

Lost Soul: "Confucianism" in Contemporary Chinese Academic Discourse. By John Makeham. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008. Pp. xii + 397. \$49.95/£36.95.

Having been a prime target of attack and denunciation for more than half a century, Confucianism enjoyed a robust rejuvenation on mainland China in the 1980s and 1990s. By all accounts, the resurgence of Confucianism was spectacular. Gone were the ominous images of Confucianism being a stumbling block to Chinese modernity and a "cultural system of feudalism" that upheld élitism, hierarchy and patriarchy. As part of the "culture craze" (*wenhua re* 文化熱) and the "national learning craze" (*guoxue re* 國學熱), Confucianism was seen as an indispensable cultural force that ushered China into the twenty-first century. More important, the Confucian revival represented the end of iconoclasm and revolutionary ethos that had dominated the Chinese cultural field since the 1920s. Rather than looking to Europe and America for inspiration to complete what Vera Schwarcz calls "the Chinese Enlightenment," the Chinese took stock from their own tradition to modernize China.

But to some China observers, the Confucian revival is puzzling. The resurgence of Confucianism took place so quickly that it resembled a political campaign of the Mao era, except that the government (particularly the Chinese Communist Party) deliberately avoided associating with it. Thus, questions arose as to the hidden agenda or the unannounced political motives behind this seemingly benign cultural phenomenon. Some suggest that the revival was part of the Chinese intelligentsia's effort to counter Western influence and conspicuous consumerism while China was integrated into the world market. Others suggest that it was a measure of the Chinese government to promote state nationalism and Chinese ethnic identity when Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Zedong Thought had lost appeal to the Chinese people. Yet others suggest that it was a dress rehearsal for the government to launch a neo-conservative campaign to rein in the Chinese society when it became increasingly complex and cosmopolitan. For Western Marxists (e.g., Arif Dirlik), the Confucian revival is a prime example of rendering a native culture to fit the narrative of global capitalism.

To add his voice into this debate, John Makeham offers a comprehensive study of the Confucian revival in *Lost Soul: "Confucianism" in Contemporary Chinese Academic Discourse*. It is Makeham's second book on the subject. In his earlier work, *New Confucianism: A Critical Examination*,¹ Makeham put together eight articles examining New Confucianism (*xin rujia* 新儒家): a contemporary intellectual movement that uses Neo-Confucian philosophy of the tenth to seventeenth centuries to address issues of Chinese modernity. Compared to *New Confucianism*, *Lost Soul* is ostensibly broader

¹ New York: Palgrave, 2003.

in scope. In addition to New Confucianism, in *Lost Soul* Makeham examines other cultural activities that made Confucianism the mainstay of Chinese cultural nationalism. With this larger scope, Makeham gives answer to a central question that has perplexed many Western observers: Was the Confucian revival a Chinese government's campaign to promote nationalism in place of Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Zedong Thought? To answer the question, Makeham attempts to "ascertain which particular authorities have been involved and to identify whether there are policy documents and programs that promote the idea of an officially sanctioned 'Confucianized' national identity" (p. 8).

By ascertaining the extent to which the Chinese government was involved in promoting the Confucian revival, Makeham makes two important contributions to the study of contemporary Confucianism. First, he steers the study away from the narrow focus of intellectual genealogy and philosophical arguments that is common in many studies of contemporary Confucianism (such as those by Umberto Bressiani and Shu-hsien Liu 劉述先). Throughout *Lost Soul*, Makeham stresses that the philosophical movement of New Confucianism was only a part of a broader Confucian revival that shaped the cultural landscape of China. Second, Makeham links contemporary Confucianism to Chinese nationalism. He points out that the Confucian revival helps to create a "*ruxue*-centered Chinese cultural nationalism" that promotes Confucianism as "a cultural formation fundamental to the identity consciousness of the Chinese (*Zhonghua*) nation" (p. 15).

