

Modernising Confucianism

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Abstract: Due to the influence of Western society and especially the values upheld by the Enlightenment thinkers, the five virtues of Confucianism, namely humanity (ren), uprightness (yi), propriety (li), the importance of wisdom and faithfulness have, for the most part, disappeared. It must be considered that on one hand, at the time of the May 4 Movement the elite's assessment of Confucianism was still too superficial and inadequate and the Enlightenment thinkers' message had still not made an impact. On the other hand, Confucianism had to stand up to dominant Western philosophy. Despite several obstacles to its development, there are still opportunities for change and renaissance.

To understand Confucianism, the author examines its temporal and geographical aspects as well as its different levels. From the temporal point of view, Confucianism is highly ideological. It is based on the assumption that any spiritual tradition that does not evolve or spread cannot survive. From the geographical point of view, despite competition from Buddhism and Taoism, Confucianism has always been an indissociable characteristic of Chinese culture. However, it would not be correct to say that in 2,000 years Chinese society has always favoured Confucianism alone.

There are different levels of Confucianism. Despite its complex nature, varying levels and facets however, this philosophy practically disappeared after the Opium Wars. For Confucianism to develop, it must not be restricted to China and East Asia, but must integrate into the international community. In order for that to happen, major changes are needed, perhaps accompanied by the translation and explanation of Confucian doctrine in several languages.

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