

CONFUCIANISM AND THE SPIRIT OF OUR TIME

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Philosophers and scholars of Chinese philosophies have engaged in a heated debate on the relationship between Confucianism and the spirit of our time, as well as Confucianism and globalization. This is timely significant. I believe that Confucianism is compatible to the spirit of our time, as it was compatible to the spirit of various times in the past, and can be an inspiring force in globalization today. Indeed, I claim, and will continue to claim, that Confucianism is globalized today, though those universal claims which it makes need to be sifted out or universalizing some of its claims still has a long, bumping road to travel. Here, we should draw a distinction between globalization and universalization. Globalization is a process of having a global presence and marked by spatial expansion. Universalization is a process in which the universality or universal acceptability of a claim is recognized and consented. Confucian ethics has a globalized presence today, not merely being a system of beliefs and values operating only in Asian cultures. This does not mean that the world is confucianalized. Rather, it is to say that Confucianism has joined other globalized ethics such as Western liberal ethics or Christian ethics, becoming a significant voice in the world today. Thus, Confucian ethics is globalized, but not yet universalized.

The marching of Confucian ethics in the global arena is speeded up by China's really becoming a more and more global power. Efforts to articulate a constructive relation between Confucianism and the spirit of our time are continuously made, though the burden to sort out various issues involved is still heavy. There are conflicts between the two, no question of that. After all, one represents a cultural tradition, and another represents modernity. One is particular, and another is universal. But interacting conflict is the mother of everything. More and more Confucian values are renovated in line with the spirit of our time. And the spirit of our time finds also more and more Confucian expressions. Historically, Confucianism has demonstrated an inherent creativity to renovate itself to continue to be an inspiring force in the world. Today, Confucianism continues to demonstrate its creativity and vitality.

Still, how best to understand the relationship between Confucianism and the spirit of our time remains an outstanding issue. Many proposals have been put on the table and most of them are yet to be critically examined. Old concepts such as Confucian humanism, Confucian socialism, Confucian constitutional democracy, Confucian Chinese-Way, Confucian modernity, Confucian East-Asian way, and

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Asian value argument continue to find good presses and markets. New concepts such as the so-called “pluralistic universality” thrive and join the dance. When the curtain is lifted, and the interlude is over, two kinds of problem are on the stage. The first kind is the conceptual problem—that is, the problem of the nature of the relationship between Confucianism and the spirit of our time. The second kind of problem is the normative problem—that is, questions of justification and justifiability of various claims on Confucianism and the spirit of our time as mentioned above. There are various issues of authority, legitimacy, justification, and rationality of those claims.

Perhaps, intending one stone for two birds is always ambitious and may be too ambitious sometimes. Still, in this essay, I intend to do nothing less than that. I want to argue for follows. First, the relationship between Confucianism and the spirit of our time is one between the particular and the universal. It is not one between two particulars or between two traditions, which many writers in effect presuppose. Second, the concept of pluralistic universality, which is entertained by some today, is self-defeated. Logically, this concept is self-contradictory. Historically, Confucianism has the concept of pluralistic embodiments of universality, not pluralistic universality. Third, Confucian values can, and should, be renovated in line with the spirit of our time. The recent reconstruction of China’s core cultural values provides a good example for us to understand the relationship between Confucian and the spirit of our time. My underlying objective is also to develop a new conception of the significance of Confucianism in our time. My contention is therefore that Confucianism is one of the few ancient philosophies having rich concepts of self, human dignity, and personal dignity; such concepts, through proper renovation in line with the concept of basic rights, can be the most viable concepts for us today. Without further introduction, I shall start to present my case.

I. The Universal and the Particular

Let me start with a court and dogmatic claim: the relationship between Confucianism and the spirit of our time is one between the particular and the universal, not a relationship between two universals or one between two particulars. In our time, the spirit of our time is the universal, not a particular. It consists in the universal norms, values, and ideals in our time. In comparison, though containing universal insights and claims, Confucianism in whole is a particular, not a universal. Confucianism is a particular form of philosophy and system of cultural values in whole. Confucian ideal in whole is a particular cultural ideal, not a universal ideal. Noteworthy, the very qualification “Confucian” indicates that such philosophy, values, and ideals are particular. To claim a philosophy to be a Confucian philosophy is to claim it to be a particular called “Confucian”. To claim specific values as “Confucian values” is to claim them to be a particular system of values called “Confucian”. To claim given ideals to be Confucian ideals is to claim them to be particulars called “Confucian”. Needless to say, to claim that a distinction exists between the particular and the universal is to claim that either one is not identical to the other or not reducible to the other.

That said, to claim that X is a particular is also to claim that X is a particular embodiment of the universal. A particular is not merely an individual existence, but one embodying the familial or the universal. For example, one's finger is a particular embodiment of the universal called "finger". By this token, a particular value, if it is truly a value, must also embody what is universally valuable. This is true even of a particular instrumental value in a given context. For example, in given contexts, compromise is required for social cooperation. In such context, compromise is an instrumental value. But compromise can be an instrumental value here if and only if it is instrumental to cooperation, and cooperation can be a value if and only if it does something good or represents something good that is not only good in terms of such contexts, but also good in terms of general or universal goodness. Needless to say, X in whole as a particular value is to be distinguished from the universal which it embodies. That is to say, X in whole is not identical to the universal which it embodies. Thus, Zhuangzi famously claimed: a white horse is not horse. A white horse is a particular horse, just as a black horse, a brown horse is. Horse is the universal—that is, the universal as the secondary substance of all horses that ever exist. By the same token, one can say that Confucian human dignity is not human dignity itself, but a particular embodiment of human dignity, just as Western human dignity is.

That a particular cannot, and should not, be identical to the universal can be seen by the fact that a universal can be a predicate of a particular, but a particular cannot be not a predicate of the universal. Thus, for example, a white horse is a horse and all white horses are a kind of horses. But it is not the case that horse is a white horse, and all horses are white horses. We can say that a Confucian value is a value and Confucian values are a form of values. But we cannot claim that value is Confucian value, and all values are Confucian values. In short, to claim that value X is a Confucian value is to claim that X in whole is a valuable quality from the Confucian perspective; that X is a Confucian value in the same way Y is a Christian value. Accordingly, it is the claim that X may be a particular embodiment of a universal value, but it itself in whole is an instance of what it may possibly embody, not what it embodies itself, just as a white horse is a particular horse, not universal horse itself.

