

FIVE CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES FOR CONFUCIANISM

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Abstract: In this essay I will discuss five major challenges faced by Confucianism in recent times. Two of these challenges have been widely acknowledged, namely those of science and democracy. I believe that Confucianism's problem with science has been largely solved, even though more constructive work would further strengthen Confucianism in this regard. The problem of democracy is still being dealt with. I will examine three more major challenges. The third major challenge for Confucianism comes from environmentalism. Confucianism has taken note of its important message and has begun to respond to it. The fourth major challenge is the feminist challenge. Even though contemporary Confucianism accepts sexual equality, philosophically significant progress is yet to be made. The final challenge is the challenge of Confucianism's own survival. After suffering three major assaults in the 20th century, especially the most recent assault by "the glorious cat," Confucianism needs to find ways to renew itself into the future.

IN THIS ESSAY I will discuss five major challenges faced by Confucianism in recent times. These are not only challenges to Confucianism, but also challenges for Confucianism, in the sense that they do not only raise problems for Confucianism to tackle but also provide opportunities for Confucianism to renew itself. Two of these challenges have been widely acknowledged, namely those of science and democracy. In addition, I will call attention to three more major challenges. I believe that Confucianism's problem with science has been largely solved, even though more constructive work would further strengthen Confucianism in this regard. The problem of democracy is still being dealt with. The third major challenge for Confucianism comes from environmentalism. Confucianism has taken note of its important message and has begun to respond to that challenge. The fourth major challenge is the feminist challenge. Even though contemporary Confucianism accepts sexual or gender equality, philosophically significant progress is yet to be made. The final challenge, the most serious of all, is the challenge of Confucianism's own survival. Given its loss of state sponsorship, which guaranteed Confucianism's continuation over long periods in history, Confucianism must now find new ways to continue into the future. In the following, I will first examine how contemporary Confucian scholars have handled the problem of science; then I will examine the current status of the problem of democracy and will propose a solution to it. Furthermore, I will discuss the problems of environmentalism and feminism related to the survival of Confucianism.¹

¹ There is a vast amount of literature on the subjects covered in this paper. Due to limited space, I will quote contemporary Confucian thinkers only when necessary.

I

In my view, the problem of science and Confucianism includes two issues. The first has to do with how Confucianism defines the nature of science and articulates its own epistemology of science. The second concerns the value assigned to science in the Confucian value framework. This involves how Confucianism assesses the value of science in its own philosophical system as well as its general attitude toward science. Confucianism has not always looked at science fair-mindedly. To be sure, Confucius was not superstitious, and he stayed away from speculating about superstitious forces (子不語怪力亂神, *Analects*, 7:20). But his main interest was not the empirical or technical aspects of the natural world. When a student asked him an agricultural question, his reaction was negative. (*Analects*, 13:4) Among early Confucian thinkers, Xunzi 荀子 (fl. 298-238 BCE) was probably the only one who had a naturalist tendency --a move that could have assigned natural science a larger role in the Confucian philosophical system. Xunzi believed that it is human nature to learn and to conjecture, and that what we learn and know is the principle or nature of things (凡以知人之性也,可以知物之理也).² However, mainstream Confucian thought has concentrated on moralistic worldviews (this is true even with Xunzi). It focuses on moral value as the core of the cosmos and centers human existence within the moral domain. Confucius explicitly defined true knowledge as knowledge about human affairs rather than the natural world (*Analects*, 12:22). In the *Analects*, one can hardly find anything on knowledge in the naturalist world. This moralistic attitude was later reflected in the neo-Confucian Zhang Zai's (张载 1020-1078) formulation of the opposition between "moral knowledge (knowledge of virtue, *dexing zhizhi* 德性之知)" and "knowledge of the senses (*jianwen suozhi* 见闻所知)." He asserts that "moral knowledge" cannot grow out of the "knowledge of the senses (*dexing suozhi*, *bumeng yu jianwen* 德性所知不萌于见闻)."³

Zhu Xi (朱熹 1130-1200) was the second major figure after Xun Zi in the Confucian tradition to attempt to elevate the status of knowledge about the natural world through his interpretation of "*gewu zhizhi* 格物致知," an ancient concept found in the "*Daxue*" chapter of the Confucian classic *Liji* 禮記. Zhu selected the "*Daxue*" chapter, along with the chapter of the "*Zhongyong*," out of the forty-nine chapters of the *Liji*, elevating it into one of the prominent "Four Books." He interpreted "*gewu zhizhi*" to mean the investigation of the things and the expansion of knowledge. According to Zhu, things in the world have their "*li*," reasonable principle, which can be known by examining them. He evidently had a holistic view of the world and saw a direct connection between empirical knowledge of the world and moral knowledge. For him, the ultimate purpose of the "*gewu zhizhi*" is to improve our moral knowledge. Because Zhu's notion of "*gewu*" includes empirical study of the natural

² Xun Zi: *Jiebi* (解蔽).

