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Elman
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Rethinking Confucianism

Past and Present in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam



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in China, Japan,
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Edited by Benjamin A. Elman,
John B. Duncan, and Herman Ooms

for an earlier generation of Asian scholars who once reduced all Asian politics, to, for instance, "Oriental despotism."²

Efforts by scholars to dissolve the disciplines of anthropology, economics, history, linguistics, literature, philosophy, political science, and sociology into the study of the single geographical category of the Pacific Rim has reprioritized so-called Confucianism (*Ruxue* 儒學, or *Rujiao* 儒教, lit., "Learning [or "teachings"] of the scholars") as the common domain of cultural life among Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, and Vietnamese living in East and Southeast Asia. One can hardly imagine taking very seriously an equivalent agenda for Europe, West Africa, and the Americas called the "Atlantic Rim" region or "Neo-Christian Studies." One arena where an approach along these lines has proven useful, however, is in the study of the Atlantic slave trade and its multifaceted consequences for the triangular trade of silver, slaves, and sugar, tobacco, or cotton between Europe, Africa, and the Americas.³

The invention in the late twentieth century of the term "Pacific Rim" coincided with a great deal of cultural and historical amnesia about the fall in the early twentieth-century of the Chinese (in 1911) and Japanese (in 1945) empires, when Confucianism (then sometimes called *Kongjiao* 孔教, lit., "the teachings of Confucius," by Kang Youwei 康有為, 1858–1927, and other Chinese reformers⁴) was more prominent in political and intellectual life than it is today. It also coincided with a forgetting that an earlier generation of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese intellectuals contended that Confucius and Confucianism not only failed to facilitate modernity but indeed stood in its way. Today those working in Asian studies, having recently rejected the dubious category of the Orient, remain critical of its facile replacement with the Pacific Rim, especially when the latter transnational category still has limited relevance for the study of premodern Asian history, languages, literatures, as well as for social science.⁵

² See Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism*. For a more nuanced analysis, see Prasenjit Duara, "Transnationalism in the Era of Nation-States."

³ See Philip Curtin, "The Tropical Atlantic in the Age of the Slave Trade."

⁴ See Kung-chuan Hsiao, *A Modern China and a New World*.

⁵ See Arif Dirlik, "Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism"; cf. Dirlik, ed., *What Is in a Rim?* See also Alexander Woodside, "Territorial Or-

Chapter 16

Rethinking "Confucianism" and "Neo-Confucianism" in Modern Chinese History

Benjamin A. Elman

Late in the twentieth century, a new generation of social scientists and humanists placed East Asian Confucianism into a fresh, unified category called the "Pacific Rim" and removed it from the old, familiar "Orient" or "Asia."¹ This has been in part the work of those specializing in contemporary Asian and Pacific studies who tend to underestimate the long-term regional, social, political, cultural, and economic trajectories of the peoples and societies that evolved on the shores of the Pacific before the full penetration of the global economy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However useful to journalists and social scientists, the new conceptualization of a transnational Confucianism in the Pacific Rim, for example, is historically simplistic and politically misleading when taking into account *la longue durée* from 1200 to 2000, just as the "Orient" was a poorly constructed category

My thanks to Hoyt Tillman, R. Bin Wong, and others for their comments and suggestions during the discussion of my paper at the workshops and conference.

¹ See, for example, Philip West and Frans Alphons Maria Alting von Geusau, eds., *The Pacific Rim*; and Steve Chan, *East Asian Dynamism*. Brian Kelley and Mark London, *The Four Little Dragons*, stress the common heritage of Confucianism in Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan.

Similarly problematic is the effort in so-called Pacific Rim studies to link Confucianism to East Asian economic success before the unexpectedly severe 1997-99 Asian economic crisis.⁶ Apart from its geographic notation, the Pacific Rim simply did not exist in the sense of sustained interactions across a swath of the globe, except perhaps for the Acapulco-Manila silver trade from 1500 to 1800, which had trans-Pacific implications for Japanese, Southeast Asian, and Chinese history that should be compared to the triangular Atlantic slave trade.⁷ As an academic and journalistic invention, the Pacific Rim construct is in some ways reminiscent of the Japanese-inspired combination known as the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere during the Pacific War, 1931-45, which included a curious blend of Japanese fascism and a remanufactured form of Confucian tradition.⁸ Perhaps the nations of the Pacific Rim will develop some unity in the future, but today's Pacific Rim is the neologism of the second stage of Orientalism in Asian studies, or the New Orientalism, as some critics have described it.⁹

In its initial stage, Asian studies existed in Western universities as Oriental studies, which included the study of what today we would identify as the Middle East, Central Asia, South and Southeast Asia, and East Asia. This classification was at least useful in getting Asian studies started, but in the twentieth century it became apparent that Ottoman Turkey and Manchu China had little "oriental" in common (except that they were outside of and generally east of Europe, particularly Berlin, London, Paris, St. Petersburg—which had the oldest Oriental Institute—and Vienna). "Oriental studies" represented the ethno-

der and Collective-Identity Tensions." Woodside notes that the old Confucian monarchies in Asia were repackaged in cultural and educational, rather than constitutional or legal, terms.

⁶ See, for example, the ongoing monograph series published in Taiwan by the Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy, Academia Sinica, Taiwan, under the general title *Dangdai Ruxue yanjiu congkan* 當代儒學研究 叢刊 (Research series on contemporary Confucian studies).

⁷ See Richard von Glahn, *Fountain of Fortune: Money and Monetary Policy in China*.

⁸ For the conceptual roots of Japan as the leading state in modern Asia, see Joshua Fogel, *Politics and Sinology: The Case of Naitō Konan*, passim.

⁹ See Edward Said, *Orientalism*.

centric agenda of European scholars in the nineteenth century. Hence, in an escape from the past, in post-1945 Western textbooks on China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam nomenclature has usually shifted from the "Orient" and the "Far East" to "East Asia." The UCLA Oriental Library, for example was recently renamed the East Asian Library. The *Far Eastern Quarterly* became the *Journal of Asian Studies* in 1957.

By entering their area studies disciplines uncritically into contemporary Asian debates about modernization and economic development in the Pacific Rim, however, scholars of China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam unwittingly oversimplified the role of traditional, pre-modern culture and religion—such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism—in East Asia. For instance, scholars tended to choose sides for or against Confucianism as a contemporary facilitator of modernization in China, or as a harbinger of human rights, when as specialists they should have known that the historical legacy of the classical political and moral economy in East Asia belies such simplistic dichotomies. (See Chapters 2 and 13, by John Duncan, in this volume.)¹⁰ Researching Chinese cultural history (or Asian cultures in general) is not an intellectual referendum on Confucianism any more than study of European cultural life is a scholarly ballot on Christianity.

The field of classical thought, popular religion, and society in Asia should be an impartial scholarly arena for both the social sciences and humanities, as well as the natural sciences whenever relevant. In such an arena the uses of classical ideas and values by elites and commoners can be assessed in light of specific social and political structures undergoing continuous change by human agents at all levels of involvement. There too Confucian ideology, whether imperial, modern, or gendered in form, can be evaluated for its political, social, and economic uses, at the same time that the philosophic import of the values of the literati (China), samurai (Japan), yangban (Korea), or rusticated elites (Vietnam) is weighed.

¹⁰ See Gilbert Rozman, ed., *The East Asian Region*, and the more thoughtful chapters in Wm. Theodore de Bary and Wei-ming Tu, eds., *Confucianism and Human Rights*.

Interpretive Problems

Unfortunately, when it comes to understanding East Asian Confucianism nonspecialists tend to follow the lead of area study specialists. The latter have been prone to overgeneralization when presenting their views in laymen's terms. Depending on their own unspoken scholarly and political predispositions, nonspecialists have then translated generalizations about Confucianism into positive claims about Neo-Confucianism (*Xin ruxue* 新儒學, lit., "New Confucianism," or lit. "new teachings of the scholars") as the moral software in China's modernization¹¹ or negative claims about its role in "legitimizing patriarchal social relations and authoritarian political habits." "Neo-Confucianism was responsible for the subjugation of Chinese women"¹² is one common theme among some feminists even while studies of elite women in late imperial China increasingly challenge this stereotype. (See Chapter 5, by Dorothy Ko, in this volume.)¹³ Another common theme is: "Neo-Confucianism provided a liberal vision of human agency and militated against autocratic government,"¹⁴ even though most Confucians since the early empire willingly served autocratic rulers and most late twentieth-century so-called Confucians favor neo-authoritarian governments. (Why is there no Confucian-Democratic Party or Liberal-Confucian Party anywhere in East Asia?)¹⁵ Still another theme: "Neo-Confucianism and market capitalism were compatible since Ming (1368-1644) times" (some would even argue since the Song, 960-1279), although recent economic historians of China have shown the folly of comparing premodern Chinese economic development to the transition from feudalism to

¹¹ See Gilbert Rozman, ed., *The Modernization of China*.

¹² Ono Kazuko, *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution*, presents a "victim's narrative" of women in modern China.

