

Introduction

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Like many before and since, 1967 was an eventful year and especially so in America. There were half a million American troops fighting in Vietnam, the civil rights movement was calling on and inspiring all Americans to live up to their high ideals, feminist thinkers and activists were overturning the persistence of patriarchy, the counterculture movement was in full swing, and Robert Bellah first published “Civil Religion in America.” However one views the excesses and shortcomings of this year and the decade in which it occurred, there is no denying that 1967 marked a period when a new and revealing sense of national self-consciousness began to dawn across the land. Americans were forced to step back from the ongoing activities of individual and national life and the larger events occurring around the world and reflect upon who they were and the direction in which they and their country were heading. This reflection was often painful, at times traumatic, and resulted in a very different trajectory for the nation and its people. Bellah’s essay was not only a part of this process, a cause of these developments, but it also captured what was going on in the hearts and minds of the American people at this critical juncture in their history. He argued that apart from the various institutionalized religions of America, there was a “religious dimension”¹ to American culture, what he called “American civil religion.”² This civil religion lacks the formal institutional structure of more familiar religions; it has no headquarters, mailing address, hierarchy, or designated leader, and yet it can be found throughout the culture and commands a special kind of reverence. It is most definitely not a national religion or even a celebration of the nation; rather it is “the subordination of the nation to ethical principles that transcend it in terms of which it should be judged.”³

In other words, it is a civil religious expression of what Alexis de Tocqueville described as one of our “habits of the heart”—the underlying, unofficial, often unselfconscious assumptions, orientations, beliefs, practices, symbols, and styles of reasoning that inform, shape, and guide life in society.⁴

American civil religion is evident in the clear and ubiquitous references to God and his plan that are woven into the fabric of our national character. Almost no political event fails to acknowledge and celebrate that we are a nation “under God.” The eye of providence appears on the Great Seal of the United States and upon the one-dollar bill, along with the dual mottos “He favors our endeavors” (*Annuit cœptis*) and a “new order of the ages” (*Novus ordo seclorum*). Our currency makes clear that it is *in God* (not the government or even the people) that we place our highest trust, but it leaves unspecified how one conceives of God. Most Americans are sure that there is a higher power guiding and judging their actions and whose plan they seek to bring to fruition; this makes clear that no secular authority or individual is the ultimate moral standard for deciding what is right and wrong, for them as individuals or for *we the people*. The government can be wrong, individual citizens can be mistaken, the entire nation can be catastrophically off course, but we can and will find our way back and make progress toward a better life for ourselves and all the world when we discover, heed, and subordinate ourselves to “this higher criterion.”⁵

This ability to judge and reassess every facet of our individual and collective lives is what allows us to talk about how we or the nation can from time to time “lose our way” or “fail to live up to our highest ideals,” while at the same time never abandoning a deep sense of our special moral mission on earth. Our shared civil religion provides us with bedrock, a place to stand, when we sense that our all-too-human efforts have failed; we turn to it in times of turmoil and find there the humility of our finitude, the solace of forgiveness, the promise of rebirth, the encouragement of hope, the strength of our convictions, and the inspiration to strive to further improve and realize a great yet still only dimly perceived goal: the ultimate, collective expression of America: “The land that never has been yet—And yet must be . . .”⁶ In light of this sketch of Bellah’s idea of civil religion, it should be clear how fitting it was for him to give voice to this notion as the decade of the sixties was grinding to a close. This was a time of great soul-searching, fierce recrimination, immense liberation, widespread confusion, and deep frustration. It was an age in which people were forced to reexamine and reevaluate their personal ideals and their vision of America. In light of the perspective and wisdom that is granted only with the passing of time, most Americans feel it was a time in which the nation made

great strides toward becoming a more moral, just, and caring society and in developing new ideals not only about how our society should be but also concerning its proper role and place in the world.

Not even Bellah could have predicted how influential and in some ways notorious his idea of a civil religion would become. Much like Kuhn's concept of a scientific revolution, the idea of civil religion nearly eclipsed the many other profound contributions its author has made and continues to make in the course of his career, several of which are trenchantly described and analyzed in chapter 9 and advanced in chapter 10 of this work. The idea generated a vast secondary literature, and again like Kuhn's concept of scientific revolution, it often was misunderstood and at times employed in ways wholly contrary to its import and intention. Bellah's notion proved far larger than its original context and too powerful to be constrained by its original time and place. It has commanded the attention and inspired people throughout the world to look for or agitate on behalf of their own civil religion. This extension, appropriation, and development has occurred throughout East Asia, which is most fitting, both theoretically and poetically, for traditions such as Confucianism seem especially suited to be understood as a civil religion and East Asia was the focus of Bellah's early research and publication.⁷ *Confucianism, A Habit of the Heart* thus marks both an extension and a return for Bellah and his theory.

In what sense, though, is Confucianism the civil religion of East Asian societies? The very fact that one points to an explicit tradition, with a long and variegated history, immediately raises questions, because one of the characteristic marks of a civil religion, in Bellah's sense of the term, is that it is not associated with *any* particular faith tradition. Some authors argue, and quite plausibly, that Confucianism is no longer, if it ever was, a religious tradition because it lacks the institutional structure required to have such a tradition. Nevertheless, Confucianism has been and remains one among several *habits of the heart* for most East Asian people: a set of general moral principles, life orientations and aims, and styles of reasoning describing what a good person and a good society are like and how one fosters personal moral development and social harmony. Such a habit of the heart reveals itself in many of the fundamental attitudes and unselfconscious behaviors of a people and, as in the earlier examples, it manifests itself in the symbols that permeate and subtly guide a culture.

