Confucian benevolent government (*renzheng*) for Marxism as the fundamental belief system of the Chinese state. This probably explains why his book on *Renzheng: The Third Road for China's Political Development* was not (probably because it could not be) published in Mainland China but was published in Singapore.

Given the legitimacy crisis faced by the Chinese regime, Kang suggests that there are basically two options from which China can choose in mapping its future: either "re-Westernization" (as the embrace of Marxism was also Westernization) (i.e., wholesale Westernization) or re-Sinicization (RZ xlv). Kang theorizes that if the first option is chosen and Western culture triumphs in China, then China will become a Western-style liberal democracy. On the other hand, if Confucian culture revives, then *renzheng* will be practiced as the Chinese system of government. Kang himself advocates re-Sinicization, which includes restoring Confucianism and Confucian *renzheng* as the foundation of the Chinese state. Only such a return to China's tradition and indigenous culture can supply the legitimacy that the existing Chinese state desperately

needs. Kang does not object to learning and borrowing from the West, but insists (like Jiang) that this should be done on the basis of the principle of "Chinese learning as the body, Western learning for use" (*zhongxue weiti, xixue weiyong*) (RZ xlv).

Kang argues that the Confucian doctrine of *renzheng* is less concerned with how political power originates (e.g., whether the government is elected by the people) than with how it is exercised (RZ 124). *Renzheng* is practiced where such power is held in trust for the people and is exercised for the benefit of the people. Like Jiang, Kang characterizes the essence of the Confucian tradition of government as government by the community of Confucian scholars (RZ xxx). And he proposes that government by the Chinese Communist Party be replaced by government by a new community of Confucians which may be produced by the metamorphosis of the Chinese Communist Party (RZ xlviii). In Kang's view, paternalistic rule by such a political elite is justified, with the state educating the people in the virtues (instead of maintaining neutrality as advocated by liberalism) and encouraging their pursuit of the good life and of moral and spiritual excellence (RZ 128–130).

Like Jiang, Kang proposes a two-fold strategy for the realization of what he calls the "Confucianization" (or re-Confucianization) of Chinese politics and society. The first strategy relates to the state, and the second to civil society (RZ xlvii). As regards the state, Kang advocates the "Confucianization" of the Chinese Communist Party, the substitution of "the Way of Confucius and Mencius" (*Kongmeng zhidao*) for Marxism-Leninism as official ideology, the inclusion (or re-inclusion) of the Confucian classics (*sishe wujing*) in the syllabus of the civil service examination, and the re-establishment of the link between the Confucian tradition of scholarship (*xuetong*) and the tradition of politics (*zhengtong*) (RZ xxxii). Moving from the domain of politics and government to that of society itself, Kang proposes that Confucianism should be included in the school curriculum, and Confucianism as a religion (*rujiao*) should be recognized as the official religion (*guojiao*, or religion of the nation) of China (RZ xlviii). Kang holds that freedom of religion should be allowed, while at the same time certain privileges should be accorded to the Confucian religion (RZ xlix). These proposals are very much in line with those of Jiang Qing's as discussed above.

As mentioned above, Jiang recognizes peaceful political transition in accordance with electoral arrangements to be a great achievement of Western civilization. Interestingly, Kang argues that transfer of power by competitive elections is not essential in the Confucian political order he advocates for China's future; instead, a modern equivalent to the traditional practice of *chanrang* (handover of power to those who merit it) can be the solution to the question of the transfer of power (RZ xxxiii, 132–134). Kang actually suggests that this has already been practiced within the Chinese Communist Party in recent decades, with Deng Xiaoping handing over power to Jiang Zemin, and Jiang Zemin handing over power to Hu Jintao (RZ xxxiii, 135).