¹³ See Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang, eds., *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*. Kang-i Sun Chang tends to equate Neo-Confucianism with gender hegemony. See her "Ming-Qing Women Poets." See also Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, and Susan Mann, *Precious Records*.

¹⁴ Wm. Theodore de Bary, *The Liberal Tradition in China*.

¹⁵ See my "Where Is King Ch'eng? Civil Examinations and Confucian Ideology During the Early Ming."

capitalism in early-modern European history.¹⁶ Or, again: "Neo-Confucianism was a socio-political ideology of gentry elites that legitimated the status quo in state and society," although it is clear from recent studies that Buddhism and Daoism in China permeated elite and popular culture and religion and that Neo-Confucianism was not the common worldview of all or even most premodern Chinese peasants, artisans, women, monks, or merchants.¹⁷

Moreover, we know that Confucianism since the Song dynasties (960-1279) was rife with dissension among elites in the face of state orthodoxy. Hoyt Tillman, like Peter Bol, successfully avoids uncritically following the long-standing convention of using Southern Song (1127-1280) classical teleologies about the "unfolding of Neo-Confucianism" to elucidate Northern Song (960-1126) literati thought.¹⁸ Tillman shares with Bol an unwillingness to grant automatically a single line of development to and from Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), the much revered champion of *Daoxue* 道學 (Learning of the Way) teachings, as the key strand in Song intellectual history. By viewing Daoxue as a problem in intellectual history rather than just as a stage in the march of philosophical truth, Tillman avoids equating the Learning of the Way (= Neo-Confucianism in contemporary accounts of the Song) automatically with Chinese intellectual history since the Northern Song (see Chapter 1). He makes the process of Southern Song literati classifying themselves as orthodox an object of historical analysis, and he thereby problematizes Daoxue philosophy and analyzes it with detachment. Tillman's study successfully exposes the social and political life of Southern Song champions of orthodoxy. The latent "Zhu Xi-ism" of modern Neo-Confucianism in Asia can now be seen as a continuation of the philosophical process, common to

¹⁶ R. Bin Wong, "Great Expectations: The Search for Modern Times in Chinese History."

¹⁷ See David Johnson, Andrew Nathan, and Evelyn Rawski, eds., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*.

¹⁸ See Peter Bol, "This Culture of Ours," and Hoyt Tillman, *Confucian Discourse*. For summaries, see my review of Tillman's book in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, and my review of Bol's book in the same journal.

China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, of continually inventing and reinventing Daoxue orthodoxy.¹⁹

Terminological Issues

It remains unclear whether the current terms we use in English, such as “Confucianism” (for *Ruxue* 儒學) or “Neo-Confucianism” (for *Xin ruxue* 新儒學), to describe classical learning (*jingxue* 經學) in imperial China, shogunal Japan, and royal Korea and Vietnam were entirely appropriate to generalize about scholarly and religious traditions in East Asia before 1900. In the twenty-first century, such anachronistic neologisms may no longer be in vogue despite the useful purpose they played in introducing East Asian classical learning to the West from 1600 to 1950. Indeed, the New Confucianism (*Xin ruxue*, lit., “new teachings of the scholars”) of the late twentieth century, championed by New Asia College in the Chinese University of Hong Kong, by the Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy in the Academia Sinica, Taiwan, by Singapore University, and by the Neo-Confucian Seminar of Columbia University, may better represent an important modern step in the long-term evolution of classical learning in the “borderlands” of China (to use Arif Dirlik’s description).

After a raucous period of contention among several schools of learning in antiquity (ca. 500–221 BC), orthodox classical learning, associated with Confucius and his disciples since the early empire (ca. 200 BC–AD 200), evolved in three major stages before 1900:²⁰

¹⁹ The pioneering studies of William Theodore de Bary have valorized Neo-Confucianism. See, for example, his *Neo-Confucian Orthodoxy and the Learning of the Mind-and-Heart*.

²⁰ See John Henderson, *Scripture, Canon, and Commentary*, pp. 38–61, and *passim*. This notion of “borderlands” is sinocentric and should not be applied uncritically to Japan, Korea, or Vietnam, since it represents Chinese tributary conceits towards them.

1. Han-Tang scholia or literati learning (*Han-Tang zhushu* 漢唐注疏 or *Han-Tang ruxue* 漢唐儒學) for the Five, Nine, or Thirteen Classics,²¹ ca. 200 BC–AD 900, during the early and middle empires;
2. Song-Ming literati learning (*Song-Ming ruxue* 宋明儒學), often based on the Daoxue interpretations (*Song-Ming lixue* 宋明理學) of the Four Books,²² ca. 1000–1700. The differences between the classical views of Zhu Xi and those of Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1528) and their myriad followers makes this period one of substantial intellectual ferment; and
3. Qing revival of “Han Learning” classicism and “evidential research” (*Qian-Jia Kaozhengxue* 乾嘉考證學 or *Hanxue* 漢學), ca. 1700–1900. The Daoxue persuasion remained orthodox in this period.²³

Lionel Jensen has recently blamed Jesuit missionaries for the modern Western focus on Confucius, the man, as the singular voice of Confucianism in China. According to Jensen, the Jesuits misrepresented the more diffuse “learning of scholars” in seventeenth-century China, thereby whitewashing the fact that the term *Ruxue*, i.e., the “learning of scholars,” in ancient and imperial China (and in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam) was rarely defined there by the single neologism of “Confucianism” (*Kongjiao*, lit., “the teachings of Confucius”) until the late

²¹ The Five Classics were: 1) *Change Classic*; 2) *Documents Classic*; 3) *Poetry Classic*; 4) *Record of Rituals*; 5) *Spring and Autumn Annals*. A sixth, the *Music Classic*, was lost in antiquity. According to legend, Confucius had compiled these instructional texts based on ancient records. See Edward Shaughnessy, *Before Confucius*. During the medieval period, however, other works—some of them later included among the Four Books—were also designated as classics. For discussion, see John Henderson, *Scripture, Canon, and Commentary*, pp. 38–88.

²² The Four Books were: 1) *Analects of Confucius*; 2) *Mencius*; 3) *Great Learning*; 4) and *Doctrine of the Mean*. Traditionally, the *Great Learning* and *Doctrine of the Mean* were included in the *Record of Rituals*, although it was believed they were compiled by two of Confucius’ direct disciples. See Daniel Gardner, “Principle and Pedagogy.”

²³ Hamaguchi Fujio, *Shindai Kōkyōgaku no shisō shi tekki kenkyū*. See also my *From Philosophy to Philology*.

nineteenth century. Although the Jesuits did not "manufacture" Confucianism, as Nicholas Standaert shows, they certainly did make Confucius the focus of their translations of the Chinese classical canon into Latin.²⁴

Hoyt Tillman similarly shows in this volume how the English term "Neo-Confucianism" has led to misunderstandings and oversimplifications of the complexity of literati thought in Song China, which is probably also the case in Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese intellectual history. One major Song tradition, which became orthodox empire-wide only later, in the early fifteenth century,²⁵ was referred to in Chinese in at least three different ways since the Song dynasties: "Learning of the Way" (Daoxue 道學); "Studies of Moral Principles" (*Lixue* 理學); and "Learning of the Mind and Heart" (*Xinxue* 心學). Not until the twentieth century did "Neo-Confucianism" in English and "Xin ruxue" in Chinese become the general term for this tradition, although the Jesuit scholar Jean-Joseph-Marie Amiot (1718-93), in his historical memoirs of China, used the term *néo-confucéens* for probably the first time.²⁶

In addition, the recent challenges that Evelyn Rawski and others have raised to our simplistic notions of sinicization, sinification, and Confucianization among Mongol and Manchu ruling elites in imperial China carry over to the broader domain of the impact of Chinese classical learning among Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese scholars outside the Chinese empire. Were they also sinified? Or Confucianized? Were Tokugawa Japan, Chosŏn Korea, or Lê Vietnam simply little Chinas, microcosms of late imperial China? Or, rather, was it not the case that the impact on non-Han Chinese peoples inside and outside

China was part of a complex civilizing process carried out via classical texts and literati doctrines that Mongols, Manchus, Japanese, Koreans, and Vietnamese themselves negotiated and utilized on their own terms?²⁷

Moreover, the recent tendency to label Confucianism a religion (*zongjiao* 宗教), while well-intentioned, has somewhat confused the issue of the differences between Chinese literati and their Buddhist and Daoist priestly counterparts. The previous tendency to conceive of literati thought (Ruxue) in imperial China purely as a system of social and ethical philosophy certainly overlooked liturgical practices, such as the public and private expressions of imperial and literati respect for Confucius demonstrated by performing sacrifices in temples directly honoring the sage and his disciples.²⁸ Although we should not underestimate the moral faith of Chinese scholars in a sacred canon, it is going too far to envisage the teachings (*jiao* 教) of Confucius and his followers in purely religious terms.

Thomas Wilson is certainly right to argue in his most recent work that the imperial sacrifices to Confucius also had religious dimensions.²⁹ His findings make it plausible for us to use "Confucianism" as the appropriate designation for such sacrifices because they prioritized the sage himself, and not just Ruxue, as the fountain of the classical tradition. But this sort of literal "Confucianism" was only part of the literati understanding of the classical canon, which in its most learned forms of Daoxue interpretation stressed the transmission of classical orthodoxy from mind to mind via enlightenment and not through works or faith alone. Although both Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism have each been referred to by modern scholars as a civic religion, which unexpectedly reaffirms the Jesuits' position during the early eighteenth century Rites Controversy,³⁰ premodern literati demarcated publicly the more secular and areligious aspects of their in-

²⁴ Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism*, chaps. 1 and 2. For a critique, see Nicolas Standaert, "The Jesuits Did NOT Manufacture 'Confucianism'."

²⁵ James T. C. Liu, "How Did a Neo-Confucian School Become the State Orthodoxy?" But see also my *A Cultural History of Civil Service Examinations in Late Imperial China*, pp. 1-65.

²⁶ See Hoyt Tillman, "A New Direction in Confucian Scholarship," and Wm. Theodore de Bary, "The Uses of Neo-Confucianism: A Response to Professor Tillman." See also Hoyt Tillman, "The Uses of Neo-Confucianism Revisited: A Reply to Professor de Bary." Cf. D. E. Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology*, p. 345 n54.

²⁷ See Evelyn Rawski, "Presidential Address," and Ping-ti Ho, "In Defense of 'Sinification.'" See also Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*.

²⁸ See Thomas A. Wilson, *Genealogy of the Way*, pp. 32-35.

²⁹ Thomas A. Wilson, "The Ritual Formation of Confucian Orthodoxy," and idem, "Ritualizing Confucius [Kongzi]."

³⁰ See Judith Berling, "Confucianism." See also C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, pp. 20-21.

tellectualized commitments to the teachings of the sages from the more popular Confucian temple rituals and the heterodoxies they associated with Buddhism and Daoism.³¹

Consequently, while we can affirm a transcendental and ritualistic, religious-like concern among Chinese literati, the literati way of intellectual life was not strictly bound by monastic views nor were literati members of religious orders like Roman Catholic priests or Muslim clerics, unless they were also Buddhist or Daoist priests, for instance. More recent scholarship suggests that the ever evolving Western concept of religion, which until recently was tied to membership in religious congregations, was not fully understood in China until the late nineteenth century, when the term "teaching" (jiao) was replaced by the term "religion" (zongjiao) for referring to literati learning, Buddhism, and Daoism.

Indeed, not until then did the term "Confucianism" (Kongjiao) come to mean for Chinese scholars such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929) a religion based on Confucius, although as we have seen above the temple sacrifices to Confucius did presage religious forms of ritual practice. The vague term "Confucianism" that we use today thus obfuscates the modern distinction between Rujiao ("teachings of the scholars") and Kongjiao ("teachings of Confucius") made explicit by Kang and Liang in the 1890s.³² One of the ironies of the Chinese anti-Confucian movement early in the twentieth century was that it was led by modern intellectuals from literati backgrounds who rejected Confucianism precisely because it seemed to be a religion in the same sense that Christianity is a religion. University-based scholars such as Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962) preferred the relatively more secular, cosmopolitan, and agnostic tone of literati learning to the religicized version of Confucianism presented by Kang Youwei.³³

Finally, the so-called Neo-Confucian orthodoxy of Song and Ming times, which was called "Learning of the Way" (Daoxue) by natives, was increasingly challenged within China beginning in the

sixteenth century by classical scholars such as Wang Yangming who marched under the banner of "Learning of the Mind and Heart." Scholarly criticism accelerated during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in China as well as Japan and Korea. A tug of war developed among Qing dynasty classical scholars over how the Five Classics and Four Books taught by Confucius and his disciples should properly be evaluated. The classics remained sacred, but they were read and interpreted with new eyes and with new strategies. Due in part to the influence of the Jesuits, Chinese literati in the seventeenth century began to reevaluate the classical canon in light of both natural philosophy and new currents in astronomy. They also initiated a return to Ancient Learning (*guxue* 古學), which carried over to Japan and Korea.³⁴

In Qing times, a unified academic field of empirically based classical knowledge emerged among literati-scholars in the lower Yangtze delta provinces (Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Anhui), which eventually challenged the orthodox curriculum authorized in Beijing. This philological grid for classical learning, called "evidential learning" or "evidential research studies" (*Kaozhengxue* 考證學), represented a fundamental shift in the common codes of elite knowledge about the past. The textual vocabulary of classical scholars during the eighteenth century in turn reinforced a shift from Song-Ming rationalism, typified by the Learning of the Way, to a more skeptical and secular classical empiricism. By making precise scholarship, rather than reason, the source of acceptable knowledge, Qing classicists contended that the legitimate reach of ancient ideals should be reevaluated through comparative delineation of the textual sources from which all such knowledge derived.

Below, based on these earlier vicissitudes in classical learning in imperial China, I recommend the use of "classical learning," "literati learning," or "teachings of the scholars" in place of "Confucianism" to refer to classical thought up to AD 1000. Such terms in any case are more faithful translations of "Ruxue." At the same time, I also recommend a more precise use of "Confucianism" when addressing the sacrificial rituals performed in the empire-wide temples honoring Confu-

³¹ See my *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*, pp. 346–60.

³² See Marianne Bastid-Bruguère, "Liang Qichao yu zongjiao wenti."

³³ Lionel Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism*, pp. 220–64.

³⁴ See my "The Search for Evidence from China," and my "The Philological Studies in the Eighteenth Century."

cius and his disciples. Instead of "Neo-Confucianism," I suggest "Learning of the Way" for *Daoxue* or *Lixue* to designate orthodox, Zhu Xi-oriented trends in classical learning from 1000 until 1700. There were of course other important trends that would be better filed under the rubrics of "Song Learning," such as Wang Anshi's 王安石 (1021-86) dominance in the eleventh century, or "Ming Learning," such as Wang Yangming's challenge.³⁵

For late imperial classical trends that informed Qing intellectual history, 1700-1900, I think "Han Learning," "evidential research," or "Qing Learning" are more appropriate than either "Confucianism" or "Neo-Confucianism," even though Daoxue remained the official orthodoxy. And, finally, for the twentieth century, regarding the self-proclaimed champions of Confucius (such as Kang Youwei and many others) and those who extolled Zhu Xi (see below), I advise the use of "New Confucianism" for Xin ruxue to characterize the scholarship of such modern or contemporary scholars who favored a return to classically inspired morality and social values.

A more precise recognition of the conceptual dissonance between English terms such as "Confucianism" or "Neo-Confucianism" and their classical Chinese referents will help us avoid the simplistic, sometimes ominous, conclusions concerning Confucius and the "danger" of his legacy that are favored by some scholars, journalists, and statesmen today. In a late-twentieth-century American echo of the medieval European clamor over the Mongol "yellow peril," Samuel Huntington, a social scientist at Harvard University, has recently warned that "Confucian" and "Islamic" civilizations may pose the greatest threat to Western interests, values, and power. What Huntington means by "Confucian" shows no conceptual awareness of the definitional problems we have outlined above.³⁶

³⁵ See also Hoyt Tillman, "Encyclopedias, Polymaths, and *Tao-Isueh* Confucians."

³⁶ See "Watch Out for China," *Newsweek*. New threats to the Western world, according to Huntington and others are now replacing the former Sino-Soviet axis of socialism that so bedeviled our Cold War warriors in the 1950s and 1960s. While still quite marginal politically and academically (although we should note that "China bashing" significantly increased in 1998-2000), such rhetoric should concern serious students of so-called Confucianism or

Old and New Uses of *Ruxue* ("Literati Learning") in China

Writing in the second century BC after the fall of the despotic Qin dynasty (221-207 BC), the Han 漢 dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) courtier Jia Yi 賈誼 (201-169 BC) concluded that the Qin state had failed politically, despite its military strength, because in governing it had made humanity and righteousness secondary (*hou renyi* 後仁義) to penalties and punishments (*suoshangzhe xingfa ye* 所上者刑罰也).³⁷ The implication was that, because it was now properly and judiciously balancing the mutual requirements of coercive force and moral governance, the Han dynasty had succeeded in harvesting the dynastic benefits of the centralized, bureaucratic state, which had been the unprecedented political achievement of the Qin unification of ancient China at the point of a sword.

Morality (*de* 德) and literate culture (*wen* 文) were keys to political power, according to Jia Yi, a view shared by the many Han officials and courtiers who produced the wedding of Qin penal law and the moral teachings of Confucius and his followers in official discourse and in court cases. The "moralization of Legalism" (or the "Legalization of Confucianism") during the Han dynasty became a historical precedent for the notion that moral ideas must play a crucial role in public life, a view that extended, despite much dissent, from antiquity to the twentieth century.³⁸ The Legalist imperial state structure, however, also lasted, with modifications, until 1911. Imperial courtiers and scholars did not need Pierre Bourdieu to remind them of the cultural basis of their dynasty's public legitimacy.³⁹

Neo-Confucianism because it contributes to the ominous turn in American social science rhetoric about China and East Asia.

³⁷ See *Shiji*, 1, 6: 283, and Jia Yi, "Guo-Qin lun," pp. 1107-10. For Jia's biography, see *Hanshu*, 4, 48: 2221-65, esp. 2244-51. Cf. Wm. Theodore de Bary, et al., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 1: 150-52.

³⁸ See Ch'ü T'ung-tsu, *Law and Society in Traditional China*.

³⁹ Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State*, pp. 217-43, describes how the Chinese modernizing state was overwhelmed by the forces of cultural and political delegitimation unleashed by early supporters of the Republic.

In the late twentieth century, Jia Yi's notion that traditional morality was essential for social, political, and economic order has revived in Hong Kong and Taiwan and to a lesser degree in China. This revival seems initially to be very surprising after a century of anti-Confucian movements that intentionally or unintentionally aided the temporary triumph of the Maoist version of Marxist-Leninism in the People's Republic of China. In a major shift from Jia Yi's more reasoned position, however, the New Confucians (*xinru* 新儒) in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong claim that Confucianism is not just a moral remedy for the excesses of Maoist cultural revolution and political violence in China but also a value-system that can ameliorate the social and cultural ravages of uncontrolled economic capitalism in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

While seeking to capitalize on the political and social revolutions of the twentieth century, as Han officials and scholars harvested the fruit of the Qin political revolution in the second century BC, the New Confucians contend that Confucianism was responsible for the economic revolution that has brought material prosperity to Taiwan and Hong Kong, and increasingly to China. Jia Yi, in contrast, never claimed for Han officials such insight into the making of imperial China and thus never portrayed Confucius as the inventor of the imperial political or economic system. Such political posturing would have imperiled the Han imperial political economy he envisioned, what we might call "Legalism with a human face" or "the teachings of classical scholars within a state structure." Legalism deserved credit for inventing the unified imperial system, but it was scholars building on Confucius' legacy who had perfected its institutions and moral applications.

Today's champions of Confucius in Taiwan and Hong Kong wish ancient moral philosophy and social values to be both an antecedent of the "good" (economic growth, rising standards of living, science and

Similarly, the delegitimation of the civil and military examination systems disenfranchised millions of local candidates competing for the degrees needed to enter the imperial bureaucracy or seeking to gain entry into the local elite. See my *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*, pp. 569-625

technology) and a remedy for the "bad" (socialist despotism, economic inequality, cultural philistinism) produced in postimperial China. They forget that the Chinese revolution itself depended on unprecedented social, political, and economic crises that late imperial literati, many of whom professed orthodox Song Learning of the Way, failed to understand or resolve. They now claim that revival of Confucian values will bring "humanity" and "morality" back into Chinese social and political life and relieve the Chinese people of the social, economic, and political traumas they have faced. This much Jia Yi and other imperial courtiers would have agreed with.

The ahistorical claim that past scholarly commitments to education and cultural solidarity produced the urban-rural economic and industrial revolutions now raging in China and Taiwan is more problematical, however. Some contend that the teachings of Confucius and his followers alone (note how in this debate the contemporary flourishing of Buddhism, Daoism, and popular religion in Taiwan and Hong Kong were elided by many of the late-twentieth-century Chinese cultural elites living there) produced the cultural conditions for the growth of capitalism in the borderlands of Hong Kong or Taiwan or the spread of a hybrid socialist-capitalist economy in China. But this view misses the historical genealogy of Western and Japanese imperialism and Chinese socialism, which both the Guomindang and Chinese Communist Party when in power grappled with in the course of the Chinese revolution. In other words, the excesses of an anti-Confucian Chinese revolution in the twentieth century, and the exhausting struggle between socialist dreamers and their political and economic enemies, set the stage for the late-twentieth-century Confucian revival.

The "faults" of socialism in general and those of Maoism in particular are the correlates to Jia Yi's "Faults of Qin." The reconstruction of ancient values as a moral remedy is plausible. To claim them also as antecedents of the twentieth-century economic revolution is an anti-socialist and anticapitalist daydream, equivalent to Jia Yi foolishly contending that Han scholars had created the centralized bureaucratic state of the early empire. Similarly, for late imperial mandarins to have claimed that orthodox Learning of the Way touched off the remarkable commercialization and urbanization during the Song and Ming dynas-

ties would have been a late imperial fantasy.⁴⁰ In each case, scholars and officials successfully reacted to historical changes they had not anticipated. Similarly, the roles of nationalism, republicanism, and socialism in reinventing the modern forms of society, politics, economy, culture, and gender appropriate for contemporary Chinese state and society must be given their historical due. Any twenty-first-century version of New Confucianism will have to incorporate these new forms of theory and practice.

Han scholars were able to adapt the teachings of Confucius and his disciples in a post-Qin empire after 200 BC. Song literati were able to rally elites and commoners to the revival of Learning of the Way in a post-Buddhistic world ca. AD 1200, which unintentionally legitimated the increased entry of outsiders such as Jurchen, Mongols, and Tibetans into the universalistic cultural world of Han Chinese scholar-officials. In postsocialist China, New Confucians from China's "borderlands" are adapting ancient Ruxue and Song Daoxue to the new terms of their success, the failure of messianic socialism, and the social inequalities of rampant capitalism.⁴¹ But the failure of communism, like its millennial predecessor Legalism, has bequeathed irrevocable political and gender revolutions that accompanied the rise and fall of militant Chinese socialism, 1915-76, and that have survived the fall of Maoism as Chinese Communist Party orthodoxy.

The tendency in the social sciences to link the teachings of Confucius and the Learning of the Way to Pacific Rim history⁴² represents at times a plausible effort by Westerners, some of whom see it as dangerous, and East Asians, many of whom see it as a sign of strength, to translate the economic clout of Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea, and Hong Kong, and the immense potential of postsocialist China, into a futurist vision of the increased cultural influence of ancient values in

Asia. This influence was diminished, some would say irreversibly, early in the twentieth century.

Conservative intellectuals in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, for instance, see opportunities early in the twenty-first century to reap the harvest of overseas Chinese economic growth by reinvesting a sizable portion of the new economic capital in the New Confucian educational agenda, which was dismantled by earlier nationalist and socialist revolutionaries in China, Korea, and Vietnam. Popular religions have since the 1970s also translated some of that new commercial wealth into a frenzied building boom of Daoist shrines and Buddhist temples in Taiwan and Hong Kong, and since 1979 in China.

There are still significant intellectual cracks in the foundation of the New Confucian cultural fortress, however. Many thinkers today remain critical of the Zhu Xi-oriented orthodoxy bequeathed from the Qing dynasty. Instead of just Zhu Xi, they also favor the teachings of Confucius himself.⁴³ Even the earlier supporters of "Neo-Confucianism" had noted its limited application to contemporary science, politics, and society. The spirited debates between Ho Ping-ti (He Bingdi) 何炳棣 and Tu Wei-ming (Du Weiming) 杜維明 over the true face of classical learning,⁴⁴ and more recently between Liu Shu-hsien (Liu Shuxian) 劉述先 and Yü Ying-shih (Yu Yingshi) 余英時 over whether or not the great twentieth-century scholar of Chinese thought and history, Qian Mu 錢穆, was a New Confucian (*xin rujia* 新儒家),⁴⁵ are examples of the still contentious nature of late-twentieth-century efforts in the "borderlands" to make New Confucianism both the remedy for socialist excesses and the cause of economic progress in contemporary East Asia.

⁴³ See Tu Wei-ming, "The Sung Confucian Idea of Education."

⁴⁴ See the exchanges in *Ershiyi shiji* 二十一世紀 by Ho Ping-ti ("Keji fuli" zhenquan dangdai xinrujia Tu Wei-ming zhixue fangfa de chubu jiantao"), Tu Wei-ming ("Cong ji jingya you rongxin dao mihuo er feijie xiezai jingda Ho Ping-ti jiaoshou zhi qian"), and Liu Shuxian ("Cong fangfalun de jiaodu lun Ho Ping-ti jiaoshou dui 'keji fuli' de jieshi"). On the importance of this passage for literati moral theory, see my "The Reevaluation of 'Benevolence.'"

⁴⁵ See Yü Ying-shih, "Qian Mu yu xin rujia," and Liu Shuxian, "Duiyu dangdai xinrujia de chaoyue neixian."

⁴⁰ See Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China*.

⁴¹ See Dirlík, "Confucius in the Borderlands."

⁴² For the claim that "Pacific Rim history" makes sense in socioeconomic terms, see the work of Dennis Flynn and others who successfully organized in 1994 (at the University of the Pacific) and 1996 (at LaTrobe University in Melbourne) conferences on "Pacific Rim History." What Pacific Rim "culture" might mean is more problematical.

The debate between Yü and Liu is over Qian Mu's scholarly legacy, between his early commitment to historical research and his later faith in Zhu Xi's Learning of the Way philosophical synthesis, which became orthodox in China, Japan, and Korea (but not Vietnam; see Chapter 4, by Alexander Woodside, in this volume). It may remind some of the debate over the differences between the intellectualism of Zhu Xi and the anti-intellectualism of Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (Jiuyuan 九淵, 1139-92) in the Southern Song dynasty.⁴⁶ Moreover, the debate has carried over into American studies of Song literati thought, where Hoyt Tillman and Peter Bol, among others, have revised earlier single-dimensional portraits of Neo-Confucianism as the dominant school of classical learning during the Song dynasty.⁴⁷

Indeed New Confucians in the Chinese "borderlands," when compared to their post-Maoist counterparts in China, seem poorly prepared to ameliorate the dual legacies of capitalism and socialism and thereby reinvent New Confucianism in China for the twenty-first century. For example, it is intriguing the degree to which the defenders of New Confucianism, such as Liu Shuxian, rely on recent developments in hermeneutics in Germany, principally the work of Martin Heidegger's disciple Hans-Georg Gadamer, while others searching for a public sphere, civil society, or human rights in China rely on the work of the distinguished German sociologist Jürgen Habermas, who himself has relied on the Western Enlightenment discourse of the eighteenth century.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Yü Ying-shih, "Some Preliminary Observations."

⁴⁷ See Hoyt Tillman, *Confucian Discourse*, and Peter Bol, "This Culture of Ours."

⁴⁸ For the case of Tokugawa Japan and a public sphere there "on its own terms," see Mary E. Berry, "Public Life in Authoritarian Japan," pp. 133-65, which tries to "detach the public sphere from the telos of democracy."

Habermas vs. Gadamer in Chinese Studies

Whether in cultural history or in the social sciences, scholars of New Confucianism in the "borderlands" tend to apply the modernization narrative to premodern China. They measure classical learning according to the yardstick of the present. As the present changes, the yardstick also changes. In an earlier "present," when China was visibly backward and weak by the standards of industrialized Europe,⁴⁹ the "learning of the scholars" (Ruxue), particularly Cheng-Zhu 程朱 (Cheng Yi 程頤, 1033-1107, and Zhu Xi) Learning of the Way, was singled out by radicals and revolutionaries in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam and uncritically blamed for all that was backward. Now that China's "present" differs from its earlier "present," so also the once-current evaluation of Cheng-Zhu Learning of the Way as an obstacle on the path to modernity has been superseded by a new evaluation of it as a bridge to modernity. It all depends on what "present" is used to measure which "past." In the 1950s, scholars sought the reasons for the success of socialism in Russia and China; now at the beginning of the twenty-first century most ponder the causes of its demise. We already find in recent Eastern European and Russian elections that socialism's obituary was premature, just as was the obituary for the teachings of Confucius in Asia earlier this century.

Modernization itself is not the issue. Conscious Westernization, which represented an early stage of adapting to Western "modernity" (*jindai* 近代), began in earnest in China after the Taiping Rebellion (1850-64). Imperial officials and literati scholars initially problematized the "West" as a competing category with Qing China, a process of adaptation and borrowing that was increasingly referred to in China in the twentieth century as "modernization." Scholars of Chinese history accordingly have made the processes of Westernization, in all its aspects, objects of analysis. However, when this overall modernization framework is uncritically applied to the history of classical literati thought, it becomes trapped in a teleological fallacy. It goes without saying that for most of Chinese history Westernization was not avail-

⁴⁹ Michael Adas, *Machines As a Measure of Man*.

able to Chinese elites, and once it did become available, whether to accept it or not became a matter of choice, not a matter foreordained.

To employ a conceptual framework suitable for evaluating historical phenomena in China after 1860 to describe earlier periods is anachronistic. Such an effort ends in a cleverly constructed narrative that reduces historical phenomena to something they never were, namely obstacles or bridges on the road to modernity. Questions such as, "Why wasn't there a scientific revolution in imperial China?" or "Why wasn't there an industrial revolution?" are now converted into their opposite: "Why was there a scientific revolution in modern China?" "What role did the traditional Chinese economy play in its modern industrial revolution?" etc. What passes for world history before and after 1900, for instance, is usually written according to this modernist narrative.

The positive or negative reading of classical learning and religion in China according to the yardstick of modernization has been popular since Max Weber.⁵⁰ Postmodernist scholars have successfully exposed the ahistorical aspects inherent in this overemphasis of the modern "present" as the measure of the premodern "past." Modernization remains an important measure for the processes of Westernization in Chinese history after 1860, but it can no longer be the sole criterion by which one evaluates classical learning and Chinese popular culture and society before the Taiping Rebellion. An example of the interpretive dangers inherent in the modernization paradigm today is the ongoing debate in American Chinese studies concerning the application of Habermas's notions of a public sphere and civil society by historians to imperial and modern Chinese history and the parallel use of Gadamer's views of philosophical hermeneutics by philosophers and historians in Hong Kong and Taiwan to reinvent New Confucianism in the borderlands.

Public Sphere/Civil Society in Late Imperial China

Essentially the public sphere/civil society debate is over how to define the complex relations from 1600 to 1990 between, on the one side, the late imperial state, which was represented at different times by the emperor and his court, eunuchs, or officials in the bureaucracy, and on the other side gentry society (particularly in the Yangzi delta). Proponents of a late Qing dynasty Chinese public sphere argue that the Confucianized gentry-managerial elites in urban centers in the late Ming had initiated a movement toward an autonomous political and economic sphere vis-à-vis the dynasty in power. Opponents contend that the claims for a public sphere in Chinese history overdetermine Habermas's notion of a bourgeois civil society in eighteenth-century Europe, itself based on Enlightenment discourse, as the measuring stick for Chinese gentry society, thereby missing the unique political and social compromises worked out between the imperial dynasty and its elites since the Song dynasty. These long-term compromises successfully reined in any localist movement toward political autonomy during the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties.⁵¹

We should add here that recent research has shown that the complicated relationships among the imperial dynasty, local elites, and village peasants were transformed between 1400 and 1600. As China's population grew from approximately 65 to 150 million during that time, the reach of the imperial bureaucracy inevitably declined. Because the monetarization of the Ming economy during the "silver age" of 1550-1650 facilitated the commutation of village and town labor tax services into cash levies, the imperial court and its bureaucracy lost control of the state's land and labor resources well before the 1911 Republican revolution. Retreat of the dynasty from direct involvement

51 Cf. "Symposium" in *Modern China* 19.2 (April 1993). See also Frederic Wakeman, Jr., "Boundaries of the Public Sphere in Ming and Qing China," where the nested hierarchies of official-bureaucratic engagement, "public weal" affairs, and private-secret parts in society are usefully distinguished.

50 Max Weber, *The Religion of China*.

in village affairs magnified the mediating role of the gentry-landlord elite in late Ming and Qing politics and society.⁵²

Under the umbrella of the central government, gentry and merchant elites in the Yangzi delta and elsewhere diversified their hold on local power into expanded forms of profiteering based on land rent and commercial enterprises.⁵³ They also monopolized positions in the imperial bureaucracy by translating their economic and social power into cultural and educational advantages that enabled mainly the sons of gentry, military families, and merchants to pass the empire-wide civil examinations based on the teachings of Confucius and his disciples as interpreted by Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi. Indeed, civil governance remained a tense bureaucratic arena where the imperial court gamely tried to maintain control of its elites, and elites used the government to enhance their social status and economic assets. Within this arena, the Learning of the Way was transmitted as imperial orthodoxy and ideology in homes and dynastic schools from 1400 to 1900.⁵⁴

Any picture of late imperial government and society that presents their interaction as an unremitting imperial hegemony is thus one-sided. So, too, any portrait of civil society as an autonomous "middle realm" misses the carefully worked out political partnership between the imperial government and gentry society. Since medieval times, the imperial state and society were maintained by both the dynasty and its evolving elites. Gentry and merchants got what they wanted through the political system: confirmation of their beliefs in the Learning of the Way; social status; political power; landed wealth. When legitimated by satisfied elites, the imperial court ruled through an elegant and sophisticated bureaucracy, which was filled with classically literate officials recruited from those very gentry and merchants on terms that their literati scholars prescribed. This remarkable partnership between late imperial dynasties and men of high social standing, often

challenged since 1400, was unceremoniously eliminated in 1905, when civil examinations based on classical learning were abolished.

The conceptual distance between a Western notion of an autonomous "public" space versus a Chinese/classical concept of a "public" (*gong* 公) partnership between elites and the ruling dynasty, makes even more limited claims for a public sphere anachronistic.⁵⁵ For example, sociologists and anthropologists such as Max Weber and Maurice Freedman hitherto have tended to view pre-modern Chinese lineage organizations as particularistic and divisive or as impediments to an autonomous society capable of assuming modern political form.⁵⁶ But imperial rulers and their officials saw instead the convergence of kinship ties and public interests, which were incorporated through the legalized institutionalization of charitable estates (*yizhuang* 義莊) and the legalized status of family division of property among sons (*fenjia* 分家) according to the ideals of partible inheritance.⁵⁷ The egalitarian ideals of the classical moral economy were fulfilled in theory through an equitable distribution of wealth and resources via lineages and families throughout society. Whereas gentry political associations (*dang* 黨) based on nonkinship ties during the Song, Ming, and Qing dynasties were defined by the government as a "private/selfish" (*si* 私) threat to society and therefore were banned as illegitimate, social organizations based on descent were promoted as "public," the exact opposite of modern Western nomenclature as used by Habermas.⁵⁸

The reason the premodern imperial dynasty and gentry and merchant families together supported kinship groups as "public" is not difficult to understand. The literati persuasion, conceptualized via classical learning and the Learning of the Way as a social, historical, and political form of daily practice organized around ancestor worship, encouraged kinship ties as the cultural basis for moral behavior. Thus,

⁵⁵ See Mizoguchi Yūzō, *Chūgoku no kō to shi*, passim. See also Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State*, pp. 118–57, for discussion of a more nuanced notion of a religious sphere/cultural nexus.

⁵⁶ See Maurice Freedman, *Chinese Lineage and Society*, pp. 29–31, 88–96, 104–17.

⁵⁷ David Wakefield, *Fenjia*.

⁵⁸ See my "Imperial Politics and Confucian Societies in Late Imperial China."

⁵² See the essays in Linda Grove and Christian Daniels, eds., *State and Society in China*.

⁵³ For discussion, see my *Classicism, Politics, and Kinship*, pp. 16–19.

⁵⁴ See my *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*, pp. 66–124.

well-entrenched local elite power. Others have called this "literati culture."⁶²

For scholars of classical learning in Asia, the public sphere debate reveals the analytic dangers of simple-minded linkages between Chinese history, literati values, and the development of a civil society in late imperial China. At the very least, the controversy concerning China should set off alarms for those working on similar problems in Japan, Korea, or Vietnam. If the Song, Ming, or Qing imperial states never legally granted townsmen, merchants, artisanal guilds, Buddhist and Daoist temples, or literati academies their political autonomy, as occurred in feudal Europe through the application of Roman law and its stress on private rights,⁶³ then inventing a civil society for Qing China, Tokugawa Japan, Chosŏn Korea, or Lê Vietnam, tells us more about ourselves than about the East Asian legacy of Confucius and his followers. Hence, a more self-critical starting point is needed to evaluate claims about the historical roots of civil society in Asia.

Philosophical Hermeneutics and New Confucianism

Similarly politically and intellectually curious is the recent proclivity of Taiwanese and Hong Kong scholars of Chinese intellectual history and Cheng-Zhu philosophy (such as Wu Guangming 吳光明 and Liu Shuxian) to cite Habermas's archenemy in Germany, Hans-Georg

⁶² Linda Grove and Christian Daniels, eds., *State and Society in China*. Duara's "cultural nexus" represents the first successful effort to transcend the arbitrary division between elite and popular society, which his predecessors have generally assumed as given. Hence Duara's "religious sphere" is analytically distinct from the notions of an elite civil society that has been read into Song, Ming, Qing, and Republican history.

⁶³ See Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*.

the bonds of kinship were thought to redound to the benefit of the dynasty. More often than not, political, economic, and cultural resources were focused on the formation and maintenance of lineages in order to promote family success in the social, academic, and political worlds. Consequently we cannot assume, as advocates of the public sphere in Europe often do, that there was an inverse correlation between the power of the state and the development of kinship groups. Chinese lineages before 1900 did not develop in a "private" realm antagonistic to the state but rather evolved in a "public" partnership between the state and its elites, who entered the bureaucracy via competitive civil examinations. In a word, in China we have a state partnership with elite society, not a separate public sphere.

This historical partnership cannot be addressed by applying the Habermas model for a civil society to China.⁵⁹ Efforts to finesse this point by arguing that in China the public sphere included family and lineage interests dilute Habermas's position on public-versus-family interests and the formation of new modes of public communication, based increasingly on bourgeois notions of privacy in eighteenth-century Europe. In a recent conference volume on Song statecraft, for example, the editors have argued that the "notion of a middle-level 'public space' . . . had emerged in Southern Song, as far as we know for the first time in the history of Chinese social and political discourse."⁶⁰ This is what Japanese and Chinese social historians after 1945 called late imperial "gentry rule" or "gentry society," which may have roots in the Song-Yuan-Ming transition,⁶¹ and which they thought explained the paradox of a centralized, bureaucratic state and

⁵⁹ See also Mary Rankin, *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China*, pp. 92-135, and David Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing*, pp. 167-97. Both works, meticulously documented, will remain important scholarly contributions after the civil society in China debate has been left behind.

⁶⁰ See Robert Hymes and Conrad Schirokauer, "Introduction," pp. 51-58. See also Thomas Lee, "Politics, Examinations and the Chinese Society, 1000-1500."

⁶¹ Robert Hymes, "Marriage, Kin Groups, and the Localist Strategy," pp. 113-34.

Gadamer, as an "intellectual ally"⁶⁴ in their struggle to reaffirm Chinese tradition and philosophical hermeneutics as the key to reestablishing the Learning of the Way as the standard of truth. While some Western and Chinese sociocultural historians trumpet Habermas in order to argue the liberating role of the public sphere in late imperial China, many "borderland" students of Chinese philosophy increasingly rally around Gadamer's profound cultural conservatism as the means to reinvent China's classical hermeneutics (*jingdian quanshi chuantong* 經典詮釋傳統) as the basis for the postsocialist future of New Confucianism.⁶⁵

Followers of Habermas place China on the road to democratic emancipation from autocratic political habits, an emancipation they then read back into the Ming and Qing dynasties. Devotees of Gadamer preach a holistic vision of historical understanding that reasserts the cultural function of Confucianism or New Confucianism to serve today as the correct hermeneutics (lit., the "study of interpretations," as opposed to exegesis or exposition) for ontological questions in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China. The hermeneutic basis of all social theory, Gadamer contends, reveals the limiting and unrealized cognitive processes that precede and undermine the so-called impartial-interpretive methods of the social scientist, historian, or philologist.

Once the scientific authority of modern objectivity is challenged in Heidegger's and Gadamer's terms, then the value-laden and value-generating prejudices of Habermasian modernization theory in Europe, as in China, can be challenged and reduced to simply another form of interpretation. True understanding is possible only when through cultural enrichment and hermeneutic amendment new horizons of philosophical meaning are fused to transcend earlier scientific versions of that truth.⁶⁶ As China's "effective history," then, Confucianism or New Confucianism, usually but not always focused on either Confucius or Daoxue, becomes the proper and authoritative locus of cultural

and historical understanding in China. This "effective history" of course is in tension with the modernist vision of emancipation from tradition, which in Habermas's scheme dissolves all authoritarian structures.⁶⁷ Those New Confucians less enamored of Gadamer, such as Yü Ying-shih, see fewer problems in reconciling the demands of Confucian tradition and modernity.

Conservative Germans and some "borderland" New Confucians employ the ahistorical and antiphilological agenda of hermeneutics, which treats texts as holistic teleologies of meanings rather than as objects of historical research, to gainsay the corrosive effects of the modernist discourses of science and objectivity and simultaneously to retreat into a premodern amnesia about how "texts" and "authors" were historically constructed.⁶⁸ Zhu Xi and his followers successfully invented a Southern Song version of such a calculated hermeneutics, which they called the "study of meanings and principles" (*yili zhi xue* 義理之學). Zhu's followers in turn constructed a seamless narrative for what would become a Learning of the Way orthodoxy.⁶⁹ Late imperial classical scholars challenged this seamless narrative and called their efforts to unravel the past a "search for evidence" (*kaozheng zhi xue* 考證之學).⁷⁰ Gadamer and his Chinese followers thus pose as postmodern cultural critics, but their positions, I suggest, could be more properly called "canonical relativism" because for them longstanding traditions—German or Confucian, as the case may be—take precedence.

⁶⁷ See *ibid.*, pp. 107–97. See also Heidegger's distinction between "calculating" and "meditative" thinking in Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, pp. 46–47, which allows him to bemoan the "loss of rootedness" in human life and the threat modern communications poses to the "autochthony" of man.

⁶⁸ See the discussion in Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason*, pp. 107–38. Cf. also Martin Heidegger's "Conversation on a Country Path About Thinking," which invents a dialogue among a scientist, teacher, and scholar on the "noble-mindedness" of waiting for the mystery of existence to be revealed through thinking as commemoration and release.

⁶⁹ See Hoyt Tillman, *Confucian Discourse*.

⁷⁰ For a recent study, see Hamaguchi Fujio, *Shindai Kōkyōgaku no shi-sōshi teki kenkyū*. Cf. Chin-hsing Huang, *Philosophy, Philology, and Politics*.

⁶⁴ On the use of allies in academic discourse, see Bruno Latour, *Science in Action*, pp. 30–59, 162–73.