If we look across East Asian societies for correlates to the aforementioned examples drawn from American culture, we get a very different message, depending on the culture we explore. For example, South Korea appears to offer good and even unequivocal evidence that Confucianism is

indeed its civil religion or at the very least a core part of such. The National Emblem of the Republic of Korea has at its center the Supreme Ultimate (*taeguk* 太極) symbol, found also on its national flag, surrounded by the five petals of the Rose of Sharon, Korea's national flower. On Korea's national flag, the *taeguk* symbol is surrounded by four of the eight trigrams from the Chinese classic the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經), a core Confucian text. The *taeguk* symbolizes the harmonious balance of *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽, the two fundamental forces in the universe, which are the origin of all things. The four trigrams on the flag represent Heaven, Earth, the sun, and the moon. These symbols date back to the earliest periods of Korean history and find even more remote precedents in China. If we look to Korean currency, we find clearer and more explicit manifestations of the culture's underlying Confucian character. The most common notes, the 1,000 and 5,000 *won* (元) denominations, both bear clear symbols of Korea's traditional Confucian culture. The obverse side of the 1,000 *won* note bears a traditional portrait of Yi Hwang 李滉 (1501–1570), one of the two most prominent Korean Confucian scholars of the Joseon dynasty; the 5,000 *won* note bears the likeness of the other, Yi I 李珥 (1536–1584), who joined in a widely celebrated debate with Yi Hwang about some of the most fundamental claims of Confucian philosophy.⁸

When we turn to the People's Republic of China, we find a very different set of national symbols. The National Emblem consists of a representation of the "Gate of Heavenly Peace" (*Tiananmen* 天安門), the main entrance to the "Forbidden City" (*zijincheng* 紫禁城, more commonly known as the "Former Palace," *gugong* 故宮), which served as the imperial palace throughout the Ming and Qing dynasties. However, most significantly and some would say ironically, it was from atop the Gate of Heavenly Peace that Mao Zedong announced the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The golden image of the Forbidden City rests in a red circle; above it stand the five gold stars that appear on the national flag. The largest star, at the top and centered, represents the Communist Party of China; the four smaller stars arrayed beneath it represent the four social classes as defined by Maoist thought: proletarian workers, peasants, the petty bourgeoisie, and nationally based capitalists. Clearly, all of these symbols represent and display the power of the Communist Party. Chinese currency reinforces this impression in an even more direct and totalizing fashion. The obverse of every common denomination of Chinese paper money: the one, five, ten, twenty, fifty, and one hundred *yuan* (元) notes, or *renminbi* (人民幣), all contain the same image of Chairman Mao. In terms of these important aspects of civil society, symbols that permeate and

subtly guide the culture, the most likely candidate for the “civil religion” of China is Maoism. But this would violate another key feature of Bellah’s conception of what a civil religion is, for Maoism in China is unambiguously a self-conscious, state-sponsored, institutionalized set of beliefs and practices. The notion of civil religion can tolerate none of these.

When we turn and look for the general moral principles; life orientations and aims; widely shared, meaning-laden symbols; and styles of reasoning about what a good person and a good society are like and how one fosters personal moral development and social harmony, we find some basis for making the case that Confucianism might be the civil religion of China or at least an important part of it. Characteristically Confucian conceptions and practices concerning, for example, the relationship between parents and children and those that stretch across generations still define a great deal of belief and activity in China. General views about the role of the family and the relationship between self and society remain in the background and often come to the fore in contemporary Chinese culture. Confucian influence can also be seen in widely held beliefs and practices concerning the nature, practice, and aims of education. All of these important social phenomena are supported by shared stories, images, and examples from traditional literary sources that resonate and inform the lives of most Chinese people today. Nevertheless, the picture in China is more ambiguous and decidedly mixed, the state ideology and its various symbols dominate much of civil society, they crowd out and do not tolerate direct competition much less challenge; while Confucianism remains an enduring influence and source of moral inspiration in contemporary China, it is by no means the only such source, and there is no clear need for it to or reason to think it will assume such a role.

The current precarious and uncertain state of the Confucian tradition in China has prompted a number of concerned scholars to work at promoting the tradition as the much-needed moral foundation and guide for a rapidly transforming China, and such concern has led to increased interest in Bellah’s conception of civil religion and his related interpretation and use of Tocqueville’s notion of habits of the heart. A number of the contributions to this volume explore the many faces and complex workings of such attempts at a Confucian revival in China, Korea, and Japan. Several of these mention a parallel movement among a number of Chinese scholars to promote Confucianism as a national rather than civil religion.⁹ A number of those who hope to make Confucianism the official national religion of China seek to enlist Bellah’s ideas about civil religion in their cause, but, as noted earlier, such efforts often misconstrue and corrupt

Bellah's conception of civil religion. A civil religion can be promoted but never officially founded, sanctioned, or supported; it can and must draw upon particular historical religious traditions but must never speak from or represent any such tradition or school. To do so would undermine one of the most essential functions and appeals of a civil religion; it would align it with the government, official culture, and law, which are some of the most important forces against which civil religion stands as a moral judge and practical challenge. Civil religion must forever stand apart from and look beyond and above any secular, institutionalized authority; it must remain somewhat enigmatic in form and open to ongoing revision and development. It expresses no particular creed or doctrine but finds its strong and enduring voice in the collective history and aspirations of a people. For these reasons it might turn out that the true civil religion of East Asian societies cannot be associated, even loosely, with any single tradition. Perhaps the less exclusive traditions of East Asia give rise to a civil religion that is more of an amalgam of traditions: Daoist, Confucian, Buddhist, among others, and that collectively these and other sources supply the habits of the heart underlying life in these rich and complex societies.