This is the fate of Confucian values in their relationships to the spirit of our time. What we often call "Confucian values" or ideals are not the universals which these values may possibly embody. They may embody or can be renovated to embody those timely universal values, but they are not timely values in themselves. Even if we can sift various universal contents out of Confucian values—for example, Confucian claim on human dignity is universalizable, the Confucian system of values in whole or those particular Confucian concepts whose claims can be universalizable in themselves are particular and cultural. As indicated above, conceptually, to claim them to be Confucian is to claim them as particulars. Taking the Confucian concept of human dignity as the guide. Confucianism makes claim on human dignity and its claim can be universalized. Indeed, one can make even a stronger claim: not only Confucian claim on human dignity is consistent with any universal claim on human dignity we know today, but also supportive to other universal claims on value—for example, the value of human rights. For example, to a great extent, Josef Seifert

(2013)'s concept phenomenological of "ontological dignity of the human person as such" can also be read as a Confucian concept and Seifert's argument for human rights in terms of such a concept of human dignity can be used by Confucianism too. Louis Henkin also indicates, "human rights are rooted in a conception of human dignity" (Henkin 1998, 309). Jürgen Habermas (2010) insists that the concept of human rights in the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights is rooted in the concept of human dignity too. Thus, Confucian claim on human dignity is not only universalizable, but also consistent with other universal claims on human values that are part of the spirit of our time.

Noteworthy, Confucianism is one of the few ancient philosophies that have developed a rich concept of human dignity that is central to the concept of basic human rights in our time today. On this point, at least two ideas of the Confucian concept of humanity are undeniable. First, in the Confucian conception, humanity is an intrinsic value and being a human is an intrinsic value and the purpose itself, not a means to other purpose. Confucian claim on being a human as an intrinsic value is the richest among all ancient philosophies. Second, the value of being a human or human dignity is inviolable. In Confucianism, human dignity is not only an intrinsic value, but also a supreme value or more exactly an inviolable supreme value. Both Confucian claims on humanity are also claimed in the UN 1948 Declaration of Human Rights, which is a universally operational charter of human rights today. That said, while Confucian claims on humanity can be universal, the Confucian conception of humanity as a whole, mitigated by others Confucian values, is a particular expression of the universal spirit of humanity, and its relationship to the universal idea of humanity of our time and all time is a relationship between a particular and the universal, not one between two particular traditions or conceptions.

Other Confucian values may also embody the universal in Confucian forms. But as Confucian conceptions, they in whole are the particular, not the universal. This is true even of such Confucian values as social harmony, duty, justice, propriety, piety, trustworthiness, loyalty, and so on. Even these Confucian values are the particular in the same sense as a white horse is not horse itself. Thus, for example, Confucian conception of harmony in whole is not the universal idea of social harmony any more than a white horse is horse itself. Therefore, the claim that Confucian values are, or can be, universal needs qualifications. The claim is valid if it is that ideas that Confucian values embody can be universal. But the claim will be invalid if it is that a particular Confucian value in whole is universal or that a set of Confucian values in whole are, and can be, universal. Noteworthy, possibility is also that Confucianism may not make literally a claim X, but its other claims claim may be supportive to claim X or imply X. In such a context, at least we can say that Confucianism and claim X are not only compatible, but are mutually supportive and enhancing.

Speaking of the relationship between Confucianism and the timely value of human rights in our time, Julia Ching once observed:

1. Support for certain human rights concepts can be found in the writing of leading Confucian thinkers, early and late.

2. Most Eastern Asian countries have been quick to endorse human rights and quite ready to claim them as their own.
3. East Asian countries historically much influenced by Confucian culture have demonstrated that the observance of democratic practices and human rights is not incompatible with, and can be beneficially adapted to, Confucian tradition (Ching 1998, 79).

Ching's claims can be rephrased as follows: the concept of human rights, though not found in traditional Confucianism, is quite consistent with core concepts of Confucianism; people living in Confucian cultures endorse the concept of human rights without giving up their Confucian conceptions of value; incorporating the concept of human rights into Confucianism will do great good to Confucianism, including Confucian values, itself. In short, not only compatibility and mutual acceptability exists between Confucianism in whole and the concept of human rights, but also many Confucian values and the concept of human rights can co-promote and co-enrich. Also, Confucian embodiment of the concept of human rights is emerging in horizon. The great potential benefit and fruitfulness of Confucian embodiment of the concept of human rights has already revealed in horizon. I would like to support Ching's claim by adding that the relationship between Confucianism in general and the idea of human rights is one between the particular and the universal, as well as between the traditional and modernity. All the same, there is no incompatibility between them. Mutual acceptability exists between them. Confucian embodiment of the concept of human rights enriches the concept. In turn, the embodiment of the concept of human rights in Confucianism modernizes Confucianism.

One may argue that there are exclusively and purely Confucian values. That is to say, they are values only in Confucian thinking and in term of Confucian way of existence. Such an argument cannot stand. A value in whole may be a particular, but it cannot be an exclusively particular in the sense that it does not embody any universal in content and claim. That said, for the sake of argument, if some values are exclusively Confucian—no embodying any universal claims, they are values only from a given perspective, not universal. One cannot claim simultaneously both that value X, say, filial piety, is exclusively Confucian and that the same value X, say, filial piety, is universal. To claim value X is exclusively Confucian is to claim it to be a value exclusively and only from the Confucian perspective and therefore to be an exclusively particular. To claim it to be an exclusively particular is to claim it not to be the universal at the same time. Thus, logically, if value X is universal, then it is not exclusively Confucian. If it is exclusively Confucian, it is not universal. If one claims that value X is exclusively Confucian, one can argue that it may be one of those local values which have legitimate claims in their own and which those universal values should interact with. One would not be reasonable to argue either that it is more legitimate than those universal values or that it is a different kind of universal as the so-called pluralistic concept of universality would claim. There is no universal that is exclusively particular. All the same, to claim that there are values that are exclusively Confucian and do not embody the universal is a mistake at the outset, just as no one

can reasonably claim that a white horse is a horse but does not embody universal horse-ness or does not belong in the family of beings called “horse”.

