

Preface

In the spring of 2007, I gave a talk at Tufts University on “Confucianism and the Transformations of Contemporary China.” I discussed two issues. One was the characteristics of Confucian values, and the other was the changes of contemporary China. As the audience of American students had no familiarity with the Chinese language, I could not quote from the Chinese classics in the way I do when speaking in China. Therefore, I declared openly at the beginning of the talk that I would not discuss classical texts and instead attempted a comparative approach to elucidating the characteristics of Chinese thought and values. I identified eight total points: Morality is more important than law, this life more important than the afterlife, the community more important than the individual, the spiritual more important than the material, responsibility more important than rights, the well-being of the people more important than democracy, order more important than freedom, and harmony more valuable than struggle.

In the summer of 2010, I gave a report on “Confucian Thought and Contemporary Society” for a forum on reading held by China’s central government at the headquarters of the General Administration of Press and Publication. I discussed four issues: The first was Confucian culture, the second was Confucian thought on governance and political administration, the third was the Confucian perspective on human life, and the fourth was Confucianism and contemporary China. In this fourth part on the question of Confucianism and contemporary China, I adopted a comparative method and modern perspective in looking at the characteristics of Confucian values. In total, I discussed ten points: Morality is more important than law, the community more important than the individual, the spiritual more important than the material, responsibility more important than rights, the well-being of the people more important than democracy, order more important than freedom, this life more important than the afterlife, harmony more valuable than struggle, civilization more valuable than impoverishment, and family more valuable than social class. This time, I discussed two points in addition to those described at Tufts and slightly adjusted their order.

In the fall of 2012, at the invitation of the Korean Academic Research Council, I served as a speaker for the 14th series of “Special Lectures by Distinguished

Scholars,” carrying out academic exchange with Korea and giving a series of talks. I spoke twice in Korea, on the topics of “The Foundations of the Philosophic Thought of Chinese Civilization” and “The Values and Worldview of Chinese Civilization,” respectively. The latter concentrated on the values of Chinese civilization, while the former, although it was devoted to the discussion of philosophical thought and cosmology, could serve as an explanation of the cosmological and philosophical background of Chinese values. The topics of these two talks were set in accordance with the requirements of the Korean Academic Research Council. The Koreans had mentioned in particular that they hoped the talks would be oriented at problems that had become apparent in Western civilization and Western modernity and seek in Chinese civilization potential alternative universalist principles. Therefore, my talk took ancient Confucianism as a prominent representative of the values of humane love, ritual, responsibility, and community emphasized in Chinese civilization. Through later philosophical explication, these values further came to express universal meaning. The principle of humane love, spirit of ritual, consciousness of responsibility, and fundamental place of the community are all value positions opposed to individualism. They lead to the rational affirmation of communal collaboration, a culture of ritual education, a politics of cooperation, and a world governed by “the Way of the king” (*wangdao* 王道). They ought to become universal principles. Communal collaboration emphasizes the significance of the community, which helps counter individualism. A culture of ritual education emphasizes moral consciousness, which distinguishes it from legalism. A politics of cooperation emphasizes the cooperative political communication, which differentiates it from a politics of conflict. Finally, a world governed by “the Way of the king” is a type of world order that differs from hegemonism. These four points are all centred in humaneness (*ren* 仁). Humaneness is a fundamental principle that takes interrelation and peaceful coexistence as its content. The principal purpose of identifying these is to elucidate alternative universal principles that differ from those of Western modernity. After returning from Korea, I immediately published the Chinese text of this study in an academic journal with slight adjustments. I added the following sentences: The basic values formed in Axial Age Chinese civilization became the principle guides for the core values developed in later Chinese civilization. Through the two millennia of development following the Axial Age, Chinese civilization formed its own set value preferences, of which there are principally four: the priority of responsibility to freedom, the priority of duty to rights, the community being higher than the individual, and harmony being higher than conflict. These four points present pronounced contrast with modern Western culture and are adjusted and simplified from the aforementioned ten points. To a certain extent, they also aim to express the characteristics of the values of Chinese civilization in a more focused and succinct way.

The above views all engage with the values of traditional Chinese culture and their characteristics. I have mentioned these often in my various works on Confucianism and Chinese culture in recent years and have drawn the attention of a

certain number of other thinkers. In fact, I have discussed the characteristics of the values of Confucianism and Chinese culture many times in various lectures since 2004.

In recent years, the fervor for *guoxue* 国学 (Chinese studies) has risen throughout China. Passion for the study of the resplendent culture pioneered by our ancestors has increased consistently among the broad Chinese masses. Therefore, this volume includes two papers on the history and concept of this area of scholarship, so as to help readers understand the general academic views on *guoxue*. During the twentieth century's New Culture Movement, there was a movement to organize traditional Chinese culture and learning, and Liang Qichao pointed out two forms of common knowledge of *guoxue*: a general understanding of Chinese history and Chinese people's perspective on human life. That is to say, the study of *guoxue* in one aspect requires grasping China's history and culture and in another aspect requires study and grasping of Chinese culture's perspective on human life. The perspective on human life discussed by Liang Qichao is also values. Therefore, in examining *guoxue* and traditional Chinese culture today, we need broad understanding of the history of the generation, maturation, and development of Chinese culture, recognizing its unique qualities, existential value, and universal significance. We also need self-conscious study and absorption of the values of Chinese civilization, by which to advance the cultural confidence of the people as a whole, inspire the spirit of the people, strengthen the cohesion and vitality of the Chinese people, and strive to realize a great renaissance of the Chinese people and Chinese culture.

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Lai Chen



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Chen, L.

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