Litwerature review for CC6307

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Literature Review

Course: CC6307 The Changing Chinese Institutions

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Introduction

In this literature review I will observe a few articles that will be highly related to my final research proposal. I will focus on status of Confucianism in contemporary Chinese society, impact of globalization factors on Confucianism, thus on its influence on society and state. I will extract the main ideas and statements to examine how Confucianism revives in Chinese world, which dimensions it may take, and how does the state interact with Confucian institutions. I will focus on Confucianism in its religious dimension, as it can show the ambiguity of its perception as a religion from the public and state`s sides.

I think that this topic is significant because examining modern changes in Confucianism, brought by globalization, can to some extent help us to understand changes that happen in contemporary Chinese society, especially in life of individuals, which reflect to the political behavioral trends of the state. I will show that official acceptance of Confucianism and its recent institutionalization has features of a new state ideology, especially it will become vivid when examining Confucianism in a religion dimension. I think that religious aspect can be used as a reflection of social and cultural trends in contemporary society, and show how cultural values are adapting to the modernization and globalization processes. I am going to show how modern phenomenon of Confucianism is influences Chinese society today, and discuss future perspectives of its development.

To support this review I will use the following literature: “A Classification of Chinese Culture” by Ying Fan, “Shifting Perspectives: Filial Morality Revisited” by Chenyang Li, “Patriarchy, Patrimonialism, and Filial Piety: A Comparison of China and Western Europe” by Gray G. Hamilton – these will help us to understand cultural features of Chinese nations with the regard of Confucian influence; “Anshen liming or the religious dimension of Confucianism” by S. Billioud, J. Thoraval, “Carrying Confucianism into the modern world” by C. Jochim, “The contemporary revival and reinvention of Confucian ritual practices” by A. Xiao, D. Sun – these
will provide a discussion of religious dimension of Confucianism in contemporary conditions; “New Confucianism and “National Learning”: New Ideological Bedfellows” by Liu Kang, “Modernizing Confucianism and “New Confucianism”” by Sor-Hoon Tan – these will give a general image of Confucian philosophy and its trends today.

**Contemporary Chinese Culture and Confucianism**

Ying Fan in his article provides us general concept of Chinese culture values. He states that contemporary Chinese culture consists of three major elements: Traditional Culture (which is largely based on the Confucian values, and makes a core of national culture); Communist ideology (which loses its fashion recently, but still has a strong influence on the society); Western Values (which is quite modern element, and spread differently according to the region) (Fan p.4). Indeed, instead of influence of Communist ideology and Western values, the cores of national culture are Confucian values, which have much longer historical roots in China. We can see these values almost in all 8 categories of cultural values, stated by the author.

In this review I will focus more on Family and Social orientation group, because the values from this group have more influence in family relations, that lead to submission of an individual in the society, thus, influence public-state relations; in addition, majority of the values in this group are rooted to Confucian philosophy.

Two of the authors which I chose for this review, Chenyang Li and Gray G. Hamilton, focus on filial piety as a cultural feature in China in their works. Both authors state that filial piety has been brought up to Chinese culture in philosophical dimension by Confucius. It becomes obvious from these articles that this cultural value is one of the core features that influences Chinese society and separates it from the Western world (Hamilton p.77; Chenyang pp.218-219). Chenyang examines filial piety deeper and provides 5 traditional types of behavior of this piety (support of one’s parents; honor, revere, and obey to one’s parents; producing heirs; ancestor worship; and offering memorial service and sacrifice for dead parents) (Chenyang p.
All three authors, mentioned in this part, put emphasis on a very important cultural feature of Chinese nationalities – *Hsiao*. The “submission of roles” plays a very important role in forming Chinese society and in our understanding of it. Hamilton states that *Hsiao* does not connote power; instead it connotes the injunction, “submit the roles of life” (Hamilton p. 95). In addition, Hamilton states: “Like the idea of loyalty to one's father, the idea of loyalty to one's emperor became translated into acting the role of the subordinate” (Hamilton p.98). Taking into account contemporary conditions, it is possible to say that this statement could be applied to the modern social and political structure as well. It becomes obvious that the concept of filial piety and submission of roles can be applied not only to analysis of family life, but also to analysis of society.