Chenyang Li (2013) puts forth a seductive concept of globalizing cultural values. The concept is pregnant with insight that cultural values should be engaged and included in the discourse of universal human values. Also as indicated above, cultural values such as Confucian values can be globalized—that is to say, they can have a global presence, even global influence. That said, we need to treat the concept “globalizing” here with cares. Being globalized should not be confused with being universalized. The universal embodied in cultural values can be sifted out in global discourse and therefore be globally appreciated, but cultural values as particulars cannot be universalized because they may not be universalizable in whole. As I shall see it, many cultural values such as Christian values or Islamic values have been globalized. First, they have a global presence. Second, they are respected as conversation partners in the global discourse of human values. Third, they are globally taught. Fourth, their globalization is helped by immigration and the global spread of their cultural institutions. That said, they are not necessarily universalized. Those universal claims in them are yet to be sifted out and consented globally. All the same, globalization of cultural values should be distinguished from universalization of cultural values. We can globalize a given cultural value in whole, but not universalize that value in whole. The particular cannot be universalized by the unforced force of human reason in moral argument, even if they can be globalized by the support of institutional forced force such as military or economic system. Moreover, the kind of rational global discourse should be based upon reason and truth, not on aggression and oppression. That is to say, what should be globalized should be globalizable in terms of reason and truth. What are not globalizable based on reason and truth—for example, religious fundamentalism or terrorism—should not be globalized. What should be accepted globally should be globally acceptable in terms of reason and truth. Imperialism should be rejected here. And cultural relativism should retire too. At any rate, what is merely cultural has no globalizability and universalizability. To attempt to globalize them—what are merely cultural—is akin to force Chinese rice on the Russians or to force all men in the world to wear skirts as Irish men do—comic, unnecessary, and counterproductive.

Speaking of the possible contribution of Confucianism to contemporary discourse of human rights in the globe, Tu Weiming correctly indicates that the Confucian values of humanity, harmony, piety, loyalty, trust, and self-discipline are compatible with the idea of human rights. He rightly insists: “The potential contribution of in-depth discussion on Asian values to a sophisticated cultural appreciation of the human rights discourse is great ... The perceived Confucian preference for duty, harmony, consensus, and network ... needs not to be a threat to rights-consciousness at all” (Tu 1998, 299). That said, in mapping the possible significance of Confucian values to the spirit of our time, for example, the universal ideal and norm of human rights, we must distinguish between what is cultural and what is universal. What is cultural cannot, and should not be, be universalized on basis of human reason, as argued above. We should recognize that the values of humanity, harmony, piety, loyalty, trust, and self-discipline are, and can be, Confucian values because they embody what are not

merely Confucian in the first place. For example, the values of humanity, piety, loyalty, trust, self-discipline embody ideas are also emphasized in Christian and many Western cultures. Some Confucian ideas can be universalized because they embody the universal. By this token, those timely ideas embodied in Confucian values can be sifted out and universally appreciated. As for those cultural claims in Confucian values, their possible contribution would not be that they can become the universal, but that they can be constructive participants in the global discourse of human values. Correspondingly, the possible contribution of Confucian values to universal human values lies further in the possibility that the chemistry between them (Confucian values) and other cultural values may generate new universal human values and the possibility that the chemistry between them (Confucian values) and existing universal human values may generate new universal human values. All the same, it remains true that any claims on the possibility to universalize what is merely cultural is akin to claim the possibility to make a rabbit out of an empty hat, a deception and self-deception.

Meanwhile, what is cultural and particular is not a candidate for alternative to the universal, and what is the universal is not a candidate for alternative to the particular. To claim that the universal should be embodied in the particular is one thing. To claim that the particular is an alternative to the universal, or the universal should be replaced by the particular is quite another. For example, Article 7 of “Report of the Regional Meeting for Asia of World Conference on Human Rights”, known as The 1993 *Bangkok Declaration*, reads, “Stress the universality, objectivity and non-selectivity of all human rights and the need to avoid the application of double standards in the implementation of human rights and its politicization and that no violation of human rights can be justified”. Article 8 also reads, “Recognizing that while human rights are universal in nature, they must be considered in the context of a dynamic and evolving process of international norm-setting, bearing in mind the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds.” In both articles, *the Bangkok Declaration* defends the idea of universal human rights, declaring that “no violation of human rights can be justified.” Meanwhile, the *Declaration* argues that application of the idea of universal human rights in Asia must do justice to the Asian historical, cultural, and regional conditions. So far, so right.

That said, Asian values are not alternatives to the universal value of human rights. To claim that the universal idea of human rights should be integrated into Asian values is not to claim that it should be diminished in front of Asian values. It is to claim that it should be living in Asian values. As the universal, it should dwell in Asian values. In context of its conflict with Asian values, it is that those values that are not compatible to the norm of basic human rights should be discarded, not the universal norm of human rights. Thus, in terms of Asian values, the question about which rights belong in basic human rights is a proper question. So is the question about the extent within which individual rights can be mitigated by collective rights. The question about which Asian context is a legitimate ground for a people or nation-state to resist, even reject, the universal norm of human rights is a wrong question.

By this token, it is incorrect to evoke Asian concepts of value to resist or reject the universal norm of human rights. It is incorrect to claim either that the norm of human rights is not universal or that Asian values have priority over the value of human rights. But claims are invalid and false. The norm of human rights is universally operating norm of our time today and indeed even institutionalized in the UN charters. Equally crucial, the norm of human rights is not merely globalized, but also universalized. That is, the acceptability and universality of the norm and value of human rights is more or less consented by most of people in the world. Even those who evoke Asian values to resist the idea of human rights also pay lip service to the idea. As for arguments such as that of Li GuangYao of Singapore that not everyone signed and believe in what is claimed in the UN 1948 Declaration of Human Rights, they may appear to be plausible, but in effect cannot stand. True, not every nation signed on the UN epoch-making document. But the context in which limited numbers of nations directly participated in making universal claim on human rights does not limit the scope of the claim of human rights itself—that is, the universality of the claim on human rights.

