

Introduction

Confucianism Meets Liberalism

The Main Purposes of the Book

The rationale of this book is to examine the possibility and plausibility of what I shall call “Confucian liberalism” from a comparative viewpoint. To this end, I shall focus on the reverberations and intersections between the discourses of Chinese Confucianism and European liberalism, primarily through a concentration on the thought of Mou Zongsan [Mou Tsung-San] (牟宗三 1909–1995), the most original and probably the most conspicuous thinker in the New Confucianism (*Xinrujia* 新儒家) of Taiwan and Hong Kong. Taken as a whole, the materials presented in this book will comprise a cross-cultural panorama of theorizing on morality, civility, and politics in the Chinese-speaking world, paving the way toward a fusion of the horizons of Confucian legacy and Hegelian liberalism. As such, not only is it aimed at presenting a “rooted global philosophy,”¹ to use Stephen Angle’s phrase, but it is also intended to extend a renewed reconstruction of Mou Zongsan’s philosophy along the lines of reexamining the reception of liberal expressions in the Chinese context.

CROSS-CULTURAL DIALOGUE

As far as cross-cultural dialogue is concerned, my study will involve three major strands of inquiry. First, in light of the *ideological debate* regarding cultural encounter, Confucian liberalism is conceived in objection to the two extreme poles identified as the Western-centric

and the Sino-centric, or more exactly, anti-Confucian liberalism and antiliberal Confucianism, still hovering over Chinese political discourse. Indeed, in the realm of Chinese political discussion, the stereotype often has it that where liberalism accommodates the values of individuality, democracy, freedom, and rights, Confucianism appreciates instead those of community, meritocracy, “inner sagehood” (*neisheng* 內聖), and duty. Against this context, Mou Zongsan serves as a good starting point for seeking moral resonance, civil essence, and political reverberation across cultures because his ideas are formulated within an immediate comparative scheme, in search of a reconciliation between Confucianism and Western democracy (and science). In the main, aspiring to overcome the moral crisis of mainstream liberalism and the political pitfalls of traditional Confucianism all at once, Mou has established, as I hope to make clear, a Hegelian form of ethical liberalism rooted in the spirit of *ren* 仁 (humaneness). That said, far from seeing New Confucianism as a philosophical school pervaded by nostalgia for a past age, what concerns me here is the manner in which it brings out a “politics of innovation” within the “Confucian forms of life.”

Second, as regards the pursuit of *mutual understanding* between different cultures,² it seems to me that the “standard viewpoint” fostered by scholars of both extreme poles consists of a partial appreciation of liberal values in particular and Western modernity in general. As a result, a substantial part of this book is designed to make explicit the crucial but often overlooked relevance of British idealism (as a Hegelian liberalism) in making sense of the ethical import of liberal vocabulary appearing in the writings of New Confucianism.³ Put in other terms, on top of Kant and Hegel, my work will bring together for the first time New Confucianism and British idealism so as to arrive at a renovated appreciation of liberal values in Confucian terms. Accordingly, in spite of staying sensitive to cultural differences,⁴ my main objective is to build the conceptual bonds between a particular stream of Confucianism and a certain form of liberalism. My key claim is that despite the divergences, there are significant commonalities to be discovered between these apparently distinct philosophical traditions, particularly in the way in which they construct their core arguments for an “ethics of self-realization,” a “deep concern for civility,” and a “perfectionist reading of politics,” which in turn reveal to us the shared value of human dignity across cultures.

Third, in terms of reassessing *liberal vocabulary* from a cross-cultural perspective, central to this book is an endeavor to explore the formula-

tion of a specific set of “idealist” expressions of subjectivity, individuality, democracy, citizenship, open society, the state, freedom, rights, and so on, in the Chinese-speaking world. Overall, I am trying to make a case that, as with the British idealists, Mou in his Hegel-inspired political writings has embarked on a revolutionary bid to merge the spirit of *ren* with a cluster of Hegelian political expressions into an anticipation of Confucian liberalism. In other words, through the lens of British idealists, it is hoped that the mapping of liberalism in the Chinese context can be recast in a significant way.

THE STUDY OF MOU ZONGSAN

Consistent with the three layers of questions concerning cross-cultural dialogue, the general picture of Mou’s philosophy delineated in the book will be remarkably *distinctive* in three basic senses, in that it will emphasize the “spirit of reconciliation,” engagement with contemporary Confucian political theory, and a turn to Hegel and beyond.

First, despite Mou’s enormous achievement in theorizing on the prospect of Confucian liberalism, his Hegelian presentation of the “blossoming of democracy” (*minzhu kaichu* 民主開出) has been severely criticized by both anti-Confucian liberalism and antiliberal Confucianism. Insofar as my proposal for Confucian liberalism is at odds with the “standard viewpoint,” an underlying theme of this book is to bring the “spirit of reconciliation” out of Mou’s work with the purpose of defying the widespread tendency to assert an uncompromising incongruence between Western democratic politics and Confucian “humane government” (*renzheng* 仁政). In this manner, the ultimate goal of Mou’s political philosophy can be seen as an attempt to offer a synthesis of the several pairs of ideas that are usually believed to be in opposition to each other, including the antagonism between the individual and community, the conflict between citizens and the state, the contrast between negative and positive freedom, the asymmetry between right and good, and so forth.

