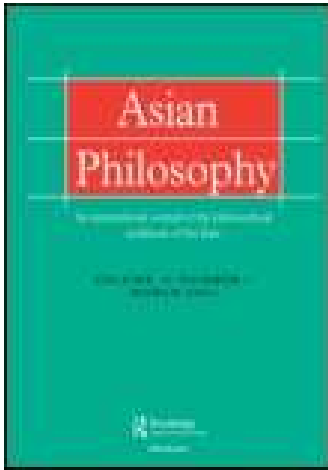


This article was downloaded by: [Peking University], [Demin Duan]

On: 01 July 2014, At: 19:18

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Asian Philosophy: An International Journal of the Philosophical Traditions of the East

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/casp20>

Reviving the Past for the Future?: The (In)compatibility between Confucianism and Democracy in Contemporary China

Demin Duan

Published online: 27 May 2014.

To cite this article: Demin Duan (2014) Reviving the Past for the Future?: The (In)compatibility between Confucianism and Democracy in Contemporary China, *Asian Philosophy: An International Journal of the Philosophical Traditions of the East*, 24:2, 147-157, DOI: [10.1080/09552367.2014.919751](http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09552367.2014.919751)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09552367.2014.919751>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

Reviving the Past for the Future?: The (In)compatibility between Confucianism and Democracy in Contemporary China

Demin Duan

The issue of (in)compatibility between Confucianism and modern democracy, particularly in China, has attracted much debate over the decade. This article singles out the particular notion of Minben 民本, which is at the center of the argument for a ‘Confucian democracy’, and argues that it is fundamentally different from modern democracy. However, this does not mean that Confucianism could not be connected with modern democracy. The important question is: what exactly does it mean to ‘connect’ Confucianism to the modern society? The author argues that only by being disconnected with political power could there be meaningful ‘Confucian democracy’ today in China.

Is Confucianism compatible with modern democracy? This question has attracted much debate over the decade. This paper singles out the particular notion of *Minben*, which is at the center of the supportive argument for a Confucian democracy, and argues that it is fundamentally different from what modern democracy is about. However, this does not mean that Confucianism has nothing to do with modern democratic life in countries like China. Contemporary proponents of the revival of Confucianism is right in that Confucianism is still greatly relevant in China’s search for a better future. But what exactly is its position today? What exactly does it mean to ‘adapt’ Confucianism to the modern society? This paper aims to provide some answers to these questions.

1. The Idea of *Minben* 民本

The term ‘Minben’ or ‘Yi Min Wei Ben 以民为本’ literally means ‘the people are the basis’. It is usually considered as the closest concept in Confucianism to modern democracy. This concept originated from a time even earlier than Confucianism. But

Correspondence to: Demin Duan, Department of Political Science, School of Government, Leo Ko-Guan Building, Peking University, Beijing 100871, P. R. China. Email: duandemin@gmail.com

obviously it got its fullest development in Confucianism, especially in Mencius's text (see Wang & Titunik, 2000, pp. 74–76). Therefore, I will mainly focus on *Mencius* to elaborate its meanings and connotations. The most classic articulation of the meaning of 'Minben' is perhaps in the chapter 'Wanzhang 万章' of *Mencius*, where Mencius and Wanzhang are having a conversation about what makes a person a ruler.

Wanzhang said, 'Did it happen that Yao gave the realm to Shun?'

Mencius said, 'No. The Son of Heaven cannot give the realm to someone.'

'But Shun did possess the realm. Who gave it to him?'

'Heaven gave it to him.'

'When Heaven gave it to him, did it ordain this through repeated instructions?'

'No. Heaven does not speak. This was manifested simply through Shun's actions and his conduct of affairs.'

'In what way was this manifested through his actions and his conduct of affairs?'

