

Introduction: Confucian Cultures of Authority

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It has often been said that change is the only constant. So often, in fact, has the claim been made recently that it has taken on the softly tarnished patina of a cliché. Yet, there is perhaps nothing so strikingly characteristic of the present postmodern, postindustrial, and (according to some) even posthistorical era than its refusal to assume any fixed form or identity. The pace and scale of change taking place in virtually all sectors of all societies is arguably, if not obviously, without precedent. Equally unprecedented is the unpredictability of the directions in which change is taking place. For good reason, the language of paradigm shifts—once reserved for rare, epochal events—has also become a commonplace.

Under such circumstances of ironically sustained inconstancy, the foundational values and strategies by means of which any given society negotiates the complementary needs for both continuity and change are inevitably brought under critical scrutiny. When, as is presently the case, the conditions giving rise to deep, rapid, and multidimensional change are overwhelmingly global in nature, it is likewise inevitable not only that a society's foundational values and strategies are called into question, but its critical tool chest as well. The nature of authority itself—the capacity and right to author and to authorize—is opened to sweeping, categorical contest.

This has become a staple of commentators on the political, economic, social, and cultural effects of a globalizing process that is evidently far from smooth and trouble-free. Contemporary patterns of globalization place considerable stress on already existing local, national, and regional communities even as it has challenged them to enter into new kinds of relationship. To take but a single example, the disparate benefits reaped by nations of the “North” and those of the “South” have made it clear that in spite of the rhetoric of “free” trade, globalization has

not been egalitarian in effect. The result has been a complex pattern of cultural and national polarizations that have led some to speak—with varying degrees of perspicuity—of an oncoming “clash of civilizations” (Huntington: 1998), of tensions between globalism and tribalism (Barber: 1996), and of epochal shifts in authoritative capital (Friedman: 1999). What is clear is that by placing conflicting systems of values into increasingly dense proximity, the process of globalization has precipitated widespread crises of identity, the intense foregrounding of ethnic and religious differences, and has significantly raised the volume of communal dissonance.

With the rapid spread of telecommunications technologies, this transition has become increasingly self-reflective. To a perhaps unique degree, authority can no longer be taken for granted, and along with this “fact” of the present era have come powerful incentives for assessing prevalent cultural axioms and for improvising or evolving new forms of community. This has, in turn, placed new and very considerable demands on educators—particularly those responsible for crafting and delivering the undergraduate core curriculum that establishes a shared generational ground for responsibly taking up active and critically aware roles in working through the local and global challenges of deep and unpredictable social, economic, political, and cultural change.

The present volume emerged out of an effort to address the needs of educators faced with these demands and with the corollary challenge of furthering commitments to global literacy through infusing Asian content into the undergraduate curriculum. With funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Asian Studies Development Program—a joint project of the East-West Center and the University of Hawai‘i—held a two-year series of workshops and a culminating on-line conference on *Cultures of Authority in Asian Practice: A Seminar Series for Undergraduate Educators*. The aim of this project was: to examine critically the values that have historically guided the negotiation of identity, both practical and ideal, in different Asian contexts; to consider how these values play into the conception and exercise of authority; to assess their contemporary relevance in a rapidly globalizing world; and to develop resources for using the theme of cultures of authority in infusing Asian content throughout the undergraduate humanities curriculum.

Beginning with the premise that cultures are continuously improvised patterns of value and conduct, this two-year project explored, in pedagogically relevant detail, the ways in which Asian cultures of authority establish the conditions of communal continuity. In particular, the four workshops engaged in comparative examination of how different cultures of authority in East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia both

canonize and challenge apparent constants in the ongoing play of values and conduct that compose a given culture. A primary aim of the series of workshops was to highlight the diversity of Asian cultures of authority as well as the ways in which studying the dynamics of authority in each of Asia's major cultural spheres can shed incisive, critical light on both their intrinsic complexity and their unique approaches to accommodating often contending indigenous impulses and exogenous influences.

Not infrequently, authority is associated with authoritarianism and hence with uncritical, often coerced, compliance with "elite" dogmas. But the exercise of authority can also be seen in the sensitively appropriate translation of an existing constellation of values and customs into novel and changing contexts—a personalization of tradition uniquely suited to prevailing circumstances. Authority in this sense is allied with authoring and hence with initiative, openness, and creativity. Indeed, it is precisely the ambiguities surrounding authority that make it so appropriate as a thematic focus for studying the ways different Asian societies have negotiated the contrary demands of change and constancy. Because the role of authority is equally pronounced in Western societies, this theme opens fertile ground for comparative studies of culture within the frame of existing undergraduate courses.

