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Confucian Renovation and the Manifesto for a Re-appraisal of Sinology and Reconstruction of Chinese Culture

Abstract

The present chapter presents, analyses and critically evaluates the *Manifesto* of the second generation of Modern Confucianism. This document was published in Hong Kong in 1958 and clearly and precisely defines the contents and goals of Modern Confucianism as the new philosophical current that emerged as a response to the socio-political situation in which China found itself in the first half of the 20th century. The main goal of this long essay was to present to the world public, and in particular to Western sinologists, the true value of traditional Chinese thought and culture, in order to reflect and possibly eliminate the orientalist and essentialist prejudices based on misunderstandings, and above all the prevailing false interpretations of the paradigmatic foundations of the Chinese conceptual traditions that have dominated over the last few centuries. The disclosure of these prejudices in the *Manifesto* is based on a more objective evaluation and re-examination of the central ideational concepts of Chinese culture, in particular the Confucian philosophy of ethics, which, according to the authors, could represent a platform for building a new ethics on a global level. The document is still an important source of information of the ideational foundations and goals of the Confucian reno-

vation, which represents the central neo-conservative movement of today's China and Taiwan, and partly also Korea and Vietnam. Therefore, understanding of the *Manifesto* can help us better comprehend the ideas and ideologies of modern East Asian societies.

Keywords: Modern Confucianism, A Manifesto for a Re-appraisal of Sinology and Reconstruction of Chinese Culture, Modernization, Democracy, *xinxing zhi xue*

Povzetek - Konfucijanska prenova in Manifest za ponovno ovrednotenje kitajske kulture kot svetovne dediščine

Pričujoče poglavje predstavi, analizira in kritično ovrednoti temeljni manifest druge generacije modernega konfucijanstva. Ta dokument, ki je bil objavljen leta 1958 v Hongkongu, jasno in natančno opredeljuje vsebine in cilje modernega konfucijanstva kot nove filozofske struje, ki je vzniknila kot odgovor na družbenopolitično situacijo, v kateri se je znašla Kitajska v prvi polovici 20. stoletja. Osrednji cilj tega dolgega eseja je bil svetovni javnosti, predvsem pa zahodnim sinološkim krogom, predstaviti resnično obličje tradicionalne kitajske miselnosti in kulture, in preko njega odpraviti orientalistične in esencialistične predsodke, ki so temeljili na nerazumevanju, predvsem pa na prevladujočih napačnih interpretacijah paradigmatičnih temeljev kitajske idejne tradicije, ki so prevladale v zadnjih stoletjih. Razkrivanje teh predsodkov v *Manifestu* temelji na bolj objektivnem vrednotenju in vnovičnem preučevanju osrednjih idejnih konceptov kitajske kulture, predvsem konfucijanske filozofije etike, ki bi po mnenju avtorjev lahko predstavljala platformo za izgradnjo nove etike na globalni ravni. Dokument je še danes pomemben vir informacij o idejnih temeljih in ciljih konfucijanske prenove, ki predstavlja osrednjo neokonservativno gibanje sodobne L.R. Kitajske in Tajvana, delno pa tudi Koreje in Vietnama. Zato nam lahko poznavanje njegove vsebine pomaga bolje razumeti tudi ideje in ideologije sodobnih vzhodnoazijskih družb.

Ključne besede: moderno konfucijanstvo, druga generacija, Manifest za ponovno ovrednotenje kitajske kulture kot svetovne dediščine, modernizacija, demokracija, *xinxing zhi xue*

1 The Philosophical Current of Modern Confucianism

The *Xinrujia* or *Xin ruxue* Modern Confucianism¹ began to emerge as a new philosophical current in China at the beginning of the 20th century and was then built up after 1958, when the representatives of the

1 In English (and other Western languages) the term is usually translated literally, as New Confucianism. However, since the Chinese terms *li xue*, *dao xue* ali *xinxing xue*, which denote the Confucian discourses of the Song and Ming dynasties, are in the West usually translated as "Neo-Confucianism", the two currents are often confused in Western sources, since Neo-Confucianism means the same as New Confucianism. For this reason, we prefer to use the descriptive translation "Modern Confucianism" to translate the name of this movement, which is also appropriate because this school of thought was very much concerned with issues of Chinese modernization. In this context, we should also mention the fact that, in addition to *Xin ruxue*, this school of thought is sometimes also referred to by terms such as *Dangdai xin ruxue* (Contemporary New Confucianism) or *Xiandai xin ruxue* (Modern New Confucianism).

second generation of Modern Confucians living and working in Taiwan and Hong Kong published *A Manifesto for a Re-appraisal of Sinology and Reconstruction of Chinese Culture* [Wei Zhongguo wenhua jinggao shijie renshi xuyan 为中国文化敬告世界人士宣言] (also translated as the *Declaration on Behalf of Chinese Culture Respectfully Announced to the People of the World*, and hereafter referred to as the *Manifesto*). This document clearly and precisely defines the substance and objectives of Modern Confucianism as a new philosophical current that emerged in response to the socio-political situation in which China found itself in the first half of the 20th century.

China's complex situation at the end of the 19th century gave birth to new ideational and cultural trends to aid it in meeting the challenges of modernization, which was taking hold there with the encroachment of Western imperialist forces. Though during this period Confucianism² was singled out as the main culprit for China's backwardness, it was precisely in original Confucianism that Modern Confucian philosophers saw the greatest potential for the establishment of a moral and ethical system of a democratic Chinese society – one that would be capable of filling the gap created by the loss of values and the spiritual void resulting from the modernization of contemporary societies built on capitalist foundations. Modern Confucian philosophy is therefore not merely an attempt to establish new ideational trends that would enable China to make the most efficient and successful transition to a globalized modern society, but also a project that carries the potential to establish a new ethics on a global scale. The philosophical system of Modern Confucianism covers the fields of epistemology, ontology, metaphysics, ethics, morality, philosophical anthropology and aesthetics.