The Son of Heaven can present a man to Heaven, but he cannot cause Heaven to give him the realm. The lords can present a man to the Son of Heaven, but they cannot cause the Son of Heaven to make him a lord. A great officer can present a man to the lords, but he cannot cause the lords to make him a great officer. In antiquity Yao presented Shun to Heaven, and it was Heaven that accepted him. He displayed him to the people, and the people accepted him. This is why I said that 'Heaven does not speak'. This was manifested solely through his actions and his conduct of affairs. (Mencius, 2009, p. 103)

A ruler (or known as the Son of Heaven) is to be a ruler not because he is given the position by any particular person. The realm (or *Tian Xia* 天下) is not anybody's property to be given to someone else. It can only be given by the Heaven. It is because someone is liked by the Heaven that he is to become ruler of the realm. The incumbent ruler can present a successor to the Heaven, of course. But it is totally up to the Heaven to decide whether he is qualified. But how can the Heaven's will be known? How do we know whether Heaven like this person or not? Then here comes the important role of 'the people'. As Mencius says, 'It is through the people that the Heaven's will is known.' Mencius cites the 'Great Declaration' (*Tai Shi* 太誓): saying that, 'Heaven sees as my people see. Heaven hears as my people hear' (Mencius, 2009, p. 104).

In this vein, in the last chapter of *Mencius*, Mencius says: 'The people are of greatest importance, the altars of the soil and grain are next, and the ruler is of least importance' (Mencius, 2009, p. 159). Here it seems that Mencius specifically says that the people are the most important, the state or nation (known as *Sheji* 社稷, or the altars of the soil and grain) is the second, and the ruler is the least important. Apparently, this is a great evidence for many scholars to believe that there are some serious elements of democracy present in the old philosophy of Confucianism. Despite the fact that from time to time Confucian teachings urge people to obey their superiors—be they rulers, fathers, or husbands, Confucianism could in a way be compatible with modern democracy. The profound emphasis on the importance of

‘Min 民’ or the people proves that it is still politically relevant today, in view of the overwhelming demand for democracy nowadays.

Indeed, in early Confucian texts, requirements for rulers to be the ‘true’ rulers are ubiquitous. For instance, Confucian thinkers always distinguish between ‘Wang Dao 王道’ (or true king) and ‘Ba Dao 霸道’ (or hegemon). A hegemon is one who is supported by force. Mencius says that, a hegemon only pretends to be humane (or *ren* 仁), and he has to have a large state to remain in power. But ‘One who out of Virtue (*De* 德) practices humaneness is a true king, and a true king does not need anything large’ (Mencius, 2009, p. 33). This is akin to what Western thinkers would call legitimate and illegitimate power. A legitimate power, in Mencius’s mind, is one that is based on *ren*, or humaneness, if we are forced to give it an English translation. Those who maintain his power and realm not on the basis of *ren*, but on mere force, are not liked by the Heaven, and will not last. Thus, we can say that, in the Confucian ideal, power is always connected with a higher moral standard. In this sense, power is to certain extent restricted. At least, Confucian scholars in the history are greatly dedicated to warning rulers the dangers of not being humane and persuading them to behave like a ‘true ruler’. The ideal of ‘Wang Dao’ functions more or less like ‘honor’ in Montesquieu’s elaboration of the principle of monarchy in Europe, in the sense that it to some extent restrains the King’s freedom of action (Montesquieu, 1989, p. 30).

In this regard, with a risk of oversimplification, modern scholars find that Confucianism is not necessarily against the liberal-democratic ideology (see Keqiang, 2006; Murthy, 2000). As a matter of fact, the school of New Confucianism, an intellectual movement of Confucianism that began in the early twentieth century, clearly claims that, as the major culture of China, Confucianism is not in opposition to the modern liberal democratic norms. Actually, not only the two are compatible, but doctrines of Western liberal democracy have a great deal to learn from Confucianism (Tang, 2000, pp. 550–555). Obviously, this idea is shared by a lot of thinkers—Western or Chinese—ever since, not without a good reason (see Hall & Ames, 1999, pp. 170–174; Tu, 1991). One of the most representative in this regard would be Chin Yao-chi’s vision of *Minben* incorporating Western democracy:

Promulgating the idea of *Minben*, making it incorporate democracy in the West, so as to refresh the idea of *Minben* and find a new way for it, and to let democracy be rooted in China: this should be the general aim of modern Chinese intellectuals. (Chin, 2008, p. 199)

If we put aside the inside differences among these thinkers, it is safe to say that, for them, people living under the Confucian culture can embrace modern democracy in a smooth way. And this is attested by the fact that many East Asian countries, which fall in the ‘circle of Confucian Culture’, are indeed leading a democratic political life. There may truly be a possibility of adapting Confucianism to modern democracy, as to some extent being exemplified by South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, etc. But here we have to ask the question: if we say that Confucianism is indeed compatible with modern democracy, what does it exactly mean by this ‘compatibility’? What kind of

‘Confucian democracy’ are we talking about? Is it a kind of modern democracy with Confucian features, or is it a totally different kind of democracy than that originated from the West? Is it ‘an apple with different color’ or an apple that is only called apple but actually is potato? In other words, is it ‘pomme avec couleur différente’ or ‘pomme de terre?’