Meanwhile, the claim that Asian values including Confucian values have priority over the universal idea of human rights smuggles in three unjustified assumptions: (1) Asian “values” can be truly values without embodying the universal understanding that recognizes human dignity; (2) there are contexts in which the universal is not applicable; thus, there Asian contexts in which the universal idea of human rights cannot be applied; and (3) the idea of human rights is not a universal idea, but a particular—that is, Western--idea. Assumption (1) is incorrect because no “value” can be value if it is antithetical or opposite of universal value. In this context, no so-called “cultural values” can be truly values if it does not share the understanding that humans have intrinsic worthiness called “human dignity” and therefore are never merely some means to tools to other purpose, but are purposes in themselves. Thus, no matter what particularity one evokes, no injustice from the point of view of universal value—for example, no raping woman—can be a value. Yes, some disvalue may still be practiced in some cultures because of history and tradition. This does not make these disvalues some values or practices of them valuable. A pig does not change into a dragon simply because it lives a long time. Assumption (2) is conceptually self-defeated. Being universal means being applicable in all contexts, though concrete applications of the universal vary from contexts to contexts. Assumption (3) is false, as mentioned above. Henkin draws an interesting comparison between Confucian values and the idea of human rights as exemplified in the United Nations Charter and the UN 1948 Declaration of Human Rights (Henkin 1998, 311-312). The comparison is flawed. It in effect reduces the idea of human rights to merely a cultural idea.

One can argue that some so-called universal values may in effect be merely some cultural values. For example, one may argue that the value of liberty is merely a Western value, not a universal one. This argument can stand in cases wherein some cultural values are proclaimed to be universal values. That said, it still remains true that one cannot claim both that X is universal and that X can be replaced by Y that is a particular. By this token, with regard to some norms that are considered to those

universally operating norms of our times such as global justice and basic human rights, one may argue that these norms are in effect Western and therefore can be resisted by people of other cultures. One cannot claim both that they are universal, and that they can be replaced by particular cultural norms. To claim that we should have what Confucianism dubbed as “*quan* (flexibility and creativity)” in applying these universal norms to particular contexts is one thing, and to claim that they cannot be applied to given particular contexts is quite another.

All the same, in order to map out properly the possible significance of Confucianism to our time, it is important for us first to recover the view that the relationship between Confucian values and the spirit of our time—that is, those core values of our time—is a relationship between the particular and the universal wherein Confucian values are the particular, and the core values of our time are the universal. It is important for us to remember that this relationship is not one between two particulars, e.g., two set of cultural values, or between two universal. It is also not a relationship between the part and the whole. By this token, the questions which we should ask here are what timely universal we can sift out of Confucian values, and which Confucian embodiment of the timely universal enrich the universal in its embodiment. For example, in discussing the relationship between Confucian values and the universal norm of human rights, we should ask the questions of which Confucian ideas pertaining to human rights can be sifted out of Confucianism, which Confucian values can be compatible to the norm of rights, and which Confucian embodiment can enrich the multifold embodiments of the norm of human rights.

In sum, any claims that Confucian values are alternatives to those values of the spirit of our time fail to see that Confucian values are particular and those values of the spirit of our time are the universal. The failure in present discourse of Confucianism to appreciate the universality of some Confucian claims—in particular Confucian claims on human dignity, person dignity, and justice in line with humanity—on human values is also due in no small measure to the inability to see the relationship between Confucian values and the spirit of our time to be one between the particular and the universal. Therefore, we here should understand the burden of exploring the relationship between Confucian values and the universal spirit of our time in terms of a two-fold task. First, it is to distinguish between universalizable claims in Confucian values and what Confucian values are globalized. Second, it is to understand how best to embody the universal in Confucian values, not how best to choose between Confucian values and the universal. That is, our task here is not to find an alternative to the universal, but find a proper integration of Confucian values and the universal.

II. Globalization and Universalization

The discussion in the preceding section leads us to the distinction between globalization and universalization, between globalizing Confucian values and universalizing Confucians values. A failure to draw such a distinction between them is the source of some parental problems in the discourse of the relationship between

Confucian values and the spirit of our time today. Such a distinction is conceptually necessary to define the horizon and normatively important to enhance the vision.

With regard to conceptual issues, some scholars today operate with the assumption that the relationship between Confucian values and such timely ideas as global justice, basic liberty, human rights, constitutional democracy, the rule of law, and crimes against humanity is one between Eastern and Western cultural values. Thus, for example, Henkin draws a distinction between Confucian value and the human rights value as if the value of human rights is merely a Western value. Chen Lai also argues,

So far as values are concerned, we can should acknowledge this. That is, such values as justice, liberty, rights, reason, and personality which the West emphasizes utmost are specially developed by the modern West and recognized to be universal values. Meanwhile, we believe, in comparison to justice, liberty, rights, reason, and personality, there is another set of values—that is, humaneness, equality, duty, compassion and community that are values having universality. These two sets of values are all needed universal human values in the world today (Chen 2014, 221).

Chen Lai's claim that the above mentioned two sets of values are universal is a justified claim. That said, his underlying concept that the first set of values is Western and the second set is Confucian and Eastern is wrong. One can see Chen Lai's error by simply asking the rhetoric question: Has Confucian culture not emphasized justice, human dignity, the rule of reason, and person of substance? Are these not values emphasized in the *Analects*, *Mencius*, *The Great Learning*, and *the Doctrine of Mean*? Have Confucianism not emphasized humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness? Conversely, have Western culture not emphasized humaneness, equality, duty, compassion and community? Which philosophy explores the concept of duty better than Kantian philosophy? In short, the concept that the relationship between these two sets of value is one between Western and Eastern values is wrong. One can see also Henkin's error by asking a simple question: Have China and other countries whose cultural heritages are Confucian not recognized the norm and value of human rights?

In connection with his misconception of the relationship between Confucian values and those timely ideas of the spirit of our time, Chen Lai puts forth the concept that universality is plural (多元普遍性 *duo yuan pu bian xing*). The concept has good press among a significant number of scholars in mainland China. According to Chen Lai, philosophy today should devote itself to exploring the possibility of pluralistic universality. He claims, "Is pluralistic universality possible and how is it possible, this should be a topic for philosophical thinking in our age of globalization" (Ibid, 222).

The concept of pluralistic universality is not a plausible one. If by pluralistic universality, Chen Lai means cultural pluralism, Chen Lai does not break any new ground and would not produce any new irritation. But evidentially, Chen Lai's ambition is far greater than defending cultural pluralism. Like Tu Weiming, Chen Lai is a devoted philosopher who argued for the universality of Confucian values. Unlike Tu Weiming who more or less is willing to live on the idea that the universal must be

embodied in the particular, Chen Lai wants to claim that the particular is a kind of universal; Confucian values themselves are universal. His basic contention is that all cultural values are relative and therefore each is the universal in its own (Ibid, 221-222). The ramifications of the concept of pluralistic universality warrant a detailed examination of it here.