Like Jiang and the neo-Confucians, Kang acknowledges that in traditional China, safeguards against the abuse of political power were inadequate (RZ xlii). However, he believes that Western liberal democratic institutions are not essential and other safeguards can be devised for the political order of China's future. More specifically, he advocates a political, social, and economic system with the following features (RZ xxxv–xli): market economy, welfare state, "administrative absorption of politics" (with the elites in society being coopted into the government consultative system), corporatism (what Kang calls *she-tuan zhuyi*, with main social groups such as workers and entrepreneurs being organized into trade unions and associations representing their respective interests and the state coordinating with them) which implies freedom of association as its prerequisite, and freedom of the media (so that the press and other media can freely report matters of government errors and mismanagement, and public opinion will be mobilized to supervise government performance and subject it to critical scrutiny).

It may be noted that although Kang rejects liberal democracy as the model for China's political reform, the implementation of some of his concrete proposals, including those relating to freedom of the media and freedom of association, would entail significant liberalization of the existing Chinese political order. So would the implementation of some of Jiang's proposals, such as the election of one house of Parliament by universal suffrage and competitive multi-party elections. However, like Jiang, Kang also draws on Confucianism in opposing the liberal democratic premise of the political equality of all in the state. Kang points out that although Confucianism affirms the equality principle in the sense that all persons have the possibility of becoming sages, it also recognizes that in reality there are people with virtues and people without virtues, and only the virtuous are qualified to rule (RZ xxxi). The tasks of government are a heavy responsibility placed on the intellectual and moral elite, who are subject to particularly onerous moral requirements, and the people are under a duty to accept their teachings (RZ 127). Like Jiang, Kang believes that the will of Heaven is higher than the will of the people, and the Way of Heaven is more fully understood by the community of Confucian scholars than by ordinary people (RZ xxxi). Kang also suggests that in recognizing the inequality of persons Confucianism is more "honest" than liberal democratic theory which propagates the myth of the equality of all and the sovereignty of the people (RZ 127).

13.4 Xu Fuguan

Xu Fuguan (1904–1982) lived more than half a century before Jiang and Kang, in the era of Republican China, Nationalist Party rule, the Sino-Japanese war and the struggle between the Chinese Nationalist Party and the Chinese Communist Party. Unlike Jiang and Kang, he did not start his career as a scholar. He served in the army of the Nationalist regime and rose to senior ranks.[6] After the

communist takeover, he lived his life in Taiwan and Hong Kong. He devoted himself to teaching and scholarship, writing many articles and books on contemporary political issues as well as on Chinese history and philosophy. Together with several famous neo-Confucian scholars (Tang Junyi, Mou Zongsan, and Carson Chang), he co-authored the *Manifesto to the World on Behalf of Chinese Culture* ("the Manifesto") published in 1958,[7] which contains among other things the definitive statement of 20th century neo-Confucian political philosophy. We will first introduce the relevant ideas in the Manifesto in this regard, and then proceed to examine Xu's own political thought.

The thesis of the Manifesto as far as China's political development is concerned is that not only are there seeds of democracy within the Chinese tradition, particularly the Confucian tradition (I will call this "Proposition 1"), but the establishment of a liberal constitutional democracy ("LCD") in China is the internal requirement or necessity of the development of the Chinese cultural tradition itself (I will call this "Proposition 2"). According to Proposition 1, Confucianism is compatible with LCD. According to Proposition 2, the development of LCD in China will (to quote from a passage in the Manifesto) "enable her national character to reach higher planes of perfection and her spiritual life to achieve a more comprehensive development" than ever before (Chang 1962, p. 469 [English translation]; Tang 1974, p. 158 [Chinese original]). It seems therefore that Proposition 2 is a stronger claim than Proposition 1.