³ Zhang Zai also believes that knowledge through the senses can contribute to acquiring moral knowledge. But Zhang seems to have kept it to the minimum.

world about us, he at least opened a door to possible scientific knowledge. Presumably, the investigation of things could lead to scientific knowledge of the empirical world.

Unfortunately, Zhu Xi's approach was quickly reversed by another major Confucian thinker Wang Yangming (王阳明 1472-1529). Zhu was at least partially to blame for this reversal because he saw too direct of a connection between empirical knowledge of the world and moral knowledge. Also, his understanding of the investigation of things was too superficial. Wang initially tried to act on Zhu's idea of "*gewu zhizhi*" and attempted to investigate the *li* from bamboos in his own yard. Wang failed miserably because he could not find any *li* through diligent observation of the bamboo. He subsequently changed course and claimed that all useful knowledge is to be found within the heart/mind; there is no need to look outside the mind. Wang's presumption inflated to the extreme the Confucian conviction that a person's primary mission in life is to develop one's moral potential. It failed to assign adequate value to the pursuit of knowledge in the natural world. This traditional attitude did not help in enhancing the pursuit of science. While some Daoists' obsession with searches for immortal substances at least helped indirectly to enhance human knowledge of the natural world; over time the traditional Confucian obsession with the classics, most notably in the form of preparation for the civil service examinations, actually degraded the pursuit of scientific knowledge.

This unflattering attitude toward scientific knowledge about the natural world has changed in recent times, especially since the "May Fourth" movement in 1919. As science started to gain more ground in Chinese society in the early 20th century, Confucian thinkers have tried to preserve the territory of traditional philosophy by separating science and philosophy into two realms. For example, as early as 1905 Liang Qichao 梁启超 writes "the boundary between *dao xue* (道学 Confucian moral philosophy) and science must be [kept] clear." (Zheng, 30). During the debate between science and philosophy ("*Ke-Xuan Lunzhan*" 科玄论战) in the 1920s, defenders of philosophy mostly followed Liang's approach in order to preserve room for traditional philosophy. Feng Youlan 冯友兰 declared that science itself is neither moral nor immoral. (Feng, 1993, 252) For Feng, although there are moral principles in the universe, the universe itself is not a moral one. That is to say, while there are moral principles in human society, the natural world is neither moral nor immoral. This is a major break from the Song-Ming neo-Confucians, who hold that there is the same moral principle (*dao* or *li*) throughout the entire universe. Feng's move is significant; if the natural world is amoral, scientific research of the natural world would not need to justify itself on the basis of its immediate contribution to moral advancement. Science should be given its own independent status.

It is Mou Zongsan (牟宗三 1909-1995), however, who made the most important contribution in articulating a new Confucian stance on science. Mou's precepts considerably expanded Confucianism to include scientific knowledge. His contribution is evidenced mostly in his theory of the nature of scientific knowledge. Mou believes that traditional Confucian culture failed to give adequate recognition to the form of knowledge of "*zhi xing*" (知性 "understanding"). In his *Characteristics of*

Chinese Culture (中国文化的特质 *Zhongguo Wenhua de Tezhi*) and other works, Mou argues that in order to embrace both science and democracy, the spirit of Chinese culture needs “to negate itself into” (坎陷 *kan xian*) the mode of *zhi xing*. According to Mou, the spirit of Chinese culture is a “synthetic approach to comprehending *li* (principle/reason)” (综合的尽理之精神 *zonghe de jinli zhi jinsheng*). It emphasizes comprehensiveness, holism, and thorough connection. Its *li* is about the moral world (or the moral aspect of the world), not the natural world (or the natural aspect of the world); it is about practice, not cognition or theory. It focuses on the world of value, rather than the world of reality (实然世界 *shiran shijie*, the factual world).⁴ Western culture, as represented by the Greek tradition, focuses on the natural world. Its spirit, according to Mou, is that of an “analytic approach to comprehending *li*” (分解的尽理之精神 *fenjie de jinli zhi jinsheng*). It is abstract, unbalanced (or concentrated) and theoretical (conceptual). This spirit is “squared and straight” (方方正正 *fangfang zhengzheng*), and it defines the world through differentiation (层层限定 *cengceng xianding*).⁵ This spirit is centered on logic, mathematics and science. It focuses on the question of “what-being” and especially values the *li* of being (1992, 40). Mou believes that this analytical spirit has produced science and Christianity in the West.

Drawing up on this analysis, Mou concludes that, in order to embrace science, Chinese culture needs to (through self-negation) incorporate the mode of “understanding” (*zhi xing*) into its culture. Whether Mou is accurate on his account of these cultures may be debatable. I believe he is nevertheless right in maintaining that Chinese culture has lacked what he calls the “analytic approach to comprehending *li*.” Scientific knowledge cannot grow without empirical and analytical approaches. Mou’s philosophy demonstrates a strong influence by the German idealism of the 18th and 19th centuries. German idealism generally divides epistemology into three modes, namely experience, understanding, and reason. Chinese tradition has not valued the mode of experience (experiment) and understanding (i.e., analytical method) enough to encourage these sorts of learning. Instead, it has valued, even overvalued, a synthetic comprehension of rational knowledge of the world and of human affairs.