Conceptually, the concept of pluralistic universality is logically self-contradictory. The concept is that the universal has multi-embodiments or what neo-Confucian masters dubbed as “the principle is one, but its embodiments are plural. Instead, the concept is that universality is plural. But universality means identity and singularity. It is not, and cannot be, plural. It makes no sense to talk about pluralistic universality any more than talking about four-corner triangle unless one uses the word “universality” not to mean universality, but in different meaning. Universality and plurality can co-exist only in embodiments—that is, the same universal has plural embodiments. There can be no plurality of universality itself. Chen Lai claims that his concept of pluralistic universality is a structuralist one (Ibid, 262). That is to say, the kind of universality which he emphasizes is structurally plural. His qualification does not help in any ways. What exactly does the qualification mean is not easy to spell out. No matter what, his concept that universality is plural, not singular and identical, is self-contradictory and self-defeated at the outset unless he uses the term universality to mean particularity.

Chen Lai draws his inspiration from the sociologist Roland Robertson’s conception of two-fold process of globalization. According to Robertson, globalization is a two-track process wherein the universal is applied in particulars and what is particular is globalized and thus universalized (Ibid.). Chen Lai insists that instructive as it is, even Robertson’s conception do not do full justice to Eastern values (Ibid.) As he sees it, both Western and Eastern civilizations have universality, and the difference is that the universality of Western civilization is an actualized—understood as globalized—one while the universality of Eastern civilization is yet to be fully actualized—understood as being globalized (Ibid). This is to say, “both Eastern and Western civilizations, as well as their values, inherently have universality” (ibid). Fair to say, the Chinese word “you (有 have)” is an ambivalent concept here. It can mean “contain” or “have”. Thus, Chen Lai statement can be read as “Eastern and Western civilizations, as well as their values, inherently contain something universal”—that is, they both have something universal that can be shared by the other. This reading is a safe one. By such reading, Chen Lai’s claim would be promising. However, by this reading, Chen Lai would be claiming that the universal is one, but its embodiments are plural, not that universality is plural. Apparently, this is not what Chen Lai wants. What Chen wants to claim is that Eastern civilization and Western civilization each is the universal in its own and therefore the East and the West each is a center of universality. That is the problem!

Robertson fails to draw a distinction between globalizing and universalizing. But a distinction exists between them. Globalization is a process wherein global acceptance occurs. Universalization is a process wherein universal acceptability is established and informed consent to it is rationally formed. X is globalized when X is

accepted in a global scale. But X is universalized if and only if X is globally acceptable. What is accepted in global scale may not be globally or universally acceptable. There are economic, political exploitations of the weak by the stronger nations precisely something from the stronger nations that may not be globally acceptable but force themselves on weak nations to accept them. As far as values are concerned, that a system of values are globalized means that they are globally accepted, not necessarily that their universal acceptability or their universality is established.

Chen Lai fails to see Robertson's failure. He also fails to draw the distinction between globalizing and universalizing. Therefore, he mistakes the possibility of globalizing Confucian values as the possibility of universalizing Confucian values (Ibid, 262-263). Indeed, his claim that Western values actualize their universality is a wrong claim that conflates global acceptance and universality. Given practice is the test of a value, Chen Lai may have a point in insisting that acceptance actualizes acceptability. That said, it is incorrect for him to claim that acceptance mean acceptability and thus global acceptance mean universality. What is acceptable will not become a real force of life until it is accepted. It does not follow whatever is accepted has acceptability and universality. Noteworthy, while the concept that globalization is plural is not self-contradictory, the concept that universality is plural is logically self-contradictory. That is to say, globalization can be plural, but universality is not. Equally crucial, the concept of cultural relativity which Chen Lai evokes rejects the concept of universality, not leading to a concept of pluralistic universality.

Noteworthy further, the two neo-Confucian arguments which Chen Lai evokes to argue for his concept of pluralistic universality in effect lead to different conclusions, not the concept that universality is plural. The first neo-Confucian argument which Chen Lai evokes is the neo-Confucian motto, "the principle is one, but its embodiment is multifold" (Ibid, 222). This neo-Confucian motto evidentially says that the universal is one, not plural. Neo-Confucian master Zhu Xi's famous metaphor for the motto, "the moon is one, but its lights are millions", clearly insists that the universal principle is one and singular, not plural. Another neo-Confucian argument that Chen Lai evokes is the argument that "when the energy is one, the principle is one; when energies are tens of thousands, and then principles are tens of thousands". This neo-Confucian argument clearly supports the concept of diversity of principles and multiculturalism and can be used to defend multiculturalism. But this argument does not lead to the conclusion that universality is plural. The main point of the argument is that principles of different can be many and diverse. But to argue for diversity of principles is one thing. To argue for the concept that universality is plural is quite another. Evidentially, diverse principles can be merely particular principles.

Chen Lai indeed draws a distinction between what he dubs as "spatial universality" and the universality of the content of thought (Ibid, 234). The distinction does not help either. By spatial universality (空间普遍性 *kong jian de pu bian xing*), he refers to the spatial scope of spread of thought, in his words, "how big the space on which thoughts are spread" (Ibid). By the universality of the content of thought (思想

内涵的普遍性 *si xiang nei han de pu bian xing*), he more or less refers to whether the content of a given thought is about universal questions. It is unclear if the distinction is intended to be one between globalization and universality. Also, fair to say, when a given thought is of universal human question, the possibility of its universality is increased. However, concerning about universal human question itself is never a sufficient condition for the universality of a given thought. Say, a claim X is of love, and love is a universal human issue. This fact does not warrant a claim that X has universality. Whether X has universality depends on whether X has truth that is universal, not on whether X is of a universal human question.

Meanwhile, the issue whether a thought is of universal human question should be treated with cares. A universal human question should be that which is universally applicable—that is, universalizable, not necessarily question that has been universally asked or is being universally asked. Thus, for example, the question of woman's right to abortion may not be much asked in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean cultures that are mainly made of Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist heritages, but mainly asked in cultures that have Christian heritage. This does not mean that the question of woman's right to abortion is not universalizable and thus universal. The question of universal human bond among all human beings is universalizable, though not universally asked.

