

## ORIGINS

In 1601 the Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci became the first Western missionary invited to live in Beijing. It was through the efforts of Ricci and his associates that the Chinese and Western civilizations first began to be seriously known to each other, to share their self-perceptions. China’s self-perception at this juncture lies at the heart of this story.<sup>1</sup> This self-perception emphasized the antiquity of China and the continuous importance to it of what the Chinese refer to as *rujia*, the scholarly tradition, or what the West calls Confucianism. It sustained an image of China’s past that was adopted and modified by the West—admired in the seventeenth century and transformed over the course of the eighteenth century from a largely favorable impression of China and what might be called Chinese “traditionality” into a hostile vision of China and a Chinese “immobility” that had to be modernized or transformed by an allegedly “dynamic” West. This image of an unacceptable Chinese or East Asian “immobility” was then projected back upon East Asia by the Western imperial powers in the nineteenth century and reabsorbed with momentous consequences for world history.

Sometimes the imperial projection of this “immobility” was done with force and violence, sometimes by diplomatic undertakings, sometimes through the written words of academics and journalists. The resulting image of their own past and present, the way they seemed to appear to others as if in some nightmarish distorting mirror, contributed to a wide variety of radical iconoclasms throughout East Asia as the Chinese, the Japanese and the Koreans sought to respond to the Western onslaught, sometimes with violence of their own. These iconoclasms

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<sup>1</sup> For a wonderful window onto the subject, see Ray Huang, *1587, a Year of No Significance: The Ming Dynasty in Decline* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

reached the peak of their frenzy in the twentieth century in the Cultural Revolution with its call to smash the “four olds,” to smash what People’s Liberation Army Marshal Lin Biao famously described as the “old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits of the exploiting classes.”<sup>2</sup> Now we are in a process of watching the image of China’s past be modified once again by a civilization whose self-confidence is reemerging. We may, as the contemporary philosopher Tu Weiming suggests, be on the verge of a Chinese cultural renaissance in which a New Confucianism—deeply influenced by its contact with Western philosophy—offers insights with global resonance. If so it will raise the question, as Tu Weiming’s work already does, of whether the West can again become a learning as well as a teaching civilization.<sup>3</sup>

When Matteo Ricci arrived in Beijing in 1601 he had already been in China for nearly a decade, was fluent in Chinese, and had developed a missionary strategy of promoting a Confucian-Christian synthesis. In much of the traditional literature, this strategy is praised for its cultural sensitivity and willingness to accommodate local conditions.<sup>4</sup> More recently, the historian Qiong Zhang has argued that Ricci’s “efforts to form alliance with classical Confucianism were more Machiavellian than people are usually willing to admit.”<sup>5</sup> Noticing that there was more of a concept of a personal God the farther back one went in Chinese history, Ricci claimed that the truths of Christianity and the truths that the Chinese ancients had known

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 108.

<sup>3</sup> Tu Weiming, *The Global Significance of Concrete Humanity: Essays on the Confucian Discourse in Cultural China* (New Delhi: Center for Studies in Civilization, 2010), pp. 37, 101.

<sup>4</sup> Although, to be fair, scholars like David Mungello were quick to point out the lack of cultural sensitivity toward Chinese Buddhism. See David E. Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1985). For an introduction to Ricci, see Jonathan Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1984). See also Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579-1724* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). Ricci is still known in China by his Chinese name, Li Madou.

<sup>5</sup> Qiong Zhang, “Cultural Accommodation or Intellectual Colonization? A Reinterpretation of the Jesuit Approach to Confucianism during the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries” (PhD dissertation: Harvard University, 1996), p. 130.

were complementary and in many cases identical. And a powerful echo of this strategy, or this perception, can be heard in such contemporary East Asian formulations as “Jesus was a sincere filial son” and “The example of Jesus shows us the ultimate dimensions of filial piety.”<sup>6</sup> The extent to which Ricci was being manipulative, or genuinely accommodating, is perhaps less important than how he and his ideas were received in China and how the image of China that he began to convey was received in the West.

The following quote, from a work titled *Humble Remarks on the Distinction between the Doctrines*, shows something of the reception of Ricci’s ideas among those Confucians who were not inclined to be sympathetic to Christianity:

The following evening, my guest, who was drunk with Western doctrine, came back to see me and said: “You revere the Sovereign on High but you do not dare to usurp a right which is not yours nor to profane him with your prayers, and in this you are obeying the laws. But Ricci says that the Master of Heaven created Heaven, Earth and the Ten Thousand Beings. He is therefore our supreme and universal father. Furthermore, he rules and supports them constantly. He is thus our common sovereign, with no superior.... How could we not be supremely lacking in loyalty and filial piety if we did not show reverence and address our prayers to the one who is our supreme father and the sovereign of all of us?” I replied: “True morality is to hand and yet you go looking for it in distant ideas. Our father is the one who engendered us, our mother the one who raised us. Filial piety consists solely in loving our parents. All good fortune and prestige depends solely upon the sovereign. Loyalty consists in respecting him. To love one’s parents is to have heart (*ren*), or humanity; to respect one’s sovereign is to have a sense of righteousness (*yi*). These are sentiments in which heavenly nature (*tianxing*) manifests itself of its own accord. Why go seeking morality in obscure and distant ideas? By revering the Master of Heaven as the supreme father of all mankind and as the sovereign of the universe, Ricci [is led to] consider parents to be negligible and unworthy of affection and to turn the sovereign into an ordinary individual.”<sup>7</sup>

The potential for a radical and leveling universalism within Western doctrine was accurately perceived and, before the end of four centuries, a Chinese antitraditionalism rooted in a

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<sup>6</sup> Jung Sun Oh, *A Korean Theology of Human Nature with Special Attention to the Works of Robert Cummings Neville and Tu Wei-ming* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2005), p. 135.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Jacques Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact: A Conflict of Cultures* tr. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 160-161.

secularized version of Western doctrine would indeed contribute to the destructiveness of several revolutions. The first of these revolutions would in fact “turn the sovereign into an ordinary individual” before a later revolution created a new sovereign of unprecedentedly concentrated power. But from the beginning there were also Confucians who perceived something worthwhile in Christianity, such as the convert Li Zubo. For them, there was a profound sense of the unity of humanity that the congruence between Eastern and Western traditions revealed. “Why is there agreement between the Confucianism of ancient times and the basic religious ideas of Christianity?” Li asked, and then answered: “They both find their origins in mankind as a single family, for both the Chinese and the Jews had the same first ancestors.”<sup>8</sup> As another early seventeenth century convert wrote: “The language and writing of the Westerners differ from those of China, but that does not stop us from understanding one another at all. The fact is that mind and reason are the same [amongst all men]. Furthermore, their teaching is at one with that of the Duke of Zhou and Confucius. That is why the great and people of standing daily seek out their company and respect them.”<sup>9</sup>

That the government of China was in the hands of the literati, that the entire kingdom was administered by “the Order of the Learned” as Ricci put it, astonished him and, as his journals were published, astonished the West. As late as the late eighteenth century, François Quesnay and the physiocrats in France were championing the Chinese examination system as a model for the French and as late as the late nineteenth century opponents of introducing a civil service in the United States complained that it was “the Chinese system.”<sup>10</sup> Of Confucius himself, Ricci

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Matteo Ricci, S.J., *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* edited by Edward J. Malatesta, S.J. and translated and with an introduction by Douglas Lancashire and Peter Hu Kuo-chen, S.J. (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1985), p. 40.

<sup>9</sup> Li Yingshi quoted in Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact*, p. 35.

<sup>10</sup> See the complete translation of François Quesnay’s 1767 *Le Despotisme de la Chine*, in Lewis A. Maverick, *China: A Model for Europe* (San Antonio: Paul Anderson Company, 1946), especially pp. 193-203; Akira Iriye,

wrote, “if we critically examine his actions and sayings as they are recorded in history, we shall be forced to admit that he was the equal of the pagan philosophers and superior to most of them.” While the nations of the West seemed to be entirely consumed with the idea of supreme domination, Ricci noted, “they cannot even preserve what their ancestors have bequeathed them, as the Chinese have done through a period of some thousands of years.”<sup>11</sup>

Although good translations of the Confucian classics had to wait for the nineteenth century, some sense of basic ideas was conveyed from Ricci’s writings forward. Here is a recent translation of the opening statement of the classic called the *Great Learning*:

The ancients who wished to illuminate “brilliant virtue” all under Heaven first governed their states. Wishing to govern their states, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their personal lives. Wishing to cultivate their personal lives, they first rectified their hearts and minds. Wishing to rectify their hearts and minds, they first authenticated their intentions. Wishing to authenticate their intentions, they first refined their knowledge. The refinement of knowledge lay in the study of things. For only when things are studied is knowledge refined; only when knowledge is refined are intentions authentic; only when intentions are authentic are hearts and minds rectified; only when hearts and minds are rectified are personal lives cultivated; only when personal lives are cultivated are families regulated; only when families are regulated are states governed; only when states are governed is there peace under Heaven. Therefore, from the Son of Heaven to the common people, all, without exception, must take self-cultivation as the root.<sup>12</sup>

One of those favorably impressed was Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, the German philosopher famous for discovering, simultaneously with Isaac Newton, the calculus. “And so if we are their equals in the industrial arts,” Leibniz wrote in 1699, “and ahead of them in contemplative sciences, certainly they surpass us (though it is almost shameful to confess this) in practical philosophy, that is, in the precepts of ethics and politics adapted to the present life and use of

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*Across the Pacific: An Inner History of American-East Asia Relations* revised edition (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1992), p. 28.

