

The Philosophical Sinification of Modernity and the Modern Confucian Paradigm of Immanent Transcendence (内在超越性)

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Abstract

As a major source of social values, Modern Confucian theory assumes essential significance amidst the proliferation of instrumental rationality in contemporary China. This current is distinguished by a multifaceted attempt to revitalize traditional thought by means of new influences borrowed or derived from Western systems. It defines itself with a search for a synthesis between “Western” and traditional Chinese thought, aiming to elaborate a new system of ideas and values, suitable for the modern, globalized society. The present contribution examines the ways in which 3rd generation of Modern Confucian philosophers changed the framework within which traditional Chinese philosophical inquiry has been carried out, exposing the importance of immanent transcendence.

Keywords: Modern Confucianism, modernization theories, immanent transcendence

Izvleček

Teorija modernega konfucijanstva predstavlja osnovni vir družbenih vrednot sodobne Kitajske. Njen pomen se kaže predvsem v širitvi inštrumentalne racionalnosti preko uporabe različnih metod revitalizacije tradicionalne miselnosti s pomočjo novih idej, prevzetih iz zahodnih miselnih sistemov. Ta struja je opredeljena z iskanjem sintez med »zahodno« in tradicionalno kitajsko miselnostjo, s pomočjo katerih naj bi postalo možno izdelati nov sistem idej in vrednot, primernih za moderno, globalizirano družbo. Pričujoči članek raziskuje metode, s pomočjo katerih je 3. generacija Modernih konfucijancev spremenila referenčno ogrodje, znotraj katerega so se dotlej izvajale raziskave tradicionalne kitajske filozofije, pri čemer so izpostavili pomen imanentne transcendence.

Ključne besede: moderno konfucijanstvo, teorije modernizacije, imanentna transcendenca

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Introduction

After representing the central state doctrine and ideological foundation of traditional Chinese society for two thousand years, beginning in the 19th century it became clear that Confucianism, at least in its orthodox traditional form, could no longer serve as a philosophical basis for the further development of modern society. However, this period also planted the seeds of so-called Modern Confucianism (*xin ruxue* 新儒學)¹, which arose as a critical attempt to revitalize and modernize this fundamental ancient tradition of thought.

The revitalization of the complex traditions of Chinese philosophical thought during the 20th century has assumed increasing relevance and significance in recent decades. In the first half of the 20th century, this tendency could be observed in the works of many of the leading modern Chinese philosophers who were searching for ways to renew the methodological and theoretical aspects of the Chinese tradition, and especially of the pre-modern philosophy which followed the Neo-Confucian revival.

These attempts manifested themselves most clearly in the abovementioned new intellectual current of Modern Confucianism (*xin ruxue* 新儒學). In addition to Xiong Shili 熊十力 and Feng Youlan 馮友蘭, who are certainly among the most visible representatives of this current, we should also mention Liang Shuming 梁漱溟, Zhang Junmai 張君勱 and He Lin 何鄰. Modern Confucianism is distinguished by a multifaceted attempt to revitalize traditional thought by means of new influences borrowed or derived from Western systems.

Because of ideological reasons, Modern Confucianism was reduced to silence for the most of the 20th century in mainland China. Its main concerns continued to be developed by Taiwanese theorists and, to a certain extent, also by those from Hong Kong. The renewed interest in Confucian renovation could also be observed among modern theoreticians in Japan and Korea.

In contrast to the People's Republic, where until recent times, Confucianism was regarded as the "ideology of a superseded feudalism", a number of

¹ The term *Xin ruxue* 新儒學 has sometimes been translated literally as *The New Confucianism* or as *Contemporary Confucianism* by some Western authors. To avoid confusing it with the traditional School of Principles (*li xue* 理學), generally denoted as *Neo-Confucianism* or *New Confucianism* in Western sources, we shall omit the literal translation and apply the most frequently used term, *Modern Confucianism*.

intellectuals living in these societies (which were determined by post-colonial discourses) began to oppose the increasingly dominant Westernization of their countries, and started looking mainly to the framework of Confucian thought for alternatives to these developments.