The four workshops took complementary approaches to the organizing theme of authority, with each workshop focusing on different sets of academic disciplines in the humanities and social sciences and contributing to an overall understanding of the place of authority in Asian cultural contexts.

The first two workshops examined Asian cultures of authority in terms of the construction and representation of authority, focusing on the relationship between authority and order, between the authoritative and the heroic, and between authorship and the pragmatics of contributing to communal flourishing and endurance. What does it mean to be an authoritative person? How does gender affect the acquisition or claim of authority? What is the relationship between personal forms of authority and those evident in the spheres of nature, society, and the spiritual or divine? How is authority transmitted—be it religious, artistic, social, or political? What makes a particular artistic work authoritative? By what means are artists and their works able to challenge authority, both artistic and otherwise?

The third and fourth workshops investigated authority through comparative discussion of the institutional frameworks associated with leadership and governance, and through the ways in which cultures of authority implicate the subaltern, invite their own revision, and both create room for and procedures for responding to dissent. What are the

institutions by means of which a culture conserves key traditions? How open are these institutions to innovation? What is the relationship between political authority and the cultures of authority associated with cultural production or religious observation? To what degree is authority distributed, and with what presuppositions regarding the value of equity? What are the mechanisms for challenging authority or critically assessing the effects of its exercise in historically unprecedented times? What opportunities and resources are there for expressing and evaluating dissent?

The articles on *Confucian Cultures of Authority* included in this volume have been selected thematically from those prepared by participants in these workshops and constitute the culminating event of the *Cultures of Authority* project. In an essay entitled “Two Loci of Authority: Autonomous Individuals and Related Persons,” Henry Rosemont Jr. begins from a series of startling snapshots about the configuration of wealth and power in the world in which we live. The fact that we have a systemic problem is all too clear. His argument is practical: there is a real tension between the freedom that we celebrate as the centerpiece of American culture and our aspirations to live in a world in which the values of equality and justice prevail. While the civil and political rights of autonomous individuals developed over the past several centuries have increased the quantum of human freedom in the world markedly—certainly a good thing—these same rights have led to an increasing concentration of wealth and power, both within the structure of American society and in the world broadly, that conflicts fundamentally with our sense of justice—a situation that will have an increasingly corrosive effect on the democracy that we want. Rosemont then turns to a portrait of the classical Confucian model of the authoritative person cultivated within the context of ritualized roles and relationships as a heuristic for rethinking the relative weight we want to invest in the values of liberty and justice, and for determining an appropriate balance between them. Can we learn something from the construction of personal and communal authority in classical China—a construction that seeks a balance between freedom and responsibility—that might allow modern America to achieve its most cherished and defining ideals?

In identifying what is distinct about political authority in Confucian China, much has been made of the contrast between ritually constituted social order and rule by law. Tao Jiang in “Intimate Authority: The Rule of Ritual in Classical Confucian Political Discourse” marshals the distinction made by the comparative philosopher Thomas Kasulis between “intimacy” and “integrity” to attempt to resolve the question: is family-centered Confucianism a particularist philosophy, or is it a more ambi-

tious universalism? Abandoning the particularist/universalist dualism as having little relevance for the Confucian sensibility, Jiang argues that “the rule of ritual” can be a productive way of thinking through the political discourse of ancient China. Jiang disputes the familiar distinction between “rule by man” and “rule by law” as failing to appreciate the vectoral force of the ritualized context in establishing and perpetuating normative authority. Jiang then uses “intimacy” as defined by Kasulis to show how ritually constituted authority for the always familial community is at once personal and objective, internal and external, rational and affective, somatic and psychical, and so on. Beginning in the classical period with the Legalists, law has certainly had a role in effecting order in Chinese history, but it has been a much “Confucianized” application of law in which the conditions of intimacy have prevailed. This entrenched tradition of “rule by ritual” leaves us with the open question: what will be the real substance of rule by law in the irreversible democratization of modern China?

