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DONALD TRUMP IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

DEAD PRECEDENTS

Edited by MICHAEL HARVEY

ROUTLEDGE


DONALD TRUMP IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Donald Trump in Historical Perspective is a collection of chapters that utilizes the thinking of historians, philosophers, and political scientists to explore historical parallels to the presidency of Donald J. Trump, the 45th President of the United States of America.

This collection provides an extensive analysis on the ways Trump's impulsiveness, breaking of norms, and disregard for long-standing democratic pieties, caused him to represent a definitive end to the "American century," an era when American self-confidence, steadiness, and leadership, even in the face of titanic challenges, were almost universally taken for granted. Yet this book also argues how in the longer sweep of history, Trump is a familiar figure in the turbulent life of democracies. These in-depth chapters reveal the ways Trump represents the anti-institutionalist, the populist demagogue, the would-be authoritarian who exploits electoral and political vulnerabilities to gain and hold power. Through these detailed evaluations, these chapters suggest that Trump is not radically unique but that democracies have produced many previous versions of the Trump phenomenon.

This book is essential reading for scholars and students in political science, political theory, history, and leadership. This book is also noteworthy for readers interested in key developments in contemporary American democracy. One of its greatest appeals is its extensive look into leadership on an international scale, from Donald Trump's global significance to various explorations of non-American leaders, and the comparisons that can be made.

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Edited by Michael Harvey

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8

DONALD TRUMP, MAO ZEDONG AND RELIGIOUS ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM

Bin Song

“So, what did Jesus think of the Pharisees?” . . . “You guys are hypocrites because you make sure that your words are right, but you don’t do a thing about it.” So, I tried to think, “Well, how is that in our day?” Well, it’s like having the right doctrinal statement, making sure it is known that you have the right doctrinal statement. In fact, you will do everything to make sure that people see it. You know, you put it on the Web, you put it in a nice booklet, you get the precise wording, you have the right proof texts. You’re meticulous about everything, even maybe the right format, even the right font. Okay, because this is important, right? But it’s all done for show. When it comes to doing the statement, well, what you start to get is, “We’ll get around to it, eventually. But we’ve got a good one.”

—*Pastor Lonnie, sermon on Mark 7:13 delivered at Riverside Bible Church, U.S., in March of 2016¹*

The door of sagely learning was blocked, and it was no longer to be seen. Therefore the learning of textual criticism developed and those perpetuating it were regarded as famous. The practice of memorization and recitation developed and those advocating it were regarded as extensively learned. The writing of flowery compositions developed and those indulging in it were regarded as elegant. Thus with great confusion and tremendous noise they set themselves up and competed with one another, and no one knew how many schools there were. Among tens of thousands of paths and thousands of tracks, none knew which to follow. . . . Extensive memorization and recitation merely served to increase scholar’s pride, substantial and abundant knowledge merely served to help them to do evil, enormous information merely served to help them

indulge in argumentation, and wealth in flowery compositions merely served to cover up their hypocrisy.

—Wang Yangming (1472–1529), “Pulling Up the Root and Stopping Up the Source,” written in Ming Dynasty of China in 1525²

It may not be conventional to start a chapter with two long epigraphs, especially when considering the fact that the statuses of the two quoted authors in their respective traditions are barely comparable to each other. Pastor Lonnie ministers an evangelical family church located in a midsized city of the southwestern United States, with about 140 weekly attendees who are predominantly white and middle-aged, including many retirees.³ In contrast, Wang Yangming is widely considered as one most significant Ru⁴ thinker, the influence of whom in the late imperial and early modern periods of the Ru tradition in East Asia may be secondary only to his rivaling predecessor, Zhu Xi (1130–1200).

Nevertheless, it is no longer a secret that evangelical Christians furnished the strongest religious support of the Trump presidency. It is also recognized that the key message delivered by Pastor Lonnie shares a general anti-intellectual mentality among nationwide evangelical Christians in the United States.⁵ Similarly, despite the fact that followers of Wang Yangming and Zhu Xi continually debated upon the role of empirical knowledge in moral self-cultivation, Wang’s moral philosophy with its latent anti-intellectualism had become a triumphant voice resonated among enthusiastic reformers and revolutionaries who strived for saving China from her national crises triggered by the invasion of the colonial West since 1840s.⁶

It is the comparable impact of “religious anti-intellectualism” of the named two traditions, viz., evangelical Christianity and the Wang Yangming school of heartmind⁷ (心學, *xinxue*) of Ruism, upon, respectively, the Trump presidency and the reign of Mao Zedong over the People’s Republic of China (PRC) which justifies my juxtaposing the two epigraphs. In this chapter, I will seek to argue several major points to demonstrate the reign of Mao Zedong as a precedent of the Trump presidency.

Firstly, both the Trump presidency and the Mao reign are characterized by anti-intellectualism, and a religious dimension registers in each anti-intellectualism.

Secondly, the religious dimension of Trumpist anti-intellectualism lies in how evangelical Christians pit “heart knowledge” against “head knowledge” via a specific type of biblical hermeneutics. The one of Maoist anti-intellectualism is historically rooted in how Wang Yangming and his followers advocated the superior role of “attaining conscientious awareness” (致良知, *zhiliangzhi*) over the pursuit of empirical knowledge in an individual’s moral self-cultivation.

Thirdly, to prohibit the undesirable impact of such religious anti-intellectualisms upon public life, affiliates and sympathizers with each tradition need to utilize their own traditional sources to reconsider the relationship between faith

and reason, or the relationship between a religious practitioner's ultimate concern and preliminary concerns.