This returns us back to the *Janus face* of the universal. As Habermas indicates, the universal have the validity claims that have a *Janus face*: “As claims, they transcend any local context; at the same time, they have to be raised here and now and be de facto recognized if they are going to bear the agreement of interacting participants that is needed for effective cooperation” (Habermas 1987, 322). That is to say, the universal claim first made by a culture does not make the claim cultural. A source of the errors of Chen Lai and others is their failure to draw such a distinction between being cultural and rising first from a culture. That a claim first rises from a culture does not mean that it is cultural—that is to say, its validity is limited only to such cultural space and time in which it arises. If X from Western culture or Eastern culture is universalized, X is the universal dwelling in Western culture or Eastern culture or is first claimed by Western culture or Eastern culture, not that X is a Western value or Eastern value that is universalized. More crucial, the universalization of values claimed first in Western cultures is not identical to the process of globalization of Western values. Instead, it is a process wherein the universal is sifted out and therefore recognized as the universal.

Chen Lai rightly indicates that both Western and Eastern systems of values contain what are universal. But strictly speaking, it is incorrect for him to claim that “Eastern and Western civilizations and their values in effect both have inherent universality” (Chen 2014, 362). It is more correct to say that both Eastern and Western civilizations and systems of value contain universal claims and embody what are universal. It is more correct to say whether it is first claimed in Eastern civilization or Western civilization, the universal is the same universal. Meanwhile, to say that X embodies something universal, say, Y, is not to claim that X is inherently universal in a strict sense. Thus, to say that Confucian system of values contain a

universal claim on human dignity is not to say that Confucian system of values is inherently universal or has inherent universality. To say that Confucian conception of human dignity has a universal claim on human dignity is also not to say that Confucian conception of human dignity in whole or in totality is inherently universal either.

With regard to Confucian values, I would like to make a strong claim here. I would like to claim that in different forms, some Confucian values have already been globalized because of the rise of modern China and Chinese participations in the global discourse of human values. We can understand their globalization as follows. First, they have a global presence and therefore have a global influence because of China's global presence—for example, China's global economic, political presence. Every time when a Chinese institution establishes a branch in another part of the world and introduces a corporal culture that emphasize Confucian values, it is globalizing Confucian values. Every time when China as a standing member of the UN security council or a responsible member of Un casts her vote on international affairs and renders her judgment that is based on Confucian values, Confucian values are further globalized. This global presence of Confucianism is strengthened in the global spread of Chinese cultural institutions too. Here, even if their global influence are limited, there is a distinction between having some, but small global influence and having no, between having and having no global presence. Second, they are accepted—not necessarily endorsed—in the global human community in various forms. For example, they are included as legitimate conversation participants in the global discourse, they are even endorsed and practiced by some in various parts of the world. In short, to a great extent, Confucianism is a more globalized philosophy and way of thinking in the world we live today. The very fact that it is taught and talked in various parts and arenas of the globe, e.g., in universities, communities, public spheres, and political arenas vouches for its global acceptance in different forms. Third, scholarships on Confucianism also spread in a global scale and become global scholarship. Confucianism and Confucian values have become an important subject-matter of global studies and investigations. Fair to say, this does not mean that Confucianism is endorsed global wide. However, it is undeniable that Confucianism is known global wide. Equally crucial, Confucianism is no longer the name for something backward for many in the globe. Instead, it is more and more recognized to be a potential source of insights.

That said, I believe that the task to sift out those universal claims made in Confucian values is still heavy and the road is still long. In front of us are two extreme approaches and attitudes: (1) cultural relativism and cultural postmodernism and (2) cultural imperialism. Cultural relativism is the doctrine that all values are cultural and relative; accordingly, there is no universal human value. Cultural imperialism is that doctrine that one set of cultural values is superior to another set of cultural values, e.g., the view that Western cultural values are superior to eastern cultural values, or the view that Eastern cultural values are superior to Western values. The concept that universality is plural smuggles in cultural relativism and cultural post-modernism on the one hand and cultural imperialism—that is, the view that Eastern values are superior to Western values—on the other hand. Thus, the

thesis, “Let the Western be back to the West” and let both Eastern and Western cultures return back to their relative positions, is pregnant with both insights and illusions. It contains insights because it correctly indicates that both Eastern and Western cultures are particulars, not the universal, just as a white horse is not identical to horse, and therefore we should resist cultural imperialism. It contains illusions and danger because it can open the door wide to cultural relativism. Again, the argument that everyone is relative leads to the conclusion of pluralism, not to the concept that universality is plural.

III. The Task to Live up to the Spirit of the Time

Re-examining the relationship between Confucian values and the spirit of our time, we are returned to the most recent reconstruction of values in China. The reconstruction provides us with profound illuminations. In its 18th National Congress, the Communist Party of China puts forth a system of so-called core socialist values consisting in prosperity and being strong (富强), democracy (民主), civility (文明), (social) harmony (和諧), liberty (自由), equality (平等), justice as fairness (公正), the rule of law (法治), patriotism (愛國), professionalism (敬業), trustworthiness (誠信), and kindness (友善). Fair to say, what is proposed is not merely a set of Chinese core socialist values in our time, but also a set of Chinese core cultural values in our time. A few things are noteworthy.

First, in the proposed new set of Chinese core values under the name of core socialist values, some core Confucian values are renovated in line with the spirit of our time into the timely spirit of China. For example, prosperity and being strong, civility, (social) harmony, and justice as fairness, patriotism, professionalism, and kindness are all among core Confucian values. In the proposed 24-word Chinese core values, those mentioned Confucian values are successfully renovated in line with the spirit of our time. This fact not only testifies to the renovatability of Confucian values, but also indicates how Confucian values can continue to live and be an inspiring force of our time. It points out that Confucian values should be renovated to live up to the spirit of our time in order to be part of the spirit of our time. Here, it is not the spirit of our time should be trimmed down to be in harmony with traditional Confucian values. It is that Confucian values must be renovated in order to live up to the spirit of our time.