Modern Confucian investigations have been based mostly on the supposition that Confucian thought could be completely amalgamated with the system of capitalistic development. Many of its proponents also believed that a renewed form of this traditional Chinese system of social, political and moral thought could serve as a basis for endowing modern life with new ethical meaning and as a spiritual salve for the alienation which appeared as an undesirable side-effect of capitalist competition and profit-seeking.

Their efforts to revitalize and reconstruct traditional Confucian thought can therefore be seen as an attempt to counter the dominant ideological trends and preserve traditional cultural identity, while also contributing to the development of philosophical and theoretical dialogue between East Asia and the West.

Despite its importance, this stream of thought is still little known in Western academic circles. It defines itself with a search for a synthesis between “Western” and traditional Chinese thought, aiming to elaborate a new system of ideas and values, suitable for the modern, globalized Chinese society. The contemporary intellectual history mainly orders the main proponents of Modern Confucianism into 3 generations.

In the present paper which aims to introduce their contribution regarding these issues, I will mainly focus upon the work of the 4 most important members of the so-called second generation of Modern Confucianism, represented by Fang Dongmei 方東美 (1899–1977), Tang Junyi 唐君毅 (1909–1978), Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 (1903–1982) and Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909–1995). In the second half of the 20th century, these philosophers have been living and working in Taiwan and Hong Kong respectively. Due to space limitations, I will try to summarize the essence of their respective individual findings and to delineate their ontological foundations by which they aimed to provide a philosophical basis for a new mode of specifically Chinese or Confucian modernization.

New Views on Chinese Modernization

While Maoist historiography relegated Confucianism to the past, most Western modernization theories also implied that Confucianism would have to be abandoned if Asia wanted to develop a dynamic modern society (Weber 1989, 132). Marx and other classical theorists of modernity assumed that traditional Chinese culture was impervious or even inimical to modernization. Max Weber's famous thesis that the Protestant ethic was an essential factor in the rise and spread of modernization contrasts with a notion that has gradually emerged in the last two decades in East Asia, which argues that societies based upon the Confucian ethic may, in many ways, be superior to the West in achieving industrialization, affluence and modernization. Weber also wrote extensively on Asia, especially China and India, concluding that Asian cultural and philosophical or religious traditions were ill-suited to modernization:

Confucianism, we have seen, was (in intent) a rational ethic which reduced tension with the world to an absolute minimum. Completely absent in Confucian ethic [*sic*] was any tension between nature and deity, between ethical demand and human shortcoming, consciousness of sin and need for salvation, conduct on earth and compensation in the beyond, religious duty and sociopolitical reality. Hence, there was no leverage for influencing conduct through inner forces freed of tradition and convention. (Weber 1989, 227)

Modern Confucian philosophies have shown that such a Western-centered perspective on modernity is no longer valid, because these discourses reopened the question about the relation of modern capitalism and culture in a new way and on a new level of intercultural philosophical methodology. Thus, it is important to examine these competing theses in order to clarify the question whether modernization is an universal process or a complex scope of social transitions which includes both universal and culturally conditioned elements.

The philosophers of the new Modern Confucianism were namely engaged in efforts to find some reconciliation between "Western" and "East Asian" values, out of which would emerge a theoretical model of modernization that cannot be equated with "Westernization". Since Modern Confucians viewed modernization mainly as a rationalization of the world, their works reflect the special relationship that has been mainly elaborated in the specific circumstances of modern Asian societies, namely the relation between the new Confucian cultures and the rapid emergence of a super-industrial world economy.

In this respect, Modern Confucian theoreticians have mainly followed the presumption, according to which China's modernization did not represent a »natural« process that could be defined solely by the inherent dynamics of an autochthonous social development. Although Modern Confucians believed that the European colonial past has to a great extent influenced these processes, they were against the supposition, according to which Chinese modernization could be equated with Westernization. Thus, for them, modernization was not necessary a universal process, but rather one that is partly also culturally conditioned. Thus, they have striven to develop a renovation of traditional Chinese, especially Confucian, thought in order to become able to preserve Chinese cultural identity in the modern world.

