

# Chapter 4

## On “One-Continuity” in Jiang Qing’s Confucian Thought

Dan Lin

### 4.1 Introduction

Jiang Qing has established the concept of “Political Confucianism” in recent years, expounded its characteristics as distinct from “Mind Confucianism”, and argued for its irreplaceability and irreducibility. The understanding of this concept is imperative for a thorough study of Confucianism. But does the distinction between Political Confucianism and Mind Confucianism lead to a separation of the two? If we do not agree to separate them, does it mean that we must “unite” them in some particular way, such as “from inner sageliness (*Nei Sheng*) to outer kingliness (*Wai Wang*)”? Does such “unity” really conform to the Confucian ideal of “One-Continuity” (*yi yi guan zhi*)? Does it really conform to the traditional Confucian thought of “Oneness of Substance and Function” (*ti yong bu er*)? In this chapter I show how Qing’s distinction between Political Confucianism and Mind Confucianism as well as his understanding of the idea “from inner sageliness to outer kingliness” does not lead to incoherence, but rather to a unity that properly exemplifies the “One-Continuity” of a coherent Confucianism.

### 4.2 The Distinction Between Political Confucianism and Mind Confucianism

Qing holds that Confucianism in the beginning has two parts, namely, Political Confucianism and Mind Confucianism, both from Confucius himself. Each of them has its own distinct characteristics and value that cannot be confused or replaced by the other. Qing states:

---

D. Lin (✉)  
Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China  
e-mail: lindan64@163.com

The Zengzi and Zisi School and the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties are Mind Confucianism, while *Gongyang* Confucianism is Political Confucianism (Qing 1995, p. 1).

Mind Confucianism focuses on the cultivation of the personal life, studying not only the physical but also the metaphysical. It emphasizes the unity of Heaven and Man (*tian ren he yi*). “The major problems that Mind Confucianism wants to solve are problems such as the value of life, the meaning of being, the improvement of personality and reaching moral perfection” (Qing 1995, p. 2). Political Confucianism on the other hand focuses on politics and society and therefore considers such issues as the legitimacy of political orders, the reform and reconstruction of political systems, and historical conceptions of justice. As one can see, Political Confucianism and Mind Confucianism have different emphases and problems to solve. Mind Confucianism can be considered the study of inner sageliness (*Nei Sheng*) since it looks inward, whereas Political Confucianism can be considered the study of outer kingliness (*Wai Wang*) since its focus on society is outward.

### 4.3 What Is the Relationship Between the Two? The *Daxue* View of *Nei Sheng* as Substance and *Wai Wang* as Function

If Qing’s position is that Confucianism has two parts, namely, Mind Confucianism and Political Confucianism, what is the relationship between the two? Mainstream Confucianism since *Daxue* (The Great Learning), which is dominated by Mind Confucianism, holds that the relationship between them is from inner to outer: inner sageliness is the substance (*ti*) while outer kingliness is the function (*yong*). The substance, which rests in the internal human mind, is the foundation of the outer function. To reject this view is to separate substance from function and to deny the idea of the “Oneness of Substance and Function” (*ti yong bu er*). Indeed, in Chinese philosophy, it is generally understood that substance means the original and essence of something, whereas function means its derivative phenomena. What is Qing’s perspective on this?

### 4.4 Qing’s Response to the Substance-Function View

Qing insists that this point of view is partial and untenable.

On the issue of human nature, Political Confucianism does not hold that human nature is good but evil. In contrast, Mind Confucianism, from the transcendent point of view, holds that human nature is good, inherent in the mind and experienced by the original mind (*ben xin*). Since Political Confucianism from the empirical point of view holds that human nature is evil, man must make great efforts to study and change human nature. Besides, to resist the evil

of human nature, political and legal systems are required. Consequently, what Political Confucianism focuses on is not personal cultivation or how one can become a sage; that is the focus of Mind Confucianism. Rather, Political Confucianism focuses on how to make society perfect and harmonious. Man always exists in society; the change of social relations and the perfection of society are the preconditions of the perfection of personal life. Qing argues,

Unlike Mind Confucianism, which is interested in the metaphysical philosophical system, Political Confucianism is interested in real living beings. Political Confucianism holds that the Way (*Dao*) does not exist in some abstract conceptual system, but in a concrete political reality (Qing 2003, p. 30).