Mou’s argument on the relationship between the mode of understanding and scientific knowledge makes good sense. In my view, he has produced a good solution to the science problem for Confucianism. However, a fully developed Confucian view of science remains to be clearly articulated. Confucianism needs not only to justify its own existence by securing adequate territories from science; it also needs to develop its own version of a philosophy of science. It needs to articulate the role of science and scientific knowledge in the human journey to moral refinement. On the one hand, Confucianism must recognize that the connection of science to the moral life is not always direct and immediate. To the contrary, for the most part, this connection is indirect and intermediate; science has to maintain its own independence. On the other hand, Confucianism must reserve its right to educate society that the most

⁴ Mou, (1992), 35-36.

⁵ *Ibid.* 39.

important thing is to lead a good life. Science, as well as any other human activity, must serve this ultimate purpose.

II

In comparison with his treatment of the problem of science, Mou's treatment of democracy is grossly inadequate. He argues that the spirit of the analytical approach to comprehending *li* has also produced democracy in the West. Democracy, according to Mou, relies on two conditions. Firstly, it pre-supposes external limitations and oppositions to the individual. Secondly, it pursues justice through competition between opposing social classes, and it establishes objective rules and regulations in order to protect individual rights and ensure one's duty to others. Mou asserts that both conditions are traced back to the Western analytical approach. The first condition for democracy is to recognize external limitations; the second condition is based on an abstract, conceptual attitude toward objects. In a word, Western democracy is established on its analytical spirit or *zhi xing* (Mou, 1992, 42-3).

Mou's reasoning on the connection between *zhi xing* and democracy is speculative and seriously flawed. The analytical mode that Mou finds in the West may enable one to recognize the reality of separate individuals besides one's own existence; it may reveal one's external limitations because of these individuals' separate existence outside of oneself. But this recognition at most puts forth a question about how one should cope with other individuals. It does not provide an answer to such a question. Recognizing the reality of others' separate existence, one could either attempt to conquer them, or to coexist with them, or to make deals with them, or something else. Democracy is one of many possible answers to the question of how one copes with individuals in society. The analytical approach to the world is typically a logical and hence a linear approach. Democracy is based on plurality instead of singularity; it requires a non-linear approach. Understanding or *zhi xing* is not adequate in grasping the spirit of democracy. Democracy demands reason and comprehensiveness. Therefore at most, Mou's solution to the problem of democracy only begins the process of searching for solutions; it is not in itself a solution.

Shu-hsien Liu, a leading contemporary Confucian thinker, evidently has recognized the inadequacy of Mou's solution to the problem of democracy. Liu has proposed a resolution by reinterpreting the neo-Confucian notion of "one principle with many manifestations" (理一分殊 *liyī fēnshū*). He maintains that the most profound aspect of Chinese culture, including Confucianism, Buddhism or Daoism, lies within its manifestation of the value of "allowing two tracks" (两行 *liang xing*). "*Liang xing*" first appears in the *Zhuangzi* 庄子. Zhuangzi maintains that, from the perspective of the *Dao*, everything in the world is ultimately the same and can be traced back to the same source. Therefore, the right (是 *shì* "yes") and the wrong (否 *fǒu* "no") of a thing are ultimately no different. He concludes that, if one understands the *Dao*, one will not be obsessed with the right and the wrong of a thing, and will see beyond them letting both tracks proceed. Liu maintains that this traditional interpretation of "*liang xing*" overemphasizes sameness and neglects difference.

According to Liu's new interpretation, the two tracks are the "one principle" (*li yi*) on the one hand and "many manifestations" (*fen shu*) on the other. Letting both tracks proceed reveals a good balance of these two aspects (Liu (1992), 549). That is to say we need to pursue the all-comprehensive and all-penetrating *Dao*, and alternatively, we need to recognize that the *Dao* has many manifestations, and all of them are rooted in the same foundation. The realization that the *Dao* has various manifestations leaves room for pluralism. Accordingly, one may argue that, for Confucianism, even though there is only one moral ideal of *ren* (Humanity), it can be manifested in many ways. Therefore, under the same principle, there is room for different opinions and different practices.

Plurality is indispensable to democracy. Liu recognizes the value of plurality within democracy and attempts to open space for plurality within Confucianism. His move is a major step forward from Mou Zongsan. It points in a new direction and provides a new approach to solving the problem of democracy for Confucianism.

However, there are still unanswered questions. As a value system, Confucianism has to answer questions on two levels. The first has to do with whether Confucianism recognizes the legitimacy of the existence of different opinions on an issue. The second has to do with where Confucianism itself stands on various issues of importance. Liu's contribution is to prepare Confucianism to give a positive answer to the first question. Through the concept of "one principle with many manifestations," Confucianism is to move away from its traditional obsession with unity (大一统 "*da yi tong*") so to allow room for plurality (Liu, 1992, 259). In other words, Confucianism now recognizes the legitimacy of others making un-Confucian claims. However, as a particular value system, Confucianism has to maintain its own stance on what values are important. It has to promote certain prioritizations of values and oppose others. For example, there is a tension between loyalty to one's country and family on the one hand, and individual autonomy and freedom on the other. Between these two, liberal democratic value systems lean toward the latter, whereas Confucianism has leaned toward the former.