In order to elaborate a theoretical condition for a specifically Chinese mode of modernization, their basic approach was defined by the analysis of traditional Chinese philosophical ideas, comparable to the three crucial concepts of modernization, namely the concept of subject, the concept of rationality and the concept of humanism. According to Modern Confucians, classical Confucianism (especially the Neo-Confucian philosophy) has elaborated these notions in the categories of the spiritual Self (*xingtǐ* 性體) in the sense of the self-reflexive will, humanness (*ren* 仁) in the sense of both, the source and the end of the development of the individual and the community, as well as the (specifically Chinese) structural principle of reasonableness (*li* 理), avoiding the Western dualism of rationality and feeling.

Modern Confucian Ontology

In their effort to modernize these traditional concepts, they had first to establish a synthesis in the more fundamental field—namely that of ontology. In order to achieve the aims of synthesizing Chinese and Western theory, Modern Confucian philosophers mostly focused upon ontological problems which had been introduced by Western systems of thought, in the belief that questions related to the ultimate reality of the cosmos, the substance of being and the Absolute determined the meaning of life and were crucial to the establishment of a new values system compatible with current social conditions and the preservation of an integral cultural and personal identity. They looked to ontology as the philosophical discipline that would provide clear solutions to the problems they faced, beginning with that of Western modernization, and with the conviction that

only through a genuine and clear comprehension of the cosmic essence would modern man become able to find his spiritual home again. Since ontology as a specific philosophic discipline has been introduced by Western systems of thought, a synthesis of Chinese and Western ideas in the field of questions, linked to the realm of existence and of being was crucial to the establishment of a new values system compatible with current social conditions and the preservation of an integral cultural and personal identity. The crucial task, therefore, was to find the “proper” orientation, i.e. new, clearly marked signposts which pointed the way towards modern culture, while also providing basic criteria for solving practical problems in the sphere of politics and the economy. Without such a framework of orientations, society would slip into a generalized spiritual malaise, in which the actions of individuals would be determined by the purely mechanistic laws of technocratic utility. In this case, the comprehension of Western thought for the purposes of finding spiritual guidelines for the modernization in course would necessarily remain fragmentary, incoherent and superficial, and would therefore not only be incapable of enriching the Chinese spiritual world, but would actually accelerate the processes of spiritual disorder and alienation.

However, the focus upon ontological questions can also be seen as a specific reaction of traditional Chinese philosophy to modernization. It represents a specific attempt of constructive reactions to developmental trends of theoretical (and practical as well) problems of modernization with the help of certain elementary aspects of traditional Chinese philosophy².

Thus, ontological issues were unavoidable for the 2nd generation of Modern Confucian theorists. Addressing these issues meant reacting constructively to the developmental trends of the theoretical (but also practical) problems of modernization with the aid of certain elementary aspects of traditional Chinese philosophy. In Modern Confucian interpretations, classical Confucianism saw Heaven or Nature (*tian* 天) as the ultimate noumenon. Mou Zongsan, for instance, described this view in the following way: “Which concept can lead us to break through existence? It is the concept of ‘Nature’³.” (Mou 1983, 29: 75)

² In traditional Chinese philosophy, the realm of ontology has been thoroughly linked to epistemology, for in this worldview, the possibility of any existence has been pre-conditioned (and endowed with meaning) by its human perception and comprehension.

³ 通過哪個概念可以透射到存在呢? 就是 '天' 這個概念。

This concept was transcendental and represented the elementary entity, creating and changing all that exists. Due to its ontological duality, one of the characteristic features of the classical Chinese intellectual tradition, the Modern Confucian Heaven was also immanent⁴ and endowed human beings with innate qualities (nature, *xing* 性) that were essentially determined by the elementary Confucian virtue of humanity (*ren* 仁). This was a development of the Mencian understanding of the Self, which was typical of the Neo-Confucian discourses in which Mengzi 孟子 was canonized as a “proper” follower of Confucius. However, in their interpretations of traditional systems, the Modern Confucians went a step further and in their discourses human innate qualities (nature, *xing* 性) became that potential which not only formed the moral or spiritual Self, but also transcended the individual’s empirical and physiological characteristics. By acting in accordance with humanity (*ren* 仁), the individual could be united with Heaven/Nature (*tian ren heyi* 天人合一) and thus comprehend the genuine meaning and value of existence.