Political Confucianism pays close attention to reality as lived by humans, not to the abstract reality, which is the focus of Mind Confucianism. Since Political Confucianism and Mind Confucianism have different characteristics, perspectives, and subject matter, they cannot be “united” forcefully by reducing Political Confucianism to Mind Confucianism or by holding inner sageliness as the substance of outer kingliness and outer kingliness as the function of inner sageliness.

Qing further argues that it is not only that the substance-function view of inner sageliness and outer kingliness is untenable because of the differences between Political Confucianism and Mind Confucianism, this view also ultimately results in the loss of any outer kingliness whatsoever. As he sees it, since the Song and Ming dynasties, Confucianism has predominantly been developed as Mind Confucianism, which has resulted in the underdevelopment of political Confucian wisdom. Contemporary Neo-Confucianism is also predominantly Mind Confucianism, which is witnessed by its Mind Confucianist interpretation of “from inner sageliness to outer kingliness”. According to this interpretation, the way of Heaven and the nature of human beings are inherent in the depths of life, namely the human mind; if this mind is to be cultivated well (namely, inner sageliness), then proper outer activities and the establishment of the necessary political institutions must take place, embodying the way of Heaven and the nature of human beings (outer kingliness).

However, this way of interpreting “from inner sageliness to outer kingliness” has the unacceptable result that it leaves no outer kingliness. Although there is no doubt that the way of Heaven and the nature of human beings can appear in life, nevertheless they cannot be achieved in society nor can their corresponding institutions be established in China, as neo-Confucianism advocates. Such neo-Confucianism faces a risk of decline. Qing holds that proper Confucianism should not be construed primarily as a study of metaphysics as upheld by Mind Confucianism. The way of Heaven and the nature of human beings are meaningful for Confucianism only when they are manifested in the concrete way of real lives. However, neo-Confucianism has understood the way of Heaven and the nature of human beings as abstract philosophical concepts divorced from concrete ways of real lives. Thus, neo-Confucianism has no outer kingliness and in fact “separate[s] substance and function into two” (Qing 2003, p. 19).

#### **4.5 Objections to Qing's Position that Neo-Confucianism Has No Outer Kingliness – Mou's View and "New Outer Kingliness"**

Although Qing argues that neo-Confucianism has no outer kingliness, we know that Contemporary neo-Confucianism is indeed concerned with outer kingliness. "New Outer Kingliness" is a major topic of contemporary neo-Confucianism, and its development is seen as an important task. For example, Mou Zongshan, through transforming Wang Yangming's theory of "inner knowing" (*liangzhi*), has raised a systematic theory of "New Outer Kingliness."

Mou calls for Confucianism to form a system of knowledge modeled on modern science and democratic political systems. To do so, Mou introduces a theory called "the negation of inner knowing". According to him, since inner knowing is only concerned with the moral world in the noumena while science and democracy are concerned with the phenomenal world, in order to have democratic politics following Confucianism, inner knowing, as moral rationality, must "negate" itself to give way to intellectual rationality. Inner knowing thus non-linearly, as opposed to directly, changes itself into a political subject and allows politics to become an independent field. Subsequently, Confucianism may accommodate "New Outer Kingliness", namely, modern science and democracy (see Mou 1990).

#### **4.6 Qing's Response to "New Outer Kingliness" – Science and Democracy as Foreign to Confucianism**

Qing holds that since the negation of inner knowing creates science and democracy, which from the Chinese perspective are at the core of Western values, Mou's "inner knowing" becomes a Western metaphysical concept. If Confucianism were to be used as a foundation for developing a scientific system of knowledge and a democratic political system, it would no longer be Confucianism. For Qing, Mou mistakenly corrupts Confucianism because of his narrow understanding of it; he understands Confucianism only as Mind Confucianism and therefore neglects Political Confucianism. However, Political Confucianism is an equally important aspect of Confucianism. Furthermore, we need not turn to Western science and democracy to build "outer kingliness", as Mou advocates. Traditional Chinese culture provides a resource of political wisdom for Political Confucianism. Qing holds that the "New Outer Kingliness" must be created based on traditional Chinese culture, namely, authentic Confucian resources, rather than from modern Western science and democracy.