As regards Proposition 1, the authors of the Manifesto adduce as evidence both ideas and practices in the Chinese tradition that are considered to be consistent with the spirit of democracy (Tang 1974, pp. 162–165). The relevant *ideas* include, for example, rule by virtue (*weizheng yide*), and the ancient ideas that the will of Heaven is reflected in the people's will, that the ruler should heed the people's views, that political power should be exercised so as to realize the people's wishes, that all under Heaven belongs to the public (*tianxia weigong*) and does not belong to one person, and that everyone has the moral potential to become a sage, thus implying human equality. Very ancient ideas such as transfer of power to the meritorious (*chanyang*) (by Yao and Shun) and rebellion against tyranny are also referred to. The relevant *practices* include, for example, ministers' remonstrance with the ruler, impartial chronicles by court historiographers, institutions such as the prime minister and the censorate, and the recommendation and examination system for bureaucratic recruitment.

The arguments for Proposition 2 are rather complicated in structure, and apparently dispersed in different passages in sections 8 and 9 of the Manifesto. The arguments may be reconstructed as follows:

(1) China's traditional political system was plagued by problems, resulting in dynastic cycles with alternating periods of order and chaos. "In order to break through this situation the only way is to establish a democratic government" (Chang 1962, p. 471; Tang 1974, p. 162).
(2) Some of the seeds for democracy in the Chinese tradition mentioned above "serve to offset the monarch's power and to bridge the gap between the

central government and the populace, although their effectiveness depended solely on the personal integrity of the monarch, since there was no fundamental law or constitution to check him. It is therefore clear that the limitations on the powers of the ruler must be transferred from the ministers to the people outside the governmental structure if they are to be effectual. Towards democracy, therefore, is the natural direction of development for Chinese political history" (Chang 1962, pp. 472–473; Tang 1974, pp. 163–164).

In this context, the Manifesto expressly advocates constitutionalism and peaceful transfer of political power as between political parties (Tang 1974, p. 164).

(3) The ancient ideas of *chanyang* and rebellion against tyranny and that all under Heaven does not belong to one person imply that political power should be transferable. However, "the deficiency of Confucian thought in the past is that it did not understand that the legal system could be used to effect the transfer of the ruler's power so as to realize the wishes of the people" (Tang 1974, p. 164).

(4) The monarchical system is inconsistent with the idea of human equality mentioned above, because it denies that politically and morally the people may have equal status as the ruler. In a democracy such equality can be secured.

(5) In the last paragraph of the section of the Manifesto on the question of democracy, the authors refer to "a more profound reason why the establishment of a democratic government is necessary for the development of China's culture and history" (Chang 1962, p. 472; Tang 1974, p. 165). It is pointed out that even if the monarch practices the ideal of rule by virtue, the people in this case are no more than "passive recipients of virtuous rule, and their status as full moral agents (subjects, actors or *zhuti*) has not yet been secured" (Tang 1974, p. 165). Thus only the monarch is a full moral agent. Interestingly, it is further argued that in this case, the monarch can hardly be said to be truly virtuous and to be an authentic moral agent unless he is willing and ready to make his own position as ruler open and accessible to all and affirm the equal political rights of all. Hence it is concluded as follows:

> The capacity for self-determination by the moral agent requires the possibility of his/her political participation. Here we see a fundamental contradiction between the moral spirit in Chinese culture and the monarchical system. The contradiction can only be resolved by a constitutional democracy that affirms that all are equal political agents (*zhuti*). Thus constitutional democracy is required by the internal development of the moral spirit in Chinese culture (Tang 1974, p. 166).

In line with the Confucian faith of the authors, the Manifesto privileges the moral consciousness and assumes that the subject (*zhuti*) in traditional Chinese culture is primarily a moral subject (agent). It is believed that it is the inner requirement of the development of Chinese culture in this modern age for this moral subject to become a political subject and a cognitive subject as well, so

that China can embrace democracy and science. For this purpose, one of the authors of the Manifesto, Mou Zongsan, developed the theory of the "self-negation" (*kanxian*) of conscience (*liangzhi*), which holds that in order to develop (*kaichu*) democracy and science in the Chinese cultural tradition, the conscience needs to undergo temporarily a process of self-negation.[8] Traces of this idea can be found in the Manifesto itself, when it suggests that the moral subject should temporarily forget itself in order to become a purely cognitive subject (Tang 1974, pp. 160–161). As mentioned above, Mou's self-negation theory subsequently became one of Jiang's targets of criticism.