Second, the landscape of contemporary Confucian political theory has been dramatically altered for the past two decades or so, but the names of Mou and other leading New Confucians are only mentioned in passing.⁵ To make the most of the legacy of New Confucianism, I plan to place Mou into the context of the updated debate between “Confucian democracy” and “Confucian meritocracy.” In so doing, it will be reaffirmed that Mou’s political thinking, if properly reconstructed in a

Hegelian vein, will give us renovated ground to relocate democracy and liberal values into the *Confucian lived forms of life*.

Third, the attack on Hegel's political philosophy, made by cold war liberals such as Isaiah Berlin and Karl Popper,⁶ had a lasting impact on the reception of liberalism in the Chinese context; even Mou's disciples have afterward turned to recast Confucian democracy by reference to Kantian liberalism. In contrast to major scholarship on Mou's studies solely focusing on the importance of Kant, my exploration will bring back the bearing of Hegel and the British idealists in reconsidering the historic achievement of New Confucianism. To be sure, one of my primary objectives in this book is to reconstruct a theoretical outlook of Confucian liberalism via a series of dialogues between Mou, Kant, Hegel, and the British idealists. By this means, we are expected to arrive at a deeper understanding of the diversity of liberalisms and a profounder reassessment of the affinities between New Confucianism and Hegelian liberalism in respect of an ethics of self-realization and a set of liberal expressions at stake.

New Confucianism and Hegelian Liberalism

Before placing Mou's work into the context of contemporary Confucian political theory, let me first say something about the specific current of Confucianism that concerns me in this book, followed by a description of the general meaning of liberalism and the noteworthy relevance of British idealism.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NEW CONFUCIANISM

I must confess from the beginning that a full examination of the historical background from which New Confucianism emerges is beyond the scope of the book.⁷ To make obvious the significance of New Confucianism, as John Makeham remarks, a preliminary differentiation has to be made between "Confucian revivalism"—a "conservative cultural phenomenon" that has taken various forms in modern China—and New Confucianism as a "distinctive philosophical movement" that was *retrospectively* identified in the early 1980s.⁸ In retrospect, as we are normally told, there have been, by and large, three generations of New Confucianism:⁹ the first generation embraces the eminent thinkers such as Xiong Shili [Hsiung

Shih-Li (熊十力 1885–1968), Liang Shuming [Liang Shu-Ming] (梁漱溟 1893–1988), Feng Youlan [Fung Yu-Lan] (馮友蘭 1895–1990), and He Lin (賀麟 1902–1993); the second one mainly comprises the four leading philosophers who signed the milestone “Declaration on Behalf of Chinese Culture Respectively Announced to the People of the World” (*Wei Zhongguo wenhua jinggao shijie renshi xuanyan* 為中國文化敬告世界人士宣言 1958), namely, Zhang Junmai [Carsun Chang] (張君勱 1887–1969), Xu Fuguan [Hsu Fu-Kuan] (徐復觀 1904–1982), Tang Junyi [Tang Chun-I] (唐君毅 1909–1978), and Mou Zongsan; finally, the well-known scholars affiliated with the third generation in promoting Confucianism globally include Liu Shuxian [Liu Shu-Hsien] (劉述先 1934–2016), Cheng Zhongying [Cheng Chung-Ying] (成中英), Jin Yaoji [Ambrose Yeo-Chi King] (金耀基), and Tu Weiming [Tu Wei-Ming] (杜維明).

Among the New Confucians, Mou’s philosophical accomplishment is most impressive to many commentators; in my view, Mou can be justifiably regarded as the most important Chinese philosopher in the twentieth century. Considering the themes of this book, my usage of the term “New Confucianism” will largely be confined to the “most specific” meaning in Yu Yingshi’s [Yu Ying-Shih] (余英時 1930–2021) definition, namely, “those people who belong to Xiong Shili’s ‘school’ (*pai* 派),”¹⁰ chiefly taking account of Mou Zongsan, Tang Junyi, and Xu Fuguan. To be sure, in Mou’s own classification, following the first period of the pre-Qin founders of authentic Confucianism, viz., Confucius and Mencius, and the second period of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, the ultimate goal of the third period of New Confucianism is to make possible “three unities” (*santong* 三統): to re-erect the “orthodoxy of Confucianism” (*daotong* 道統), to accept the “knowledge of science” (*xuetong* 學統), and to develop the “politics of democracy” (*zhengtong* 政統).¹¹ In this book, nonetheless, I shall focus on the topics of *daotong* and *zhengtong* in respect of Mou’s moral and political philosophy, largely putting aside Mou’s discussion of *xuetong* in respect of epistemology.

As regards morality, it is notable to observe that Mou, Tang, and Xu were all greatly influenced by Xiong Shili, “the first philosopher after Wang Yangming [Wang Yang-Ming] (王陽明 1472–1529) to inherit and promote moral spirituality in general, and moral metaphysics in particular.”¹² For this reason, the most representative cultural mission of the Declaration stated above consists of a robust commitment to the “learning of the heart-mind and *Xing*-nature (human nature)” (*xin xing zhi xue* 心性之學), that is, a philosophical reexamination of the moral

perfectibility of humanity with regard to a comprehensive theory of moral metaphysics. As we shall see, Mou spent most of his intellectual life re-erecting the new *daotong* in support of the “learning of the heart-mind and *Xing*-nature.”¹³

In terms of politics, the philosophical endeavor to combine the Confucian tradition with political modernity was, among others, initiated by Xiong Shili’s transfiguration of democracy as the new crux of “outer kingliness” (*waiwang* 外王). Greatly inspired by Xiong, Mou, Tang, and Xu were eager to establish, in their own way, Confucian democracy as the hub of the “new outer kingliness” (*xin waiwang* 新外王), that is, what Mou refers to as *zhengtong*. Contrary to the “standard viewpoint” in question, it seems plain that the cultural hybridity identified as Confucian democracy in their writings is all but hostile to both the extreme poles of anti-Confucian liberalism and antiliberal Confucianism.