There are certainly other Confucian values that can be renovated to be part of spirit of our time for China and even for the world and that are not included in the proposed set of core values. For example, the Confucian values of tolerance and toleration, human dignity, personal dignity, humanity, and righteousness in terms of humanity. I claim, and will continue to claim, that Confucian claims on these values are not only universalizable, but also a crucial source of the compatibility between Confucianism in whole and other timely universal values such as human rights, global justice, and crimes against humanity. Noteworthy also, China remains actively being contributive to international tribunals concerning crimes against humanity. This

indicates the profound affinity of the concept of crimes against humanity with Confucian concepts of humanity and righteousness in terms of humanity.

The second thing to be said is that in the new set of Chinese core socialist values, some core values of the spirit of our time have their Chinese translations. Democracy, the rule of law, liberty, and justice as fairness are among those core values of the spirit of our time. Their universality is once again demonstrated in the fact that they are also part of the spirit of our time for China, and can be embodied in particular Chinese forms. Fair to say, Chinese embodiments here still leave much to be desired. For example, it should not only be democracy, but should be constitutional democracy in the new set of Chinese core socialist values. It should not only be the rule of law, but the rule of laws that are democratically, legitimately established. Thus, both the Chinese concepts of democracy and the rule of law can be better in embodying the ideas of democracy and the rule of law of our time. The similar can be said of liberty. It should not only be liberty, but should be basic liberties as basic rights. Still, the timely values of China as proposed are democracy, the rule of law, and liberty, not aristocracy, Monarchy, tyranny, the rule of man or lawlessness, oppression and repression. In other words, what are in Chinese new value systems are part of the spirit of our time.

The third thing to be said is that those renovated traditional Confucian values and those Chinese translated core values of the spirit of our time are successfully combined into a new coherent set of Chinese core socialist values or core cultural values. The successful integration of them proves again the compatibility between Confucianism and the spirit of our time. It also indicates the possibility of further larger scale, and deep integration, for example, traditional Confucian values and the value of basic human rights as part of the operational norm of our time can be integrated. It rejects, at least it gives us an example to reject, any tendency to use the particularity of Confucian values as an excuse to resist the universal. It rejects any tendency to reject Confucian values as a possibly ally to the universal and the timely universal. It indicates clearly the possibility of Chinese embodiment of the universal through an integration of Confucian values and those universal values of our time.

The fourth thing to be said is that the 24-word Chinese core cultural values are compatible to six epoch-defining values of our time: global justice, human rights, constitutional democracy, crimes against humanity, and social toleration. Accordingly, a new system of Chinese cultural values centered on the 24-word core values is compatible to the spirit of our time defined by those six epoch-making values. Admittedly, the 24-word Chinese new core cultural values still leave much to be desired and some of their totalitarian contents should be eliminated and their liberal contents should be expanded. That said, the 24-word Chinese new core cultural values are geared toward to developing a more democratic, law-governed China and Chinese culture wherein liberty, equality, justice, and social cooperation thrive, not toward a China and Chinese culture where oppression, repression, and dictatorship are values and norms.

The fifth thing to be said is that a new system of Chinese cultural values can be enriched and lifted up further by importing those missing core values of our time including human rights, global justice, social toleration, and crimes against humanity.

It can also be enriched by recovering some missing Confucian values including human dignity, personal dignity, and righteousness in terms of humanity that also have universal claims. This amounts to saying that a new system of Chinese cultural values can be enriched by drawing further both from Confucianism and the spirit of our time with an understanding that the spirit of our time is the parameter to which cultural values should be lifted up to. Here, to plant those missing universal human values such as the value of human rights is to embody them in the particular, while recovering those missing Confucian values in line with the spirit of our time is to renovate and reconstruct the particular. Here, the fact that Chinese culture have no X and Y is not a legitimate reason for Chinese culture to resist X and Y. A new system of Chinese cultural values cannot be modern if they do not embody and contain those timely universal human values. Meanwhile, a new system of Chinese cultural values will not utilize utmost its national and cultural heritage and resource unless it makes those truths and insights which its tradition contains continue to live in new light.

The sixth thing to be said is that the assumption of some kind of unbridgeable cultural gaps between Confucian values and the spirit of time is a total wrong assumption. The assumption is based on a false assumption that the relationship between Confucianism and the spirit of our time is one between one set of cultural values and another set of cultural values. But the relationship between Confucian values and the spirit of our time is not a relation between two reasonable particulars. Noteworthy, unbridgeable cultural gaps and incompatibility can exist between two particulars, but not between a reasonable particular and the universal. That is to say, unbridgeable cultural gaps and incompatibility do not exist between Confucian values in whole as a reasonable particular and the spirit of our time as the universal. Noteworthy, the assumption of unbridgeable cultural gaps and cultural incompatibility between Confucian values and the spirit of our time confuses the concept of conflict and incompatibility. But conflict is not incompatibility. Neither does it mean the existence of unbridgeable cultural gaps. Diversity is not identical to incompatibility either. What are in conflict can still be compatible. Indeed, it is not unreasonable for us to see that existence consists in conflicts. For example, Daoism claims that everything is a totality of *yin-yang* energies and everything exists in a dialectical way of *yin-yang* conflict. But we certainly cannot assume that in this world, nothing is compatible to anything else.

Craig K. Ihara (2004), David Wong (2004), Chad Hansen (2004), and some scholars often recall the Confucian emphasis on role obligation and community to question about the universality of the idea of human rights in Asian context. Doing so, they commit three flaws. First, the concept of role obligation is not incompatible to the concept of basic human rights and an emphasis on communal good and one's communal obligation is compatible to an emphasis on individual rights. The minimal thing to say is their arguments—for example, Ihara's argument—commit the logical fallacy of appealing to the wrong authority. Second, it is untrue that Western ethics that emphasize individual rights do not emphasize public good, communal good, and role obligation. Therefore, their arguments are based on a wrong assumption of a distinction that does not really exist. Third, it is true that Confucianism does not have a concept of human rights. That said, one must also not forget that Confucian ethics

emphasizes first of all a person is, and should live as, a human being, not a tool or thing-like. As mentioned above, Confucian ethics has a rich concept of human dignity and personal dignity. To conceive Confucian values to be an alternative to the value of human rights is to forget that in Confucian ethics, the first value is humanity—the value of being a human.