Our first contribution, "Confucianism as Civil Religion," by Fenggang Yang, explores the vibrant contemporary movement among Mainland New Confucians to revive Confucianism as a resource for the moral reconstruction of China, an aim the author shares. Yang focuses on a group of thinkers whose goal is to make Confucianism the "state religion" of China, an aim the author does not share. As an alternative, Yang advocates the development of a new civil religion "based on both Confucianism and Christianity, which would serve not only China but also East Asia, the Pacific region, even possibly 'all under Heaven'" (p. 25). Yang's essay provides a helpful historical context within which to better understand the current interest in Confucianism as a civil religion in China; he explores the earlier harsh criticisms and campaigns against Confucianism, the subsequent collapse of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism as a normative standard and guide, and the recent avid advocacy of a return to and elevation of Confucian tradition. He also surveys some of the challenges involved in understanding Confucianism as a religion and explores the potential dangers of establishing Confucianism, or any tradition, as the state religion of China.

Yang also discusses one of the commonly encountered objections Mainland New Confucians make against liberal democracy: that "its legitimacy comes solely from popular votes of equal citizens" (p. 37). The thought is that such a political system inevitably leads to fragmented and selfish forms of individualism, problems for which Confucianism purportedly offers

a ready-made and decisive solution. Careful readers will question whether these Mainland New Confucians have an accurate and adequate grasp of the nature of contemporary liberal democracy, for they fail to account for or appreciate the rule of law or the roles of rights, which are specifically designed to alleviate many of the problems they attribute to such societies. Yang takes their comments in a different direction by exploring the role that religion has always played in societies such as America, and this leads him to connect his analysis with Bellah's conception of civil religion and the possibility of Confucianism serving this role in China. As noted earlier, Yang rejects the latter possibility and instead contends that a combination of Confucianism and Christianity offers the best possibility for the development of a civil religion in China. He supports this proposal by claiming, "Christianity has become one of the major religions among the Chinese" (p. 40), and hence in some sense it is an important element among the Chinese habits of the heart. He further argues that Christianity offers "important resources for civil religion in China," foremost among these is that it provides a way, perhaps the *best* way, "to critically evaluate and purge its feudalist remnants, including gender inequality" (p. 40). Yang concludes his essay by suggesting that this new amalgam of Confucianism and Christianity "may serve well not only China or the greater China but also much of East Asia, the Transpacific region, even 'all under Heaven'" (p. 26), pointing toward themes that will take center stage in the concluding contributions to this volume.

Our second contributor, Sébastien Billioud, shifts the focus on the contemporary Confucian revival from the level of theoretical possibility to that of everyday norms and practices in "The Revival of Confucianism in the Sphere of Mores and the Reactivation of the Civil Religion Debate in China." This more practical perspective allows us to see a far greater range of Confucian civil religious norms, feelings, beliefs, and activities and gives us insights not only into where "the sphere of Chinese mores" currently is but also where it might be heading. Among Billioud's case studies are Mrs. D., formerly a member of the People's Liberation Army but now the owner of a vegetarian restaurant in Shenzhen who found "inner peace and life direction" through her contemporary reappropriation of Confucian tradition. Mrs. D. sponsors "classics reading sessions for children or conferences for adults" (p. 50) that count among their regular members many of her customers as well as several of her employees. Another case study focuses on Mr. Y., a university professor in Beijing and disciple of the Mainland New Confucian Jiang Qing. Mr. Y. organized and now leads a Confucian academy where he gathers "a group of well-educated young

people (students and young professionals) for whom Confucianism now becomes a real spiritual resource” (p. 51).

Billioud does a splendid job describing the personal dimensions and deep subjective significance of these newly developed forms of Confucian spiritual practice, but he also carefully explores the role that the systematic views of thinkers such as Mou Zongsan, Wang Caigui, and Jiang Qing play in this growing social phenomenon. He also shows how the revival of Confucian practice often spills over into unexpected aspects of life, well outside any strict conception of Confucian circles. For example, Billioud describes the moral training regimen organized by the Taiwanese Buddhist monk the Venerable Master Jingkong, in which “selected candidates follow a six-month training course during which they live in the community and are mainly exposed to traditional Confucian values” (p. 54). Preliminary indications are that such “promotion of the Confucian classics or core elements of Confucian ethics by Buddhist organizations is quite a widespread phenomenon” (p. 55).

Another important dimension of Billioud’s contribution is his survey and discussion of various contemporary debates concerning the notion of civil religion. He focuses on the views of mainland scholar Chen Ming, Paris-based Ji Zhe, and our first contributor, Yang Fenggang, professor of sociology and director of the Center on Religion and Chinese Society at Purdue University, as representing a distinctive perspective in this debate, one that explicitly rejects, for principled reasons, establishing Confucianism as any sort of national teaching or state religion. This puts them in direct opposition to contemporary mainland figures such as Jiang Qing and Kang Xiaoguang or the earlier view of Kang Youwei. Billioud goes on to explore some of the challenges associated with the possibility of Confucianism as a civil religion, for example the dangers of it becoming a vehicle for cultural nationalism as it has been in other contexts (i.e., Japan and Taiwan) and the profound difficulty posed by the condemnation and persecution of Confucianism by the CCP, still fresh in recent memory. Among the most fascinating possibilities he proposes is the idea that Confucianism might develop into what Jean-Paul Willaime calls a “common religion” that is “a civil religion with a primarily social—rather than political—orientation” (p. 58).

