Zhu Xi and Confucian Democracy

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Abstract

In recent years, Confucianism has re-emerged as a prominent political ideology in China, as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) increasingly turns to China's traditional cultures to shore up its legitimacy. This recent political revival of Confucianism corresponds to the scholarly trend that began in the mid-1990s. From the late-90s until the present, the dominant anglophone voices in Confucian political theory are in favor of replacing liberal democratic values with Confucian communitarian ideals. More recently, however, those Confucians with a liberal bent have sought to reconcile Confucian values with Western values. For these synthesizers, liberal democracy has much to teach Confucianism and can help the two-and-half-millennium-old tradition adapt to our late-modern time.

Situated in these political and intellectual contexts, this dissertation explores the following question: how should political power be arranged in the service of Confucian ideals? As suggested by the brief overview above, many Confucians scholars have addressed this question. This project differs from previous investigations because its source of inspiration is an important but often overlooked Confucian figure, Zhu Xi (1130–1200). As I shall detail, Zhu Xi's philosophy can help us lay a firmer moral foundation and construct stronger justifications for integrating egalitarian elements of Western political thought into Confucian learning. My main thesis is that Confucian ethics—defined by Zhu Xi as the universal exhortation for all human beings to pursue moral perfection or sagehood by self-cultivation—is best supported by a participatory democracy that encourages all citizens to be politically active (Chap. 1), to learn from meritorious teachers (Chap. 2), to assert their legitimate individual interests (Chap. 3), and to embrace non-Confucian traditions (Chap. 4). If this dissertation's arguments are persuasive and its participatory vision of Confucian democracy compelling, it can both contribute to Confucian political philosophy, which is currently dominated by communitarians and liberals, and serve as a democratic counterpoint to the CCP's authoritarian propaganda. Although I do not believe that an immediate democratic revolution is necessarily the best route forward for China, I do think that democratic ideals can flourish in Confucian soil.

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Notes on the Primary Sources and Translations

All citations of Zhu Xi's writings follow *The Complete Works of Master Zhu* 朱子全書 published by Shanghai Guji Press 上海古籍出版社 in 2010. Since *Expositions and Collected Commentaries on the Four Books* and *The Categorized Conversations of Master Zhu* are the two most frequently cited texts in this dissertation, I shall refer to a cited passage from these texts with an abbreviation of the book title, the volume number, and the page number. For abbreviations, YL= *The Categorized Conversations of Master Zhu* 朱子語類; *SS*= *Expositions and Collected Commentaries on the Four Books; Questions on the Four Books* 四書章句集註; 四書或問. For other less frequently cited books, I will use their full titles such as *Reflections on Things at Hand* 近思錄.

For translations, I draw most heavily on D. C. Law (1979, 2003), Wing-tsit Chan (1967), and Daniel K. Gardner (1986, 2003, 2007). Unless indicated otherwise by citations, all other translations of Zhu Xi's works are mine.

Introduction

A New Construction of Confucian Democracy

In recent years, Confucianism has re-emerged as a prominent political ideology in China, as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) increasingly turns to China's traditional cultures to shore up its legitimacy. On September 11, 2016, the *People's Daily*, the official newspaper of the CCP, devoted an entire page to Confucianism, stipulating the benefits of integrating this tradition into contemporary China. On February 10, 2017, the *People's Daily* published another pro-Confucian article by Zhao Zhenyu. It reiterates President Xi Jinping's instruction that as a key component of China's traditional cultures, Confucianism can still strengthen today's China. The political revival of Confucianism, a monarchist tradition, also coincides with the (re)turn to personalist authoritarianism in the communist regime's seven-decade rule in China. On March 11, 2018, the National People's Congress of China voted nearly unanimously to end the constitutional term limit on both the presidency and vice-presidency. Although the current president Xi Jinping's real power comes from his other positions as the General Secretary of the Communist Party and the Chairperson of its Central Military Commission—neither of which has formal term limits—the symbolic meaning of the constitutional amendment was significant. It legitimated the communist regime's increasingly rapid shift towards a personalist autocracy. For many Confucians, this is welcome news because, as many commentators have noticed, President Xi is fond of praising Confucianism publicly

(Crane 2017; Van Norden 2017; Hong, Liu, and Huang 2017; Ownby and Cheek 2018). A quick glance of some prominent Confucian websites (e.g., *Rujiawang* 儒家网) and their accounts on Weibo (China's version of Twitter) reveals how delighted some Confucians are to see China's own political tradition becoming dear to the authoritarian leader of Chinese Marxism.

This recent political revival of Confucianism corresponds to the scholarly trend that began in the mid-1990s.[1] Along with other Asian countries, China's rise as an economic and a geopolitical power has promoted some Western scholars to praise Confucian values (e.g., meritocracy and social harmony) as equally viable, if not superior, to Western values (e.g., democracy and individual freedom). From the late-90s until the present, the dominant anglophone voices in Confucian political theory are in favor of replacing liberal democratic values with Confucian ideals (e.g., Hall and Ames 1999; Tu 2002; Rosemont 2015; Bell 2016). These Confucian communitarians often decry the excess of liberal individualism in the West and urges China not to follow the suit but to retain its Confucian roots. More recently, however, those Confucians with a liberal bent have sought to reconcile Confucian values with Western values (e.g., Angle 2012; J. Chan 2014; S. Kim 2014a, 2016). For these synthesizers, liberal democracy has much to teach Confucianism and can help the two-and-half-millennium-old tradition adapt to our late-modern time. Although community and virtue are still important to these Confucian

[1] For more detailed surveys of these debates, see He and Shin (He 2012; Shin 2012, 68–70).

liberals, the liberal conception of Confucian political authority places much greater emphasis on the protection of the individual's—especially the non-Confucian individual's—dignity and interests than the communitarian conception.

Situated in these political and intellectual contexts, this dissertation explores the following question: how should political power be arranged in the service of Confucian ideals? As suggested by the brief overview above, many Confucians scholars have addressed this question. This project differs from previous investigations because its source of inspiration is an important but often overlooked Confucian figure, Zhu Xi (1130–1200). As I shall detail, Zhu Xi's philosophy can help us lay a firmer moral foundation and construct stronger justifications for integrating egalitarian elements of Western political thought into Confucian learning. My main thesis is that Confucian ethics—defined by Zhu Xi as the universal exhortation for all human beings to pursue moral perfection or sagehood by self-cultivation—is best supported by a participatory democracy that encourages all citizens to be politically active (Chap. 1), to learn from meritorious teachers (Chap. 2), to assert their legitimate individual interests (Chap. 3), and to embrace non-Confucian traditions (Chap. 4). If this dissertation's arguments are persuasive and its participatory vision of Confucian democracy compelling, it can both contribute to Confucian political philosophy, which is currently dominated by communitarians and liberals, and serve as a democratic counterpoint to the CCP's authoritarian propaganda. Although I do not believe that an immediate democratic

revolution is necessarily the best route forward for China, I do think that democratic ideals can flourish in Confucian soil.

I.i. Why Zhu Xi?

If the Western periodization is to be followed, the Confucian tradition can be roughly divided into three periods. The first is the Classical period before the short-lived Qin dynasty (221–207 BCE) united China. Classical thinkers like Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi lived during this time. The second period is the two-millennium development of the tradition under various imperial dynasties. The conventional narrative is that Confucianism became political orthodoxy by the effort of Dong Zhongshu (195–115 BCE) during the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE).[2] Since the late nineteenth century, Confucianism started undergoing a decline as many (but not all) prominent reformists denounced it (especially Zhu Xi's brand) as a feudal vestige harmful to a modern and progressive China. As a reaction to this decline, some Confucian scholars in the 1950s and 60s began to reflect more carefully on the relationship between Confucianism and Western modernity. In 1958, four prominent scholars—Tang Junyi, Zhang Junmai, Mou Zongsan, and Xu Fuguan—issued a resounding manifesto in a Taiwanese journal called *Democratic Review* (*minzhu pinglun* 民主評論), calling for the integration of Confucian

[2] Some historians contest this narrative (Nylan 1998).

culture and Western modernity.[3] This manifesto signaled the beginning of contemporary Confucian scholarship, and my dissertation is a continuation of this broad effort.

Today, most political philosophers rely on Confucianism's classical and modern periods as sources for envisioning Confucian democracy. Compared to classical thinkers like Mencius (e.g., Bai 2013; S. Kim 2016, chap. 6) or modern figures like Zhang Shizhao (Jenco 2010) and Mou Zongsan (Angle 2012; Elstein 2015, chap. 3), imperial Confucians from the intervening period have received little attention from political philosophers. This lack of attention is not unlike the Western tendency to appeal to classical—especially Greek—sources and modern ones, but to neglect medieval ones.[4] This dissertation hopes to narrow this gap by focusing on an imperial Confucian, Zhu Xi. He lived during the Song dynasty (960–1279). Song was an transformative era for China because, during this time, Confucianism started taking the shape as we know today and gradually gaining a dominant impact on the Chinese society that earlier had been under the prevailing influences of Buddhism and Daoism (Bol 1992, 2008; Kuhn 2011; Zhao 2015, chap. 12).

[3] The full title is *A Manifesto on the Reappraisal of Chinese Culture: Our Joint Understanding of the Sinological Study Relating to World Cultural Outlook* (《為中國文化敬告世界人士宣言：我們對中國學術研究及中國文化與世界文化前途之共同認識》).

[4] I am not sure about the exact reasons for this neglect among Confucian scholars. One reason may be that many contemporary scholars either believe that they can produce better interpretations of Confucian classics than imperial Confucians. Or they may think that modern giants like Mou Zongsan have found the best approaches for integrating Confucianism with Western modernity (especially Kant). It could also simply be that contemporary Confucian political philosophy is a very young field (no more than three decades old) and it takes a long time to cover all major political thinkers in the Confucian tradition.

Zhu Xi was born in 1130 in Youxi County in Fujian, a Southeastern region of China. His father, Zhu Song (1097 – 1143), was a typical scholar-bureaucrat who had a modest income (Gao 2016, 19–26). Zhu Xi's father died when he was only fourteen years old. He and his mother were then supported by his father's friend Liu Ziyu (1086 – 1146) but received only meager means for living. Although Zhu Song passed away early in Zhu Xi's life, he made sure that Zhu Xi received a proper education. Before his death, Zhu Song entrusted his son's education to Liu Ziyu and asked Zhu Xi to go study with some of his most learned friends (L. Chen 2000, 23; Gao 2016, 48–57). According to Zhu Xi's own words, he was an inquisitive boy who pondered the nature of the cosmos but did not exhibit any preternatural talents for learning (L. Chen 2000, 20–22). Thus, to make up his natural deficiencies, Zhu Xi studied diligently Confucian classics, especially *Analects*, *Mencius*, *Great Learning*, and *the Doctrine of the Mean*. His eventually published commentaries on these Four Books (*sishu* 四書), which would later become his own masterpiece, constitute the core text of this dissertation.

Under the care and guidance of his father's friends, Zhu Xi did well on the civil-service examinations and passed the imperial palace examinations at the highest level (*jinshi* 进士) at the age of 19. After his success in the examinations and before he became a devoted Confucian under Li Dong's (1093–1163) influence, Zhu Xi spent much time studying Buddhism and Daoism. Scholars do not agree on the exact age when Zhu Xi committed himself fully to Confucianism. But it is clear that Zhu Xi started seeing himself

exclusively as a Confucian practitioner in his late twenties (L. Chen 2000, 37; S. Liu 2015, 36–37; Gao 2016, 60–61). Afterwards, Zhu Xi dedicated the rest of his seven-decade-long life to Confucian studies, earning the enduring reputation as one of the most influential and prolific thinkers in the tradition.

As a Confucian scholar, Zhu Xi had many intellectual friends and rivals. His collaboration with Lyu Zuqian (1137–1181) produced one of the most famous Confucian anthologies, *Reflections on Things at Hand* (近思錄), which I will also draw on in this dissertation. Zhu Xi's sustained discussions with Zhang Shi (1133–1180) helped develop his own method of self-cultivation consisting of both internal meditation and external investigation, the latter of which will be the focus of Chapter 1 (S. Liu 2015, chap. 3). Perhaps the most well-known intellectual activity Zhu Xi undertook was his debate with the Lu brothers, Lu Jiuling (1132 – 1180) and Lu Jiuyuan (1139 – 1193), at the Ehu Temple (鵝湖之會). At the meeting, Zhu Xi defended his investigative method of self-cultivation that focused on exploring and understanding the external truth of the world, whereas the Lu brothers contended that self-cultivation should start with one's innate moral intuitions (Gao 2016, 92). As we shall see in Chapter 4, Zhu Xi also endorses intuitionism as a key part of his moral psychology; but at the debate, he was worried that the Lu brothers' heavy reliance on moral intuitions oversimplified the assiduous process of Confucian self-cultivation.

Politically, Zhu Xi was a key player during the Song Neo-Confucian revival, a political movement aiming to both curb the influence of Buddhism and Daoism and re-Confucianize Chinese society. Although his political career was short (seven years in total), Zhu Xi sought to put a Confucian imprint on his jurisdiction by compelling the local population to comply with the Confucian moral code whenever he was assigned to a local executive post (Meng 2003). At each possible opportunity, Zhu Xi also pleaded with the reigning emperor to follow his method of self-cultivation as the foundation of imperial governance (Gao 2016, 68, 72, 74). When Zhu Xi was not politically employed, he would be assigned to religious sinecures in charge of various temples throughout the empire. Such positions allowed the assignees to receive a stipend from the state with few administrative responsibilities, which was ideal for a studious scholar like Zhu Xi (Gao 2016, 75–76).

Zhu Xi's last political assignment as an imperial lecturer (*shijiang* 侍讲), however, would get him in trouble, culminating in an official ban on his work among other scholars' in 1195 (*qingyuan dangjin* 慶元黨禁). Zhu Xi obtained this position because his political patron, Prime Minister Zhao Ruyu (1140 – 1196), admired his scholarship and reputation. Almost immediately after Zhu Xi assumed his position, Zhao Ruyu lost favor with the reigning emperor, Ningzong (r. 1194 – 1224). As a lecturer to the emperor, Zhu Xi criticized Zhao Ruyu's political rival Han Tuozhou (1152 – 1207) who was conspiring to overthrow Zhao. Zhu Xi was subsequently attacked by Shen Jizu, an imperial censor loyal

to Han, and promptly removed from his post. To consolidate his power, Han Tuozhou banned the work of any scholar who had criticized him and denounced his critics (including Zhu Xi) as promulgators of "spurious learning" (*weixue* 伪學). Consequently, Zhu Xi had to move around within his home region Fujian to avoid political persecution during his last years (Gao 2016, 104–9). Zhu Xi died in 1200 while the ban was still in force. Nearly a thousand people attended his funeral (W. Chan 1963, 588–89).

After Emperor Ningzong lifted the ban in 1202, Zhu Xi's stature began to rise. the same emperor granted him the posthumous name of "Venerable Gentleman of Culture (*wengong* 文公)" in 1209. His successor, Emperor Lizong (r. 1224 – 1264), ennobled Zhu Xi posthumously as the Duke of Xin in 1227 (*xinguo gong* 信國公) and changed the title to the Duke of Hui (*huiguo gong* 徽國公) three years later. In 1231, Emperor Lizong permitted sacrifices to be made to Zhu Xi in the Temple of Confucius, the highest honor for any Confucian scholar. In 1313, the fourth emperor of Yuan, in the dynasty succeeding Song, sanctioned Zhu Xi's commentaries on the Four Books as the basis of the civil service examinations.[5] Zhu Xi's exegesis remained political orthodoxy in the following six centuries despite two dynastic changes. Partly due to his scholarly excellence and partly due to the orthodox status his philosophy attained in late imperial China, Zhu Xi profoundly shaped the later development of Confucianism in China, Korea, Japan, and

[5] For a more detailed introduction on Zhu Xi's commentaries on Four Books and their historical influences, see Gardner (2007).

beyond.[6] Given the centrality of ethics to his political philosophy, Zhu Xi is largely responsible for our contemporary impression that Confucianism is a moralistic political tradition that prioritizes virtue over statecraft (El Amine 2015, 8–9).

As its organizing principle, this dissertation follows Zhu Xi's emphasis on ethics in the political life. The starting point of all my arguments is that Zhu Xi's ethics orients politics towards an all-encompassing perfectionist mission, i.e., the fundamental purpose of government is to create a political and social environment that can best help all individuals attain moral perfection or, to use Zhu Xi's term, sagehood. The moral foundation of all my arguments is Zhu Xi's egalitarian moral universalism. This moral principle, which I will explicate in greater detail in Chapter 1, states that all individuals are born with the same moral perfection and have the equal potential to become a Confucian sage by self-cultivation. The normative core of my claims regarding a Confucian democratic theory is that democracy and some of its companion concepts such as rights and pluralism are the best arrangements of power for realizing Zhu Xi's Confucian ideal of universal sagehood.

I.ii. Methodological Challenges: Essentialism and Presentism

According to Leigh Jenco, a prominent interpreter of Chinese philosophy, any attempt to integrate Western political thought into Confucian learning is faced with two

[6] For a detailed account of how Zhu Xi's philosophy attained the status of political orthodoxy in China, see James Liu (1973), Tillman (1992), and De Weerdt (2007). For an introduction to Zhu Xi's philosophical and political impact on Korea and Japan, see Choi (2010, 37–47) and Nosco (2010, 55–62) respectively.

methodological problems, i.e., essentialism and presentism.[7] In her critique of contemporary Confucian political philosophy, Jenco argues that essentialism reduces "Chinese thought to… the postulation of a timeless 'spirit' of Confucianism that is presumed to persist unchanged since the classical era more than 2500 years ago," whereas presentism subjects "Confucianism's internal diversity to the dominant terms of contemporary liberal analytic philosophy" (Jenco 2017, 3). For Jenco, the danger of adopting the essentialist and presentist approaches to Confucianism is that it reinforces European colonialism because "the validity of Confucian ideas [is articulated] in terms shaped almost exclusively by modern European thought and experience [such as Rawlsian liberalism]" (Jenco 2017, 7, 17).[8] Although Jenco raises serious concerns for any Confucian political philosopher, I do not think that they invalidate the value or significance of my project.

Jenco's first concern is that contemporary political philosophers tend to essentialize the inherently diverse Confucian tradition. I agree with Jenco that essentializing Confucianism is the wrong approach. Precisely because of this agreement, I choose to study an influential Confucian figure like Zhu Xi who lived more than a thousand years

[7] These two terms are not Jenco's but reflect my understanding of her critique.

[8] Drawing on Chinese intellectuals in the early twentieth century, Jenco argues that "the point of studying and ordering the past… is to resist those powers [that are dominating our present modes of thinking, e.g., liberal democracy] rather than fall prey to them, by showing diverse 'tracks' of evolution that make new futures possible" (Jenco 2017, 17). One way to carry out this task is to acknowledge "the significance played by a variety of typically marginalised groups and practices, such as folk traditions, non-canonical bodies of Chinese thought and practice, and non-Han contributions to Chinese civilisation" (Jenco 2017, 15).

later than Confucius. By selecting Zhu Xi as my starting point and introducing him into the current debates in Confucian political philosophy, which have overlooked imperial figures in the tradition, I hope to remind my readers that Confucianism does not end with those classical or modern figures but has undergone many vast changes and developments throughout different Chinese dynasties. As a Confucian scholar who has absorbed many Buddhist and Daoist insights, Zhu Xi is a great representative of the Confucian tradition's rich historicity.[9] Hence, I do not think that Zhu Xi's thought represents some claimed essence of Confucian philosophy, despite its historical stature as the state-sanctioned Confucian orthodoxy in late imperial China, Choson Korea, and, to a lesser extent, Edo Japan.

Nevertheless, simply because we do not revere Zhu Xi as *the* spokesperson of Confucian learning does not mean that we cannot appeal to him as *a* great representative of the tradition. Zhu Xi is important especially because of his historical influence. For anyone who is remotely familiar with the history of late imperial China or the early modern history of East Asia, Zhu Xi is enormously important both as an intellectual giant and a political symbol. As we have seen, Zhu Xi was a controversial figure in his own time and beyond, both intellectually and politically. Intellectually, Zhu Xi's Confucian philosophy was questioned and challenged by many of his contemporaries such as Zhang

[9] For more on the relationship between Zhu Xi's Confucianism and Buddhism, see Makeham (2018). Chen Lai argues that Zhu Xi is influenced more by Daoism than by Buddhism (L. Chen 2000, 153).

Shi, Lu Jiuyuan, and Chen Liang (1143–1194). Later during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), another towering figure Wang Yangming (1472–1529) would establish his reputation by attacking Zhu Xi's investigative method of self-cultivation. Politically, as we have seen, Zhu Xi's writings were first banned at one point during his life by the imperial court and then elevated to be the political orthodoxy a century after his death.[10] Zhu Xi's scholarship gained him a large and faithful following among Confucian scholars in China, Korea, and Japan. Even some female Korean scholars like Im Yunjidang (1721–93) and Kang Chŏngildang (1772–1832), who were marginalized by mainstream Confucians, drew on Zhu Xi to advocate gender equality (Y. Kim 2011; S. Kim 2014b, 2014c).[11] Therefore, no emphasis on Confucianism's internal diversity and complexity can legitimately ignore Zhu Xi's widespread and lasting influence on the tradition. Taking Zhu Xi as its Confucian starting point, this dissertation could encourage more scholars to diversify Confucian political philosophy by engaging with more imperial Confucian thinkers.[12]

Jenco's second charge is that contemporary Confucian political philosophy offers "not forthright confrontations with the vast amount of texts and practices that have

[10] For a fuller intellectual and political history of Zhu Xi's time, see Tillman, Yu, and De Weerdt (Tillman 1992; Yu 2004; De Weerdt 2007).

[11] Although this dissertation does not address gender issues directly, I intend all my political and ethical aspirations to be equally applicable to both men and women. In other words, this dissertation fully supports gender equality.

[12] As far as I know, Elton Chan's 2018 article on Huang Zongxi (1610 – 1695) is another rare example that reads imperial Confucianism as a political tradition (E. Chan 2018).

historically constituted the Chinese past, but rather selective readings of the past advanced in the service of present values" (Jenco 2017, 16). There are two challenges raised by this charge of presentism. First, how do we know whether our readings are selective? Second, is advocating present values inherently problematic? Let me start with the first question. I have already stated that I select Zhu Xi for his historical importance. He can give us an influential Confucian approach to politics, even if his approach has been extensively contested by others. My selection of Zhu Xi can be valuable at least as initial groundwork for scholars who are interested in imperial Confucians' potential contributions to contemporary political questions. I am being selective so that our future understanding of the Confucian tradition can be less essentialist.

Still, Jenco could respond by saying that my exegesis of Zhu Xi's philosophy is too narrowly selective, reflecting only present concerns of Western political theory. To address this concern, however, we must go beyond methodological disputes. We should dive into Zhu Xi's vast corpus and search for evidence that can either confirm or contradict my egalitarian reading of Zhu Xi's ethics. The exegetic task of this dissertation is not to be narrowly selective but rather to present a well-rounded collection of textual evidence that can be found in Zhu Xi's writings. Whether or not I have succeeded in this task will depend on other Zhu Xi scholars' evaluations of my work. To be sure, my claim that Zhu Xi espouses moral egalitarianism is not necessarily the only interpretation of Zhu Xi's ethics. Other scholars would probably suggest that some of the later Confucians

such as Wang Yangming (1472–1529) and Jeong Yakyong (1762–1836), who are influenced by Zhu Xi but also diverge from him philosophically, are better advocates of moral egalitarianism than Zhu Xi himself (Fang 2016, chap. 2; Back 2017). To engage with these differences between my exegesis and others' is precisely the point of Confucian scholarship, of which Zhu Xi would almost certainly approve.

Second, Jenco worries that contemporary Confucian political philosophy merely rehashes modern European thought (especially that of Anglo-American analytic political philosophy), giving it a different philosophical language.[13] In principal, I agree with Jenco that Confucian political philosophy should retain its own evaluative standards instead of succumbing to European ones. However, insisting upon Confucianism's internal standards should not entail any categorical refusal to learn from other traditions. Extensive engagements with other traditions may improve Confucian learning even according to its internal standards. Since Confucian learning develops itself independently from Western political philosophy, any effort to bridge these two traditions is a new construction. From late-Qing reformers such as Kang Youwei (1858 – 1927), to Taiwanese New Confucians such as Mou Zongsan (1909 – 1995), and to contemporary scholars such as Stephen Angle and Joseph Chan, Confucian scholars are all confronted with the same challenge, i.e., how Confucianism should position itself vis-

[13] Drawing on Joseph Levenson (1968), Jenco thinks that "assessing Confucianism's value in terms of another tradition pretty much signals the end of a tradition as valuable in itself, rather than as valuable simply because it is ours." (Jenco 2017, 4).

à-vis the West. As the later chapters will suggest, the prevailing position is that Confucian learning should adopt some Western elements for its own good. However, scholars disagree regarding which Western elements should be adopted and how such integration should be justified. This dissertation intends to justify certain Western values on Confucian terms, not vice versa. For example, I encourage Confucians (at least those sympathetic to Zhu Xi's ethics) to embrace democracy not because it is the dominant form of political authority in the West but because my reading of Zhu Xi's philosophy leads me to conclude that democracy is the best political way to serve his moral ideals. Therefore, I think that engaging with modern European thought does not reduce the value of Confucianism but improves its political vitality defined by its internal standards.

If persuasive, my egalitarian arguments will have significant political implications, as it can strengthen Confucian democratic voices in an increasingly autocratic China. As appeals to Confucianism become more frequent in the CCP's propaganda, the question regarding the proper relationship between Confucian ideals and Western values seems all the more urgent and necessary. For example, is Confucianism compatible with democracy? If yes, what would a Confucian democracy look like? If no, should a Chinese national support Confucianism, democracy, or something else? The current regime is eager to present Confucianism as an ethical tradition fully supportive of its authoritarian rule. It is my job as a Chinese political philosopher to assess the accuracy of that presentation.