Here there are two pluralistic positions that Confucianism can choose from. The first one is an internal pluralistic position. This is the position that allows various values, including opposing values, to prevail within its value system. In such a way, it not only endorses the one principle of *liyi*, but also endorses equally its many manifestations as well, as long as these manifestations are considered "good." The second approach is an external pluralistic approach. On this latter approach, Confucianism endorses the principle of *liyi fenshu*, but discriminates between various prioritizations of values that are generally considered good, and prioritizes its own core values.

If Confucians are to follow an internal pluralist approach, they would have to emphasize both ends of some contending values. They would have to say, for instance, on the one hand, that loyalty to one's country and family should be prioritized, and on the other, so should individual autonomy and freedom be prioritized. In reality, this approach amounts to no prioritization. This move would bring Confucianism close to the kind of materialist dialectics that has been popular in

China in the last century. This position may sound good. But it involves a self-contradiction because it endorses both the prioritization of “A” and that of “-A” at the same time. One has to ask, what does Confucianism really stand for? While some contemporary Confucian thinkers attempt to conciliate Confucianism with democracy, they have moved too far from Confucianism’s traditional base. In their attempt to make Confucianism everything (e.g., both for group loyalty and for individual liberty), they have made Confucianism a “no-thing.”⁶

While Confucianism struggles with the first question, it also needs to take the second question seriously. It must not forget what it stands for as a particular value system. A value system disseminates moral values. Namely, it prescribes to its followers whether one should subscribe to a certain value and, if yes, how much importance or priority one should give to it with respect to other values. For example, should one subscribe to the moral value of filial piety or of loyalty or of individual freedom? If there is a tension or conflict between two moral values one subscribes to, how much weight should one give to each? Due to the tension or conflict between these values, assigning more importance to one entails giving less importance to the other or others. Valuing filial piety more entails assigning less room for individual freedom from parents, for example. When one’s duty toward the country and one’s duty toward one’s parents are in conflict, weighing one more implies weighing the other (relatively) less.

In both traditional Confucianism and liberal democracy (as value systems) one can find the value of loyalty and that of individual freedom, the value of unity and that of diversity, the value of individual “rights” and that of one’s social duties, and that of individual autonomy and that of responsible paternalism; but as value systems they configure these values differently. Confucianism assigns more importance than liberal democracy does to the values of loyalty, unity, duties to society, and responsible paternalism. Facing a conflict between these values within each pair mentioned above, Confucianism tends to stand more for the values of loyalty, unity, duty, and responsible paternalism than their counterparts, even though it does not outright reject their counterparts. On the other hand, the value system of liberal democracy tends to stand more for the values of individual freedom, diversity, individual rights, and individual autonomy than Confucianism does.

Because Confucianism and liberal democracy assign differing emphasis to their values, the two will continue to have tensions or even conflicts on some issues. A healthy modern society should have different value systems vying over their audience. The tension between Confucianism and liberal democracy will help maintain a dynamic and energetic society.⁷

III

⁶ I have called such attempts “the Mat Vendor’s fallacy.” See Li (2007).

⁷ For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Li (1999), 163-190.

The third major challenge to Confucianism comes from environmentalism. Environmentalism challenges various world traditions for their lack of adequate concern for the natural environment; it demands that philosophy and religion take seriously the ethical relation of human beings to the natural environment. To be sure, there are rich resources in the Confucian tradition to meet this demand; one can think of ideas regarding the balance of *yin* and *yang*, and ideas about the inseparability of humanity from the rest of the world in the *Book of Changes* 易經 and particularly in Song-Ming neo-Confucianism. It remains nevertheless a fact that mainstream Confucianism in practice has been largely anthropocentric, and to a large extent is at odds with contemporary environmentalism.

Take Confucius's *Analects* 论语 for example. Although the *Analects* does not deal with the environment directly, it contains passages in regard to animals that at least indicate a lack of concern for them, such as one would also find in the Old Testament. For instance, Section 10.12 of the *Analects* records an instance when Confucius' horse stall burned down. Upon returning home, Confucius asked if any people were injured. The passage specifically says that Confucius did not ask anything about the horses. This story purports to tell us how humane Confucius was toward people; after all, the horses were his property, and people's lives were more important. Indeed, if Confucius had been eager to know if his horses (property) were damaged, he would have seemed selfish and inhumane. However, by today's standards, one may have to say that Confucius did not show enough concern for animals. Why didn't he ask about the horses after asking about people? In 3:17, his disciple Zi Gong wanted to spare the sacrificial sheep at the monthly ritual. Confucius, with a tone of disapproval, said that while Zi Gong loved the animal, he himself loved the ritual, implying that, for the sake of the integrity of the ritual, the sheep's life should not be spared. A possible criticism of Confucius here could be that he did not show adequate concern for the lives or the wellbeing of animals, not to mention any concern for non-animated natural objects, even though he was clearly concerned about the quality and integrity of the sacrificial rituals.