In our next contribution, “Inside the Revival of Confucianism in Mainland China: The Vicissitudes of Confucian Classics in Contemporary China as an Example,” Peng Guoxiang offers a revealing survey and personal evaluation of the recent history, current state, and future potential of the Confucian classics in China and beyond. In the past, the classical texts of

Confucianism commanded a central role in the life of the tradition not only as scriptures to be venerated and studied but also texts that inspired a rich and extensive tradition of commentary. Not surprisingly, study groups on the classics and schools for teaching the classics to young people are widespread and popular manifestations of the contemporary Confucian revival. Peng's contribution thus gives us a clear and revealing lens through which we can consider not only the roles the classics have played as repositories of Confucian habits of the heart and scriptural authority but also a reflection on what part they might and should play in contemporary Chinese and world culture.

As Peng's title suggests, the recent history of the Confucian classics within China is a tale of vicissitudes and challenges, and the current state of play is no less tumultuous or rife with danger. As noted in chapters 1 and 2, the Chinese classics and the tradition as a whole suffered fierce condemnation and criticism by the CCP since the founding of the People's Republic of China and down through the 1970s. Focusing on the classics brings this general attack into clear focus, for throughout this period the Confucian classics were banned from all formal education; "during this period the term 'classics' (i.e., canonized) could only refer to works of the Marxist-Leninist tradition" (p. 72). When this rocky relation came to be replaced with increased attention to the classics by the party and the government, during the 1980s, there was a surge of interest, among academics, in the Confucian classics. After 2000, this interest spread to society in general and served as an important facet of the widespread Confucian revival. Nevertheless, in the wake of this most welcome attention were unwelcome and unappealing consequences. Roughly, these can be described as the politicization and commercialization of the Confucian classics.

Other contributions to this volume explore some of the many ways the revival of Confucianism is being politicized. Those advocating that Confucianism be established as China's official national religion often are closely aligned with or at the center of movements advocating cultural nationalism; they typically contrast their beliefs and policies with those advocating various forms of "Western" democracy and human rights. Most who advocate Confucianism as China's civil religion work to distance themselves from this kind of national or state-sponsored model. In addition to these attempts to have the tradition directly represent the state, Peng explores how Confucianism has been implicated in recent government calls for building "a harmonious society," where harmony is largely understood not as the blending of different voices, which is what traditional Confucian sources advocate, but obedience to a single authoritative voice.

Alongside and sometimes in step with such politicization is the parallel threat of commercialization and commodification of the tradition. There is a fairly widespread inclination among people and governmental agencies with no deep understanding or real interest in the tradition to hop on board and ride the current wave of interest in Confucianism to profit themselves. This can be seen at the level of individuals teaching or selling products connected with the classics, from new translations and commentaries to CDs and television programs, or governmental agencies seeking to cash in on such programming and the tourist revenues associated with revived interest in visiting Confucian sites.

Peng laments that the best aspect of the Confucian classics, their ability to guide and inspire moral values, is being crushed beneath the twin pressures of politicization and commercialization. He notes the remarkable fact that “the Confucian classics have not been officially adopted into the officially sanctioned education system at any level and are not part of the general education requirements in universities” (p. 76). This lack of serious attention to and engagement with the classics is a powerful impediment to them regaining a proper and prominent place within Chinese culture and society and works against them taking what Peng sees as their destined place upon the even larger stage of world culture.

In her lucid and revealing contribution, “The Politics of Confucianism in Contemporary China,” Anna Sun begins by introducing three “snapshots” taken from contemporary Chinese society to highlight a range of political possibilities for Confucianism in China. First, she notes that in recent publications the government seems inclined to regard Confucianism not only as a religion but one of the five “major religions” within China. This would mark a profound change in the official stance and attitude toward Confucianism, though it would leave as an open question what the state would do from this new stance and with this new attitude. Second, she recounts the remarkable but difficult to decipher incident concerning the thirty-one-foot-tall bronze statue of Confucius that suddenly appeared in front of the National History Museum, which is located on the border of Tiananmen Square, and just as quickly disappeared, whisked inside the museum for display. This event gave rise to a frenzy of speculation about the symbolism, possible internal political struggles, and final meaning of these actions. Third and finally, she introduces the “Qufu Church Controversy,” which concerned the planned construction of a Protestant church in Qufu, Confucius’s native home. This plan generated heated protests from various “Confucian” individuals and groups who objected in various ways to the building of such a prominent Christian structure on the “sacred” ground of

Confucianism. Sun takes these snapshots as representative of three different political dimensions of contemporary Confucianism. The first represents the “politics of epistemology,” the second stands for the “politics of the religion question,” the third manifests the “politics of Confucian nationalism.”