Therefore, this dissertation is framed as a comparative political study not because the value of Confucianism is somehow determined by, in Jenco's words, "modern European thought and experience" but because the tradition is being used by the leaders of the CCP to legitimate their own rule, which is itself based on a branch of Western thought. These power holders all have sworn allegiance to the Leninist interpretation of Marxism, a European tradition enshrined in the CCP's Constitution. By displaying sympathies to Confucianism, the ruling class has already made clear their comparative conclusion that Leninist authoritarianism welcomes Confucianism as a nationalist source of political legitimacy. But should Confucianism embrace Leninist authoritarianism in return? Having been thrown into this question by history, any Chinese national should hold Confucianism (or in my case, Zhu Xi's brand) as her normative standard and ask the crucial question, i.e., whether or not Leninist authoritarianism is the best European source for serving Confucian Learning. My dissertation sets out to demonstrate that Confucian ideals may be better served by participatory democracy than by Leninist authoritarianism.

I.iii. Key Concepts and Exegetical Strategy

This dissertation supplies a Confucian moral foundation for some of the most prominent Western political concepts such as democracy, rights, and pluralism. My construction of this moral foundation relies heavily on Zhu Xi's metaphysics or ontology. This section will first explain two key concepts in Zhu Xi's ontology and then lay out my

exegetical strategy for using his philosophical framework to build a Confucian democracy. For Zhu Xi, all beings in the universe have two composite dimensions: *li* (理) and *qi* (氣). *Li* determines the normative dimension, whereas *qi* operates in the physical or material dimension. The exact natures of *li* and *qi* are immensely complex and many great Confucian scholars have debated these concepts for centuries.[14] Although the aim of the dissertation is not to adjudicate these debates, I will defend my egalitarian interpretation of these concepts in later chapters. For the rest of the dissertation, I will render *li* as "coherence" and *qi* as "material force" to help the reader follow my exegesis of Zhu Xi's ontology and ethics.[15] Let me now explain these two key terms in greater detail.

For Zhu Xi, coherence is the supreme cosmological good that stipulates how human beings and all other beings *ought* to function in relation with other beings (YL, 14:182-214; see also L Zhang, 2016: 24–31). Coherence defines moral perfection in Zhu Xi's Confucian ethics. As a relational and contextual good, coherence manifests itself when all elements come together in a rightfully patterned way in a being, an event, or a relationship. Although all beings have coherence in them, only human beings can *fully* comport themselves in accordance with this cosmological good by responding rightfully to

[14] For surveys of these debates, see Jones and He (2015) and Back and Ivanhoe (2016). For fuller explorations of these two terms, see Liu (2017) and Angle and Tiwald (2017).

[15] I follow Stephen Angle and Willard Peterson in translating *li* as coherence because I want to emphasize the relational connotation of the term (Angle, 2009: 49; Peterson, 1986: 18). My translations of *qi* as material force and *qizhi* as physio-psychological constitutions draw on Wing-tsit Chan (1989) and Daniel K. Gardner (1986), respectively.

external events, e.g., following the rules of coherence in social relationships. Since the ethical manifestations of coherence are always relational responsibilities, no individual can be fully coherent when secluded from others. The hallmark of a Confucian sage is someone who lives a coherent life by perfectly fulfilling all his proper responsibilities to those surrounding him, both humans and non-humans, with an authentic heart.

The reason I emphasize authenticity is that human nature is identical with coherence in Zhu Xi's ontology. All human beings are born with coherence as their innate moral essence. According to Zhu Xi's moral ontology, the ethical flourishing of a human being means that his heart-mind (*xin* 心) always follows the commands of coherence inherent in his nature. Hence, a Confucian sage is the most authentic person because he is always true to his perfect human nature (SS, 6:49-52). To be sure, human beings' innate possession of coherence does not mean that they are ontologically identical with the cosmos. It simply means that human nature and the cosmos share an intimate microcosmic-macrocosmic relationship with coherence as their shared normative source. Through coherence, the flourishing of a human life is always in harmony with that of the universe. Put differently, Zhu Xi's conception of coherence is functionally analogous to the medieval view of natural law in the sense that both coherence and natural law integrate human beings into a larger moralized universe and stand as the cosmological ideal for all human actions in both empirical and normative realms (Angle and Tiwald 2017, 32–33). Both coherence and natural law are written in the human nature and remain

accessible to the human mind. Attaining moral perfection for both late imperial Confucians and medieval Christians requires compliance with coherence and natural law, respectively.

Unfortunately, for most of us, our inborn knowledge of coherence has been obscured by impure material force (*qi* 氣), which constitutes our physio-psychological constitution (*qizhi* 氣質). Although the character of coherence, the source of normativity inherent in human nature, is perceptible by the human mind, its manifestations would remain invisible, intangible, and abstract without the concrete substances generated by material force (YL, 14: 194-6). Material force is the cosmological component necessary for actualizing moral goodness defined by coherence. However, although coherence sets the normative standard of purity for material force, it does not control the actual operation of material force (YL, 14: 200). Further, material force usually endows human beings with impure physio-psychological constitutions, which impedes the manifestations of coherence inborn in human beings (YL, 14: 198). Having an impure physio-psychological constitution means that an individual's natural perception of his innate coherence is obscured. Both his mental and bodily motions will often deviate from moral goodness, resulting in human defects such as selfishness, self-indulgence, and excessive emotions (Ching, 1986: 275; Ivanhoe, 2000: 47–8). For Zhu Xi, material force (with its varying degrees of purity) explains why human beings, who have the same moral nature, can exhibit different moral behavior (YL, 14: 199). But Zhu Xi is not a determinist. People with

impure physio-psychological constitutions can always be reformed. The purpose of Confucian self-cultivation is to help all human beings purify their physio-psychological constitutions so that they can return to their inborn moral perfection and act in accordance with coherence.

Zhu Xi's egalitarian moral universalism or, specifically, his optimistic belief in all people's moral perfectibility is the exegetical key I will use to unlock his potential contributions to Confucian democracy. Personally, Zhu Xi is a monarchist who believes in social hierarchy and sees Confucianism as the only and absolute truth for all human beings. His personal values thus clash with late-modern Western sensibilities such as political equality, voluntary social associations, and pluralism. Nevertheless, Zhu Xi undergirds his inegalitarian and homogeneous vision of the ideal society with his unwavering belief in all human beings' equal potential to attain moral perfection. As it shall become clear in the later chapters, Zhu Xi's philosophy contains an internal contradiction between his egalitarian moral universalism and his vision of a homogeneous hierarchical society. I argue that it is reasonable to resolve this contradiction by favoring Zhu Xi's egalitarian moral universalism because, for Zhu Xi, the ultimate mission of the government and society is to raise sages, a point he makes clear in his preface to the guidebook of Confucian self-cultivation *Great Learning* (SS, 6:12). In other words, upholding Zhu Xi's egalitarian moral universalism as the overriding

exegetical principle enables me to create a bridge between modern Western political thought and Zhu Xi's Confucianism.

It may be helpful here to distinguish Zhu Xi's egalitarian moral universalism from the Western natural-law tradition that also emphasizes moral equality among all human beings. The Western reader may think of St. Thomas Aquinas—to whom Zhu Xi has been compared (Klancer 2015)—as an example of arguing for moral equality in the natural law tradition. However, St. Thomas's conception of moral equality does not necessarily lead to democracy because it is unclear to me whether a Thomist social order needs political equality to realize moral equality. On the other hand, I think that Zhu Xi's egalitarian moral universalism necessarily supports democracy and many of its companion concepts because it requires an investigative method of moral self-cultivation that emphasizes on learning from external affairs (e.g., politics, family life, and, as I shall argue, non-Confucian traditions). Therefore, Zhu Xi's conception of moral equality can be immediately translated into *universal* calls for undertaking certain activities to achieve moral perfection. The following chapters rely on this direct linkage to argue for equal political participation, equal rights, and equal respect for non-Confucian traditions and see them as indispensable practices for all citizens' moral self-cultivation. One of my general points in the dissertation is that moral equality does not automatically entail political equality or other egalitarian activities. It must come with some ethical instructions that everyone must undertake an activity X to achieve a normative goal Y

with X being doable by all and Y being accessible to all. In other words, moral equality must be combined with some universal method of self-cultivation to have egalitarian significance in practice.

I.iv. The Road Ahead

To build bridges to modern Western political values on Confucian terms and show how they can benefit Confucianism, the following chapters take Zhu Xi's optimistic view of universal sagehood as their foundational premise. Chapter 1 demonstrates that Zhu Xi's monarchism can be overruled—and Confucian democracy affirmed—by his universal self-cultivation philosophy that requires Confucian learners to acquire and practice political knowledge. Chapter 2 extends Chapter 1's egalitarian conclusion and turns apparent meritocracy into a democratic program for facilitating citizens' political self-cultivation. Chapter 3 explains how Zhu Xi's defense of legitimate individual interests, which is rooted in his moral egalitarianism, justifies an effort to integrate individual rights into Confucian social hierarchies. Chapter 4 brings out the pluralist potential in Zhu Xi's moral universalism by illustrating why other traditions should be considered intrinsically valuable as non-Confucian manifestations of coherence and should stand as important sources of learning for Confucians. Together, these chapters serve the goal of persuasively envisioning a participatory democracy that fosters citizens' political excellence as a key part of their moral self-cultivation, protects their legitimate self-interests, and embraces cross-cultural engagements.

Chapter 1 offers a Confucian justification of participatory democracy with a perfectionist cast.[16] Building on Zhu Xi's egalitarian ontology as its moral foundation, I argue that to attain sagehood by self-cultivation requires Confucian learners to study the character of political life and perfect their political knowledge in practice. This strong emphasis on learning and practice is central to Zhu Xi's method of self-cultivation, which centers on the principle of "investigating things" (*gewu* 格物). For Zhu Xi, thorough investigations help individuals learn the coherence of both human and natural affairs and personal practice deepens such knowledge. Accumulating coherent knowledge is essential to moral progress because Zhu Xi believes that coherence is present in all affairs, and to be a sage is to handle all affairs—especially political affairs—according to their coherent patterns. Since Zhu Xi believes that Confucian self-cultivation is the moral duty of all human beings, all citizens are entitled to equal political participation as an indispensable mode of self-cultivation.

Certainly, no democratic order can be effective simply by letting the people participate. The people need to learn how to govern. The key question is how to foster such political excellence in the populace. Chapter 2 illustrates Zhu Xi's solution to this question. Despite being a meritocrat, Zhu Xi does not believe that mere bureaucratic management is enough for transforming the populace ethically. For Zhu Xi, *no Confucian learning is transformative unless the learner participates.* He exhorts the Confucian

[16] An earlier version of this chapter has been published on *European Journal of Political Theory* (Ying 2018).

meritorious to be the people's mentors through a kind of civic education. They should devise practical learning programs according to students' needs and encourage students to rely on their own agency in learning. Therefore, the Confucian meritorious should strive to impart political merits into citizens through Zhu Xi's pedagogy. Chapter 2 will show that Confucian democracy is anti-meritocratic but not anti-meritorious.

Chapter 3 intervenes in the perennial controversy over the status of individual rights in Confucian politics. Although many Confucian scholars believe that Confucianism lacks a political mechanism for protecting the individual, they hesitate to endorse the notion of rights because they think that its legalist and contestatory nature does not fit well with the Confucian emphasis on social harmony. By analyzing Zhu Xi's views on individual interests and litigation, Chapter 3 argues that no pursuit of Confucian social harmony can be genuine without a coercive mechanism to protect legitimate individual interests. As a moralist, Zhu Xi is not oblivious to abuses of power in Confucian social relationships and recognizes the crucial need for the Confucian state to protect vulnerable individuals in social hierarchies. Therefore, the legalist and contestatory nature of rights is not detrimental but rather conducive to a harmonious society, because rights enable individuals to hold accountable the power holders in Confucian social relationships and further their knowledge of moral responsibilities as social superiors.

Chapter 4 responds to the increasingly strong nationalist sentiments among Confucians in China because their propensity to disparage non-Confucian traditions can

potentially impede Confucian self-cultivation, i.e., the need to gain a better understanding of coherence from other traditions. I reject the nationalist and communitarian claim that China (or other historically Confucian societies) must enact a cultural hierarchy with Confucianism at the top. Appealing to Zhu Xi's moral universalism that *all* human beings are endowed with the same moral goodness (i.e., coherence), Chapter 4 argues that both Confucianism and non-Confucian traditions are intrinsically valuable and should be treated as political equals. The reason is that non-Confucian traditions are embraced by human beings who, by virtue of their inborn coherence, possess the same ability to make sound moral judgements as Confucians do. Non-Confucians must have found in their own traditions moral goodness that resonates with their inborn coherence. The presence of coherence in non-Confucian traditions means that these traditions are worthy of Confucians' respect and careful studies.

In the conclusion, I reflect on what remains to be done for a full theory of Confucian democracy and on the field of Confucian political philosophy. I acknowledge a key deficiency of this dissertation by highlighting the unresolved problem of gender inequality in Zhu Xi's ethics and in the wider tradition. I also suggest that Confucian political philosophy must be political (defined as the perpetual need to question power) before it can be Confucian, a requirement that will make it a field that departs from traditional Confucian scholarship that, like Zhu Xi's own work, focuses on ethical theories but not on power relations.

Chapter One

Political Participation as Self-Cultivation: Towards a Participatory Theory of Confucian Democracy

This chapter lays the foundation of the entire dissertation by constructing a participatory theory of Confucian democracy based on Zhu Xi's philosophy. It intervenes in the lively debate on the compatibility between Confucianism and democracy. To those who are skeptical of the possibility of Confucian democracy, I will show that political equality can be a moral ideal internal to the Confucian tradition because it enhances Confucian learning for all. To Confucian democrats, my chapter reinforces their defenses of Confucian democracy by adding a robust participatory dimension. Enriching the prevalent liberal model of Confucian democracy, which does not expand the scope of popular participation beyond electoral politics, I will demonstrate that popular participation in self-governance should be an indispensable activity or mode of Confucian self-cultivation. Therefore, by appealing to Zhu Xi's egalitarian moral universalism and his investigative method of self-cultivation, this chapter not only justifies democracy on Confucian terms—i.e., showing how democracy benefits Confucian learning—but also illustrates how Confucian ethics can help promote a robust democratic civic culture.

The following is divided into four sections. Section 1 reviews the current literature on Confucian democracy and specifies my contributions. Section 2 addresses two charges of anachronism against my democratic reconstruction of Zhu Xi's thought. Section 3 lays

the moral foundation of Confucian democracy by explaining Zhu Xi's moral egalitarianism, which stems from his ontology of coherence (*li* 理) and material force (*qi* 氣). Section 4 illustrates why Zhu Xi's investigative self-cultivation program (*gewu zhizhi* 格物致知), along with his belief in the universal accessibility to sagehood, calls for popular political participation.

1.1 The (Im)possibility of Confucian Democracy

As noted in the Introduction, the CCP has recently resorted to Confucianism as a nationalist source of political legitimacy. Given the currents of contemporary China, this is unsurprising. In contemporary China, there are many grass-root efforts to revive various Confucian elements (e.g., see Sun 2013; Billioud and Thoraval 2015; Ivanhoe and Kim 2016). Although many Confucian political theorists do not necessarily support the CCP, they reject the idea of Confucian democracy for four different reasons. First, some hesitate to endorse political equality because they are concerned with the kind of liberal individualism that undergirds the popular understanding of democracy (e.g., Hall and Ames 1999, chap. 8; Ames 2011, 268; Rosemont 2015, 63, 125). Second, some nationalists defend Confucianism as China's native identity, which is incompatible with foreign egalitarian values (Jiang 2013a, 27–43; Fan 2013, 103–9; for a study of Confucian nationalism, see Makeham 2008). Third, others agree with the nationalists' conclusion but offer a less nationalist and more philosophically nuanced defense of Confucianism's incompatibility with political equality (e.g., Tan 2003, 153–56, 2016, 502; Elstein 2010, 440;

Angle 2012, 54–56; J. Chan 2014, 85). That is, these scholars care more about preserving the philosophical integrity of Confucianism than about re-Confucianizing China. Lastly, some praise Confucianism as a worthy rival to democracy. Unlike the mob rule by universal suffrage, Confucianism reserves political power mostly for the meritorious (Bai 2013, 76; Bell 2016, 99–108; for critiques, see S. Kim 2014a, chap. 3). Simply put, none of these Confucians sees how the tradition can benefit much from the ideal of political equality.

Against this inegalitarian current, a few egalitarian voices have emerged. New Confucians in Taiwan maintain that liberal democracy benefits Confucianism, a state-centered political tradition, by protecting individual autonomy and popular welfare against abuses of governmental power (Xu 1979, 287–89; Mou 2010, 122–28; S. Liu 1993, 138–40). Thus, they believe that democracy is necessary for realizing Confucian ideals (Lee Ming-huei 2005, 35–37; Elstein 2015, chaps. 3–5). Others like Sungmoon Kim are less concerned with how democracy may benefit Confucianism. They consider democratic ideals intrinsically valuable and reconstruct Confucianism as civic instruments for strengthening democracy (S. Kim 2014a, 85, 2016, 18, 27, 67–68, 2017, 246). For example, Kim affirms the value of democratic participation, but he does so "without rendering the value of democracy dependent on traditional philosophical Confucianism's perfectionist moral ends" (S. Kim 2017, 247). In sum, Confucian democrats remain divided on the

theoretical relationship between Confucianism and democracy: does democracy benefit Confucianism or vice versa?

My answer to this question combines insights from both sides of Confucian democrats. First, I agree with New Confucians like Mou Zongsan and Xu Fuguan that the philosophical relationship between Confucianism and democracy is more intimate than Kim has suggested. Kim refuses to associate his Confucian political theory with any school of Confucian Learning and argues that "as a civic culture, Confucianism is not necessarily democratic in itself, and it is compatible with a wide range of political systems" (S. Kim 2017, 246). This chapter shows that Zhu Xi's Confucian ethics is incompatible with authoritarianism and that democracy is *a key implication* of his Confucian ethics. My exegesis of Zhu Xi will demonstrate that democracy should be ethically valuable to Confucians because it is a political ideal deduced from their own ethical commitments.

Although I agree with Mou and Xu that democracy is necessary for realizing Confucian ideals, my argument draws on a source different from theirs. Xu mostly focuses on Classical Confucians, whereas Mou relies heavily on the Heart-Mind school (*xinxue* 心學) of imperial Confucian Learning. My theory of Confucian democracy rests on Zhu Xi's Coherence school (*lixue* 理学), which reinterprets Classical Confucianism in the wake of Buddhism and Daoism and against which the Heart-Mind school developed itself. Thus, supplementing Mou's and Xu's defenses of Confucian democracy, my appeal

to Zhu Xi shows that, even with all its diversities, the Confucian tradition has a significant philosophical congruence with democracy.[17]

Second, I side with Kim in affirming the value of democratic participation, though I do so by grounding this participatory value in Zhu Xi's perfectionist moral ideals.[18] New Confucians like Mou and Xu mostly adopt liberal democracy, i.e., a limited, representative government with free and fair elections, with a non-liberal justification (Elstein 2015, 91–6). They never affirm the crucial need for Confucians to participate in self-governance beyond casting ballots, something valuable for them only as a means of individual self-protection. Building on Brooke A. Ackerly's insight that Confucian democratic institutions should foster universal self-cultivation (Ackerly 2005, 562), I contend that a participatory democracy can benefit Confucians beyond the liberal need for political self-protection. Popular participation in politics is internally valuable to Confucians because it can facilitate their self-cultivation by encouraging them to acquire and perfect their political knowledge in practice. Consequently, my perfectionist theory

[17] In this chapter and throughout the dissertation, labels like "Confucians," "Confucian Learning," or "the Confucian tradition" mostly refer to Zhu Xi's school. To be sure, I am not at all arguing that Zhu Xi's scholarship is the correct essence of Confucianism or somehow representative of the highly diverse Confucian tradition. I am simply contending that democracy is beneficial to an extremely influential tradition of Confucian Learning.

[18] Although Stephen Angle also considers political participation valuable (Angle 2012, 56, 72), he does not specify "precisely what mode of democracy modern Confucianism requires and what additional value(s) the democracy required would provide for citizens in East Asia besides its instrumental contribution to personal moral growth, which is possible even under nondemocratic regimes and by means of nonpolitical social participation" (Kim 2017, 244). Like Angle, I also take political participation to be an instrument for personal moral growth. However, my conception of political participation requires citizens' *equal* participation in political matters, which Angle rejects (Angle 2012, 55).

of Confucian democracy can also help build a vibrant democratic culture, which Kim values deeply (Kim 2017, 247).[19] In short, although this chapter focuses on justifying democracy to Confucian Learning, it also supports the idea that Confucian Learning benefits democracy (Kim 2017, 248).

1.2 The Challenges of Anachronism

Considering Zhu Xi's historical context, to democratize his monarchist thought runs the risks of anachronism. To respond, I am not conducting an exegetical exercise to prove that Zhu Xi supports democracy, which is indeed anachronistic. Rather, I am *constructing* a Confucian democratic vision animated by Zhu Xi's moral egalitarianism, i.e., all of us should pursue sagehood by self-cultivation. To do so, I need to address two historical challenges. First, I must confront Zhu Xi's personal monarchism. To dispel this monarchal preference, I show that there is an internal conflict between Zhu Xi's support of monarchism and his moral egalitarianism.[20] In short, it is impossible for a benevolent political hierarchy to realize Zhu Xi's moral egalitarianism *even in theory*. Pinpointing Zhu Xi's conflicting commitments to moral equality and political inequality, I leverage his

[19] In other words, my participatory theory of Confucian democracy can also be read as a Confucian ethics of democratic citizenship, which some scholars think is missing in the Confucian tradition (Dallmayr 2003, 207–9). It encourages Confucian citizens to take an active role in politics.

[20] Historically, Confucians like Zhu Xi often clashed with imperial authority because they thought that the emperors repeatedly failed to meet the Confucian standard of good governance (De Bary 1991, chaps. 4–6; Wood 1995, 130–31). In one of his memorials, for example, Zhu Xi criticizes the Song Emperor Xiaozong for his interests in Daoism and Buddhism and exhorts him to focus solely on Confucian governance (*wenji* 文集, 20:572). For more historical studies on Song Confucians' attempts to restrain imperial power, see Yu Ying-hshi (2004, 156–83), Zhang Hao (2006, 52), and Peter K. Bol (2008, 129–38).

egalitarian ethics against his personal monarchism (Section 4). I will demonstrate that Zhu Xi's support of monarchism is inconsistent with his *political* desire to implement his self-cultivation program for all because his self-cultivation program requires political participation. To truly realize the fundamental perfectionist purpose of government for Zhu Xi requires us to abandon his monarchism and embrace democracy. Simply put, although Zhu Xi himself does not envision democratic institutions, I think that his ethics contains an egalitarian spirit that conflicts with authoritarianism but resonates with democracy.

Second, popular participation in politics requires widespread linguistic proficiency in Classical Chinese, a precondition that did not exist in Zhu Xi's time. As a local official, Zhu Xi established or restored local academies to promote his own self-cultivation program and welcomed all willing students and scholars—including his intellectual opponents—to attend these academies (YL, 17:3481; also see Chaffee 1985; W. Chan 1987, 61–62; Bol 2008, 140–44, 231–32; Walton 1999, 40). Despite Zhu Xi's openness to welcoming all as Confucian learners, however, his academies remained elite institutions and failed to reach the vast majority of the Chinese people (Elman 1991, 91). This is because Zhu Xi did not promote any radical policy to ensure that children from the artisanal or peasant class could receive the basic classical training to attend an advanced institute such as his academies (Elman 1991, 90–92).

Although Zhu Xi does not promote universal education as a public policy, he does uphold it as a political ideal. In his preface to *Great Learning*, a Confucian text he singles out as *the* guidebook of self-cultivation, Zhu Xi expresses his admiration for the ancient times when the sages made elementary learning available to both male aristocrats and commoners: "Amidst the glory of the Three Dynasties, regulations were gradually perfected, and thereafter schools were found everywhere, from the imperial Palace and the state capitals on down to the villages. At the age of eight, all the male children, from the sons of kings and dukes to the sons of commoners, entered the school of elementary learning" (SS, 6:13; Gardner 1986, 79). For Zhu Xi, the curriculum of elementary learning includes literacy in Classical Chinese (SS: 6:13; YL, 14:273).[21] In other words, Zhu Xi does support the political ideal of universal education in theory (De Bary 1989, 191). Indeed, Zhu Xi praises another local official for devoting personal and state resources to establish a charity school for poor students from the official's lineage (including members of his extended family) and local community (Walton 1993, 265–66). Therefore, to realize the sagely principle of universal education in Zhu Xi's thought, we should foster a democratic conception of Confucian citizenship that promotes equal access to education. In short, this chapter (and the dissertation as a whole) may be called a progressive Confucian project because I believe that Zhu Xi's "ethical insight leads to progressive

[21] For more on his philosophy of education for young children, see his *The Essential Knowledge for Young Children* (*tongmeng xuzhi* 童蒙须知, 13: 369-92). There Zhu Xi further specifies his reading method.

political change, which in turn leads to greater realization of our potential for virtue" (Angle 2012, 18).

1.3 Confucian Moral Equality and the Universal Accessibility of Sagehood

Employing an ontology of coherence (*li* 理) and material force (*qi* 氣), Zhu Xi can help us explain why "evaluative inequalities among people do not disqualify the fundamental similarity among human beings" (S. Kim 2016, 211). For Zhu Xi, coherence, as the common essence of all human beings, grounds the moral identity between the sages and the non-sages, whereas material force accounts for the differences in moral orientation that exist between them at any given time. Coherence outweighs material force in moral evaluations because coherence is the highest Confucian good, the supreme normative standard with which we evaluate the purity of material force. Therefore, all persons' moral identity in coherence overrides their moral differences caused by material force. Let me present this argument in greater detail.

