PRELIMINARY PROGRAMME

Confucianism and Modern Society

Venue:
Gravensteen (room 111), Pieterskerkhof 6, Leiden

Thursday 28 May 2009

10.00 – 10.30
Registration and coffee

10.30 – 10.35 hrs
Welcome by Prof. Max Sparreboom, Director, International Institute for Asian Studies, Leiden

10.35 – 10.45
Introduction to the workshop theme by Prof. Ho Hsin-chuan, European Chair of Chinese Studies, International Institute for Asian Studies, Leiden / Professor of Philosophy Department at National Chengchi University, Taipei, Taiwan and Prof. Axel Schneider, Professor of Modern China Studies, Chinese Department at Leiden University / Director of Modern East Asia Research Center, Leiden

Session I

10:45-12:15

Chairman: Fabian Heubel

Joel Thoraval. Religious Confucianism, Secular Confucianism: Can Confucianism Become a Modern Civil Religion?

Peng Guoxiang. Confucian Classics in a Changing Contemporary China

12:15-14:00
Lunch

Session II

14:00-15:30

Chairman: Joel Thoraval


15:30-16:00
Coffee Break

Session III

16:00-17:30
Chairman: Peng Guoxiang

Axel Schneider, *Is Confucianism Compatible with a Modern View of History? The Book of Changes, Confucian Rites and the Nature of History in Modern China*

Fabian Heubel, *Self-cultivation and Modernity: On the Critique of Kant in Mou Zongsan and Foucault*

Friday 29 May 2009

Session IV

10:00-11:30
Chairman: Daniel Bell

Thomas Fröhlich, *Individual Freedom and the State in Tang Junyi’s Modern Confucianism*

Ho Hsin-chuan, *How Is a Liberal Confucianism Possible?*

11:30-11:50
Coffee Break

11:50-12:30
*Final Discussion*

Chairmen: Ho Hsin-chuan & Axel Schneider

All presenters
Individual freedom and the state in Tang Junyi’s modern Confucianism

The project of a modern Chinese state was a crucial element in the development of the mature form of Tang Junyi’s modern Confucianism. It happened as late as the second half of the 1960s that the agenda of his modern Confucianism shifted in favor of “non-political” topics. This turn was due to political changes in East Asia, since by the late 60s it became obvious that a Confucian “reconstruction” of the Chinese mainland was not likely to take place in the years to come, while the regime of the Guomindang was favoring its own, strictly ideological brand of Confucianism. Thus, from the mid-60s onwards, Tang Junyi and other prominent Confucians concentrated more on studies on Chinese metaphysics, philosophy of culture, the religiosity of Confucianism and the history of Chinese philosophy. Only recently, political philosophy reappeared in the writings of contemporary Confucians, yet with a different agenda (e.g. Jiang Qing in the PRC). It is striking that the kind of traditionalism which marks many current positions of modern Confucianism is absent in Tang Junyi’s political thought. This can be highlighted by his dictum that there was no “state” in traditional China, and also no “society”– neither in reality nor in theory. Against this background, this paper will analyze Tang Junyi’s concept of a modern Chinese state in the light of his theory of freedom and of a renewal of Confucian morals, “Sittlichkeit” (inspired by Hegel’s political philosophy). His vision of a modern state entailed at the same time a reflection on Confucianism’s future role in a modern China which would incorporate what Tang perceived as core elements of Western modernity (rule of law, democratic government, social pluralism, advanced economic development). Yet, Tang’s reflection on Confucianism in a modern world was linked to another aspect of statehood, this one situated within a distinct Chinese historical context: With the proclamation of the Chinese republic, the whole structure of political institutions was depleted of its underlying religious meaning, especially after the failure of Yuan Shikai’s attempt to reintroduce a state cult modelled after dynastic political rites. From then on, the republican state and its (provisional) constitutions represented merely a human collectivity, whereas the religious infusion of political institutions with the belief in a metaphysical/spiritual order (e.g. cult of Heaven) had disappeared completely. It shall be argued here that against this backdrop, Tang Junyi’s modern Confucianism, and very likely modern Confucianism in general, should be understood as a form of intellectual/spiritual compensation for this loss of religious meaning in political life. Insofar as Tang Junyi’s theory of freedom inscribes a metaphysical anthropology in the tradition of Mencius and the “xin xue 心學” into the spheres of community, society and state, it replenishes these spheres with religious-metaphysical meaning. As a result, modern Confucianism’s political theory is characterized by a very strong normativism and an accompanying lack of interest in empirical aspects of political science and sociology.
**Dr Joël Thoraval.** Centre d'études et de recherches sur la Chine moderne et contemporaine, France