<sup>11</sup> Matteo Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century: the Journals of Matthew Ricci, 1583-1610* translated from the Latin by Louis J. Gallagher (New York: Random House, 1953), pp. 30, 55.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Tu, *The Global Significance of Concrete Humanity*, p. 212

mortals. Indeed, it is difficult to describe how beautifully all the laws of the Chinese, in contrast to those of other peoples, are directed to the achievement of public tranquility and the establishment of social order, so that men shall be disrupted in their relations as little as possible.” Leibniz worried that if the missionaries the West was sending to China continued to transmit Western scientific and religious knowledge, “we may soon become inferior to the Chinese in all branches of knowledge.” What was needed, he thought, was for the West to absorb from China those elements that would most strengthen Western society: “we need missionaries from the Chinese,” he wrote.<sup>13</sup>

Not everyone was as enchanted with China in the seventeenth century as Leibniz. Later missionaries, particularly among the Dominicans, were less comfortable than the Jesuits with Ricci’s efforts at synthesis or “cultural accommodation.” This yielded, for more than a century, what became known as the rites controversy. Rites of homage to Confucius, to parents and ancestors, and to the emperor—were they civil and moral ceremonies or idolatrous worship? Were they compatible with Christianity or not? There was also controversy over the name of God: could and should God be referred to by such ancient Chinese terms as Shangdi? Was Tian the material sky, or did it also signify Heaven and perhaps even God for the Chinese? Tianzhu, the Master of Heaven, was the term Ricci advocated using for God, but he also used the terms Tian and Shangdi.

The Spanish Dominican Domingo Navarrete was one of the most articulate of the Jesuits’ critics and a vehement opponent of the rites. Yet even he praised China as the “noblest Part of the Universe,” and was quite willing to accommodate other aspects of Chinese culture. “The custom of swathing women’s Feet is very good for keeping females at home. It were no small

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<sup>13</sup> Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Writings on China* translated and with an introduction by Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, Jr. (Chicago: Open Court, 1994), pp. 46-47, 51.

benefit to them and their menfolk if it were also practiced everywhere else too, not only in China.” In fact, he thought it the universal opinion of all the missionaries in China that “It is God’s special Providence that the Chinese don’t know what’s done in Christendom, for if they did there would never be a man among them but would spit in our faces.”<sup>14</sup>

After many years of effort on the part of the Jesuits, the Kangxi emperor issued an edict of toleration of Christianity in 1692, news of which in Europe contrasted favorably with Louis XIV’s revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Nor was admiration for China a purely moral and political phenomenon. This is the epoch of Chinoiserie—the popularity of Chinese style imagery in pottery, wallpaper, furnishings and gardening—which was then widespread in Europe, peaking finally in the mid-eighteenth century.

A current of hostile opinion began to emerge early in the eighteenth century as something of a nationalistic rejection of all the praise of China. The earliest expression of this current of which I am aware—outside of some of the Roman Catholic circles opposed to the Jesuits’ cultural accommodation—is in Daniel Defoe’s writing. *The Consolidator or Memoirs of Sundry Transactions from the World in the Moon* of 1705 is primarily an allegory of European politics, but it suggests in passing that claims of Chinese accomplishments are pure fiction.<sup>15</sup> Defoe may have been influenced by the extraordinary story of George Psalmanazar who in 1703 succeeded in passing himself off as a native of Taiwan in a meeting with the Royal Society and whose 1704 volume, *An Historical and Geographical Description of Formosa*, became a bestseller before the

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<sup>14</sup> J. S. Cummins, ed., *The Travels and Controversies of Friar Domingo Navarrette, 1618-1686* in two volumes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), pp. 1:137, 1:162, 2:176.

<sup>15</sup> See Daniel Defoe, *The Consolidator or Memoirs of Sundry Transactions from the World in the Moon* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1972), p. 5.

fraud was revealed.<sup>16</sup> In any case, by the second volume of *Robinson Crusoe* in 1719, Defoe was openly contemptuous:

But when I come to compare the miserable people of these countries with ours, their fabrics, their manner of living, their government, their religion, their wealth, and their glory, (as some call it) I must confess I do not so much as think it is worth naming, or worth my while to write of, or any that shall come after me to read. It is very observable, that we wonder at the grandeur, the riches, the pomp, the ceremonies, the government, the manufactures, the commerce, and the conduct of these people; not that it is to be wonder'd at, or indeed in the least to be regarded; but because, having first a true notion of the barbarity of those countries, the rudeness and the ignorance that prevails there, we do not expect to find any such things so far off.<sup>17</sup>

#### TRANSFORMATION

Deepening this negative current, in 1715, the rites controversy yielded a Papal Bull that prohibited converts from following the Confucian rites. By 1721, the Kangxi emperor had revoked his edict of tolerance. As late as 1735, however, a general history of China compiled by the French Jesuit Jean-Baptiste Du Halde could still sing China's praises. In this history—which was soon translated into other languages—we see the clearest formulation of the image of Chinese traditionality: “*China* has this Advantage over all other Nations, that for 4000 Years, and upwards, it has been governed, almost without Interruption, by its own Native Princes, and with little Deviation either in Attire, Morals, Laws, Customs, or Manners, from the wise Institutions of its first Legislators.”<sup>18</sup>

This mythic view of Chinese traditionality was both largely impervious to contrary evidence and rooted in a real phenomenon. The relatively recent transition from Ming to Qing was known

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<sup>16</sup> David E. Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500-1800* second edition (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), p. 114.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (London: Constable & Company, 1925), pp. 266, 270.

<sup>18</sup> Jean-Baptiste Du Halde, *The General History of China* [1735] tr. by R. Brookes in four volumes (London: John Watts, 1736-1741), Vol. 2, p. 1.



to Du Halde, as were other dynastic changes, but they were seen through a filter of contrast with the greater and more frequent violence in European history, and through a filter of a Chinese self-perception that emphasized continuity and what came to be known in the West as Sinicization. The Manchus who had conquered China in 1644, and established the Qing, adopted the Confucian bureaucracy and the examination system and became Sinicized. Montesquieu, who was able to interview a genuine Chinese visitor to Europe, in addition to reading the missionary literature, captured the phenomena succinctly in 1748: “As either the vanquisher or the vanquished must change, in China it has always had to be the vanquisher; for, as the *mores* of the vanquishers are not their manners, nor their manners their laws, nor their laws their religion, it has been easier for the vanquishers to bend slowly to the vanquished people than for the vanquished people to bend to the vanquishers.”<sup>19</sup> But Montesquieu did not look favorably on this alleged combination of *mores*, manners, laws, and religion. He saw it as a foundation for tyranny. “The ruler’s authority there is completely unlimited, he combines ecclesiastical power with secular power, for the Emperor is the head of the school of literati. Thus the goods and lives of his subjects are always at the sovereign’s disposition, exposed to all the caprices and untamed whims of a tyrant.”<sup>20</sup>

Commodore George Anson’s memoirs concerning his visit to China in 1743 was another addition to what was becoming a critical chorus. Anson had captured a Spanish galleon, his share of which would total a half a million pounds sterling, at the cost of severely damaging his vessel and had arrived in Guangzhou (Canton) apparently thinking that as a man-o-war his ship would owe no port dues, that he would be invited to dine with the Viceroy, and that the supplies

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<sup>19</sup> Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* translated and edited by Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, and Harold Samuel Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1989), p. 319.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Jonathan Spence, *The Chan’s Great Continent: China in Western Minds* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), p. 90.

his ship needed would be readily provided. When they were not, he tried to force his way upriver to meet with the Viceroy, which, not surprisingly, led to further delays to the Commodore's growing outrage: "Indeed, thus much may be asserted," he would later write, "that in artifice, falsehood, and an attachment to all kinds of lucre, many of the Chinese are difficult to be paralleled by any other people." Referring to a host of dishonest procurement practices from cramming ducks and chickens with stones to bloating hogs with water, Anson claimed "these instances may serve as a specimen of the manners of this celebrated nation, which is often recommended to the rest of the world as a pattern of all kinds of laudable qualities."<sup>21</sup>

Beginning his 1756 *Essay on the Manners and the Spirit of Nations* with China, Voltaire took the Jesuit praise of Chinese morals, and the Jesuit strategy of a Confucian-Christian synthesis, and turned it against them. If Chinese morality was so great, he seemed to ask, what did China need Christianity for? As for Anson, he was clearly judging the morals of a great nation by the inhabitants of a remote province. Yet Voltaire was also struck with alleged Chinese deficiencies and mistakenly believed that the Chinese written language was particularly difficult even for native speakers:

It is surprising that this people, so happy at invention, have never penetrated beyond the elements of geometry; that in music they are even ignorant of semitones; and that their astronomy, with all their other sciences, should be at once so ancient and imperfect. Nature seems to have bestowed on this species of man, so different from the Europeans, organs sufficient to discover all at once, what was necessary to their happiness, but incapable to proceed further: we, on the other hand, were tardy in our discoveries; but then we have speedily brought everything to perfection.... If we inquire why so many arts and sciences, so long cultivated without interruption in China, have nevertheless made so little progress, perhaps we shall discover two causes that have retarded their improvement. One is the prodigious respect paid by these people to everything transmitted from their progenitors. This invests whatever is antique with an air of perfection. The other is the nature of their language, which is the first principle of all knowledge. The art of communicating ideas by writing, which should be plain and simple, is with them a task of the utmost difficulty. Every word is represented under a different