Following Cheng Yi (1033–1107), his main philosophical influence, Zhu Xi believes that human nature is constituted by coherence (*xing ji li* 性即理). The sages and the rest of us share the same moral essence by the virtue of our common humanity (YL, 14:196). This anthropological presumption pervades Zhu Xi's entire philosophy. A typical example can be found in Zhu Xi's commentary on *Mencius* 3A:1, where Mencius speaks with the Crown Prince of Teng about the moral identity between the sages and others. Zhu Xi writes:

> Originally, humans do not differ from Yao and Shun [two legendary sages] *even slightly*. However, many are drowned in their selfish desires (私欲, i.e., those human desires contrary to coherence) and lose their original nature. In contrast, Yao and Shun are never blinded by their selfish desires and can act in full accordance with their nature. Therefore, whenever Mencius speaks with the Crown Prince about the goodness of human nature, he always mentions Yao and Shun to substantiate his point. Mencius wants the prince to understand that the virtues of benevolence and appropriateness are not acquired by seeking them externally and *sagehood can be attained through learning*. [Mencius's teaching is to encourage the prince] never to slack off in exerting effort to pursue sagehood. (Emphasis added; SS, 6: 306)

What I want to highlight in this passage is that, for Zhu Xi, coherence represents Confucian moral perfection. It is the moral standard by which the sages live. When Zhu Xi asserts that the sages and all other human beings receive the same coherence from heaven, he is saying that humanity is morally perfect by nature. Thus, Confucian virtues are innate in human nature. Commenting on *Great Learning*'s famous opening line, "the way of great learning lies in illuminating one's luminous virtue," Zhu Xi writes: "Luminous virtue is what all humans receive from heaven; it is open, spiritual, and undarkened; and it contains the multitudinous manifestations of coherence to respond to the myriad affairs" (SS, 6:16; Gardner 1986, 88–89). In other words, all human beings are born sages who possess complete virtues and perfect knowledge to handle all situations in both human and natural worlds according to coherence. Like the sages, all of us have the full moral potential to attain sagehood.

If the sages and the non-sages are morally identical by birth, how can we explain their apparent moral differences? For Zhu Xi, moral differences across human beings are

caused not by different types of human nature but by different physio-psychological constitutions (YL, 14: 199). According to Zhu Xi, human beings (like everything else) are not composed only of coherence, which is perceptible by intellect but remains invisible, intangible, and abstract. We are also constituted by material force, which generates physical substances in which coherence manifests itself concretely (YL, 14: 194-6). Unfortunately, although coherence sets the moral standard of purity for material force, it does not control the inherently random operation of material force (YL, 14: 200). In reality, material force impedes the manifestations of coherence by endowing most persons with an impure physio-psychological constitution (YL, 14: 198). Having an impure physio-psychological constitution means that an individual's natural propensity towards moral perfection is impeded. Her mental and bodily motions often deviate from coherence, resulting in human flaws such as ignorance, selfish desires, and excessive emotions (Ching 1986, 275; Ivanhoe 2000, 47–48).[22]

[22] One may ask: "Since *qi* determines a person's physio-psychological constitution, can individuals with physical incoherence or disabilities still pursue sagehood?" To answer this question in detail is beyond the scope of the chapter, but I think that Zhu Xi's guiding principle is clear. That is, physio-psychological incoherence or disabilities are not obstacles to sagehood, as long as such deficiencies do not affect one's moral cognition of coherence. As Zhu Xi comments on *Mencius* 6A:3, "humans and [non-human living] beings are the same in merely knowing the appearances (*chunran* 蠢然) of cognition, perceptions, movements, and motions. However, humans and [non-human living] beings are different [because the former knows] the essence (*cuiran* 粹然) of benevolence, righteousness, ritual propriety, and wisdom, [whereas the latter does not]" (SS, 6: 396; also see YL, 14: 186). Zhu Xi would think that the only people who are unable to pursue sagehood are those with such an impure physio-psychological constitution that makes them permanently incapable of moral judgments.

Nevertheless, moral differences between the sages and non-sages do not constitute their moral inequality because, for Zhu Xi, these moral differences are random and do not constrain anyone's moral agency for self-cultivation. He believes that all impure physio-psychological constitutions should be transformed to embody coherence, the universal moral perfection inborn to all (SS, 6: 49; YL, 14: 198). As Zhu Xi exhorts his students, "an ordinary person should consider [pursuing] sagehood his own duty. Worldly people consider sagehood too lofty and themselves too unworthy. Therefore, they are unwilling to improve themselves…. However, the sage's natural essence is the same as that of ordinary people. If so, how could an ordinary person not consider [pursuing] sagehood his own duty?" (YL, 14:198, 280; C. Chen 1986, 50). Here we hear Zhu Xi's egalitarian conviction loud and clear: sagehood is accessible to *everyone* by self-cultivation because all human beings share the same inborn moral essence, coherence, with the sages (Angle 2009, 17–18; Back 2015, 267, 273).

1.4 Political Participation as Self-Cultivation

Based on his moral egalitarianism, Zhu Xi envisions a Confucian polity dedicated to allowing the flowering of each person's capacity for self-cultivation. He expresses this political vision in his commentary on *Great Learning*, one of the four Confucian classics (*sishu* 四書) he canonizes as the new foundation of Confucian learning. As Zhu Xi indicates in his preface to *Great Learning*,

> [In ancient times,] should there appear among the people one who is bright and wise and capable of fulfilling the full potential of his [moral] nature,

> heaven would certainly ordain him to act as the sovereign instructor to the multitudes (*yizhao zhi junshi* 億兆之君師), commissioning him to govern and teach them so that they can return to their nature (*yifu qixing* 以復其性). Thus, Fu Xi, Shen Nong, Huang Di, Yao, and Shun [all of whom were legendary sages] carried on for heaven and established the highest point of excellence; and these were the reasons for which the office of the Minister of Education and the post of the Director of Music were founded. (SS, 6:13; Gardner 1986, 77–9)

The last two sentences make it clear that the purpose of Confucian political authority is to help all persons return to their inborn coherence. The sage-king is the instructor not for the few but for *the many* ("the sovereign instructor to the multitudes"). His government establishes the offices of education and music to promote the ethical transformation of the populace. The reason why those sage-kings like Yao and Shun succeeded in completing their heavenly mission is precisely that they reconstructed the society to help all return to their own original nature, i.e., to pursue sagehood and attain ethical perfection.

Zhu Xi's preface is echoed by his commentary on the text of *Great Learning*. The text begins with the famous line that "the way of great learning lies in illuminating one's luminous virtue, in renewing the populace, and in coming to dwell in perfect goodness" (SS, 6: 16; Gardner, 1986: 88–89). For Zhu Xi, "coming to dwell in perfect goodness" is a critical ideal for both self-cultivation ("illuminating one's luminous virtue") and cultivating others ("renew the populace") (SS, 6: 16-7). It means that Confucians have a moral duty to help others reach perfect goodness *by political means*, i.e., making public

policies that compel the entire populace towards self-cultivation by state edicts and enforcement.[23] Zhu Xi thinks that, if one fails to renew the people, it can only mean either that one's own self-cultivation is still insufficient or that the political environment is too degenerate. The latter means that one should strive to change the political environment (YL, 14: 446). As Angle and Tiwald empathize, for Confucians like Zhu Xi, the ultimate political goal is to facilitate "the ethical transformation of people in the state, as well as their leaders" (Angle and Tiwald 2017, 183).[24]

Since politics serves ethics in Zhu Xi's political theory, we need to show that his ethics calls for popular participation in politics in order to draw a theory of Confucian democracy from Confucian Learning. Our first step is to undermine Zhu Xi's own monarchism. Zhu Xi's own elevation of *Great Learning* as a popular guidebook for self-cultivation, which he published along with the rest of the Four Books in 1190, already destabilized his perfectionist hierarchy. For Zhu Xi, *Great Learning* contains the complete, systemic program of Confucian self-cultivation (SS, 6:16; YL, 14:420-1). He credits

[23] To be sure, Zhu Xi has no problem with using coercive political means to push others towards self-cultivation. However, he also thinks that political coercion alone is insufficient for attaining sagehood. Answering a student's question on the "infamous" passage from *Analects* 8:9 that the populace can be made to follow a path but cannot be made to understand it (Lau 1979, 93), Zhu Xi emphasizes that the populace cannot be made to understand the Confucian path not because they are incapable but because mere bureaucratic management is insufficient for fulfilling the ideals of Confucian, which as we shall see requires the learner's independent agency (SS, 6: 134; YL, 15: 1303). The populace may be pushed to pursue sagehood but the ideal itself is attainable only by *self*-cultivation, i.e., initiated by one's own will and action.

[24] Thus, it is unsurprising that Zhu Xi also wants women to receive some education, even though he does not believe that they can attain sagehood. When asked by his student whether or not women should be educated in the *Classic of Filial Piety* and some simple passages in the *Analects*, Zhu Xi answers affirmatively and goes on to mention other prominent books on women's moral education (YL, 14: 271).

Confucius for composing the main text of *Great Learning* and making Confucian education *available to all* (SS, 6:13-4). Even those adults who have missed out on elementary learning can now pursue sagehood by studying great and elementary learning simultaneously (SS, 6:505–6; YL, 14:270; *The Essential Knowledge for Young Children*, 13:371;).[25] Thus, all learners can now pursue sagehood even *in the absence of* a benevolent sovereign instructor (as was in Confucius's own time) because the sage has passed down the complete method of self-cultivation in *Great Learning*. This means that Zhu Xi unwittingly transformed *Great Learning* into a democratic text for all (Bol 2008, 136; Gardner 1986, 58).

The rest of this section elucidates how Zhu Xi's self-cultivation program (based on his egalitarian reading of *Great Learning*) and his ideal of universal self-cultivation render political hierarchy incompatible with Confucianism and make democracy a more coherent implication. By doing so, this section sketches a participatory conception of Confucian citizenship that encourages all Confucians to see political participation as a moral good that can benefit their self-cultivation.

Recall that, for most of us, our inborn knowledge of coherence has been obscured by our impure physio-psychological constitutions. Since human nature and the world both have coherence as their normative standard, Zhu Xi exhorts us to seek ethical

[25] Historically, when Zhu Xi's philosophy was the ruling ideology of late imperial China, *Great Learning* was taught as an official textbook to students as young as seven (Gardner 2007, xiii).

knowledge externally by investigating the coherent patterns underlying the diverse affairs of the world (SS, 6: 167; YL, 14: 194). This is where Zhu Xi's famous precept—investigating things (*gewu* 格物) to extend one's knowledge (*zhizhi* 致知)—comes in. This precept originates in *Great Learning* as a minor point but Zhu Xi turns it into the foundation of Confucian self-cultivation (Gardner, 1986: 53–8). For Zhu Xi, Confucians should keep investigating various coherent patterns of the world until they have reached the full extent of knowledge and thus returned to their original moral nature. Considering how little the previous editions of *Great Learning* had said about investigating things, Zhu Xi inserts the following passage into his 1190 edition:

> What "the extension of knowledge lies in the investigation of things" means is that if we wish to extend our knowledge to the utmost, we must probe thoroughly the coherence in all things we encounter. It is because every person's intellect is possessed of the capacity for knowing and that everything in the world is possessed of coherence. But, to the extent that coherence is not yet thoroughly probed, human knowledge is not yet fully realized. Hence, *the first lesson in great learning* is to teach the student, whenever the student encounters anything in the world, to build upon what they have already known about coherence to probe further. This is to seek the utmost extent of knowledge. (Emphasis added; SS, 6:20; Gardner 1986, 104-5)

For Zhu Xi, the coherence of the diverse universe can be intelligible to us precisely because it is identical with our inborn coherence (YL, 14: 183-5). Thus, the most effective way for us to recover our inborn knowledge of coherence is to investigate the various affairs of the external world and understand their unique patterns of coherence (L. Chen 2000, 294–303). Since the light of our inborn coherence is never completely extinguished,

our epistemic pursuit should start by following our vague intuitions stimulated by external events, then proceed to see how those intuitions may be clarified in further investigations, and finally extend the acquired knowledge to other analogous circumstances (Angle and Tiwald 2017, 127–8). Zhu Xi's epistemic self-cultivation constitutes a hermeneutic circle in which the coherence of the human mind and that of external affairs are enlightening each other (Cheng 1986, 176). Therefore, investigating things is the foundation of Zhu Xi's self-cultivation program because it provides ethical guidance derived directly from coherence, the supreme moral standard itself.

Although Zhu Xi emphasizes investigating things as the foundation of Confucian Learning, he does not at all neglect the importance of practice. In fact, he does not enact a rigid sequence of learning, i.e., acquiring knowledge before practicing it. Rather, Zhu Xi thinks that knowledge and practice are intertwined with each other: "Knowledge and practice *constantly need each other* (*chang xiangxu* 常相須), just as the eyes cannot walk without the feet and the feet cannot see without the eyes. In terms of sequence, knowledge is prior, but in terms of weight, practice is heavier" (emphasis added; YL, 14: 298). Notice that Zhu Xi's sequence that knowledge comes before practice is *prefaced* by his emphasis that they are mutually dependent. Indeed, the analogy of walking is illuminating here. During walking, the exact relationship between the eyes and feet is not a rigidified sequence but a continuous interaction. When we walk, we use our eyes and feet *simultaneously*. Another conversation between Zhu Xi and a student of his can further

substantiate my exegesis on the knowledge-practice relationship in Zhu Xi's self-cultivation program. The student asks him: "Should we know first and then practice?" Zhu Xi responds with an emphatic negation:

> No! [If so,] then we would have upheld no moral commitment (*bu chishou* 不持守) before we could understand coherence (*mingli* 明理). Take Zeng Dian and [his son] Zengzi as two different examples. Zeng Dian understood coherence thoroughly but his practice (*xing* 行) failed to match his understanding. Zengzi, [on the other hand,] upheld moral commitments instantly (*hexia chishou* 合下持守), understood coherence gradually, and [eventually] reached the ultimate truth he learned from Confucius (*yiweichu* 一唯處; see *Analects* 4:15). (YL, 14: 298-9)

As we can see, Zhu Xi rejects his student's suggestion that there is a rigid sequence going from acquiring knowledge to taking actions. He does not think that an advanced understanding of moral principles is the precondition of moral actions. On the contrary, he believes that the very act of acquiring knowledge itself *requires practice*. That is why he praises Zengzi, a disciple of Confucius's who is slow in his moral apprehension but known for his commitments to moral actions (SS, 6: 96).

Therefore, Zhu Xi's conception of investigating things is more of a practical pursuit than a theoretical endeavor. Book learning is necessary but insufficient (YL, 14: 437-8). Even though Zhu Xi emphasizes reading Confucian classics as a matter of investigating things, he cautions learners never to lose their focus on practical matters (YL, 14:314, 319–20, 331–2). Excessive theoretical speculation would only exhaust their minds in a vain pursuit (YL, 14: 473). As Zhu Xi tells his pupil, "people often treat the truth as a lofty and

empty thing. *Great Learning* speaks not of probing coherence thoroughly but only of investigating things because it requires people to understand coherence in practical affairs. Only by doing so can their real essence can be seen. What the so-called 'real essence' means is that it can only be seen in practical affairs" (YL, 14:469; Qian 2010, 2:626–30). Zhu Xi then illustrates his point with an example of pushing a boat on land. He thinks that only after experiencing the inevitable failure of such an endeavor can the learner truly know the coherence of the boat as a water vehicle unsuitable for land travel (YL, 14:469; see also Angle and Tiwald 2017, 118, 129–30). Thus, Zhu Xi makes it clear that the true knowledge of coherence is gained only in concrete trials (for more examples, see YL, 14: 597, 15: 1024). Investigating things to acquire knowledge must be fulfilled in practical affairs. It is an experiential method, i.e., to know coherence by experiencing it in practice.[26]

For Zhu Xi, practice not only produces knowledge but also perfects it. He thinks that "just having the knowledge before practicing it means that one's knowledge is still shallow. Once one has personally experienced the specific field, one's knowledge of it will also become more illuminated, which will differ from how one experienced it before" (YL, 14:298). Answering a student's question on how to reach moral perfection, Zhu Xi responds: "Effort must be put into both knowledge and practice *simultaneously*. The more illuminated knowledge is, the more earnest practice will become; the more earnest

[26] It is no surprise that prominent Confucian scholars like Qian Mu (2010, Chap. 5), Chen Lai (2000, 302), and Cheng Chung-Ying (1991, 379) have all argued that Wang Yangming was wrong in criticizing Zhu Xi for being too theoretical and insufficiently practical.

practice is, the more illuminated knowledge will become. Neither should be abandoned…" (emphasis added; YL, 14:457). Here we see another hermeneutic circle in which knowledge and practice illuminate each other. Only by practice can one truly understand coherence and know how to act coherently in diverse situations. Simply put, Zhu Xi thinks that genuine knowledge is inseparable from practice because the former is both acquired and perfected in the latter (Le 2010, 172–75).

Now that we learned Zhu Xi's emphasis on the inseparability of knowledge and practice for self-cultivation, we must show that his experiential method also applies to politics. First, Zhu Xi knows that it is neither possible nor desirable for a finite human being to investigate everything to reach the full knowledge of coherence. In his commentary and conversations, Zhu Xi repeatedly invokes Cheng Yi to state that a Confucian learner's investigative journey is long and difficult but does not entail the need to investigate all thing (SS, 6: 525; YL, 14: 602-4). Although all things possess their own patterns of coherence that can be learned through investigation, Zhu Xi believes that "after exerting oneself in this [investigative] way *for a long time*, one will one day become enlightened and thoroughly understand coherence; then, the manifest and the hidden, the subtle and the obvious qualities of all things will be known. Then, my mind will be completely illuminated in its whole substance and vast operations. This is what is called 'things fully investigated'…" (emphasis added; SS, 6:20). In other words, a large accumulation of knowledge will lead to a fundamental change of one's moral cognition

of the world, which then enables one to see and follow coherence in all affairs (Chen, 2000: 306-7).

Since we cannot and should not investigate everything, we must have priorities. Although Zhu Xi never excludes propositional knowledge (e.g., the growth patterns of plants) from our investigative pursuits, he does make practical knowledge the priority of our investigations (Chen, 2000: 313-4).[27] One of such investigative priorities is politics. When one of his favorite students Chen Chun asks him how to respond to exceptional situations that evade regular rules (*yingbianchu* 應變處), Zhu Xi cautions him not to get ahead of himself by worrying about those exceptions (YL, 18:3703–5). Instead, the student should first investigate things broadly. Zhu Xi explicitly instructs Chen Chun that moral virtue alone is insufficient for dealing with the affairs under heaven (*ying tianxiashi* 應天下事). Zhu Xi tells Chen Chun to emulate King Wu of Zhou's (one of the ancient sages) broad political learning, study the *Rites of Zhou* (a classic containing the ancient designs of political institutions by another sage Duke Zhou), and investigate political matters

[27] Zhu Xi's emphasis on practical knowledge does not at all mean that he finds propositional knowledge unnecessary for truly understanding coherence. It simply means that, for Zhu Xi, to truly know something, we must know how to interact with it (practical knowledge), which requires us to know what the thing is (propositional knowledge). As Angle and Tiwald remind us, "for Zhu Xi, 'knowing' is a process concerned with coming to understand things, coming to be able to make distinctions (in practice) among things, as well as coming to have specific items of articulable knowledge" (Angle and Tiwald 2017, 118). Indeed, as scholars have noted, one reason that Zhu Xi stands out among Neo-Confucians is his inclusion of propositional knowledge about nature as a necessary part of understanding coherence (Qian 2002, 69; L. Chen 2000, 296; Y. S. Kim 2000, 6). Later, Wang Yangming explicitly excludes propositional knowledge from Confucian self-cultivation (Fang 2016, 29). For a more detailed analysis of Zhu Xi's intellectualism, cognitivism, and its relationship with his moral self-cultivation, see Yu (1986, 231) and Yung Sik Kim (2000, 23–24).

such as "musicology and calendar, criminal law, astronomy, geography, military affairs, bureaucracy, and so on" (YL, 18:3704–5). By the end of the conversation, Zhu Xi returns to the first teaching (*shoushuo* 首說) of *Great Learning*, i.e., investigation of things (also see YL, 18: 3764). He thinks that, once we have investigated these political affairs to the full extent of our knowledge, all our actions—including our political actions to govern the state and bring peace to the world (*guozhi tianxiaping* 國治天下平)—will be "spontaneous like floods overrunning all without obstacles and resistance" (YL, 18:3706).[28]

I have two more arguments to support my exegesis that Zhu Xi's investigative priorities include political affairs. First, for Zhu Xi, the investigation of things must start with careful studies of Confucian classics such as the *Analects* and *Mencius* (YL, 14: 314, 319–20, 331–32). Any glance at these preferred texts would reveal that they are filled with political discussions about concrete public policies (e.g., taxation, land distribution, and commerce). Zhu Xi also supplies plenty of commentaries on these political matters (e.g., see *Mencius* 1B:5, 3A:3, 3B:8; SS, 6: 266-8, 309-313, 329-330). Therefore, given Zhu Xi's emphasis on the inseparability of knowledge and practice, he certainly expects

[28] In the same conversation that encourages Chen Chun to investigate a wide variety of things, Zhu Xi invokes Confucius as a learning example who was born with sagely capacities but still studied many things and spoke of everything (YL, 18:3705). To be sure, although theoretical studies might be sufficient for a natural sage like Confucius because he has no impure physio-psychological constitution to transform, Zhu Xi thinks that the rest of us must exert hard effort in *practicing* our knowledge of coherence so that we can transform our impure physio-psychological constitutions (SS, 6:48-9). Therefore, in rare cases, we may encounter natural sages who need no political practice to attain moral perfection, but most of us who have impure physio-psychological constitutions still need political practice to acquire and perfect our political knowledge.

Confucians to acquire and perfect their political knowledge by reading the classics and applying the political lessons in practice, which are their first steps towards sgaehood.

Second, more importantly, the *Doctrine of the Mean*—the final book of the *Four Books* and the classic Zhu Xi regards as the culmination of Confucian learning—includes political matters as a part of Confucian self-cultivation. The textual evidence appears in Chapter 20 where Confucius advises Duke Ai of Lu on good governance.[29] Here Confucius lays out the coherence of governance, i.e., the duties of a political authority. Confucius instructs Duke Ai that "to govern the kingdom with its states and families is to follow nine standard principles (*jiujing* 九經): cultivating oneself; honoring the meritorious; being affectionate toward relatives; respecting the great ministers; empathizing with the whole body of officers; treating the common people with parental love; recruiting all classes of artisans; showing hospitality to travelers from afar; and embracing the lords of all the states" (SS, 6:46-7).[30] As *a critical ideal*—not as a description of political reality—Zhu Xi's commentary on Confucius's nine standard principles sketches at least a partial political agenda for Confucians. According to Zhu Xi (SS, 6:587–89), a Confucian polity is following coherence if 1) governmental officials feel trusted and

[29] Zhu Xi thinks that Confucius's advice is not just for rulers but also for all learners (SS, 6: 49; YL, 14: 419), which means that statecraft should also be a concern for all. As a prominent scholar on Zhu Xi's political thought reminds us, Zhu Xi wants everyone—not just the political elites—to be attentive to how well the polity is being governed (Schirokauer 1978, 130). For more on Zhu Xi's specific views of statecraft, see Schirokauer (1976, 1978), Zhang (1998, chaps. 2–3), Shu (2003, chap. 12), and Angle and Tiwald (2017, 201–6).

[30] All translations of the *Doctrine of the Mean* are adopted from W. Chan (1963, 105–6), Gardner (2007, 120–21), and Legge (1971, 408–13). They are modified according to my understanding of the original text.

devote themselves to public welfare, 2) the populace is exhorting one another to be virtuous, 3) the economy is diversified and booming, and 4) many immigrants are eager to enter the polity. Put differently, the coherence of politics at least demands Confucians to know how to improve a polity's bureaucracy, public culture, economy, and immigration policies.

For Zhu Xi, such political knowledge is gained by the same experiential method of self-cultivation, i.e., investigating things. Near the end of his lengthy advice to Duke Ai, Confucius states: "To govern the kingdom with its states and families is to follow nine standard principles. What propels action is one [nature] (*suoyi xingzhizhe, yiye* 所以行之者，一也)." Zhu Xi takes the word "one" to mean authenticity (*cheng* 诚), which for him designates the sagely state of moral perfection. An authentic person is a sage who has become identical with coherence, one's true self and inborn moral essence (SS, 6:48, 591–92; also see *tongshu zhu* 通書注, 13: 95–100). In other words, for Zhu Xi, political competency and moral perfection are mutually constitutive. To be an authentic sage *is* to govern a polity according to nine Confucian principles and vice versa. By the end of his advice, Confucius teaches Duke Ai how to attain this sagely state: "Study it broadly, inquire into it accurately, think over it carefully, discern it clearly, and practice it earnestly." According to Zhu Xi, Confucius is giving a catalogue of self-cultivation methods (SS, 6:48). He then interprets this catalogue according to his own theory of knowledge and practice. The first four items belong to the investigation of things (YL,

14:634). The last item is Confucius's exhortation for gaining practical proficiency (YL, 14:298). Zhu Xi's interpretation means that learning how to govern is a key part of attaining authenticity or sagehood by self-cultivation. It requires acquiring and perfecting political knowledge in practice. In other words, for Zhu Xi, political excellence is an essential part of sagehood and political practice is an integral activity of self-cultivation through which one's political skills are tested and honed.