We now turn to Xu Fuguan's political thought.[9] His political thought is closely linked to his study of Chinese political and intellectual history and of the classical texts of pre-Qin Confucian thought. One of the central notions developed by him is the contradiction of "double subjectivity" (*shuangchong zhutixing*) in Chinese history (Xu 1980 [abbreviated hereinafter as "XS"], p. 104). By this he means that whereas, according to true Confucian thinking, the people should be the subjects (*zhuti*) or primary actors in the political order, in practice in Chinese history the monarch or emperor was the subject or primary actor in the political order. In his view, Confucianism requires the rulers to put aside their self-interests and to serve only the interests of the people. However, in the actual course of Chinese history, such Confucian ideal was seldom realized (XS 385). And Confucianism did not develop sufficient institutional safeguards to restrain the exercise of absolutist imperial power. It was only able to alleviate to some extent the oppressive use of political power (XS 54, 395). Xu stresses that in the course of Chinese history, some Confucian scholars and intellectuals did practice true Confucianism and spoke up and stood up against the abuses of political power; their history has been written in blood and tears (XS 386).

Xu distinguishes between true or original Confucian thought which developed before the Qin unification and its subsequently being distorted or compromised to serve the interests and needs of imperial rule during and after the Han dynasty.[10] For example, he believes that the theory of the Three Bonds (*sangang*) departs from the true spirit of classical Confucianism which emphasizes the reciprocal obligations in and mutuality of the relationship between monarch and minister, father and son, and husband and wife. The ethics of the Three Bonds leads to the subordination of the minister, son, and wife to the absolute authority of the other (superior) party in the relationship and their absolute loyalty and obedience to that party (Xu 1988 [abbreviated hereinafter as "RJ"], pp. 77, 137). Xu is also critical towards the traditional civil service examination, arguing that it was largely an instrument used by the regime to tame and control the intellectuals of traditional China (XS 193).

On the basis of his study of classical Confucian texts, Xu points out that Confucianism understands the system of political rule or government as being established by Heaven for the benefit of the people. "Heaven sees as the people see, Heaven hears as the people hear" (XS 51).[11] Rulers need to win the voluntary support of the people, and political rule should be based on morally exemplary conduct and virtues, rather than coercion. Rulers should practice benevolent

governance (*renzheng*), rule by virtue (*dezhi*), and rule in accordance with the rites (*lizhi*). In particular, rulers should govern in accordance with the interests and the wishes of the people themselves (XS 389; RJ 126, 213), and should not impose their own political blueprint on the people. This is Xu's interpretation of the concept of "doing nothing" (*wuwei*) as a political virtue (XS 105, 111–112; RJ 210). Xu interprets the Confucian precept on the pursuit of righteousness rather than profit (*yili zhibian*) as requiring rulers to pursue the people's interests (righteousness) rather than the rulers' own interests (profit) (RJ 136).

One of Xu's most important and original interpretations of Confucianism lies in his distinction between the Confucian notions of self-cultivation (*xiuji*) and ruling the people (*zhiren*) (RJ 203–220). He stresses that the standards to be adopted in these two domains are different and should not be confused with one another. In practicing self-cultivation, practitioners of Confucianism should impose the highest ethical standards on themselves and practice utmost self-discipline. But this does not mean that as rulers, political leaders, or officials they should impose such standards on the people. This would be oppressive, as encapsulated in the Chinese term *yili sharen* (killing people with ethics) (RJ 205; XS 112). According to Xu, Confucianism applies a different set of standards in the domain of political rule. In political rule, feeding the people (*yangmin*) takes priority over teaching the people (*jiaomin*); the natural life (*ziran shengming*, or physical life) of the people is the uppermost consideration (RJ 18, 197–198, 203). Furthermore, even when it comes to "teaching the people" (*jiaomin*, or education and cultivation of the people), what should be taught is no more than the basic principles of Confucian ethics, such as filial piety, benevolence, righteousness, and fulfilling one's duties to others in the context of ethical human relationships (RJ 199). Thus in Xu's view, Confucianism by no means justifies the kind of ideological indoctrination practiced in modern totalitarian states.