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent*, pp. 53-54.

character; and he is deemed the most learned, who knows the greatest number of characters.<sup>22</sup>

Still, Voltaire's basic attitude was one of sympathy and admiration: "We have calumniated the Chinese, merely because they differ from us in their system of metaphysics. We should rather admire them in two articles of merit, which at once condemn the superstition of the pagans and the morals of the Christians. The religion of their learned men was never dishonored by fables, nor stained with quarrels or civil wars.... The great misunderstanding that prevails concerning the rites of the Chinese, arose from our judging their customs by our own; for we carry our prejudices, and spirit of contention along with us, even to the extremities of the earth."<sup>23</sup>

Europe's sense of the value of what it was increasingly imagining as its own dynamism and progress, and the value a thinker like Montesquieu placed on liberty, shifted its attitude toward Chinese traditionality over the course of the eighteenth century. Perhaps the strongest of the new hostile voices was that of the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder in 1787. It is in Herder's writing that Chinese "traditionality" first fully emerges as "immobility." It is here that one can most clearly see the change in European attitudes toward tradition in changing attitudes toward China:

Is it to be wondered, that a nation of this kind should have invented little in the sciences according to the European standard? or that it has remained for some thousands of years at the same point? Even their books of law and morality continually pace round the same circle, and carefully and precisely say the same things of childish duties, in a hundred different ways, with systematic hypocrisy. In it music and astronomy, poetry and tactics, painting and architecture, are as they were centuries ago, the children of its eternal laws, and unalterably childish institutions. The empire is an embalmed mummy, wrapped in silk, painted with hieroglyphics: its internal circulation is that of a dormouse in its winter sleep.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent*, p. 98.

<sup>24</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder, *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* [1784-1791] reprint of the translation by T. Churchill of 1800 (New York: Bergman Publishers, 1966), p. 296.

Like the mythic view of Chinese traditionality, from which it derived, this mythic view of Chinese immobility was largely impervious to contrary evidence. Note that it was fully articulated a half-century before overseas Western imperialism really got going in East Asia; before, and not after, Lord George Macartney's famous 1793 mission to China. In this mission, on behalf of the British government, Macartney sought to persuade China to end its restrictions on the limited international trade that was allowed through Guangzhou, to open new ports for international commerce, to allow a British diplomat to remain in Beijing, and to establish fair, that is to say low, tariffs. The rebuff that the Qianlong emperor sent to King George III was direct and to the point: "We have never valued ingenious articles, nor do we have the slightest need of your country's manufactures. Therefore, O king, as regards your request to send someone to remain at the capital, while it is not in harmony with the regulations of the Celestial Empire we also feel very much that it is of no advantage to your country."<sup>25</sup>

Faced with a lack of Chinese interest in their manufactures, and strong British consumer demand for Chinese silks, porcelains and teas, British traders increasingly turned to selling opium. And the Americans followed suit. Each chest that was sold, as the historian Jonathan Spence relates, contained between 130 and 160 pounds of opium, and by the outbreak of the Opium War in 1839, the trade amounted to more than 40,000 chests a year. The Chinese government's blockading of some 350 foreigners in their warehouses to enforce compliance with China's anti-opium laws, and the destruction of some 20,000 chests of opium, led to demands in Great Britain for the protection of British citizens, and for compensation, and before long led to war. The British dictated a peace in 1842—the Treaty of Nanjing—that included, among other measures, the opening of five new port cities in which British merchants would be free to

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<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* third edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013), p. 121.

conduct mercantile transactions with whomever they pleased, and with guaranteed low tariffs. Hong Kong was to be possessed in perpetuity by the British crown. Following this incivility, the United States soon signed a treaty in 1844—the Treaty of Wanghia—granting it the same rights the British had extorted, including the right to what became known as “extraterritoriality” whereby American nationals accused of crimes in China were to be tried only by Americans under American and not Chinese law.<sup>26</sup>

In 1856, after China seemed to Britain and France to be dragging its heels in opening up to international trade, they took advantage of a supposedly illegal search of a vessel once under Hong Kong registry, the *Arrow*, to resume hostilities.<sup>27</sup> This time British and French forces reached Beijing where, in retaliation for the kidnapping, torture, and murder of members of a team of peace negotiators, the decision was taken to burn the Yuanmingyuan, the Gardens of Eternal Brightness. These had been built with the help of Jesuit architects during the reign of the Qianlong emperor as his summer abode. “The hundreds of palace buildings—art pavilions, pagodas, temples, and libraries—burned for several days, while soldiers and officers tried to get away with as much plunder as they could,” the historian Odd Arne Westad has observed; “A French soldier wrote: ‘I was dumbfounded, stunned, bewildered by what I had seen, and suddenly Thousand and One Nights seem perfectly believable to me. I have walked for more than two days over more than 30 millions worth of silks, jewels, porcelain, bronzes, sculptures, [and] treasures! I do not think we have seen anything like it since the sack of Rome by the barbarians.’”<sup>28</sup>

If a digression may be allowed at this point, I would note that Americans have always tended to consider themselves more civil than their great power rivals, not only Nazi Germany and

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<sup>26</sup> Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 127-130, 143-163.

<sup>27</sup> Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 175-178.

<sup>28</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *Restless Empire: China and the World Since 1750* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), p. 51.

Soviet Russia, but the Western European imperial powers as well. The historian Akira Iriye has presented evidence that some Chinese officials viewed the United States in a kindred light. The Qing statesman Zeng Guofan, who would successfully lead the Hunanese provincial army that defeated the Taiping rebellion, praised the Americans in 1861:

Of all western barbarians, the English are the most crafty, the French next; the Russians are stronger than either the English or the French and are always struggling with the English barbarians, who are afraid of them. The Americans are of pure-minded and honest disposition and long recognized as respectful and compliant toward China. In 1839 [Commodore Lawrence Kearny] reported to Assistant Military Governor Yang Fang that he was willing to act as mediator [between us and the English].... In 1853 the rebels occupied Nanking and it was reported that the American chief proffered his good offices.... When the English and the French barbarians attacked the capital of Kwangtung, the American chief never assisted.... Thus, while the American barbarians have always been sincerely loyal to China, they have never been in close alliance with the English and French barbarians.”<sup>29</sup>

Those Chinese that perceived this greater American civility, and were inclined to place some weight upon it, were almost perpetually disappointed that, aside from rhetoric, more tangible assistance was not forthcoming.<sup>30</sup> But the significance of generations of American rhetoric on behalf of China’s administrative and territorial integrity should not be underestimated. While it is easy to dismiss such rhetoric as mere words, the sympathy and sense of legitimacy behind those words ultimately contributed to war between the United States and Japan. When push finally came to shove, in 1941, the United States insisted that a withdrawal of Japan’s forces from China would be required to end an American de facto oil embargo against Japan, an embargo imposed in the aftermath of Japan’s military moves beyond China and northern Indochina into southern Indochina.<sup>31</sup> Faced with a choice between surrendering the “gains” of

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<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Iriye, *Across the Pacific*, 35.

<sup>30</sup> For this theme of Chinese expectation and disappointment with the Americans, see Michael H. Hunt, *The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and China to 1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

<sup>31</sup> See Waldo Heinrichs, *Threshold of War: Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Entry into World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 159-214, especially 206-214.

years of aggression in China, and taking the fight to a new level, the militarists dominating the government of Japan chose to fight. American civility helped produce a “soft peace” after the extremely brutal end of that extremely brutal war which, in turn, helped Japanese civility reassert itself.<sup>32</sup>

During the nineteenth century, while the Opium and Arrow wars were going on, China also saw major internal rebellions. The leader of the largest of these rebellions, Hong Xiuquan, had been given a protestant missionary tract back in 1836 and dreamed of a bearded golden haired man and a younger man whom Hong addressed as elder brother. Eventually, he came to believe that the men of his dream were God and Jesus and that he was also a Son of God and Jesus’ younger brother. Drawing converts from his own Hakka people, and from other mountain tribes, by 1849 he had attracted about 10,000 followers and proceeded to conquer numerous cities in southern and central China. In 1851, Hong declared himself the Heavenly King of a Heavenly Kingdom. By 1853, the capital of this kingdom was Nanjing. In Jonathan Spence’s succinct summary:

The Taiping ruled their Nanjing-based Heavenly Kingdom for eleven years (1853-1864) under the formal authority of Hong Xiuquan as Heavenly King. The politics of the Taiping remained, on paper and often in practice, startlingly radical. One facet of their rule was an asceticism that required segregation of the sexes and absolute bans on opium smoking, prostitution, dancing, and drinking of alcohol. Money was held in a common treasury, theoretically to be shared by all; and since the Taiping had acquired more than 18 million taels—[or ounces of silver]—along their route of march and within Nanjing itself, their prosperity