How are we to make sense of “culture of authority” as a theme in a contemporary Confucian vocabulary? Wenshan Jia in his essay, “The *Wei* (Positioning)-*Ming* (Naming)-*Lianmian* (Face)-*Guanxi* (Relationship)-*Renqing* (Humanized Feelings) Complex in Contemporary Chinese Culture” provides terminology that allows us to reflect again on the resolutely hierarchical Confucian social dynamic described by Rosemont and Jiang. *Lianmian*—literally “face”—is a social capital accumulated through moral self-cultivation that enables persons to establish themselves in community and to reposition themselves as circumstances require. As a social display of who one is, “face” is a concrete and pervasive factor in all dimensions of social living. Importantly, *wei*—status, position, rank—is always hierarchical and is open to the dynamics of personal transformation. It is something accomplished and sustained through effective social living. *Ming*—not just naming, but naming properly—allows us to discriminate and acknowledge discursively the shifting grammar of the community as it is expressed in meaningful relations. Having defined these Confucian terms of art, Jia then uses several case studies to demonstrate the contemporary relevance of these terms by showing how they are still alive and well in the social, political, and educational dynamics of modern China.

In these discussions of the ritually constructed authority that defines Confucianism, the institution of the family has been alluded to as the governing cultural metaphor. In “Creeping Absolutism: Parental Authority as Seen in Early Medieval Tales of Filial Offspring,” Keith Knapp turns to the early literary corpus to construct a more focused picture of how family authority functioned under concrete circumstances.

To establish a clear and indeed necessary distinction between the Chinese experience and the power of the father in the Roman *paterfamilias*, Knapp is able to demonstrate that Confucian filial piety (*xiao*) was understood to have more to do with the duties that children owe their parents than it does with the exercise of parental authority. Citing the classical philosophical and historical texts, Knapp shows that the model of filiality recommended in the formative period of this culture was far from simple, entailing a combination of both obedience and appropriate remonstrance. The picture he is able to glean from the early medieval literature, however, places a clear emphasis upon doing as one is told without assuming any latitude for a child's own critical assessment. In explanation of this changing phenomenon, Knapp suggests that in this early medieval period, parents had come to be portrayed as having the unconditional authority of rulers within their own homes, a situation that reflects the weakened power of the central government and the rise of the extended family. This authoritarian picture of parental power, however, far from reflecting real conditions, instead suggests insecurity on the part of the parents, mothers as well as fathers. In order to corroborate his argument that these literary sources are compensatory, Knapp turns to an evaluation of *shengfen* during this same period—the prevailing practice of sons splitting off from the father to establish a separate financial identity. In establishing a separate household, the husband-wife relationship came to supercede that of parent and child. In showing that the household heads were far weaker than previously thought, Knapp is able to establish and explain a distinction between the representation of parents in the literature and the actual state of affairs.

Of course, integral to the institution of family is gendered authority. Robin Wang in “Virtue (*de*), Talent (*cai*), and Beauty (*se*): Authoring a Full-Fledged Womanhood in *Lienüzhuan*” explores the biographies of notable women to identify the criteria according to which the authority of women was constructed and evaluated. In using this literary source, Wang must struggle with the same equivocation between representation and actual circumstances—between normative standards and real lives—that Keith Knapp has engaged in his research. Although there is a clear separation of roles between men and women advocated in the *Lienüzhuan*, and although the circumstances in which virtue is demonstrated are different because of this, what in fact constitutes excellence is the same for both. That is, a woman is celebrated to the extent that her personal example is deserving of deference by the family and community in which she is located. The fact that the commentary on each story is frequently able to associate the anecdote with a particular passage in the *Analects*

reflects the androgynous character of Confucian virtue. Of particular importance is her pivotal role as teacher of and model for her children—a role in which she constitutes the primary formative authority for the next generation. In their role of wife and counselor, women portrayed as exemplary persons (*junzi*) are able to transform the social restrictions imposed upon them into a context in which their own personal dignity and self-worth are displayed. Confucian selfhood, male or female, is defined in a network of relations, and moral autonomy is to be achieved through virtuosity in those relations. Even female beauty is defined as the outside of an inside—an acknowledgment of moral worth. Although *Lienüzhuan* is a didactic idealization of the woman's experience, by representing excellence as a possibility for both women and men, an argument can be made that the Confucian tradition has the resources within it to resolve its own problem of gender discrimination.