The “politics of epistemology” concerns the formidable difficulties associated with our understanding of the phenomenon of religion: what precisely is religion, and how do we know one when we see one? Related to this question are the very real consequences that come with any view or typology of religion: once institutionalized classifications of religion play significant roles “in knowledge production as well as policymaking” (p. 88). The “politics of the religion question” is connected to what is at stake for the Chinese state (and one might add to those outside of the state both within and beyond China) in declaring and treating Confucianism as a religion. The CCP is an adamantly atheistic political party. As noted in several of the other contributions to this volume, it has had a profoundly antagonistic relationship with Confucianism as well as other religious traditions, throughout most of its history. And yet now, for a variety of reasons, arising from both domestic and foreign concerns, the government has grown increasingly more engaged with religion. Today, we find the government explicitly approving of Confucianism and at least tacitly endorsing certain interpretations of Confucian ethics as a kind of state morality. At the extreme, some within the government want to make Confucianism China’s national religion, and surely hints of such a view have manifested themselves in recent statements and actions, among them the appearance and subsequent disappearance of the statue of Confucius on Tiananmen Square. The “politics of Confucian nationalism” was manifested in the “Qufu Church Controversy,” but like the other forms of politics associated with the revival of Confucianism, this one too has an ambiguous and evolving nature. The intolerance displayed by some who protested the building of the church was in several cases conjoined with a growing national pride and related hypersensitivity to insults, real or imagined, to the dignity of Chinese culture (represented in this case by the sacred ground of Confucianism). Such growing nationalism is evident in a range of contemporary phenomena in China and has risen along with the fortunes of the Chinese economy and its corresponding greater influence on global political, military, and economic affairs. National pride, however, is a two-edged sword and not always in the hands of the government. Some who want to make Confucianism a national religion make clear that their ultimate goal is not just to influence or even convert the CCP but to replace it with a “Confucian” form of government. One man’s patriot can be another man’s traitor, a nation’s revolutionary, or a people’s savior.

All these forms of politics are inextricably intertwined with the question of Confucianism as a civil religion, for whatever form such advocacy takes, it must be based on a belief that Confucianism is a religion (the politics of epistemology), that viewing it as such will have profound consequences (the politics of the religion question), and that the imperative to take up this cause is an overriding concern with the current state and future prospects of China (the politics of Confucian nationalism). Sun dedicates the remaining sections of her essay to this set of issues, which she identifies as the “Politics of Confucianism as a Civil Religion.”

In “Obstacles to the Globalization of Confucianism,” Richard Madsen draws attention to and seeks to explain why, unlike the other major East Asian religions of Daoism and Buddhism, Confucianism has not traveled as well or settled in as comfortably in North America, Europe, and other parts of the world. This anomaly is not only intellectually curious but practically important, especially for those, like several of our contributors, who see Confucianism as an important resource not only for East Asian people but also for all the people of the world.

Madsen argues that part of the reason lies in the particular historical formation of our current notion of “Confucianism.” While the Confucian tradition has a long and varied history in East Asia, Confucianism as a world religion is a recent phenomenon, arguably coming into being at the Parliament of World Religions in 1893. Madsen notes that the Chinese ambassador to this meeting “gave a famous speech proclaiming that China too had a national religion and that religion was Confucianism” (p. 101). The more scientific spirit of the age, along with a strong desire on the part of Chinese intellectuals to present their national religion in the best possible light, conspired to shear Confucianism of its more mysterious, other-worldly, and metaphysically arresting features and shape it into a purely humanistic philosophy of life. This transformation tended to render Confucianism more amendable to some but less intriguing and inspiring for the average person. It became a form of life most attractive to intellectuals, particularly academics, and less distinctively a world religion in any robust sense of the term.

Another challenge for Confucianism has been its association with the ruling class. Historically, Confucianism has been understood as offering “a guide to cultivating elites who will be fit to govern” (p. 109). This has led to it becoming a target for the CCP throughout much of its history. Wholly apart from this aspect of its legacy, the explicitly political nature and focus of much Confucian thought at times has tended to limit its appeal to those who take a strong interest in the political dimensions of human

life. Moreover, the particular political character of Confucianism, which calls for the subordination of the self to the group and the greater good, has made it quite attractive to authoritarian regimes and makes it appear incompatible with Western individualism, a current that runs well beyond the societies of Europe and North America. The liberal tradition, with its profound commitment to the dignity and rights of each person, conflicts with the generally more communal character of Confucianism and with specific beliefs, attitudes, and practices that traditionally have reinforced things like gender inequality. Given all these obstacles, is there any reason to hope that Confucianism will be welcomed and embraced outside of East Asia?

Madsen contends that there is certainly room for improvement and suggests there may yet be room for hope if Confucianism “dissociates itself from political power, comes to terms with the rights and freedoms that Western Enlightenment liberalism has made possible, and re-embeds itself to some degree in the myths and rituals that give meaning to ordinary life” (p. 109). While all of these are daunting challenges, they remain more than notional possibilities. For one thing, living traditions are not closed off from reform and self-transformation; for another, there are clear and impressive examples, in Taiwan and South Korea, of how strongly Confucian societies can accommodate all of the changes that Madsen claims are needed to revive the tradition. One lesson that recent history seems to teach is that such reforms cannot be ordered from the top down, “Confucianism that is developed from the ground up . . . will be more credible globally than that promoted from the top down” (p. 109). Here we return to a theme found in many of the contributions to this volume: a true civil religion, whether particular or global in nature, must take shape and command the hearts and minds of the people. Habits of the heart flow forth freely and spontaneously; they cannot be engineered by a central authority and stamped upon the soul.