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<sup>32</sup> See Steven Schwartzberg, “The ‘Soft Peace Boys’: Presurrender Planning and Japanese Land Reform,” *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, Volume 2, Number 2 (Summer 1993), pp. 185-216. “It would be difficult to find another cross-cultural moment more intense, unpredictable, ambiguous, confusing and *electric* than this one. The Americans arrived anticipating, many of them, a traumatic confrontation with fanatical emperor worshippers. They were accosted instead by women who called ‘yoo hoo’ to the first troops landing on the beaches in full battle gear, and men who bowed and asked what it was that the conquerors wished. They found themselves seduced (far more than they realized) by polite manners as well as by elegant presents and entertainments. Most of all, they encountered a populace sick of war, contemptuous of the militarists who had led them to disaster, and all but overwhelmed by the difficulties of their present circumstances in a ruined land. More than anything else, it turned out, the losers wanted both to forget the past and transcend it.” John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), pp. 23-24.

seemed assured. Examinations were reinstituted, based now on Chinese translations of the Bible and on the transcribed versions of Hong Xiuquan's religious revelations and literary works.<sup>33</sup>

Viewed as foreign occupiers by many of the citizens of Nanjing, and resented in the countryside for their taxation, the Taiping ultimately were defeated by the Qing. It was one of the bloodiest civil wars in history costing some twenty million lives. Initially attracted to the Taiping, the Western powers were put off by its religious eccentricities and its staunch opposition to opium.<sup>34</sup>

Favorable Chinese impressions of the Americans, such as Zeng Guofan's, and a sense of affinity that probably existed for a United States that had also recently put down a bloody southern rebellion, and for that matter a United States that had gotten out from under England's power, may help account for the extraordinary embassy of Anson Burlingame. After serving as the American minister to China for half a dozen years, the former Massachusetts congressman turned around and accepted appointment as China's first ambassador to the western powers in 1867. Burlingame travelled widely and even signed a treaty with Secretary of State William Seward guaranteeing Chinese citizens rights of immigration to the United States, before dying on his mission in Russia of pneumonia. His basic appeal was for self-determination: "Let her [China] alone; let her have her independence; let her develop herself in her own time and her own way. She has no hostility to you. Let her do this, and she will initiate a movement which will be felt in every workshop of the civilized world."<sup>35</sup> Disgracefully, an anti-Chinese racism that was particularly strong on the West Coast—and doubtless rooted in part in contempt for Chinese civilization as something immobile and backward—soon led the United States to push the Qing for a renegotiation of the Burlingame treaty. By the end of the nineteenth century,

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<sup>33</sup> Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 171-172.

<sup>34</sup> Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 173-174.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Iriye, *Across the Pacific*, p. 29.



immigration from China had been largely cut off and those who had already arrived were systematically discriminated against.

The contrast with the generous vision of an Anson Burlingame, or a mid-nineteenth century author such as Clifton Phillips, is poignant. In *Protestant America and the Pagan World*, Phillips had written, “May it not be that the causes which have thronged the Atlantic states with European immigrants, will crowd the Pacific states with the teeming population of the Asiatic nations? And as Germany, France, and Ireland have been leavened, in a measure, with republican and evangelical principles, and will be in greater degree by the reflex influence of the emigration; so, may it not be that China, India, and even Japan, shall receive missionaries, in due time, from the converts among their native emigrants to the American coast?”<sup>36</sup>

In seeking to “open” China, Japan and Korea to greater international trade, the Western powers imagined they were doing something that would be beneficial to these countries as well as to the West. As one American observer put it at the time of Commodore Matthew Perry’s mission to Japan in 1853, “The thirty millions of Japan await the key of the western Democrat to open their prison to the sun-light of social interchange.”<sup>37</sup> Richard Cobden, the principal leader of the successful campaign against high tariffs on imported grains in Great Britain in the 1840s, went so far as to adopt the slogan: “Free Trade is the International Law of God.”<sup>38</sup> This Western belief in the morality of the West’s position had a resonance among Confucians in East Asia, particularly in Japan. Although initially put off by the West’s intrusiveness, as the historian Watanabe Hiroshi has observed, by 1860 the scholar and Fukui domain political adviser Yokoi Shōnan was advocating that Japan should voluntarily embrace openness:

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<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Akira Iriye, *Pacific Estrangement: Japanese and American Expansion, 1897-1911* (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1992), p. 17.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Iriye, *Across the Pacific*, p. 23.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Jacob Viner, *The Role of Providence in the Social Order* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1972), p. 50.

Govern and manage things under Heaven by following “the Fair and Public Way”; then there will be nothing to worry about. Countries in the world have improved their politics and education very much. Especially in America, Washington established great principles and one of them is to abolish war in the world in accordance with the “Will of Heaven” [*Teni*]. When countries like this request us to open the country in the name of the “Fair and Public Way,” Japan should renounce its policies for its own sake [*shiei no sei*] and accept the principle [*ri*] of commerce.... In America, the power of a president is succeeded not by his son but by an outstanding person. They [the American people] abolished the relation between lord and vassal and concentrate on the realization of “fairness and peace” [*kokyo wahei*]. They are introducing anything good and just from all over the world into their country ... and are promoting the “life-loving sense of humanity” [*kosei no ninfu*]. In Britain, policies are always based on the sentiment of the people and every act of the government is submitted for the people’s discussion. The government decides for the benefit of the people ... Besides, many Western countries, including Russia, have not only schools ... but also hospitals, orphanages, facilities for the deaf, and so on. Their governments are striving for the sake of the people in accordance with ethics. They are almost the same as the ancient Three Dynasties.<sup>39</sup>

And it was a disciple of Yokoi’s—Yuri Kimimasa—who first drafted the famous Five

Articles that the Meiji emperor swore before the gods in 1868:

Deliberate assemblies shall be widely established and all matters decided by public discussion.  
 All classes, high and low, shall unite in vigorously carrying out the administration of affairs of state.  
 The common people, no less than the civil and military officials, shall each be allowed to pursue his own calling so that there may be no discontent.  
 Evil customs of the past shall be broken off and everything based on the just laws of nature.  
 Knowledge shall be sought throughout the world so as to strengthen the foundations of imperial rule.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Watanabe Hiroshi, “‘They are Almost the Same as the Ancient Three Dynasties’: The West as Seen through Confucian Eyes in Nineteenth Century Japan,” in Tu Weiming, ed., *Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity: Moral Education and Economic Culture in Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 126-128.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Donald Keene, *Emperor of Japan: Meiji and his World, 1852-1912* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 139.

## THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

While much has been made, I believe rightly, about the significance for Japan of gradually and peacefully coming to know something of Western culture—or “Dutch Learning”—through the trade with the Netherlands that was allowed during the Tokugawa period at the port of Nagasaki, this connection that Watanabe has stressed between Confucianism and Japan’s opening in the late nineteenth century is worth emphasizing.<sup>41</sup> So is the radical character of the iconoclasm that followed. By the 1880s, Inoue Kaoru, who would become Japan’s Foreign Minister, had declared: “we must make our nation and people into a European nation and European people.”<sup>42</sup> In this endeavor, not only an orientation toward China, but also an orientation toward Confucianism, soon came under attack. Fukuzawa Yukichi, according to Watanabe, was the most famous intellectual leader in the Meiji era and he maintained that while Confucianism had once helped to civilize Japan to some extent, it had become an important cause of the stagnation of Japanese society. According to Fukuzawa:

Of all the Confucians who have ever been in Japan, those who enjoyed a reputation as most talented and most capable were the greatest experts on absolutism, and the greatest tools of the government. In regard to absolutism, then, the Confucianists were the teachers and the government was the pupil. Alas, we Japanese of today are their descendants! For us to be practicing absolutism in this day and age, and to be subjected to it, is not entirely the fault of the present generation; we have inherited a disease from our distant ancestors. But who were the ones who helped spread this contagion? The contribution of the Confucian teachers was great.... It is indeed regrettable that it [Confucianism] does not know the meaning of change and progress.<sup>43</sup>

Fukuzawa, I suggest, was drunk with the Western doctrine of Chinese or East Asian “immobility,” perceiving stagnation where none was actually present. His inebriation, under the

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<sup>41</sup> See Donald Keene, *The Japanese Discovery of Europe, 1720-1830* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969).

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Akira Iriye, *Japan and the Wider World: From the Mid-Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London: Longman, 1997), p. 5.

<sup>43</sup> Fukuzawa Yukichi, *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization* [1875] translated by David A. Dilworth and G. Cameron Hurst (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1973), p. 151.

influence of this particular intoxicating brew, and the inebriation of many others with him, can perhaps be made clearer by reference to the inebriation in Nakae Chōmin's famous essay, *Discourse by Three Drunkards on Government*. Nakae was a representative intellectual leader of the democracy movement in Japan in the 1880s. Democracy and freedom were, he maintained, universal principles based on a human nature that had also been discovered by Confucian thinkers, especially Mencius.<sup>44</sup> Nakae's essay is remarkable in how much it shows of the choices that lay before Japan, and which Japan actually pursued, both in terms of pacifism and militarism. The three drunkards are the Gentleman of Western Learning, who maintains an extreme pacifist position, the Champion of the East, who maintains an aggressive nationalist position, and Master Nankai, the host of the inn where they are drinking, who maintains a middle position that is probably close to the author's own, but this is hardly a discussion among straw men.