One of Xu's main theses about Confucianism and democracy is that the Confucian theory of the goodness of human nature (*xingshan lun*) provides the moral foundation for democracy (RJ 99).[12] In his view, this positive and optimistic view of human nature affirms human dignity and leads to respect for and trust and faith in the people (or *min* in Chinese) (RJ 152). Xu argues that democracy is based on such respect for and trust and faith in the people. He also argues that the opposite view of human nature – that human nature is basically evil (*xing'e lun*) – would lead to the opposite of democracy: if people are evil and not to be trusted, then authoritarian rule would be justified to keep them from evil (RJ 110, 153). Xu's view in this regard may be contrasted with that of Chang Hao, who argues that Western liberalism is closely associated with the distrust of human beings (particularly rulers) that originates in the Christian notion of original sin (Zhang 1989).

Xu fully embraces Western liberal democracy and believes that it is universally applicable; he expressly points out that there is no specifically Chinese style of democracy (XS 42). He suggests that if Confucius and Mencius were alive today, they would also be in favor of democracy (RJ 191). Xu's writings also affirm a basic proposition in the 1958 Manifesto discussed above: the

democratization of China is not only consistent with its Confucian cultural heritage but would be the natural development of the Confucian tradition and enable Confucian ideals to be better realized than before (XS 59–60). In particular, the historical tragedy of the contradiction of "double subjectivity" as mentioned above can be overcome (XS 126).

Although Xu was a firm believer in and was fully committed to Confucianism, he recognizes that there were deficiencies and weaknesses in the Confucianism tradition. For example, he points out that the Confucian conception of the "five cardinal relationships" (ruler-minister, father-son, elder and younger brothers, husband and wife, friend-friend) did not sufficiently address the relationship between the government and the people (XS 390). He suggests that traditional Confucianism looks at politics mainly from the standpoint of the ruling elite rather than from the standpoint of the people (XS 54–55; RJ 72). He also notices that in emphasizing duties and obligations, Confucianism and traditional Chinese culture did not facilitate the development of the individual subject's self-consciousness and assertion of his subjectivity, legitimate interests and rights (XS 57–58). Thus he suggests that a modernized Confucian philosophy should not only preach the achievement of moral excellence by human beings but also preach liberty, equality, and human rights (RJ 190). At the same time, he believes that Confucian ideas of conscience and moral self-restraint in recognition of the interests of others can enable Western liberal democracy – which originated in the struggle for individuals' rights – to find a firmer moral foundation (XS 53–54). Thus Confucianism can not only give rise to democracy in China but can also provide deeper roots for it in the West.

13.5 Conclusion

Xu wrote at a time when communism was at its heights in mainland China and authoritarian rule was practiced by the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) in Taiwan. He was critical towards both communist totalitarianism and the Kuomintang's authoritarianism, and advocated Western-style liberal democracy for China's future. However, unlike many Chinese liberals in modern times who were critical of traditional Chinese political culture and Confucianism, Xu believed in the reconciliation and synthesis of Confucianism and the Chinese cultural tradition on the one hand and liberal democracy on the other hand. Xu and other neo-Confucian thinkers who co-authored with Xu the 1958 Manifesto were of the view that democratization in China does not mean wholesale Westernization and the abandonment of China's cultural tradition. On the contrary, China's democratization should be, as Xu pointed out, the quest and dream of all those who understand and love the Chinese cultural tradition and Confucianism and who are committed to defending and promoting them (XS 126; RJ 72, 191).

