

BOOK REVIEW

Jin Huimin, *Towards a Theory of Post-Confucian*, Henan University Press

In essence, Confucianism lay emphasis on ethical ideology while Neo-Confucianism, despite its focus on a philosophy of life, “is practically irrelevant to the daily routines, life styles or ethical conduct of bustling mortal beings” (Gong, 344), hence rendering no efficient solutions to modern social issues in reality. The publication of Jin Huimin’s monograph *Towards a Theory of Post-Confucian* by Henan University Press marked the advent of contemporary “New Neo-Confucianism” (by Prof. Chung-Ying Cheng). What is the newness of it?

The ritual and music culture in ancient China, typical of a moral and ethical system with rigorous hierarchical structures, is prominently incarnated in Confucianism. The essence of Confucianism is its rank that Distinguishes between nobles and slaves. As a result, it is understandable that Confucianism has always been the easy target for attacks in the process of constructing modern China’s subjectivity (for example, there existed an exceedingly stirring slogan of “*Down with the Confucius’ Philosophy*” prevalent in the May 4th New Culture Movement, and a political campaign of “Criticizing Lin Biao [1907-1971] and Confucius as well” in the later period of Cultural Revolution.). Compared with the idea of democracy and equality, Confucianism is backward, therefore the criticism of Confucianism is a big step forward modernity. New Confucianism is a new understanding and interpretation of Confucianism with the help of Western philosophies such as rationalism and humanism. It is full of misreading and misunderstanding of the idea of Confucius and his disciples, such as the idealization of a social, ecological, and political harmony. Enfeebled to forge durable solutions to realistic issues in postmodern times owing to its disregard of new circumstances and their problem domains, it has become the target of public criticism today. In consequence, Post-Confucianism comes into existence as the situation requires.

Then, what is Post-Confucianism? Theoretically, it is a philosophical response under the post-modern context directed against modernity problems confronting the current world, “a hermeneutics of realism” (Jin, 2008: Preface p.2), and the latest research findings of Confucius’ ideology. Methodologically, Post-Confucianism, by drawing on post-modern theories, mainly fixes its

attention on theoretical reflection, criticism and construction so as to explore a possible access to a dialogue between the ethics of Confucianism and the existing cultural barriers and political conflicts in modern times. Specifically, it is a concrete application of the Global Dialogism intensively discussed by Jin to an ethical philosophy, an underlying approach to the interaction of *Self* and *Other*, or Subjectivity and Otherness, and one of the global culture research paradigms of constructing inter-otherness beyond modernity and post-modernity.

As is mentioned above, Confucianism and its post-Confucian studies are in essence an ideology maintaining the hierarchical order, hence doomed to be liquidated in the process of promoting China's modernization characteristic of such subjectivity as equality, liberty and democracy. But, to our surprise, there are so many people who advocate Confucianism nowadays. They mistook despotism for democracy, enslavement for liberty, and caste for equality. Accordingly, as Professor Jin puts it, the slogan "*Down with the Confucius Philosophy*" boasts a historical inevitability and progressiveness (Jin, 2008:6), which is objective and pertinent. As is evident, principles of feudal ethical conduct rigidly laid down by Confucianism, such as the Three Cardinal Guides (the wife should absolutely obey her husband; the son his father; and the minister his king.) and Five Constant Virtues (Benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and fidelity: inaccurate translation) as well as its rigorous ranking notion, will unavoidably check the propagation and acceptance of bourgeois aggressiveness in the process of China's modernization. Should traditional doctrines of Confucianism still remain unchanged, China's modernization would be far away out of reach.

Nevertheless, nearly one-hundred-year history of China's modernization, more than 30 years' consistent implementation of reform and opening up policy in particular, along with economic boom and improvement of living standards, has witnessed extremely grim social problems: environmental deterioration, wealth polarization, moral decline and supremacy of calculative rationality, all resulting from the radicalization of modernity. Consequently, attempts to seek elixir for healing the world from Confucianism ultimately have touched off a nationwide craze for Chinese Classics. However, as times and social mechanisms have changed tremendously, is it possible for the pre-modern Confucianism to offer constructive solutions to such social embarrassments under the post-modern context? Morality is not abstract. The ethical relationship between people will not change because of the preaching of abstract morals. However, Hermeneutics counts. As a matter of fact, it follows that Confucianism which centers on ethics

and moral principles, has to take a turn towards a theory of post-Confucianism so as to bring its contemporary value into full play. And this turn does not regress to the fundamentalist Confucianism, but demands new epochal and innovative interpretation.

As to how to construct Post-Confucianism, Jin maintains that “Post-Confucianism also focuses on ethics” (Jin, 2008:97), and its subjectivity can be well structured by way of intellectual enquiries into the relationship between subjectivity and otherness. However, quite different from the construction of subjectivity constrained by the condition of binary distinction of subject-object as well as anthropocentrism popular with western scholars, Jin’s advocacy lays stress on the recognition, participation and accountability of otherness. To be specific, the way to build the subjectivity of Post-Confucianism will be a way featured by “self-abnegation”, “empty self” and “benevolence” which are the key words in *The Analects of Confucius* (Jin, 2008:27-36).