Since Confucians must acquire and perfect political knowledge in practice, they should take governance into their own hands. As Zhu Xi puts it, "to study means that [one] blames no one for not dissecting or analyzing things for oneself. [Studying] entails that one must dig into it, put careful effort into it, and see it for oneself" (YL, 14:284). To give citizens equal political power is to ensure that they can have meaningful opportunities to study and participate in the process of making political decisions so that they can acquire and perfect their political knowledge in practice.[31] Therefore, even a benevolent dictator cannot realize Zhu Xi's self-cultivation program because such dictator necessarily takes away the populace's opportunity to "dig into [politics], put careful effort into it, and see it" for themselves. As this section has demonstrated, a Confucian study of politics *requires practice*. A participatory democracy is the only way to ensure that all can have the equal opportunity to pursue sagehood by self-cultivation.

[31] Here I am echoing Mou and Xu's point that political equality protects citizens' moral space for self-cultivation, though my conception of such moral space includes politics itself.

However, a practical-minded reader may worry that my democratic reconstruction of Zhu Xi's self-cultivation program is asking too much of ordinary citizens. First, sagehood is a very demanding ethical ideal. To think that everyday citizens can attain expertise in so many political matters such as bureaucracy and economy is to dream of an unrealistic prospect. Second, there are simply not enough governmental positions for everyone to acquire and improve their political knowledge in practice. Third, many citizens today have little knowledge about political matters or few incentives to acquire and improve their political knowledge. Therefore, letting poorly informed citizens participate in making political decisions would make everyone worse off.

My response to the first challenge is that Zhu Xi does not require one person to know all the technical details pertaining to political matters. When he tells his student Chen Chun to investigate political affairs, he also tells him that "even though we are unable to dive deeply into the complexities and subtleties of all political matters [such as bureaucracy and economy], we need to know their basic structures and key principles (*guimo dagai* 規模大概) so that [our understanding of] the truth (*daoli* 道理) is comprehensive and penetrating" (YL, 18:3705). In other words, Confucian learners are not required to attain expertise in all political matters. Rather, they are only encouraged to know the fundamentals of each political matter. To be sure, this teaching is still demanding but more likely to be realized than the impossible standard that one should

know all political matters down to their smallest details, which Zhu Xi certainly does not endorse.

Since the second and third criticisms could be made against all conceptions of participatory democracy, I can only respond to them briefly here. The second criticism asks how we can ensure that there will be enough opportunities for all citizens to participate, since there is only a limited number of governmental positions? To answer this question, let me make a conceptual distinction between political excellence and administrative competency. Political excellence indicates the ability to make informed political decisions for the common good. Administrative competency refers to technical expertise and the capacity of executing a political order. The modern state is a complex political organization whose daily operation requires a high level of administrative competency, which means that not everyone can be a qualified administrator. As we have seen, Zhu Xi does not think that to pursue sagehood requires us to attain administrative competency—that is, we do not have to know all technical details on all political matters.

However, as a political organization, the modern state needs normative directions, which requires political excellence. Confucius's nine standard principles of governance are normative guidelines, not technical workbooks. The model of Confucian citizenship is not a bureaucrat or technocrat who merely executes public policies but a sagely statesperson who understands Confucian political principles and helps constitute public policies according to them. For example, citizens do not have to know the technical details

of building a bridge. They can leave these technical matters to civil engineers. However, as potential sages, they will have to know the basic principles of civil engineering and those of related subjects so that they can know to what extent the proposed bridge can contribute to popular welfare. Thus, to cultivate themselves, Confucian learners only need to acquire and practice political knowledge necessary for them to excel at making informed political decisions. They do not need all the administrative skills necessary for implementing a public policy. Since self-cultivation needs only political excellence, not administrative competency, a limited number of governmental positions is not an obstacle for realizing the equal opportunity for all to pursue sagehood. As long as citizens can participate in the political decision-making process outside political administration, they do not have to hold governmental positions.

Third, even if citizens do not need administrative competency, it is still a challenge to enable them to make informed political decisions. Today's citizens have few incentives to improve their political knowledge. To solve this problem, however, our discussion will have to move beyond the central concern of this chapter, i.e., the issue whether my participatory theory of Confucian democracy is well-grounded in Zhu Xi's philosophy. This is not to say that I am dismissing this profoundly important question. Rather, I am suggesting that the foremost mission of this chapter is to propose a democratic theory based on Zhu Xi's philosophy. Only after the reader finds my democratic theory sufficiently compelling can we move on to deliberate together how to best achieve the

moral ideal of a participatory Confucian democracy in our time. One key theme of that deliberation would be how to incentivize citizens to study and participate in politics, which is a topic beyond the scope of this dissertation.

1.5 Conclusion

Engaging with Zhu Xi, a representative of orthodox Confucianism, we have arrived at a democratic understanding of Confucianism antithetical to the popular impression. According to Zhu Xi, nearly all of us are not yet sages and lack political knowledge. We should all be encouraged to acquire and perfect our political knowledge in political practice. Accordingly, democracy is more coherent to Zhu Xi's moral egalitarianism than any political hierarchy, for only political equality can enable all to study politics in practice and pursue sagehood effectively. Political hierarchies like monarchy or meritocracy, on the contrary, deprive the populace of the opportunity for exercising the equal capacity for self-cultivation by excluding them from political participation. Hence, *political hierarchy, not democracy, is a fundamental contradiction of Zhu Xi's moral ideals.* Confucians, at least those sympathetic to Zhu Xi's school, should not worry that embracing democracy, an idea new to the Confucian tradition, would dampen their ontological or ethical commitments. On the contrary, they should be confident that advocating for political equality only reflects their deepest moral conviction. Democracy, as I have shown, should be an integral part of the Confucian mission to "renew the populace," as *Great Learning* exhorts all Confucians to do.

Chapter Two

More than Good Executives: The Teaching Mission of the Confucian Meritorious

Emboldened by the rise of China's economic power, a meritocratic trend has surged in recent Confucian political theory. It seizes on Confucianism's traditional emphasis on talent and virtue as the key argument for a hierarchical meritocracy. For these critics of democracy, popular sovereignty means little more than the tyranny of the self-centered majority, which is either selfish, short-sighted, ignorant, or some mixture of these vices. Meritocrats laud the Confucian tradition as a superior, or at least equally viable, alternative to democracy because populist vices do not exist in Confucian meritocracy.

This chapter challenges this meritocratic critique of democracy from within the tradition of Confucian meritocracy. Drawing on Zhu Xi, one of the most influential Confucian meritocrats, I argue that the apparent dichotomy between democracy and meritocracy is not as stark as some think. For Zhu Xi, the purpose of Confucian meritocracy is to transform the populace ethically, which, given his integration of ethics and politics, should also compel the meritorious to *foster political excellence in the people*. Such an orientation toward transformation, I shall demonstrate, arises from two key pedagogical principles, i.e., universal inclusion and student participation, which are incompatible with the hierarchical, managerial conception of Confucian meritocracy. I think that a better and more accurate way of understanding Confucian meritocracy is to conceive the meritorious not merely as good executives but as the people's mentors

whose primary responsibility is to pass on the art of governance (among other Confucian virtues) to the populace.

The following is divided into four sections. The first section situates my argument within the scholarship on Confucian meritocracy. The second centers on the principle of universal inclusion, i.e., the Confucian meritorious must welcome all interested students, regardless of their given talents or moral achievements, and conceal no knowledge from anyone. The third section shows the importance of student participation in Zhu Xi's pedagogy, which demands that teachers customize learning programs for different students so that each can participate in learning at his or her own pace. The fourth section specifies why these two educational principles are applicable to political participation according to Zhu Xi's philosophy.

2.1 Re-Imagining Confucian Meritocracy

Within the camp of Confucian meritocracy, there are two conceptions of merit. The first group simply conceives merit as the talents and virtues necessary for effective governance without defining merit strictly according to a Confucian scheme (Bai 2013; J. Chan 2014; Bell 2016). These scholars' arguments converge on the same point: meritocracy is better than democracy in managing a polity and can produce more effective public policies (Bai 2013, 64; Bell 2016, 19; J. Chan 2014, 100–101). This point may be inspired by Confucianism but it "does not presuppose the social dominance of a 'Confucian' culture… and this regime design is meant to be universal…" (Bai 2013, 65).

The second group is more nationalistic. They conceptualize merit based on Confucian ethics to distinguish a Confucian polity from other forms of meritocracy (Jiang 2013a; Fan 2013). As Fan Ruiping puts it, the scholars from the first camp "attempt to build a Confucian meritocracy without relying on a genuine Confucian understanding of merit" (Fan 2013, 108). For nationalists like Fan, a genuine Confucian meritocracy must integrate "the substantive Confucian view of human well-being (especially its familist way of life) into the constitution as well as implement it through appropriate governmental institutions" (Fan 2013, 109). Despite their differences, the universalists and nationalists are united in their rejection of political equality. These meritocrats are all concerned with popular participation in politics, which they think tends to produce bad policy decisions and deprives a Confucian regime of its own political advantages against Western democracies.

However, these Confucian scholars' conception of the meritorious is inadequate because, for them, the role of the meritorious in a Confucian polity is equivalent to chief executives who make optimal policy decisions for their corporations. They neglect the other indispensable role the meritorious are expected to play in the Confucian tradition, i.e., exemplary mentors. Although Confucian meritocrats like Fan, Bai, and Chan emphasize the importance of (moral) education in their work, they usually recommend it as a matter of public policy. They rarely discuss how the meritorious should personally play the role of the Confucian teacher. This omission leaves the reader a distorted

impression of Confucian meritocracy that is nearly indistinguishable from technocracy or corporate management.

This chapter counters this misimpression of Confucian meritocracy. Following Zhu Xi's two pedagogical principles—universal inclusion and student participation—I highlight the Confucian meritorious' role as political mentors who must involve their students in political decision-making. Thus, my participatory view of Confucian meritocracy differs from the representative conception of Confucian democracy.[32] For these Confucian democrats, "meritocracy is realized when representatives employ their knowledge, experience, and skills to discern and implement optimal policies for the voter…"(S. Kim 2014a, 196). However, this selection model of representative democracy is similar to the conventional view of Confucian meritocracy because it still emphasizes what the political elites can and should do *for* their constituents, not what they can do *with* the people. As it will become clear, mere political representation, no matter how well intended and implemented, falls short of Zhu Xi's pedagogical principles that exhort the meritorious to welcome all interested students to participate in politics.

Put differently, this chapter seeks to reconcile Confucian meritocracy with the vision of participatory democracy that I sketched in Chapter 1. It responds to Confucian meritocrats' critique of democracy as "mob rule" by fleshing out how Zhu Xi aims to

[32] What comes closest to my position is perhaps Angle's discussion on the need for wider political participation (Angle 2012, 115). However, Angle never presents a systemic argument for the teaching role of the Confucian meritorious in helping the populace participate in politics.

transform the populace ethically. For Zhu Xi, such universal transformation cannot be done without respecting the people's own agency in Confucian learning. Therefore, the proper role for the meritorious is neither a paternalistic manager nor just a faithful representative. They should be exemplary mentors who guide the populace's pursuit of sagehood, which cannot succeed without cultivating political competency.

2.2 Universal Inclusion

As we have seen in Chapter 1, Zhu Xi believes that all individuals can and should pursue sagehood by self-cultivation. However, this ethical pursuit is never meant to be a solitary journey but needs the guidance of a meritorious mentor. Commenting on the opening passage of *Analects*, where Confucius exhorts learners to study diligently, Zhu Xi writes: "The nature of all human beings is good, but some are quicker than others to become awake to such goodness. Those who are slow in awakening must emulate the actions of those who are quick so that the slow learners can also illuminate their own [innate] goodness and return to their inborn [perfection]" (SS, 6:67). Zhu Xi's commentary is a paraphrase of *Mencius* 5A:7, where Mencius quotes Yi Yin, one of the wise ancient ministers, to indicate that "heaven, in producing the people, has given to those who first attain understanding the duty of awakening those who are slow to understand; and those who are the first to awaken the duty of awakening those who are slow to awaken" (Lau 2003, 108). Citing Cheng Hao, Zhu Xi explains that "to help others attain awakening does not mean that I give a portion of my possession to them. Rather, they already have such

coherence [i.e., humanity's inborn moral perfection] and I can only help them become awake to it" (SS, 6: 378). Zhu Xi's commentary makes it clear that there is no inherent moral inequality between the meritorious and those lacking merits. They are different merely because the timing of their moral awakening is different. It is the meritorious' duty to enable others to see their own goodness and it is the responsibility of those slow learners to model themselves after the meritorious.

As people's teachers, the meritorious should follow two pedagogical principles: universal inclusion and student participation. Let us start with the first principle. For Zhu Xi, the Confucian commitment to teaching is universal and incompatible with the inegalitarian assumption that the common people are too stupid to be taught. This universalistic belief requires the meritorious to see all people equally as potential students. As Confucius states, he never refuses to teach anyone who has given him "so much as a bundle of fried meat as a present" (Analects 7:7; Lau 1979, 86). In his in-text commentary, Zhu Xi further explains that this gift-giving act is an inexpensive ritual that expresses the student's reverence for the teacher:

> In ancient times, when people met each other for the first time, they would always present a gift as to be ritually respectful. Among gift choices, a bundle of fried meat is the cheapest option. *Since every living person has coherence in common, the sage's way of treating people is to desire everyone to enter goodness.* However, if the person does not know to approach the sage for learning, then it is ritually inappropriate for the sage to go teach him. Therefore, for anyone who approaches the sage with ritual propriety, the sage will always teach him without exception. (emphasis added; SS, 6: 122)

Zhu Xi's comments depict Confucius as a welcoming yet an unimposing teacher. The sage harbors the sincere intention to help all attain ethical perfection, but he is not despotic in his pedagogy. He patiently waits for others to show interests in Confucian learning first and then teaches them the Confucian way of self-cultivation. Once others decide to follow the Confucian way, the sage discriminates against no one and shares his knowledge with all who approach him.

Although Zhu Xi thinks that we should teach all interested students the art of self-cultivation, he recognizes that different students have different levels of moral achievements. Nevertheless, students' uneven moral progress is no excuse for the meritorious to reject anyone. As Confucius puts it, "in education there is no separation into categories"(Analects 15:39; Lau 1979, 137). Zhu Xi's in-text commentary states that "human nature is good in all instances. The differences of good and evil among people result from material force and habituation. For this reason, with the instruction of the superior person, all can return to their original goodness, and never again will there be the need to speak of the evil kind among people" (SS, 6: 210, 863; Gardner 2003, 50). In other words, despite Zhu Xi's awareness that many people fall short of sagely ideals, he is optimistic that, with the proper guidance of the meritorious, all individuals can attain ethical perfection. Since the very mission of the meritorious is to overcome uneven moral progress among individuals by turning all into sages, they should not reject anyone for moral deficiencies.

In fact, Zhu Xi's commitment to universal education runs so deep that he even reads Confucius's and Mencius's refusals to teach someone as teaching examples. Mencius says: "There is more than one way of instructing others. My disdain to instruct a man is itself one way of instructing him" (Mencius 6B:16; Lau 2003, 144). As Zhu Xi reads it, Mencius is suggesting that "if the experience of rejection stimulated the person to withdraw himself and engage in reflection and cultivation, then such rejection would also be a form of instruction for the person" (SS, 6: 423). Zhu Xi then applies this pedagogical method as an exegetical clue to explain why Confucius sometimes turns away students. According to *Analects* 17: 20, "Ru Bei [who studied with Confucius how to mourn for a deceased official properly] wanted to see Confucius. Confucius declined to see him on the grounds of illness. As soon as the servant conveying the message [of refusal] had stepped out of the door, Confucius took his lute and sang, making sure that he [i.e., Ru Bei] heard it" (Lau 1979, 146–47). In his in-text commentary, Zhu Xi cites Cheng Hao to indicate that this story is an instance of instruction by rejection. Zhu Xi explains that "Ru Bei must have done something offensive to Confucius at that time. Therefore, Confucius refused to see him on the grounds of illness. However, Confucius also let Ru Bei know that he was not ill, which was to ensure that Ru Bei would understand his rejection as an act of admonishment" (SS, 6: 224). Based on Zhu Xi's reading, Confucius was not actually turning the student away but merely wanted to motivate the student to examine his actions more carefully so that he could rectify his own errors.

Similarly, Mencius also once turned away Cao Jiao, who was seeking the way of sagehood. On this instance, Zhu Xi states that it is because Cao Jiao "did not serve his superiors with ritual propriety and lacked a determined heart-mind to seek the way. Therefore, Mencius merely instructed Cao Jiao to be filial and brotherly but did not allow him to study with him… This was also [an instance of] instruction by rejection" (SS, 6: 413). For Zhu Xi, Mencius's refusal was meant to provoke Cao Jiao to reflect on his ethical failings before he could receive further instructions. It was a drastic way to demand that the student master the basics of Confucian rites and *show more initiative* in Confucian learning. In Zhu Xi's view, there is no one who is unteachable. The meritorious must educate all who seek Confucian learning. Even if they sometimes have to turn down some student's request for instruction, they must do so with the sole purpose of enhancing the student's desire for further ethical improvement and future education.

The Confucian principle of universal inclusion entails not only welcoming all interested students but also the rejection of esotericism. The meritorious must not conceal knowledge from any students, just as Confucius never hides anything from any inquirers. The sage once said of himself: "Do I possess knowledge? No, I do not. A rustic put a question to me. It was like a complete blank. I kept hammering at the two sides of the question until I got everything out of it"(Analects 9:8; Lau 1979, 97). In his commentary, Zhu Xi takes "a complete blank" to be a description of the rustic's ignorance, not Confucius himself (SS, 6: 771). According to Zhu Xi, Confucius's self-professed ignorance

is only a sign of his humility (SS, 6: 141). Citing Cheng Yi, Zhu Xi states that self-deprecation is Confucius's pedagogy to prevent the less advanced students from feeling alienated by his sagely majesty. When teaching an ignorant person, Confucius always deprecates himself first and then exhausts all he knows in answering the student's question. Citing Yin Tun (1071-1142), another prominent Confucian scholar, Zhu Xi asserts that Confucius entertains no esoteric teaching:

> The words of the sage contain both what is lofty and basic. *It is so accessible that everyone can be taught such knowledge.* It is so perfect that even the sage himself cannot make it better. This is what it means by 'two sides.' Take for example [Confucius's] answers to Fan Chi's questions on benevolence and wisdom. The answers are exhaustive on both sides [i.e., accessible and perfect] without any remnants…. (emphasis added; SS, 6: 141)[33]

For Zhu Xi, the pedagogical principle of universal inclusion means that the entire Confucian learning, despite its profoundity, is completely accessible to the common people. Following Confucius's example, the meritorious should always ensure that their instructions are both exhaustive and understandable to all. In Zhu Xi's vision of Confucian meritocracy, there is no esoterism and all students are welcome to study with the meritorious.

[33] Fan Chi, a disciple of Confucius's, is not known for his mental acuity. Whenever Fan Chi asks Confucius anything, the sage always exhausts his knowledge in answering his questions (e.g., Analects 12:21-2, 13:4; SS, 6: 175-6, 180).

2.3 Student Participation

In addition to exhorting the meritorious to teach all who approach them, Zhu Xi's pedagogy requires the meritorious to respect students' agency and encourage their participation in learning. For Zhu Xi, the ethical ideal of sagehood is attainable only by self-cultivation (*xiushen* 修身). Here the term "self/*shen*" has two meanings. First, self-cultivation means that ethical perfection requires the individual's personal engagement. Second, it means that Confucian ethics centers on the perfection of the individual self.

Let me start with the first point. *Analects* 9:19 records Confucius's teaching on the individual's initiative in learning: "As in the case of making a mound, if before the very last basketful, I stop, then I shall have stopped. As in the case of leveling the ground, if, though tipping only one basketful, I am going forward, then I shall be making progress" (Lau 1979, 98–99). Zhu Xi comments:

> [What Confucius] says is that, if the mount is near completion but misses only one basketful, [the project is] stopped because I have stopped myself (*wu zizhi er* 吾自止耳). If there has been only one basketful tipped on the ground that needs leveling, [the project] is moved forward because I have made progress myself (*wu ziwang er* 吾自往耳). [The lesson here is that,] if the learner never ceases to strengthen himself (*ziqiang buxi* 自彊不息), then small accumulations will lead to large quantities. If [the learners] stops in the middle of the journey, then all he has accomplished will all be lost. *Whether to stop or to make progress is wholly up to me, not to others.* (emphasis added; SS, 6: 144-5).

Aside from the last sentence that emphasizes the individual's volition in self-cultivation, Zhu Xi repeats the same word for personal agency (*zi* 自) three times in the same passage.

His commentary indicates that self-cultivation is a personal undertaking and needs the individual's active commitment. It echoes two other instances where Confucius reproved two of his disciples, Zaiwo and Ranqiu, for their lack of initiative and commitment in self-cultivation (*Analects* 5:9, 6:12; SS, 6: 102, 113). Although Zhu Xi never advocates that the individual should be given unfettered freedom, he does think that the individual should be given a large autonomous space in which he can make free decisions regarding self-cultivation.

Indeed, for Zhu Xi, Confucian pedagogy cannot be effective without the learner's own active agency. In *Analects* 7:8, Confucius teaches: "I never enlighten anyone who has not been driven to distraction by trying to understand a difficulty or who has not got into a frenzy trying to put his ideas into words. When I have pointed out one corner of a square to anyone and he does not come back with the other three, I will not point it out to him a second time" (Lau 1979, 86). Here Zhu Xi invokes the Cheng brothers' commentaries as the authoritative interpretations. He first cites Cheng Yi's commentary that Confucius only enlightens those whose "sincere intentions are already apparent in their facial expressions and words. [Confucius] gives advice only after [the student] has become truly sincere [in trying to learn]. Once [Confucius] has given the advice, he always waits until the student has understood the lesson *by himself* before he will give new advice" (SS, 6: 122). Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi are clear that Confucian self-cultivation certainly requires a teacher's guidance. However, the teacher should not help those

students who lack initiative in self-cultivation. The teacher should always let students digest new knowledge by themselves and allow them to run into problems before he instructs them again. As Zhu Xi cites Cheng Hao to point out, the rationale for such pedagogy is that, unless the student has either become obsessed with trying to understand a difficult problem or go frenetic in trying to put his ideas into words, "he will be unable to gain secure and solid knowledge" (SS, 6: 122). According to Zhu Xi, Confucian self-cultivation requires individuals to demonstrate their own initiative and interest in Confucian learning first. Even with a meritorious teacher, students would not have progressed much if they were slacking off in personal efforts.

The second reason Zhu Xi respects the learner's agency is that the very aim of Confucian self-cultivation is the perfection of the self. *Analects* 14:24 records a famous teaching from Confucius that appears frequently in Zhu Xi's instructions to his own students. It says: "Men of antiquity studied to improve themselves (*weiji* 為己); men today study to impress others" (Lau 1979, 128). In his in-text commentary, Zhu Xi follows Cheng Yi's interpretation: "To improve oneself means the desire to obtain truth for oneself. To impress others means the desire to become known by others" (SS, 6: 194; also see SS, 6: 67 for a similar point). In other words, the individual must seek truth for his own wellbeing, not for chasing any external benefits such as fame. To Cheng Yi's commentary, Zhu Xi adds his own exegesis: "The sages and the worthy have discussed much about the gains and losses of different attitudes the learner can adopt [towards

learning]. However, *they have never said anything as incisive and essential as this teaching*. If the learner discerns this teaching [i.e., *Analects* 14:24] clearly and reflects on it daily, he has not been very ignorant of what he is following" (emphasis added; SS, 6: 194). As Zhu Xi tells his disciples, this individual choice between learning for oneself or studying for others should not be taken lightly because "it concerns a matter of life and death" (YL, 18: 3758).[34] Zhu Xi makes it clear that the most important question facing Confucian learners is why they want to learn, for it determines whether or not one is on the right ethical track. Confucians must examine their motives for learning daily to ensure that they are always studying for the right reason, i.e., to perfect themselves. Naturally, for an ethical project that centers on perfecting one's own self, the student's own agency must be respected and encouraged.

What balances the guidance of the meritorious with the student's own agency is a personalized learning program that enables individual students to study at their own pace. Such customization, which for Zhu Xi is the duty of the meritorious, lets students receive necessary guidance without trampling on their agency. Zhu Xi knows that different students have different starting levels when entering Confucian learning. As Confucius tells us, "you can tell those who are above average about the lofty, but not

[34] Throughout his conversations with students, Zhu Xi frequently employs the phrase "studying for oneself" to indicate the essence of Confucian learning. Any glance of *Master Zhu's Categorized Conversations* can reveal that the phrase pervades Zhu Xi's instructions to students. Zhu Xi was deeply disturbed by his time during which many pursued Confucian studies only to gain fame and profits.

those who are below average"(Analects 6:21; Lau 1979, 84). Zhu Xi turns this seemingly meritocrac saying into an egalitarian doctrine. In his in-text commentary, Zhu Xi cites Zhang Shi (1133-1180) as the authoritative interpretation of the passage. According to Zhang Shi,

> Although the sage's Dao contains no dichotomy between what is refined and what is coarse, his pedagogy surely focuses on teaching everyone according to their own natural abilities. The reason is that if those whose inborn constitution is below average were suddenly told about what is too lofty, they would not only fail to enter [Confucian learning] but also arrogantly overstep their levels and suffer from the defect of neglecting what is truly urgent for their self-cultivation. As such, they would only end up at the bottom level. Therefore, only telling students what they could reach at their own levels is how they could be encouraged to ask urgent questions and reflect on things at hand. Consequently, they can gradually progress to the lofty and far. (SS, 6: 115)

The passage is clear that Confucius does not set limits to what the average person or those below average can achieve ultimately. All can reach the lofty height of sagehood but some start at lower levels than others. Therefore, the meritorious should personalize their teaching for different students, enabling all individuals to pursuit sagehood at their own speed. To be hasty in teaching and learning is a recipe for regression, not progress. As Zhu Xi puts it, "those who teach others should instruct their students based on the latter's own progress, which is to ensure that the instructions are easy for the students to follow without the drawbacks of overstepping their own levels" (SS, 6: 115; also see SS, 6: 236). In other words, to have a personalized curriculum for each student is meant to optimize student participation in learning. Since the student's own agency is indispensable for

making progress in self-cultivation, a personalized learning program ensures that the student gets to participate effectively at every step of the process.