In the process of modernizing Chinese society and culture, most Modern Confucians engaged with the differences between Western and Chinese philosophy. They were looking for a suitable framework to identify the different characteristics of the two systems of thought as a basis for interpreting the differences between Western and Chinese culture. Once they had become familiar with the central schools of thought in Western philosophy they sought to interpret Chinese philosophy and tradition on the basis of their own understanding of the former. Fundamental to this process was the re-evaluation and reinterpretation of Chinese ideological tradition and culture. Twentieth-century Chinese philosophy thus began with the discovery of Western philosophy and the reflection on its own ideological and cultural tra-

2 Both Confucianism as state doctrine or national ideology (*rujiao* 儒教), as well as Confucianism as philosophical teaching or philosophical theory (*ruxue* 儒學 or *rujia* 儒家) (Rošker 2013, 43).

dition. In doing so it naturally sought ways of reforming Chinese culture in a way that would meet the demands of modernization, while at the same time rationally justifying and reconstructing traditional views on the central concepts of Chinese philosophy, such as Heaven or Nature or the Cosmos (*tian*), the Way (*dao*), humanness (*xing*) and humaneness (*ren*), morality and ethics (*de*), the individual, society. In general, Modern Confucians have followed the premise that questions of the inner reality of the Cosmos, the substance of being, and the Absolute are the issues that determine the meaning of human life (Rošker 2013, 53). As such these questions are essential both for the establishment of a new, modern society, as well as for the preservation of an integrated and non-alienated cultural identity of the Chinese people.

The Modern Confucian school of thought emerged out of an attempt to establish a synthesis of Western and traditional Chinese thought, an attempt defined by the crisis of both discourses (*ibid.*, 75). It absorbed certain elements of Western philosophy, while also seeking a starting point for their critical reflection. It thus sought a new interpretation of Chinese philosophy based on methods that integrate modern and Western positions (Cheng 2002, 375). The ideals of Modern Confucians were thus not limited to the pursuit of a revitalization and rehabilitation of their ideational tradition. From this perspective, it was clear that they could only begin the intellectual process of modernizing Confucianism on the basis of its synthesis with ideas imported from Euro-American philosophy, since the latter constituted the cultural background from which modernization actually developed.

The philosophical movement of modern Confucianism can be divided into three generations. Most of the authors of the *Manifesto*, as already mentioned, belonged to the so-called second generation, which was active from the founding of the People's Republic of China, i.e. from 1949 until 1995. Its representatives were Fang Dongmei (1899-1977), Tang Junyi (1909-1978), Xu Fuguan (1903-1982) and Mou Zongsan (1909-1995).

2 Fundamental characteristics and philosophical content

Members of the second generation left their homeland after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Xu Fuguan and Mou Zongsan fled to Taiwan to escape Mao Zedong's regime and its strict control over intellectuals, Tang Junyi withdrew to Hong Kong, and Fang Dongmei retreated to India and later to the United States. On the first day of 1958, however, the con-

ceptual guidelines for the re-valuation of Chinese culture and its traditional concepts, using theoretical methods adopted from Western philosophy, were formally published in the form of the famous *Manifesto*, which is still referred to by Chinese theorists as the *Magna Carta* of Modern Confucian philosophy. The content and significance of this *Manifesto* will be discussed in detail below, but here we should first briefly outline the general features of the second generation's philosophical system and highlight the fundamental problems it dealt with.

Within second-generation Modern Confucianism there further existed two ideational currents, the moral-metaphysical and the practical-cultural. The first current focused on the ontological and cosmological aspects of Chinese philosophy. Methodologically, its representatives started from moral and ethical experiences and then extended these to a metaphysical understanding of reality based on the paradigm of the unity of essence (*ti*) and function (*yong*) (Cheng 2002, 380). The second current, on the other hand, started from the study of values in the Chinese tradition, whose main aim was to show how Chinese culture should be studied and developed in order to realize a more meaningful human existence and to create a culturally richer world.

The basic features that, according to Cheng Chung-Ying (2002, 396-400), are common to all generations of Modern Confucianism (and contemporary Chinese philosophy in general), but which have emerged most clearly in the second generation, are systematically summarized by Cheng in the following points:

The first feature is the dominant role of the philosophy of the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*), from which they draw the onto-cosmological unity of essence and function (*ti* 體 and *yong* 用), of reality and its processes, and the fundamental character of all that exists. This philosophy has continuously been a source for understanding reality from the time of Confucius, Daoism, Neo-Daoism, Chinese Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism and Modern Confucianism, all the way to the present day (*ibid.*). Its main function can be seen in the establishment of the foundations of Chinese ontology and cosmology, from which all other schools of philosophy have drawn. The metaphysical outlook found in the *Book of Changes* has been a major influence on 20th century Chinese philosophy in all its elements, and in particular on the establishment of moral metaphysics as the fundamental feature of Modern Confucianism. Here, questions of ethics and morality are inseparable from the consideration of human character and reality. This inseparability is reflected in the traditional priority given to ethics in Chinese philosophy.

Another characteristic that Cheng points out is the focus of Modern Confucians on the human being. If change is the basis of reality then, in their view, there is no need to concern oneself with a transcendent god. In this context, however, human-centredness does not mean anthropocentrism, but rather a tendency towards holism and the organic interconnectedness of people and nature, which is already reflected in the traditional Chinese concept of the unity of humanity and Nature, or the Cosmos (*tian ren he yi*).