In terms of structure, *Lost Soul* is divided into four parts. Part One, entitled "Historical Background," traces the process by which the Confucian revival was first started in the early 1980s in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan when overseas Chinese scholars discussed Confucian Capitalism. Later, the Confucian revival spread to mainland China when the Beijing government decided to fund a ten-year research project to study New Confucianism. In this part of the book, Makeham offers, by far, the most succinct summary of the developments of New Confucianism. He emphasizes the dynamic and reciprocal relationship between overseas and mainland Chinese scholars in studying New Confucian thinkers such as Xiong Shili 熊十力 (1885–1968), Tang Junyi 唐君毅 (1909–1978), and Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909–1995). He considers the "cross-fertilization and intellectual engagement" across the Taiwan Strait to be a major factor in stimulating and expanding the discussion of Confucian Capitalism (pp. 42–43). More important, he sees the Chinese government's support of the research on New Confucianism as a key "official" factor in generating interest in New Confucianism. Stopping short of calling it a state-sponsored project, Makeham points out that the Beijing-funded research did provide "a discursive space for studying and discussing *ruxue* on the strength of its perceived role in the cultural tradition of the 'Chinese nation'" (p. 54). Although the government involvement was implicit and indirect, Makeham finds that the Beijing government provided critical resources to promote the study of New Confucianism. As the Confucian studies spread in academic institutions across the country, Makeham asserts, mainland Chinese scholars were able to dictate the terms of the Confucian discourse, shifting the focus of contemporary Confucianism from the metaphysical philosophy of New

Confucianism to the discussion of political and social developments in a capitalistic China (pp. 63–73).

While in Part One of *Lost Soul* Makeham provides a chronological survey of contemporary Confucianism, in Parts Two, Three, and Four he examines various aspects of the cultural phenomenon. In Part Two, entitled “*Ruxue* and Chinese Culture,” he examines the writings of two major mainland Confucian scholars, Guo Qiyong 郭齊勇 and Zheng Jiadong 鄭家棟, who developed an affinity with New Confucianism after studying it for a period of time. For Makeham, Guo and Zheng represent a change of position among some mainland Chinese scholars from “regarding New Confucianism simply as an object of research to one of ‘sympathetic understanding’” (p. 133). This change of position paved the way for the spread of interest in New Confucianism among mainland scholars. In Part Three, entitled “The Politics of Orthodoxy,” Makeham focuses on the critics of New Confucianism on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. On the one hand, he summarizes the arguments of the Taipei scholar, Lin Anwu 林安梧, who attempts to go beyond the narrow metaphysical philosophy of Mou Zongsan. On the other hand, he examines the writings of the Marxist critic, Fang Keli 方克立 who, while leading the Beijing-funded research project, attempted to limit the discussion of New Confucianism to the socio-political framework of Marxism. In Part Four, entitled “Distinguishing *Rujiao* and Propagating *Ruxue*,” Makeham introduces other activities of the Confucian revival that do not fall under New Confucianism. For instance, he discusses Jiang Qing’s 蔣慶 plan to use the Confucian revival as a platform for advocating political reforms in China; he describes Li Shen’s 李申 attempt to promote Confucianism as a religion; he assesses the efforts taken by Beijing Oriental Morality Research Institute (北京東方道德研究所) in promoting Confucian values.

Despite offering important information, the last three parts of *Lost Soul* is less organized and coherent. The main problem in these three sections is that Makeham replaces the chronological approach in Part One with a thematic approach that stresses diversity and competing voices in the Confucian revival. Certainly, one sympathizes with Makeham’s decision. After giving a broad survey of contemporary Confucianism, it makes sense to expand the study to assess the contributions of various participants of the Confucian revival. However, lacking a strong and clear structure to link various chapters, the last three parts resemble a series of research notes that offer undigested information. This problem is particularly acute in chapters that do not seem to be directly related to the main theme of the book, such as “*Daotong* and Chinese Culture,” and “From Doubting Antiquity to Explaining Antiquity.” In these chapters, Makeham introduce a host of topics in quick succession without discussing their significance.

On the whole, *Lost Soul* is significant because it explains the complexity and limitations of contemporary Confucianism. As Makeham repeatedly points out, while the Confucian revival in the 1980s and 1990s drastically changed the Chinese view toward their tradition, it was more an academic discourse than a popular movement. Even in its prime, the Confucian revival was confined to ivory tower dominated by academics

working in the philosophy departments in Hong Kong, mainland China, Singapore, and Taiwan. As such, Makeham is correct to call contemporary Confucianism a “lost soul.” Despite all the pomp and fanfare, contemporary Confucianism remains a scholastic exercise rather than a potent social and political force. While no one can deny the importance of contemporary Confucianism in altering the Chinese view of the past, it remains a small step toward making Confucianism a vital part of contemporary Chinese life.

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