In his conversations with his students, Zhu Xi repeatedly emphasizes the importance of student participation in learning. He states that "studying the basics and reaching the lofty are not two separate undertakings. No one can reach the lofty by being told so. [We] must wait for the student to arrive there by himself" (YL, 15: 1151). "Reaching the lofty" is the phrase Confucius uses in *Analects* 14:24. In his commentary, Zhu Xi asserts that "to reach the lofty" means to comprehend coherence (SS, 6: 194). For him, "to reach the lofty" demands Confucian learners' personal engagements. According to *Mencius* 7A:5, many people "never understand their own practices, comprehend their own habits, or are aware of the path they follow during their entire life" (Lau 2003, 146). Zhu Xi tells his students that the exegetical emphasis here should be on "practices" and "habits," not on "understanding" or "comprehending," because people today are eager about comprehending Confucian learning but do so without any practice or habituation (YL, 16:1952). Zhu Xi's exegesis echoes another of Mencius's teachings that "a carpenter or a carriage-maker can pass on to another the rules of his craft, but he cannot make him skillful" (7B:5; Lau 2003, 158). In his in-text commentary, Zhu Xi cites Yin Tun to accentuate the necessity of the student's practical engagement with Confucian learning: "The rules of the craft are the measuring laws that can be taught. Skillfulness, on the other hand, depends on the learner. Even a great craftsman cannot help with it. This is because

the basics can be passed on through words, but to reach the lofty requires the awaking enlightenment of the heart-mind…" (SS, 6:445). As we can see, although Zhu Xi thinks that the guidance of the meritorious is necessary for students to progress in self-cultivation, their teaching programs should be neither uniform nor paternalistic. Rather, they must respect students' own learning paces so that the students can participate in their own learning efficaciously. In short, to truly digest Confucian learning, the student must put their knowledge into personal practice.

2.4 Political Learning

Is Zhu Xi's teaching ethics for the meritorious applicable to political learning? Confucian meritocrats would have no problem with our principles of universal inclusion and student participation, if they were applied only in ethical education. They just want to exclude these pedagogical principles from politics. However, in Zhu Xi's philosophical system, ethics and politics are inseparable. It entails more than the conventional impression of Confucianism as a moral tradition that builds politics upon ethics and selects the virtuous and talented for political power. More importantly for our purpose, Zhu Xi's integration of ethics and politics means that what is political and public is also ethical and personal. Political affairs are matters of self-cultivation and ethical progress itself requires political competency.

For Zhu Xi, self-cultivation is inherently political because communal wellbeing depends on the individual's own virtue. By collating his own edition of *Great Learning*,

Zhu Xi creates the famous eight-step program that starts with the individual and then branches out to the community:

> The ancients who wished to illuminate the luminous virtue throughout the world put the governance of the country first; wishing to govern their countries well, they first regulated their households; wishing to regulate their households, they first cultivated themselves; wishing to cultivate themselves, they first set their hearts upright; wishing to set their hearts upright, they first ensured the sincerity of their intentions; wishing to ensure the sincerity of their intentions, they first extended their knowledge to the utmost; and the extension of knowledge lies in the investigation of things…. (SS, 6:19; Gardner 1986, 91)

Note that the structure of this procession starts with political goals and ends with personal cultivation. In other words, for Zhu Xi, the ultimate goal of ethics is politics. As Zhu Xi writes in his in-text commentary, "to illuminate the luminous virtue throughout the world means to enable all throughout the world to illuminate their inborn luminous virtue." That is, individuals cultivate themselves to renew others, which, as Zhu Xi indicates in his preface to *Great Learning*, is the fundamental aim of government. No one can be exempt from this political task. As *Great Learning* teaches, "from the Son of Heaven on down to the commoners, all without exception should regard self-cultivation as the root" (SS, 6: 17; Gardner 1986, 94). For Zhu Xi, the political foundation of a good Confucian society is well-cultivated individuals (SS, 6: 513). His ethics serves his politics and vice versa.[35]

[35] See Yu for a historical argument of this reading (Yu 2004, 422–23).

However, making self-cultivation a political duty for both the Son of Heaven and commoners raises the typical objection in a hierarchal society. Should not politics be reserved only for the ruling elites? [36] Isn't the teaching of *Great Learning* encouraging all people to overstep their social roles by participating in politics (SS, 6: 513)? Zhu Xi is aware of this challenge. Responding to the question why politics should be an integral part of "the learning program that aims at self-perfection" (*weiji zhixue* 為己之學; SS, 6: 513), Zhu Xi appeals to humanity's common cosmological origin:

> Heaven's illuminating command is what all living beings receive in common, not just my private possession. Therefore, the heart-mind of the superior person (*junzi*) is open and impartial. When we see all under heaven from this perspective, there is nothing that my heart-mind should not love and no affair that does not fall under *the responsibilities of my office* (*zhi* 職). Even though one's positioning (*shi* 勢) is *the humble background of a common man*, one's duty does not exclude those matters that can turn one's ruler into Yao and Shun [i.e., two sage kings] and one's people into those of Yao and Shun. (emphasis added; SS, 6: 513)

For Zhu Xi, what matters to politics is not one's social positioning but one's mindset. If the individual intends to improve himself through self-cultivation and has adopted the heart-mind of *junzi*, he has a duty, not just a choice, to participate in politics. A person cannot be considered cultivated unless he helps his state govern in the sagely way. For Zhu Xi, ethics subsumes politics, not vice versa. Therefore, if universal inclusion and

[36] Chan develops an argument for a Confucian conception of moral autonomy based on the Confucian need to pursue the ethical good (J. Chan 2014, 154). However, his reading of Classical Confucians suggests that moral autonomy is reserved only for the elites (J. Chan 2014, 145), while my interpterion, which follows Zhu Xi, is egalitarian.

student participation are two pedagogical principles that guide the meritorious in helping with others' self-cultivation, they should also be applicable to the political realm. As Zhu Xi puts it, "if the learner sees the affairs of all under heaven and execute them as his own affairs according to the principles of self-improvement (*weiji* 為己), then military equipment, taxes, sacrificial vessel, and bureaucracy can all improve the self" (SS, 6: 514; also see SS, 6: 508). Thus, Zhu Xi makes politics accessible to all by grafting politics to self-cultivation. Politics is not a restricted area that only those possessing talents and virtues can enter but an activity that everyone must undertake to cultivate their talents and virtues.

Given his moral egalitarianism, Zhu Xi reads an apparently meritocratic *Analects* passage in a non-meritocratic way. Confucius (in)famously teaches that "the common people can be made to follow a path but not to understand it"(Analects 8:9; Lau 1979, 93). Following Cheng Yi, however, Zhu Xi rejects the interpretation that Confucius approves of obscurantist policies. Rather, Zhu Xi thinks that

> When a sage establishes the mission of education, *it is not that he does not desire all families and households to recognize and apprehend his teaching*. Rather, he is incapable of making the people understand the path but only capable of making them follow it. If [we say that] the sage did not make the people understand the path, then it would be no different from later generations' deceptive practices. How could it be the heart-mind of a sage?" (emphasis added, SS, 6: 134; also see YL, 15: 1303)

Cheng Yi's wording is not completely lucid, but his point is clear. That is, the sage does not simply want to ensure that the populace is well-governed, which could justify

political deceptions. Rather, the sage intends to make the populace understand the rationales undergirding all his public policies. But why is he incapable of making the populace understand his policy rationales? Answering a student's question, Zhu Xi clarifies the reason: "The sage can only make the populace fully filial to their parents and respectful of their elder brothers. Yet he has *no means to go door to door explaining to them* why one should be filial and why one should be respectful of their elder brothers" (YL, 15: 1303). According to Zhu Xi, therefore, the sage cannot help everyone understand his political reasoning not because he wants to conceal it from them but because he is unable to engage with the populace one by one. For Zhu Xi, the populace's lack of political understanding indicates a practical shortcoming on the part of the sage, not any inborn deficiency of the populace. In any case, this practical difficulty does not obscure Zhu Xi's egalitarian reading of the *Analects* passage that the sage desires *everyone* to understand politics.

For Zhu Xi, to overcome the practical limit of a sage's teaching capacity, a teaching network established by the meritorious is necessary. As he reminds us, studying with the sage personally is not the only way to receive proper guidance. Otherwise, Zhu Xi would not have regarded Mencius, who was not a sage and never studied with Confucius, as the authoritative transmitter of the Confucian way (SS, 6: 242-4).[37] For Zhu Xi, there are other ways to learn from the sages. Their inability to teach all does not necessarily deprive

[37] Mencius studied under Confucius's grandson Zisi.

the entire populace of the opportunity to learn the Confucian way. As Mencius points out, "a superior person teaches in five ways. The first is by a transforming influence like that of timely rain. The second is by helping the student realize his virtue to the full. The third is by helping him develop his talent. The fourth is by answering his questions. And the fifth is by setting an example those not in contact with him can emulate. These five are the ways in which a superior person teaches" (7A: 40; Lau 2003, 155). The first four methods require personal contact with the sages, but the last one does not. As Zhu Xi further explains in his in-text commentary, the last one is how Mencius and others got to learn the Confucian Dao:

> A person may be unable to be taught directly by a gentleman (及門受業). However, he hears the gentleman's Dao from others and in private takes it as the good way to cultivate himself. This is also the reach of the superior person's teaching, just like how Confucius taught Chen Kang and Mencius taught Yi Zhi. Mencius also said that "I did not get to be a disciple of Confucius's. I have learned indirectly from him through others." (emphasis added, SS, 6: 439-40; also see YL, 16: 1969)

Chen Kang and Yi Zhi were educated by Confucius and Mencius respectively (*Analects* 16:13; *Mencius* 3A:5). Neither, however, did so by any direct means. Chen Kang obtained his lessons from Confucius's son Boyu and Yi Zhi from Mencius's disciple Xu Pi. Zhu Xi's commentary suggests that the practical limit of an exemplary teacher's instructing capacity is overcome by a social network of Confucian teachers. Although no meritorious person can teach everyone by himself, his disciples can help promulgate the same Confucian ideas and thus extend his pedagogical reach. Through this teaching network,

many people, who otherwise would have no opportunity to study with the meritorious person face to face, can also receive the same valuable lessons in a personalized way. Therefore, to help the populace study politics under proper guidance, the meritorious should devote themselves to teaching and training other teachers.

Indeed, as a local official, Zhu Xi tried to build a robust civil network of moral education. In his depiction of the ancient golden age when the sages were the rulers, he writes that "amidst the glory of the tree dynasties, regulations were gradually perfected, and thereafter schools were found everywhere, from the Imperial Palace and the state capitals on down to the villages…. This is why in the heyday of antiquity good government flourished above and excellent customs prevailed below—it was a period never equaled by later generations" (SS, 6:13-14; Gardner 1986, 79–82). In Chapter 1, we have seen how Zhu Xi attempted to reenact such sagely governance by restoring or founding many local academies whose aim was to encourage students to focus less on the civil service examinations but more on moral self-cultivation. Although Zhu Xi operated these academies with state resources (e.g., funds and land) and applied for imperial recognition, he did not want the state to take control over these local academies. As the eminent Song historian Peter Bol points out, "what Zhu Xi had in mind was … an alternative [to the state schools] that would be controlled by Neo-Confucian teachers [like himself] and supported by local elites but able to tap the state's resources without becoming responsible for preparing students for the examinations" (Bol 2008, 232).

Perhaps what the Confucian meritorious today can learn from Zhu Xi is to construct a broad network of local academies by their own initiatives (e.g., building schools through crowdsourcing websites) and then ask the state to certify them. In the process of building these schools and through these schools, the meritorious can teach the local populations the Confucian character of the political life and how to participate in it effectively. The meritorious can first start with a few small schools in a few select regions (e.g., big cities) and then send the best students of these schools to other regions to build new ones. With time and sustained effort, they can create a network of Confucian teachers. This network does not have to replace the existing public education system but can supplement it with ethical programs that, in my view, include civic education.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter outlines two pedagogical principles for the teaching mission of Confucian meritorious, i.e., universal inclusion and student participation. I contend that the Confucian meritorious are by no means equivalent to the traditional Chinese bureaucracy or the contemporary technocracy. The primary role of the Confucian meritorious is much more than a paternalistic manager who merely imposes policies onto the populace. Rather, the meritorious must take on the role of Confucian teachers who strive to foster political excellence in the populace. This chapter shows that to be a Confucian teacher means that one should embrace all interested students as moral equals,

pass onto students all of one's knowledge at the pace suitable for them, and encourage students to participate in learning and practice their knowledge.

When the two pedagogical principles are applied to politics, our vision of a Confucian polity will be very different from the conventional, managerial conception of a Confucian meritocracy. Within the framework of Zhu Xi's philosophy, Confucian politics is not merely about making good public policies or producing material prosperity for the populace. Rather, the process of political decision-making itself can also become an educational arena in which the people are instructed by the meritorious not just to follow political orders but, much more importantly, to learn how to govern. This chapter has attempted to dissolve the prevailing dichotomy between democracy and meritocracy among Confucian scholars. Popular sovereignty is better realized when an instructive meritorious class is dedicated to spreading the art of governance to all.

Chapter Three

Social Harmony with Accountability: A Confucian Theory of Rights

Among the cross-cultural dialogues between Chinese and Western traditions, one persistent theme is the proper place of rights within Confucian ethics. Although the concept of rights entered the Chinese political vocabulary well over a century ago, the precise relationship between rights and Confucianism is still subject to intense debate. Over the past two decades, most scholars have opposed the integration of rights and Confucianism but other have also expressed support. In this chapter, I take the supporting stance. Specifically, I respond to a practical challenge faced by all supporters of Confucian rights, i.e., how to reconcile Confucianism, a relational ethical tradition, with the contentious and coercive implications of rights talk that tends to turn every dispute into a competition of individual interests. The common solution is to relegate rights to a reserved status either as a secondary resort for the fear of the contestatory nature of rights. Contrary to this common solution, this chapter considers the contestatory nature of rights an asset and argues that a robust rights consciousness can facilitate the Confucian pursuit of social harmony by holding accountable Confucian hierarchies in social relationships. Drawing on Zhu Xi, I argue that Confucians should embrace rights because, as a social practice of self-assertion, rights protect those occupying the inferior positions of Confucian hierarchies by rendering their superiors accountable and thus compelling them to adopt a more other-oriented mentality.

Therefore, conceived as an argument for accountability, my theory of Confucian rights promotes genuine social harmony by encouraging victims of injustice to contest abuses of power and assert the proper responsibilities of the social superiors.

Zhu Xi is a good source of Confucian rights because he can help us see why the pursuit of social harmony cannot be effective without the legal protection of individuals' legitimate self-interests. Although Zhu Xi is known not as a theorist of power but as a political moralist—that is, Confucians like him believe that good governance arises from ethical exemplarity, not accountability—he is not oblivious to the power dynamics inherent in Confucian social relationships. What I hope to show in this chapter is that, despite all his emphasis on virtue, Zhu Xi's political thought does not deny individuals the right to assert their legitimate self-interests by resorting to coercive enforcement by state power. Within this framework, we can construct a new Confucian perspective on rights, power, and accountability, which does not neglect the value of moral virtue and social harmony but promotes Confucian learning.

The following is divided into four sections. The first reviews the recent scholarship on rights and Confucianism and sketches my contribution. The second explains Zhu Xi's affirmation of legitimate self-interests. The third section demonstrates how Zhu Xi's support of individuals' moral standing to protect their self-interests can support resorting to coercive enforcement of one's rights. The final section illustrates why the practice of claiming rights, when properly grounded in Zhu Xi's political philosophy, benefits the

Confucian pursuit of social harmony by helping the populace learn how to be a good social superior in relational hierarchies.

3.1 Confucianism and Rights: An Uneasy Fit

In the past two decades, scholars have taken a variety of positions on the precise relationship between rights and Confucian ethics. Some contend that the language of rights is too individualistic for a communitarian tradition like Confucianism (Ihara 2004; Bell 2006; Ames 2011; Rosemont 2015). In contrast, scholars like Mou Zongsan and Xu Fuguan recognize that traditional Confucianism's overemphasis on the community resulted in its failure to protect legitimate individual interests (Xu 1979; Mou 2010; Kwok 1998, 90–91; Peerenboom 1998, 250–51; S. Kim 2015, 179–80). Accordingly, they identify some limited compatibility between Confucianism and a few individual rights, e.g., the right to basic material welfare and a limited right to free speech (D. B. Wong 2004; S. Kim 2014a, 63–70; Elstein 2016). Others are more optimistic, believing that Confucianism is compatible with the full spectrum of individual rights (Bloom 1998; De Bary 1998; Twiss 1998; Sim 2004, 2013).

There is a fourth position. These Confucians embrace rights only reluctantly. They all agree that rights are necessary for protecting legitimate individual interests in a Confucian society. Nevertheless, they worry that frequent invocations of rights would habituate individuals in a competitive and selfish mentality, which contradicts the Confucian emphasis on social harmony (Tiwald 2012, 250–51; Angle 2012, 84; J. Chan

2014, 126). In particular, they are worried how rights can disrupt familial relationships. To introduce a rights consciousness into Confucian ethics is to encourage individuals to "think of their interests as competitive with one another," disregarding the communal context (Tiwald 2012, 251). As Tiwald elaborates,

> By Confucian lights, members of the same communities should have a similar sense of trust and care, and they should share the presupposition that their concerns will converge with the concerns of other community members, at least on matters of importance. Even if there are some instances where rights-claiming does not reflect a breakdown in trust and care, it is enough for Confucians that they frequently do, and that the divisive ways of thinking that rights-claiming evokes will tend to grow on those who do it. (Tiwald 2012, 250)

As we can see, the reason why these Confucian scholars consider the practice of rights disruptive of Confucian social relationships is that they take the Confucian community to be one of "trust and care." In such a context, asserting one's individual interests is inappropriate because it will divide the community, signaling that everyone is out there for themselves, not for one another.

Although Confucians like Tiwald are right to be concerned with the individualistic implications of rights, their argument suffers two weaknesses. First, it is unclear why a strong awareness of one's self-interests is necessarily incompatible with other-regarding concerns. Such thinking presumes a zero-sum understanding of individual interests, which, as Section 2 shall demonstrate, is not how Zhu Xi conceptualizes legitimate self-interests. If individual interests, at least those legitimate ones, are not necessarily in competition with one another, then claiming one's legitimate interests will not necessarily

harm others or lead to social divisions. Second, power disparity pervades the Confucian community because its social relationships are structured around hierarchies, e.g., the parent-child relationship. In these unequal contexts, "a similar sense of trust and care" is inadequate for protecting those who occupy the inferior positions because it makes their welfare dependent only upon the power holders' good will. As we shall see in Sections 3 and 4, Zhu Xi knows that the superiors in Confucian hierarchies do not always have their subordinates' best interests in mind, which is why he thinks that state enforcement is necessary for holding the superiors accountable. Following Zhu Xi, this chapter demonstrates that accountability entailed by taking rights seriously is precisely what is needed for protecting individuals in Confucian social hierarchies, and that the integration of rights into Confucian ethics will not impede but promote the pursuit of social harmony.

3.2 Self-Interests in Zhu Xi's Ethics

To have a Confucian theory of rights, we first need to know that Confucian ethics affirms the legitimacy of individual interests. For Zhu Xi, the very first step of self-cultivation, the investigation of things or *gewu*, is to distinguish legitimate self-interests from the illegitimate ones. Refuting an ascetic reading of *gewu* that demands the learner to "resist the temptations of external things," Zhu Xi offers a forceful defense of legitimate individual interests, which is worth quoting at length. He says:

> "Heaven produces the teeming masses, and where there is a thing there is a norm" [This is a famous line from the *Book of Odes*]. Therefore, the relationships between things and the Dao have never been that of separation. The current argument that to know the ultimate Dao is to resist

> external thing [amounts to the claim that] eliminating the father-son relationship is to know what filial piety and affection are and separating the ruler from the minister is to know what benevolence and reverence are. How could such a claim be valid? Even if the claim were that the so-called external things only meant bad temptations, not the father-son or ruler-minister relationships, then no temptation from external things would be stronger than the desires to eat, drink, and have sex. Yet, [when we] probe these desires' origins, [we will certainly find that] they are also desires that humans should possess and cannot do without. Nevertheless, amid these desires, [we need to] discern the differences between those of heavenly coherence and those of selfish desires. We should not conflate one with the other even by the slightest extent. It is only because I merely encounter things and fail to be alert to the desires that propel my actions—i.e., fail to distinguish desires of heavenly coherence from those of selfishness—that I am unable to exert the effort of overcoming [selfish desires] and following [the heavenly ones]. Consequently, [I fall into] the temptations of external things, which can obscure the original state of heavenly coherence [inborn in all human beings]. If we today did not study things we encountered to seek their origins but merely loathed how things tempted us and wanted to resist and eliminate all desires, then we would have to close our mouths and empty our bellies so that we can eat and drink in a rightful way or eliminate the entire human race so that we can consummate the husband-wife relationship…. (SS, 6: 529)

The first two sentences state Zhu X's ontological principle that moral goodness always has concrete manifestations external to the individual. Therefore, we cannot cultivate ourselves by simply resisting external desires because social relationships like the father-son and ruler-minister relationships, which are foundational to Confucian ethics, are by definition anti-solipsistic. Indeed, even our seemingly self-centered desires such as eating, drinking, and sex are moral goods because they have their ontological origins in heavenly coherence. What concerns Zhu Xi is not that human beings have desires or interests but that they often are blind to the differences between heavenly desires and selfish ones.

Therefore, the first activity of Confucian self-cultivation is to investigate one's own desires that are being stimulated by external sources. Such ethical investigations are to help the learner discern coherence and avoid self-indulgence. After hearing a student say that nothing is more important for self-cultivation than limiting one's desires, Zhu Xi cautions him that "this is precisely where it gets tricky. We must investigate things to get it right. It would be wrong if we relied only on inhibiting desires" (YL, 14: 614). Zhu Xi's precaution, along with the last sentence of this lengthy quote, makes it clear that, for him, it is equally wrong to shut off all desires as to indulge in all desires. To shut off all desires is to destroy the human life with all its biological necessities and social relationships. Accordingly, to have a flourishing human life requires individuals to fulfill their legitimate desires, e.g., receiving proper treatments from their social superiors (affection from their fathers and benevolence from their rulers) and having rightful sensual enjoyments.

Indeed, Zhu Xi thinks that obtaining an accurate understanding of one's legitimate self-interests is not just for the person's own sake. Confucians must acquire such ethical knowledge so that their own minds can serve as the normative standard for interacting with others. According to Zhu Xi's edition, Chapter Ten of *Great Learning* teaches that the proper way of treating others is to follow the principle of the measuring square (*xuju* 絜矩):

> In dealing with subordinates, do not practice what you hate in your superiors; in serving superiors, do not practice what you hate in your subordinates. In leading those behind you, do not practice what you hate in those ahead of you; in following those ahead of you, do not practice what you hate in those behind you. In interacting with those on your left, do not practice what you hate in those on your right; in interacting with those on your right, do not practice what you hate in those on your left. This is what is called the principle of having the proper measure in one's own minds to measure the minds of others. (SS, 6: 24; Gardner 1986, 114)

The principle of the measuring square elaborates on Confucius's Golden Rule: do not impose on others what you do not wish for yourself (Gardner 1986, 114; also see Analects 12:2, 15:24). Zhu Xi gives two additional examples in his in-text commentary:

> If I do not wish my superior to treat me with no ritual prosperity, then I will for sure use this standard to measure the heart-mind of my inferior and dare not command my inferior with a lack of ritual prosperity. If I do not wish my inferior to be disloyal to me, then I will for sure use this standard to measure the heart-mind of my superior and dare not serve my superior with disloyalty. (SS, 6:24)

Embedded in the context of the *Great Learning* passage, Zhu Xi's examples indicate that the principle of measuring square is a role-based ethical guide. Individuals have different self-interests according to their different social roles. What remains the same, however, is that these role-based interests are universally applicable to all individuals because, as Zhu Xi tells his student, "there is not one of us who does not have someone above me and those below me" (YL, 14: 560).

Thus, to follow Zhu Xi's principle of the measuring square requires Confucians first to know their own role-based self-interests. As Zhu Xi instructs his student, "if I wish my children and grandchildren to be filial to me without my being filial to my parents or if I

wish my parents to be affectionate toward me without my being affectionate toward my children and grandchildren, then such behavior contradicts the principle of the measuring square because the boundaries [of my social relationships] are not upheld evenly" (YL, 14: 560). The reciprocal spirit in these relationships involves three parties: the Confucian learner, the person from whom the learner receives the treatment, and the person to whom the learner gives the treatment. Therefore, unless the individual understands his legitimate self-interest in the relationship where he is the receiver of benefits, he will be unable to be the proper giver in the other relationship. Accordingly, in Zhu Xi's role ethics, to serve others properly requires Confucians first to understand their own legitimate self-interests. As he puts it succinctly, "the standard of measurement is the heart-mind. Whatever is desired by my heart-mind is also what others desire" (YL, 14: 555). Or more plainly, "if I want ease and joy for myself, I should think that others also want ease and joy (YL, 14: 559).