In the next two chapters, Sungmoon Kim and Do-Hyun Han examine how Confucian habits of the heart have been revitalized in two different stages of contemporary Korean society—before and after democratization. Taken together, the sociological and political implications of these two chapters are of critical significance because they powerfully show that Confucianism as social capital and practice can not only be compatible with but even bolster both authoritarian and democratic regimes, implying that the relatively stable social semiotics underlying Confucian habits of the heart does not necessarily prevent it from developing into multifaceted (democratic, nondemocratic, or antidemocratic) social actions and strategies.¹⁰

In “Beyond a Disciplinary Society: Reimagining Confucian Democracy in South Korea,” Sungmoon Kim examines why South Korea, arguably

the most Confucianized society in the contemporary world, has remained (and still remains) one critical exception to the recent fascination with Confucian constitutionalism and Confucian democracy among East Asian scholars, even if “Koreans are still deeply saturated with Confucian habits and mores in their daily social life” (p. 114). The virtual lack of interest in Confucian democracy in today’s Korea, argues Kim, has a great deal to do with the failure of what can be called the “New Confucianism Movement” initiated by a group of Confucian-minded philosophers and social scientists in the late 1990s and early 2000s, especially its critical failure to present Confucianism in a way that resonates with the increasing democratic sensitivity of the general Korean public (particularly young Koreans).

Kim pays special attention to Chaibong Hahm’s political theory of postmodern Confucianism, which undergirded the theoretical foundation of the whole intellectual movement during this period and which Hahm presented as a discourse that would best capture the Koreans’ Confucian habits of the heart. Kim argues that Hahm’s Confucian political theory, at the heart of which lies a poignant critique of Western modern epistemology and the reaffirmation of Neo-Confucian cosmology and metaphysics (along with associated social and political assumptions), failed to accommodate much less resonate with the active participatory citizenship and strong democratic civil society that were increasingly characterizing Korean politics in the postdemocratic context, because it could hardly come to terms with the new “Confucian-democratic” social habits and mores that had taken hold throughout Korean society. In Kim’s view, Hahm’s postmodern Confucianism, though helpful for understanding why the modern onto-epistemology underlying Western liberal democracy is both at odds with Confucian ontology and the normative ideas affiliated with it and unpalatable to the Koreans’ (Confucian) moral sensibilities, only reaffirms premodern Confucianism in the name of postmodern Confucianism (“post-modern” in the sense of overcoming the limitations of modern Western epistemology and political theory), thus failing to reinvent Confucianism as democracy-enhancing political theory and social practice. In particular, Kim contends, Hahm’s strong emphasis on “discipline” as the core element of the Confucian habit of the heart only tended to alienate the Korean public from a serious exploration of a new mode of democracy in their given societal and cultural context by making Confucian democracy look like another version of East Asian developmentalism or soft authoritarianism.

Kim’s core claim vindicates Fenggang Yang’s worry about recent attempts to revive Confucianism by some Mainland Chinese scholars—that is, unless such a revival genuinely reflects the general public’s deep Confu-

cian moral sensibilities and political aspirations, not only can it turn out to be a sort of phantom social phenomenon, having no meaningful social moorings, but, more problematically, it can be socially dangerous and politically oppressive. Kim's essay can and should serve as a cautionary reminder to some Chinese scholars of why they should be extremely cautious about what they are asking for (i.e., the revival of Confucian monism) while at the same time further encouraging them to develop modes of Confucian political theory attractive not only to Confucian intellectuals but, more crucially, to ordinary Chinese citizens.

In his contribution, entitled "The Experience of Village Leaders during the *Saemaul* Movement in the 1970s: Focusing on the Lives of the Male Leaders," Do-Hyun Han shows how a plethora of Confucian social capital organized through the *Saemaul* (New Village or New Community) movement launched in 1970 nurtured and supported Park Chung Hee's authoritarian government, thereby (although implicitly) belying one of the dominant theses among contemporary Confucian theorists, namely, the thesis about the happy congruency between Confucian communitarianism and (national) democratic empowerment. As a sociologist, though, Han's primary focus in this chapter is not so much on refuting the congruency thesis as such or on examining the complex nature of what can be called Park's "Confucian authoritarianism," which enabled the regime's remarkable political and economic "success," but, by drawing on some powerful empirical evidence (consisting mainly of interviews), on showing how the *Saemaul* movement, otherwise known as a government-originated and government-coerced political project, often functioned as a community project in which local leaders and ordinary peasants participated with great enthusiasm, devotion, and self-sacrifice.

Han's central finding is that the *Saemaul* movement, which he notes was inspired and partially based upon the model of the traditional Korean Confucian *hyang'yak* (Community Compact), as a voluntary community project carried out in local villages was possible due to the "Confucian values, orientations, and practices" (p. 139) or habits of the heart of the local leaders who actually carried out the movement. "The Confucian orientation and values of those who participated in the *Saemaul* movement provided both the initial motivation and sustaining perseverance required to implement this large-scale and dramatic social initiative," says Han (p. 140). What is worth noting is that in contrast to most Korean social scientists, who understand the *Saemaul* movement as essentially a purely secular economic developmental plan, Han captures its driving force in terms of Confucian civil religion by drawing attention to strong religious—Christian

in appearance but Confucian in actual content—elements widely found in the ordinary discourse of its actual carriers in Korean localities. It is the Confucian habit of the heart, asserts Han, that transformed the ground-level leaders, unpaid volunteers, into “incarnations of the spirit of community development or priests of the Korean civil religion” (p. 162) who devoted themselves to the rebirth of the village. Such participants were motivated by traditional Confucian views about self-cultivation and its proper aims to train and discipline themselves to develop the abilities and skills needed to transform their local communities and the larger state into a flourishing and harmonious social order. They were guided, in ways that still inform the lives of many East Asian people, by an ideal that sees learning and self-improvement as inextricably tied to more comprehensive social welfare and inspired by their beliefs about and at times meetings with a charismatic leader: Park Chung Hee, whom many perceived in terms of the Confucian ideal of a virtuous ruler. In the absence of such Confucian underpinnings, it is implausible to think that the *Saemaul* movement would have commanded such loyalty and been as successful as it proved to be.

