

An Introduction to the Study of Confucianism in Mainland China in the Past Decade (2014-2024)

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Introduction

Confucianism is an important part of traditional Chinese culture and has always played an important role in Chinese history. The value of Confucianism has been fully affirmed in recent years as China has significantly increased its comprehensive national power, realized “The Chinese Dream” of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and increased its cultural self-confidence. Contemporary Confucianism co-exists with the trend of nationalism, cultural renaissance, and “A Human Community with a Shared Future”, and has attracted more and more attention globally, and has been constantly interpreted and researched. The study of Confucianism has received unprecedented attention for more than a hundred years. This paper briefly introduces the current status of Confucian studies in the past decade (2014-2024), and hopes for the contribution of Confucian studies in building a cultural powerhouse with high quality.

Overview of Confucian studies and development in the past 10 years

In the past ten years, Confucianism research has been mainly manifested in the inheritance and innovation of traditional Confucianism.

A New Contemporary Interpretation of Confucianism

From the books on Confucianism published in 2013-2014, it is clear that most scholars are trying to clarify past misunderstandings about Confucianism. For example, Fang Zhaohui's *Wei Sangang Zhengming* 为“三纲”正名, which criticizes the previous view that “the three mainstays (“hawsers”) of social order” were feudal dregs as an ahistorical attitude. Guo Qiyong edited *Zhengbenqingyuan Lun Zhongxi: Dui Mouzhong Zhongguo Wenhua*

de Binglixue Pouxu 正本清源论中西——对某种中国文化观的病理性剖析 to clarify society's misconceptions about Chinese culture.

At the same time, scholars' new interpretations of Confucianism are characterized by diversity. Some scholars put forward the attitude of studying Confucianism, such as Yao Zhongqiu, who advocates getting rid of modern pessimism. Some scholars put forward research methods, such as Tang Yijie, who pointed out that the way to the rejuvenation of Chinese civilization lies in strengthening the dialogue between Chinese and Western civilizations, bridging the gap between the East and the West, and reconstructing the core values and concepts. Some scholars have given new interpretations to Confucianism. Over the past decade, Confucian researchers have paid great attention to politics, arguing that the political status of Confucianism, including its constitutional status, should be raised. This is a point that has been particularly emphasized and advocated by contemporary “Confucianism” today. Jiang Qing's *Books Confucian Constitutional Order* 儒教宪政秩序 and *A Broad Discussion of Political Confucianism* 广论政治儒学 discussed the triple legitimacy of the kingly way of politics. Kang Xiaoguang proposes to establish Confucian cultural leadership in the field of culture and advocates that on this basis, “taking Confucianism as the body and constitutionalism as the function, to establish Confucian constitutionalism.” Other scholars have also been discussing “Confucian constitutionalism”, for example, the “Symposium on Confucian Constitutionalism and the Way of Confucian Governance” held in Beijing in 2013 to discuss this topic. Bai Tongdong's latest English-language book, *Fandui Zhengzhi Pingdeng: Yige Rujia de Anli* 反对政治平等——一个儒家的案例 (Against Political Equality: A Confucian Case), proposes a new Confucian “Tianxia” system on the relationship between national identity and international order.

Confucianism researchers attach great importance to the continuation and development of traditional Confucianism and have organized many symposia to explore the innovation of Confucianism from different perspectives. For example, a symposium on “Research on the Historical Inheritance and Transformation and Innovation of Confucianism and Mencius” was held in 2017, and “International Academic Forum on the Innovation and Development of Confucianism in the New Era” and “Social Confucianism and the Diversification of Confucianism” were held in 2018. Confucian researchers have also attached importance to the dissemination of Confucianism overseas. The “2019 International High-end Dialogue on Mencius Studies” focused on the discussion of “Overseas Dissemination of Mencius Studies under the Concept of ‘A Community with a Shared Future’”, combining Mencius studies with “A Community with a Shared Future”.