## 4.7 The Proper Relationship Between Political Confucianism and Mind Confucianism

Qing has rejected the substance-function view of inner sageliness and outer kingliness as well as Mou’s view of New Outer Kingliness. So what is Qing’s own constructive view? Li Minghui holds that the primary feature of traditional Confucianism is the unity of “inner sageliness” and “outer kingliness”, making it impossible to speak of “outer kingliness” without speaking of “inner sageliness”. However, from Minghui’s perspective, because Qing distinguishes Mind Confucianism from Political Confucianism, “utterly denying the possibility of creating Political Confucianism from Mind Confucianism”, it results in “the loss of coherence of Confucianism” (Minghui 2005, p. 118), since both are derived from Confucianism; therefore, Qing “must acknowledge that the two sides of Confucian thought are incoherent” (Minghui 2005, p. 183). However, whether or not Qing is committed to the incoherence of Confucianism depends on how he understands “the oneness of substance and function” and the Confucian thought of “One-Continuity”.

Wang Chuanshan, a Confucian thinker of the late Ming dynasty, expounds the proper relationship of substance and function: “when speaking of the Way (*Dao*) correctly, one gains substance from function. When speaking of the Way incorrectly, one arbitrarily misconceives substance governing all functions” (Chuanshan 1977, p. 38). Yet, the true ontological assumption of “the oneness of substance and function” is that both substance and function are realities. They are dependent on each other and substance does not govern function. The oneness of substance and function is “inquiring into [the] principle (*li*) in things” (*ji shi giong li*), rather than “setting up a principle to confine things” (*li li yi xian shi*). “Wang Chuanshan strongly criticizes the tendency of “forcing all things into one”, which is called “Unifying-One” as opposed to the Confucian idea of “One-Continuity” (Wang 1977, pp. 215, 223). All things develop but do not harm each other; each comes to be itself but not as a distinct piece; all are coherent with the Way of Heaven. This is the “Oneness of Substance and Function” and “One-Continuity” (*yi yi guan zhi*).

According to Qing, the views concerning the relationship between inner sageliness and outer kingliness proposed by contemporary neo-Confucianism exemplify not “One-Continuity” but “Unifying-One”. Thus in criticizing these views, one does not necessarily commit the problem of fragmenting Confucianism. One can avoid fragmentation by properly understanding “One-Continuity”. Qing understands the relationship between Mind Confucianism and Political Confucianism as “all things growing in the Way but not contradicting each other” (Qing 2003, p. 5). Qing holds that the way of Heaven and the nature of human beings must be realized in human society. If a political environment is unfavorable for one to become a sage in his personal life, Mind Confucianism’s pursuit of the value of life and moral ideals are difficult to realize. So Mind Confucianism and Political Confucianism must be related through

“One-Continuity.” Therefore, even though Qing distinguishes Mind Confucianism from Political Confucianism, he does not *separate* them or make Confucianism incoherent.

Qing holds that Confucius is not a “philosopher” in the Western sense, i.e., someone who is interested in speculative theory. Truth in Confucian thought is not confined to logical or speculative truth. Truth is not the abstract existing in a philosopher’s universalizing theory. Rather, truth is lively, present in particulars and manifested in historical events. It is meaningful only when it is in human activities. Qing contends that according to Political Confucianism, Confucius is a king of sages. He “reaches the continuity between Heaven and Man, as well as the continuity between the metaphysical and the physical. The Way moving in politics, life and politics is not separated into two” (Qing 1995, p. 371). This is the Confucian spirit of “One-Continuity”. So Mind Confucianism and Political Confucianism are naturally related in “One-Continuity”. Therefore, the so-called problem of “the two sides of Confucian thought [as] incoherent” does not exist.

#### 4.8 The Dangers of Unifying-One and Fragmentation

History repeatedly cycles between “Unifying-One” and “Fragmentation”. This is the consequence of the lack of “One-Continuity”. From Qing’s view, Western medieval times were characterized by “unity without diversity”: only Christianity was allowed. In modern times, at the other extreme, the medieval unifying values are denied: “diversity without unity”. In a society of diverse values, the value of unity may not be acknowledged, because “unifying” thought is considered as “autocracy”.