More precisely, the New Confucians generally agree that there are two related but distinguishable aspects of democracy, namely, moral and political (also referred to as rational and institutional). And thus, it is likely that the moral spirit of Confucianism may provide solid ground for the functioning of democratic institutions, as long as the “moral rationality”—to use Tang Junyi’s phrase—spelling out the character of Confucianism in respect of dignity and respect is to be reunited with liberal democracy through practice.¹⁴

In no way, then, do the New Confucians deny that the pursuit of “rule by *de*” (*dezhi* 德治) in the Confucian tradition might have hindered the development of democracy in ancient China. But this gives us no sufficient reason to infer that the moral spirit of Confucianism, if properly rebuilt, will do more harm than good to democracy. For the most part, it is against this context that Xu Fuguan sets out to embark on a ground-breaking examination of the disparity between “cultivating oneself” (*xiuji* 修己) and “governing the people” (*zhiren* 治人) in Confucianism, resulting in a potential differentia between the personal and the public.¹⁵

Put clearly, the New Confucians actually realize that the institutions of democracy cannot develop out of Confucianism *itself* directly, for to develop democracy *in real terms* involves the will to power, the conflict of interest, class struggle, and so forth. But *in philosophical terms*, a disclosure of the anticipation of democracy in Chinese societies will definitely be insufficient, if we refuse to ask this vital question: *How can democracy work at all in a cultural setting traditionally fostered by Confucian*

civilization? Consequently, for the New Confucians, the starting point for examining the possibility and plausibility of merging liberal democracy with Confucian culture is a bid to develop a “significantly different political philosophy.”¹⁶ All things considered, one of the main tasks of Confucian political philosophy at present is to connect the basis of democracy, not with the morality of Confucianism as a whole—this is apparently the business of a “moral metaphysics”—but with a restatement of the moral principles of “governing the people,” or to put it another way, the moral codes of the Confucian political ideal.

THE NEW OUTER KINGLIENESS

For this reason, Mou thus progresses to make a famous distinction between the “way of politics” (*zhengdao* 政道) associated with the institutions and values of democratic politics and the “way of governance” (*zhidao* 治道) related to moral cores of “humane government,” that is, the Confucian political ideal in Mou’s restatement. Ostensibly, a significant part of Mou’s political philosophy is designed to provide an in-depth analysis of the disparity between the “way of politics” and the “way of governance” in relation to a series of contrasting terms.

In a basic sense, the “way of politics” is taken to mean the “objective form” of “constitutional democracy,” which could serve as the most credible justification for the “legitimacy of political authority” at the end of the day, whereas the “way of governance” presents the “essential elements” of “humane government,” spelling out the “virtue of the ruler” in traditional Confucianism. These concepts, in Mou’s scrutiny, are basically in line with the two distinguishable presentations of human reason. In a nutshell, the “way of politics” is grounded in the “constructive presentation of reason” (*lixing zhi jiagou biao xian* 理性之架構表現), which is aimed at developing the situation of “Sub-Ordination” (*duilie zhi ju* 對列之局) under the name of Understanding (*zhixing* 知性), whereas the “way of governance” is associated with the “functional presentation of reason” (*lixing zhi yunyong biao xian* 理性之運用表現), which is intended to retain the relationship of “Co-Ordination” (*lishu quanxi* 隸屬關係) in favor of a harmonious moral order. Or alternatively, as Mou puts it elsewhere, the “way of politics” and the “way of governance” also can be appreciated as two different dimensions of democracy, namely, the “extensional meaning of democracy” (*minzhu zhi waiyan de yiyi* 民主

之外延的意義) concerning “political power” (*zhengquan* 政權) and the “intensional meaning of democracy” (*minzhu zhi neirong de yiyi* 民主之內容的意義) regarding “governing power” (*zhiquan* 治權).

In the course of this book, we shall have opportunities to make clear the significance of these technical terms where appropriate. For now, it is more urgent to single out that unlike the most scholarship on Mou’s political thinking, concentrating on the novelty of the “way of politics” alone, I contend that to fully grasp Mou’s discussion of the subtlest model of Confucian democracy, the “way of politics” and the “way governance” are of equal importance. That said, in accordance with my endeavor to employ a Hegelian reinterpretation of Mou’s political thought, the focus of attention will be evenly directed to Mou’s decisive invention of the “way of politics,” as well as his critical recovery of the moral elements of the “way of governance” as the key ingredients of what I shall call “Confucian democratic civility,” or alternatively, a set of “Confucian public virtues” constituting Confucian *res publica*. In this manner, the voice of Mou’s democratic theory presented in this book is unique, in that to adopt a saying of Feng Youlan, the author is devoted to “continuing” (*jiezhu* 接著) rather than “repeating” (*zhaozhu* 照著) what Mou has said about the prospect of the “new outer kingliness,”¹⁷ leading to a fuller understanding of Confucian liberalism.