According to Han, by participating in the movement, the *Saemaul* leaders underwent a kind of spiritual self-transformation and then each became active “proselytizers” of this transformative experience by helping local farmers to personally embody the spirit of community. For instance, successful (or “self-reliant”) village leaders participated in a “training program,” in which they invited six to ten leaders of less successful (“basic” or “self-help”) villages for a few days’ visit to their homes, during which they offered the chance for “field training”: an opportunity to gain the know-how to “live better,” the famous catchphrase of the movement. In each of these cases, the visitors were fully accommodated by their hosts; this would not have been possible without tremendous yet voluntary sacrifices on the part of the hosts (and their wives). In other words, says Han, “after ‘conversion,’ they [the village leaders] became preachers and were ready to be ‘martyrs.’” (p. 162).

Our next contribution, by Takahiro Nakajima, “Contemporary Japanese Confucianism from a Genealogical Perspective,” explores a range of different features and qualities of what he refers to as the “Confucian boom” in contemporary Japan. His essay thus concerns the general theme of our anthology by exploring the revival of Confucianism in East Asia and its role as a habit of the heart among the Japanese people; as readers will see, this revival takes a very specific form in Japan, manifesting both similarities and differences from what we find in China and Korea. For example, like the increased contemporary interest in Confucianism in China and Korea, the Japanese revival of Confucianism always has a spiritual dimension, with

a number of people arguing explicitly that Confucianism is and must be understood as a religion, in the fullest sense of that term. Also like what we find in China and Korea, the Confucian boom in Japan often is associated with if not explicitly tied to movements of national revitalization and claims about how Confucianism is part of an essential and authentic “national spirit.” On the other hand, in a number of important respects, the Confucian revival in Japan is quite distinctive.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of contemporary Japanese interest in Confucianism is that it is almost exclusively focused on the figure of Confucius and study of the *Analects*. Other major figures and classical texts from the tradition are largely ignored. Behind this intense interest in the *Analects* and its traditional author is a widely held belief in the existence of a pure “Confucian spirit” that can and must be extracted from the text and internalized within each person. This spiritual essence is then to serve as an unwavering moral guide, offering the opportunity to recover a profound religious sensibility. Nakajima explores a variety of contemporary Japanese discourses focused on reviving Confucianism that develop contrasting interpretations of the role of Confucius and the nature of the *Analects* from this common starting point, which supplies a shared reference across the genealogies he traces.

An interest in “cultural cultivation” (*kyōyō* 教養) is shared by many proponents of the Confucian revival in Japan. This process consists of a range of practices, from recitation and study of the *Analects* to more formal regimens of meditation. Yasuoka Sadako advocates *kyōyō* for children, insisting that it can produce “adults with firm principle” (p. 171). As Nakajima is careful to point out, like many who emphasize such training, Yasuoka’s aim is to recover an ideal past essence or character that is held up as authentically Japanese. Such policies are encouraged for students at all levels of education and by educators, both within and outside the profession. For example, Saitō Takashi, a professor at Meiji University, is a prominent proponent of *kyōyō* as the only sure way to recover Japan’s “national character.” Nakajima points out that in Saitō’s writings, we “easily find an echo from prewar Japan, when it was commonly said that we Japanese understand the essence of the *Analects* better than the Chinese” (p. 172).

Katō Tōru, another Meiji University professor, offers one of the rare criticisms of this kind of essentialist and nationalistic view, arguing that such nostalgic readings obscure “the dangerous or critical aspect of the *Analects*” (p. 173), a criticism that also has been leveled at contemporary popular Confucian advocates such as Yu Dan. The idea is that the *Analects* is a fundamentally political text and one deeply concerned with political

legitimacy; it often has been the source of revolutionary inspiration and remains so today. Katō's emphasis on the revolutionary character of the *Analects* rests on an explicitly religious reading of Confucius and his teachings, and in doing so he was building on and acknowledges the work of people like Shirakawa Shizuka. Shirakawa presented a bold religious interpretation of the *Analects* that offered a stark contrast with widely accepted secular humanistic understandings of the text and its traditional author and used this reading to launch fierce criticisms of the Japanese establishment. Kaji Nobuyuki follows this line of argument as well, offering an elaborate theory of how Confucius himself attained a powerful religious consciousness. Kaji relies upon this religious reading of the *Analects* as a foundation for criticizing modern Western values such as "democracy, individualism, and feminism" (p. 176–77) and advocating the restoration of a traditional, conservative form of life. Here we see another important point of contact between these Japanese revivalists and the Mainland New Confucians. This critique of Western values and call to return to an authentic Confucian tradition is also seen in the influential work of authors such as Yasuoka Masahiro, who combined this political and cultural orientation more explicitly and intimately with the issue of *kyōyō*, discussed previously, but who turned away from a religious reading of the *Analects*, insisting that Confucius was a philosopher and moralist.