The third feature, according to Cheng, is the application of science and scientific methodology to Chinese philosophy. From the first beginnings of modernization, all modern Chinese philosophers accepted the validity of science and scientific methodology. However, in the holistic paradigm of contemporary Chinese philosophy the importance of human values prevails. This then primarily becomes a question of how to transform scientific knowledge into worldly wisdom.

The fourth feature is a discussion of political philosophy in terms of the fundamental concepts of political power, the common good and equality. Modern Confucianism, in its holistic and organic view of reality, places democracy within a Confucian framework.

The above features are, of course, only a superficial and rough outline of the content of Modern Confucian philosophy. Each individual representative has made his own theoretical contributions to it, which need to be known for a comprehensive understanding of this philosophical current. In what follows, we will present the core of the second generation's *Manifesto*, which, although not an academic text, raises questions in an essayistic manner and offers certain answers to the prevailing problems facing Chinese thought and culture in the middle of the last century.

3 Summary of the main ideas and thematic orientations

The *Manifesto* was published in Chinese and English on January 1, 1958 in the Hong Kong journal *Democratic Tribune* (*Minzhu pinglun*), and shortly afterwards in the Taiwanese journal *National Renaissance* (*Zaisheng*), almost a decade after the second generation of Modern Confucians had emigrated from mainland China. The central aim of this long essay was to present the true face of traditional Chinese thought and culture to the global public (mainly Western, but also contemporary Chinese academia) in order to draw attention to the essentialist prejudices based on the misunderstandings and

misinterpretations of the fundamental paradigms of Chinese ideational traditions. These prejudices, which over the course of the West's encounter with China have become entrenched in Western sinological circles in particular, are, according to the authors, the product of Eurocentric and orientalist discourses. In the *Manifesto*, the authors therefore also put forward their own critique of the West in order to call for reflection on, and to shed light on, the reasons for its sense of superiority over other cultures, and to draw attention to the need for intercultural dialogue in order to establish a new world ethic that would integrate the ideological traditions of the West and the East.

The *Manifesto* examines the cultural, political and ideational features of traditional and contemporary China and places them into a contrastive and critical dialogue with Western thought. In the *Manifesto*, however, the solution to the above-mentioned prejudices against the Chinese ideational tradition and culture is based on a more objective evaluation and re-examination of its central concepts.

The twelve chapters focus on discussions on the fundamental misunderstandings of Chinese culture in both the past and present, on explaining the key characteristics of Chinese ideational tradition, and its future prospects. This rethinking of their own culture is, among other things, a product of the loneliness and suffering that the authors have experienced as a result of their migration from their homeland. They were convinced that the problems facing Chinese culture in the mid-20th century had a global dimension, since China had made a significant contribution to the development of the world as a whole. In addition, the authors point to the fact that China is home to a quarter of the world's population. The direction and manner in which it would develop was thus not just a matter for China alone, but a problem for the world as a whole.

The central idea of the *Manifesto* was based on two visions: the first aimed at making the Western and Chinese academic audiences recognize the value of traditional Chinese culture, while the second aimed at creating a conceptual platform for the reconstruction of Chinese culture based on Confucian philosophy. In this way, the authors highlighted and defended the fundamental position of Modern Confucianism, namely that Confucianism is not a relic of a bygone feudal social order, as it has been accused of by contemporary Chinese academia, and is essentially compatible with both modern science and democracy. What is more, in their view the Confucian moral concept of humaneness and Confucian ethics in general can cure the overly rationalistically and mechanistically oriented Western world.

Although the *Manifesto's* fundamental objective of recognizing the meaning and value of Confucianism as a system of ideas capable of forming an ethical basis within the discourse of China's modernization, on which China could offer solutions to spiritual emptiness and alienation as a product of the capitalist economic-political order on a global level, was not achieved at the time, it is in recent times once again becoming a subject of discussion and debate (see Makeham, Cheng, Fan, and Rošker).

The main themes of the *Manifesto*, which are spread over twelve chapters, can be narrowed down into three main strands. The first deals with the prejudiced view that the Chinese ideational tradition lacks a religious or transcendent dimension, attempting to establish or illustrate the said dimension through a detailed outline of Confucian moral metaphysics. The second set of problems concerns the socio-political question, in particular the question of modernization and democracy, and the critique of the communist ideology that has prevailed in mainland China. In this strand, it is argued that China certainly lacks a modern democratic system and the scientific and technological achievements of the West, but that the view that Chinese culture is devoid of democratic foundations and tendencies, as well as being negative towards science and technology, is both problematic and false. The third strand is a critical evaluation of the West or Western culture, which the authors believe is based on a sense of superiority, exclusion of other cultural traditions and an emptiness of values. Through this argument the authors also want to draw the attention of Euro-Americans to the necessity of intercultural dialogue. This, they argue, is necessary in order to establish a new ethic at global level, which is essential for the further development of humanity as a whole, since it cannot be based on exclusion, still less on a value system that originates in the so-called developed capitalist Western world. Below, we will present the three strands of the problem in more detail, but let us begin by looking at the content of the *Manifesto's* introduction.

3.1 Introduction

The authors point out at the very beginning of the *Manifesto* that the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of Chinese culture began with the Jesuits in the 16th century, who were in fact the first to introduce classical Chinese works to the Western world. The greatest inconsistency was in their interpretation of the philosophical structure of the Neo-Confucianism of the

Song (960-1127) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties,³ which equated the central ideas at the forefront of philosophical debate at the time with Western rationalism, atheistic naturalism and even materialism⁴. The Jesuits, in the authors' view, were responsible for the general misunderstanding of the Chinese thought system because, in their mission to spread the Christian faith, they adapted Chinese classics and central concepts in a way that suited their ideology. In doing so, of course, they nullified not only the actual significance of the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties, but also the contributions of Daoism and Buddhism (Chang et al. 2018, 8).