To be sure, the heart-mind with which we measure others is not our selfish desires but ethically cultivated sentiments. To understand his own legitimate interests, the individual must follow Zhu Xi's self-cultivation program:

> It can also be said that, because things are investigated and knowledge perfected, the individual can penetrate the will of all under heaven and know that the heart-mind of tens of thousands is that of one person. Because the intentions are sincere and the heart-mind rectified, the individual can overcome his own selfishness and use his own heart-mind as that of tens of thousands…. (SS, 6: 540)

For Zhu Xi, unless one's understanding of self-interests has been enlightened by the investigation of things and one's heart-mind guided by coherence, what one likes or dislikes will not be necessarily rightful and thus cannot serve as the legitimate standard for all. As Zhu Xi puts it, "even though [an uncultivated person] strives to be impartial, his actions may still turn out to be selfish (SS, 6:541-2)." Hence, to treat others properly, Confucians must know their legitimate interests prescribed by heavenly coherence.

Indeed, the Confucian social order hinges upon the cultivated person upholding his rectified heart-mind as the standard of social interaction. In such a well-ordered society, all people will receive their fair share of responsibilities and benefits:

> those above, below, and around me and the boundaries between things and me will all receive their proper shares. They do not intrude or overstep into each other. If we inspect the places they occupy, it will reveal that their width and length are even and identical and [their spaces are] entirely foursquare without any excess or deficiency. This is what it means to measure with a squaring instrument. (SS, 6:540)

For Zhu Xi, the ideal Confucian society is not a community in which individuals must sacrifice their individual interests to others. Rather, Confucian self-cultivation ensures that no one's legitimate interests are harmed, and everyone gets his or her due according to his or her roles. A strong awareness of legitimate self-interests is not detrimental to social harmony but necessary for a well-ordered society. As Zhu Xi explains to his student,

> … Let us say [hypothetically] that I own a land of one *zhang* (丈, an ancient Chinese measuring unit), the neighbor on my left owns a land of one *zhang*, and the neighbor on my right owns a land of one *zhang*. If my left neighbor usurps five *chi* (尺, another ancient Chinese measuring unit smaller than

> *zhang*) of my land, he fails to abide by the correct measurement and *I must sue him* to take back the usurped area. If I usurp five *chi* of my right neighbor's land, I also fail to abide by the correct measurement and should return the usurped area to my right neighbor…. (emphasis added, YL, 14: 558)

Zhu Xi's illustrative example suggests that the Confucian pursuit of social harmony does not contradict but requires the protection of legitimate individual interests. It does not demand individuals to put up with those actions that undermine their legitimate self-interests. Instead, it encourages individuals to redress injustices by appealing to the state for help, since legitimate individual interests do not compete but cohere with one another to form a harmonious community.

3.3 State Enforcement and the Confucian Family

So far we have only alluded to Zhu Xi's support of individuals' moral standing to assert their legitimate self-interests. Let me demonstrate this point more thoroughly. The social practice of rights requires that 1) individuals can assert their legitimate self-interests by filing complaints against violators and 2) such complaints, if truthful, must be legally enforceable. This section shows that self-assertation and enforcement, two essential components of rights, are indeed affirmed in Zhu Xi's political philosophy. As we shall see, Zhu Xi's understanding of self-assertion and state enforcement already resembles a prototypical conception of rights.

Let us start with state enforcement. There is a famous *Analects* (2:3) passage on state enforcement where Confucius says: "Guide them by edicts, keep them in line with

punishments, and the common people will stay out of crime but will have no sense of shame. Guide them by virtue, keep them in line with the rites, and they will, besides having a sense of shame, reform themselves" (Lau 1979, 63). According to the popular reading, Confucius is seeing a dichotomy between state enforcement and ethical virtue (e.g., Fingarette 1972, 27–28). He is exhorting officials to choose ethical virtue *over* state enforcement as the only mode of governance.

Zhu Xi, however, interprets *Analects* 2:3 differently. Despite his constant emphasis on the political leader's ethical virtue, Zhu Xi reads *Analects* 2:3 not as a statement of dichotomy between enforcement and morality but as a teaching of their complementarity. In his in-text commentary, Zhu Xi explains:

> I think that edicts are tools of governance and punishments are the supportive means for governance. Virtue and rites are the foundations of governance and virtue the foundation of rites. These two methods [i.e., legal enforcement and ethical virtue] are complementary. *Although neither should be abandoned*, edits and punishments can only make the people stay away from crimes, whereas the effect of virtue and rites can make the people move towards goodness daily without any awareness of such an effect. Therefore, those who govern the people should not only rely on the branches [i.e., edicts and punishments] but also probe deeply the roots [i.e., virtue and rites]. (emphasis added, SS, 6:75)

There is no doubt that Zhu Xi desires governance by ethical virtue. The emphasis on virtue and rites should never be sidelined by any heavy reliance on edicts and punishments. However, such an emphasis does not entail that Confucian governance needs no coercive mechanism (Ho 2011, 186–90). As Zhu Xi explains to his student, the ruler should first try to transform the populace by "leading them with exemplarity.

[However,] people are born with different moral qualities. [The ruler's ethical exemplarity] affects different individuals differently. Therefore, we need a system of rites to ensure compliance [with Confucian ethics] …. If they still fail to comply with the rites, then punishments are unavoidable." In other words, Zhu Xi is realistic in his moral expectations. He knows that different individuals have different moral sensitivities and predispositions. Although virtue, rites, and legal punishments target different subsets of the populace, they all work to foster compliance with Confucian ethics. Zhu Xi's ideal of Confucian governance aims at the ethical transformation of the populace, but that ideal does not obscure his realism that virtue and rites alone will not necessarily achieve his ethical aim. As he asks his student rhetorically, "when the sages were governing the world, when had they ever abolished edicts and punishments?" (YL, 14: 804). In short, even though the coercive enforcement of Confucian ethics is only a branch (not a root) of Zhu Xi's political philosophy, it is indispensable and does not contradict the Confucian pursuit of social harmony.

Considering his view of state enforcement as a complementary tool to virtue politics, it is no surprise that Zhu Xi supports individuals' moral standing to resort to state enforcement for self-protection even within the family. Let me demonstrate this point with two legal cases he discusses with his students. A caveat: I select these cases not because I agree with Zhu Xi's patriarchal conception of marriage or his stereotypical view

of women (I do not) but because they highlight Zhu Xi's general support of vulnerable individuals' right to self-protection *even within a family*.

The first case is a complicated one regarding the annulment of a marriage. The situation was that a wife desired to leave her husband and return to her original family because he was too poor to support her. The local officials, however, were divided on how to render a verdict. This is a highly unusual case because, according to the Neo-Confucian ethics, the husband can dismiss the wife (with legitimate causes) but the wife cannot leave the husband under any condition. Zhu Xi's student is adamant that the moral principle of the husband-wife relationship requires the wife to stay with the husband even in dire poverty. Zhu Xi disagrees and says:

> Cases like this should not be viewed only from a one-sided perspective. If the husband were truly talentless and unable to nourish his wife and the wife were also unable to support herself, what else could we do? It seems that we should not impose grand moral principles [onto the wife] here. I only worry that there are ulterior reasons motivating the wife's desire to leave her husband, which should not be left uninvestigated. (YL, 17: 3467)

Zhu Xi's response is nuanced. Despite his last-sentence reiteration that the husband-wife relationship should not be broken easily without a compelling cause, Zhu Xi supports the wife's decision to leave her husband if there is truly no other alternative (e.g., the wife lacks self-supporting means) to stop the wife from starving to death while staying in the marriage. According to Zhu Xi's analysis, the wife has a relational right to her husband's material support and the husband has a relational right to the wife's marital commitment. However, the wife gains the legitimate right to leave the marriage, if the husband is

unable to fulfill his obligation to support the wife and the wife is incapable of self-support. Although the husband, as the superior party in Zhu Xi's patriarchal view of marriage, has a legitimate interest in demanding his wife's marital commitment, he has no right to her life. Therefore, Zhu Xi thinks that the state should protect the wife's legitimate self-interest in survival as a higher priority than the marital bond. It should enforce the wife's desire to leave marriage against the husband's wish if leaving her husband is the only way to help her survive. Certainly, the danger of starvation as an acceptable reason for marital separation is an extremely low bar. I do not at all think that Zhu Xi's patriarchal vision is humane for women. Rather, I believe that it is oppressive and should not be re-instated in our time. Nevertheless, the main point of this example concerns less with gender (in)equality. It only intends to show that Zhu Xi supports the state's coercive intervention to deter abuses within the family.

In another conversation, a student relays to Zhu Xi what he considers a difficult case regarding child abuse. In this case, the local official refused to hear a complaint against a father and stepmother by some of their children that they were being starved to death, because the official thought that children should not be suing their parents. The official did sympathize with the suffering children but felt that his hands were tied by Confucian ethics. Zhu Xi, however, thinks that this case is clear-cut and does not constitute a moral dilemma:

> [The local official's decision was] wrong. For cases like this, we should punish the offenders according to the state law. We must also find out the

> identity of the stepmother and admonish her. If she again estranges the sons of the former wife [from their father] and wishes for their death, we must exact severe punishments. (YL, 17: 3467)

Zhu Xi's response makes it clear that, if the parents deliberately refuse to fulfill their parenting obligation, they should be faced with state punishments. State officials should not be concerned with the violation of filial piety in these clear cases of parental abuses. For Zhu Xi, filial piety does not bind children to their parents' abusive desires. They can indeed appeal to the state for necessary protection against their parents. As we have seen, in this case and the annulment case, Zhu Xi sides with those who occupy the inferior roles against the power holders when the latter violated the former's legitimate interests. He envisions the state as an enforcer of justice to ensure that Confucian hierarchies do not oppress the inferiors but work to satisfy the duties stipulated by the coherence of that relationship.

3.4 Rights and Social Harmony

After demonstrating Zhu Xi's support of state enforcement and individuals' moral standing to contest injustices by appealing to the state, we must now confront the difficult challenge from contemporary scholars. That is, would not a robust rights consciousness lead to excessive litigation and disrupt social harmony? My response is three-fold. First, Zhu Xi wants the state to be an agent of justice who corrects wrongdoings *precisely by hearing litigations*. Second, Zhu Xi considers the reduction of litigations not an ethical problem of the people but a moral duty of the state officials. Third, perhaps most

importantly, individuals' rights to guard their own welfare facilitates the pursuit of genuine social harmony by holding Confucian hierarchies accountable. The first two responses mitigate the severity of the challenge by showing litigation as an indispensable part of Zhu Xi's political philosophy and hence that of orthodox Confucianism. The last response explains why rights are not harmful but beneficial to Confucian social harmony.

First, as Song historians remind us, the expectation for a competent state official in Zhu Xi's time was to process lawsuits efficiently and justly (McKnight 1992; X. Liu 2007, 55–61). Indeed, Zhu Xi laments that many officials of his time neglected their essential responsibility to hear litigation. As he states,

> Regardless of their ranks and status, many officials consider it an effective strategy to both avoid meeting their subordinates and constituents and refrain from active administration. They take this to be the way of suppressing litigations. When what is crooked and straight is laid out in front of them, they still refuse to recognize it, hoping that the populace will stop coming to them by themselves. *Yet, those who suffer an iniquitous wrong are deprived of places to plead their cases and can only bear their suffering by swallowing it*. Even if some litigation occurs, the involved parties will not hear anything for half a year or a whole year. Since no decision is forthcoming, the populace can do nothing but abandon their cases. Subsequently, officials think that there is no litigation to be heard. Such is our social custom. How grievous! How grievous! (emphasis added; YL, 17: 3521)

Here we see that Zhu Xi is not at all worried about the populace suing too frequently or being too competitive in claiming their self-interests. On the contrary, he is disturbed by the political norm that refusing to hear litigations is seen as an effective way of governance. In fact, Zhu Xi is particularly concerned about the suffering of the victims of

injustice. As Zhu Xi tells his students, "local states and prefectures are where the imperial court executes laws. Their duties are to protect the good people and restrain the bullies" (YL, 17: 3464). Following Zhang Zai, Zhu Xi emphasizes that to govern in the Confucian way is to advocate for "all under Heaven who are tired, crippled, exhausted, sick, brotherless, childless, widows or widowers" because Confucians ought to count as their own siblings "those who are helpless and have no one else to whom they can appeal" (YL, 17: 3464). In other words, Zhu Xi wants officials to be attentive to local injustices by hearing litigations with open arms. For him, unless the vulnerable can press their legal claims by resorting to the state, they lack protection from evil.

My first response, however, only stipulates how state officials should react to a litigious populace. Exhorting officials to hear litigations does not mean that Zhu Xi endorses litigiousness. For example, Zhu Xi once criticized a disciple of his for being too litigious (YL, 18: 3846). How can we prevent a robust rights consciousness, which is needed to defend one's legitimate self-interests, from breeding an overly litigious mentality? My second response answers this question.

For Zhu Xi, the responsibility of learning when to (or not) to invoke one's rights lies not with the populace but with the officials. Both *Analects* (12:13) and *Great Learning* (SS, 6: 20) contain a similar teaching against litigation. The passage records Confucius's saying that "in hearing litigation, I am no different from any other man. But if you insist on a difference, it is, perhaps, that I try to get the parties not to resort to litigation in the first

place" (Lau 1979, 115). Zhu Xi's commentary indicates that the Confucian ideal is indeed for the society to do away with litigations (SS, 6: 20, 173). However, he thinks that to attain such an ideal requires not repressing litigation but eliminating the underlying causes of injustice through the state official's ethical exemplarity.

Since Zhu Xi's commentary on *Analects* 12:13 essentially cites another two Confucian scholars to affirm the Confucian ideal of zero litigation,[38] we can focus on his commentary on *Great Learning*, where he specifies the means for achieving the ideal. After quoting Confucius's words, the original author of *Great Learning* (Zengzi, in Zhu Xi's view) adds his own explanation: "[The reason why the sage can eliminate litigation is that] *those whose accusations are baseless* will not be able to pour out all their lies—so greatly shall the people's will be kept in awe. This is called 'knowing the root'" (emphasis added; Gardner 1986, 103). As Zhu Xi further explains, the means for making those baseless litigations disappear is to keep the people's will in awe (YL, 14: 510). It requires the individual official's ethical exemplarity attained by his self-cultivation: "It seems that, once his inborn luminous virtue becomes unobscured, the official naturally becomes capable of awing into submission the people's will. Consequently, litigations will disappear of their own accord without ever being heard" (SS, 6:20; Gardner 1986, 103). For Zhu Xi, therefore, what awes the popular will and subsequently eliminates baseless litigations is not the

[38] Specifically, these scholars' words are "the sage does not take hearing litigations to be a difficult task [that needs to be tackled] but values the pursuit to make litigations disappear among the populace" (SS, 6: 173). The cited scholars are Fan Zuyu (1041–1098) and Yang Shi (1053–1135).

discouragement of the populace from asserting their legitimate self-interests but the shining light of the official's ethical exemplarity. Once the populace becomes virtuous, they certainly no longer need to sue one another without a just case because, as I have demonstrated, the ideal Confucian society is not a self-sacrificial one but a community in which all receive their legitimate shares from one another.

In his explanation to his student, Zhu Xi cites an example from the *Classic of Rites* to illustrate the transformative power of the official's ethical exemplarity. He says: "For example, there was a man of Cheng, who did not go into mourning on the death of his elder brother. Hearing, however, that Zigao [a disciple of Confucius's known for his moralistic conduct] was about to arrive [to become governor of the city,] he forthwith did so. When did Zigao ever hear the litigation? He simply had the ability to move and compel the people [to do the right thing]" (YL, 14: 510).[39] With the example of Zigao, Zhu Xi points to the importance of the individual official's ethical exemplarity in eliminating litigations. Note that, in Zhu Xi's use of the example, what prevents potential litigation from occurring is not any attempt to suppress it but the disappearance of underlying injustice. The elder brother's family no longer needed to file a lawsuit because the younger brother was moved by Zigao's ethical exemplarity to go into mourning. Such self-correction epitomizes Zhu Xi's commentary that "once my virtue has been luminous, the populace's virtue will renew itself" (SS, 6: 531). Therefore, to eliminate litigations

[39] This translation is adapted from Legge (1885)'s translation.

means to remove all causes of injustice with the official's ethical exemplarity. It does not mean that the populace should refrain from resorting to litigation when encountering injustice.

In fact, for Zhu Xi, even hearing baseless litigations is not entirely valueless because he wants the state official to take baseless lawsuits as additional opportunities for transforming the populace ethically. Zhu Xi once asked Li Xiuji, a student of his and a reputed official, about the latter's handling of litigations. Li complained that there were too many baseless cases. Zhu Xi responded by instructing him to hear these cases patiently:

> If you investigate the truth thoroughly with the concerned parties to help them distinguish what is right and straight from what is wrong and crooked, then litigations will naturally decrease. If you spurn litigations because there are too many of them and do not help the concerned parties make ethical distinctions, you will find these affairs increase further. (YL, 18: 3582)

Zhu Xi asks state officials not even to back away from baseless cases because these seemingly burdensome legal disputes are good opportunities for teaching the populace moral principles. This instruction echoes Zhu Xi's moral optimism that a virtuous official can attain the ideal of zero litigation by eliminating injustice. In Zhu Xi's philosophy of local governance, it is solely the state official's responsibility to educate the populace on the ethical difference between a legitimate complaint against injustice and a self-

indulgent pursuit of interests.[40] Victims of injustice should not worry that resorting to litigation will affect them in any negative way. When suing each other, the populace should expect to either have their injustices redressed or obtain valuable moral lessons from the local official.

Finally, after showing how Zhu Xi values litigation as a key means for the people to combat injustices and for the state to transform the populace ethically, we are now at the place to explain why a robust rights consciousness helps promote genuine social harmony by holding accountable the power holders in Confucian social relationships. Confucians like Zhu Xi never thought of politics in terms of rights or accountability. Nor do they offer any systematic analysis of power. However, it should be clear from my preceding analysis that Zhu Xi is well aware of potential abuses of power in social relationships. That is why, with all his emphasis on virtue and exemplarity, Zhu Xi supports individuals' moral standing to protect their legitimate self-interests by appealing to the state. He does not say that individuals' rights claims can function as a mechanism of accountability because he mostly writes from the perspective of the state and its officials. Nevertheless, for individuals who live under a Confucian regime, Zhu Xi's conceptualization of the state as an agent of justice operates as a practical check on power disparity within Confucian ethics.

[40] According to the Song historian Liu Xinjun (2007, 216–38), local officials in Zhu Xi's time did prosecute those professional "lawyers" who profited from encouraging baseless lawsuits. However, the standard was not to be so severe as to discourage the populace from reporting true injustices.

To be sure, contemporary Confucian political philosophers are aware of this need for accountability and make rights a second (but not the last) resort for conflict resolution (Angle 2009, 216–21). They think that victims of injustice can raise rights claims only after other non-confrontational solutions fail to work. Nevertheless, relegating the practice of rights to a secondary status underestimates its value to Confucian ethics. Recall that Zhu Xi's view of individual interests is always reciprocal. When I am in an inferior role, I should have a correct understanding of my legitimate self-interests with respect to that specific role. Only with such an understanding can I adequately fulfill my relational obligations when I am in a position of power. For example, my role as a child enables me to see a child's legitimate needs or rights, which are the parent's relational obligations. When I become a parent, I should respect my children's rights by fulfilling my relational obligations to them. Put differently, individuals in a Confucian society should discern their legitimate self-interests in their inferior roles so that they can strive to exercise their power rightfully when they are in the superior positions. Therefore, raising rights consciousness across the Confucian society reminds both the inferiors of their legitimate interests and the superiors of their accountability to those over whom they exercise power. Since Zhu Xi's ideal Confucian society requires the superiors to exercise power in the legitimate interests of the inferiors, the language of rights should have a primary place in public consciousness to signify a hierarchical society's deep commitment to the pursuit of genuine social harmony.

My accountability-based theory of rights also resonates with Zhu Xi's complementary view of morality and coercion. For Zhu Xi, state enforcement is the branch necessary for sagely governance whose root is the ruler's virtue and his implementation of Confucian rites. The branch and the root work together to achieve the ideal Confucian society. As Zhu Xi points out, state enforcement is no detriment to those who can easily become virtuous by learning from exemplary officials and rites, but it is necessary for those who fail to be moved by virtue or refuse to be regulated by rites. Similarly, a robust rights consciousness complements the state official's ethical exemplarity because it guides the virtuous to fulfill their relational obligations and deters the vicious from violating others' legitimate interests (SS, 6: 507-8). To all power holders in Confucian social relationships, rights can serve as a reminder that their exercise of power should benefit not themselves but others. Therefore, coerced or not, respecting others' rights is fully consistent with Zhu Xi's vision of a harmonious society where each person's legitimate self-interests are protected by the state.

At this point, the reader may wonder if my insistence on individual rights is an exception that proves the rule. The rule is that those in the inferior positions have essentially no right to contest hierarchical authority except in the cases of horrendous abuses like my previous examples. Such exceptions imply that the egalitarian nature of rights that encourages individuals to contest authority are in intension with the

hierarchical nature of Confucian social relationships that asks individuals to obey authority.

To ease this tension, let me again call attention to Zhu Xi's role ethics and his moral universalism. Zhu Xi defends the legitimacy of individual interests based on social roles. As we have seen, he instructs all Confucians to study the coherence underlying all social roles because they do not just play one social role for their entire life but can assume different roles in different social relationships. As Chapter 1 has pointed out, the pursuit of sagehood demands Confucians to be proficient at all their social roles. For example, a person should be a good child (an inferior) and a responsible parent (a superior). If a person suspects that the treatment she receives from her superior is questionable, which could mean a potential infringement of her legitimate interest, she should speak with her superior and ask for justifications. If her superior fails to resolve her concerns, she should have the freedom to appeal to the state for guidance and, if necessary, for enforcement. As we just saw, Zhu Xi encourages state officials to welcome these litigations because they can use them as teaching lessons to educate the populace on Confucian ethics.

All Confucian learners need an external authority to check for them whether their superiors are exercising their power in accordance with coherence because they need the knowledge to guide them when they assume the similar positions of power. For example, a child needs to know whether her parents are abusing her in any way so that she can avoid committing abuses against her own children. Consequently, the contestatory

process of claiming one's rights should not be limited only to horrendous abuses but be applicable to all possible acts that are contrary to coherence. Confucians must know clearly the *exact* responsibilities of all their social-superior roles so that they can play these roles perfectly for the sake of attaining sagehood. Therefore, Zhu Xi's call for all people to pursue sagehood and the perfectionist mission of the state should motivate all Confucian learners to raise rights claims not only for self-protection but also for self-cultivation. Confucians should contest all potential abuses of power not because they should overturn social hierarchies but because they need to learn how such hierarchies should be properly maintained. This healthy tension between the egalitarian nature of individual rights and the hierarchical nature of Confucian social relationships is necessary for the pursuit of genuine social harmony that does not trample on legitimate individual interests.[41]

3.5 Conclusion

In sum, this chapter demonstrates that a robust rights consciousness does not contradict genuine social harmony but helps us pursue it. Confucian ethics is hierarchal by nature. Although a hierarchal ethics is not intrinsically wrong, it is politically naïve to

[41] To be sure, I am not suggesting that the entire code of Confucian ethics be codified as enforceable rights because the state, as a political organization, has limited resources and cannot take care of every single dispute among individuals. However, how to best address this practical concern requires us to first understand the moral necessity of rights as a Confucian political language. Once we agree that rights, a self-assertive social practice, could facilitate the Confucian pursuit of social harmony, we can move onto more technical and practical legal discussions on how to best use rights in Confucian governance. One criterion is to focus on those rights that are most essential to an individual's self-cultivation.

think that its inherent power disparity can function well without any external checks. As a Confucian official, Zhu Xi is aware of the injustices caused by dysfunctional hierarchies. Since Zhu Xi affirms the legitimacy of individual interests and supports individuals' moral standing to protect themselves by resorting to state enforcement, it opens the possibility for us late-modern individuals to import rights, a Western political concept, into Confucian ethics without violating its philosophical integrity. In a hierarchical Confucian society, a robust rights consciousness enables individuals to contest injustices in the name of self-protection and reminds power holders that the Confucian ideal of social harmony is no mask or excuse for abuses of authority.

Chapter Four

Seeing Coherence Diversely:
A Confucian Theory of Pluralism

In December 2010, the state-run news agency Xinhua reported that in Qufu, Confucius's homeland, Christians were planning to build a church that would reach 136.8 feet high (55.4 feet higher than the Confucian Temple in the vicinity) and could accommodate more than 3,000 worshippers. This building plan provoked immediate and repeated objections from Confucians well into 2016 (Pu 2016). Ten prominent Confucian scholars wrote a public letter that was later endorsed by hundreds of other Confucians. The letter states: "To build a grand Christian church so close to Three Confucian Sites [i.e., the temple and cemetery of Confucius and his family mansion in Qufu] undoubtedly profanes the Holy Land of the Chinese culture, hurts the sentiments of Confucian believers, and contradicts the wishes of world-wide descendants of Emperors Yan and Huang" (Guo 2010). In a later interview, Jiang Qing, one of the signatories and a famous Confucian nationalist, says that "Confucianism does not accept the West's hypocritical theory of multiculturalism…. Confucianism represents the Chinese culture. As such, we say that Confucianism is superior to all other religions in today's China" (Jiang 2011). Jiang Qing's exclusionary attitude is common among Confucian scholars, most of whom envision a cultural and political hierarchy with Confucianism at the top. For them, if other traditions want a place in China, they must first bow to Confucianism's cultural and political superiority.