To be more precise, it is my central argument that while the “way of politics” denotes a “politics of innovation” in the face of the newly emergent *historical condition* identified as the age of democracy, Mou’s discussion of the core characteristics of the “way of governance” actually gives rise to a democratic rebuilding of “Confucian civility,” or so to speak, “Confucian democratic civility,” whose function resembles the “etiquette of democracy,” to use Stephen Carter’s expression,¹⁸ in an open society. Or, to put it another way, Mou’s Confucian liberalism is all but a “Confucian” way of re-evaluating liberal values in the sense that the moral foundation of democracy is, after all, based on Confucian *res publica*, that is, a Confucian notion of the common good surrounded by a set of Confucian governing and civic virtues.

As such, despite the fact that Mou repudiates antiliberal Confucianism for the benefit of democracy, he insists at the same time that democracy cannot be separated from morality for good as anti-Confucian liberalism claims, mainly because good operation of democracy in the Chinese cultural setting must rest on a well-ordered civil society grounded in Confucian *res publica*, consistent with the elements of “humane gov-

ernment.” In short, Mou’s presentation of Confucian liberalism, far from sliding into the extremes of Western-centrism and Sino-centrism, makes a Hegelian synthesis of the “way of politics” and the “way of governance.”

THE FAMILY OF LIBERALISMS

Instead of treating liberalism as a single form, I take it that there never has been “a liberalism” but “only a family of liberalisms.”¹⁹ In contemporary political theory we have, for example, with Richard Rorty, Kantian liberalism versus Hegelian liberalism;²⁰ with Charles Taylor, procedural liberalism versus communitarian liberalism or rights-based liberalism versus republican liberalism;²¹ and with John Gray, rationalistic liberalism versus agonistic liberalism.²² Considering the aims of this book, there are, accordingly, three main aspects of liberalism that need to be pointed out.

First, I agree with Alan Ryan that in light of *political creeds*, the history of liberalism is a “history of opposition to assorted tyrannies”²³ in favor of a group of liberal values, such as individual freedom, human rights, moral equality, democracy, tolerance, open society, pluralism, and so forth. Not surprisingly, different liberals may have different views about the different scopes and priorities of liberal values. In search of Confucian liberalism, nonetheless, it suffices to stress that at the heart of the practice of liberalism lies an attempt to seek the moral equality of all human beings by resisting the use of arbitrary and unaccountable power.²⁴

In this regard, it is worth mentioning that for Mou, a careful reexamination of “humane government” actually unveils the ideas of individual freedom and moral equality in objection to oppression and domination, but it simply lacks the “way of politics” related to a set of liberal institutions, such as the rule of law, constitutionalism, and democracy, for making happen the spirit of *ren* in the political sphere. Hence, as stated, Mou argues that the modern transformation of Confucianism hinges on a “politics of innovation” that envisions a free society that can accommodate Confucian civilization and liberal values all together. Overall, it is against this context that I come to identify Mou’s anticipation of Confucian liberalism as a Hegelian form of “ethical liberalism.”

Second, it has been said that Western liberalism recognized as a *historical product of the civilizing process* is the “offspring of the Enlightenment,”²⁵ prone to treat reason and progress as the kernel of modernity. In the Chinese context, however, it is the crisis of civilization caused by Western imperialism since the late nineteenth century that gave rise

to the “paradigm shift” of political language. For this reason, it seems appropriate to remark that from the very beginning, the endeavor to merge Confucian culture and liberal values has its roots in the long-standing question of whether Confucianism is compatible with modernity.

On this matter, my general view is that just like liberalism, there has been a “family of enlightenments,” as J. G. A. Pocock claims, and that the gist of Confucian liberalism is, by definition, more analogous to a “moderate” enlightenment than to a “radical” one.²⁶ That is to say, unlike both the “radicalism” of anti-Confucian (or antitraditional) liberalism and the “traditionalism” of antiliberal (or anti-Westernized) Confucianism, Confucian liberalism attempts to combine the traditional practice of Confucian civility with the progressive avowal of liberal values. In the case of Mou, his anxiety for preserving what I have otherwise called “Confucian democratic civility” with regard to the “way of governance” consists of a bid to reassess the public good in Confucianism from the standpoint of liberalism. Insofar as Confucian liberalism seeks to bring together Confucian civility (civilization and public norms) and liberal politics, it can be further itemized as a form of “civil liberalism.”

Third, as far as *the justification of liberalism* is concerned, there are certainly a variety of liberal theories, including the natural rights tradition, the brand of social contract theory (be it Hobbesian or Kantian, contractarian or contractualist), and the consequentialist approach.²⁷ Despite the differences, the consensus of mainstream liberalism is, by and large, in support of “state neutrality” and “rights as trumps.” To be sure, the leading liberal philosophers in our time, including Bruce Ackerman, Ronald Dworkin, Charles Larmore, Will Kymlicka, John Rawls, and so on, all would grant that the principle of neutrality is a defining feature of liberalism, acting as “a means of showing respect to persons who, as rational purposive beings, often select and act on controversial conceptions of the good.”²⁸ In other words, rights-based liberalism urges that “rights are best understood as trumps over some background justification for political decisions that states a goal for the community as a whole.”²⁹

By way of contrast, Confucian liberalism in association with “humane government” is devoted to undertaking a perfectionist reading of politics grounded in the ethics of self-realization underpinning this book. Put in other terms, since the business of government in Confucianism, as Mou clearly puts it, is to “attain accomplishment according to the individual’s nature” (*jiu geti er shuncheng* 就個體而順成), the “way of governance” mentioned above simultaneously contains a certain conception of the

common good, or so to speak, Confucian *res publica* containing a set of Confucian governing and civic virtues. In this regard, what is central to Mou's project of Confucian liberalism is not so much about a "politics of rights" but about a "politics of the common good," alluding to some sort of "perfectionist liberalism."