Nevertheless, the authors acknowledge the outstanding contribution of Western sinologists in the field of archaeological excavations and the collection of ancient Chinese sculptures and works of art, as well as the analysis of inscriptions on bones and bronze vessels, which have been linked to the study of Chinese language and writing. On the other hand, however, they point out that the primary purpose of excavating and analysing these sources, which were of course also primary sources for research in the field of Chinese culture and civilization studies, was not directly related to the study of China as a living nation and culture in its present, changing and evolving state, as they themselves would have wished it to be (*ibid.*, 12).

They point out that most Western scholars have been mainly concerned only with the study of Chinese antiquity, not with current Chinese realities, which has resulted in a misrepresentation of Chinese culture. The project of reviving Chinese culture must therefore be based on a reinterpretation of the fundamental concepts of Chinese philosophy, since only in this way will a proper understanding of Chinese culture and its reality be possible (*ibid.*).

3.2 Traditional Chinese culture and the problem of its pragmatism and atheism: the transcendent moral subject vs. the transcendence of religion

The authors point out that the misunderstanding of Chinese culture that prevails both in the West and in contemporary China is based on ignorance of

3 Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties is the second Confucian reform and considered to be a qualitative leap forward in the Confucian tradition. The first reform, which happened during the Han (second century BCE – second century CE) dynasty, integrated into the Confucian teachings elements of Legalism and became an autocratic state doctrine. Neo-Confucianism on the other hand integrated Daoist and Buddhist concepts, and through metaphysics developed a rationalist philosophy of ethics.

4 For more on this, see the next subchapter.

its specificity and origins. China is a single cultural system with a single origin and continuity. This unity and continuity relate above all to the Confucian tradition of ideas. In this respect, the Chinese world of ideas is said to be quite different from the Western, i.e. European, world of ideas, which is made up of different cultures and origins; Western science and philosophy have their origins in ancient Greece, the legal system with the Romans, and religion in the Hebrew culture. While the West is supposed to see the division between abstract speculation and ethical practice, between religious piety and socio-political action, as something to be taken for granted, Chinese culture understands all these levels as a continuum (*ibid.*, 13). Because of these differences, the West fails to recognize the religious sense of transcendence that is present in the everyday practice of ethics in China (*ibid.*).

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Writing in 1958, the authors point out (*ibid.*) that in the previous hundred years Western merchants and missionaries, who forced their way into China with battleships and compelled the country to trade with them, had become a symbol of the West's cultural invasion. For this reason, the leaders of the May Fourth Movement⁵ were indifferent to Western religion, but at the same time they also neglected the religious elements in Chinese culture. They were enthusiastic about science and democracy, while in the field of philosophy they believed in pragmatism, utilitarianism, materialism and naturalism. Their interpretation of Chinese culture thus completely excluded the element of religiosity, and they also labelled the traditional principles of morality, as expressed through social rituals and customs, as harmful and decadent. Chinese ethical-moral principles were regarded by them as mere formalities within human and social behaviour, without any spiritual value (*ibid.*, 5). And the Communist ideology's attitude towards tradition dealt an even more serious blow to Chinese culture, as it demonstrated a complete lack of insight into the transcendent dimension of human existence that underlies Chinese ethical-moral principles. The authors of the *Manifesto* point out (*ibid.*, 7) that while there has never been a religious system in China of the kind found in the West, this does not mean that there was no religious spirit or transcendent dimension, or that there were only ethical and moral principles that de-

5 The May 4th Movement (*Wu si yundong*), represents an ideological and political turning point in modern Chinese history and is often equated by contemporary theorists with the beginning of the Chinese Enlightenment. It began in 1919 with student protests against the unfair decisions of the Versailles Peace Treaty, and soon exploded into a massive pan-Chinese movement of so-called "new intellectuals", who campaigned for democracy, the right to self-determination, freedom of speech, gender equality, the right to free marriage, etc. The so-called New Culture Movement (*Xin wenhua yundong*), however, combined both patriotic nationalist elements and elements of harsh criticism or outright denial of Chinese tradition, especially its Confucian state doctrine (Rošker 2013, 16).

termine interpersonal relations and behaviour in a pragmatic way in order to maintain political and social order. The prejudice that religiosity does not exist in China is thus, in their view, untrue, since such religiosity is certainly to be found in the idea of the unity of Heaven and humanity, where moral practice is also imbued with a belief in the *Dao* (*ibid.*). However, based on this misunderstanding Western and Chinese sinologists have largely proceeded on the false assumption that these principles are supposed to regulate only the external forms of human existence, entirely devoid of the transcendent elements that would also affect people's spiritual lives (*ibid.*, 20).

Crucial to overcoming this prejudice is the understanding of traditional Chinese humanism, in which there exists the central Chinese concept of the unity of humanity and Heaven i.e. Nature (*tian ren he yi*).

We can also interpret this concept to mean that people and Nature are not separate entities [*tian ren bu er*] since they are of the same substance [*tian ren tong ti*] and stand in harmony. The word Heaven can express different meanings – it is for example the heaven we see. However, in ancient China Heaven clearly referred to a higher transcendent force. Confucius, Mencius, Laozi and Zhuangzi all ascribed transcendent meaning to the concept of Heaven. (*Ibid.*)

They also point out (*ibid.*, 21) that this kind of belief in the divine nature of Heaven or Nature is manifested within the Chinese tradition through a combination of worship of Heaven, Earth, rulers, ancestors and teachers. In ancient China, the associated rituals and worship of Heaven could only be performed by the emperor, who thus integrated politics and religion into one system. This inseparability of political and religious elements, together with the traditional emphasis on the inner, i.e. moral, perfecting of the individual at the expense of the development and cultivation of external, i.e. social and political factors, has led to a system that has often tended towards despotism, which has certainly hampered the development of modern democracy.⁶