**Confucianism of the modern age**

In this part I will review the works of two authors Liu Kang and Sor-Hoon Tan. I will focus on the evolution and revival of Confucianism, some interpretations of neo-Confucianism, and examine the way how it is being assimilated in the modern society and state.

Tan in his article identifies the ambiguous role that Confucianism plays in the contemporary arena. He states that while some politicians continued to enlist Confucianism to support authoritarianism, others argued for Confucian democracy, while people considered it irrelevant. Hence, he identified the main problem which is: “how to convince modern Chinese to retain or revive Confucianism” (Tan p.140). Tan also makes distinction between New Confucianism and earlier one; he states that the difference is in the ability of new Confucianism to respond to Western modernity; a response that is culturalist in asserting the primacy of culture and explanation of problems posed by Western modernity to China, and in solutions it provides (Tan p.142). Neo Confucians state that role of traditions contributes in shaping the
modernization process at the same time defining the meaning of modernity. “Modernization is culturally differentiated, and there are multiple modernities rather than a singular one defined by West” (Tan p. 152). Generally the significance of Tan`s article is in his provision of two roles of Confucianism in Contemporary Chinese world. First, is its use by CCP as justification of defending of conserving Chinese culture. Second, is alternative new Confucian liberal democratic future of this phenomenon in Chinese culture.

In his article, Kang argues that “Traditional Culture” became the core of curriculum in the patriotic education in China (Kang p. 32), which is also evident from Tan`s article. At the same time, the author states that Confucianism cannot serve as a national ideology in CCP, because “Confucian discourse is constituted globally as integral part of the ideology of capitalist globalization” (Kang p.32). Kang examines Confucianism in contemporary China as a phenomenon of “national learning”. He states: ““national learning” becomes complicit with both the power bloc at home and the ideology of global capitalism abroad. In this sense, “national learning” and global neo-Confucianism are ideological bedfellows under the same roof of a nationalism that debunks the revolutionary legacy in the service of global capitalism.” (Kang p. 37).

Indeed, Confucianism in modern Chinese Society can be used as an ideological, commercial, cultural instrument etc. The idea that it constitutes the variety of modernities makes Confucianism transform into a variety of instrument that have to deal with answering the questions of these modernities. And these articles showed two major applications of Confucianism in the contemporary arena, which are “national learning” as a defense of Chinese culture and support of state’s ideology, and more democratic development of culture through Confucianism, which at the same time contributes in “smoothing out the corners” between global capitalist world and Chinese state.

Confucianism in its religious dimension
Confucianism in the Chinese world today remains an ambiguous phenomenon in terms of its perception as a religion, teaching, philosophy or a set of ethical rules (Billioud pp.92-99). I will focus on Confucianism in a religious dimension.

It took a long way for Confucianism to become an officially recognized Institutional religion in China, though in other Chinese nation`s states like Taiwan it was already used as a semi-religion for a long time at schools, by government, or by various sects (Jochim pp. 56-74). Nowadays establishing Confucius temples, worshipping, and promoting religious rituals became a usual practice in China. A lot of new rituals like wedding ritual in a Confucian temple, writing pray cards, or worshipping Confucius in a way how it is done in diffused religions in China have emerged recently (Xiao pp.159-172).

In his article Billioud examines three most popular permutations of Confucianism in contemporary China. First, (and it is a reality today) he states that Confucianism can be an Institutional religion like those which are officially recognized by the state. Second, it can take more dominant position and become a ‘national or state religion’ (in this case it should accomplish 3 tasks: promote cultural heritage, mobilize society, and recreate a system or set of new institutions). Third, is something between first two options, Confucianism can cast as ‘civil religion’ (Billioud pp. 99-101).

The author concludes with two essential tensions which are important in appreciating the future vitality of the phenomenon. First, is an intermediate space between force of spiritual quest and the reality of individual and communal practices, seeking for institutional space. Second tension is between an aspiration towards official institutionalized status and an attachment to the autonomy of Confucian teaching (Billioud pp105-106).