Qing sees that the diversity in modern society and modern politics, despite its positive values, has its disadvantages. The major disadvantage is its negation of unity among human social life, as well as its lack of metaphysical grounding and legitimacy in political life. Since transcendent value cannot be found in the human world, the world becomes meaningless (Qing 2003, p. 311). This is a kind of “fragmentation”. This fragmented society is a psychological hotbed of authoritarianism because external order must be put into the world, rather than realizing the order inherent in nature itself. This authoritarianism is a manifestation of “Unifying-One”. A vicious cycle between “Unifying-One” and “Fragmentation” is to a great extent unavoidable.

This tendency to regard “unifying” as necessarily contradictory to “diversity” and thus entering the cycle between “Unifying-One” and “Fragmentation” ignores the solution given to us from traditional Confucian wisdom, namely, a “moral” society of “One-Continuity”, as opposed to a “moralized autocratic” society or modern “moral revolution” that characterizes modern society (Liu 2000, p. 69). Political Confucianism and traditional Chinese thought cherish the idea of “grand unification” (*da yi tong*). Qing holds that “grand” means “to hold

in esteem”, rather than “big” or “large”. “Unification” means things seek for their origin, rather than forcefully governing all things through authoritarian methods. Political society must be dependent on metaphysical being so as to gain transcendent value and a sense that all things are reasonable and meaningful. Qing states:

According to Confucianism, Heaven gives birth to all things, yet things grow freely to become themselves. So Confucian thought does not contradict with a diverse society. Moreover, Confucianism raises the idea of “grand unification”, which does not deny the unity of a society despite the diversities found in it (Qing 2003, p. 312).

So, human society and all things have a metaphysical ground. This is “One-Continuity”. Given the Confucian doctrine that “the human being forms one body with Heaven-and-earth and all things” and its ethic of “the continuity of Heaven and man”, one can see that “Confucianism values things and lets all things be themselves but does not force things to serve human beings” (Qing 2003, p. 346).

Qing points out that “grand unification” uses the force of morality to sustain the whole society and to influence surrounding nations, rather than the compulsory measures used to govern a political society (Qing 1995, p. 293). It is the collapse of just such a society of “One-Continuity” that causes the “moral revolution” [of “Unifying-One”], and thereafter the vicious circle between “Unifying-One” and “Fragmentation” cannot be avoided. Traditional moral society does not cause this kind of moral revolution. On the contrary, it is the collapse of traditional moral society that causes the moral revolution and the inevitable cycles between moral revolution and moral collapse.

## 4.9 The Future Prospects of Confucianism

Because of the unity of life and thought, there is both a distinction and a unity between Political Confucianism and Mind Confucianism. But the reality of life and society today is far from that of traditional Confucianism, which is a great pity for contemporary Confucians, who are anxious to resurrect true Confucianism.

However, one must realize that the goal of reviving Confucianism cannot be achieved quickly. As Qing points out, “politics is not the construction of an abstract theory of human nature or a deductive effect of an abstract concept of human nature, but a long-term evolutionary effect of a specific culture” (Qing 2003, p. 270). To deduce politics from an abstract concept of human nature is to fall prey to “Unifying-One”, while “One-Continuity” calls for the long-term evolution of a culture. Thus, the revival of Confucianism requires a long-term process, and it cannot be “deduced” in a hurry. Traditional Confucianism needs a space where it can grow slowly and thrive. Given that there are few Political Confucian statesmen, part of this process may be the raising of more Political Confucian statesmen.

## References

- Jiang, Qing. 1995. *Introduction to GongYang Confucianism*. ShenYang: Liaoning Education Press.
- Jiang, Qing. 2003. *Political Confucianism*. Beijing: Sanlian Press.
- Li, Minghui. 2005. *Political Thoughts in Confucian Horizon*. Beijing: Peking University Press.
- Liu, Xiaofeng. 2000. *On the Revolutionary Spirit of Confucianism*. Shanghai: Sanlian Press.
- Mou, Zongshan. 1990. *Phenomenon and Thing in Itself* (Xian Xiang yu Wu Zi Shen). Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju.
- Wang, Chuanshan 1977. *On the Book of Change* (周易外传). Beijing: Zhong Hua Press.