It still remains controversial whether there is subjectivity in Confucius’ philosophy. Zhang Shiyong (1921~) contends that subjectivity is embedded in Yang Zhu’s (450B.C~370B.C.) ideas, but unfortunately restrained by Confucius’ cultivating means of self-restraint and return to rituals of Western Zhou Dynasty (1100B.C.~771B.C.) (78). Yet Jin holds a different view. He argues that Zhang has confused negative individualism with positive one (Jin, 2008:15). What’s more, the way to construct subjectivity in Confucianism is relatively unique. It is a process of starting from the Self, shaping for the Self and achieving in the Self (Jin, 2008:22).

In addition, Confucius’ proposal of self-abnegation and empty self indicates that taking “the Other” as a subject also means “the equal status of an Ego-subject” (Jin, 2008:20). Confucius’ inculcation of self-denial, inhibition of selfish desires and restraint from being opinionated reveals that “Confucius does not care about the so-called ‘grand’ premise. He just knows to empty himself for the other to come in.” (Jin, “Towards” 2016: 24). As is often seen in *The Analects of Confucius*, Confucius constantly humbles himself, leaving room to the other for a real conversation, “a face-to-face conversation, let others be others, respecting diversities” (Jin, 2003:46). By contrast, in the eye of Emmanuel Levinas, the “Other” means the absolute Other, while for Jin, once the Other is engaged in a dialogue, s/he would be projected to the status of a subject, rendering the absolute Other impossible (Jin, 2013:20). Then, how would Post-Confucianism start a dialogue? Simply, just let the Other speak and proceed

the dialogue typical of inter-otherness.

What mentioned above is the interpretation and translation of philosophy by Jin. Actually, historically speaking, the purpose of Confucius' proposal of self-abnegation and empty self is to restore the Code System of Western Zhou Dynasty. Why did Confucius follow the humanities of Zhou? Because he lived in the Spring and Autumn period, which is referred to as the turbulent times with the collapse of its ritual and music regulations, and his political effort was to restore Zhou system and maintain the order of aristocracy. The value of classic lies in its usability. With the philosophy of the Global Dialogism, Professor Jin offers a new and valuable explanation to the ethical idea of Confucius.

Since Global Dialogism is the philosophical basis of Post-Confucianism, it is necessary to figure out what it is. Global Dialogism is essentially an ontological discourse concerning globalization. Globalization, as a new philosophy, insists on the subject of modernity, rationality, universality, and ultimate, but it also puts all these in questioning with the other, the body, the special, and the process. Or, conversely, globalization does not simply agree with modernity, nor does it affirm the post-modernity, but rather the endless contradictions, confrontations, and a never-definite articulation. Globalization, as global dialogism, will embrace both modernity and post-modernity, therefore it is a combination of both and beyond. In the process of globalization, it transcends or discourages modernity and post-modernity, and is a new becoming in the model of global cultural studies (Jin, "Towards" 2016: 159-166).

Now let's come to Confucius' core concept of the character Benevolence (仁 rén). Mou Zongsan (1909~1995) elucidated Confucius' doctrines of benevolence as ontology since it is a core category of Confucianism. *The Analects of Confucius* has witnessed 109 times of benevolence on the list. But what is benevolence? Confucius does not deliver a model answer. He instructs his disciples in accordance of their distinctive aptitude and for different disciples, he renders different explanations based on their personal conditions. Confucius told Fan Chi, one of his disciples, that benevolence is love. Is it the love of all the human being? Just like the Bible says, "love the person you love, love the person you don't love and love your enemies." No, it is the love of the officials, the superior, and the aristocrat (Yang, 1980:4). There is a difference between the love of Confucius and the love of Christians. As to benevolence in *the Analects*, Professor Jin enhanced the quality of its philosophy. As for Confucius himself, benevolence is the reification of rituals moving towards the inner mind with

emotional dimensions. Hence it is a dynamic concept, and being dynamic itself also makes it clear that benevolence is not goal ontology, but a practical and constructive one with unbounded openness (Jin, 2008:56). In this way, a conclusion was drawn by Jin that the subjectivity construction from Confucius is completed through inter-otherness in the era of postmodernism (Jin, 2008:56-57).

Comparatively, Jacques Derrida stressed the inter-subjectivity of signifiers to the extreme, sparking off the infinite difference of the construction of subjectivity. In contrast, Post-Confucianism insists that ethical philosophy should be advisable in handling the dilemma of modernity. By way of difference, Derrida illuminates the specific meaning without regard to time and space while Jin expanded Derrida's philosophical speculations by drawing on difference and the Other theory, assuming that nature is the nature of culture while culture is the culture of nature (2007:102), the deconstruction of binary opposition, thereby offering theoretical strategies and routes for working out solutions to modernity problems (Ryan Bishop).

Jin Huimin, proficient in foreign languages, expounds his doctrines on the height of philosophy by way of conception and logic, strikes a dialogue between scholars of Confucianism and Post-Confucian studies as well, and constructs a theory of Post-Confucianism in post-modernist context directed against the existing extremity of modernity. Jin proposes a new ethics concerning the Self and the Other, advances a new interpretation on Confucianism and responses to the challenges of subjectivity in the post-modern world. Evidently, his theory sheds new light upon China's modernity related to issues home and abroad.

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