Other classic Confucian thinkers have also held an attitude which may be interpreted as detrimental to the environment. For example, Xunzi 荀子 presented a naturalistic interpretation of Heaven (*tian* 天), making it a totality of all natural phenomena. He advocated that human beings should exert control over the natural environment, and put it for our use (制天命而用之 "controlling *tian* to serve our purposes"). Xunzi's idea on nature predates Francis Bacon (1561-1626) in the West by nearly two thousands years. Bacon's notion of humankind's overpowering and manipulating nature has exerted a largely negative impact on the environment.

Let me state that we should not use today's environmental standards to judge people of ancient times. Confucius may or may not have been guilty of these charges. However, the fact remains that the *Analects* provides nothing or little that can be used

to construct an environmentally friendly philosophy.⁸ Unfortunately, over the long history of Confucian influence in China, the influence of the *Analects* on ordinary people's daily lives has been much greater than that of other, more philosophical, Confucian classics such as the *Book of Changes*, the *Shang Shu*, and even the *Zhongyong*.

Today the environment poses serious challenges to every world tradition. It can be argued, however, that in comparison with Daoism and Buddhism, the challenge to Confucianism is greater. One fundamental characteristic of Daoism is its doctrine of staying close to nature and following the flow of nature. It can be readily construed to be an environmentally friendly philosophy, regardless of its actual practice in history. One cardinal Buddhist virtue is frugality. Buddhism shares with Daoism the belief in a simple life without promoting accumulation of wealth. While thrifty is a virtue in Confucianism, Confucians also value economic success and family prosperity. This economic orientation itself is not necessarily detrimental to nature, but without adequate consideration to the environment, as has been the case in the past, Confucianism has not been a close friend to nature.

In recent years, Confucian thinkers have attempted to meet the environmental challenge. In an effort to change the anthropocentric image of Confucianism, Tu Weiming has formulated Confucianism to be anthropocosmic and argued that implicit in this Confucian outlook is human beings' ability to relate empathetically to all modalities of being in the universe. According to Tu, "The action of *chün-tzu* [*jun zi*, the morally cultivated person], so conceived, expresses the idea of humans as co-creators of the universe. As a co-creator, the paradigmatic human is an initiator, a participant and a guardian of the universe." (Tu, 1993, 53). Tu's approach, if successful, may help Confucianism to meet the environmental challenge. Chung-ying Cheng, another leading Confucian scholar, has attempted to articulate an environmentally friendly philosophy. His 1986 article "On the Environmental Ethics of the *Tao* and the *Ch'i*," is one of the earliest serious works from the perspective of Chinese philosophy in recent decades. In his 1998 article "The Trinity of Cosmology, Ecology, and Ethics in the Confucian Personhood,"⁹ based on the relational pattern of the *Book of Changes*, Cheng articulated a specific Confucian view of the environment. He interprets Confucianism as an "inclusive humanism" and advocates a revival of this kind of relational and processive world outlook as a response to environmental changes.¹⁰

Tu's and Cheng's works draw on one strand of thought within Confucianism. Along this line of thinking, we can find abundant resources in Confucian classics which can be used to produce an "environment-friendly" Confucianism. One can

⁸ The *Analects*, however, records that Confucius exercised restraint with animals. He did not use a net as he fished with a fishing line, and he did not shoot at roosting birds even though he used a corded arrow (7:26).

⁹ In Tucker and Berthrong (1998), 211-235.

¹⁰ In recent years many scholars inside China have done much work in this area of research. Unfortunately, little has been introduced to the West. Tucker and Berthrong (1998) is a notable achievement in the English-speaking world on the study of Confucianism and the environment.

think of such works as the *Book of Changes*, the *Shang Shu* 尚書 (especially the chapter of *Hong Fan* 洪範), and the *Zhongyong* 中庸. For example, the *Zhongyong* states that “if one can fully realize one’s own nature (characteristic tendencies), one can fully realize the natures of other things. If one can fully realize the natures of other things, one can assist the transformation and production between Heaven and Earth; if one can assist the transformation and production between Heaven and Earth, one can form a triad with Heaven and Earth 能盡人之性則能盡物之性，能盡物之性則可以贊天地之化育；可以贊天地之化育則可以與天地參矣 (Section 22, my translation).” Passages such as this one clearly draw a holistic picture of human beings and the environment, which provides a good basis for moving forward in an environmentally friendly direction.

Today, Confucianism needs to reevaluate its own thinking and come up with a viable account of the relationship between human beings and the environment. But this is not as easy a task as one may think. For example, in certain ways, giving more weight to the natural environment entails taking something away from its traditional humanistic emphasis. Confucianism has to carefully decide how much to preserve, and how to preserve, its humanistic core.

It may be useful to consider where Confucianism stands on the environment vis-à-vis two environmental approaches developed in the West, i.e., conservationism and preservationism. Conservationists hold that only human beings have intrinsic value and the ultimate purpose of protecting the environment is to promote human welfare. Preservationists, on the other hand, hold that, in addition to its instrumental value, nature also has intrinsic value. Even though protecting the environment can benefit human beings, it is not the only reason for environmental protection (des Jardins, 1997, 39). The key difference between conservationism and preservationism is the ultimate purpose of environmental protection. Conservationists hold that the purpose is to protect the environment from human exploitation so that human beings can receive greater long-term benefit from it. The benefit that the non-human world may get from this protection is just a by-product and in addition to the human benefit. Philosophically this view can be justified on the ground of anthropocentrism. Preservationists hold that, in addition to being beneficial to human beings, protecting the environment also benefits the non-human world, which also has intrinsic value. Therefore its benefit to the non-human world is not only an extra but an intrinsic part of environmental protection. This latter view is best justified on the basis of non-anthropocentrism. Today, the preservationist view has grown into a full-fledged holistic environmental philosophy. According to this view, humans are merely a part of the entire ecological system, with no special privileges, and the right or wrong of our action affecting the environment is determined by whether the action tends to promote the overall health and integrity of the ecological system as a whole.

If Confucianism follows and develops the humanistic and anthropocentric aspect of thinking as we found in the *Analects*, it could develop into a conservationist environmental philosophy. In this way, it may share a position on the environment similar to today’s mainstream Christianity, which takes as its duty to protect the environment because it is a gift from God for the ultimate benefit of humanity.

Conversely, if Confucianism follows a non-anthropocentric strand of philosophical thinking as we find in such classics as the *Book of Changes*, the *Shang Shu*, and the *Zhongyong*, it may become a holistic environmental philosophy. However, a Confucian holistic environmental philosophy may not be the same as its counterpart in the West. The Confucian holism as implied in the above-mentioned works includes three key aspects: namely, Heaven, Earth, and Humanity (天地人). “Heaven” here should be understood to mean the universe beyond the earth. As humans extend our capacity to exert impact beyond the earth, this part of the triadic structure should be taken more seriously. On this Confucian triadic conception, while humans are not the center of the world, it is more than just one member in the animal kingdom. In other words, humans are not a mere member of the world community, not a mere member in equal status to other members. At the risk of being taken too literally, I would venture to say that, on this Confucian view, humans weigh about one third in this triadic universe beside Heaven and Earth. Thus, a Confucian holistic environmental philosophy may assign humanity a position in the universe that is considerably higher than is found in the holistic environmental philosophy developed in the West. A Confucian environmental philosophy may be somewhere between the typical conservationist approach and the typical preservationist approach. To be sure, such a philosophy is yet to be further developed or articulated, but I believe that its material can be found within the Confucian tradition.

If Confucianism takes the non-anthropocentric approach and develops a holistic environmental philosophy, it still has another issue to deal with. This is the issue of translating theory into actual practice. Holmes Rolston (1987) made a point by arguing the relevance of a particular worldview to its effect on the environment has not only to do with the way one thinks about nature but, more importantly, the way one acts in relation to nature. This raises an important question, because the primary prescriptive force affecting average people’s daily behavior has traditionally come from the strand of Confucianism represented by the *Analects*, rather than the strand represented by the *Book of Changes*. Therefore, even if Confucianism takes the non-anthropocentric approach and draws from such classics as the *Book of Changes*, it still needs to figure out a way to translate such a worldview into people’s daily practice. While this may not be an insurmountable task, one should not overlook this critical step in a Confucian environmental philosophy. Unfortunately, little attention seems to have been paid to this practical aspect. In order to develop a full-fledged Confucian environmental philosophy, Confucian thinkers have to engage in serious discussion on the issue. Any sensible, viable, and practical Confucian environmental philosophy has to be a result of extensive engagement in a social movement by Confucian thinkers.

IV

The next issue is the feminist challenge to Confucianism. It is no secret that Confucianism carries a huge historical record of sexual discrimination against women. In order for it to move forward, Confucianism has to reshape its position with

respect to women. Contemporary Confucian thinkers have been slow in engaging in feminist/gender issues, even though they usually support sexual equality between men and women. In fact, the very formulation of the first two challenges as merely a “*Mr. Science*” and a “*Mr. Democracy*” is already an indication of the lack of sensibility to feminist concerns. A strange phenomenon has persisted: on the one hand feminist scholars have raised critical issues concerning Confucianism, particularly at some conferences of Confucianism, and on the other, few major Confucian thinkers have yet to take active steps to respond to these challenges. It seems that either these thinkers have not taken feminist challenges seriously or they have not taken steps to do in-depth study and to produce new thinking in this regard to fulfill the need. This situation has to change.