The relationship between Confucianism and the four major religions of the world, whether the ideological connotations can be exchanged and communicated, what are the similarities and differences between them, and whether they can be learnt and absorbed from each other is not only a major issue facing Confucianism researchers at present, but also a major issue facing the history of China. Over the past decade, scholars have mainly compared the similarities and differences between Confucianism and Christianity and Islam. In 2017, a conference was held on “Mandate of Heaven and God: A Comparison of East and West and Confucian-Christian Dialogue,” in which scholars discussed the possibilities of dialogue between Confucianism and Christianity, and the similarities and differences between their faith cultures. In 2018, an academic seminar on “Dialogue between Confucianism and Islam” was held to discuss the practical significance of the dialogue between Confucianism and Islam at home and abroad. At the same year, an academic seminar on “Confucian Culture and Sinicization of Islam” was held to discuss topics such as the practical path of Sinicization of Islam. In dealing with the relationship between Confucianism and Western civilization, thought and philosophy, most Confucian researchers affirm the value of Confucianism, emphasize the national cultural orientation and oppose Westernization. At the “Dialogue on Confucianism and the Renaissance of Chinese Civilization” held in 2016, scholars believed that the renaissance of Chinese civilization has become a major trend, and that it is necessary not only to reflect on Western political concepts and models, but also to transcend the West.

Contemporary translations of Confucian Classics

In order to promote the development of Confucianism, the most fundamental work is to translate some important or high-value but neglected Confucian classics into vernacular languages, which is conducive to the modernization and popularization of Confucianism. Over the past ten years, there have been two main types of work in this area: the first type is the translation of single classics by famous authors, such as Yang Fengbin’s Lunyu Xinzhū Xinyi 论语新注新译 (New Notes on the Analects of Confucius),

Mengzi Xinzhū Xinyi 孟子新注新译 (New Notes on Mencius), Han Xing’s Xiaojing Quanjie 孝经全解 (The Complete Explanation of the Book of Filial Piety), Liu Shangci’s Chunqiu Gongyangchuan Yizhu 春秋公羊传译注 (Translation and Commentary on Gongyang Gao’s Commentary on The Spring and Autumn Annals), and Deng Aimin’s Chuanxilu Zhushu 传习录注疏. These translations are easier to understand than the annotated versions of the same type published during 1911 to 1949. The second is to publish integrated series of books, such as the 200 volumes of Mencius Literature Collection 孟子文献集成 published in Zoucheng city, the 100 volumes of Essence of Confucian Collection published by Peking University, and the 274 volumes of “History Section” of Confucian Collection 儒藏 published by Sichuan University. These are important materials for studying traditional Confucianism, and their publication will help the academia to study traditional Confucianism in depth.

In the past ten years, the study of Confucianism in the Mainland has made great progress and achievements: it has received much attention from the national leadership. Chinese President Xi Jinping met with Tang Yijie, President of the Chinese Confucius Academy, attended the International Symposium to Commemorate the 2,565th Anniversary of the Birth of Confucius and delivered an important speech. The General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the General Office of the State Council officially announced the “Opinions on the Implementing the Project of the Inheritance and Development of Chinese Excellent Traditional Culture” in 2017, marking the elevation of the inheritance of Chinese excellent traditional culture (including Confucianism) to the level of national strategy. The study, development and implementation of Confucianism have entered a brand-new historical stage, and institutions, activities and researches related to Confucianism have been developing rapidly and flourishing in mainland China.

Reasons for the emergence of a decade-long boom in Confucian studies

The emergence in Confucian studies over the past decade is not accidental. It is closely related to rapid development, especially since the 18th CPC National Congress. Since this National Congress, China has made outstanding achievements in the “Belt and Road Initiative”, environmental protection, energy conservation, and poverty alleviation. With the improvement of comprehensive national strength and the three initiatives put forward by the President (Global Governance Initiative, Global Development Initiative, and Global Civilization Initiative) to promote the building of a community with a shared future for mankind, China has established closer relations with many countries and regions in the world, and its soft power is also having an increasingly greater impact on the world. In addition, Chinese society is undergoing profound changes, with rapid economic development, accelerated urbanization, changes in the social structure, and the application of various new technologies, which have led to reflections on issues such as social ethics, family relationships, and personal val-

ues. Confucianism is a core part of Chinese culture. Its revival is inseparable from such a background. Many scholars are noticed that Confucianism can provide wisdom and reference for Chinese-style modernization and high-quality development, as well as a theoretical basis for the improvement of family ethics and social order in modern society, and they also realize that the success of reforms has to be rooted in the deep traditions of the Chinese nation and culture, and therefore exhaust all their efforts to explore the value of Confucianism.

A short conclusion

In the past ten years, there has been a boom in the Confucian studies in China, and there is a trend of diversification, internationalization and modernization of research and interpretation, which is closely related to the development of China, and also inextricably related to linked to the rich, profound and progressive contemporary value of Confucianism.



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