Nakajima concludes his chapter with the observation that contemporary Japanese discourses about reviving Confucianism have more or less turned in a great circle but never broken out of the general perspectives and approaches found in prewar Japan. The Confucian revival remains mired in essentialist notions of a pure Japanese spirit and national essence and is closely tied to criticisms of modern "Western" values. In these respects, we see strong similarities with certain currents running through the resurgence of Confucianism in other East Asian cultures and especially in China. Nakajima bemoans this recurrent, conservative nostalgia and holds out the hope and promise not of Confucianism as a civil or national religion but "a new approach to Confucianism," what he calls "Critical Confucianism," as the path toward a more accurate and revealing understanding of the tradition, its contemporary possibilities, and future potential.

As noted in the opening sections of this introduction, this volume is both an extension and a return for Bellah and several of his key theories about religion. It is a return to the East Asian cultures that served as the focus of Bellah's early research and publications and has always remained among his deepest and most abiding interests. It is an extension to take as its central theme his theory of civil religion and his general, ethically

charged approach to social scientific research and apply and develop them in new and revealing ways. The last two contributions step back from the application of Bellah's theories and turn toward a more synoptic analysis and further development of them.

In his chapter, "The Bildungsroman of the Heart: Thick Naturalism in Robert Bellah's *Religion in Human Evolution*," Xiao Yang relates the central issues of this volume to larger themes in our understanding of religion. In this way, his work serves as a bridge between much of what the volume contains up to this point and Bellah's latest work, including his concluding essay to this volume. Xiao begins by noting the important relationship between Bellah's earlier arguments in *Habits of the Heart* and his recent, monumental volume *Religion in Human Evolution*—how the latter work should be read as offering "a general theory of culture as habits of the heart, of which religion is an essential dimension" (p. 184). Most importantly, in this volume, Bellah enlists the resources of disciplines from the natural sciences, such as biology, evolutionary psychology, cognitive science, and child psychology, in order to develop a nonreductive humanistic naturalism concerning religious phenomena. This establishes a new point of view, distinct from those who seek to deploy the natural sciences either to debunk or to defend the status of religion. Bellah seeks neither; his aim is to understand and explain; the effect is often to amaze and inspire.

Religion in Human Evolution offers a general theory of religion as a cultural system, and as Xiao points out, one of its most fascinating claims, defended in the first part of the book, is how the human proclivity to play "gives rise to culture, especially ritual and myth, which are the key components of religion" (p. 187). This shows how Bellah's project not only sheds light upon the origin, nature, and role of religion, but also how it contributes to a more general understanding of the character of human nature. Bellah provides a grand narrative of the evolution of religion, which both defends and qualifies his earlier claim of religion as a cultural system. It defends this claim by showing how all religions share core structural features and a similar course of development but qualifies it by illustrating how religion is always "embodied, social, personal, emotional, experiential, developmental, and historical" (p. 187).

One of the most revealing and powerful claims Xiao defends is the parallel he draws between Bellah's *Religion in Human Evolution* and Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Xiao notes that both works and few others share the virtue of providing a general theory of religion and tying this theory to in-depth analyses of a broad range of religions from around the world. This insight reminds us that the notions of civil religion and

habits of the heart, which have served as the guiding themes of our volume, are equally at home and powerfully revealing in China and the modern West. The combination of grand theoretical construction and extensive and meticulous application is breathtaking in both Bellah's and Hegel's works. So too is the profound shared theme that "nothing is ever lost." Xiao brilliantly summarizes this point, saying, "Hegel and Bellah try to tell the universal history of religion as *Bildungsroman* of humankind" (p. 192). As Bellah himself describes it, in order to fully realize our humanity we must "live again those moments that belong to us in the depths of our present, to draw living water from the well of the past" (p. 192).

Nothing is ever lost for each individual, for each tradition or culture, and for the general phenomenon of religion as well. Every stage of our experience draws upon and reconfigures elements of our history, and these elements echo and are reflected and refracted throughout the world's religions and cultures. In these ways, the habits of the heart we find in individual lives and particular societies, while in certain respects clearly distinctive of specific historical trajectories, are also, at the same time, traveling along shared trajectories. They do not, though, always travel in straight lines, and as Xiao insightfully explains, this is a major strength of Bellah's account, for this "crucial insight allows Bellah to hold the view that there is 'progress' in the sense that new capacities are acquired as humankind moves from tribal and archaic religions to Axial Age religions. Yet he can at the same time reject the view that there is progress in all aspects in general" (p. 197).

The implications of *Religion in Human Evolution* are dramatic and diverse; it is pointedly opposed to antifoundationalism and postmodernism but offers a revolutionary form of grand narrative that goes far beyond traditional versions of universal history in both its open-ended interpretative capacity and its incorporation of insights from the natural sciences. In regard to our concern with habits of the heart and the possibility of Confucianism as a civil religion, *Religion in Human Evolution* seems to say not only that traditions like Confucianism will always have a civil religious dimension but also that they will always point beyond their specific place, time, and culture, drawing "living water from the well of the past" and pointing the way forward to a more grand and global future.

Our final contribution—"Can We Imagine a Global Civil Religion?"—carries forward many of the claims discussed in Xiao's essay and refocuses and extends the central themes of this volume. In it, Robert Bellah takes up again an idea he first raised in his provocative, inspiring, and influential essay "Civil Religion in America": the possibility of a "world civil religion" (p. 205). In its original context, this idea was suggested as a possible