The elementary features of the concept of Heaven or Nature (*tian* 天) can help clarify the difference between external (*waizai chaoyuexing* 外在超越性) and internal (or immanent) transcendence (*neizai chaoyuexing* 內在超越性) with the latter being one of the typical features of Chinese philosophy.

The “Pure” and the “Immanent” Transcendence

In interpreting traditional Confucian thought (especially the idea of Heavenly Dao or the Dao of Nature, *tian dao* 天道), the Modern Confucians often made use of the concepts of “transcendence” or “immanence”.

They pointed out that the Confucian Dao of Nature, which is “transcendent and immanent”, is diametrically opposed to the basic model of Western religions, which are “transcendent and external⁵” (Lee 2001, 118).

Immanent notions, which are essential to defining Chinese philosophy, are necessary outcomes of the holistic worldview. If there is no separation between two worlds (material/ideal, subjective/objective), it is difficult to define which of

⁴ The Modern Confucian formulation of immanent transcendence is discussed below.

⁵ 當代新儒家常借用「超越性」和「在性內」這兩個概念來詮釋傳統儒家思想（特別是其天道思想），強調儒家的天道或基本精神是「在內超越而」，以與西方宗教中「超越而外在」的基本模式相對比。

the two is more important or absolute. This also explains why transcendent notions, which are generally perceived as transcending one and proceeding into another (usually higher) sphere, are also immanent in most traditional Chinese philosophical discourses. The Modern Confucians often defined the differences between “pure” and “immanent” transcendence on the basis of discursive differences between Christianity and Modern Confucianism:

The theological worldview of Christianity could be defined as “pure transcendence”. This means that God has created the world, but is not part of it. Thus, God possesses a transcendental nature which is beyond or outside of the world. This is the actual traditional belief in the Christian tradition... The Chinese tradition instead believes that Dao circulates between heaven and earth. The *Xi Ci* 繫辭 chapter of the *Book of Changes* 易經 states “that which is above the form exists as Dao (the Way, the Great principle), and that which is below them exists as a definite thing”. But it also affirms that “Dao is the definite thing and vice versa”. On the one hand, Dao is above the forms (i.e. it is metaphysical), and thus not a definite, visible or perceivable thing. Therefore, it is transcendent. On the other, it can only be put into practice through definite things (i.e. through physical forms); thus, it is immanent. This is the form of ‘immanent transcendence’⁶ (Liu 2005, 14–15).

The notion of Dao, which is one of the core concepts of traditional Chinese philosophy and manifests itself in multiple ways in the category of the Way, is thus a notion of “immanent transcendence” (*neizai chaoyue* 內在超越). In its oneness and indivisibility it reflects the original cosmic principle, but at the same time it also reflects the smallest atoms of existence, constantly creating through their infinite combinations all existing worlds. Dao is both the elementary, abstract driving force of the universe, and the concrete, intimate path of every human being. Dao is the fundamental source of all existence, and the incorporation of each particular appearance.

In Chinese philosophy, “Dao” represents the essence of the universe, society and every individual, but also the moral substance implying humanity, justice, rituality, loyalty and similar axiological contents⁷. (Liao 1994, 46)

⁶ 我把基督宗教的神觀定為“純粹超越”(pure transcendence),意思是上帝創造世界,並不是世界的一部分。上帝有這種超越在世界意外的性格,的確是基督宗教傳統的信仰...而中國傳統相信,道流行在天壤間,一方面“形而上者謂之道,形而下者謂之器”(易·繫辭上,第十二章),另一方面,“器亦道,道亦器”。道既是形而上,非一物可見,故超越;但道又必須通過器表現出來,故內在,這樣便是一種“內在超越”(immanent transcendence)的型態。