2. Minben and Modern Democracy

Although there are elements in traditional Confucian belief, especially in the idea of ‘Minben’, that seems to be compatible with the basic pattern of modern democracy, as a matter of fact, if we look carefully into the religious–political basis of the ‘Minben’ idea, there are fundamental differences.

In the conversation between Wanzhang and Mencius we mentioned above, Mencius emphasizes that people’s feelings and opinions are critical in judging whether a ruler is a true ruler. Yao presented Shun to the Heaven. But the Heaven does not speak. The Heaven presented Shun to the people, whose reactions *speak for* the Heaven. Actually, Yao has a son, who by some thoughts could be the convenient successor of Yao himself. However, that did not happen. Instead, the people in a way ‘chose’ Shun to be the true ruler. Mencius ‘recorded’ how the people reacted:

After Yao died, and the three years’ mourning was completed, Shun withdrew from Yao’s son and went south of the South River. But the lords of the realm, when they went to court, went not to Yao’s son but to Shun. Litigants went not to Yao’s son but to Shun. Singers sang not of Yao’s son but of Shun. This is why I said, ‘It was Heaven’. It was after all this that he went to the central states and ascended to the position of the Son of the Heaven. (Mencius, 2009, p. 1104)

It is apparent that ‘the people’ get much privilege here in Mencius’s articulation of what a true ruler is. However, let us not forget that there is always ‘the Heaven’ involved. In fact, in the text, the Heaven is without question the highest order of will. Ultimately, a ruler is a true ruler only because he is wanted or approved by the Heaven. And ‘the people’ is the correct ‘reference point’ from which we can know about the Heaven’s will. In Chinese history, especially during transitions of political power, there were always ‘signs’ of the change of the Heaven’s will. These signs were usually said to be carved in nature, in a way representing the Heaven’s will. For example, someone would find in the body of a living fish a note that ordains a particular person to be the true Son of Heaven. Certainly, this is superstitious from the hindsight. But it actually points to the fact that it is the belief system with the Heaven at its center that is behind the body politic and its power structure. The idea of ‘Minben’ could only be properly understood from this perspective.

How the Heaven’s will is known? How to interpret the Heaven’s will? Those who are closer to the answers to these questions are closer to power. The early Confucian saints, including Mencius, obviously believe that the most reasonable way to interpret the Heaven’s will is to see through the people’s eyes and hear through people’s ears. There, within this system of ‘Heaven-ruler-people’, the people are actually the least

important. It is the ruler at the center, with the unseen Heaven above his throne and the people under his rule. This is despite the fact that Mencius specifically said that the people are the most important. What Mencius actually meant is that the people are the most important in knowing who is the true ruler. He does not mean that the people should rule.

So, we can see that it is the Heaven's will, instead of the people's will, that is the ultimate source of legitimacy for political power. The people do not have the right to choose who could be the ruler. The Heaven chooses a true ruler and the Heaven's will is reflected within and confirmed by people's feelings and opinions. This is why a ruler is called and believed to be the 'Son of Heaven' instead of 'representative of the people'. People believe that they are not equal with the true ruler. The ruler and persons around him are 'above them' or somehow 'sacred' in their eyes. The ruler is the representative of the Heaven instead of the people.

Thus, we can definitely say that 'Minben' is fundamentally different from what we say about modern democracy. Of course, there can never be agreement about what modern democracy is supposed to be. But at least I think we can be sure about this: it is the people who rules, instead of either God or the Heaven. Or, to put it in another way, neither God nor the Heaven could be the source of legitimacy for political power any more. I would refer this idea of modern democracy to Alexis de Tocqueville, in whose mind we are supposed to lead a democratic political life exactly because the religious one ceases to be politically relevant in the modern society. We are equal in conditions, as Tocqueville says (Tocqueville, 2000, p. 6). This 'equality in conditions' means that people consider themselves as equal in the representation of the will of God or the Heaven. And we cannot claim that, because someone is more favored by God or the Heaven, he/she deserves to be in power. In other words, God's will or the Heaven's will no longer matters in people's political life.