**Religious Confucianism, secular Confucianism: Can Confucianism become a modern civil religion?**

The idea of Confucianism becoming a modern civil religion (partly patterned after the American model analyzed in the 1960s by Robert Bellah) has recently being promoted by some intellectuals in Mainland China: this phenomenon serves as a starting point to present some critical remarks on the present evolution of Confucianism in the PRC, taking into consideration the specific meaning of secularization in a Chinese context.

II. Taiwan

**Prof. Chung-hwa Ku.** Professor of Sociology Department at National Chengchi University, Taipei, Taiwan

**Seeking New Economic Ethic in the Global Context: The China-Thesis of Max Weber revisited**

Since the collapse of the investment bank Lehmann Brothers in September 2008, the global finance crisis has had damaged the Capitalism system seriously. In this contemporary context, it is significant to re-think the analysis of Max Weber about the root of modern Capitalism, in which he saw the key element of “religious motivated economic ethic”. Max Weber has not only discovered the relationship between the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, but also discussed different economic ethics of World Religions, including Confucianism. This paper aims to use the logic of Weber’s thought, to examine the new situation of Capitalism. During this “think experiment”, we attempt to check the China-thesis of Max Weber, which he tried to prove that the traditional Confucianism was incompatible with the Western Capitalism. But if the modern Capitalism has lost his “spirit” already, just like Max Weber has diagnosed almost 100 years ago, then that means we must seek new economic ethic to correct the “failure of market”. We need to ask: is it the time to build new trust in economic sphere? Which ethic system could offer a better code for economic institution and behavior? And what resources does Confucianism have to provide ethic standard for the global economic order? It is suggested that we should throw new light to explore the possibilities for all the World Religions to answer the question of our time, and again, including Confucianism.

Dr Fabian Heubel, Research Fellow of Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy at Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan

**Self-cultivation and Modernity: On the Critique of Kant in Mou Zongsan and Foucault**

In the preface of his book Intellectual Intuition and Chinese Philosophy Mou Zongsan bluntly states, that the whole of Chinese philosophy would have been in vain if the possibility of intellectual intuition could not be proved. This assertion expresses the desperation behind Mou’s effort to overcome Kant through the foundation of moral metaphysics. For Mou the possibility of “metaphysics”, the
rescue of the Confucian “way of the saints” and a philosophy of self-cultivation are intertwined: “The very project of Mou Zongsan is to demonstrate that the Chinese tradition of thought offers solid grounds to go beyond Kantism and express the validity of practical and direct knowledge of the 'noumenal' associated with a transformation of the self”, notes Sébastien Billioud in a study on Mou’s philosophy. Mou tries to affirm the modern significance of the Chinese philosophy of cultivation by exposing it to the challenge of critical philosophy (represented by Kant) and reconstruct the traditional model of spiritual cultivation under modern conditions. This attempt stands in sharp contrast to the experimental research into a contemporary philosophy of cultivation as undertaken by the late Michel Foucault. His idea of aesthetic cultivation is based on the criticism of a transcendent subjectivity which has dominated traditional concepts of spiritual cultivation.

Both attempts to rethink cultivation within contemporary philosophy unfold through a critique of the Kantian system: Mou works with the tension between Kantian philosophy and Confucian sources; Foucault’s resort to Greco-Roman antiquity is strongly characterized by the relation between Kant, Nietzsche and Heidegger. While Mou, from a Chinese perspective, tries to repudiate the Heideggerian interpretation of Kant, from which he believes that it leads to an “immanent metaphysics” which betrays Kant’s metaphysical intention, Foucault rather pursues a radicalization of the Heideggerian “analytic of finitude” (as developed in his early book on The Order of Things), opening up an aesthetic version of immanent transcendence, in which the possibility of infinity consists in striving for “endless self-overcoming”, “by which human finitude would be transcended in the very operation that makes it reach beyond itself.” (Béatrice Han)

The philosophical correspondence between Mou Zongsan and Foucault gains the character of a trans-cultural constellation through their common relationship to Kant. Two radically different philosophical endeavors are interconnected by a shared problem: the possibility of a contemporary philosophy of cultivation. For both, cultivation refers to the relation between finitude and infinity: human beings are finite but capable of the infinite. The trans-cultural dynamics of the constellation Mou Zongsan - Foucault is driven by the fact that both attempts are confronted with major philosophical difficulties inherent in the metaphysical approach on the one hand and the post-metaphysical one on the other. To understand these respective difficulties, it seems promising to me to make both enter into mutual criticism and to undertake a historical-transcendental analysis, which may clarify the conditions of possibility for a philosophy of cultivation today.

