

New Confucianism in Twenty-First Century China: The Construction of a Discourse,
By Jesús Solé-Farràs, 2014, Routledge.

This is a book on discourse. Discourse is understood as the result of an incessant process of collective creation that intellectually structures both the determining of diverse desires for living in an ideal way, often employing imprecise conceptions in accordance with certain values, but not others, and the contingency of unintentional actions benefiting this ideal. The study undertaken here is not, nevertheless, a merely speculative exercise. On the contrary, aware as we are of the historical privilege of witnessing one of the greatest instances of recreating. Confucianist thought—actually, the adaptation of the alluvial Confucianism that reached the nineteenth century to the requirements of our contemporaneity, which we conventionally and rationally call New Confucianism or the ‘third epoch of Confucian Humanism’. Indeed, this is a book whose goal is to analyze the Confucianist discourse specifically, as well as with the hope of making a theoretical contribution to discourse studies in general.

As for the goal mentioned previously, we should point out the genesis of the initial evolution of New Confucianism, as a movement and as discourse, takes us back to the beginning of the twentieth century. Also note that the later development of its thought, faithful to the principle of creativity that defines the Confucianist ontology, have manifested an unequivocal harmony with our times. It is clear, moreover, that New Confucianism has contributed new ideas to the numerous debates, which a poly-connected world has made more complex, by bringing individual forms of thought and culture into contact.

The book explores how Confucian thought, which served as the ideological underpinning of traditional, imperial China, is being developed and refined into a New Confucianism relevant for the twenty-first century.

It traces the development of Confucian thought, examines significant new texts, and shows how New Confucianism relates to various spheres of life, how it informs views on key philosophical issues, and how it affects personal conduct. It argues that New Confucianism, unlike its earlier manifestation, is more accommodating of a plurality of ideologies in the world; and that understanding Confucianism and how it is developing is essential for understanding contemporary China; how Confucianism lies behind the drive, seemingly disconnected from ethics, for economic enrichment, regardless of the social inequality, environmental degradation and other problems which result.

Based on a large amount of the information processed, an overall synopsis is presented of the philosophical and ideological principles of New Confucianism. Likewise, the theory of multipurpose cooperation is set forth, in which the entire study presented in this book is framed; its elements and the dynamic charted by these elements. This general theory of discourse construction explains the necessary complexity of prognoses – on the social and political transitions in China, for instance

– when they must inevitably include the influence of a creative discourse as the New Confucianist is.

In line with the dual goal of approaching discourse both in general and specific terms, this study will unfold:(1) within a theoretical framework that has taken shape and cohered as we analyze the New Confucianist discourse, which we call multipurpose cooperation—the dynamic of which is explained, by way of conclusion ,in Chapter 5--(2)and following a methodology made up of four approaches, each of which responds to a differentiated dynamic (see Chapter1-4) , inspired by the very etymology of the word discourse, that is ‘running to and fro’ but ‘in logical sequence’.

Framed by the theoretical and methodological design ,the analysis of the construction of New Confucianist discourse is based on the theoretical assumption that discourses are dynamic concretions which we can identify, with varying analytical effort, within discursive space configured by the discourses themselves within which they interact. In other words, discourses are singularizations constantly being refined which, by virtue of the association of ideological elements with different degrees of affinity, occur within complex, heterogeneous and permeable structures called discussive spaces. The ideological elements that are made up of these spaces differ much in origin, and not all come to form integral parts of discourse. Many of them are conjectural and will have difficulty finding a possibility of integrating themselves through affinity into any lasting discourse. The dynamic and characteristics mentioned previously of discourses and ideological elements bring about the fact that discursive spaces are endowed with a highly flexible intellectual perimeter, and are permanently conditioned and modified; especially through the processes of construction and evolution of the discourses.

Thus, the discourse construction is based on the contemporary intellectual context of Confucianism, on the discursive spaces of New Confucianism, on the major contributions to it, and on a text of reference as A Manifesto for Chinese Culture is.

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