According to Tocqueville, it is the people's will that counts in the modern society, not God's will or the Heaven's will. Tocqueville is concerned with what binds people together, or what organizes people in to a unity (Jaume, 2011). In the past, it is religion that binds people together and power structure is arranged accordingly. However, in the modern society, it is what Tocqueville calls people's 'common opinion' that binds them together. Or, to put it differently, it is the people's will that unites them together. If any person claims that he/she deserves to be in power only because of God's or the Heaven's favor, he/she would most probably be considered as crazy.

On this line, I think there is much reason to believe that the idea of 'Minben' embodied in early Confucians' thought is basically outdated. It has very little relevance in the realm of the politics in modern day. Tocqueville talks about the transition from aristocratic society to modern democracy society. I am not claiming that this is exactly the same process that happened in China. But at least we can say that, regarding the form of society, modern China is fundamentally different from the old China. We would definitely fool ourselves if we ignore the tremendous change. For one thing, we no longer distinguish ourselves into 'big man' (大人) and 'little man' (小人). We no longer believe that some person is more sacred than others, in

the same sense as there is no longer any social distinction between aristocrat and common people in the West that carries political importance. It would be ridiculous nowadays if someone claims that he is 'Son of Heaven'.

Apparently, there is a kind of 'equality of conditions' in Chinese society. Political legitimacy in China today has to be based on the will of the people as a whole. This is most obvious in the language used by politicians today. Although the rule of the Chinese Communist Party in China is not exactly democratic, the party uses the same kind of language that is used by any party in Western democracies. That is, the party has no other option but to claim that its power is rooted in the people as a whole. The party clearly bases its power upon the people's will. It is of course a serious question whether it allows dissent in interpreting the people's will. But, because it puts its legitimacy on the people's will, its rule is fundamentally different from traditional powers. Although there has already been much elaboration on the conflict between Confucianism and modern democracy, this dimension of power and its legitimacy is rarely seen in the debate. And underestimation of this dimension would lead to what I would call being 'lost in the past'.

3. Lost in the Past?

If we accept what has been said above, we have to admit that the kind of democratic life we are supposed to lead in today's China is distinctively different from the Confucian ideal. Many contemporary Confucian thinkers who are looking for some kind of compatibility between the two are either overlooking or underestimating the break between modern China and ancient China. However, this being said, I very much sympathize with those who want to believe that there will be a kind of Confucian modern democracy in the future. This intellectual trend represents a respectable revolt against Western hegemony on what kind of political life China should embrace. They are fighting on two fronts at the same time: on one front, they are against the communist ideology and its take on China's political future; on the other, they are in opposition to the idea of copying Western liberal democratic life to China. This turn to China's ancient culture is a way to look back in search of a better future (Zhang, 2010). But it is exactly because we are in the modern time, instead of the past, that this search could sometimes be confusing or even upsetting.

Qiu Feng 秋风, the now famous advocate of the so-called 'Confucian constitutionalism', is a good example of this kind of confusion. Qiu Feng's advocating of 'going back' is clearly aimed at the now overwhelming Western influence in conceiving China's (political) future. Basically, what Qiu Feng asks is: why do we have to choose between Communism and liberalism? Why cannot there be a 'Chinese' way out? He claims that there are actually enough sources in China's own culture, especially in early Confucianism, that we can use to organize our own political life. He went to great lengths to prove that there is already a kind of constitutionalism embodied in ancient Confucian philosophy waiting us to uncover for our contemporary use. We should 'go back' in order to conceive a good future, he specifically says. We have to

adapt, of course, since we are living in a modern world. But the point is that ‘the past could be the ideal’ (Qiu, 2011, p. 28).