All the same, the 24-word Chinese core cultural values are illuminating for us to understand the compatibility between Confucian values and the spirit of our time. It leads us to see that globalization of Confucian values today involves a two-fold task: on the one hand, it is to sift out those universalizable universal claims in Confucian values and on the other hand, it is to let Confucian values in whole co-live with other cultural values under the guidance of the spirit of our time. That is to say, one part of the task to globalize Confucian values is to locate those Confucian values and ideas that can be integrated with the spirit of our time and therefore to universalize them in the process of their globalization. To universalize them is to let their validity claims to be universally recognized and therefore their global presence and acceptance is based upon their universal acceptability. Meanwhile, another part of the task to globalize Confucian values is to locate a mechanism of cultural toleration on which those Confucian values that are valuable only in Chinese or other Asian cultural contexts can co-live with other cultural values, e.g., Western cultural values. It is to develop virtues, norms and rules that facilitate cultural toleration and inclusion in the global value discourses.

In such a context, we should distinguish between two kinds of dialogue: (1) dialogues between Confucian values and the spirit of our time and (2) dialogues between Confucian values and other cultural values. In dialogues between Confucian values and the spirit of our time, the fate of Confucian values is determined by one choice: be lifted up to the ideas and values of the spirit of our time or be retired from our life today. Any so-called cultural gaps between Confucian values and the spirit of our time indicate nothing but that Confucian values must be renovated and lifted up or otherwise become history. There can be no excuses of cultural particularity to applications of the spirit of our time in particular cultural contexts. In other words, dialogues between Confucian values and the spirit of our time do not occur between two equal parties, by between the led and the leader. They are essentially dialogues of how best to renovate Confucian values in line with the spirit of our time. They are dialogues with only one direction wherein Confucian values move toward the spirit of our time.

Especially, the ideas of human rights, global justice, constitutional democracy, the rule of law, crimes against humanity, and cultural toleration are six epoch-making ideas of our time and summarize the essence of the spirit of our time. Dialogues between Confucian values and these six ideas are between tradition and the spirit of our time, as well as between the particular and the universal. In such dialogues, it is Confucian values that must be lifted up to embody the six timely universal claims on human rights, global justice, constitutional democracy, the rule of law, crimes against humanity, and cultural toleration. Of course, the argument that Confucian values should be lifted up to these six epoch-making ideas is not the argument that people in Asian culture should dogmatically embrace Western interpretation of these ideas.

Instead, people in Confucian cultures should develop their Confucian interpretations of these epoch-making ideas. That said, no excuse of cultural contexts is a legitimate reason to resist these six epoch-making ideas. To find a Confucian expression or interpretation of these epoch-making ideas is not to shun away from these ideas in the name of Confucianism. Any claim of the particularity of Confucianism as the legitimate reason to resist these six timely ideas implies a distortion of the relation between the universal and the particular in understanding.

In dialogues between Confucian values and other cultural values, dialogues are ones among equal systems of cultural values wherein different systems of cultural values engage one another but do not need to change for the sake of other. In such dialogues, the task is to find common ground for co-existence and stable mechanism of cultural toleration, e.g., legal framework or so on and to attempt to generate produce something universal through the chemical interaction of different systems of values. In such a context, conflict is the mother of the new. Conflict is the mother of Hegelian superseding. In such a context, no system of cultural values should claim itself to be the only embodiment of the universal and therefore to be the universal. Instead, we must always bear in mind that a white horse is not horse, as the Daoist master Zhaungzi famously claimed.

That said, multiculturalism need not go hand in hand with cultural relativism or the so-called pluralistic universality. As the neo-Confucian motto indicates: the principle is one, but its embodiments are multifold; that is, the universal is one, but its particular embodiments are diverse. By this token, multiculturalism is better understood as multifold embodiments of the universal. Here, we must reject both cultural imperialism and cultural relativism. We should reject what Hilary Putnam calls metaphysical realism on the one hand, and what Chen Lai dubs as “pluralistic universality” on the other hand. Metaphysical realism is the doctrine that there is, and can be, only one correct system of expression of the universal—that is to say, there is, can be, only one correct embodiment of the universal. The concept “pluralistic universality” is the concept that universality is plural. Both concepts have a wrong view on the relationship between the universal and the particular. Metaphysical realism identifies the universal with one particular embodiment of the universal. The concept of so-called pluralistic universality identifies the universal with diverse embodiments of the universal.

In short, Confucian system of values lives if and only if Confucian values continue to inspire. Confucian values can continue to inspire if and only if they are constantly renovated in line with the spirit of time. If Confucian values cannot live up to the spirit of our time, they will be pushed away from the historical platform.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, the present discourse of the relationship between Confucian values and the spirit of our time should be re-tuned. Most importantly, we should reject any claims that Confucian values are the alternative to those timely universal human values of our time. Such claims, as indicated above, presuppose one erroneous concept: Confucian ethics is geared to turn persons into merely thing-like functions in

society, forgetting the most fundamental of Confucianism: human persons are the foundation for everything. Therefore, we should see that only when we continue to renovate Confucian values in line with the spirit of our time, we can make Confucian values a vital force of our time. Some conceptual clarifications are needed here.

First, the relationship between Confucian values and the spirit of our time is one between the particular and the universal. Therefore, the matter at hand is how best Confucian values should be renovated in line with the spirit of our time. More specifically, the question here is how best to lift Confucian values up by the ideas of global justice, human rights, constitutional democracy, the rule of law, crimes against humanity, and cultural toleration. The possible contribution of Confucian values to global human values will not come from any direction in which Confucian values are conceived as alternatives to the spirit of our time, but only from the direction in which Confucian values not only richly embody the spirit of our time, but also their claims consistent with the spirit of our time are sifted out and universalized.

Second, Confucianism is essentially compatible to the spirit of our time. How best to renovate Confucian values in line with the spirit of our time is a test of our creativity. Historically, Confucianism has been again and again renovated to live up to the spirits of various times. Today, it can, and should, be renovated in line of the spirit of our time.

Third, some Confucian values and norms have been globalized and Confucianism is globalized today. But Confucian values are yet to be universalized. That is, their universal claims are yet to be sifted out and recognized. In particular, while Confucian views on duty, social harmony, and community doubtlessly contain claims that are universalizable, Confucian views on humanity, righteousness in line with humanity, human dignity, personal dignity, self free of the causality of material interests, and toleration are even richer with universal claims in light of the six epoch-making values: global justice, human rights, constitutional democracy, the rule of law, crimes against humanity, and cultural toleration in our time.

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