Roberta Adams makes use of a different genre of literature—the folk novel—to explore “Aspects of Authority in Wu Cheng'en's *Journey to the West*.” *Journey to the West* is a legendary recreation of the adventures of the Tang dynasty Buddhist monk Xuanzang who in the seventh century travels to South Asia to bring Buddhist scriptures back to Emperor Taizong. While authority in the story resides in political and religious personages, mortal and immortal, and of course in the Buddhist scriptures, there is a key antinomian figure in this 100-chapter sixteenth century novel who through his subversive antics establishes himself as a major icon in the evolution of Chinese culture—the figure of Monkey. There is a sustained tension between the boundless talents and audacious arrogance of Monkey and the many attempts that the Heavenly authorities make to rein him in. Whatever violence is inflicted on Monkey, he repeatedly rises to the occasion and hurls Heaven into chaos. In the end, it is only with the intervention of Buddha that Monkey is finally contained and sent down to accompany Xuanzang on his many adventures. Although the story is Buddhist, it also prompts reflection on the Confucian virtues of loyalty and selecting worthy officials, and echoes the old story of how so often literati merit has gone unappreciated by the Confucian state. There are also allusions to Daoist alchemical practices and the secrets of immortality, and the Five Phases *qi* cosmology that is a shared assumption of all of these traditions. Xuanzang is the human everyman whose innocence and purity—yet another kind of authority—make him both victim and hero as he wins the absolute loyalty of Monkey and his other disciples, and proceeds on his hazardous journey. Perhaps the main message of the entire novel is that it is the irrepressible authority of the cultivated human spirit that is to be prized

over any other kind of power. The sheer complexity of this fabulous tale as a cross-section of Chinese cultural sensibilities has made it a contested landscape plowed by commentators over the centuries, and continues to absorb the lifelong interest of some of our best interpreters of Chinese ways of living and thinking.

In reflecting on the construction of authority in late imperial China, Steven B. Miles endorses the trend of contemporary social history to argue that general discussions of central political authority must be balanced by the hydraulics of power found at more local levels of family and society. In his essay, “Establishing Authority through Scholarship: Ruan Yuan and the Xuehaitang Academy,” Miles explores authority as it is constituted by scholarship, culture, and education at a specific time and place. An account of Guangzhou’s Xuehaitang Academy founded by the prominent political and cultural figure, Ruan Yuan, in the 1820s is itself a story of contested authority. Ruan Yuan was a powerful patron of the Han evidential learning movement that sought to challenge both the tenets of orthodox Song dynasty “neo-Confucianism” and the political legitimacy of its adherents. The Cheng-Zhu interpretation of Confucianism that had emerged in late Song became the standard commentary for the civil service examinations that provided aspirants access to political power, and it was the function of most academies to educate students in this curriculum. It was Ruan Yuan’s personal prestige as both research scholar and regional governor-general that enabled him to become a force for educational reform by expanding the authority of Han learning from the north into the southern quarters of Qing China. But it was the institutionalization of evidential research in the curriculum at the Xuehaitang that perpetuated this redirection of education among the Cantonese elite long after Ruan Yuan as a person departed the scene. Miles examines one leading “immigrant” Cantonese scholar, Chen Li—perhaps the most prominent product of Xuehaitang—as a case study of how the prestige of this academy, its famous founder, and its authoritative scholarly methods demonstrated in new anthologies was used to certify the cultural authority of a small gentry elite.

While notions of orthodoxy and the inertia of authority are familiar themes in recounting the long story of imperial China, the beginning of the twentieth century was a period in which the old principles and the traditional institutions of authority had become thoroughly discredited, and political reformers and intellectuals—divided and conflicted among themselves—had to embark upon a transformation of the social and political order. The choice they faced was between Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao’s revisionist “enlightened despotism,” in which a modernized monarch would use the weight of tradition to effect sorely needed