Occasionally, however, Qiu Feng finds himself to be admitting that this ‘adapting’ of early Confucianism to the modern world could be more complicated than it appears. In an article emphasizing the importance of preserving ancient culture and religion for the sake of modern public’s good, using Tocqueville’s thoughts on religion as an example, he states that we have to untangle politics and religion if we want to maintain religion’s influence on the modern time (Qiu, 2009). Unfortunately, this idea has not been developed in his other major works. The reason, I think, is that this idea of the necessity of separation between religion and political power in the modern society goes against his search in the past. In the past, power comes from the Heaven, not the people. If this religious dimension does not exist anymore, we are living in a totally different world than did the early Confucians. If we want to salvage Confucianism’s influence on modern China, we have to break with it in a way. Apparently, Qiu Feng has not been able to give much thought to this dimension.

Jiang Qing 蒋庆, another famous contemporary Confucian scholar, a devout Confucian legitimist, is clearer on this point. More strictly following early Confucian belief, Jiang specifically says that political legitimacy should not be restricted to the people’s will in the modern world. Drawing on *Gongyang Zhuan* 公羊传, a commentary on a Confucian classic, he says:

Political power can be justified through three sources: the legitimacy of heaven (a sacred, transcendent sense of natural morality), the legitimacy of earth (wisdom from history and culture), and the legitimacy of the human (political obedience through popular will). (Jiang & Bell, 2012)

On top of these three sources of legitimacy, Jiang further claims that it is ‘Humane Authority’ (仁政) that should be installed in contemporary China. He says:

Today, the will of the people must be given an institutional form that was lacking in the past, though it should be constrained and balanced by institutional arrangements reflecting the other two forms of legitimacy. In modern China, Humane Authority (仁政) should be exercised by a tricameral legislature: a House of Exemplary Persons (通儒院) that represents sacred legitimacy; a House of the Nation (国体院) that represents historical and cultural legitimacy; and a House of the People (庶民院) that represents popular legitimacy. (Jiang & Bell, 2012)

As we can see, what Jiang is suggesting is that, in addition to the legitimacy of the people’s will, we have to include other sources of legitimacy as well, most importantly the Heaven and the history. He even laid out plan for the tricameral legislature. For instance, ‘Candidates for membership of the House of Exemplary Persons should be nominated by scholars and examined on their knowledge of the Confucian classics and then assessed through trial periods of progressively greater administrative responsibilities’ (Jiang & Bell, 2012). Thus, we have a balance between the will of the Heaven and the people. It is a way allowing both the modernity and the past to reign in Chinese political life. Moreover, he uses this ‘legitimacy of the Heaven’ to criticize the modern doctrine of the sovereignty of the people, saying that it is too

narrowly confined to the electorate's will, ignoring such greater good as global environment protection.

Not usually being considered as an orthodox academic, he may be excused for a lot of vagueness in his expression. For instance, the people's will may not exactly be the same as the electorate's will. However, the major problem with his approach is that he cannot explain how exactly this representation of the Heaven and history works in real life. Either the persons that somehow represent the Heaven get too much power and annul the people's will, or they are just minor checks and balances against the popular will and does not really constitute serious challenge to the supreme legitimacy of the sovereignty of the people. Actually, there can only be one will of sovereignty if there is to be a political unity at all. There can be only one common language for acquiring power: either through claiming representation of the Heaven's will, or through claiming representation of the people's will. Otherwise, sooner or later, the society will fall apart in acquiring power through fundamentally different means. As far as I can imagine, Contemporary China cannot be on the path to retrieve the legitimacy of the Heaven. The ship has sailed and there is no turning back. China is in the modern period and there is no other way but to accept that.

4. An Alternative Approach in Combining the Modernity and the Past

However, what has been said above does not mean that Confucianism is totally irrelevant in conceiving a better future for China. On the contrary, I believe that it is absolutely a noble cause to turn back to past for the future. It is also respectable to try to 'adapt' Confucianism to modern democracy. But the problem is how to adapt; or, as we can see, what exactly does this 'adapt' mean. Now that the idea of 'Minben' inherent in the old Confucian ideal is fundamentally incompatible with modern democracy, could there still be a way to connect the two?

An alternative approach in combining the modernity and the past, adapting Confucianism to modern democracy, is to completely disentangle Confucianism from political power. Modern democracy has its own dynamism of power which is alien to any kind of traditional Confucian doctrines. More importantly, this dynamism has already become completely 'Chinese'. Ever since early nineteenth century, the people's rule has become *the* language for legitimizing political power. Somewhat ironically, the Chinese Communist Party has played a significant role in forging this language. It is unthinkable nowadays that any other party would avoid using that language. It is ever more impossible and anachronistic to try to reverse this trend and try to go back to some kind of rule of the Heaven's will.