⁶⁵ Both Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming, and their followers, are elaborated within the Neo-Confucian framework. Often, Confucius and Mencius are referred to in light of Confucianism.

⁶⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, pp. 18–58.

For early modern European intellectual history, studies of earlier discontinuities in discourse, such as that between rationalism and empiricism, reveal how the formation of concepts and their modes of connection and coexistence can change dramatically from one epoch to another.⁷¹ The epistemological vocabulary of educated Europeans during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment in turn reinforced a shift among some elites from Christian rationalism to skeptical and secular empiricism. An epistemological position which stressed that valid knowledge must be corroborated by external facts and impartial observations in turn gained further impetus from the study of the natural world and the concomitant emergence of the scientific revolution.⁷² At the dawn of the twenty-first century we may be witnessing a decisive, postmodern assault on that confidence in epistemology and knowledge, an assault that builds on German romanticists and their existentialist successors.⁷³

An empirical epistemological turn also occurred among elites in seventeenth-century China, which represented the third stage of the scholarly developments in classical learning from antiquity to the late empire. For reasons quite different from the European case, China experienced a remarkable turn in classical discourse from the hermeneutics typified by the philosophy of Zhu Xi to a commitment to empirically based philosophical inquiry. Abstract ideas and a priori rational argumentation gave way as the primary objects of discussion among classicists to concrete facts, verifiable institutions, and historical events.⁷⁴

Unfortunately, the role of Qing philology, when repackaged as the hermeneutics of New Confucianism,⁷⁵ is conveniently elided, leaving "borderland" New Confucians in Taiwan and Hong Kong free from textual controversy,⁷⁶ and able to pose as latter-day Jia Yi's trumpeting a Confucian or Neo-Confucian version of classical philosophy

⁷¹ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 50.

⁷² Cf. Basil Willey, *The Seventeenth Century Background*, pp. 11–30.

⁷³ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.

⁷⁴ See my *From Philosophy to Philology*, passim. See also my "The Unravelling of Neo-Confucianism," pp. 67–89.

⁷⁵ Liu Shuxian, "Duiyu dangdai xin rujia," pp. 4–8.

⁷⁶ On this, see Mark Elvin, "The Collapse of Scriptural Confucianism."

that is both heir to the economic triumphs of market-driven trade and remedy for the political failures of the Chinese revolution. Classical hermeneutics as a tactic of interpretation presupposes a nonphilological reading of literati cultural criticism that reduces intellectual debate centering on phonological (*yinyunxue* 音韻學), etymological (*xun-guxue* 訓詁學), and paleographical studies (*wenzixue* 文字學) of the official canon to a behaviorist-like black box called "ritualism" in the work of Kai-wing Chow or "metaphysical ontology" in On-cho Ng's writings.⁷⁷ Gadamer's stress on the ontological conditions for the possibility of human understanding, which undergirds German and recent New Confucian hermeneutics, restores to canonical texts their religious and philosophical conceits and belittles scholars who impeach the philosophical holism in such pretensions to academic and political power.⁷⁸

Is Gadamer's twentieth-century reading of the history of European philosophy and philology appropriate to the analysis of Chinese texts from the imperial era? Is his Heideggerian approach even appropriate to the study of the Bible or Greek and Latin literature? Is the hermeneutic way of reading texts and authors really the way European intellectual history developed,⁷⁹ i.e., was philology always a servant of hermeneutics? Did it never break free to challenge hermeneutics? Where does Friedrich Nietzsche fit in, then? Or are our "borderland" New Confucians captives of Gadamer's rhetorical flourishes about

⁷⁷ See On-cho Ng, "Toward an Interpretation of Qing Ontology," and Kai-wing Chow, "Purist Hermeneutics and Ritual Ethics in Mid-Qing Thought," both in Richard J. Smith and D. W. Y. Kwok, eds., *Cosmology, Ontology, and Human Efficacy*, a volume commemorating the scholarship of Kwang-Ching Liu to which I also contributed (Benjamin Elman, "The Re-valuation of Benevolence"). For more sobering accounts, see Hamaguchi Fugio, *Shindai Kōkyōgaku no shisō shi teki kenkyū*. See also my *From Philology to Philology*.

⁷⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, pp. 69–104, 151–66, on Husserl. On the rise of humanistic scholarship in Europe, see Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities*.

⁷⁹ See Anthony Grafton, *Defenders of the Text*, for a historical account of the vicissitudes in Western scholarship that both Heidegger and Gadamer conveniently elide (and not simply interpret differently) in their self-serving accounts of Western philosophical hermeneutics.

hermeneutics in German thought, which are poorly grounded in the historical evolution of linguistics, philology, and cultural criticism since the middle ages.⁸⁰ If Gadamer's, like Heidegger's, is a twentieth-century reading of truth in an age of relativism, then it is unclear how this sort of perspective, a sort of "canonical relativism," helps us understand what truth in the present inheres in the Confucian classics and Four Books (other than suggesting that the classics give us "classical" truths). How indeed does one reinvent New Confucianism in Hong Kong and Taiwan without any sacred classical texts? By whose authority are the classics and their commentaries revived as cultural icons?

Liu Shuxian, who is much more careful than many other contemporary New Confucians, generally makes no appeal to canonical texts in his writings. Others, following Gadamer, invoke Cheng-Zhu philosophical ideas as metaphysical and ontological truth. Qian Mu 錢穆, for instance, was instrumental in the historicization of the Five Classics.⁸¹ Later, Qian appealed to Zhu Xi's grand synthesis in his oft-cited *Zhuzi xinxue 'an* 朱子新學案 (New studies of Master Zhu's learning).⁸² Indeed, which Qian Mu do we prefer? Or is the focus on the early Qian Mu and his Han Learning (*Hanxue* 漢學) or the later Qian Mu and his Song Learning (*Songxue* 宋學) part of a contemporary intellectual conundrum?

Yü Ying-shih recommends that we take seriously all of Qian's published writings and address the full historical significance of the changes in his intellectual life. In other words, rather than canonizing Qian Mu as a Song Neo-Confucian, a suspicious cultural enterprise today, New Confucians should be willing to recognize the postclassical elements in Qian Mu's early work on Qing intellectual history, for example.⁸³

⁸⁰ Cf. Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason*, pp. 5-41. Applying a Nietzschean perspective (Nietzsche after all was a remarkable philologist), one could describe the work of Gadamer as postmodern historical amnesia. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, and "Nietzsche: Notes for 'We Philologists.'"

⁸¹ See, for example, Qian Mu, *Liang-Han jingxue jingwen pingyi*.

⁸² See Qian Mu, *Zhuzi xinxue 'an*.

⁸³ Qian Mu, *Zhongguo jin sanbainian xueshushi*.

Hans-Georg Gadamer's conservative views and his use of his mentor, Martin Heidegger, to articulate the authentic, existential encounter between personal prejudice and wider societal horizons of meaning have been formulated in the context of public debates with Jürgen Habermas in which Gadamer stands opposed to what he considers the anarchistic utopian vision of those who would undo the authority of the past needed to maintain public order in the present. It is revealing, therefore, that when scholars of Chinese history and thought incorporate notions from Habermas or Gadamer into their analyses of late imperial civil society or New Confucian philosophical hermeneutics, they seem oblivious to the Habermas-Gadamer debate and simply coopt whatever part of the debate that supports their predetermined scholarly agenda. Indeed, those who cite Gadamer usually make no mention of Habermas; certainly no one involved in the original brouhaha surrounding the "public sphere" in China that I have read has even mentioned Gadamer.

Such elective affinities in contemporary sinology reveal the overdetermined process of adapting Western ideas to do battle in the arena of classical thought and Chinese history. We should be wary of taking sides in the Habermas vs. Gadamer debate until one camp or the other can demonstrate why the choice in China's modern historiography should be between imagining a liberal Chinese public sphere or inventing a conservative New Confucian philosophical hermeneutics. Without that clarification, the Habermasians as well as the Gadamerites are accomplishing little more than unwittingly presenting their autobiographies in Chinese/classical dress: in other words, that they are either in favor of a sinified version of Western liberal democracy or steeped in profound cultural and political conservatism drawn in part from German romanticism. Such personal views are perhaps admirable in Hong Kong and Taiwan where New Confucians are free to protect and preserve their revered traditions of learning. But their academic tactics are also useful indicators of contemporary Confucian currents. When we want to understand the classical/Chinese past and its relevance for Asia in general, however, we must see beyond such ideological distortions, whether in modernist or postmodernist guise.