6 In this regard, the views of the individual representatives of the second generation were different. Unlike Fang Dongmei and Tang Junyi, Mou Zongsan and Xu Fuguan believed that traditional Chinese culture had actually neglected the development of the individual's political consciousness (*wai wang*) because it was too focused on the cultivation of the inner moral self (*neisheng*). This concept is one of the key ideas in the political philosophy of Modern Confucianism. Here, the "inner sage" is a symbol of the transcendent, and the "outer ruler" is a symbol of the empirical subject; however, both of them together refer to the unification of personal morality with a broader social ethic and, at the same time, with a successful life in society (Rosker 2013, 54). Traditional Confucians have taken the external ruler from the Daoist work Zhuangzi, in which it is defined as the one who, together with the inner sage, constitutes the ideal of a person, and is a metaphor for the comprehensive realization of a person as an

The practical side of Chinese humanism is manifested in the theory of reasonable rightness (*yi li zhi xue*), which is about discerning right from wrong, together with the moral reason that shapes or regulates human intentions and behaviour. This process is, of course, not limited to relations between people with the sole purpose of maintaining political and social order. Its real aim is the perfecting of the human moral person, which arises from the observation of rightness in the sense of rational action, and does not look towards personal profits or losses, benefits (*ibid.*, 22). This goal was emphasized by the Confucian School, which stressed the importance of moral integrity for the attainment of rightness (moral perfection) on the basis of one's own personal responsibility.

How to achieve this, if there is no faith in absolute rightness? This faith can be interpreted as an act of placating one's conscience, without having to necessarily give into god's orders. Where conscience finds peace, there exists the rightness (and morality) of the Cosmos. The *Dao*, in which conscience finds consolation, is on the one hand built into the human mind, while on the other it transcends the narrow limitations of a person's concrete life. (*Ibid.*)

In this context, members of the second generation have questioned whether belief in the *Dao* is not exactly the same as religious belief in a supernatural order. The remarkable longevity and vitality of the Chinese tradition, they argued, is conditioned by its constant demand to reconcile social life with the cultivation of transcendent consciousness. This view is contrary to the hypothesis that Chinese culture only developed the principles of external forms of interpersonal relations at the expense of neglecting transcendent aspects, i.e. the prejudice of the purely pragmatic nature of traditional ethics, which is supposed to be devoid of any transcendent elements. Modern Confucians firmly rejected this thesis, stressing that such transcendence is an inherent and important part of the Chinese tradition of ideas. According to the authors of the *Manifesto*, the reason for the fact that Western sinologists mostly do not perceive it at all is that such transcendent feelings are not directed

individual who nurtures their intimate spiritual inner side and at the same time remains active in society. In Confucian discourse, however, this concept became the ideal of moral rule. The first generation of Modern Confucians embraced this ideal, but also stressed the importance of scientific knowledge. The second generation, however, had already noticed that the ideal of moral rule was not realisable in the society of the time, and so they incorporated into it Western science and democracy. The third generation, on the other hand, is of the opinion that the content of modernization should not be sought only in science and democracy, but that it is even more important to find a reasonable adaptation to the developments and achievements of modern capitalism (*ibid.*).

towards any external God, but remain part of the individual's interiority and are realized through cultivation of themselves.

In this they focus on the discussion of the so-called Chinese rationalism of the Song and Ming Neo-Confucianism, also known as the doctrine of the heart-mind and humanness (*xinxin zhi xue*) (*ibid.*, 8-11), a discourse that addresses the reasons for the existence of a moral imperative between Heaven (Nature) and humanity, but at the same time a doctrine that they believe has been largely neglected or misunderstood by Western sinologists. The authors are of the opinion that this doctrine constitutes the core of Chinese culture, as it also contains the fundamental concept of the unity of humanity and Heaven. The relationship between the heart-mind⁷ and humanness is at the very core of Confucian thought as well as of pre-Qin Daoism. The Jesuits equated the concept of the heart-mind and humanness (*xinxing*) with the rational soul⁸ in Western philosophy, but the authors point out that the doctrine of the heart-mind and humanness, which was passed on from Confucius and Mencius to the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties, can also be interpreted as a doctrine of transcendent mind in the sense of morality, with metaphysical implications similar to those established in the West by Immanuel Kant. It forms the basis for moral practices in the daily lives of individuals and communities. In this context, all moral practice derives from the inner, self-directed effort of one's moral mind and moral reason. When one fully develops one's so-called transcendent mind, one can eventually approach Heavenly virtue, Heavenly reason and cosmic consciousness, and thus attain the unity of virtue between man and the cosmos that is the essence of traditional Chinese rationalism. Such an idea of transcendent consciousness is the source of all valuation in Chinese culture, through which one becomes aware of

7 These are the cognitive forms of the subject's interiority, which combine both rational and sensual elements.

8 In the authors' view, by translating humanness in a dichotomy with the supernatural, the Jesuits completely distorted its meaning and also lost its transcendent dimension, which is intrinsically present (*ibid.*) The doctrine of the heart-mind and of humanness directs human activity, which manifests itself outwardly, towards the attainment of inner, i.e., transcendent, dimensions. A person thus carries within them a line of communication in the systematic transmission of social, ethical and ritual activities which, through inner transformation or cultivation and in conjunction with the religious spirit and metaphysical perception, they bind into a unity. Since, in the authors' view, this kind of rationalism is the essence of Chinese culture, they appeal to the need to dispel the prejudice that the essence of Chinese culture is limited to adapting and regulating interpersonal relations at the expense of inner or metaphysical transcendent feelings, such as those provided by religion in the West.

the value of one's own life and the Cosmos and their interconnectedness. This awareness gives one contentment and peace of mind, and thus also enables a state of acceptance of the present. Thus in the Chinese tradition acceptance of the present and reconciliation with its conditions are not necessarily linked to a constant striving for progress and profit, as in the West (*ibid.*).

Very important here is the concept or wisdom of non-attachment (*fangxia zhi zhihui*), (*ibid.* 23), which occupies a very important place in Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism and Indian theology. Since Western culture is mostly equipped with an analytical rational cognitive apparatus, and more or less works from the particular to the universal, it lacks the flexibility which would allow it to follow the winding path of the specific and the concrete in its mutability. Unlike the above-mentioned static approach, the wisdom of non-attachment, which the authors of the *Manifesto* call "circular and wondrous" and which can already be found in the *Book of Changes* (*yuan er shen de zhihui*) (*ibid.*) is dynamic.

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In the Western philosophy of ethics the question of morality often refers to rules of conduct and the social value of moral rules in relation to religious worship (*ibid.*, 14), and few thinkers have stressed that the practice of morality must transform human behaviour and virtue. The original Confucianism, however, emphasized this very dimension. All Chinese virtues, in the Confucian conception, have their origin in the highest cosmic reason, which is inherently present in the human heart-mind. Therefore, the prejudice that Chinese culture is merely oriented towards the pragmatic regulation of interpersonal relations and social order, in which there is no transcendent dimension, has, in the view of the authors of the *Manifesto*, no real basis and is grossly unfair to the actual content of Confucian theories of the moral subject and of Chinese culture as a whole.

3.3 Views on democracy, communism, modernization and scientific development

Under this heading the authors point out that despite the rich ethico-moral dimension of the Chinese tradition, Chinese culture lacks science and democracy and therefore needs to evolve as an empirical and political subject (*ibid.*, 15).

Here they also present their views on China's political position in the 1950s, raising the question of whether the Chinese people actually want democ-

racy, since the Communist regime, i.e. Marxist Leninism, which the authors perceive as anti-democratic (*ibid.*, 7), had prevailed, despite the fact that democratic thought and the tendency towards scientific progress had been prevalent in the early period of the Chinese republic. In this context they list a series of reasons why in their opinion the Red Army's dictatorship will not exist for long as the leading principle within the cultural and political institutions of mainland China (*ibid.*, 19). In the Communist ideology they see a discourse that is opposed to human beings and as such *a priori* violates the rights of individuals. In their opinion Communism is dogmatic and represents an obstacle to the free evolution of humanity.⁹

They further emphasize that a certain segment of the Chinese population only accepted Communism due to its fight against the aggression of Western capitalism and imperialism. In its dynamic power Communism had managed to meet the Chinese social and political demands of the given moment, but Marxism is only a temporary tool to meet the positive demands and goals of the Chinese people, which are first and foremost anti-imperialistic (*ibid.*).

In the opinion of Modern Confucians the seeds of democracy did exist in the traditional Chinese culture (*ibid.*, 16). Daoist and Confucian political thought says that the ruler can never abuse their power and must act in accordance with non-action, i.e. virtuously. Even before the Zhou dynasty (11th – 2nd century BCE) there was the belief that the empire does not belong to a single individual, but to the people as a whole: “The state was not the property of one man alone, but of all the people [*tianxia wei gong*]” (*ibid.*, 17). These principles were passed down from Confucius and Mencius and we can see them as laying the foundations for Chinese democracy. The authors believe that in China the formation of a democratic system should proceed from traditional Confucian political philosophy, but the latter must first be developed and perfected. On a political level the people were theoretically able to demand the right to co-determine the rule of the state, while in practice this was not realizable, since there was no legal system that defended the rights of the people and weighed and judged the deeds of the rulers. Besides, the institutionalized Confucianism that prevailed in Chinese history drew its principles from Legalism, which is *a priori* anti-democratic. The contradiction between the moral spirit of Chinese culture and monarchic absolutism can in the authors' opinion be resolved through the establishment of democratic constitutionality.

9 For more on the Modern Confucian criticism of Communism, see Sernelj 2019.

In the opinion of Modern Confucians China was not able to modernize and industrialize because it did not develop a system of democracy, science and technology (*ibid.*, 15). Despite this, they do not agree with the prevailing opinion that in the Chinese culture there was no internal trend towards the development of a democratic system. They also do not accept the thesis that Chinese culture was opposed to science and that it radically dismissed technical knowledge. They emphasize that ancient China paid much attention to the development of practical knowledge and skills. The Confucian School did not only stress the need for establishing virtue, but also the use of tools and technology for the betterment of life (*ibid.*), which is why in ancient China astronomy, mathematics and medicine had already blossomed. Moreover, all the way up to the 18th century China was far ahead of the West with regard to handicrafts and techniques to cultivate the land. Despite this, the representatives of the second generation still believe that Chinese culture lacked science of the Western type, since its own science had only focused on everyday use and short-term benefits. For the future development of the Chinese culture a theory of science and a new academic system with continuous study and spread of scientific knowledge must thus be established (*ibid.*).

Dealing with the question of modernization, the second generation of Modern Confucians built upon the supposition that Chinese culture carried inside it the potential for modernization, despite the fact that modernization was, due to a series of external and internal factors, in the concrete case of China, “imported” from the West. That is why the problems that China was facing due to modernization were different to those that the modern Western societies had. While the latter are defined by excessive individualism, rationalism and social alienation, the greatest problem in China is the weak development of technology, law and democratic social structures (*ibid.*, 27). In the opinion of the second generation representatives China should therefore in many ways learn from the West. However, on the other hand the Confucian tradition can also offer the West much precious knowledge that could aid it in alleviating – if not eliminating – many of the serious problems that arise in its societies.

The question of the presence or absence of transcendence in traditional Chinese philosophy and ethics is thus to them extremely important, simply due to the fact that classical Western theories of modernization have always claimed that Chinese culture (like all other “non-Western” cultures) would never be able to modernize by itself, since the internalized concept of transcendence and the creative tension between the human and Divine is one of the central suppositions of modernization, and the Chinese ideational tradition never de-

veloped that sort of transcendent tension (Rošker 2013, 189). It was therefore extremely important to the Modern Confucians of the second generation to thoroughly demonstrate that in its ideational tradition Chinese culture also contained key elements that could potentially allow for a kind of modernization that would be based on and built upon its own ideational foundations.

3.4 The criticism of Western culture and a call to change

As pointed out above, a large part of the *Manifesto* is also dedicated to the analysis of Western culture and the question of why from the beginning of the 19th century onwards Western culture was so dominant across the modern world and why the whole world was seeking to adopt Western religion, science, philosophy, literature, law and technology. The authors wonder whether Western culture is truly able to lead human civilization as a whole. They wonder whether the “East”, learning from the “West”, might not also teach something in return (*ibid.*, 20).

The authors certainly acknowledge that through the use of the theory of scientific progress for the reconstruction of the natural world and reformation of the social, political and economic fields, Western culture has achieved extraordinary feats. In its progress of the last one or two hundred years it surpassed all traditional cultures in the world and left them behind. This cultural progress of the West has universal and eternal value, which other nations, if they want to compete with it, must respect, emulate and study. On the other hand, in the process of achieving this progress, Western culture provoked different conflicts and severe problems, such as wars (political and religious), antagonism between workers and employers (i.e. capitalists in the Industrial Revolution), colonialism (as accompanied by the imperialist oppression of different peoples), Communism (which they claim to have sneaked in under the guise of economic equality but in fact brought with it the totalitarian regime of the Soviet Union that is the mortal enemy of Western democracy), and the development of nuclear weapons, able to destroy the whole of humanity (*ibid.*, 21). In the opinion of the authors, the West has managed to solve most of these problems, but they still believe that the problems themselves come from the shortcomings of Western culture, which today still exist and it is for precisely this reason that there is a need for a re-evaluation of Western culture as such. The authors thus list various different weaknesses of the Western culture.

In their opinion Westerners lack the respect for and compassionate understanding of other cultures. That is why they overlook the latter’s authentic

demands for their own development. We must not forget here the orientalist approach that Westerners have been using in the study of other cultures. Orientalisms, Euro-centrism, cultural provincialism, modern colonialism and false universalism are all living mechanisms through which the West “justifies” its own feelings of superiority over others.

Such attitudes are in their opinion the product of Greek culture and its analytical-scientific methods, the Hebrew tradition and modern technological spirit.

If we understand the background against which the West’s feelings of superiority are built, then we must also understand and forgive the Westerners. However, if this culture wishes to exist in the future and together with other cultures ensure global peace, then it also has much to learn from other cultures. (*Ibid.*, 22)

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This applies first and foremost to Western intellectuals and academics, who ought to perform their tasks of building explanatory models with a greater degree of accountability and openness towards non-European cultures.

Among the most important values of the Confucian tradition, which could certainly benefit Western culture, are satisfaction without a ceaseless desire for profits, compassion, kindness and gentleness. The West must learn that interpersonal relations need to be based on equality, but also humaneness (*ibid.*, 24). In other words, the brotherhood that the West emphasizes needs to be transformed into one that values and practices humaneness and compassion.

God, who is the origin of powerful love, should not be seen merely as the one that surpasses the human spirit and who is the object of human prayer, but also the one with whom humanity is in unity with. (*Ibid.*)

From Confucian culture the West can also learn the importance of respecting tradition, familial ties, international solidarity and ethical values.

The main problem of Western culture and ethics is therefore that it sees society and human history merely as an object for rational and objective inquiry and does not manage to also dedicate its attention to the importance of a meaningful human existence.

4 Analysis and critical appraisal of the Manifesto

As we have seen above, the meaning of the revitalization of Chinese culture that the second generation strived for and whose guidelines are clearly stated in the *Manifesto* is on the one hand directed towards the rehabilitation of

Confucianism, while on the other becomes an appeal for the establishment of world ethics that would include Confucian theories of moral subject.

Despite its undoubtedly great importance for the preservation of Chinese cultural heritage, the Modern Confucian *Manifesto* also includes a few problematic points that we are going to shed light on below.

The essay is based on the supposition that culture is the product of a people's spiritual lives. In the West the authors limit this spirituality to religion, while spirituality in China is supposedly based on the philosophical traditions of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. This view is problematic even just from the fact that Christian theology, especially medieval scholastics, mostly drew from Plato and Aristotle's philosophy. Moreover, European humanism is based on ethical and moral values that are just as universal as the Confucian values are claimed to be here. The authors see the reason for the spiritual emptiness of the Western culture in the ceaseless pursuit for progress as based on religious foundations, especially the emptiness of religious rituals and the inherent separation of humanity from its Creator. This criticism is of course mostly valid, but the authors of the *Manifesto* also fall into an essentialist generalization, since "Western values" certainly cannot be limited to those values that are propagated by the Judeo-Christian religion. This is also connected to the next inconsistency in the text: its authors speak of the West in the sense of a cultural construct, derived from numerous traditions, but they do not take into account the specifics of the individual cultural areas that in most cases influence the different value systems arising within the different cultures. It therefore seems that the critics of the West are here mostly referring to America, since they emphasize pragmatism and utilitarianism, ideational trends that mainly evolved there and not within the European tradition.

However, the criticism of the West found in the *Manifesto* is in most of its arguments otherwise justified and valid. The authors rightly point out its Euro-centric feeling of supremacy and superiority over other cultures, the provincialism of their own culture, which misjudges the ideational systems of other cultures based on its own conceptual frameworks, imperialist and colonialist interests, which can be seen in the oppression and degradation of other peoples. The suggestion that they offer Western academics to reflect on – about the further development of the world – also seems sound and suitable: the West must learn from the East (of course this mostly means China) if it wishes to preserve and develop its own culture. Here they emphasize the feeling of compassion and non-attachment, which in their opinion Western culture is lacking. However, in this segment they are in my opinion

being essentialist, since first and foremost there is (again) a lack of criticism towards capitalism as the economic and political system, and the coinciding ideology in which such feelings of course *a priori* do not have much value.

Their criticisms and predictions as to the fate of the Chinese Communist regime are also mostly visionary, but their thesis that the system could not survive either in China or anywhere else in the world due to the fact that it acts against the basic humanist principles, is in my opinion again very generalizing and naïve, since the fall of regimes in all the so-called “real socialism” states was predominantly followed by the rise and aggressive dominance of capitalism, as well as unbridled lust for power and privilege of the inner Communist elites (higher officials and other leaders).

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A number of Western and Chinese sinologists criticize the *Manifesto* for numerous other shortcomings. The post-colonial critic Arif Dirlik warns that with the Modern Confucian revival of the Chinese ideational tradition and its values there is also the danger of its links to Chinese nationalism. On the other hand, Heiner Roetz warns of the questionability of the Modern Confucian thesis on the religious dimensions of original Confucianism, which in his view is neither sound or needed, since it is precisely the non-religious reading of the ancient texts – through a suitable interpretation and adaptation – that would allow for a more objective conceptualization of a modernity that is not limited to instrumental rationalization while on the other hand also does not negate the social progress that is the necessary consequence of the Enlightenment (Rošker 2013, 57).

Theoreticians from mainland China also accuse the Modern Confucians of an idealistic view of Confucianism as the ideational foundation upon which it is actually possible to carry out the modernization of Chinese society. If Confucianism as an obsolete ideology of the feudal tradition was not able to carry this out in the past, then in their opinion it is incapable of doing so in the present or future (*ibid.*).

Meanwhile, Modern Daoists in general accuse Modern Confucians of an excessive and rigid formalization that stifles critical dialogue and the development of critical thought. For example, the most well-known Taiwanese Modern Daoist, Chen Guying, reproaches them for being too obsessed with morality and ethics. Here he otherwise agrees with the supposition that the modern, market-directed society needs to be furnished with ethical meaning. However he also emphasizes that this meaning cannot be achieved by excluding other intellectual traditions and ascribing exclusive value and meaning to the Confucian School. Such positions are in his view an expres-

sion of intolerance and absolutism. Despite the fact that Modern Confucians in principle advocate for dialogical openness, Chen believes that they themselves are not really capable of it, since they do not follow the traditional Chinese concept of the “free dialogue of a hundred schools” (*baijia zhenming*), which is a true dialogue and the precondition of any real philosophy. Chen thinks that their support for a synthesis of the Chinese ideational tradition and Western science and democracy is therefore hollow (Rošker 2013, 58). Regarding the question of adapting the ideational tradition of the Song and Ming Neo-Confucianism, he further reproaches them for lacking innovation, since in his view they did not manage to really upgrade it.

I myself am of the opinion that in this regard Chen Guying’s criticism is not valid, since the synthesis of Confucianism, Daoism and Chinese Buddhism, as well as the analysis and comparison of Chinese and Western ideational concepts that shed light on certain completely new aspects of both ideational systems, was precisely what Modern Confucians built their philosophical system on. Here we should especially mention Mou Zongsan’s comparison of the moral self to Kant’s moral imperative, as well as Xu Fuguan’s comparative analysis of Zhuangzi’s onto-aesthetics to Western phenomenology, and his thesis on why in China monotheistic religion did not evolve, which also demonstrates certain inconsistencies in Jaspers’ theory of the Axial Age.¹⁰

5 Conclusion

The central idea of the *Manifesto* was based on two visions: the first strived for Western sinologists and the Chinese academic public to recognize the value of traditional Chinese culture, while the second was directed towards building the ideational platform for the revitalization and reconstruction of the Chinese ideational tradition. In this regard the authors took the position that Confucianism is not a relic of the so-called feudal social order and is compatible with modern science and democracy. Moreover, the Confucian concept of humaneness can in their opinion even cure the overly rationalistically and mechanistically oriented and alienated Western world. That is why one of the goals of the *Manifesto* was to use the critique of Western culture and the West as a political construct to present their guidelines for a more just and balanced development of the world as a whole, one that would be based on intercultural connectedness and cooperation on the global level. The authors note that the West lacks the ethical values on which such a construction of the world would be possible. They therefore suggest that the

10 See Rošker (2013) and Sernelj (2013).

West should adopt the Confucian ethico-moral system, which is based on the sort of integrity of the individual that that allows for their internal development and realization in a spiritual, social, and even political sense. In this regard the *Manifesto* represents the promotion of Confucian ethics. Taking into account the socio-political situation that China was facing at the time of its writing, the document can also be seen as a defence of Confucianism as an integral part of traditional Chinese culture that is of the highest value to China's progress in the direction of democracy, which the Chinese intellectuals had been working towards since the May Fourth Movement. On the other hand the authors of the *Manifesto* tried, through the discussion on the Neo-Confucian teaching of the heart-mind and humanness (*xinxing zhi xue*), to eliminate the misguided view that Confucian philosophy and Chinese culture in general are only oriented towards pragmatic solving of interpersonal relations and establishing a harmonic social order that contains no transcendent dimension. In this regard the essay represents an important contribution to the understanding of Confucian moral philosophy. Since Confucianism represents an important part of the common cultural heritage of East-Asian countries, it can give us a better insight into contemporary cultures in this important region of the world.

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