I propose that Confucianism's influence upon our modern political life should only be acquired through indirect means. Confucianism should become a strictly personal ethics and should leave democracy to itself. Only by being a personal ethics could it have full impact on people's mores or habits of the heart. By regulating people's mores, setting boundaries in people's moral word, Confucianism can become a remarkable source in helping modern democracy work in China. As a matter of

fact, if Confucianism continues to be entangled with political power in contemporary China, as many Confucian scholars today would propose, Confucianism is more likely to lose its effective impact on people's soul and heart. People would turn against it as they see it as a tool used by politicians and parties to strengthen their own power.

Very importantly, by being disentangled from political power, Confucianism can become a truly critical source. For thousands of years Confucians have been talking about the critical edge of 'Dao 道' in Confucianism. 'Rather to follow *Dao* than the king' has indeed been the ideal of many integrate Confucians in the history. But it is also true that for the most part of the Chinese history, Confucianism has been strengthening rather than diminishing Kings' power. By becoming a personal ethics, Confucianism can reclaim its critical function and become a remarkable force in the political dynamism in China.

An example of this is the response of the 'modern Confucian' to the latest judicial interpretation of the Marriage Law by the Supreme Court of China. This new (or the third) judicial interpretation basically rules that a spouse has no share of ownership of property bought in mortgage by the other spouse before marriage. This interpretation drew a lot of criticisms, especially from the Confucian intellectuals. Confucians argue that this new interpretation emphasizes too much on individual liberty with regard to couple relationship in marriage. It diminishes the status of family by disadvantaging the party who contributes to the family but does not earn much money. As one author named Wu Fei 吴飞 says:

Individual liberty is indeed valuable. But it is also dangerous, isolated, and uneasy to bear. If we take individual liberty as the only value, law would slowly become a tool for building legal cases. At this time, only institutions that strongly safeguard family ethics and protect family stability can enrich and empower individuals, enabling him to realize and be responsible for his freedom. (Wu, 2011, p. 38)

Interestingly, the criticism of the individualistic turn of law on marriage comes right out of Confucian resources. Authors like Fei Wu specifically cite early Confucian texts, such as *Li Ji* (or *Book of Rites*) to support their arguments. More importantly, as far as I can, see this approach can easily connect with ordinary Chinese people. In today's China, people are more and more suspicious of moral superiority on the basis of age. But they can easily sympathize with the Confucian accentuation of the value of family. It is in this regard that I think Confucianism today could still play a very important role.

Relatedly, I would emphasize that the separation between Confucianism and political power is the very precondition of the former being a critical source. In 2010, Daniel A. Bell published an article titled 'Reconciling Socialism and Confucianism?: Reviving Tradition in China' in *Dissent*, which is followed by Michael Walzer's response and after that Bell's response to Walzer. In his article, Bell argues for or defends the contemporary relevance of Confucianism in China. Moreover, he says that the West could learn a lot from this East Asian culture. However, Walzer's response is largely critical, claiming that Bell's representation of

Confucianism in China today is not critical enough (Bell, 2010). Indeed, much of today's Confucian talking tends to condone, rather than criticize, the authoritarian state. In Jiang Qing's words, Confucianism has to use state for its own use. Apparently, Walzer has noticed the problem, but is not able to spell out where that problem comes from. As we can see from above, only by being separated from power could Confucianism retain its full critical force, which Bell fails to notice.

Additionally, Confucianism nowadays could greatly contribute to the (re)building of civil society in China. After the Cultural Revolution, people can to some extent reconnect with their ancestor's customs. By emphasizing the value of community and 'organic' connection among people, it could help build a vibrant civil life in mainland China, just as it has already done in Korea and Taiwan. There have already been a lot of civil organizations that are dedicated to Confucian causes. People in China today no longer see Confucianism as something backward or 'feudal', but as a proud tradition of their own. Even the party or the state occasionally makes use of that 'tradition' in their representation of the people.