This, of course, does not mean that "perfectionist liberalism" belittles the individual, freedom, and rights; to be fair, what really sets these two versions of politics apart is the debate over the methodology in political theory. Instead of giving a detailed account of this debate, it is sufficient to only note here that while Confucian liberalism understood as a Hegelian form of "ethical liberalism" emblemizes both "civil liberalism" and "perfectionist liberalism," the overall features of Confucian liberalism at large bear striking similarities to the wing of Hegelian liberalism encouraged by the British idealists. Accordingly, regardless of the widespread belief that there is a serious tension between Confucianism and rights-based liberalism,³⁰ there is still a possibility of merging Confucian ethics, Confucian civility, and Confucian *res publica* with liberal values by reference to the legacy of British idealism.

THE RELEVANCE OF BRITISH IDEALISM

That being said, we are now in a better position to single out the relevance of British idealism in reassessing the liberal outlook of New Confucianism from a comparative viewpoint. For the most part, it is my observation that the leading British idealists, including T. H. Green (1836–1882), F. H. Bradley (1846–1924), Bernard Bosanquet (1848–1923), R. G. Collingwood (1889–1943), and in some qualified sense, Michael Oakeshott (1901–1990), are driven to resolve—albeit in distinctive ways—the ideological disputes over the contrasts between modernity and tradition, politics and civility, individuality and sociability, citizens and the state, negative freedom and positive freedom, and the like.

More exactly, as regards the characteristics of moral thinking, there do exist some salient affinities between New Confucianism and British idealism. For example, like Mou Zongsan and Tang Junyi, the British idealists have common roots in German thought, especially in Kant and Hegel, apart from the influence of Plato and Aristotle.³¹ Again, similar to Confucianism in general, the British idealists hold that the self and the social are inseparable, that the ultimate end in morality is to fulfill a "morally worthwhile life" in a society, and that "human beings' ideas

of what is good and of what constitutes a morally worthwhile life are continually developing.”³² On the whole, echoing the moral spirituality of Confucianism, the themes of British idealism consist of “an emphasis on moral practice and life in community, the recognition of the values of culture and social institutions, the centrality of self-realization and human flourishing, and an openness to new experience.”³³

And thus, in spite of Mou’s insistence that Chinese and Western philosophy can be conceivably connected only via the lens of Kant, it remains the case that in terms of moral practice, New Confucianism and British idealism share a similar view of what may be referred to as the ethics of self-realization. In fact, it is largely thanks to the British idealists that the term “self-realization” became widely recognized in the English-speaking world.³⁴ Above all, for the British idealists, self-realization means the perfection of human personality or human character, namely, the full actualization of one’s moral capacities and ends toward a higher self. By the same token, the core of Confucian ethics, as Stephen C. Angle puts it, “should be centered around the ideal of all individuals developing their capacities—ultimately aiming at sagehood—through their relationship with one another and with their environment.”³⁵

In terms of political theory, the British idealists are greatly indebted to Hegel, on the account that they gravitate toward examining the meaning of politics with regard to history, culture, and civilization. In this manner, Oakeshott’s profound discussion of the relationship between individuality and tradition, and Collingwood’s attempt to relate the purpose of a body politic to the ideals of civility, are advantageous for illuminating the political theory of New Confucianism. For, in line with Oakeshott and Collingwood, Mou and his companions are all motivated to find potential resolutions for relocating newly emergent political values into the lived forms of life in a given community. In other words, Oakeshott’s and Collingwood’s civility-based *ways of theorizing* are interestingly comparable to Mou’s political thought, in that the sharp contrasts between progressivism and traditionalism, between modernity and tradition, etc., can be effectively reconciled.

What is more, there is a great deal of agreement about political philosophy among the British idealists in the name of perfectionist liberalism (except for Oakeshott). Although “Hegelian to different degrees,”³⁶ the British idealists can be identified as post-Kantian writers who admire a large measure of liberal values and try to redefend them in a Hegelian way. The upshot is that the British idealists’ endorsement

of human fulfillment or self-realization not only plays a crucial part in their Hegel-inspired defense of democracy, freedom, and rights without sliding into authoritarianism, but it also serves as an internal critique of mainstream liberalism, which initiates the ethical turn to liberalism. Put differently, it is to the credit of the British idealists, notably Green, that the cultivation of individuality rooted in an ethics of self-realization is further established as a liberal conception of the common good, functioning as a yardstick against which the ethical character of the citizen and the crucial values of freedom and rights are justified in accordance with the moral ideals of an open society. In this regard, conducting a profound dialogue between Mou and Green would help shed light on the liberal aspect of Confucian *res publica* in the Chinese context.

Contemporary Confucian Political Theory

To illuminate the uniqueness of Confucian liberalism in a fuller sense, let me move to shed some light on the taxonomy of contemporary Confucian political theory.