⁷ 在中國哲學中,‘道’,即是宇宙,人事和人性之本體,又是以仁義禮智信等為內容的道德實體。

However, Dao does not constitute an absolute principle, as in the theological idea of Divinity or the ancient Greek idea of substance. Immanent notions are never incorporations of absoluteness, for their nature is conditioned by everything they surpass. The concepts resulting from the immanent worldview are based upon the relativization of all that exists. Therefore, they seldom appear independently or individually. In traditional Chinese philosophy, this essential relativity was expressed through binary categories, composed of binary oppositions. The complementary, mutual interaction of both antipodes was able to express every, even the most complex, area of time and space. For a better understanding of binary concepts and the principle of complementarity, we must first examine their theoretical foundation, which is reflected in the traditional, structurally ordered and, at the same time, comprehensive Chinese worldview.

As is well known, the traditional Chinese worldview was a holistic one⁸. Traditional Chinese thinkers did not strictly or categorically distinguish between the spheres of matter and idea, nor between any other dualistic connotations resulting from this basic dichotomy⁹. What is much less known or recognized is that this holism was by no means indiscriminate. The traditional Chinese holistic world was not some sort of homogenous unity in which everything was connected to everything else, without boundaries or distinctions. On the contrary, the traditional Chinese worldview was logically ordered based on relatively strict, binary oppositional patterns. On a mental-reflective level, these patterns formed a series of specific Chinese analogies¹⁰ which provided the basis for the prevailing method of logical thought. (Cui and Wen 2001, 14–24)

Specifically Chinese Mode of Binary Patterns as Basic Inherent Structures of Immanent Transcendence

Binary categories (*duili fanchou* 對力範疇) are thus one of the fundamental characteristics of traditional Chinese philosophy. They are a kind of duality that seeks to attain the most real (possible) state of actuality through relativity,

⁸ The Chinese holistic worldview is traditionally expressed by the phrase “unity of men and nature” (*tian ren heyi* 天人合一).

⁹ For example, distinctions between subject and object, substance and phenomena, creator and creation, etc.

¹⁰ The analogical model used in the context of traditional Chinese logic differs from the classical European model in terms of both its methods and functions (Cui and Wen 2001, 25–41).

expressed in terms of the relation between two oppositional notions¹¹. As Graham (1989, 286) points out, distinctions were seen in binary terms, and primarily between pairs of opposites (with even figure and color reduced to square/round and white/black). Having drawn them, and recognized some recurring or persisting pattern (e.g. white, large, square, hard or heavy), we can then detach, for instance, a stone from other things in the same way we cut out a piece of cloth or chop off a piece of meat. Things were not seen as isolated, each with its own essential and accidental features; instead, distinguishing characteristics were mostly seen as relative.

Of course, binarity as such is not a specific feature of Chinese philosophy, for in its function of differentiation it is basic to human thought. What distinguishes Chinese binary categories from traditional Western dualisms is the principle of complementarity, which forms a basic method for their functioning. (Rošker 2012, 12–13)

In effect, what we have is a structural pattern of binary oppositions which, however, differs fundamentally from the model of Cartesian dualism. The Cartesian model involves dialectic between the mutually exclusive, polar opposites of thesis and antithesis that have been determined by an opposition which is also a contradiction (Hegel 1969, 112). This contradiction creates a tension, in which the mutual negation of thesis and antithesis forms a synthesis. Instead, the complementary model which was dominant in the Chinese tradition of thought, is based on a non-contradictory opposition between two poles which do not exclude but complement each other, and which are interdependent (Hegel 1969, 14). Contemporary Chinese scholars generally define this difference as that between two types of dialectical reasoning, in which the Western, Hegelian model tends to look for divisions and contradictions, while the traditional Chinese form of dialectical thought seeks to achieve a unity between these binary oppositions.

In the traditional Chinese complementary model, binary patterns did not produce any separate syntheses that could preserve “positive” elements from their previous state, while eliminating the “negative” ones. Zhuangzi described the relation between the two binary poles of a complementary model as follows:

¹¹Some well-known binary categories are: *yinyang* 陰陽 (sunny/shady), *tiyong* 體用 (essence/function), *mingshi* 名實 (concept/actuality), *liqi* 理氣 (structure/ phenomena), *benmo* 本末 (roots/crown).