"Because we live today in Country A, we are of that nationality," argues the Gentleman of Western Learning. "However, if we live in Country B tomorrow, we will be of that nationality. It's just that simple. As long as doomsday is not yet here and the earth, which is the home for our human race, survives, isn't every nation of the world our homestead?"<sup>45</sup> As for Japan, he declares, "I want to make this small Asian nation a laboratory for democracy, equality, moral principles, and learning. We might be able to distill the world's most precious and most beloved compound: world peace and universal happiness."<sup>46</sup> The Champion of the East would have none of this. "It is sheer luck that our harbors have not yet been blown up. It is mere chance that our fortresses have not been burned down, our countryside torn to pieces, and our capital city... Ah,

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<sup>44</sup> Watanabe, "They are Almost the Same as the Ancient Three Dynasties," in Tu, *Confucian Traditions*, p. 131.

<sup>45</sup> Nakae Chōmin, *A Discourse by Three Drunkards on Government* [1887] translated and with an introduction by Nobuko Tsukui and Jeffrey Hammond (New York: Weatherhill, 1984), p. 51.

<sup>46</sup> Nakae, *A Discourse by Three Drunkards*, p. 80.

in today's world, what a precarious existence we small nations have."<sup>47</sup> Fortunately, he continued, there is a large country in Asia or Africa. "I've forgotten its name, but it is vast and rich in natural resources. In some ways, however, it is very weak. I hear that this country has over a million soldiers, but they are confused and undisciplined, and will be useless in an emergency. I also hear that the government of this nation is as good as nothing—a big, fat sacrificial cow. This is what heaven provides as nourishment for small nations like us to fill our bellies with."<sup>48</sup>

Master Nankai took another drink and said, "Let's summarize.... Mr. Gentleman's ideas are pure and righteous; Mr. Champion's ideas are uninhibited and extraordinary. Mr. Gentlemen's ideas are strong liquor that makes me dizzy. They make my head swim. Mr. Champion's ideas are harsh poison that rends my stomach and rips my intestines.... If our Asian soldiers are ultimately no match for European soldiers, it is inevitable that Mr. Gentleman's democratic nation and Mr. Champion's new and enlarged nation would both fall. I certainly don't have any great master plan. But I'm not alone. Great Britain, France, and the others attack one another or defend themselves, but they don't have a master plan either. In short, although our Asian troops are not sufficient as invading forces, they are indeed sufficient as defense forces. Therefore, if we educate our soldiers well, make them practice regularly, and keep their morale high in times of peace, why should we worry that we cannot defend ourselves in time of war? Why should we follow Mr. Gentleman and wait to be killed without attempting any resistance? Or why should we incur our neighbor's hostility by following Mr. Champion's plan? Of course, I have no idea which country Mr. Champion refers to as a certain large nation of Africa or Asia. But if that nation is in Asia, we should ally ourselves to it, and become brother nations sworn to help each other in an emergency. Thereby we can save ourselves from danger. It is indeed a poor policy to take up arms blindly, to provoke our neighbors and make enemies thoughtlessly, and to cause innocent citizens to die from bullet wounds."<sup>49</sup>

If the democracy movement in Japan had triumphed in the 1880s, the history of East Asia might have been radically different under the influence of a Japanese policy similar to that advocated by Nakae Chōmin. As it was, Japan emulated the imperial powers. In 1875, Japan "opened" Korea with a treaty quite as unequal as any Japan had been forced to accept, complete

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<sup>47</sup> Nakae, *A Discourse by Three Drunkards*, p. 99.

<sup>48</sup> Nakae, *A Discourse by Three Drunkards*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>49</sup> Nakae, *A Discourse by Three Drunkards*, pp. 121-122, 132-133.

with extraterritoriality. Korea was declared fully independent of China and three ports were opened for trade.<sup>50</sup> An 1894 rebellion against the Korean king led both Japan and China to send troops. The image of Chinese immobility and backwardness in the Japanese media during the Sino-Japanese War is quite striking. The journalist, Uchimura Kanzō, wrote that the purpose of the war “is to decide whether Progress shall be the law in the East, as it has long been in the West, or whether Retrogression, fostered once by the Persian Empire; then by Carthage, and again by Spain, and now at last (last in the world’s history, we hope) by the Manchurian Empire of China, shall possess the Orient forever. Japan’s victory shall mean free government, free religion, free education, and free commerce for 600,000,000 souls who live on this side of the globe.”<sup>51</sup> What it meant most immediately was that China recognized the independence of Korea, agreed to pay an indemnity of 200 million taels—nearly the entire annual income of the Qing—and ceded Taiwan, the Pescadores, and the Liaodong region of Manchuria to Japan in perpetuity.

The doctrine of Chinese immobility and backwardness was a difficult doctrine for China to swallow. For many of those who did seek a measure of change in response to the Western, and later the Japanese, challenge, the initial effort was to seek what was called “self-strengthening” with the assistance of Western technology. After defeat in the Sino-Japanese War, the *ti yong* formula became widespread drawing on the Chinese words for “essence” and “practical use.”<sup>52</sup> The idea was somehow to selectively adopt Western methods without adopting Western culture. But where one ended and the other began was problematic. After rebuking the visiting Japanese Foreign Minister, Soejima Taneomi, for his Western clothing in 1873, the Chinese statesman Li Hongzhang, received this reply: “If, Your Excellency, the dress of foreigners is not beautiful, it

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<sup>50</sup> Marius Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 424.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Keene, *Emperor of Japan*, p. 481.

<sup>52</sup> Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, p. 217.

is quite useful, especially on board our men-of-war which are also of foreign style. With our ancient costume our men could not have thought of working in the rigging or at the guns. But since we have changed our dress, we get along very well, so well in fact, that in the ironclad and the corvette which we have brought with us to China there is not a single foreigner.”<sup>53</sup>

There were Confucians in China, as in Japan, who were favorably impressed with the moral and political as well as the economic and technological accomplishments of the West. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Xu Jiyu, who would later become the first president of Beijing University, stressed the exemplary character of George Washington’s patriotism: “He refused to receive pecuniary recompense. He labored to rear an elective system of government. Patriotism like this is to be commended under the whole heaven. Truly it reminds us of one of our own three great ancient dynasties!”<sup>54</sup> But such figures were farther from the center of political power in China than in Japan. At the time of the Sino-Japanese War, a group of scholars who were gathered in Beijing as candidates for the *jinshi* examination, the highest level in the examination system, presented a long memorial to the throne. It called for a host of practical reforms, but perhaps more importantly at a deeper level its organizers—Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao—were convinced that Confucianism was compatible with the basic ideas of human development and progress. The memorial was filed away by the bureaucracy and its initial effects were negligible. Then in 1898 the emperor Guangxu began what became known as the “Hundred Day’s Reforms” and called Kang and other reformists into high level government positions. Some of these reformists, Jonathan Spence suggests, worried that there might be a coup against the emperor, appear to have approached various leading generals in an effort to win their support. When word of this got back to the empress dowager Cixi, she moved against the

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<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Keene, *Emperor of Japan*, p. 225.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Iriye, *Across the Pacific*, p. 38.

emperor herself, placing him under house arrest, and having six of his supposedly radical advisers killed. Kang and Liang escaped, but more radical forces soon eclipsed their reformist position.<sup>55</sup>

The Boxer Rebellion in 1900 further contributed to the polarization and disintegration of Chinese politics as did the 450 million tael indemnity—nearly twice the Qing’s annual income—that the Western powers and Japan required of the Qing after putting it down. Tens of thousands of Chinese converts to Christianity were killed by the Boxers and more than two hundred missionaries and their children. As the Boxers laid siege to the foreign legations area in Beijing, the empress dowager joined their cause denouncing the aggressive, oppressive, and blasphemous foreigners: “The common people suffer greatly at their hands, and each one of them is vengeful. Thus it is that the brave followers of the Boxers have been burning churches and killing Christians.”<sup>56</sup> In the aftermath of defeat, to again quote Jonathan Spence, the “traditional Chinese ‘essence’ seemed every year more fragile in the face of the West’s overwhelming practical power.”<sup>57</sup>

As iconoclasm deepened even among the Qing elite, and as the prestige of Western science and learning increased its ascendancy, the Confucian examination system was abolished in 1905. In 1911, the Qing were overthrown and a republic soon proclaimed. In contrast with Japan, China lacked the prestige of the imperial court as a source of continuity to facilitate change, and as a potential obstacle to militarism, and lacked the bridge between old and new that Japanese Confucians had helped build. Sun Yat-sen’s National People’s Party (the Guomindang) won a plurality in the parliamentary elections of December 1912, but Yuan Shikai, the leader of the Beiyang army, and a would-be “strong man,” soon shut down the new parliament with the

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<sup>55</sup> Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, p. 217, 220-221.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 223-224.

<sup>57</sup> Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, p. 229.



words: “Parliament was an unworkable body. 800 men! 200 were good, 200 were passive, 400 were useless. What had they done? They had not even agreed on procedure.”<sup>58</sup> In 1915, Yuan went so far as to attempt to have himself declared emperor only to face mass protests and die humiliated the following year. When he failed, as the historian Lin Yü-sheng has observed, “no one was again strong enough to rule the country single-handedly. China succumbed to warlordism and internecine wars. Since there was no longer a Mandate of Heaven to justify political power, and new political ideologies were beyond their reach, the warlords could only thrash about without meaningful goals or aspirations.”<sup>59</sup>

Feeling vulnerable in these circumstances, especially to increasing encroachment on the part of imperial powers threatening to carve China up like a ripe melon, Chinese intellectuals looked to the Versailles Conference and the League of Nations for support only to see Japan’s wartime seizure of Germany’s position in Shandong internationally accepted. The wave of student protests against the Chinese government’s failure to effectively oppose this development, on May 4, 1919, helped give its name to a broader cultural movement. The radical iconoclasm of this movement, as Lin notes, provided the environment in which Mao Zedong came of age. Chen Duxiu, one of the leaders of the May Fourth Movement and, in the early 1920s, one of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party, exercised a particularly strong influence on Mao.