For example, in his account of the historical significance of the 1793 Macartney mission, James Hevia contends that Lord Macartney's discourse of "sovereign equality" derived from an emerging European

view of equal nations and the concomitant natural exchange of commodities between states that would enhance the well-being of all. Hevia calls this mode of cultural production "speaking public sphere ideas and values" to the Qing empire. A member of the English intellectual aristocracy, Macartney represents for Hevia "public sphere culture" in England, which stressed the British empire's exceptional values of tolerance and liberty, as well as its enlightened use of reason in separating empty diplomatic ceremony from the realpolitik of diplomacy. The embassy's sense of its superiority to the Manchu imperium, complete with Macartney's "naturalist gaze" on all things Chinese, contributed to its inability to understand the diplomatic world of the Qing court. For instance, to Macartney's consternation the court ranked Britain below Burma (soon to become a British colony) in the 1793 diplomatic ceremonies for the Qianlong emperor's eightieth birthday at the imperial summer retreat.⁸⁴

Hevia notes the controversies surrounding the application of Jürgen Habermas's public sphere to European history. Moreover, he does not follow others in misapplying the concept to Qing China. Nonetheless, his argument is not without problems. If Macartney indeed represented a European public sphere, we should also note that he directly served the British ruler as its plenipotentiary envoy to China and was a member of the English aristocracy. Indeed, Macartney falsely presented himself to the Qing court as a cousin of King George III. Macartney's location in the social space of eighteenth-century English political culture, between a royal family and a still aristocratic elite, suggests that Habermas's notion of an autonomous European-style public sphere in England capable of criticizing the British state specifically via a newly emergent modern public opinion is not an altogether satisfactory way of dealing with Macartney and the British embassy to Qing China.⁸⁵

Indeed, it is likely that our views of the public sphere and philosophical hermeneutics are themselves recent genealogical derivatives of a cultural enterprise peculiar to the postwar intellectual environment of West Germany before 1990 (and one that draws on eight-

⁸⁴ James L. Hevia, *Cherishing Men From Afar*.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

teenth century Enlightenment discourse), which is then applied teleologically to both premodern European and premodern Chinese history. The Habermas-Gadamer debate over a progressive public sphere versus conservative cultural hermeneutics reflects one of the central issues in contemporary Germany's own historical self-understanding, that is, how to deal with the traumatic transition in postwar Germany from Prussian, Nazi, and Stalinist despotism to liberal democracy. Similarly, when translated into Chinese history, the debate is emblematic of the traumatic retreat of Confucianism from China proper to the nonsocialist "borderlands" after 1949.

Final Comments

Just as for imperial China, classical learning has served us as a weapon. Loaded down by our own contemporary presuppositions, we have, like our predecessors, used Confucius and Zhu Xi, among many others, as ammunition to fire the terms Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism into our own unspoken ideological battles. In the China field, we have still not put behind us the misleading image of Huang Zongxi 黄宗羲 (1610–95), a critic of Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy and a champion of Wang Yangming, as the "Rousseau of China."⁸⁶ Nor have we generally overcome the erroneous image of Yan Yuan 顏元 (1635–1704), a cantankerous ritualist bordering on the hysterical, as a Dewey-style pragmatist.⁸⁷ And we still pigeonhole the reclusive Hunan scholar Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–92) as the pioneer of materialism in early-modern Chinese thought.⁸⁸

Similarly, in a recent study, Kai-wing Chow, makes ritualism (*liao* 禮教) the central, hermeneutic discourse of Confucianism from

⁸⁶ Shimada Kenji, *Chūgoku ni okeru kindai shii no zassetsu*.

⁸⁷ For a corrective, see Jui-sung Yang, "A New Interpretation of Yan Yuan."

⁸⁸ For discussion, see Alison H. Black, *Man and Nature*, pp. 61–63.

the late Ming to the late Qing.⁸⁹ Chow links classical learning during the Qing dynasty to a conservative fixation on classical ritual. His research adds to our understanding of how and why changes in rituals remained an important dimension of literati and merchant life in the transition from Song Learning discourse to Qing-dynasty Han Learning. Unfortunately, his monocultural account fails to consider aspects of the historical record that are not reducible to ritualism and the top-down social hegemony of elites.

We need to ponder whether classical rituals also served as a venue for local forms of resistance in China, and whether, as demonstrated by Nicholas Dirks in India, ritual can also be read as a form of social subversion where the "old arenas are also brimming with resistance."⁹⁰ We have seen above that family division of wealth in imperial China was played out according to the rules of the imperial moral economy, lineage ritual traditions, and imperial legal statutes and sub-statutes. At bottom, however, the division of economic wealth in Chinese families was not top-down or hegemonic. Brothers fighting against brothers was socially dangerous, and only the invention of the charitable estate preserved some lineages from the inevitable long-term social and economic consequences of partible inheritance. The secular trend toward downward social mobility for most Ming-Qing families was, as David Wakefield's recent study has shown, not a sign of ritual hegemony, but its opposite, sibling resistance to the social and economic forms of power wielded by patriarchs.⁹¹

Chow's account also uncritically labels Yan Yuan's early Qing focus on ritualism as social pragmatism, without fully realizing that Yan's influential reform of what he considered the excesses of Cheng-Zhu classical ritual was in part his personal cure for a debilitating identity crisis, a cure which Yan wished all literati, then living after the traumatic demise of the Chinese Ming dynasty at the hands of Manchu conquering elites and their collaborators, to follow. Yan's ritualism was not an example of pragmatic, rational choice. Rather, for Yan Yuan proper physical training through ritual was not only instru-

mentally useful but also culturally healthy as a corrective for what he perceived as the feminized and bookish ritual practices of the followers of Cheng-Zhu Learning and self-cultivation who had lost the empire.⁹²

Ritualism by itself tells us very little about the vicissitudes in late imperial literati life and thought because the changes in classical ritual, whether during the Song when family rituals were reformed, or during the Qing when pre-Song rituals were revived, were part of the larger historical context of politics, economy, and society within which ritual operated. Ritual—like literacy—was not an autonomous cultural technology that operated independently according to the internalist laws of philosophical hermeneutics. Yan Yuan's body-oriented ritualism became subversive, in Dirks' terms, of Zhu Xi's mind-oriented meditational ideals based on the Learning of the Way. Because of this sort of "ritualist excess," Yan was frequently attacked. Very often the hysterical voices of social conservatism in Ming-Qing China, such as Yan Yuan's, were markers for how much their society had already changed, not conclusive evidence for a cultural and ritual regime that reigned supreme in the seventeenth or eighteenth century.

Things do not get much better in other recent studies. The Taizhou 泰州 literatus Li Zhi 李贄 (1527–1602) from the late Ming, formerly described as "left wing," now appears as a Bourdieuan-like anti-academic academic in Pierre Bourdieu's own *Homo Academicus*.⁹³ Indeed, to turn Orientalist discourse inside out a bit, Bourdieu's influential efforts to transvaluate Emile Durkheim's sociological vision of healthy social, political, and cultural reproduction via state-sponsored public education into a dark, hegemonic vision of symbolic violence may require a 1960s Maoist prism to unravel French refractions of the Chinese revolution within the European revolutionary tradition.⁹⁴

Mao's role in the violent mid-twentieth century demise of classical learning in China, which influenced Korean and Vietnamese revolutionaries, also reads as a cautionary tale about the uses of Confucian-

⁹² See Jui-sung Yang, "A New Interpretation of Yen Yuan."

⁹³ See Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, p. 5.

⁹⁴ See, for instance, Roland Depierre, "Maoism in Recent French Educational Thought and Practice."

⁸⁹ Kai-wing Chow, *The Rise of Confucian Ritualism*.

⁹⁰ See Nicholas Dirks, "Ritual and Resistance."

⁹¹ David Wakefield, *Fenjia*.

ism in modern Asian history. Early twentieth-century efforts to negate Confucianism in the name of national progress and modern science followed the same simplistic intellectual logic as current appeals to Neo-Confucianism as the voice of progress (see Chapter 14, by Theodore Hutner, in this volume).⁹⁵ Neither is an accurate assessment of the Chinese classical legacy, whether defined in terms of ancient literati learning (Ruxue), Song Learning of the Way (Daoxue), Qing dynasty evidential research studies (Kaozhengxue), or the New Confucianism (Xin ruxue) of contemporaries.

One of the important lessons of this volume of essays on rethinking Confucianism is that unless we become more precise about the historical uses of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism, we will remain captives of political and ideological agendas, pro or contra Confucius, pro or contra Zhu Xi, that are free to grow into conceptual monsters, out of our control, in the realms of journalism, religion, and politics.⁹⁶ Another important conclusion of this volume is that we urgently need in the twenty-first century a fuller genealogical and intellectual account of the "New Confucians" of China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, as well as of Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, which will overturn the accounts of the so-called last Confucians in most twentieth century published work on the "modern fate" of Confucianism.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ See Wang Hui, "The Fate of 'Mr. Science' in China."

⁹⁶ Revival of shrill "yellow peril" rhetoric in radical American Republicanism, and in the troubled American Reform Party, represented by Patrick Buchanan, and the strident Confucian challenge voiced by the political cadres of East Asian economic growth are self-fulfilling prophecies that have been formulated in terms of each other.

⁹⁷ See for example, Guy Alitto, *The Last Confucian*, and Susan Chan Egan, *A Latterday Confucian*. Cf. Joseph Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate*. For pioneering work in this new direction, see Susan Lee, "Xu Fuguan and New Confucianism in Taiwan."

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