Therefore: why do we not preserve truth and abolish falseness? Why do we not preserve order and abolish chaos? If we think in this way, we do not understand the structure of nature, nor the state of being in which everything exists. This would mean preserving earth and abolishing heaven, preserving yin and abolishing yang. It is quite clear that this would not work¹². (Zhuangzi 2012, *Qiu shui*, 5)

But in the Judeo-Christian tradition the dominant pattern was one of “logocentric” binarity which aimed at preserving one anti-pole, while eliminating the other. The post-structural theorist Jacques Derrida, the founder of ‘Deconstruction’, pointed out that we live in an intellectual tradition that tends to preserve the significant at the expense of the signifier, speech at the expense of writing, noumena at the expense of phenomena, Nature at the expense of culture, life at the expense of death and good at the expense of evil (Derrida 1994, 95–6; 1998, 35). As Graham affirms (1989, 65), in reflecting on the more profound implications of this tendency, we can note a certain affinity among a number of apparent oppositions in “Western” culture, given that the majority of Western discourses are based on the idea of a universal causality that tends to eliminate one oppositional pole in order to preserve the other. (Rošker 2012, 142) Such an affinity can be found, for example, between Christian beliefs regarding the immortality of the soul, and the tenets of traditional science (before the discovery of quantum mechanics).

In their article, “Chinese philosophy” for the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, David Hall and Roger Ames (1998, 1–2) list and compare some of the typical chains of binary patterns. They conclude that the dominant Western tradition of thought usually treats one of the poles as being “transcendental”, i.e. in a way that allows it to exist independently of its oppositional pair, which instead does not have this possibility (Hall and Ames 1998, 1–2). Graham argues (1989, 65) that reasoning in accordance with such patterns means being incapable of imagining the possibility of creation without a creator, reality without appearances or good without evil¹³.

¹² 故曰，蓋師是而无非，師治而无亂乎？是未明天地之理，萬物之情者也。是猶師天而无地，師陰而无陽，其不可行明矣。

¹³ Several interpreters (e.g. Ng 1996, I), especially those seeking a connection between Christian and Confucian ethics, see transcendence (in the sense of a *possibility of transcending*) as proof that Confucian ethics is not secular, but contains religious elements.

The Transformation of Religion into Morality

According to the Modern Confucians, this paradigm (or worldview) of immanent transcendence has been developed in China during the axial age (800–200 BCE, Jaspers 2003) in which religion was transformed into morality. The representatives of the second generation have namely followed the supposition according to which in the abovementioned historical process of social transformations in China, the idea of Heaven or Nature (*tian* 天) has been transformed from an anthropomorphic higher force in to something which determined the inner reality of every human being. Fang Dongmei 方東美, for instance, explained:

At first, this culture was formed on a basis of a religious spirit, but it has been transformed into a culture of a highly developed ethics. This ethics was assumed and properly ordered by Confucius¹⁴ (Fang 2004b, 99).

Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 has followed the hypothesis that the original Confucianism has attempted to establish a basis for moral decisions in the idea of a subjective righteousness which was supposed to serve as a fundamental criteria and thus replace the previous fear of spirits. Xu has exposed that this transformation represented a higher level of spiritual development which cannot be found in monotheistic religions, based upon the idea of an (external) God. According to him, in China, this transformation has led to humanism based upon a high level of “self-awareness” (*zijuexing* 自覺性):

The main contribution of the Zhou period lies in the fact that a spirit of self-awareness was incorporated into traditional religious life. In this sense, a culture that has previously been rooted in material achievements, was raised to the sphere of ideas. This contributed to the establishment of the humanistic spirit of Chinese morality.¹⁵ (Xu 2005, 15–16)

Thus, regarding the human beings, since they exist in such a realm of immanent transcendence, they also have to be limited and infinite at the same time. On this basis, Mou Zongsan has developed a double ontology, namely an ontology of the noumenal and the ontology of the phenomenal world.