ANTI-CONFUCIAN LIBERALISM VERSUS ANTLIBERAL CONFUCIANISM

On the whole, the anti-Confucian liberals such as Yin Haiguang [Yin Hai-Kuang] (殷海光 1919–1969) and Zhang Foquan [Chang Fo-Chuan] (張佛泉 1907–1994)³⁷ maintain that the endeavor to combine Confucianism with liberal values not only commits an error of neglecting the cultural incompatibility between the Chinese and Western worlds,³⁸ but also falls victim to a categorical confusion between morality and politics, allowing leeway for the conceptual abuse of the notions of positive freedom and common good, resulting in a more authoritative character of the state. In contrast, the antiliberal Confucians declare that the credulous acceptance of liberal values is uncritical of Western-centrism, neglects both the moral crisis of liberal democracy and the political problems confronting China and undervalues the political tradition of Confucianism. In this book I plan to engage with arguments from both camps in detail. But here, I just want to round off the category of antiliberal Confucianism in a way that leads to various versions of contemporary Confucian political theory.

To begin with, as opposed to Mou's "spiritual Confucianism" (*xinxing Ruxue* 心性儒學) based on a "rooted global philosophy" of *ren*, the recently

emerged discourse of “political Confucianism” (*zhengzhi Ruxue* 政治儒學) advocated by Jiang Qing (蔣慶), among others, is keen to establish a state-supported “Confucian religion”³⁹ in place of Mou’s philosophical examination of moral religion. Poles apart from Jiang, Chen Lai (陳來) rests his own version of “socialist Confucianism” on an *ontological* explanation of *ren*,⁴⁰ taking “benevolence as substance and harmony as means”;⁴¹ yet, in order to eradicate the domination of Western values, he is apt to set forth a “Sinified” standard on universal values. Encouraged by the rapid growth of cultural self-confidence, a young scholar affiliated with “contemporary Confucianism” lately depicted the preponderance of Western culture in China as “a turtledove taking over the nest of a magpie” (*jiu zhan que chao* 鳩佔鵲巢), meaning that the Western pursuit of democracy and freedom has for so long occupied the central place belonging to Chinese culture that it is time now for Confucians to “eliminate the heresy.”⁴²

Against this context, we are not surprised that there appears a propensity to reflect on China’s current state of affairs from a Confucian viewpoint, including Fan Ruiping’s (范瑞平) “reconstructionist Confucianism,”⁴³ Kang Xiaoguang’s (康曉光) “politics of benevolence,”⁴⁴ Jiang Qing’s “Confucian constitutionalism,”⁴⁵ “the China model” of Daniel A. Bell,⁴⁶ and so forth. In general, while Fan and Kang are disposed to file an entire objection to liberal values, Jiang and Bell aim to incorporate the elements of both Confucian meritocracy and liberal democracy into a “mixed” regime. In this book, the latter writers are still considered to be antiliberal, despite that some of their work aims to transcend the predicament of abstract individualism and the pitfalls of mainstream liberalism, since they ultimately refuse to implement the *full* picture of democracy and liberal values associated with the “way of politics” in the Chinese context.

Therefore, another feature related to antiliberal Confucianism is to go back over the advantages of Confucian political tradition, giving rise to an ongoing movement toward Confucian meritocracy. Apart from the writings of Jiang and Bell, the idea of Confucian meritocracy also can be found in Bai Tongdong’s (白彤東) “new mission of an old state,”⁴⁷ Li Chenyang’s (李晨陽) “Confucian elitism,”⁴⁸ and Joseph Chan’s (陳祖為) “Confucian political perfectionism.”⁴⁹ Despite criticizing liberal democracy, as indicated, these writers are determined to merge the meritocratic distribution of political power according to personal virtues and talents with a *limited* adaptation of elections and participation. It is to their

credit that the Confucian values of harmony, deference, and hierarchy have reentered the discussion of contemporary political theory, and the proper relation between morality and politics has been reconsidered in Confucian terms. Despite the different versions of Confucian meritocracy,⁵⁰ Mou's Confucian liberalism in the long run departs from all of them in demanding that the ultimate end of the Confucian political ideal that he aspires to, namely, "fulfilling self-realization" with regard to *others* in an ethical life, could only be actualized through nothing but the venue of democracy.

CONFUCIAN DEMOCRACY OR CONFUCIAN MERITOCRACY

In this fashion, contemporary Confucian political theory can be further divided into two main groups: Against Confucian meritocracy or "Confucian meritocratic perfectionism," the followers of Confucian democracy or "Confucian democratic perfectionism"⁵¹ are surrounded by the "Confucian pragmatism" of David Hall, Roger Ames, and Tan Sor-Hoon (陳素芬);⁵² Stephen Angle's project for "progressive Confucianism";⁵³ and Sungmoon Kim's version of "public reason Confucianism,"⁵⁴ to name only a few.

Confucian liberalism has both similarities with and differences from the main approaches to Confucian democracy. In general, it parts company with them in stressing the importance of self-development and the sociality of human beings, in affirming the relationship between democracy and moral development, and in welcoming political freedom and participation. Nonetheless, unlike "pragmatist Confucianism," which rests on the authority of John Dewey, Confucian liberalism takes British idealism as the closest Western correlate to elucidate Confucian democracy.⁵⁵ Contrary to the Deweyan rejection of a metaphysics of ethics, I contend that Mou's lifelong devotion to rebuilding a "Confucian moral metaphysics" deserves serious discussion in its own right.