This chapter rejects this hierarchical vision of Confucian society and advocates a Confucian theory of pluralism that is anchored in Zhu Xi's moral universalism. My pluralist theory stipulates that, thanks to their inborn moral perfection, i.e., coherence, all human beings possess the same innate ability to recognize moral goodness. I argue that non-Confucian traditions are intrinsically valuable because non-Confucian practitioners, who are as capable of making sound moral judgments as Confucians by virtue of their humanity, have found moral truths in these traditions. In other words, non-Confucians embrace their own traditions because these non-Confucian traditions contain the manifestations of coherence that resonate with their practitioners' innate coherence. Accordingly, Confucians are morally obliged to learn from non-Confucian traditions because to attain sagehood requires Confucians to comprehend coherence fully, which means that they must understand how coherence manifests itself in non-Confucian ways. This does not mean that Confucians should try to reconfigure non-Confucian traditions according to the Confucian image. Rather, to see the non-Confucian manifestations of coherence as they truly are, Confucians must maintain an open mind in studying non-Confucian traditions so that they can appreciate the latter's perspectives on coherence and avoid the risk of misunderstanding the supreme good in Zhu Xi's ethics. Simply put, as manifestations of coherence, non-Confucian traditions are worthy of Confucians' *respect* and stand as valuable sources for them to *learn* a pluralist way of comprehending coherence.

The political upshot of my pluralist theory is that it allows the state to retain its Confucian identity while welcoming other traditions as non-Confucian manifestations of coherence, the Confucian good. The state is expected to play two roles in a pluralist Confucian society. First, to fulfill its perfectionist mission to increase Confucians' knowledge of coherence—a goal we have seen in Chapter 1—the state should endorse pluralism as a Confucian ideal and spread it, along with other Confucian values, among the populace. Second, the state should intervene in cross-cultural conflicts not as a champion of Confucianism but as an impartial facilitator of cross-cultural interactions. This role is to show the public the genuineness of the state's pluralist commitment and give Confucians more exposure to non-Confucian traditions. If the state's mediation attempt fails, it should set up a pluralist democratic committee (composed of those who are uninvolved in the conflict) to impose an enforceable resolution that that would attempt to provide fairness for all opposing sides.

The rest of the chapter is divided into four sections. Section 1 reviews the current literature on Confucianism's relationship with non-Confucian traditions and specifies my intervention. Section 2 explains why Zhu Xi's moral universalism obliges Confucians to respect and learn from non-Confucian traditions as a part of their self-cultivation. Section 3 demonstrates open-mindedness as the proper Confucian predisposition for cross-cultural learning. That is, although Confucians embrace their Confucian truth, coherence, as the universal good, they seek to appreciate other traditions' conceptions of moral

goodness not from a narrowly Confucian perspective but as defined by native practitioners themselves. Section 4 illustrates some political implications of my pluralist theory, particularly the dual roles of the state in promoting pluralism as a Confucian ideal and resolving cross-cultural conflicts.

4.1 Confucianism versus the Other

For many Confucian political theorists, Confucianism should reign as the cultural hegemon in China. Nationalists believe that China's political reforms should be carried out according to a Confucian scheme (Jiang 2013b, 71–96). For Confucian communitarians, non-Confucian groups, traditions, or identities are no obstacles to Confucianizing a society because the Confucian pursuit of harmony can easily integrate them into the Confucian moral system (Hall and Ames 1999, 193–96, 204–20; Rosemont 2015, 72–73, 94–98, 142–46; Tan 2003, 62, 75–88).[42] Put differently, nationalists deny the value of diversity, whereas communitarians want Confucians to dictate the terms of cultural integration (S. Kim 2014a, 111). Neither Confucian nationalists nor Confucian communitarians offer a genuinely pluralist vision.

[42] One exception is P. J. Ivanhoe, whose Confucian cosmopolitanism encourages Confucians to see practitioners of non-Confucian traditions as brothers and sisters. For Ivanhoe, Confucians should "devote considerable time and energy to understanding and appreciating as best as they can the values, ideals, and practices of their siblings" and strive to maintain the familial bond even when they disagree with one another (Ivanhoe 2014, 41–42). However, Ivanhoe does not cite any Confucian passage to support his pluralist interpretation that Confucian familism entails accommodating different beliefs. Indeed, Ivanhoe's familialism is indeterminate. It could be used to justify cultural oppression as well—that is, since we love one another as family, we should want the best for our deviant brothers and sisters by making them return to the best moral truth, i.e., Confucianism.

The need to respect pluralism, however, is not lost on Confucian liberals. Joseph Chan thinks that there are overlapping grounds between Confucianism and other traditions, which can enable Confucians to enforce Confucian values (e.g., fairness and mutual care) through the state without the need to invoke any Confucian comprehensive doctrine (J. Chan 2014, 199–204).[43] Another Rawlsian advocate for value pluralism is Sungmoon Kim. In contrast to Chan, Kim thinks that if Confucian values are invoked without a Confucian comprehensive doctrine, they can no longer be counted as *Confucian* values (S. Kim 2016, 47). Instead, Kim proposes Public Reason Confucianism. It means that, if a society remains saturated with "Confucian habits, mores, and moral sentiments, despite their subscriptions to various comprehensive doctrines" (S. Kim 2016, 88), both Confucian and non-Confucian citizens can appeal to distinctively Confucian reasons (its metaphysics, anthropology, and ethics) to justify perfectionist public policies to one another (S. Kim 2016, 93, 98–101).

To better illustrate Chan's and Kim's positions, let us consider a public policy that promotes filial piety by legally mandating that adult children spend a minimum amount of personal time with their aging parents each week.[44] Chan would say that this

[43] Though relying on a Rawlsian strategy, Chan's position is practically similar to that of Confucian communitarians because they both believe that different traditions contain enough overlapping grounds to be integrated together into a Confucian social order. However, Chan's position is less communitarian because he promotes only those overlapping values between Confucianism and other traditions whereas Confucian communitarians does not mind using Confucian values to correct what they see as deficiencies in other traditions, particularly in liberal individualism (Tu 2002; Rosemont 2015).

[44] A similar policy is already a law in China (E. Wong 2013).

Confucian policy could be justifiable in a pluralist society if Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, and other non-Confucian citizens would find this policy valuable according to their non-Confucian ethical codes. Kim, on the other hand, would suggest that this Confucian policy on filial piety would be acceptable, provided that most non-Confucian citizens in a Confucian society share the virtue of filial piety as a part of their common Confucian identity. Put differently, to respect value pluralism, Chan relies on the overlapping grounds between Confucianism and other traditions, whereas Kim reconceives Confucianism as an all-embracing political identity among followers of different traditions.

Although I am sympathetic to both Chan's and Kim's positions, I find their proposals to be insufficiently pluralistic because they lack a Confucian reason to see non-Confucian traditions as intrinsically valuable. Chan only endorses those moral values of other traditions that happen to overlap with Confucianism, while Kim relegates non-Confucian identities to a secondary status in politics by subsuming them under a common Confucian identity. What is problematic with both approaches is that they fail to celebrate non-Confucian traditions as worthy sources of learning for Confucians. They still implicitly uphold Confucian ethics as the only acceptable mode of moral reasoning in a pluralist society, which means that the only way to resolve cross-cultural conflicts is to appeal to the Confucian standard.

In the following, I sketch a Confucian theory of pluralism that asserts the intrinsic value of non-Confucian traditions and affirms the need for Confucians to respect and learn from non-Confucian traditions as a key part of their self-cultivation. My pluralist theory challenges nationalists and communitarians' monist vision of Confucianism by demonstrating how Confucians can be motivated by their own tradition to embrace pluralism. My theory can also supply a firmer Confucian foundation for pluralism than Chan's and Kim's Rawlsian proposals because it does not measure other traditions with a Confucian yardstick. Instead, my pluralist theory asks the state to promote pluralism—i.e., Confucians should respect and learn from other traditions—as a Confucian aspiration and create cross-cultural opportunities for Confucians and non-Confucians to interact with each other and construct a mutually agreeable way to co-exist.

4.2 A Confucian Call for Respecting and Learning from Non-Confucian Traditions

Historically, Confucianism was not known for its tolerance of other traditions. At its classical stage, Mencius proclaimed himself as a Confucian combatant against heretics (3B: 9; Lau 2003, 73). Following Mencius's call, Zhu Xi warned Confucians that the most dangerous heresy of his time was Buddhism (SS, 6: 332). At one point, he told his students that "those Confucians who do not refute heresies are like [those governors] who let the robbers roam at large without understanding the urgency to arrest them" (YL, 18:3963). Therefore, to Confucian pluralists, Zhu Xi would appear more like an obstacle than a source of inspiration.

Fortunately, just as there is an internal tension between Zhu Xi's moral egalitarianism and his personal monarchism, which I exploited in Chapter 1 to make a case for Confucian democracy, there is also an internal tension between Zhu Xi's moral universalism and his parochial conception of moral perfection. As we shall see, if we push Zhu Xi's universalist belief—all human beings are born with the same moral perfection—to its logical conclusion, Confucians will be faced with the genuine possibility that their ethics may not have exhausted the contents of human perfection and other traditions may contain different but intrinsically valuable ethical insights that are absent in Confucianism.

As we have seen in Chapter 1, Zhu Xi believes that all human beings are born with the complete virtues necessary for being a sage. The purpose of Confucian self-cultivation is to enhance the individual's moral capacity to follow these innate virtues in action. As Zhu Xi puts it in his preface to *Great Learning*:

> Since heaven first gave birth to the people down below, it has granted them all the same nature of benevolence, righteousness, ritual propriety, and wisdom. Yet their physio-psychological constitutions often prove unequal; so not all are able to know the composition of their natures and thus to preserve them whole. (SS, 6:13 Gardner 1986, 77)

The first sentence summarizes Mencius's teaching on human nature (2A:6, 6A:6, 7A:21). For Mencians like Zhu Xi, all human beings are naturally endowed with the same set of virtues. By birth, human beings have the same moral intuitions, i.e., how to be benevolent, righteous, ritually proper, and wise. However, since not all human beings have the same

pure physio-psychological constitution as the sages do, many of them do not exhibit the same virtues to the same sagely degree. That is, people with impure physio-psychological constitutions will have unbalanced desires that will lead them to exhibit self-centered, immoral dispositions, e.g., laziness, lust, and gluttony. For Zhu Xi, human beings' inborn luminous virtue (*mingde* 明德) "may be restrained by the endowed physio-psychological constitution or concealed by human desires, so at times it will become obscured. *Never, however, does its original luminosity cease*" (emphasis added; Gardner 1986, 89). In other words, no matter how impure human beings' physio-psychological constitutions are, they can never extinguish humanity's original moral goodness. As Zhu Xi emphasizes in his commentary on *Great Learning*,

> … the original luminosity of the [human] essence is received from heaven and it cannot be completely darkened. Therefore, even if one's mind has been blinded and eclipsed [by one's impure physio-psychological constitution] to the utmost, there are bound to be moments of moral awareness [occurring in one's mind]. Through these openings, [one] can clearly perceive the original essence [of human nature] (SS, 6:508).

In Zhu Xi's view, no human being is so impure as to be completely immoral. Even the most depraved understand what moral goodness is. They are just incapable of living a moral life because their heart-minds are too burdened by their impure physio-psychological bodies, which desire nothing but sensory pleasures (SS, 6:508). Yet, these immoral desires cannot completely shut out one's moral conscience, which will always provide windows of moral clarity to help imperfect human beings perceive moral intuitions stemming from their inborn moral perfection. In short, Zhu Xi's moral

optimism entails that, despite human beings' propensity to do evil, they can never lose their inborn ethical sensibilities.

Zhu Xi is morally optimistic because he believes that humanity's inborn moral perfection is a heavenly attribute, *not* a creation of socialization. As I have pointed out in Chapter 1, Confucian self-cultivation does not socialize individuals into moral habits but only allows humanity's inborn goodness to manifest itself. To illustrate humanity's inborn goodness, Mencius tells a now famous story regarding a child who is about to fall into a well:

> My reason for saying that no man is devoid of a heart-mind sensitive to the suffering of others is this. Suppose a man were, suddenly, to see a young child on the verge of falling into a well. He would certainly be moved to compassion, not because he wanted to get in the good graces of the parents, nor because he wished to win the praise of his fellow villagers or friends, nor yet because he disliked the cry of the child…. The heart-mind of compassion is the germ of benevolence; the heart-mind of shame, of righteousness; the heart-mind of courtesy and modesty, of ritual propriety; the heart-mind of right and wrong, of wisdom. Man has these four germs just as he has four limbs…. If a man is able to develop all these four germs that he possesses, it will be like a fire starting up or a spring coming through…. (2A:6; Lau 2003, 38–39)

For Mencius, a person could be motivated by social reasons to save the child (e.g., befriending the parents or obtaining good reputation), which Zhu Xi views as selfish desires (SS, 6: 289). However, Mencius thinks that the real reason why the person leaps to the child's aid is that his human nature makes him naturally compassionate. Humanity consists of such natural compassion and other moral intuitions, just as it is composed of four limbs. As Zhu Xi puts it, "as soon as the man sees the falling child, he immediately

gets this heart-mind [of compassion]. This compassionate heart-mind manifests itself at the sight [of suffering] and is not caused by" any social reasons (SS, 6:289). For Zhu Xi, we human beings are preordained by heaven to recognize instances of moral goodness like the urgent need to save a falling child.

If we read the Mencian passage by itself, it seems to suggest only a developmental view of human virtues. That is, moral intuitions like compassion are the seeds from which humanity's full virtues will grow.[45] Zhu Xi, however, interprets this passage differently. For him, compassion, shame, courtesy and modesty, and the sense of right and wrong are not the seeds of potential virtues but the sentimental manifestations of inborn virtues. These moral sentiments reveal the true nature of humanity, which, as Zhu Xi states, is composed of full virtues such as benevolence, righteousness, ritual propriety, and wisdom. In his in-text commentary, Zhu Xi writes: "Because of the manifestations of these emotions, the original state of human nature can be seen, as if there were things inside [a human person] but their traces were being exposed externally" (SS, 6:289-290). In other words, Zhu Xi takes an essentialist view of human nature. Humanity's natural capacity for exhibiting moral sentiments indicates not mere moral potentials in the sense of a seed but innate moral perfection. These moral sentiments are clear exhibitions of humanity's innate virtues.[46] For Zhu Xi, the spontaneous urge to save a falling child has nothing to

[45] For a defense of this interpretation, see Ivanhoe (2000, chap. 2).

[46] However, humanity's inborn moral perfection is not exhibited in all individuals to the same degree at all times because not all individuals have the same physio-psychological constitutions. A person with an

do with social habituation. It springs from the perfect human essence itself, which illustrates humanity's inborn ability to recognize moral goodness.

To be sure, Zhu Xi's moral optimism is monistic. He thinks that all human beings are born with the natural ability to recognize the *Confucian* moral standard. Such monistic universalism cannot ground any genuine vision of pluralism because different traditions have different moral standards. But Zhu Xi also offers some evidence that allows us to interpret his moral universalism in a more pluralist way. In order to expose it, we must start with Mencius's hedonist defense of moral universalism. When arguing for humanity's inborn moral commonality, Mencius appeals to what he takes to be human beings' common sensory experiences. As he says:

> … Now things of the same kind are all alike. Why should we have doubts when it comes to man? The sage and I are of the same kind. Thus Longzi (a prominent logician of Mencius's time) said, "When someone makes a shoe for a foot he has not seen, I am sure he will not produce a basket." All shoes are alike because all feet are alike. All palates show the same preferences in taste. Yi Ya was simply the man who discovered what would be pleasing to my palate before I did. Were the nature of taste to vary from man to man in the same way as horses and hounds differ from me in kind, then how does it come about that all palates in the world follow the preferences of Yi Ya? The fact that in taste the whole world looks to Yi Ya shows that all palates are alike. It is the same also with the ear. The fact that in sound the whole world looks to Shi Kuang shows that all ears are alike. It is the same also with the eye. The whole world appreciates the good looks of Zi Du; whoever does not is blind. Hence it is said: all palates have the same preferences in tastes; all ears in sound; all eyes in beauty. Should heart-minds prove to be an exception by possessing nothing in common? What is it, then, that is common to all heart-minds? Coherence and righteousness.

impure constitution will have excessive self-centered desires, which in turn prevent the person from acting morally even though he knows from his inborn human nature what constitutions a moral action.

> The sage was simply the man who discovered this common element in my heart-mind before I did. Thus, coherence and righteousness please my heart in the same way as meat pleases my palate. (6A:7; Lau 2003, 126–27)

To many of us, Mencius's generalizations are clearly false because we know that what is delicious, musical, and beautiful to one person or one group is not necessarily delicious, musical, or beautiful to another. Without any attempt to defend Mencius's generalizations, Zhu Xi affirms Mencius's point in his in-text commentary, i.e., the sages and the rest of us share the same moral nature, which is why the sages' ethical teachings are pleasing to us (SS, 6: 401). Thus, to the late-modern reader, Confucian moral psychology seems shallow and parochial because it makes very simplistic and monistic assumptions about the human mind. Mencius's comparison between moral goodness and meat is also very odd. After all, to have a meaningful moral experience requires a properly functioning moral conscience, whereas sensory pleasures can be experienced even without our moral faculty in operation.

I think that what both Mencius and Zhu Xi are emphasizing here is the strength of humanity's inborn capacity to recognize moral goodness, which is the same in both the sages and others. For Zhu Xi, at least, most of us may be unable to live a morally perfect life like the sages, just as not all of us can cook the most delicious meal or compose the most melodious music. However, thanks to our inborn moral perfection, we are natural connoisseurs in ethics. All human beings can recognize and appreciate an act of moral goodness whenever they encounter it. Such moral cognition is as intuitive and pleasing

to the human heart-mind as meat is to the human palate. According to Zhu Xi, this natural ability to recognize moral goodness is not limited to the sages. As Zhu Xi tells his students,

> There is no need to look at the lofty. Just look at what is in front of you and you will see righteousness and coherence everywhere, which *everyone* can recognize as the public standard. For example, if I return home hearing that someone has done good deeds, I will be joyous. If I hear that someone has done bad deeds, I will be thinking about the unhappiness [caused by those bad deeds]. [Take another instance.] If I hear that someone is being a good state official, I will be delighted. If I hear that the official did not do a good job, I will naturally be thinking of [him] as a bad official. It is not just my heart-mind evaluating things in this way. The heart-minds of all people do the same. This is because all human heart-minds have the same righteousness and coherence. They all desire goodness and hate evil. (emphasis added; YL, 16:1893-4)

Zhu Xi is clear that ordinary people, who are not yet sages, are just as capable of recognizing moral goodness as the sages. Recall that, for Zhu Xi, humanity's inborn moral light does not get extinguished even in the minds of the most depraved. Although ordinary people are prevented by their impure physio-psychological constitutions from exemplifying moral goodness personally, it does not inhibit their inborn ability to know that moral goodness is pleasant and moral evil is unpleasant to the human heart-mind.

Zhu Xi believes that a sage like Confucius would approve of his moral universalism. Mencius once cites Confucius's comment on a line from the *Book of Odes* to reinforce his hedonist defense of humanity's inborn moral goodness. As the line goes, "Heaven produces the teeming masses, / And where is a thing there is a norm. / The people hold on to their constant nature, / And are drawn to admirable virtue" (6A:6; Lau 2003, 126).

Confucius said: "The author of the poem must have had the knowledge of the Dao" (6A:6; Lau 2003, 126). In his in-text commentary on Confucius's words, Zhu Xi writes:

> Where is a thing there must be a norm. For example, the ears and eyes have the virtues of intelligent hearing and clear sight. The father-son relationship entails the heart-minds of affection and filial piety. [These natural norms] constitute the constant nature onto which the people hold, which is why there are no human sentiments that do not favor such admirable virtues. (SS, 6:399)

As we can see, Zhu Xi takes it to be the sage's teaching that the common people have the natural ability to recognize moral goodness. This universal ability is not a creation of socialization but stems from all human beings' inborn moral perfection. Following Mencius, Zhu Xi thinks that recognizing moral goodness is just as intuitive and pleasant as enjoying a delicious piece of meat. All human beings can do it easily.[47]

When applying Zhu Xi's moral universalism today, we immediately run into the problem of pluralism. How do we explain the great diversity of human traditions in light of Zhu Xi's moral universalism? Zhu Xi's personal answer is clear, i.e., all non-Confucian traditions "confuse the world, deceive the people, and obstruct the path of benevolence and righteousness [i.e., the way toward Confucian sagehood]" (SS, 6:14; Gardner 1986, 84). However, Zhu Xi's personal condemnation of non-Confucian traditions is in tension with his optimistic view of humanity's moral nature. As we have seen, Zhu Xi believes

[47] Zhu Xi understands that political power can blind the people's moral recognition. Although the people will certainly follow the virtuous rulers, popular mores can also become corrupt when the tyrants are in power (SS, 6:23; Gardner 1986, 111). Therefore, political equality, which is the central contention of Chapter 1, is essential for the people to be guided by their innate moral perfection without being misled by a political hierarchy.

that, thanks to their inborn moral perfection, ordinary people who are not yet sages can recognize moral goodness without difficulty. Therefore, if a non-Confucian tradition has been widely recognized as morally worthy in a given community, it seems unreasonable for Confucians to think that that non-Confucian tradition has no moral truth in it. Indeed, by invalidating these non-Confucian people's moral judgments, Confucians would be implying that non-Confucian people have been completely corrupted and lost their inborn ability to recognize moral goodness. This implication would severely undercut Zhu Xi's moral universalism. Instead of dampening Zhu Xi's moral optimism, Confucians can reinterpret Zhu Xi's faith in ordinary people's moral competence in a more expansive way. That is, like Confucians, non-Confucian people must have found moral truths in their own traditions.

If non-Confucian traditions can be deemed valuable from Zhu Xi's universalist perspective, then Confucians will have a moral obligation to learn from those traditions. This obligation stems from Zhu Xi's self-cultivation philosophy. From Chapter 1, we know that Zhu Xi takes the moral essence of humanity to be coherence, the cosmic source of all normative standards. Coherence is the ontological reason why both Confucians and non-Confucians are naturally capable of recognizing moral goodness. Therefore, those moral truths that non-Confucians find in their own traditions must also correspond to their innate coherence. Accordingly, Confucians are morally obliged to study and investigate non-Confucian traditions because they need to understand the coherence of

these traditions, i.e., why non-Confucians' innate coherence leads them to follow these traditions. As Zhu Xi states in his famous commentary on the Chapter Five of *Great Learning*, "every person's intellect is possessed of the capacity for knowing and everything in the world is possessed of coherence" (SS, 6:20; Gardner 1986, 104–5). To attain sagehood, Confucians "must probe thoroughly the coherence in *all things* [they] encounter" (emphasis added; SS, 6:20; Gardner 1986, 105).

Indeed, for Zhu Xi, the hallmark of a Confucian sage is his full comprehension of coherence. Once a person becomes a sage, "the manifest and the hidden, the subtle and the obvious qualities of all things will all be known [to him], and [his] mind, in its whole substance and vast operations, will be completely illuminated" (SS, 6:20; Gardner 1986, 105). In this pluralist era, Confucians likely have heard about other traditions in their community. To attain sagehood, therefore, Confucians must investigate non-Confucian traditions in their community to learn the patterns of coherence embedded in those traditions. Cross-cultural immersion thus enhances Confucians' understanding that all human beings share the same ethical sensibilities towards coherence, something which is not reified in a single tradition but reflected in diverse conceptions of moral perfection.

4.3 Seeing Coherence Diversely

Now that we have established the moral obligation for Confucians to learn from non-Confucian traditions, we need to clarify how Confucians should do it. Particularly, what is the proper Confucian predisposition for cross-cultural learning? According to the

preceding analysis, Confucians should realize that non-Confucians possess the same innate ability to recognize moral goodness because of their inborn moral perfection, i.e., coherence. When non-Confucians follow a non-Confucian tradition—provided that they are doing so consensually without external pressure or deception—it must be because the tradition contains moral truths that resonate with non-Confucians' innate coherence. These moral truths in non-Confucian traditions are valuable to their practitioners not because these truths correspond to Confucian ethics but because they are justified by these non-Confucian traditions' internal standards. For example, a Buddhist embraces Buddhism not because somehow Buddhism is similar to Confucianism but because Buddhism is intrinsically valuable and resonates with a Buddhist's inborn coherence. Therefore, Confucians must not be content with knowing the ethical code of another tradition. They must strive to understand the justificatory reasons (*suoyiran*, 所以然) behind the ethical code, which will require them to keep an open mind so that they can dive into another tradition's moral reasoning to see a non-Confucian tradition *as its practitioners see it*. Confucians should see coherence in diversity through their cross-cultural learning.

For Zhu Xi, to comprehend coherence requires Confucians to understand the justificatory reasons behind all things, which is the aim of Zhu Xi's investigative method (SS, 6:527-8). In 5A:7, Mencius cites the words of Yi Yin, a wise adviser to the sage king Tang: "Heaven, in producing the people, has given to those who first attain knowledge

the duty of awakening those who are slow in knowing; and to those who are the first to awaken the duty of awakening those who are slow to awaken" (Lau 2003, 108). In his commentary, Zhu Xi takes "knowledge" to mean "recognizing how things ought to be done" (*shi zhi suodangran*, 事之所當然) and "awakening" to mean "apprehending the justificatory reasons given by the underlying coherence" (*qi li zhi suoyiran*, 其理之所以然) (SS, 6:377-8). In other words, Zhu Xi thinks that, to comprehend coherence, Confucians must understand not only how things ought to be done but also why they should be done thusly. At another place (7A:5), Mencius makes a similar point that "the multitude are like this. They never understand what they practice or notice what they do repeatedly. Therefore, they are not aware of the Dao [underlying the path] they have followed all their lives" (Lau 2003, 146). In his in-text commentary, Zhu Xi writes:

> The following is why many people have followed a path all their lives without knowing the Dao underlying it [i.e., its coherence]. When they first start practicing it, they do not clearly know the things that ought to be done. When they have habituated themselves in it, they still cannot understand the justificatory reasons behind [those things that ought to be done]. (SS, 6:427)

In other words, Zhu Xi is clear that, to comprehend coherence, Confucians must take up the practice in which the coherence is embedded and then seek to understand why certain ethical actions are structured as such. As Zhu Xi instructs his students, it is insufficient to merely know that we should serve our parents with filial piety and our elder brothers with respect. We must know *why* we should treat them thusly (YL, 14:625). For Zhu Xi,

Confucian learners should know not only that heaven is lofty and the earth is deep but also why heaven is lofty and the earth is deep (YL, 14:625). He also compares the investigation of things with eating stone fruits. We must peel off a stone fruit's skin, eat its meat, and crack open its core to taste its kernel (YL, 14:627). We do not have to take Zhu Xi's example literally to see his point that, for the investigation of things to be exhaustive, Confucians must get into the heart of the investigated matter to see the full truth. Only with such exhaustive investigations can we know the full manifestations of coherence in all things, which include non-Confucian traditions.