III. China

Prof. Guoxiang Peng, Professor of Tsinghua University, Beijing, China

Confucian Classics in a Changing Contemporary China

This paper tries to provide some personal observations and remarks on the current situation of Confucianism, especially the so-called “revival of Confucianism”, in mainland China. It includes three parts: first, a retrospect on the fate of Confucian classics in contemporary China; second, the general situation of Confucian “classics education” in today’s China and more in particular in the “general education” program in China currently; and third,
some personal observations and remarks on the matter. The final concerns in this paper are three interrelated points: if an educational system that focuses on the Confucian classics and includes other great books as well can be established; second, if commercialization and superficial popularization of Confucian classics can be avoided; and third, if Confucian values can be effectively promoted to transform a degenerated politics without being contaminated and corrupted in the process.

Prof. Daniel Bell, Professor of Tsinghua University, Beijing, China

China's New Confucianism: Politics and Everyday Life in a Changing Society
Arguably, there is a need for a new moral foundation for political rule in China, as well as a new philosophy that can provide moral guidance in everyday life. In contrast to most political debates in the twentieth century, the new philosophy does not owe much to Western political ideals. Rather, the old and venerable tradition of Confucianism is being revived and debated by government officials, critical intellectuals, as well as ordinary citizens. Daniel A. Bell's talk will explore the influence of Confucianism on politics, economics, and everyday life in contemporary China, as well as draw implications for China's role in the international arena. Bell argues in favor of a "left-Confucianism" that offers a compelling alternative to Western liberalism.

IV. Leiden

Prof. Axel Schneider, Professor of Modern China Studies, Chinese Department at Leiden University / Director of Modern East Asia Research Center

Is Confucianism compatible with a modern view of history? The Book of Changes, Confucian rites and the nature of history in modern China
The dominant view of history in modern China seems to be a teleological and progressive view centered around the national subject and the process of it becoming aware of itself. In my research I focus on Chinese historians that have challenged the Western progressivist view of history and have developed alternative concepts of national and in some cases even non-national history that link back to Chinese historiographical traditions, some of which have again become popular in recent years.

In this paper I focus on Liu Yizheng's (1880-1956) theory of history and his ideas on the relationship between history and ethics. Although Liu seems to resemble in many aspects a modern historian, adopting new methods and ideas, after 1925-1926 he increasingly relied on a view and theory of history centered on the traditional Confucian notion that "the core of history is ethics". In contrast to contemporary Western historians and the crisis of ethical relativism triggered by historicism, Liu relies on history to illuminate and confirm China's ethical tradition and the socio-political order centered on the rule by virtue. However, Liu Yizheng, nevertheless wants to partially modernize historiography and the socio-political order.
How Is a Liberal Confucianism Possible?

The relationship between Confucianism and Western liberalism is one of the most important unsettled questions in modern China. Some scholars indicate it is incompatibile, but some other scholars don’t think so, they consider it is compatible, and even point out it’s possible to reconcile Confucianism and liberalism. If we review the justifications of both camps, we could find out their divergence results from the different perspectives. On one hand, the former observe the little tradition, and the latter look at the great tradition in traditional China. On the other hand, the discourses of the former seem to be based on the historical cause-effect model, and indicate that modern China’s backwardness was just the historical effect of the development of traditional Confucianism. By contrast, the latter’s arguments are based on the logical premises-conclusion model, and accordingly construct the logical relationship between Confucianism and liberalism. Frankly, both approaches are explanatory and mutually complementary for our explorations of the relationship between Confucianism and liberalism. In this paper, instead of historical cause-effect model, I would just adopt the logical approach, review the related points and attempt to examine the possibilities for the construction of a liberal Confucianism base on the logical premises-conclusion model.