One may think that the issue of sexual equality can be resolved as part of the issue of democracy. One may think that, for example, as Confucianism settles with democracy, it will automatically square well with feminism. This belief, however, is unfounded. Democracy may be helpful to the cause of feminism, but it does not automatically achieve equality between men and women. Ancient Athens was a democracy, but in that early democracy women and slaves were mere properties of male citizens. The United States has been a democracy for quite some time. Yet, equality between men and women is still an ongoing and unsettled battle. If one regards Japan as a democracy, one has to recognize that Japanese women socially fare far worse in many aspects than women in some non-democratic or less democratic societies. Democracy does not automatically promote equality between the sexes, and, for Confucianism, the issue of this feminist challenge has to be tackled side by side with that of democracy.

There is also an internal need for Confucianism to articulate its view on women. This is so not only because Confucianism has not treated women well and owes a deep historic debt to women, but also because a philosophical system like Confucianism is incomplete without a clear articulation of equality or inequality between all human beings. Such an articulation would include a number of things. It would need to address the issue of whether Confucian philosophical thinking accords with feminist philosophical thinking in a fundamental way. It would also need to address how Confucianism answers feminist concerns such as sexual equality and other important human ideals. In a 1994 article I argued that Confucian ethical thinking meshes well with at least one strand of contemporary feminist ethical thinking, namely ‘care ethics.’ (Li, 1994). There are three parallels between Confucian ethics and feminist care ethics. First, *ren* 仁 and care, as the highest moral ideals of each ethical system, share some commonality (e.g., tenderness toward others). Second, in contrast with Kantian and utilitarian ethics, both *ren* and care ethics are not as dependent on general rules. Third, based on their common notion of relational self, both *ren* and care ethics believe in care/love with gradations, vis-à-vis Kantian ethical universality. Based on these important similarities, one may argue that Confucian philosophy is not inherently opposed to feminist thinking; to the contrary, it has a solid base for making ethical claims consistent with those of feminist ethics and ideals.

To be sure, we should not overemphasize the similarities between Confucian ethics and feminist ethics. Any discussion of their similarities has to be done within the context of their significant differences. Whereas feminist care ethicists specifically have women in mind as they engage in their explorations, Confucian thinkers have not been adequately concerned with women's issues. Classic Confucian thinkers virtually excluded women from the realm of philosophical exploration; contemporary Confucian thinkers have also largely avoided that subject. Nevertheless, if these similarities as identified above indeed exist, we must not underestimate their significance in today's world moral philosophy. Joel Kupperman has argued that, in some way, feminism can be seen as a radical form of Confucianism. Both feminism and Confucianism are concerned with such philosophical issues as social roles, rituals, and the formation of or revision of self. But their attitudes toward tradition are quite different. Confucianism pretty much bases itself on tradition, whereas feminism generally opts for reforming tradition (Kupperman, 2000). These issues may be subject to debate. But we also must realize that feminism is more than care ethics. There should be no doubt that more explorations in this area will be beneficial to the cause of Confucianism.

The traditional Confucian view of the two genders has been that of their differentiation (男女有别). It is one of the Confucian "Five Constant Relationships," namely love between parents and children, appropriateness between rulers and ministers, differentiation between husband and wife, order between the old and the young, and trust between friends. Traditionally differentiation between husband and wife has been interpreted as that of the *nei* 内 and *wai* 外, namely the functions internal and external to the household. It means that the husband is responsible for affairs outside home whereas the wife is responsible for affairs inside home. This traditional division of labor may have had justifications in ancient times. The "external" functions of Chinese peasants, who made up the vast majority of the population in ancient times, required a lot of physical strength (farming, taking merchandises to the market, etc.), and were more appropriate for men than for women. For the most part it may have made sense for men to perform these "external" duties and leave women to affairs inside home. Today, the situation has changed considerably. The distinction between internal and external is largely no longer appropriate. Confucians should abandon this distinction and look for something more appropriate.

But should Confucianism abandon differentiation between men and women altogether? It can be argued that some kind of differentiation should still be maintained. The biological fact that women give birth will not change. This fact has implications on the appropriate roles for the two sexes. Caution needs to be taken, though, not to define the differentiation between men and women to the detriment of women, as has been the case with Confucianism in the past.

The issue of sexual equality is not a purely philosophical issue. It also has to do with society at large. Confucianism is not a pure philosophy in the Socratic sense. The broad scope of Confucianism equips this tradition with the capacity to tackle the issue of sexual equality.

V

The greatest challenge facing Confucianism today is also the ultimate one: whether Confucianism as a living tradition can survive into the future. This may sound alarming, but the issue is real. While Confucianism on its own merit facilitates its social influence and continuity, the fact is that for long periods in history Confucianism was sponsored by the state. In the aftermath of the “hundred blossoming flowers” of the Warring States, the Han dynasty’s policy of “eliminating one hundred schools in order to establish Confucianism” made it possible for Confucianism to come to the forefront of Chinese culture. It is equally true that the second peak of Confucianism, in the name of neo-Confucianism of the Song, Yuan and Ming, was greatly enhanced by the patronage of the state. Now state sponsorship of Confucianism has become virtually nonexistent. Throughout history Confucianism has faced serious challenges to its survival. The battle with Buddhism during the Tang dynasty may have been its first serious battle for survival; Confucianism made it. We have no reason to think that it will not make it again this time. But, the challenge is real and serious. No tradition –none –can take its own survival for granted.