The spirit of Confucian liberalism largely amounts to "progressive Confucianism," standing up for the "core Confucian commitment to individual and collective moral progress."⁵⁶ In brief, Confucian liberalism is like "progressive Confucianism" in believing that the essence of Confucianism lies in an ethics of self-realization involving an "endless process" of seeking the full development of the virtues of humaneness, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness, but it needs the venue of "new outer kingliness" to make happen its own core commitment. Consequently, I also agree with Angle on affirming a "certain degree of

convergence between Confucianism and the liberal tradition,” on distinguishing political virtue from personal virtue, and on making evident the boundaries of the political.⁵⁷ Surely, Angle’s pursuit of “virtue-ritual-politics” is, by default, a bid to harmonize these three dimensions of value. By contrast, this work focuses on Mou’s transformation of Confucian civility into “Confucian democratic civility,” which consists of a set of Confucian governing and civic virtues consistent with liberal elements.

Speaking of Confucian ritual proprieties, Kim is correct in observing that East Asian societies were not historically illustrated by value pluralism and lacked the Rawlsian notion of democratic political culture embedded in civil society, and thus, to regulate moral disagreements, Kim proposes “public reason Confucianism” to urge citizens to “cultivate reason” that they employ in democratic deliberation and political participation—hence “public reasons”—by reference to Confucian cultural values—hence “Confucian public reasons.” In fact, Kim’s appeal to “public reason Confucianism” to mediate between communal values and democratic citizenship, and especially between moral perfectionism and liberal concerns,⁵⁸ is saliently reminiscent of the New Liberalism of British idealism. In this regard, my own search for Confucian *res publica* in terms of “ethical citizenship” and a “nondominant idea of the common good” may make a significant addition to “Confucian democratic perfectionism”⁵⁹ from a fresh new perspective.

As a final point, the fact that Confucian liberalism prefers Confucian democracy over Confucian meritocracy does not imply that it entirely gives away the pursuit of a harmonious order, which is essential to Confucianism throughout time. Rather, the truth is that Confucian liberalism, identified as a “rooted global philosophy,” engages in critical dialogue with relevant ideas from other philosophical traditions to temper the progress of the rootedness of Confucianism—hence its spirit of *ren*—in a global context—hence the pursuit of *common humanity*. In this manner, the “spirit of reconciliation” at work can be deemed an attempt to prevent our collective hope for social harmony from turning into authoritarianism and to restrain the deferential sentiments and hierarchical relationships existing in Confucian societies from domination and oppression in public opinion. In short, not only does Confucian liberalism uphold the ethical view that participation “in shaping public goals and endeavors [is] of great importance to one’s moral development,”⁶⁰ but it also maintains the liberal emphasis on preventing potential damages to humanity caused by political evils.

From Kantian to Hegelian

Given the importance of Mou, we are not surprised by the fact that there have been a number of important commentaries on Mou's legacy appearing in the past two decades or so.⁶¹ Compared to the current literature concerning the study of Mou, the two vital ways of extending Mou's Confucian liberalism, namely, Kantian and Hegelian, are what particularly concern me here. While it is true that Mou's disciples and followers form a group of "Kantian New Confucians," within which the work of Li Minghui [Lee Ming-Huei] (李明輝)⁶² provides a benchmark, this book is intended to shift the focus of attention from Kant to Hegel and beyond.

As we shall see in detail, Mou surely believes that Kant's philosophy, representing the highest peak of Western philosophy, could be very beneficial, on several grounds, in shedding light on traits of Chinese philosophy. My point of departure, however, is predicated on the premise that although Mou highly appreciates Kant's great achievement in moral philosophy, he takes issue with Kant largely for the reason that Kant clearly denies the existence of "intellectual intuition" (*zhi de zhijue* 智的直覺) in grasping the thing-in-itself, but a common thread running throughout Chinese philosophy, including Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, is the total affirmation of "intellectual intuition."

If focusing on Confucianism, there thus appear, for Mou, serious limitations in Kant's treatment of free will as a "postulate" of practical reason, in the "bifurcated" world of nature and morals, or phenomena and noumena that Kant left for us, and in the "Christian" backdrop that Kant takes for granted when addressing the moral ideal of the highest good (the *summum bonum*). In short, in view of the fact that Kant's metaphysics of morals is tightly associated with an attitude toward the "finitude in human beings," it falls short of establishing a deep-rooted moral metaphysics, particularly with regard to concerns about the actualization of the ideal self in pursuit of the ultimate meaning of human life.

Against this context, I have several reasons for drawing on Hegel's insights when pondering the possibility and plausibility of Confucian liberalism as Mou did. First, Mou's philosophical project of connecting the "way of politics" with the "way of governance," or alternatively, reuniting the political *form* of liberal democracy with the ethical *content* of Confucian civility, as I see it, conforms to a dialectical pattern that takes after Hegel.

Second, despite the fact that Mou also picks holes in Hegel, he greatly recognizes the value of Hegel's idea of "concrete philosophy" in respect of real subjectivity, actualization, embodiment, individuality, the concrete universal, and so forth. All in all, in the post-Kantian setting, Hegel can be deemed an internal critique of Kant, who has never discarded the gist of the moral subject that Mou conveys to establish the spirituality of Confucianism.