Jiang and Kang write at a time when communism as a secular religion was on the wane in China and indeed all over the world and when China is experiencing an upsurge of nationalism and a renaissance of traditional Chinese culture and thought. Both of them question the legitimacy of the existing regime in China which still proclaims communism as its official ideology. And both of them propose the adoption or re-adoption of Confucianism (in substitution for communism) as the guiding philosophy for the Chinese people. This contrasts with Xu's endorsement of a liberal democratic constitutional framework in which no preference will be accorded to any ideology or political, philosophical, or religious beliefs, and different political parties and programs can freely compete for people's votes in an electoral system.

Although Jiang and Kang do not support the liberal neutrality of the state, neither of them rejects extensive borrowing from Western political and social institutions. For example, Jiang is in favor of a parliamentary system in which one of the houses is popularly elected in periodic elections with multi-party competition. Kang proposes the freedom of media, the freedom of association and corporatism. Both support the market economy with welfare provisions, and a vibrant civil society in which different beliefs and opinions can freely co-exist, although they would also like Confucianism to be recognized by the state as the official religion and to be accorded a privileged status.

The differences between Jiang and Kang on the one hand and Xu on the other boil down to the following issues. First, should Confucianism be privileged as an ideology, religion, philosophy, or belief system endorsed by the state? Second, should there be equality of political rights among all Chinese citizens in the sense that the highest political institutions should be elected by universal and equal suffrage on the basis of free and fair elections? The first question concerns the extent to which the Chinese state should be a liberal state. The second question concerns the extent to which it should be a democratic state.

On the first question, Jiang's argument is apparently that Confucianism should be privileged because it expresses the transcendent-sacred reality and has also been the dominant force in Chinese history and culture. However, it may be questioned as regards the first point why Confucianism should monopolize spiritual truth and why other religions, philosophies, or belief systems that are subscribed to by some members of Chinese society should be discriminated against. As mentioned above, this would constitute disrespect to them and to their human dignity and freedom of belief. As regards the second point, it may be argued that even if Confucianism was the dominant force in Chinese history and culture for a long time in the past, this is not a sufficient reason why it ought to be the dominant force in China's future. Whether it would be so should not be decided by the state but is to be decided by the people in their daily life as Chinese society changes and evolves.

We now turn to the question of democracy. Here both Jiang and Kang on the one hand and Xu on the other hand draw on Confucianism in defending their positions. Jiang and Kang argue that according to Confucianism, although everyone has the moral potential to become a sage, in practice some have

achieved higher levels of learning, cultivation, and virtues than others. Thus there is a Confucian distinction between "superior people" (*junzi*) and "ordinary people" (or mean/average people, or *xiaoren*). And the Confucian thesis is that positions of power and responsibility should only be open to the virtuous. Thus it is not right that everyone, irrespective of their moral and intellectual qualities, should have completely equal rights to political participation, and it would not be wrong to accord privileges to "superior" people.

Xu draws on the Confucian thesis that human nature is good rather than evil to argue that democracy (in terms of equal rights to political participation) has a Confucian foundation. He argues that because human nature is good, people have human dignity, they should be respected and they can be trusted to make judgments and decisions for themselves. Insofar as democracy is a system that trusts the people and entrusts political power to them, it is consistent with this Confucian insight into human nature. Xu also points out that Confucianism requires holders of political power to exercise it in accordance with the interests and wishes of the people, and not to abuse it so as to promote the rulers' self-interest. This is also the principle and objective of democracy. Xu also makes the extremely important point about the distinction between self-cultivation (*xiuji*) and ruling the people (*zhiren*): Confucianism does urge practitioners of Confucianism and the ruling elite to engage in self-cultivation and to become *junzi*, but the distinction between *junzi* and *xiaoren* is only for the purpose of self-cultivation and not to be extended to politics and used to take away or diminish the political rights of ordinary people. Indeed, if ordinary people are to be regarded as *xiaoren* and not to be trusted, this would contradict the Confucian proposition that rulers should rule in accordance with the wishes of the people and win their hearts' support.