This change in people's opinions and attitudes—or in Robert Bellah's words 'habits of the heart' (see Bellah, 1985)—may well lead to some significant change in the political scene. This change would definitely go against totalitarian tendency as we see during the Cultural Revolution era. Certainly, in this regard, Confucianism itself should go through some alternation so as to fit in the modern society, as Christianity does in modern times. But as long as it is a living belief in people's lives, it could and should be beneficiary to the well-being of the political community.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that the Confucian idea of 'Minben' is fundamentally different from modern democracy. This leads to the serious question of whether there could be a Confucian version of modern democracy today. If there is, what kind of 'Confucian democracy' we could anticipate. In this regard, I contend that many contemporary advocates of a combination/adaption between democracy and Confucianism overestimate their congruence. The reason, I think, lies in their negligence or underestimate of the break between modern and ancient China. Following this, I propose that only by being disentangled from political power, Confucianism could play a meaningful role in contemporary Chinese politics. Only in this way could there be 'Confucian democracy' that makes sense.

References

- Bell, D. A. (2010). Reconciling socialism and Confucianism?: Reviving tradition in China. *Dissent*, 57(1), 91–99.
- Bellah, R. N. (1985). *Habits of the heart: Individualism and commitment in American life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

- Chin, Y.-C. 金耀基. (2008). *Zhong Guo Min Ben Si Xiang Shi* 中国民本思想史 [The history of the thought of Minben in China]. Beijing: Law Press.
- Hall, D. L., & Ames, R. T. (1999). *The democracy of the dead: Dewey, Confucius, and the hope for democracy in China*. Chicago, IL: Open Court.
- Jaume, L. (2011). The avatars of religion in Tocqueville. In M. Vatter (Ed.), *Creating god: Sovereignty and religion in the age of global capitalism* (pp. 273–284). New York, NY: Fordham University Press.
- Jiang, Q., & Bell, D. A. (2012, July 11). A Confucian constitution for China. *New York Times*, p. A25.
- Keqiang, X. (2006). Early Confucian principles: The potential theoretic foundation of democracy in modern China. *Asian Philosophy*, 16(2), 135–148.
- Mencius. (2009). *Mencius* (Irene Bloom, Trans., Philip J. Ivanhoe, Ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Montesquieu, C.-L. D. S. B. D. (1989). *The spirit of the laws*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Murthy, V. (2000). The democratic potential of Confucian Minben thought. *Asian Philosophy*, 10(1), 33–47. doi:10.1080/09552360050001752
- Qiu, F. 秋风. (2009). Tocqueville Lun Zong Jiao Yu Li Xian Zhi Guan Xi 托克维尔论宗教与立宪之关系 [Tocqueville on the relationship between religion and constitution]. *You Tai Yan Jiu* 犹太研究, 7, 85–98.
- Qiu, F. 秋风. (2011). Ru Jia Xian Zheng Min Sheng Zhu Yi 儒家宪政民生主义 [Confucian constitutional thoughts on people's livelihood], *Kai Fang Shi Dai* 开放时代, 6, 26–41.
- Tang, J. E. A. (2000). Manifesto for a reappraisal of sinology and the reconstruction of Chinese culture. In W. T. De Bary & R. Lufrano (Eds.), *Sources of Chinese tradition* (Vol. 2, pp. 550–555). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Tocqueville, A. D. (2000). *Democracy in America* (Harvey C. Mansfield & Delba Winthrop, Ed. & Trans.). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Tu, W.-M. (1991). A Confucian perspective on the rise of industrial East Asia. In S. Krieger & R. Trauzettel (Eds.), *Confucianism and the modernization of China* (pp. 29–41). Mainz: Hase & Koehler Verlag.
- Wang, E., & Titunik, R. F. (2000). Democracy in China: The theory and practice of Minben. In S. Zhao (Ed.), *China and democracy: Reconsidering the prospects for a democratic China* (pp. 73–88). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Wu, F. 吴飞. (2011). Dang Dai Zhong Guo Hun Yin De Jia Zhi Que Wei 当代中国婚姻的价值缺位 [The value vacancy of marriage in contemporary China]. *Wen Hua Zong Heng* 文化纵横, February, 35–38.
- Zhang, Y. (2010). The future of the past: On Wang Hui's. *Rise of Modern Chinese Thought*. *New Left Review*, 62, 47–83.