Third, Mou's political writings were critically influenced by Hegel and full of Hegelian terminology, such as "subjective freedom," "objective spirit," the "self-awareness of the individual" (*geti de zijue* 個體的自覺), "self-negation" (*ziwo kanxian* 自我坎陷), and so forth. Besides, Mou's diagnosis of the crisis of modernity and the dilemma of liberalism was to a great extent inspired by Hegel. For example, Mou remarks that liberalism today has lost its "moral ideals," or "moral spirituality," in the sense that "the presentation of [its] freedom is negative and incautious."⁶³ And here, by "moral spirituality" of liberalism, Mou means the "unity of subjectivity and objectivity in rationality," which is true "freedom (in Hegel's definition)."⁶⁴ The upshot here is that the historical reception of liberalism, together with political modernity, in the Chinese context is rather limited. As such, it has been largely neglected that Hegel, as John Rawls correctly claims, "stands in the liberal tradition" and that Hegel is a "moderately progressive reform-minded liberal" as well as a "defender of the modern constitutional state."⁶⁵

In addition to the above considerations, there are three other reasons that can help clarify the credibility of extending our attention from Hegel to the Hegelian liberalism of the British idealists. For one, it should be remembered that there is textual evidence indicating that Mou was familiar with the work of British idealism. In brief, as Mou confessed, it was through Tang Junyi that he learned about Bradley's "reconciliatory dialectic" (*xiaorong bianzhengfa* 消融辯證法) and came to realize the gist of dialectical thinking and the importance of Hegel's philosophy.⁶⁶

For another, while Mou bitterly blamed Hegel for treating the Absolute as a "bare concept" without moral import from the very beginning, he openly admitted that Bradley's "reconciliatory dialectic" successfully resolved this shortcoming rooted in Hegel's philosophy. For this reason, Mou sympathized with Tang's opinion that Bradley's "reconciliatory dialectic" can to a large extent help elucidate Chinese philosophy in general and the spirit of *ren* in particular.⁶⁷

Third, as a matter of fact, the liberal traits of Hegel's political thinking have long ago been captured by Bonsanquet, when he says that "the whole political philosophy of Kant, Hegel, and Fichte is founded on the idea of freedom as the essence of man" first announced by Rousseau.⁶⁸ On the whole, it is to the credit of the British idealists that the mapping of liberalism has been significantly extended by incorporating a cluster of important issues that equally concern the New Confucians, the issues touching on history, civility, tradition, community, the common good, self-realization, and the like.

The Structure of the Chapters

Before turning to accomplish in full the main purposes of the book stated above, let me quickly say a few words about the structure of its chapters.

THE MORAL OUTLOOK OF CONFUCIANISM

I shall begin chapter 1 with an examination of the moral outlook of Confucianism from a comparative perspective, by bringing together Mou, Kant, Hegel, and the British idealists in dialogue. Based on this scheme, I am equipped to explain more fully the reasons for incorporating Hegel and the British idealists into a reconstruction of Mou's Confucian liberalism in the following two chapters.

In terms of moral religion, I argue in chapter 2 that Hegel's "immanent theology," aiming to settle the division between God and man in Catholicism, actually provides Mou with an essential framework for spelling out the "religiousness" of the attainment of "inner sagehood" in Confucianism with regard to the principle of the "conformity of Heaven and man in union" (*tianren heyi* 天人合一). Considering the purposes of this book, it is instructive to further compare Mou with the work of T. H. Green. There are, by and large, three main aspects that Green contributes to amplify the idea of moral religion in the thought of Hegel: the disapproval of the orthodox Christian view that God exists externally, a reinterpretation of the attributes of God through internalization, and the moral ideal of self-realization as the fulfillment of one's moral ability through communicating with the way in which God works in history.

To elaborate on the ethics of self-realization, another dialogue between Mou and Bradley will be undertaken in chapter 3. There are

several observations that I wish to make. First, like New Confucianism, there is also a tendency to emphasize the social dimension of the moral self in British idealism. Second, as for moral practice, Bradley also criticizes Kant for treating freedom as a postulate from a Hegelian perspective. As such, Bradley's analysis of the dialectical movement from "pleasure for pleasure's sake," via "duty for duty's sake," to "my station and its duties" can help bring to light the concrete actualization of *ren*. Third, regarding moral reality, both Mou's and Bradley's main opinions border on Hegel's "concrete universal"; therefore, similar to Mou's claim that "although man is finite, he can be infinite,"⁶⁹ Bradley points out that to take self-realization as the moral end is to "realize yourself as an infinite whole," which refers to being "specified in yourself, but not specified by anything foreign to yourself."⁷⁰

Having untangled the knotty conceptual links between New Confucianism and British idealism in respect of an ethics of self-realization, in subsequent chapters, I am turning to sustain Mou's effort in applying a Hegelian reading of liberal vocabulary, such as democracy, civility, individuality, the political subject (citizenship), public good, the state, freedom, and rights, in association with the moral spirit of "fulfilling self-realization" in Confucianism. In so doing, I am simultaneously determined to explain away the misconceptions about the merging of Confucianism and liberalism launched by both anti-Confucian liberalism and antiliberal Confucianism.

IN PURSUIT OF CIVIL LIBERALISM

To make my case, I contend in chapter 4 that as for democracy, Mou actually raised three main questions: (1) Why did ancient Confucianism not develop democracy? (2) How can Confucianism develop democracy? And, as I shall make efforts to explain in the rest of the book, (3) what is the subtlest model of Confucian democracy? Seen in light of the Hegelian scheme, Mou's answer to the first question points to the fact that traditional Confucianism failed to formulate the bare concept of "subjective freedom" that unveils the regeneration of democracy in the modern epoch, that is, an "independent political subject" having the sense of freedom and rights. To develop democracy out of Confucianism, as a result, Mou employs Hegel's philosophy of history to remark that the moral subject must endure a process of "self-negation" such that the political subject in question can be separated from itself. The crucial