Here is Chen’s assessment from 1915:

All our traditional ethics, law, scholarship, rites and customs are survivals of feudalism. When compared with the achievements of the white race, there is a difference of a thousand years in thought, although we live in the same period. Revering only the history of the twenty-four dynasties and making no plans for progress and improvement, our people will be turned out of this twentieth century world, and be lodged in the dark ditches fit only for slaves, cattle, and horses. What more need be said? I really do not know what sort of institutions and

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<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, p. 269.

<sup>59</sup> Lin Yü-sheng, *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Radical Antitraditionalism in the May Fourth Era* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), p. 19.

culture are adequate for our survival in the present world if in such circumstances conservatism is still advocated. I would much rather see the past culture of our nation disappear than see our nation die out now because of its unfitness for living in the modern world.... Whatever cannot skillfully change itself and progress along with the world will find itself eliminated by natural selection because of failure to adapt to the environment.<sup>60</sup>

Increasingly cut off from any appreciation of the strengths and accomplishments of China's scholarly tradition, Chinese intellectuals became ever more intoxicated with the Western doctrine of Chinese immobility. Here is Fu Sinian, a prominent Chinese intellectual, in 1944:

If we drag a four-thousand-year-old garbage can on our backs how can we still have the energy to be a modern nation capable of resisting the enemy and working hard?... Today, there are some people who think that the kind of re-evaluation that took place during May Fourth harmed the nation's self-confidence ... but with sheltered exaggerations, how can there be confidence in the future?... With self-confidence commissioned from the stone age or the period of the 'Beijing Man,' how can we hope to have a shred of self-confidence left a hundred years from now?<sup>61</sup>

It is easy to see, in this context, the strength of Marxism-Leninism's ideological appeal in mid-twentieth century China. As Tu Weiming notes, its anti-feudalism met the requirements of the cultural iconoclasts while its anti-imperialism met the requirements of the political nationalists.<sup>62</sup> There were still a few Confucian humanists in this period, such as Liang Shuming, but they were marginalized and faced opposition from both the Guomindang and the Communists, as these movements sought to mobilize the people with the power of the state. Here is Liang, arguing against such a course, in 1929:

The Chinese people may well be compared to beancurd, and the strength of officials likened to an iron hook. One may take the iron hook and with the best of intentions come to help the beancurd. But no help at all is better [than this kind of help], for once helped the beancurd will certainly be damaged. Today

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<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Lin, *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness*, p. 66.

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 288.

<sup>62</sup> Tu, *The Global Significance of Concrete Humanity*, p. 25.

‘reconstruction’ [*chien-she*] is a fashionable term in party and government circles. They do not know that the common people fear this word more than anything else. Does this mean that we should not have reconstruction? Naturally not. When [the people themselves] have cultivated the habit and ability of self-government, the great way of government will be opened, and then reconstruction will come naturally. All that is needed will be there.<sup>63</sup>

#### THE INVERSION OF CONFUCIANISM

Consider the contrast between Liang and Mao. Here is Mao, in 1957, boasting of not engaging in the kinds of atrocities that Joseph Stalin had engaged in, and that had recently been revealed to the world after Nikita Khrushchev’s secret speech to the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress was smuggled out to the West. Note that this is Mao before he launched the Great Leap Forward in which tens of millions died or the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in which hundreds of millions were terrorized.

We didn’t do this sort of thing, having seen his [Stalin’s] example. Have there been any people unjustly killed? Yes, at the time of the great [campaign] to eliminate counterrevolutionaries [*sufan*], 1950, 1951, 1952, in those years of the great *sufan*, there were. [When] killing local bullies and evil gentry [*tuhao lieshen*] in [the campaign against] the five types of counterrevolutionaries, there were. But basically there were no errors; that group of people should have been killed. In all, how many were killed? Seven hundred thousand were killed, [and] after that time probably over 70,000 more have been killed. But less than 80,000. Since last year, basically we have not killed people; only a small number of individuals have been killed.... It is true that 700,000 people were killed; [but] if they had not been killed, the people would not have been able to raise their heads. The people demanded [*yaoqui*] the killing in order to liberate the productive forces. They [those killed] were fetters on the productive forces.<sup>64</sup>

Dangerously drunk with a simplistic conception of the ultimate value of “productivity” as against “immobility,” the extent of Mao’s hard-hearted self-righteousness cannot be exaggerated.

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<sup>63</sup> Quoted in Guy S. Alitto, *The Last Confucian: Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 169. See also Thierry Meynard, *The Religious Philosophy of Liang Shuming: The Hidden Buddhist* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

<sup>64</sup> Mao Zedong, “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People,” 27 February 1957, in Roderick MacFarquhar, Timothy Cheek, and Eugene Wu, eds., *The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao: From the Hundred Flowers to the Great Leap Forward* (Cambridge, MA: The Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1989), p. 142.

At a superficial level of Chinese nationalism, Mao and the Chinese Communist Party he presided over have some accomplishments to their credit such as the military unification of the country and fighting the Americans to a standstill in Korea, a source of considerable national pride after a century of humiliation at the hands of the imperial powers. But at a deeper level, Mao was a monster unique in Chinese history because of the way he inverted and sought to uproot and destroy the scholarly tradition. In a brilliant essay on the subject, titled: “Destructive Will and Ideological Holocaust: Maoism as a Source of Social Suffering in China,” Tu Weiming draws the contrast between Mao’s “negative will”—his determination to destroy systematically and thoroughly, if only as a precondition for reconstruction—and the cultural tradition of the Chinese intelligentsia with its ethos of harmony, reconciliation, negotiation, shareability, and consensus.<sup>65</sup>

While Confucian teaching takes, as a point of departure, the bonding affection between parent and child for moral development, Maoists purposefully drove a wedge into the sacred relationships (i.e. parent-child, husband-wife, siblings, and friends) as a litmus test for loyalty to the socialist cause. The bellicose nature of Maoist thinking lies in its determination to bear the unbearable in such a way that sympathy, defined in Confucian terms as “the inability to bear the suffering of others,” was condemned as weakness of the will. The inversion of Confucian values would simultaneously defeat individualism and undermine the moral resources available to make despair meaningful. Once basic human feelings, such as loving and caring for the closest kin, were strongly criticized as petty bourgeois sentimentalism and publicly denounced as incongruous with the revolutionary spirit, they lost their legitimacy in the court of appeal of the newly constituted discourse community.<sup>66</sup>

Mao’s demonic power, his capacity to be an inversion of a Confucian sage-king, rested on the combination, in his own hands, of political leadership, ideological legitimacy and moral authority. Traditionally, as Tu Weiming explains, it was the Confucian elite that sought to make the emperor act sagely. That bound him in an elaborate ritual system to ensure a routinized and harmonized form of life. And that, by

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<sup>65</sup> Tu, *The Global Significance of Concrete Humanity*, p. 145.

<sup>66</sup> Tu, *The Global Significance of Concrete Humanity*, p. 147.

distinguishing between the personality of the emperor and his position, constituted a de facto loyal opposition. Indeed, as Tu notes, this Confucian elite by combining the roles of cultural creators, transmitters and interpreters with those of policy implementers, evaluators and initiators, was often in control of ideological legitimacy and exercised moral authority. Mao's position was even more terrifying than what Montesquieu had mistakenly imagined was true of Chinese emperors. Mao could seek to silence even the smallest minority on the grounds that *any* criticisms of him or of the party were attacks on the well-being of the people.<sup>67</sup> And he was able to use this position to seek to force everyone, including the party bureaucracy, into compliance with his visions as part of the Cultural Revolution. To again quote Tu:

The grammar of action, defined in terms of conflict, confrontation, contradiction, and contention – a reflection of Mao's insistence on the primacy of class struggle in social development – was, during the period of the Cultural Revolution, omnipresent in thought, literature, art, music, film, and drama. The effects of moral inversion on the social level were so extensive that kindness was mistaken for weakness, sympathy for sentimentalism, and civility for hypocrisy. The psychology of suspicion, linguistic violence, verbal aggressiveness, insensitivity in interpersonal communication, and an inability to be decent or polite in social relations would take years to overcome in ordinary practical living. A new intellectual vision, a new world view, indeed a new way of learning to be human is required to heal the wounds in the value system. "De-Maoification" is not only a political process but a social transformation and a cultural rejuvenation.<sup>68</sup>

China's partial embrace of openness—a partial embrace that that began in earnest with Deng Xiaoping's reforms in the late 1970s—seems to have been impelled by a search for wealth and power rather than by a Confucian search for a new way of learning to be human in the aftermath of Maoism. Nevertheless, I suspect that moral revulsion at the Cultural Revolution increased the attractiveness of the United States in important ways that facilitated openness. The search for

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<sup>67</sup> This paragraph is a close paraphrase of Tu, *The Global Significance of Concrete Humanity*, pp. 134, 143, 151-153.