Confucianism has encountered three major assaults in the 20th century. The first assault was the “May Fourth Movement” attack. The second was during the Cultural Revolution. These assaults are widely known and need no further discussion here. The third assault on Confucianism has not been discussed or not even recognized. For the lack of a ready name, I call it the assault by the “glorious cat.” This attack began in the 1980s when two ideas became the dominating ideology in China. One is that “To get rich is glorious (致富光荣).” The other is “Catching mice makes good a cat.” Both ideas have been attributed to Deng Xiaoping. Although there is no conclusive evidence that Deng actually expressed the first idea in these words, there is no doubt that both ideas were key components of his philosophy. Arguably Deng Xiaoping’s philosophy is broader than these two ideas. But these two concepts are undeniably the most influential. Combining these two ideas, we have what may be called the “glorious cat” doctrine. Backed by the government, the doctrine says that the glorious goal in life is to get rich, and that one can use any means possible as long as such a goal is achieved. Such a doctrine is diametrically opposed to the Confucian belief that material wealth should be pursued only with ethical means. While the “glorious cat” doctrine may have contributed to the economic success in the past decades in China, it also undeniably contributed to the recent severe moral deterioration in China. Its assault on Confucianism is not direct and may even not have been intentional. Its consequences are nevertheless the same. While efforts to revive Confucianism have been launched repeatedly in China, mainly in the academic realm, the social environment in the wake of the onslaught by the “glorious cat” has made it particularly challenging for Confucianism to renew itself.

Challenges are often opportunities. A challenge to survival can be an opportunity for renewal. Needless to say, Confucianism’s well-being largely depends on its successful handling of the major challenges discussed above. A tradition that does not

adequately respond to new challenges cannot maintain its healthy existence. There is also an issue of the different ways for Confucianism to continue. The first way is to seek sponsorship again from the state. Post-Marxist China needs its own cultural philosophy. Confucianism is a suitable candidate. State sponsorship would be hard to get if China is to become a liberal democracy. But China may not become a liberal democracy. The Chinese government has in recent years shown only a restrained willingness to support Confucianism. It is conceivable that a moderate non-totalitarian government rallies its people under the banner of Confucianism as its national heritage and spiritual foundation. The second form for Confucianism to revive is to take the form of a religion. There has been debate about whether Confucianism is a religion because it has appeared to be a borderline case on religiosity. In recent years, some Confucian thinkers have advocated Confucianism as a religion. On its positive side, this strategy has helped Confucianism to acquire a seat on the dialogue of world religions and has given Confucianism a platform and visibility on the world stage. It is not clear, however, whether Confucianism can be (or continue to be) a religion in this increasingly secularizing world. Unlike other religions today, leading Confucians today are academic scholars rather than religious leaders or practitioners. Without specific social organization, it is difficult to see how Confucianism can be a commonly practiced religion. The third possibility is for Confucianism to continue as a public philosophy, like liberalism or utilitarianism. As a public philosophy, Confucianism exerts its influence in society through its advocates, namely scholars and public intellectuals convinced of its value and validity. This would require not only the existence of some influential Confucian thinkers to represent the tradition on the world stage, but also a large number of intellectuals of the Confucian conviction, believing in and promoting Confucianism. In history, Confucianism has existed through the advocacy of intellectuals and people of various professions, with or without state sponsorship. Now its future may also depend on committed advocates. In order to secure Confucianism as a world public philosophy, Confucian thinkers need to articulate it in languages that are resonant with both marginalized and mainstream philosophers, not only in the language of Chinese studies or cultural studies, but also in the language of analytical and comparative philosophy. The third approach as a public philosophy does not exclude the first two, nor does it depend on them. It is possible for Confucianism to utilize all three approaches.

Unlike the first four challenges, the fifth one is not a theoretical issue; it cannot be solved by theoretical explorations by Confucian thinkers. Realizing the urgency of dealing with Confucianism's challenges, Confucian thinkers may be able to more actively engage themselves in searching for solutions to the first four challenges, and hence to better position Confucianism for the future. I believe that, in order for Confucianism to survive and prosper, it does not only need representative Confucian thinkers as its spokespersons, such as Tu Weiming and Chung-ying Cheng, but it also needs institutional enhancement. Perhaps an effective world organization of Confucianism, which is not limited to academia, would serve as a gathering point for contemporary Confucians and scholars of Confucianism to coordinate efforts and work together for their common cause of promoting this tradition. If this essay's

assessment of the five major challenges to Confucianism is correct, Confucianism still has a long way to go to advance itself as a flourishing philosophy in the 21st century.

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