In my view, Xu's interpretation of Confucianism which renders it consistent with and supportive of democracy is more convincing than that of Jiang's and Kang's. It is true that, as stressed by Jiang and Kang, Confucianism has insisted that positions of political power and responsibility should be held by the learned, cultivated, and virtuous. But it does not follow that these people (or those who claim that they are such people) should become a self-perpetuating ruling elite who rule without any need to be held accountable to ordinary people (in periodic elections). If Xu is right, then ordinary people can be trusted to recognize who are learned, cultivated, and virtuous enough to deserve to be elected by them to positions of power and responsibility. This means that there is actually no inherent conflict between the Confucian thesis that positions of political power should be held by the learned, cultivated, and virtuous, and the democratic thesis (which, according to Xu's interpretation of Confucianism, is also a Confucian thesis) that ordinary people can be trusted to make judgments and decisions about who deserve to hold positions of political power. In a society with a Confucian culture, the people will recognize and elect into positions of power persons with the moral integrity and strength of character that Confucianism affirms and preaches. On the other hand, if a society does not have a Confucian culture, it would be impossible and un-Confucian for a self-proclaimed and

self-appointed Confucian elite to impose their rule and their values on the people. This would not be Confucianism; it would be totalitarianism, known not to traditional China but well-known to modern China.

I would thus conclude this chapter as follows. The political Confucianism of Xu Fuguan and of the 1958 Manifesto is more persuasive than that of Jiang Qing or Kang Xiaoguang. Although developed more than half a century ago, it can speak to us directly today and resonate in our hearts. The mere substitution of Confucianism for communism as the ruling ideology of a non-liberal-democratic state is, as the Chinese saying goes, "changing the soup but not changing the medicine" (*huantang bu huanyao*). Instead, believers in Confucianism should push for more freedom of expression, freedom of association, and freedom of religion, so that Confucianism – together with other religions or faiths – can flourish in civil society. And when Confucian culture revives and China democratizes, the people of China will then be able to elect into office leaders with the moral integrity and strength of character that is the product of Confucian self-cultivation, who will put the Confucian principles of benevolent governance and rule by virtue into practice.

Notes

1. The authors of the Manifesto were Tang Junyi, Mou Zongsan, Xu Fuguan, and Zhang Junmai (Carson Chang). The Manifesto was first published in 1958 in Hong Kong and Taipei in the magazines *Minzhu pinglun* [*Democratic Critique*] and *Zaisheng* [*National Renaissance*]. The full Chinese version has been re-published under the title of "*Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie"* ["Chinese Culture and the World"] as an Appendix in Tang (1974), pp. 125–192. It has also been published in Tang (1975); Tang (1991), part II; and Zhang (1981), pp. 849ff. An abbreviated English version of the Manifesto has been published under the title of "A Manifesto for a Re-appraisal of Sinology and Reconstruction of Chinese Culture" in Chang (1962), pp. 455ff. For an English summary of and commentary on the Manifesto, see Chang (1976). For my earlier article on the Manifesto, see Chen (2007).
2. On this theory of Mou's, see Mou (1991), pp. 55–62.
3. Note that Bell's translations of some of Jiang's terms are different from my translations here.
4. Oft-quoted passage from "*Taoshi"* in *Shangshu*.
5. See, for example, the collection of Jiang's articles (Jiang Qing *wenji*) at the website of Pinghe College, a Confucian college in Zhuhai: www.pinghesy.com.
6. For biographical information about Xu, see for example Liu (2001), chap. 1.
7. See note 1 above.
8. See note 2 above.
9. See generally Xu (1980); Xu (1988). For secondary sources, see Xiao (1999); Liu (2001).
10. See generally Liu (2001).
11. See note 4 above.
12. For a good critical discussion, see Xiao (1999), pp. 225–232.

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