¹⁴這個文化傳統的形成, 主要是從宗教精神體現出來, 而成為高度的倫理文化. 孔子承受之而予以適當的整理.

¹⁵ 周人的貢獻, 便是在傳統的宗教生活中, 注入了自覺的精神; 把文化在器物方面的成就, 提升而為觀念方面的展開, 以啟發中國道德地人文精神的建立.

If we start from the assumption, that “man is finite as well as infinite”, we need to use ontology on two levels. The first is the ontology of the noumenal sphere and can also be called the “ontology of the intangible”. The second is the ontology of the sphere of appearances and can also be called the “ontology of the tangible”.¹⁶ (Mou 1975, 30)

It is the very awareness of this double nature that defines human nature. The moral Self which links the immanent and the transcendental sphere is simultaneously the link connecting the individual with the society in which he/she lives. Tang Junyi’s idea of such individual self-awareness is rooted in the individual feeling of the inborn responsibility that could (similar to the neo-Confucian concept of “inborn knowledge” /*liang zhi* 良知/ lead humans through the opaque jungle of all ethical dilemmas and doubts with which they are confronted in their concrete lives. As can be seen from this quotation, the individual can offer his/her contribution to the higher goal of social harmony only on a basis of following this inner signpost of responsibility:

A human being is not a thing; a human being is a goal in and of itself. This means that individuals are not tools of society, nor tools of the state. And the people of today are not tools for the people of tomorrow... But if we say that people are not tools of society, this does not mean that we are outside of it, and individuals should not look upon society and the state as the means for achieving their own interests... I believe that the conflict between individuals and society can only be solved by educating people to develop to the utmost their innate moral nature¹⁷. (Tang 2000, 61–62)

This is clearly not about obedience to external authorities. As his choice of language indicates, Tang remains loyal to the fundamental principles of Chinese ethics, which consciously strives to transcend the boundaries between the Self and Others through harmonious action in the sphere of interpersonal relations. (Sin 2002, 320)

¹⁶我們以“人雖有限而可無線,”需要兩層存有論,本體界的存有論,此亦曰“無執的存有論,”以及現象界的存有論,此亦曰“執的存有論”。

¹⁷人不是物,人本身為一目的。人本身為一目的涵義,亦包括個人不是社會之一工具,國家之一工具,此時代之人不是下不是下一時代人之工具...我們說每一人不是社會之一工具,不是說每一人可以自外與社會,個人亦不須視社會國家為達其個人目的之工具...我們人為只有以教化充兩發展人之此種道德的天性,可以協調所為個人與社會的衝突。

Conclusion

As we could see, the Modern Confucian philosophers see the world as a metaphysical reality which is immanent to everything that exists in the universe and also possesses moral qualities. Therefore their ontology is tightly connected with their epistemology and with axiology. In this way, the central Confucian virtue of humanness or mutuality (*ren* 仁) as such is already part of the cosmic structure; its perception of reality which is incorporation and internalization at the same time, is namely manifesting itself in the moral performance of individuals, necessarily existing in a mutually complementary relation with society.

Hence, it is not coincidental that Modern Confucians have always emphasized the significance of “immanent transcendence”. According to Lee Ming-Huei (2001, 118), this emphasis is explained by the fact that they wished to overcome the widespread prejudice against Chinese philosophy (including among sinologists) prevalent in the Western academic world since Hegel. In his *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* (1969, 142–43), Hegel described Confucius as an ancient “master” who had disseminated a collection of thoughts on morality without creating any real philosophy. This naturally implies that his work did not contain any transcendental dimensions. This superficial (mis)understanding of ancient Chinese texts continues to hold sway in Western theory not only with respect to Confucius, but in terms of Confucianism in general, and the whole of traditional Chinese thought. The present article represents a humble, but nevertheless important, attempt to abolish, or at least reduce these kind of ingrown prejudices in order to establish a less biased basis for intercultural philosophical dialogues between the Chinese and the Euro-American theories.

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