<sup>68</sup> Tu, *The Global Significance of Concrete Humanity*, p. 156.

wealth and power is simply more apparent. As Deng Xiaoping told an aide during his 1979 visit to America, it was clear that “all states that went along with the US subsequently became rich and strong.”<sup>69</sup> If moral considerations were less important to China’s opening than to Japan’s the century before, the fact remains that this opening increased the space for the beginnings of a Confucian revival, one whose influence is now perceptible even among the Communist elite.<sup>70</sup>

Speaking before the United Nations in September 2005, the Chinese leader Hu Jintao conveyed a sense of China’s approach to the world as resting in part on a Confucian-based Chinese civility:

Diversity of civilizations is a basic feature of humanity and an important driving force behind human progress. In the course of human history, all civilizations have, in their own way, made a positive contribution to the overall human progress. It is their differences that allow them to learn from one another and grow stronger together.... We should enhance intercivilization dialogue and exchanges, allowing cultures to complement one another through competition and comparison, and to develop together by seeking common ground while putting aside differences. We should do away with misgivings and estrangement existing between civilizations and make humanity more harmonious and our world more colorful. We should endeavor to preserve the diversity of civilizations in the spirit of equality and openness, make international relations more democratic and jointly build towards a harmonious world where all civilizations coexist and accommodate each other.<sup>71</sup>

Xi Jinping, China’s incoming president in 2013, building on this rhetorical foundation, went so far as to claim: “All countries in the world are closely linked and share converging interests.”

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<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Wu Baiyi, “An analysis of Chinese images of the United States and the EU,” in Robert S. Ross, Øystein Tunsjø and Zhang Tuosheng, eds., *US-China-EU Relations: Managing the New World Order* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 164. See also Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>70</sup> “Today, debates between liberals and socialists cover a wide spectrum of the critical issues confronting China. Intellectual discussions are no longer mere exercises to test the limits of democracy. They are also attempts to influence political decisions. The political leadership considers seriously the academic experts’ recommendations for new policies and objections to old ones. Indeed, provincial and central government officials commonly seek ideas from scholars. Never before in the history of the PRC has the academic community been so prominent in shaping the character and direction of the Chinese political economy.” Tu, *The Global Significance of Concrete Humanity*, p. 173.

<sup>71</sup> Hu Jintao, “Build Towards a Harmonious World of Lasting Peace and Common Prosperity” (translation), statement at the United Nations Summit, 15 September 2005, <http://www.un.org/webcast/summit2005/statements15/china050915eng.pdf>. (accessed 5 February 2013).

Indeed, he declared that “Mankind has only one earth, and it is home to all countries. Common development, which is the very foundation of sustainable development, serves the long-term and fundamental interests of all the people in the world. As members of the same global village, we should foster a sense of community of common destiny, follow the trend of the times, keep to the right direction, stick together in time of difficulty and ensure that development in Asia and the rest of the world reaches new highs.”<sup>72</sup> Official rhetoric is, of course, always designed for public consumption. It may be doubted that the Communist elite, the presence of Confucius Institutes around the world notwithstanding, have been transformed into members of a new Confucian literati. Still, the contrast in rhetoric with that of a generation ago provides a striking and a hopeful sign.

#### REDISCOVERY AND REINVENTION

The rediscovery and reinvention of Confucianism is not only and perhaps not even primarily an elite phenomena. It may be best seen, as the historian Sébastien Billioud has suggested, as part of an extraordinary expansion of popular horizons in China in the aftermath of an intense narrowing that reached its most constrictive and life-choking phase in the Cultural Revolution:

At the popular level, China is currently undergoing an exceptional moment of rediscovery and reinvention of a traditional culture that was repressed for a long time. This rediscovery fits into the larger framework of the extremely rapid evolution of ways of thinking within a society that has only recently—a point often forgotten—emerged from totalitarianism. It is also powerful evidence of the progressive enlargement of experience and cultural references at both personal and collective levels during the past thirty years. Here, I am evoking a movement that extends beyond classical culture; China’s fascination with the West (which was particularly strong during the 1980s) and the current rapid growth of

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<sup>72</sup> “Full text of Xi Jinping’s speech at opening ceremony of Boao Forum” (translation), *People’s Daily Online*, 8 April 2013, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90785/8198366.html> (accessed 21 January 2014).”

Christianity, as well as a transformation of certain modes of sociability via the Internet, are other illustrations of this tendency.<sup>73</sup>

The political scientist Yan Xuetong's work, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, provides an interesting window onto efforts to renew Confucianism within the Chinese elite. Drawing especially on the Chinese philosopher Xunzi, Yan argues that three types of leadership were discerned in ancient China: humane authority, hegemony, and tyranny. "Humane authority won the hearts and minds of the people at home and abroad. Tyranny—based on military force—inevitably created enemies. Hegemonic powers lay in between: they did not cheat the people at home or cheat allies abroad. But they were frequently indifferent to moral concerns and often used violence against non-allies." The lesson, Yan seems to suggest, is that a China capable of building an exemplary society devoted to social justice at home, and committed to mutually beneficial economic relations internationally, a China that refrains from meddling in the internal affairs of other nations, will be well positioned in its competition with the United States: "China's quest to enhance its world leadership status and America's effort to maintain its present position is a zero-sum game. It is the battle for people's hearts and minds that will determine who eventually prevails. And, as China's ancient philosophers predicted, the country that displays more humane authority will win."<sup>74</sup>

At the heart of Yan Xuetong's analysis is a conception of political power as ultimately depending on morality.<sup>75</sup> He is convinced that world leadership "will automatically come to

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<sup>73</sup> Sébastien Billioud, "Confucianism, 'Cultural Tradition,' and Official Discourse in China" in William A. Callahan and Elena Barabantseva, editors, *China Orders the World: Normative Soft Power and Foreign Policy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), p. 216. See also Sébastien Billioud and Joël Thoraval, *The Sage and the People: The Confucian Revival in China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>74</sup> Yan Xuetong, "How China Can Defeat America," *The New York Times*, 21 November 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/21/opinion/how-china-can-defeat-america.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/21/opinion/how-china-can-defeat-america.html?_r=0) (accessed 14 July 2015).

<sup>75</sup> Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 115.



those who do sufficient good for people and depart from those who commit evil.”<sup>76</sup> Only when the international community believes that China is a more responsible state than the United States, he argues, will China be able to replace the United States as the world’s leading state.<sup>77</sup> He offers a number of examples of what he sees as a renewed morality serving as the basis for growing political power such as the Meiji Restoration in Japan.<sup>78</sup> “The religious authority of the Vatican,” he maintains, “is rather like what Xunzi says about humane authority. The territory of the Vatican is even smaller than that of Singapore and its economic might is not as great as Singapore’s. Moreover, it has no army. Nevertheless, the Vatican’s authority in world affairs is far beyond Singapore’s. This example can help us understand why Xunzi thinks morality is the foundation for attaining leadership under heaven.”<sup>79</sup>

Criticizing Yan Xuetong, the historian Yang Qianru stresses the great gap between the soft power and hard power of the United States and that of China. She maintains that China’s problem—both now and far into the future—is to guarantee its own survival, development, and security, not to lead the world:

As to whether we can become the leading world state, I think that Laozi has the right and apposite answer: “I have seen that it is not possible to acquire all under heaven by striving. All under heaven is a spiritual vessel and cannot be run or grasped. To try and run it ends in failure; to try to grasp it leads to losing it.” This is proved by history: when, before World War II, the fascist states of Germany and Japan wanted to gain world hegemony, they precipitated a world war, with the result that they were ultimately defeated.... Borrowing Laozi’s broad view and his systematic thought, we should seek the harmony and balance of the whole as the starting point, actively join in the existing international organization, and work to raise our international status and influence.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, p. 76.

<sup>77</sup> Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, p. 65.

<sup>78</sup> Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, p. 79. He also mentions the formation of the American constitution and, mistakenly, the Bolshevik Revolution, as other examples of renewed morality serving as the foundation for growing political power.

<sup>79</sup> Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, p. 87.

<sup>80</sup> Yang Qianru, “An examination of the Research Theory of Pre-Qin Interstate Political Philosophy,” in Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, pp. 153-54.

A widespread belief in the United States that the policies of all other nations are determined by the pursuit of power and profit has helped obscure China's civil aspirations.<sup>81</sup> So has an American tendency to view China simply as an authoritarian country, without any real appreciation of the opening it has experienced. This is unfortunate as knowledge of the civility of each country in the world can help strengthen the civility of others to the benefit of all.<sup>82</sup> Even if some aspects of the competition between China and America are zero-sum, the cultivation of "brilliant virtue" in the world is a task that Chinese and American progressives can undertake together. The foundation of international civility, beyond the simple fact of our shared humanity and emerging common culture, is mutual recognition that the common good of each is part of the common good of all. The growth of such civility, whether rooted in Chinese or American traditions—or in the traditions of other countries—is something to be welcomed and sought. It is the progress of the modern moral order.<sup>83</sup>

The transformation of Chinese rhetoric and conduct since the late 1970s, and especially the changes that have lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty, are grounds for optimism, though the accompanying income inequality and pollution constitute major challenges. Yet those who would see China's embrace and adaptation of capitalism as inevitably contributing to

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<sup>81</sup> I am indebted here to Hermann Kantorowicz and his observations on the "Bismarxism" that plagued pre-WWI Germany—"the conviction that all Policy, or all Policy with the exception of that of one's own Party or Nation, must be explained as based only on the striving for Power and Profit, and that all contrary assumptions are dreams of political innocence. This Bismarxism has wrought incalculable harm. It has worked against the humanitarian and idealistic tendencies in the German people itself, formerly so strong (for with us the facts must accord with the theory); and, secondly, it has led to a dangerous misapprehension of the policy of other people, and especially of that people in whom these tendencies have remained exceptionally strong—the English." Hermann Kantorowicz, *The Spirit of British Policy and the Myth of the Encirclement of Germany* translator W. H. Johnston (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1931), pp. 44-45.