change, and the motley advocates of democratic reform—anarchists, radical nationalists, and republicans—who envisioned the wholesale modernization of Chinese political institutions. But nothing comes or goes easily in China. In his “Intellectual and Political Controversies over Authority in China: 1898–1922,” Lawrence R. Sullivan rehearses the contesting forces that joined the struggle in the early days of Republican China and recounts the many false starts on the march toward democratic reform that only fed the disgust of the New Culture critics of traditional Chinese. By establishing the crucial distinction between power and authority, Sullivan is able to underscore the key role that culture plays in galvanizing legitimate authority—a communally shared sense of what is right. The May Fourth intellectuals believed that real political change required nothing less than a thoroughgoing cultural emancipation that allowed China once and for all to throw off the chains of entrenched ethical, religious, philosophical, and linguistic values that bound the population to promonarchical thinking. The painful comedy of errors that continued among the political elite was only symptomatic of a chronic malaise that afflicted the general population, expressed almost universally as a numbing apathy and an irrepressible indifference. You cannot have a democracy without the people, and in the eyes of the reformists, the defect preventing the emergence of a new China lies ultimately in the Chinese character itself. Indeed, it was the inability of the often cynical and always frustrated reformers to move the masses and overcome popular complicity in the familial and political tyranny of Confucian culture that in the fullness of time led China to embrace Marxism-Leninism as an alternative despotism.

Lawrence Sullivan has certainly provided the context. And Virginia Suddath then asks “Ought We Throw the Confucian Baby out with the Authoritarian Bathwater?” adding yet another twist to the complex history of early twentieth-century China. In this critical inquiry into Lu Xun’s extreme “anti-Confucianism,” Suddath locates the discussion within the context of the continuing encounter between Chinese and Western cultures, and speaks to the very pressing question: what kind of democracy will emerge in contemporary China? After all, the controversy over the value of Confucianism in the construction of a new China—does it serve as an authoritative or an authoritarian normative force?—still divides our best interpreters of Chinese culture in our own historical moment. What is unique to Lu Xun and the stinging critique he directed at China’s degenerate past is that unlike other reformers, he had on offer neither an idealized Western future for his countrymen, nor a nostalgic return to the Han past. Having been educated as a traditional intellectual, even in his rebellion against the content of the canons, he

could not entirely escape their influence. In demanding change, he advocated a transformation of the existing social order rather than disjunction with it, and a retail rather than a wholesale solution to China's recalcitrant problems. The question that Suddath asks is: how do we reconcile Lu Xun's strident anti-Confucianism and what Li Zehou would call his own "psychocultural construct"? In response Suddath shows that Lu Xun is indeed something of a paradox in that, in his iconoclastic assault on Confucian feudalism, at the same time he perpetuates the high status of remonstrance (*jian*) and its place in the Confucian project of self-cultivation. In reflecting on Lu Xun's legacy and his relevance for contemporary China, Suddath is keen to distinguish the Confucian sense of protest from dialectical dissent, personal realization from liberal individualism, and the ritually constituted, flourishing community from the ideal state. Indeed, there must always be room for a Lu Xun-like indeterminacy within the Confucian construction of authority.

It is hoped that this collection of essays will benefit teachers of the undergraduate curriculum in their commitment to help foster global literacy among all college and university graduates. While separate courses focused on the histories and cultures of Asia, Central and South America, Africa, and the Pacific are an important and even necessary element in any comprehensive university or college curriculum, they are not a sufficient response to the broad needs of all American undergraduates. Teaching Asia, for example, can no longer be the sole responsibility of the area specialist. Indeed, the segregation of Asian cultures, religions, literatures, and histories from those of the European and American traditions has tended to perpetuate the erroneous impression that "they" have not been members of "our" community for centuries.

In today's colleges and universities, teachers previously responsible for conducting lower division courses with a traditional Euro-American focus are being asked to add comparative emphases including other world cultures, Asian exemplars among them. The challenge these teachers face is formidable: to provide American students with an understanding of how the more familiar European and American values compare with and—in many cases—have been informed by those of other peoples, often in the context of intellectual, artistic, and commercial dialogue. This involves not only introducing alternative ways of thinking and living that merit study on the basis of their own intrinsic worth, it also involves highlighting the uniqueness and complexity of the contributions made by Europe and the Americas to world history and their role (for good and ill) in the emergence of global cultures. An integrated approach to the humanities is not only conducive to, but grounded on, an explicitly

critical engagement with values proper to both our own and other cultural lineages.

These essays examining authority in cultural context shed considerable light on the continuities and contentions underlying the vibrancy of Chinese culture. In spite of their common footing in the Sinitic world, they also exemplify the substantial merits of a thematic (rather than geographic or area studies) approach to infusing Asian content throughout the undergraduate experience. It is hoped that such an approach promises broad applicability across the undergraduate curriculum, increased opportunities for critical and pedagogically relevant cross-cultural comparisons, and a ready forum for encouraging values-centered conversation in the undergraduate classroom.