Following Zhu Xi's investigative spirit, Confucians should learn the coherence embedded in other traditions by understanding both their ethical codes and the justificatory reasons behind those codes. Since non-Confucian traditions are valuable to their followers for non-Confucian reasons, Confucians must not let their own Confucian prejudices get in the way of understanding another tradition's moral reasoning. For example, Confucians will find that some monotheists also obey their parents. However, they do because they see it as a divine commandment, not because it is a Confucian norm. Even if Confucians sometimes find similar ethical contents in other traditions, they should consider these contents worthy of respect and studying *not* because of their similarity to Confucian ethics but because of the reasons internal to those non-Confucian traditions. Like Confucian ethics, these non-Confucian moral reasons also stem from coherence, the same cosmological truth for all human beings. If Confucians viewed non-

Confucian traditions through a rigidly Confucian lens, Confucians would risk losing the true sight of coherence in other traditions and consequently jeopardize their pursuit of sagehood.

Therefore, open-mindedness is the most important predisposition for Confucians to maintain in cross-cultural learning. It is not a quality alien to Confucian learning. Zhu Xi repeatedly exhorts his students to empty their own heart-minds before reading books. As he instructs, "to read the words requires [us] to empty our heart-minds. We must not have any pre-established personal opinions, which would soon lead to many mistakes…" (YL,14:335). Zhu Xi knows that, if we do not maintain an open mind, we will only project our own prejudices onto the readings: "Those opinions we have prior to reading the words probably only stem from our personal thoughts. It is said that the savage and harsh reader is slanted to see resoluteness and power in a book, whereas the gentle and charitable reader is slanted to see kindheartedness and generosity. What is not there in a book!" (YL, 14:341). Zhu Xi's instructions to his students reflect his deep concern about the dangers of eisegesis. He urges Confucians not to read themselves into the text but to try to see what the text has to say for itself.

Like investigating human affairs or hearing litigations, the correct way of reading books should to have a detective mindset, i.e., to be careful, attentive, and alert to any presupposed frameworks that may distort one's observations. As Zhu Xi teaches:

> To know another person's affairs, we must ask the other person. Nowadays some do not [exert the effort to] ask the person but only imagine affairs

> according to their own opinions, saying that it must be so. I once heard people say: "Generally speaking, those with a partial heart-mind are unable to read books." Looking at today's [state of affairs], [I think that] the saying is accurate…. (YL, 14:342)

In Zhu Xi's view, Confucian readers should always guard themselves against their own preoccupations. They should be like an impartial investigator who listens to the involved parties to retrieve unfiltered first-hand information. Elsewhere, Zhu Xi compares good reading practices to hearing litigations:

> [Reading books] is just like hearing litigations. If [the judge's] heart-mind had the predetermined intention to support B (*yi* 乙), then he would only look for A's (*jia* 甲) errors. If the predetermined intention were to support A, then he would only look for B's errors. Neither is as good as leaving aside both A's and B's claims so that one can view [the disputation] slowly, which is the only way to distinguish crookedness from straightness. Zhang Zai [a Confucian scholar whom Zhu Xi respects greatly] said: "[We should] wash away one's old views to let new meanings appear." This saying is quite right. If we do not first wash away our old views, where can we find new meanings? Today's scholars have two kinds of illness. One is their insistence on their personal opinions. The other is that they are possessed by an old view that was established earlier. Even though they want to break away from it, it still colors their judgments (YL, 14:342-3).

In this passage, Zhu Xi first warns against partiality because it blinds the judge to the truth. He then exhorts scholars to be vigilant against their own prejudices (either mere personal opinions or preestablished interpretations) because they will prevent new and presumably better readings of the texts from emerging. Although Zhu Xi is advocating good exegetical principles, his analogies (e.g., investigating human affairs and hearing litigations) indicate that he takes these principles as the guiding light for all kinds of

inquiries. In all cases, Zhu Xi wants Confucians to maintain their open-mindedness, defined as the unwavering search for the truth of the matter under question. Similarly, in their studies of non-Confucian traditions, Confucians must keep an open mind so that they can see the undistorted conceptions of moral goodness in other traditions, which are the manifestations of coherence.

In addition, to perfect their understanding of coherence's diverse manifestations in non-Confucian traditions, Confucians should practice the non-Confucian traditions they are studying. This requirement comes from Zhu Xi's general method of self-cultivation. In Chapter 1, I have demonstrated that, according to Zhu Xi's investigative method (*gewu* 格物), no knowledge is genuine unless it has been perfected in practice. Accordingly, the only way for Confucians to deepen their knowledge of another tradition is to immerse themselves in its practices. Whenever possible, Confucians should seek sustained interactions with non-Confucian communities and try to assimilate themselves to their non-Confucian ways of life. This practical requirement does not mean that Confucians should all become cultural anthropologists who take a sabbatical year to conduct field research. Rather, it means that Confucians should look to integrate non-Confucian elements into their moral self-cultivation. For example, they can move to a multiethnic neighborhood where their daily life can be filled with cross-cultural interactions. They can also use their spare time to participate in other traditions' services of worship and cultural events. As long as they are attentive, Confucians can find many practical

opportunities of cross-cultural learning in our pluralist age, which will give them a fuller understanding of coherence in non-Confucian traditions.

The foregoing line of interpretation should lead Confucian nationalists to reconsider their claim that Confucianism ought to be the dominating tradition in China and other historically Confucian societies. According to my pluralist reading of Zhu Xi's moral universalism, Confucianism can no longer claim itself to be the universal normative standard. Instead, Confucians should admit that their tradition is only a particular and local manifestation of coherence.[48] Note that such awareness of Confucianism's own particularity stems *internally* from my reconstruction of Zhu Xi's philosophical anthropology. Human beings are all alike across traditions because they possess the same inborn moral perfection (i.e., coherence) that enables them to recognize moral goodness. This core belief does not necessarily entail, however, that all human beings will end up in developing or endorsing the exact same tradition. Given the existing variety of human traditions, Confucians should be aware that coherence can define moral perfection pluralistically. The diverse definitions of moral perfection entail not overturning Zhu Xi's version of Confucian moral perfection but expanding the moral vision of his coherence-centered ontology. Confucians need to realize that, although Zhu Xi's ethics gives a

[48] This inherent plurality of coherence should not surprise Confucians. As we have seen in Chapter 1, Zhu Xi believes that, although coherence is the singular source of normativity in the cosmos, its manifestations are diverse (*liyi fenshu* 理一分殊). It is plausible that non-Confucian traditions are coherence's moral instructions for people in non-Confucian regions.

valuable definition of human perfection, so do other ethical traditions. Therefore, when Confucians investigate other traditions to learn more about coherence, they should be as open-minded as possible. Open-mindedness ensures that other traditions can define their own moral goodness and allows Confucians to see coherence in its diverse manifestations.[49]

To be sure, my Confucian theory of pluralism does privilege Zhu Xi's Confucianism as its normative perspective. For Confucians to be able to respect and learn from non-Confucian traditions, these traditions will have to be "re-described" through a Confucian vocabulary. Such re-description is inevitable because there is no initial "view from nowhere" and one must always start from within some tradition. For example, Confucians do not believe in the Christian God and deny the kind of ontological reality Christians attribute to their God. However, as we have seen, such denial should not prevent Confucians from respecting and learning from Christianity. Seeing the Christian tradition as another manifestation of coherence (instead of God's revelation), Confucians should let Christians worship their God freely both in words and deeds, provided that

[49] To ask Confucians to respect and learn from non-Confucian traditions does not mean that they must accept all elements of a given tradition uncritically. It simply demands Confucians to make immanent critiques or suggestions within the tradition under question. Confucians must first learn to see why a non-Confucian tradition is good according to its internal criteria. Then, instead of evaluating it with a Confucian standard, which amounts to denying the unique manifestation of coherence in that tradition, Confucians should construct critical arguments according to the normative standards provided by the tradition itself. The persuasiveness of Confucians' critiques against another tradition will depend on how well they have understood the tradition. As Zhang Longxi reminds us, the greatest danger of cross-cultural learning is to see one's own image in the other and attack another tradition for the flaws that exist only in one's own imagination (Longxi Zhang 1988, 127).

those Christian activities do not interfere with other traditions' autonomy. Certainly, no matter how pluralist my perspective is, it is rooted in Confucian ontology and ethics, which are indeed incommensurable with Christians' or any other tradition's ontology and ethics (MacIntyre 1991, 199–22).

4.4 Political Implications

So far, we have only seen the moral reasons for Confucians to respect and learn from non-Confucian traditions for the sake of their self-cultivation. What are the political ramifications for the state, i.e., how political power is expected to operate in regulating the relationship between Confucianism and other traditions? To provide a full answer to this complex question is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, we can use the cross-cultural controversy surrounding the siting of the Christian church as a starting point to discuss the dual roles of the state as a promoter of pluralism among other Confucian ideals and as a peace-making host of cross-cultural interactions between Confucians and non-Confucians. A democratic procedure operated by those outside the conflict will be activated to resolve cross-cultural conflicts when the state's meditation attempt fails.

Recall from Chapter 1 that the fundamental duty of the Confucian state is to help the populace achieve Confucian moral perfection. For Zhu Xi, this duty justifies the state's active interventions in the society both as a promulgator of Confucian values and a moral enforcer. For example, Zhu Xi thinks that the state should create and maintain a public education system that teaches the populace how to conduct their social relationships in

accordance with Confucian ethics (*Mencius* 3A:3). As Chapter 3 has pointed out, Zhu Xi takes both state edicts and punishments to be political means for imparting Confucian morality into the populace (SS, 6:75). As a local official, Zhu Xi employed state power to rectify local mores whenever he deemed it to be necessary (Meng 2003, chap. 4). For instance, when he was the governor of Zhangzhou (漳州) in South Eastern China, he abolished a local Buddhist convent and admonished Buddhist nuns to get married because he believed that the husband-wife relationship was a pillar of the Confucian social order and adult women living as singles was immoral (Meng 2003, 305). As we can see, Zhu Xi's expansive conception of state power is two-fold: to spread Confucian ideals among the populace and to enforce popular compliance with the Confucian moral code. The latter also entails expelling those non-Confucian elements (e.g., celibacy) that the state deems immoral. Zhu Xi's dual employment of state power serves the same end, i.e., to compel the populace into a Confucian moral order.

My Confucian theory of pluralism stands as a corrective to Zhu Xi's two-fold conception of state power. First, under my pluralist theory, the state does not enforce popular compliance with Zhu Xi's Confucian moral code, which is narrowly confined to the developments of a native Chinese tradition initiated by Confucius. Building on Zhu Xi's moral universalism, my pluralist interpretation of Confucian ethics embraces other traditions (e.g., Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam) as non-Confucian manifestations of coherence, which makes them intrinsically valuable to Confucians' self-cultivation.

Therefore, given non-Confucian traditions' value to Confucians, the state should not coerce non-Confucians to abandon their own traditions or suppress the presence of non-Confucian communities in the society. Instead, non-Confucian traditions should be allowed to flourish on their own as manifestations of coherence. Without non-Confucian communities, Confucians would have no opportunities to investigate the coherence in other traditions, which are necessary for completing their understanding of coherence.

Second, my Confucian theory of pluralism still supports the state's mission to educate the populace in Confucian ideals. To these ideals, however, my pluralist theory adds the moral obligation to respect and learn from non-Confucian traditions as a key part of Confucian self-cultivation. Accordingly, the state's cultural policies must be adjusted to reflect this new pluralist dimension of Confucian ethics. For example, the public education curricula should include extensive lessons on cross-cultural learning and hold cross-cultural activities for students to appreciate non-Confucian manifestations of coherence in other communities. Following Zhu Xi's example, the state can also issue moral edicts that discourage exclusivist nationalism and proclaim cross-cultural learning as an essential component of Confucian aspirations. Simply put, my Confucian theory of pluralism asks the state to allow non-Confucian communities to live out their traditions undisturbed and to infuse into the populace a pluralist mentality rooted in Zhu Xi's ethics. Both activities are derived from the state's perfectionist duty to increase the populace's knowledge of coherence and foster Confucian sages.

Aside from being a promoter of pluralism, what should the state do in cross-cultural controversies such as the siting of the Christian church in Qufu? First, my pluralist theory does not accept the kind of exclusionary rhetoric used by Confucian nationalists, who defend the superiority of Confucianism in China and treat the Christian church in Qufu as a sign of profanity. Non-Confucian traditions should not be considered inferior or sacrilegious, no matter how geographically close they are to any sacred Confucian places. Hence, the state is compelled by its pluralist commitment to publicly criticize Confucian nationalists' language.

However, affirming the Confucian value of pluralism does not entail that Christians have the absolute right to build a church within the vicinity of the Three Confucian Sites. The state cannot support or enforce Christians' unilateral need to build a church in Qufu, because it appears to go against the will of Confucians. If the state could pressure a tradition—be it Confucian or non-Confucian—to accept external elements without the consent of its practitioners or a democratic procedure, it would severely undermine my pluralist theory. Hence, given Qufu's Confucian heritage, Qufu Christians cannot build their local church there without first securing Confucians' consent or proper authorization.

In other words, when confronted by this dilemma between Qufu Christians' spiritual needs and Confucians' concern for their native heritage, the state should do two things in order. First, it should be an *impartial* facilitator of cross-cultural interactions

between Qufu Christians and Confucians. This role is justified because the state needs to demonstrate to the public that its commitment to pluralism is genuine. Cross-cultural conflicts are good opportunities for the state to assume the role of a peace maker who does not favor any side but works to ensure harmonious co-existence among different traditions. It does not mean that the state should remain neutral and inactive in cross-cultural conflicts. It means that the state should intervene in these conflicts in a way that respects all traditions' grievances. Inviting conflicting sides to dialogues is one way to realize the state's pluralist commitment. Doing so can also help the state turn cross-cultural conflicts between Confucians and non-Confucians into opportunities for Confucians to have exposure to non-Confucian traditions, which benefits Confucians' self-cultivation.

The aim of these state-sponsored cross-cultural interactions is to produce an agreement between opposing sides, e.g., between Qufu Christians and Confucians. The exact content of such an agreement should not be fixed prior to the activities but be generated by the interactive process itself. The state's responsibility here is to serve as a monitor who enables both sides to communicate with each other effectively and work towards a mutually agreeable solution. Favoring any side in cross-cultural conflicts would make other sides feel unjustified pressure from the state and contradicts the pluralist spirit.

Second, dialogues and other forms of meditation often cannot resolve cross-cultural

conflicts and the state needs to impose an enforceable decision. In these scenarios, there is no perfect solution that will make all (or any) of the involved parties happy. In our case, if Qufu Christians and Confucians fail to identify a mutually acceptable solution, the state can impose a decision by a democratic procedure. It could set up an ad-hoc committee composed of members of different traditions who are not affiliated with any of the opposing sides but are predisposed to remain impartial (e.g., Buddhists, Muslims, and secular citizens in our case). The political institution in charge of multicultural affairs (e.g., the United Front Work Department in contemporary China) would be responsible for maintaining a pool of eligible citizens and randomly select committee members from the pool.[50] With the help from experts in law, religion, culture, and other related areas, the committee should assess the nature of the conflict and evaluate the merits of each side's claims. It could hold public hearings for all involved parties to present their arguments or conduct other forms of investigation. After the committee has gathered all the possible evidence, it should deliberate and make the final decision by a super majority (e.g., two thirds of the votes) to ensure that the decision can appear acceptable at least to most non-Confucian and non-Christian observers.[51] An example of a decision that might be a fair

[50] Officially, members would be appointed by the head of the political agency for multicultural affairs, but the head would be bound by law to appoint all those selected by the random procedure. Thus, the committee receives its authority from the multicultural affairs agency, which in turn obtains its authority from the national government. If we are in a Confucian democracy, the national government derives its authority directly from the people.

[51] If the committee cannot reach a supermajority decision, it should by a simple-majority vote select a qualified arbiter (e.g., a judge) who is unimplicated in the conflict to make the final decision based on the existing evidence. The failure to produce a supermajority decision suggests that the cross-cultural conflict

compromise could be endorsing Qufu Christians' demand to build a local church while asking them to build it farther away from the sacred Confucian site.

Delegating cultural authority to this ad-hoc committee reflects the state's pluralist commitment in three ways. First, the state maintains its pluralist commitment and impartiality to all traditions by allowing all sides of the conflict to persuade the committee. The super-majority requirement can also steer the committee's decisions to be pluralist agreements. Second, since my pluralist theory is built on Zhu Xi's moral optimism and trusting ordinary citizens to make sound moral judgments about cross-cultural conflicts is a political application of this key tenet. Indeed, given their belief in humanity's inborn goodness, Confucians, in particular, should have good reasons to accept the judgments of the committee. Lastly and most importantly, by ensuring a pluralist membership of the committee that does not include anyone involved with the conflict, the state fosters in non-Confucian citizens with a stronger sense of political efficacy. That is, they know that, *even in a Confucian society*, Confucians can be subject to a non-Confucian authority in conflicts between Confucians and non-Confucians. After all, the purpose of the committee is not to please any side of the conflict but to guarantee that the state has made

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under question has no clear-cut and morally justifiable resolution even to the representatives of outside parties. Thus, the committee can only relegate its authority to a reputable referee (determined by the simple majority) and trusts his or her ability to make the difficult call in a reasonable way (defined by the supermajority of the committee). To keep the arbiter accountable, the committee can revoke her decision if the super majority finds it unreasonable and then appoint another arbiter by a simple-majority vote. All these intricate democratic mechanisms exist to ensure that even if the eventual decision is difficult for all involved parties to accept, it is at least acceptable to uninvolved members of the pluralist society who share the same good human nature with those involved in the conflict but are more likely to remain impartial.

its best effort to safeguard a pluralist society.

4.5 Conclusion

In sum, my theory of pluralism eases the tension between my Confucian justification of democracy and the pluralist reality in China and beyond. Building on Zhu Xi's moral universalism, I envision Confucian democracy to be both a pluralist *and* perfectionist community in which the state helps Confucian citizens pursue sagehood by cultivating in them a pluralist disposition towards non-Confucian traditions. When a cross-cultural conflict between Confucians and non-Confucians becomes inevitable, the Confucian state should not favor any side because its own pluralist principle stipulates that both Confucianism and non-Confucian traditions are intrinsically valuable as manifestations of coherence. Accordingly, the Confucian state should first stop all parties from fueling the conflict with the kind of exclusionary rhetoric employed by Confucian nationalists. Then, the state should host and facilitate interactive activities among the conflicting parties, the aim of which is to let opposing communities create a mutually acceptable way to resolve the conflicts by themselves. If the state fails to make peace among opposing sides, it should ask a democratic committee whose members are uninvolved in the conflict to make an enforceable resolution. This procedure expresses the Confucian state's commitments to pluralism and impartiality because it reflects the state's trust in non-Confucian citizens' moral competence and empowers non-Confucian citizens to regulate Confucians' interactions with other traditions in cross-cultural conflicts.

Conclusion

In the preceding four chapters, I have argued in favor of integrating participatory democracy, rights, and pluralism into Confucian political philosophy. My central thesis is that all these Western political transplants benefit Confucian learners' pursuit of moral perfection, which for Zhu Xi is the ultimate purpose of Confucian politics. In this conclusion, I will briefly discuss what remains to be done in Confucian democratic theory (e.g., gender equality) and then reflect on the practice of Confucian political philosophy itself.

5.1 What Remains to Be Done for Confucian Democracy?

My vision of Confucian democracy remains incomplete because this dissertation has not touched on many key issues concerning Confucian democracy, e.g., distributive justice, immigration, and gender equality. I want to flag gender equality here because it is directly related to Zhu Xi's moral universalism, the foundation of this dissertation. To many late-modern readers, Zhu Xi's moral egalitarianism simply cannot be universal without ensuring that women enjoy the same moral and political status as men. Nevertheless, as the reader must have noticed by this point, most of the third-person singular pronouns in this dissertation are masculine. The reason is that I do not intend to whitewash the patriarchal core of Confucian ethics. As Leigh Jenco points out, too many Confucian political philosophers do not even acknowledge the perennial problem of gender inequality in their work (Jenco 2017, 4). Although there is a burgeoning

scholarship on Confucianism and gender, most Confucian political philosophers (I included) have failed to incorporate it into their theorizing.[52] Critics can rightly say that my dissertation has only defended political equality and rights for male citizens in a Confucian society.

Although this dissertation does not argue for gender equality explicitly, it creates room for future scholars to construct a Confucian theory of gender equality within a democratic framework. For Confucians like Zhu Xi, the ideal society must be composed of three social hierarchies (*sangang* 三纲): the ruler-minister bond, the father-son bond, and the husband-wife bond. My dissertation seeks to modify the fixed meanings of these political and social relationships by leveraging Zhu Xi's moral egalitarianism against his hierarchical beliefs. According to my exegesis of Zhu Xi's Confucian ethics, any human being who has the moral potential to attain sagehood should be entitled to political equality defined by this dissertation. As noted by my Introduction, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century female Korean scholars such as Im Yunjidang (1721–93) and Kang Chŏngildang (1772–1832) have provided some starting points for a Confucian theory of gender equality. They draw on Zhu Xi's ethics to defend the moral equality between woman and man and believe that both men and women can attain sagehood. However, their moral vision is equality with difference. That is, men should treat their wives as

[52] For more discussions on gender issues in Confucianism, see Li (2000), Wawrytko (2000), Mann and Cheng (2001), Birge (2002), Ko, Kim-Haboush, and Piggott (2003), Wang (2003), Rosenlee (2006), Foust and Tan (2016) and Pang-White (2016).

moral equals, but women's pathway to sagehood is to excel within the domestic sphere (Y. Kim 2011, 73; S. Kim 2014b, 39–40, 2014c, 403–4). Since nascent but inadequate arguments for gender equality do exist in Zhu Xi scholarship, future scholars could build on the work of these Korean female scholars to advocate *full* gender equality informed by both Zhu Xi's philosophy and contemporary feminist scholarship. My theory of Confucian democracy has provided a direct path from moral equality to political equality. Since women and men are moral equals (as Im Yunjidang and Kang Chŏngildang have argued), I think that women are entitled to the same political rights as men do. The full arguments, however, will take another dissertation to accomplish.

5.2 The "Unfaithful" Practice of Confucian Political Philosophy

At this endpoint of the dissertation, it may be helpful to return to a challenge raised by Leigh Jenco. That is, if contemporary Confucian political philosophy has accepted so many presentist or modern Western values (e.g., political equality, value pluralism, and gender equality), how can it remain faithful to Zhu Xi or the Confucian tradition at large? My answer is that it cannot in any essentialist sense because the notion of Confucian democracy was not a thinkable possibility to Zhu Xi, his allies, or his enemies. In the Introduction, I stated that the political purpose of this dissertation would be to serve as a democratic counterpoint to the authoritarian co-optation of Confucianism. Therefore, I examined Zhu Xi's thought to see if autocracy would be a good fit for his ethics. As my analysis indicates, Zhu Xi's Confucianism could be made to fit the current authoritarian

regime in China. However, it could *also* be reconstructed to support democracy. Indeed, my main argument is that, if we look at contemporary politics from Zhu Xi's perspective, democracy, not authoritarianism, would be a better option for Confucianism because equalizing political and social relationships is the better way to resolve the internal contradiction between moral equality and sociopolitical hierarchies in Zhu Xi's philosophy. Thus, my dissertation is like a contemporary imaginary just as the CCP's view of Confucianism. However, it is a democratic *counter* imaginary of Confucianism because the tradition itself does not offer any political concepts comparable to participatory democracy or Leninist Marxism.

Thus, the audience of my dissertation is those contemporary readers who are shaped by late modern sensibilities but remain interested in the grand questions on the relationship between Confucian and Western political thought. Political imaginaries are driven by historical circumstances and ours are drastically different from Zhu Xi's. This dissertation was conceived and is being finished in an era where nationalism and anti-democratic forces are on the rise. As we have seen in Chapters 1 and 4, Confucian nationalists and others often pit Confucianism against the Western political tradition as incompatible rivals. Given our historical circumstances, it seems more urgent to reflect on the relationship between Confucianism and Western political thought. Since I am writing in English, the analytic language of this dissertation naturally resembles not that of traditional Confucian scholarship but that of Western (specifically, Anglophone)

political philosophy. Leigh Jenco is not wrong in saying that contemporary Confucian political philosophy is not a continuation of traditional Confucian learning because it focuses on contemporary political issues that did not exist in Zhu Xi's time (Jenco 2017, 4).

Nevertheless, being categorized as a new field distinct from traditional Confucian learning is not necessarily a bad thing for contemporary Confucian political philosophy. After all, the general field of political philosophy—to which I think Confucian political philosophy belongs—would be an alien concept to traditional Confucian scholars. As a Confucian practitioner of political philosophy, I share the same fundamental concern with many other non-Confucian political philosophers, i.e., the perpetual need to question power (Idris 2016, 5–6). Our focus on power relations is what makes our scholarship *political*. Accordingly, the ultimate value of this dissertation in political philosophy depends on its analysis of power from Zhu Xi's Confucian perspective. My aim has been to draw attention to an important question for Confucians (at least those sympathetic to Zhu Xi's ethical ideals): what would be the arrangement of power that can best facilitate every person's pursuit of moral perfection?

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