<sup>82</sup> On civility, see Edward Shils, *The Virtue of Civility: Selected Essays on Liberalism, Tradition, and Civil Society* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1997). See also Edward Shils, "Reflections on Civil Society and Civility in the Chinese Intellectual Tradition" in Tu Weiming, ed., *Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity: Moral Education and Economic Culture in Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 38-71.

<sup>83</sup> On the modern moral order, see Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

world peace and Chinese democracy should be given pause by the history of the first ninety years of Japan's experience after the Perry expedition.<sup>84</sup> That experience, after all, included both a greater measure of democracy than China has yet known and, following its breakdown, as vehement hostility towards the United States as it has ever encountered. One must hope that Chinese and American civility will prove stronger than American and Japanese civility proved during the first half of the twentieth century, or at least that the challenges and difficulties that confront China and the United States will prove less severe.

Looking ahead, in 1873, toward what Japan's future might hold, the traveler and historian William Griffis observed of the Japanese that, "they are one of the most polite, good-natured and happy nations in the world. By introducing foreign civilization into their beautiful land they may become richer; they need not expect to be happier."<sup>85</sup> Here we have an observation the strength of which the West's own iconoclasm has helped to obscure: the ultimately unsatisfying character of obsessing over wealth and power and the greater importance of other values. In the West's own religious traditions, the right relationship of wealth and power to more important values has been conveyed in scripture and commentary for millennia. In the words of the prophet Jeremiah: "Thus says the LORD: Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom, do not let the mighty boast in their might, do not let the wealthy boast in their wealth; but let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the LORD; I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, says the LORD."<sup>86</sup> There are, in other words, traditions in the West that disparage the value of riches and civilization, power

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<sup>84</sup> When President George H. W. Bush sought to maintain Sino-American economic relations in the wake of the Chinese government's crackdown on protestors in Tiananmen Square in 1989, he did so in part in the belief that with the maintenance of such relations, "the move to democracy becomes inexorable." George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Random House, 1998), p. 89.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted in Iriye, *Across the Pacific*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>86</sup> Jeremiah 9:23-24.

and knowledge, relative to the value of loving and serving God, even if these traditions have also been largely eclipsed in recent centuries by the progress of Western secularism.<sup>87</sup>

In both the religious traditions of the West and in the tradition of New Confucianism that Tu Weiming and others seek to convey, man is not the measure and master of all things as he is in the mainstream of the Enlightenment mentality.<sup>88</sup> Nor are human beings the only source of power for social development. There is the power of Heaven.<sup>89</sup> “Surely Enlightenment values such as instrumental rationality, liberty, rights-consciousness, due process of law, privacy, and individualism are all universalizable modern values, but ... ‘Asian values’ such as sympathy, distributive justice, duty-consciousness, ritual, public spiritedness, and group orientation are also universalizable modern values. Just as the former ought to be incorporated into East Asian modernity,” as Tu suggests, so “the latter may turn out to be critical and timely references for the modern Western way of life.”<sup>90</sup>

Consider Tu Weiming’s presentation of the relationship of Heaven to humanity in the following passage:

Copernicus decentered the earth, Darwin relativized the godlike image of man, Marx exploded the ideology of social harmony, and Freud complicated our conscious life. They have redefined humanity for the modern age. Yet they have also empowered us, with communal critical self-awareness, to renew our faith in the ancient Confucian wisdom that the globe is the center of our universe and the only home for us and that we are guardians of the good earth, the trustees of the Mandate of Heaven that enjoins us to make our bodies healthy, our hearts sensitive, our minds alert, our souls refined, and our spirits brilliant. We are here because embedded in our human nature is the secret code for Heaven’s self-realization. Heaven is certainly omnipresent, and may even be omniscient, but is most likely not omnipotent. It needs our active participation to realize its own

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<sup>87</sup> See Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

<sup>88</sup> In connecting the tradition of New Confucianism that I am specifying to Tu Weiming’s name, I am seeking to distinguish it from more broad-brush portrayals of “New Confucianism” in which all sorts of phenomena are gathered under the heading. See, for example, Daniel A. Bell, *China’s New Confucianism: Politics and Everyday Life in a Changing Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>89</sup> Tu, *The Global Significance of Concrete Humanity*, pp. 112-113.

<sup>90</sup> Tu, *The Global Significance of Concrete Humanity*, pp. 100-101.

truth. We are Heaven's partners, indeed cocreators. We serve Heaven with common sense, the lack of which nowadays has brought us to the brink of self-destruction. Since we help Heaven to realize itself through our self-discovery and self-understanding in day-to-day living, the ultimate meaning of life is found in our ordinary, human existence.<sup>91</sup>

Had the Confucian-Christian synthesis that Matteo Ricci began to articulate in the sixteenth century been a more genuine bridge between cultures, Confucianism would have left a greater imprint on Christian thinking than it has. Still, it is not difficult to see points of concord as well as of difference. This is true even with regard to the idea of mutuality between Heaven and humanity. According to the theologian Herbert McCabe: it is in the self-communication of Yahweh that is Jesus, that we are able to enter into the language, and hence the life, of God: "This self-giving of the Father is the meaning of human history because what man is meant for, what he is summoned to, is to share the life of the Father—on the analogy of a child growing up to share the life of his parents."<sup>92</sup> The congruence and the tensions between these faiths are still a fruitful source for discussion among friends and for mutual learning among civilizations.

## CONCLUSION

In the broad sweep of several centuries of Sino-Western relations, it is clear that the Western belief in the virtue of the West's image of reality, and the Chinese adoption of much of that image, was not entirely without beneficial consequences for China. It may yet be that belief in the virtue of democracy and human rights will do China real good. But if the leaders of China woke up tomorrow and found themselves in unanimous agreement that they wanted China to become a liberal democracy, they wouldn't have much of a clue as to how to get from here to

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<sup>91</sup> Tu, *The Global Significance of Concrete Humanity*, pp. 300-301.

<sup>92</sup> Herbert McCabe, *Law, Love and Language* (London: Continuum, 1968), pp. 126-127. According to Timothy Radcliffe: "Whenever we speak to and about each other, then we are either being God's partners in creation, or else trying to subvert it." Timothy Radcliffe, *What is the Point of Being a Christian?* (London: Continuum, 2005), p. 17.

there without a great risk of chaos. It is perhaps worth noting that in an editorial of 9 March 2015 in the *Global Times*, Beijing's mass-circulation tabloid owned by the *People's Daily* and run by the Communist Party, the following remarkable sentence appeared: "The West has never thought that China might have a 'peaceful democratic transition;' their goal is simply for 'China to collapse'—and they never consider the well-being of the Chinese people."<sup>93</sup> The possibility that the Chinese elite itself might find a "peaceful democratic transition" compelling, and something that would advance the well-being of the Chinese people, but be dissuaded from pursuing that end not only by a love for power, but by a fear of chaos, is a possibility worth dwelling upon.

If the Western advocates of democracy and human rights were to reflect carefully on the issue of a democratic transition for China, they would have to admit that they have but little practical advice to offer. This is one reason why a measure of humility is called for in advocating such change for China. Those who care about the cause of democracy and human rights in China should look first to supporting the cultural renaissance of China's New Confucianism—China's recovery of the spiritual and moral resources that have been connected for millennia to the cultivation of Chinese civility. And the easiest way to do that is simply by seeking to listen to, learn from, and talk with China's New Confucians.<sup>94</sup> Solidarity among democratic forces will follow naturally—all that is needed will be there.

To end on a more somber note, we should remember that the West contributed to unimaginable human suffering with the bitter brew it served up to East Asia in the doctrine of

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<sup>93</sup> Quoted in Matthew Robertson, 'Global Times responds to David Shambaugh', 9 March 2015, Epoch China Blog, <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n3/1277441-global-times-responds-to-david-shambaugh/>, accessed on 20 May 2016.

<sup>94</sup> "According to the Chicago social theorist, Edward Shils, the minimum condition for the establishment of an intellectual tradition requires three generations, which means two trans-generational transmissions, and the continuation of a community forged by shared values and a common sense of purpose. By this definition, 'New Confucianism' can be qualified as a tradition." Tu, *The Global Significance of Concrete Humanity*, p. xiii.

Chinese immobility. Now that the strength of this doctrine has finally evaporated, it is high time that more wholesome elixirs were shared between an East and a West that may in many ways be converging as the world becomes one place, but which are still shaped by distinct traditions. In short, let's open up the good stuff—the best that these traditions have to offer, and keep away from the cheap and toxic inebriants.