Trumpist Anti-Intellectualism and Its Religious Dimension

Since Richard Hofstadter's *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (1963), scholars have defined "anti-intellectualism" varyingly.⁸ Because I'll compare the religious dimensions of anti-intellectualism in two different cases, my definition, while informed by others, is intended to highlight the common feature of both: anti-intellectualism is a resentment and suspicion towards the value of empirical knowledge which is produced by intellectual elite via the method of rational criticism.

In light of the increasingly polarized American politics, Scholars also analyzed varying dimensions of American anti-intellectualism, as well as manifestations of the anti-intellectualism among evangelical voters. Because of the following reasons, the Trump presidency can be seen as having intensely manifested all major dimensions of American anti-intellectualism: anti-rationalist, anti-elitist and instrumentalist.⁹ Firstly, as being supported strongly by evangelical voters, the Trumpist anti-intellectualism had a conspicuous religious implication, which is anti-rationalist and will be analyzed thematically later. Secondly, there was a rhetorical pattern of Trump's speeches which pitted "the people" against the established class of intellectual and social elite. The incited hostility inhibited the implementation of progressive policies normally supported by American intellectual elite, such as eradication of poverty, healthcare reform, climate change legislation, and social restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic.¹⁰ Thirdly, as frequently touting himself as a business genius whose career had been deliberately detached from politics, Trump's election amplified the instrumentalist suspicion among American capitalists towards the value of higher education which takes the creation of well-rounded scientists, experts, and rigorously scrutinized empirical knowledge as a major task.

Clearly, the religious support furnished by evangelical voters is just one among many reasons why anti-intellectualism prevailed under the aegis of the Trump presidency. However, as stated by the National Association of Evangelicals in an article calling evangelicals to action: "never before has God given American Evangelicals such an awesome opportunity to shape public policy in ways that could contribute to the well-being of the entire world,"¹¹ the anti-intellectual character of evangelical Christianity is capable of generating significant impact in real politics if under certain circumstances (such as the Trump presidency), objective conditions converge into a favorable environment for the wide spread of anti-intellectualism in society.

Be that as it may, it is all too obvious that not all Christians look like the majority of evangelicals towards and during the Trump presidency. In other words, the marriage of anti-intellectualism with Christianity requires a specific

type of biblical hermeneutics, as well as an accompanying mindset or strategy to perpetuate the hermeneutics in real politics. In the following, I'll analyze the evangelical biblical hermeneutics to compare it later with the religious dimension of Maoist anti-intellectualism.

An evident reason for evangelicals to remain suspicious towards the intellect lies in their fear that intellectualism calls their faith into doubt and leads to adopting science, secularism, and relativism.¹² However, the tension of faith and reason has been rooted in the West ever since the convergence of ancient Greek philosophies and Christianity in the late antique Europe. Given abundant variations of the way how Christian denominations and thinkers have addressed the tension, it is not necessary that such a tension develops into a full-fledged anti-intellectualism. Therefore, we need concrete analyses to set light upon how the evangelical reading of the Bible leads to anti-intellectualism.

Fortunately, Mark Ward Sr.'s field study on the sermons of Pastor Lonnie furnishes such a concrete case. While analyzing the biblical hermeneutics in Pastor Lonnie's sermons, Ward comments:

Evangelicals believe that the scriptures are inspired by God and provide believers an inerrant "manual for living." Thus, the chief aim of evangelical Bible study is making *applications* to personal concerns of the moment. So long as chapter and verse are cited, applications are seen as valid appropriations of biblical authority. Nor are applications constrained by the original historical meaning intended by the author since the Bible is viewed as God's Word for all times and all cultures. Taking the Bible literally thus equates to a plain reading of the text; inquiring into its literary provenance or structure, on the other hand, would hinder its accessibility and relevance.

Because the Bible is regarded by evangelicals as self-authenticating and thus *the best interpreter of itself*, teaching and preaching typically devolve either into narrative preaching that cites a proof text and then illustrates it through a series of stories, or into expository preaching that often relies on *word studies* or picking out keywords in the text and then reciting other Bible verses where the same word appears. . . . congregational norms are created not only, or even primarily, by the *content* of what the leaders said but, rather, the construction of identities and social structures . . . are profoundly shaped by the *form* of suasion that a given leader normalizes.¹³

Given such a way of reading the Christian Bible, it is no wonder that Pastor Lonnie, in the quoted epigraph, can liken "Pharisees" to scientists, experts, and even sophisticated biblical scholars who do care about the literary provenance or structure of biblical verses. Hence, Pastor Lonnie is also able to deliver anti-intellectual weekly sermons to construct a strong evangelical identity for the

local Riverside Bible Church. Several major points of this evangelical biblical hermeneutics are summarized as follows:

- 1 The Bible is inerrant and needs to be read plainly.
- 2 It is individuals who, in reliance upon their religious devotion rather than discursive intellect, hold onto the final authority of reading the Bible plainly.
- 3 The value of the devotional reading of biblical verses consists in how to apply them to address personal concerns of the moment.

There is a discernable superiority of action and emotion over intellect in the hermeneutics, which illuminates evangelical Christianity as a hotbed of political movements featured by anti-intellectualism such as the Trump presidency. More importantly, pivoting upon contextless reading and personal application to daily life, the hermeneutics speaks to the overall nature of evangelical politics. It has been noticed that there is no evangelical system of social thought, and hence, “many evangelicals seem to find their theory merely by following the contours of the political movement that is currently defending, and exploiting them.”¹⁴ In other words, the political engagement of evangelicals is more reactionary to situational opponents, rather than proactive out of well-articulated and systemized moral principles. This is the reason why they do not only support political campaigns per their adjudication of wedge issues such as gay marriage and abortion which seem to be of biblical relevance. Evangelicals also espouse conservative political agendas that, without apparent biblical references, happen to belong to political movements which currently employ the evangelical constituency.

A few examples would suffice to demonstrate how the Trump presidency tapped into the anti-intellectual mentality of evangelical Christianity shaped by such biblical hermeneutics and, hence, has become the most prominent force of evangelical politics so far. On the level of policy making, it is well documented that the Trump presidency and its conservative political allies overtly utilized the evangelically manufactured antagonism of faith versus reason to justify policies contrary to the consensus of scientists and experts, such as rolling back environmental protection¹⁵ and defying social restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic.¹⁶ Moreover, despite his apparent lack of religious education in the Bible,¹⁷ when Trump personally cited the scripture in speeches, his offhand usage of biblical tropes often reminds us of how Pastor Lonnie read the Bible “plainly” in order to address personal concerns of the moment, albeit Trump’s usage on a politically much more potent scale. For instance, Trump said he was “the chosen one” for “taking on China on trade,” and he also endorsed the idea propagated by a conservative radio host that in light of Trump’s foreign policy, Israeli Jews see him as the “second coming of God.”¹⁸ Regarding such egregious usage of the Bible in real politics, I believe no scenario is more defining the Trump presidency than on June 1, 2020, when a peaceful crowd of

George Floyd protesters were forcefully cleared from Lafayette Square to create a path for President Trump to walk from the White House to the St. John's Episcopal Church. Trump then held up a Bible and posed for a photo op in front of the church's parish house. Remarkable points of this religious and political stunt include: firstly, the held Bible was admitted by Trump as not his own; secondly, the Episcopal Church neither invited Trump nor identifies itself among evangelical Christians.¹⁹ Regardless of these contextless ways of employing the Bible, what Trump actually accomplished was to claim a biblical authority via a photo op for his highly divisive political response to the protest and hence exploit the ethos of Christian nationalism among white evangelical Christians for partisan political purposes. Emphatically, employing while exploiting, such a manipulative use of the Bible has epitomized the definitive feature of evangelical politics analyzed earlier.

Maoist Anti-Intellectualism and Its Religious Foundation

Perceptive scholars in the United States have noticed the similarity between Mao Zedong and American populist politicians such as Donald Trump and Andrew Jackson. For instance, Melissa Macauley opines in *Washington Post*:

There are many differences between Mao and Trump, but their similarities are uncanny. Both are sons of wealthy landlords. Both rely on ties to propaganda machines to stoke hatred of ostensible enemies. Both sabotage international alliances. The political rallies of both men are vermilion spectacles of adulation as the legions hold aloft their 'Little Red Books' or adorn their crowns with red MAGA caps. Such populist extravaganzas manifest their unparalleled political advantages.²⁰

However, concerning the topic of this chapter, there are abundant evidences of anti-intellectualism especially towards the last decade of Mao's reign, viz., the Cultural Revolution. In one noticeable occasion that reminds of Trump's claim "I don't think science knows" to deny the impact of climate change on California's wildfires in 2020,²¹ Mao Zedong pronounced the demerit of critically minded intellectuals in 1966 as follows:

Those professors and students in college can only bite their books (which is an easier job to do): firstly, they cannot fight a war; secondly, they cannot contribute to revolution; thirdly, they cannot do factory work; fourthly, they cannot plow any field. Their knowledge is extremely poor, and they know nothing about these mentioned jobs. As always, some of them do have knowledge on one topic, which is to counter communism, the people, and revolution. They also have a "method" which is the one of countering revolution. Therefore, I usually say that compared with

factory workers and peasants, intellectuals are the least knowledgeable. They never feel a regret when they toil from one book to another, and from one concept to another. If they continue to do, they cannot do anything other than countering revolution, reviving capitalism, and developing revisionism.²²

These words indicate that the Maoist anti-intellectualism has its strong anti-elitist and instrumentalist connotations. However, it is replete with anti-rationalism as well. During the tumultuous decade of Cultural Revolution, Mao believed that the key factor for the desired social transformation of China to communism is not objective reality (traditionally considered by Marxists as necessary for any change of social superstructure) but the knowledge and will of each individual. Such a Maoist voluntarism²³ does not only project a perfect future as the end of human history that can be finally and fully realized and hence is utopian in nature. But it also asserts that China can reply upon the correct knowledge and will of each individual. And this can be achieved mainly through ideological inculcation and organized mass movements. In a word, the Maoist voluntarism pits the will of the people with the critical rationality of intellectual elite and hence entails the anti-rationalist nature of Maoist anti-intellectualism.

Nevertheless, in contrast with the case of the Trumpist anti-intellectualism which has a conspicuous religious dimension illustrated earlier, it remains a controversy among scholars whether there is any religious characteristic of the Maoist anti-intellectualism. When the Cultural Revolution started to be reported in the West, scholars readily recognized the phenomenon of Maoism as a “quasi-religion.”²⁴ The current scholarship also focuses upon Maoism as a “political religion,” via methods such as tracing the historical development of such a religion to its earlier Yanan period or indicating the similarity of it with other Western totalitarian political movements in the 20th century.²⁵ Be that as it may, it is the character traits of Mao and the sociological features of the political movement under the banner of Maoism which have intrigued these scholars to portray Maoism as being religious. While doing so, scholars liken those character traits and sociological features to cases of the Christian religion. Therefore, it is ultimately the similarity of the material appearance of the political movement (*viz.*, its leader’s character traits and its sociological features) to Christianity that lies at the center of scholars’ definition of Maoism as being religious.

However, in my view, such an approach of studying religious Maoism is questionable because of two reasons. Firstly, since the degree of “similarity to Christianity” remains flexible, the definition of “being religious” in question would greatly expand the scope of “religious phenomena” in society so as to include potentially any collective social event led by charismatic leaders, which may even refer to events that are overtly anti-religious. In other words, such a definition of “being religious” may remain remote from our everyday use of

the phrase and thus be quite counterintuitive in certain cases. Secondly, which is more important, the portrayal of material appearances of Maoism as being religious does not address its ideological nature. Ideologically, as the previous analysis of Maoist voluntarism indicates, Maoism forcefully opposes Christianity or any Christianity-like religion, and it takes nothing except the envisioned final stage of human history as the ultimate goal of individual and social transformation. Because of its all too immanent nature, it is problematic to characterize the ideology of Maoism as being religious.

To avoid these problematics in the study of religious Maoism, I shall stick to a stricter definition of “being religious” and seek somewhere else the religious foundation of the anti-rationalist nature of Maoist anti-intellectualism. In other words, for a comprehensive doctrine to be characterizable as “being religious,” the doctrine needs to convey a transcendent ideal of ultimate transformation such that no identifiable state of individuals, societies, or human history can be perceived as a complete realization of such an ideal. With this stricter definition of being religious, I submit that one religious foundation of Maoist anti-intellectualism lies in a specific type of Ruism, viz., the school of heartmind led by Wang Yangming and his followers in late Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) of China.

I have three major arguments to support my claim that such a kind of Ruism comprises the religious foundation of Maoist anti-intellectualism:

Argument 1: the way Wang Yangming and his followers interpret Ru classics, mainly the *Great Learning* (大學, daxue), betokens a Ruist version of anti-intellectualism. This Ruist anti-intellectualism, which I’ll call a Xinxue Anti-intellectualism (XA), is religious, homologically identical to major characteristics of Maoist voluntarism and historically precedes the latter.

Argument 2: the holistic and idealistic mindset of XA helped to shape the radically anti-Ruist attitude of westernized Chinese intellectuals in the period of New Cultural Movement and May Fourth Movement (1910s–1920s), who envisioned the masses’ adoption of new and correct ideas from the West as the ultimate path to China’s modernization. As growing from and sharing similar visions with such a cultural milieu, the young Mao Zedong’s thought during this period was evidenced as having been greatly influenced by XA.

Argument 3: XA continued to influence Mao Zedong after 1920s. The Maoist utopian voluntarism rampant during the Cultural Revolution can be seen as resulting from a continuous application of the logic of XA to the issue of class struggle in the socialist movement of China, and hence, XA contributed to the religious cause of Maoist anti-intellectualism.

In the following, I will elaborate each of these arguments so as to compare them to the Trumpist anti-intellectualism.

Argument 1

Similar to the religious dimension of the Trumpist anti-intellectualism which ultimately rests upon a specific way of reading the Christian scripture, XA derives from a distinctive way of reading Ru classics. As I will indicate as follows, although Wang Yangming does not see ancient Ru classics as inerrant, his reading of them prioritizes how individuals apply their innate moral intuition to moments of everyday life over empirical knowledge of the outside world, which bears a strong resemblance to the second and third points of the evangelical biblical hermeneutics I generalized earlier.

The Ru classic the interpretation of which is at stake for my analysis of XA is quoted as follows:

If an ancient person wished that all people under Heaven manifest their luminous virtues, he would first govern his state well. If he wished to govern his state well, he would first regulate his family. If he wished to regulate his family, he would first cultivate himself. If he wished to cultivate himself, he would first rectify his heartmind. If he wished to rectify his heartmind, he would first make his intentions sincere. If he wished to make his intentions sincere, he would first zhi zhi (致知, extend his knowledge or attain his conscientious awareness). zhi zhi consists in ge wu (格物, the investigation of things, or the rectification of things).²⁶

The text was received by the Ru tradition as Confucius's own words which break down the Ru self-cultivation into eight steps: the grand goal of peace throughout the world rests upon the well-ordering of states, families, and the self-cultivation of each individual, which is furthermore elaborated as a process of the inner-work of human heartmind. The ultimate step is concerned with how to address the relationship of *zhi zhi* and *ge wu*, which I translate alternatively because the two different translations represent the greatest controversy of Ru thought in the time period of which we are concerned. For Zhu Xi and his followers in the school of pattern-principle (理學, *lixue*), *ge wu* means investigating empirically the ways how things in varying contexts dynamically and harmoniously fit together, which they call the "pattern-principles" of things. It is only after such empirical investigations that individuals are able to *zhi zhi*, viz., extend their moral knowledge about how to align their heartmind with outside realities so as to create layers of individual or social harmony aimed by the text. However, for Wang Yangming, such an empirical and piecemeal approach of self-cultivation is doomed to make scholars hypocritically not committed to practicing their words, as well as being susceptible of all other critiques in the quoted epigraph. Instead, Wang insists that *zhi zhi* should not come after *ge wu*. *Zhi zhi* means attaining one's innate moral consciousness, which Wang termed as "conscientious awareness" (良知, *liangzhi*) amenable to all major

virtues taught traditionally by Ruism (such as humaneness, righteousness, and filial piety). *Ge wu* then means applying this innate conscientious awareness consistently to one's interactions with things and events in the world so as to "rectify" them to establish the desirable moral order in compliance with one's conscience. The following words best represent how Wang's construal of *zhi zhi* and *ge wu* can lead to serious suspicion towards empirical knowledge and hence to anti-intellectualism:

Conscientious awareness does not exist because of what one sees and hears, while conscientious awareness can apply to all of what one sees and hears. Therefore, conscientious awareness is not restricted by one's seeing and hearing, but it is not apart from them either. . . . Outside of conscientious awareness, there is no other knowledge.²⁷

Clearly, according to Wang, empirical knowledge of things outside the heartmind has no role whatsoever in *anchoring* one's self-cultivation. Wang Yangming's followers in late Ming Dynasty, the so-called left-wing school of heartmind, developed Wang's thought radically to an even utopian degree. For them, the innate knowledge of the good via one's conscientious awareness is "complete" (具足) and "continuously present" (見在) in each individual's heartmind.²⁸ Therefore, in reliance upon a method of mass education called "to enlighten the commoners for practicing the Way" (覺民行道),²⁹ these devoted followers of Wang Yangming went into suburbs, villages, and remote places of the country to inculcate Wang's teaching of conscientious awareness and stimulate individuals' will of moral self-cultivation in order to achieve the grand religious ambition that "Everyone filling the street is a sage."³⁰

Careful readers may have already discovered why I stated XA as homologically equivalent to Maoist voluntarism: they both resort to mass education, and ultimately to the will of each individual in order to realize the allegedly correct ideas of individual and social transformation, although the content of these educations and ideas remain different. The religious nature of XA is conspicuous as well. Comparable to the Christian commitment to the transcendent goal of personal growth as being like Christ, Wang Yangming, following major teachings of traditional Ruism, considers the conscientious awareness as a manifestation of the cosmic Dao which ceaselessly generates novel things in the universe. Hence, via attaining conscientious awareness, Wang expects that one would constantly strive to become a sage who is a human exemplar of the cosmic Dao.³¹

Argument 2

Given the dominant influence of the Ruist statecraft stated by the *Great Learning* among traditionally educated intellectuals in late imperial China, it is no wonder why many of them turned into a radically anti-Ruist mindset during 1910s–1920s.

This is because the statecraft ties the success of a state firmly with whether individuals in the state are sincerely knowing a correct doctrine which provides comprehensive orientations to individual and social life. Hence, in face of the massive failure of the Chinese state triggered by the invasion of the colonial West, such a statecraft would drive dismayed intellectuals to totally abandon their tradition and hence seek alternative comprehensive doctrines from the invading Western powers.

In reality, such a holistic and idealistic statecraft did not affect China's social transformation once. As I argued somewhere else, it worked twice.³² Pressured by domestic rebellions and national crises provoked by the invasion of regimes of ethnic minority, Ru literati launched a series of political and social reforms in Tang, Song through Ming Dynasties. The reforms underwent three stages to, respectively, focus upon literal techniques, political institutions, and the intellectual and moral state of each individual. This led to the rising of the Learning of Dao (道学, *daoxue*, commonly termed as "Neo-Confucianism" in English) as the dominant state ideology in late imperial China and concluded with a radical trend of moral utopianism in the left-wing school of heartmind analyzed earlier. Similarly, China's modernization after 1840s also experienced three stages: technological, institutional, and cultural, with the adoption of Marxism in the mainland of China as a conclusion. Understood as such, the final stage of China's modernization before China reopened to the West in late 1970s, viz., the Maoist utopian voluntarism during the Cultural Revolution, is nothing but a historical repetition of the holistic and idealistic Ru statecraft prescribed by the *Great Learning* and interpreted by XA.

However, in order to prove XA as indeed a religious cause of the Maoist anti-intellectualism, we need concrete evidences of the influence of Wang Yangming upon Mao's thought before he turned into Marxism. In this regard, two following quotes speak to such an influence decisively.

In the notes he took in college in 1913, Mao Zedong praised Confucius and Wang Yangming as equally "a man of transmitting (ancient) teaching" (傳教之人).³³ In addition, in a letter written in 1917 to a college teacher who also favored Wang's learning of heartmind, Mao says:

If one wants to move the people under Heaven, one should move the heartmind of these people, and hence, cannot merely focus upon material manifestations (of the heartmind). If one wants to move the heartmind of the people, one must reply upon the fundamental root and origin. . . . The fundamental root and origin is the cosmic truth. The cosmic truth is located in the heartmind of each individual. . . . Nowadays, if we call on the people using the fundamental root and origin, can any heartmind under Heaven not be moved? If the heartmind under Heaven is all moved, can anything under Heaven not be done? If all things are done under Heaven, can our nation not be rich, powerful and happy?³⁴

Despite the fact that in varying stages of Mao's thought the reference of "the cosmic truth" remains different, Mao's overall strategy of empowering the state via mobilizing the will of each individual to sincerely embrace a single correct comprehensive doctrine was formed, as indicated by the letter, in the earliest stage of Mao's thought. Because the semantics of the letter is extremely similar to the one of the *Great Learning* and Wang's interpretation of it, I have confidence to affirm Wang's significant influence upon Mao's young mind.

Therefore, regarding the ways how religions have shaped their anti-intellectualisms, Trump and Mao indicate similar and different characters. Mao is different from Trump in that Mao purposefully studied ancient Ru classics and Wang Yangming's thought in his youth, whereas Trump was not raised as an evangelical Christian and instead expected as a "baby Christian" by an influential evangelical Christian theologian during his presidential campaign.³⁵ However, the anti-intellectualisms of both Mao's and Trump's are clearly a product of the cultural and political movements in which they were so intensely involved. After all, I conclude that it would be as significant for us to understand the connection between XA, the New Cultural Movement, and the socialist movement led by Mao as it is to understand the interdependence between evangelical politics and the Trump presidency.

Argument 3

To indicate how XA continually influenced Mao's thought after Mao's youth, we shall just need to show how the XA logic of solving manifested social and national crises via a gradually deepening process of internalization, idealization, and radicalization continued to function on multiple facets of Maoism until the end of Mao's life. Two such examples are raised as follows.

Firstly, the attitude of Mao towards Confucius underwent radicalizing stages. As previously indicated, the young Mao knew Ru Classics "exceedingly well."³⁶ However, towards his middle age after the New Cultural Movement, Mao was increasingly critical of Confucius and saw "the veneration of Confucius" as an emblem of the "semi-feudal culture" of ancient China and thus of "the opposition of new culture and new thought."³⁷ Even so, Mao didn't entirely abandon Confucius's teaching and instead advocated to dialectically "inherit such a precious cultural heritage."³⁸ One example of this is that Mao urged his communist comrades to practice Ru virtues such as wisdom, benevolence, courage, loyalty, and righteous, yet to serve a communist cause.³⁹ Nevertheless, compounded by the fear of the threat from rising powers in the party such as Lin Biao, Mao launched the most ferocious anti-Confucian campaign at the last stage of Cultural Revolution. In other words, towards the end of his life, Mao's thought reached a final phase which pitted Ruism radically against his own voluntarist Marxist Maoism, viz., his final version of "the cosmic truth."

Secondly, a similar radicalizing process of Mao's thought can be found on his view of class struggle. In the early years of PRC, class struggle was treated by Mao mainly as an economic issue which got solved through political movements such as the land reform and the transformation of capitalist industries and commerce. However, as early as the anti-rightist movement in 1957, class struggle got addressed mainly politically so as to purge varying alleged enemies of the class of proletariat and peasants.⁴⁰ During the Cultural Revolution, the class struggle, seen increasingly as acute and violent, had become ideological, and "Mao became increasingly preoccupied with the pervasiveness of old values, ideas, and attitudes among the highest ranking Communist Party members."⁴¹ Again, being subsequently economic, political, and ideological in nature, Mao's thought of class struggle follows the same logic of XA.

From these two examples, we can also compare how Trump and Mao utilized the anti-intellectual sources within their respective religious traditions to serve political purposes. The key method of Trump's citation of the Bible in political speeches is to quote it contextlessly, while applying biblical tropes directly to his political concerns of the moment, a method remarkably consistent with Pastor Lonnie's evangelical hermeneutics. Mao's application of XA to real politics was to strip it of any transcendent ideal which is supposed to be beyond the reach of any material reality, while keeping XA's holistic and idealist mindset so as to demand a perfect idealistic solution to pressuring problems at hand. Despite this apparent difference, both the Trumpist and Maoist anti-intellectualisms have committed the same religious fallacy, viz., they evoke religious ideals⁴² unreflectively to justify and mobilize initiatives of mundane politics and hence unduly close the gap between religion and politics.

Conclusion: Antidotes

A certain suspicion towards the self-interest of intellectual elite while they pursue empirical knowledge is desirable, since firstly, this reflection is required by the spirit of rational criticism normally championed by such elite, and secondly, interests of varying social groups need to be harmonized for the sake of good governance. However, a religious foundation of the suspicion towards empirical knowledge acquired via the procedure of critical rationalism is by no means desirable. Empirical knowledge of objective reality is crucial to the survival and prosperity of any society whether the political regime of the society is a liberal democracy, an authoritarian socialist party-state, or an ancient imperial empire, three regimes addressed by this chapter. I see the Capitol riot in the United States on the January 6, 2021, and the rampant social chaos and economic collapse during the Cultural Revolution as the implosion of anti-intellectualist leadership of the Trumpist presidency and its precedent in the reign of Mao Zedong, although the scale of harm brought by the former is currently much less than the latter. As stressed earlier, albeit one among many factors to effect

an overall anti-intellectual leadership, religious anti-intellectualism is capable of generating significant impact under certain favorable circumstances. Therefore, as a conclusion of this chapter, I feel obligated to say a few words about the antidote to each identified religious anti-intellectualism.

The way evangelicals read the Bible makes themselves susceptible to political manipulation (of which the Trump presidency furnishes ample evidences), because their biblical hermeneutics offers contextless exegesis, emphasizes personal application, and hence, ties their ultimate concern of salvation by the Christ directly and seamlessly with varying preliminary concerns addressed by public policies advocated by political groups. However, as my earlier definition of “being religious” implies, the value of religion as “ultimate concern”⁴³ consists in exactly that while providing comprehensive orientations to one’s social and political engagement, religion transcends any concrete form of the engagement. This entails a double consciousness of religious people when they pursue politics: on the one hand, their religion shapes a moral consciousness to orient their advocacy of particular public policies; on the other hand, the religion should also keep them being critical of, and if necessary, attempting to revise any particular public policy since none of these policies is or will be adequate to the transcendent demand of faith in the ultimate sense. The careful gauging of whether or to what extent one supports a particular public policy clearly needs the ability of critical thinking and the respect towards empirical knowledge. So, I will cite a biblical verse to indicate why, for the sake of political engagement more beneficial for individuals and the society, evangelicals should not downplay the value of intellect: the belief in God doing His work dwells in “the evidence of the works themselves,” and for Jesus’s followers who are commanded by Jesus to “do even greater things”⁴⁴ than what Jesus did, they clearly need to think over more evidences about things in the world.

The case to make about the antidote to XA on the side of Ruism is less complicated since Wang’s theoretical rival, the school of pattern-principle led by Zhu Xi’s thought, offered an alternative interpretation of the classical Ru verses at stake. In order to prevent the reading of the *Great Learning* from devolving into that sort of ideological utopianism prevalent in the left-wing school of heartmind and in Maoist voluntarism, Zhu Xi’s understanding of the relationship between the human heartmind and the pattern-principles of things in the world is a necessity. In other words, I advocate Zhu Xi’s reading of the controversial verses in the *Great Learning* because, firstly, I do believe there are ecstatic moments during a Ru’s religious practice of faith when his or her heartmind feels united with everything in the universe without being able to express such feeling in any discursive thought. Secondly, however, such a union of the heartmind with things in the universe can only happen momentarily under a certain circumstance. It does not imply that all pattern-principles of the universe have been absorbed by the heartmind, as Wang Yangming conceives it. Instead, the feeling of harmonious union, albeit being momentary and

incomplete, shall motivate a Ru to continually investigate things in the world so as to increase the capacity of his or her heartmind to harmonize involved beings in evolving situations. In a word, the reading of the *Great Learning* along the lineage of Zhu Xi's thought can balance the commitment to the faith in the Cosmic Pattern-principle (天理, tianli) as a Ru's ultimate concern and the processual and concrete engagement with objective realities as his or her preliminary concerns. In an increasingly globalized and diversified world where the national crisis of China due to Western colonialism is no longer an emergency, the more empirical Ruism of Zhu Xi should be practiced more.

Notes

- 1 Mark Ward Sr., "Knowledge Puffs Up': The Evangelical Culture of Anti-Intellectualism as a Local Strategy," *Sermon Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2020), 12. The name of the studied pastor is changed.
- 2 Wang Yangming, *Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang Yang-Ming*, trans. Wing-tsit Chan (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1963), 122–123. The translation is adapted.
- 3 Ward, "Knowledge Puffs Up'," 9.
- 4 "Confucianism" is a misnomer devised by early Christian missionaries in around the 19th century to refer to the Ru (儒, civilized human) tradition with a primary purpose of religious comparison and conversion, just as Islam was once called "Muhammadanism" in a similar historical context. Following the reflective scholarly trend upon the nomenclature, and in line with my other publications, "Confucianism" will be written as "Ruism" or "the Ru tradition," and "Confucian" or "Confucianist" will be written as "Ru" or "Ruist" in this chapter.
- 5 Ward, "Knowledge Puffs Up'," 1–2.
- 6 One most informative research on the receptive history of Wang Yangming's moral philosophy in China and Japan can be found at 陈立胜 Chen Lisheng, "阳明学登场的几个历史时刻—当'王阳明'遭遇'现代性'" (Several Historical Moments of the Presence of the Learning of Yangming: When Wang Yangming Encounters Modernity), 《社会科学战线》, 2018 (07): 44–57. I follow the original language when quoting Chinese works titled either in traditional or simplified Chinese.
- 7 There is no sharp distinction between intellect and emotion in the traditional Ru understanding of the mind, and thus, 心 (xin), the center of human consciousness, is translated normally as "heartmind" in English scholarship.
- 8 A summary of such definitions can be found at Daniel Rigney, "Three Kinds of Anti-Intellectualism: Rethinking Hofstadter," *Sociological Inquiry*, vol. 61, no. 4 (November 1991), 435; Gretchen Ruecker Hoog, "The Liberal University and Its Perpetuation of Evangelical Anti-Intellectualism," *Seattle University Law Review*, vol. 33, no. 3 (2010), 690.
- 9 These three dimensions of American anti-intellectualism are categorized by Rigney, "Three Kinds," 434–451.
- 10 The connection between the anti-intellectual electorate and policies of the Trump presidency is studied by Matthew Motta, "The Dynamics and Political Implications of Anti-Intellectualism in the United States," *American Politics Research*, vol. 46, no. 3 (2018), 465–498.

- 11 Hoog, "The Liberal University," 695, quoting National Association of Evangelicals, *For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civil Responsibility* 1 (2004).
- 12 The fear of intellectualism is analyzed by Hoog, "The Liberal University," 691. The politics of fear among evangelicals is thematized by John Fea, *Believe Me, The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump* (Eerdmans, 2018).
- 13 Ward, "'Knowledge Puffs Up,'" 5. All italics are original.
- 14 Michael Gerson, "The Last Temptation," *The Atlantic*, April 2018, www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/04/the-last-temptation/554066/.
- 15 Carly Cassella, "Trump Cabinet Bible Study Teaches About the 'False Religion of Radical Environmentalism,'" *Science Alert*, 5 April 2018, www.sciencealert.com/trump-cabinet-bible-study-teaches-about-the-false-religion-of-radical-environmentalism.
- 16 Laura Ellyn Smith, "The Spread of COVID-19 in the South Shows the Risks of Anti-intellectualism," *Washington Post*, 4 August 2020, www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/08/04/spread-covid-19-south-shows-risks-anti-intellectualism/.
- 17 Ed Kilgore, "The Time Trump Got a Biblical Citation Very Wrong," *Intelligencer*, 17 December 2020, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/12/the-time-trump-got-a-biblical-citation-very-wrong.html>.
- 18 Christina Zhao, "Reverend Schools Trump by Quoting Bible, Tells President to 'Break with Your Sins and Start Living For Others,'" *Newsweek*, 22 August 2019, www.newsweek.com/reverend-schools-trump-quoting-bible-tells-president-break-your-sins-start-living-others-1455817.
- 19 Ian Frazier, "Donald Trump and Uses and Misuses of the Bible," *The New Yorker*, 15 June 2020, www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/donald-trump-and-uses-and-misuses-of-the-bible.
- 20 Melissa Macauley, "To Understand Trump's GOP, We Need to Look to Lenin and Mao," *The Washington Post*, 1 November 2020, www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/11/01/understand-trumps-gop-we-need-look-lenin-mao/. Another source on the similarity is Abigail Myers, "Those Who Fight and Those Who Write: Overthrowing the Elite and Their Institutions: Exploring Communist China & the United States" (Thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 2017), 44–56.
- 21 Alana Wise, "'I Don't Think Science Knows': Visiting Fires, Trump Denies Climate Change," *NPR*, 14 September 2020, www.npr.org/2020/09/14/912799501/i-don-t-think-science-knows-visiting-fires-trump-denies-climate-change.
- 22 毛泽东 Mao Zedong, "对《在京艺术院校试行半工（农）半读》一文的批语 (A Comment on the Article 'An Experimentation of Half Worker (Peasant) Half Student in the Art Schools at Beijing')", 《建国以来毛泽东文稿》(北京: 中央文献出版社, 1998), 34–35. Translation is my own.
- 23 About Maoist Voluntarism, see Arif Dirlik, *Marxism in the Chinese Revolution* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 120–133; Maurice Meisner, *Marxism, Maoism and Utopianism* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 38–61, 89–109.
- 24 Joseph M. Kitagawa, "One of the Many Faces of China: Maoism as a Quasi-Religion," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2/3 (June–September 1974), 125–141.
- 25 David E. Apter, "Bearing Witness: Maoism as Religion," *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 22 (2005), 5–37. Rana Mitter, "Maoism in the Cultural Revolution: A Political Religion?" in *The Sacred in Twentieth-Century Politics*, ed. R. Griffin et al. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 143–165.
- 26 This translation is adapted from Wing-Tsit Chan, trans. and ed., *A Source Book of Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1936), 86. The use of

- “he” highlights the importance of individual and keeps in line with the historical context, rather than showing any gender bias of the translator. My following analysis of Zhu Xi’s and Wang Yangming’s disparate interpretations is based upon my more extensive study on the text in Bin Song, “The Utopian Seed of Modern Chinese Politics in Ruism (Confucianism) and its Tillichian Remedy,” in Thomas Bandy (ed.), *Why Tillich? Why Now?* (Atlanta, GA: Mercer University Press, 2021), 95–110.
- 27 Wang, *Instructions for Practical Living*, 150. The translation is adapted.
- 28 See 稽文甫 Ji Wenfu, 左派王學 *The Left-wing School of Wang Yang-ming* (台北: 萬卷樓出版社, 1990), 25–41; 钱明 Qian Ming, 阳明学的形成与发展 *The Formation and Development of the School of Wang Yang-ming* (南京: 江苏古籍出版社, 2002), 172–176.
- 29 See 余英时 Yu Ying-shih, 宋明理學與政治文化 *Neo-Confucianism in Song and Ming and the Political Culture*, in 余英時文集 *Collected Works of Yu Ying-shih*, vol. 10 (桂林: 廣西師範大學出版社, 2006), 38.
- 30 Wang, *Instructions for Practical Living*, 240. Translation is adapted.
- 31 Wang’s thought on this point is best represented by his four-sentence teaching. Please see Wang, *Instructions for Practical Living*, 243–245.
- 32 Song, “The Utopian Seed,” 95–110.
- 33 毛泽东 Mao Zedong, “讲堂录” (Notes in Classrooms), 毛泽东早期文稿 *Early Writings of Mao Zedong* (长沙: 湖南出版社, 1990), 591. Translation is my own. 教 (teaching) is also used to translate “religion” in modern Chinese.
- 34 毛泽东 Mao Zedong, “致黎锦熙信” (A Letter to Li Jinxi), 毛泽东早期文稿 *Early Writings of Mao Zedong* (长沙: 湖南出版社, 1990), 85–86.
- 35 James Dobson, “Dr. James Dobson on Donald Trump’s Christian Faith,” *Dr. James Dobson Family Institute*, www.drjamesdobson.org/news/dr-james-dobson-on-trumps-christian-faith, retrieved 29 May 2021.
- 36 Roland Boer, “Confucius and Chairman Mao: Towards a Study of Religion and Chinese Marxism,” *Crisis and Critique*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2015), 40.
- 37 Boer, “Confucius,” 39, quoting “On New Democracy” (1940) of Mao Zedong. Translation is adapted.
- 38 Boer, “Confucius,” 44, quoting “On the New Stage” (1938) of Mao Zedong. Translation is adapted.
- 39 Boer, “Confucius,” 48–49.
- 40 See A. James Gregor and Maria Hsia Chang, “Anti-Confucianism: Mao’s Last Campaign,” *Asian Survey*, vol. 19, no. 11 (November 1979), 1089.
- 41 *Ibid.*
- 42 According to the previous analysis, in Trump’s case, the unreflectively evoked religious ideal is “being like Christ,” as well as other related Christian goals. In Mao’s case, it is the deeply Ruist one of “being willing to sincerely practice the cosmic truth,” as well as other adapted Marxist ideals.
- 43 See Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 11–14.
- 44 John 14:11–12, translation by the New International Version (NIV), www.biblica.com/bible/niv/john/14/.