Taking as a case study post war Taiwan Jochim examines how Confucianism develops under conditions of modern society. The article starts from implication of megatrends to modernizing religion traditions, especially Confucianism. These megatrends are Globalism and
Nationalism, Individualism and Democratization, Rationality and Progress, This-Worldliness and Economic Encompassment (Jochim p. 49). Each of these trends is highly interconnected with tree ways of accepting Confucianism in Taiwan. First, the author focuses on the government-supported interpretations of Confucian Heritage. Second are Intellectual interpretations. Third, contributors in modernizing Confucianism in Taiwan are Confucian Societies and Harmonizing Sects. All three players have one feature in common: they stress that people need Confucian values today, as they face onslaught of Modernization, Westernization, and other forces that undermine traditional Chinese culture. This text also indicated the need of Taiwanese in personal cultivation rather than in national ideology, but this might be different when applying to PRC.

Xiao in her article shows some practical changes which globalization and popularization of Confucianism brought to the practice of the cult. She highlights the emergence of new rituals and pays attention to the growing and more influencing phenomenon of Confucianism. Majority of Confucian temples in China have an ambiguous status of museum and a temple, which allows them to develop their sources of funding in different ways. The author provides 3 forms of infidel ritual practices in Confucius temples: burning incense, praying to the tablet, statue, etc., and writing wishes and prayers on the praying cards (the ritual which came from Japanese Shinto temples not very long time ago) (Xiao pp.160-163). She expresses the idea of new social rituals which emerge from Confucianism (Confucian wedding rituals (Xiao p.170)). She also concludes with the idea of growing influence of Confucianism in a society, which has already become one of the state’s instruments, and sees the 21st century in China as a Confucian century.

Indeed, Confucianism in its religious dimension is becoming a rapidly developing phenomenon. We can see the reflection of social needs in self cultivation or state’s needs in establishing new ideology or the need of controlling religion when examining Confucianism revival as a religion. There is a high possibility that combination of using Confucianism as a part
of states ideology in terms of “national learning” and its injection into religious dimension may result into emergence of a tremendous nationalistic institutional mechanism that might be hard to be controlled even by the state.

Conclusion

The articles, reviewed in this paper, showed the relevance of Confucianism in contemporary Chinese society. It became evident that Confucianism provides the society with absolutely important and unique cultural values, such as filial piety and role submission. It also became vivid that revival of this phenomenon made it possible to accept it in different dimensions. We could see how new Confucianism evolved and found the respond to Western modernity. It became possible to identify two major applications of Confucianism to modern Chinese culture: “national learning” application and more liberal global development. Speaking of Confucianism in a religious dimension, it is evident that the applications of neo Confucianism can be adapted to religion as well. We could see the emergence of society in self cultivation and the need of state in new ideology which could be satisfied with Confucianism and its dimensions.

This literature review leads to following discussion points which could be summarized under the “Impact of globalization on Confucianism in contemporary Chinese society” which I will cover in my further research:

- It became evident that cultural values brought by Confucianism, didn’t lose its importance in contemporary Chinese society. To what extent did globalization processes influenced these values? How relevant is filial piety and role submission is in modern Chinese society?
- How do globalization aspects influence state’s recognition of neo Confucianism? Can the government constitute the dimensions of Confucianism? How dangerous to the society can be Confucianism as a “national learning”? 

- Assuming that religion may reflect the trends in modern social behavior and cultural shifts in the society, I will argue that if we apply modern globalizing trends in Confucianism that were discussed in Jochim’s article to mainland China, the influence of Confucianism may become tremendous. While it is unlikely for Confucianism to become a national religion, there is a high possibility that it will become a civil religion, which allows people to accept this movement with a variety of perceptions on individual level. Because there will never be a determined and universal explanation for religion, there must be a freedom in determining it at least for yourself. Thus, the form of religion which allows people a wider range of its understanding is more likely to survive.

References:


