



WHY  
TILLICH?

WHY  
NOW?

THOMAS G. BANDY, ed.

*Why Tillich?*

*Why Now?*

Thomas G. Bandy, Editor

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## The Utopian Seed of Modern Chinese Politics in Ruism (Confucianism) and its Tillichian Remedy

*Bin Song*

A substantial intellectual interaction between Paul Tillich's thought and the Ru<sup>1</sup> tradition started from Liu Shu-hsien (1934-2016), a contemporary Ru philosopher who completed his dissertation on Tillich at Southern Illinois University in 1966 and then compared Tillich's conception of religion as "ultimate concern" to the religiosity of Ruism. Liu was born in a transformative period of modern China, when traditional Ruist values were radically doubted by Chinese intellectuals. Liu's comparison of Tillich's thought and Ruism has two major motifs.

Firstly, it rediscovers the transcendent dimension of Ruism that makes it more relevant to the modern era. Secondly, Liu presents the wisdom of Ruism to a global audience to enrich global conversation about religion. Ru scholars' work on Tillich shares largely the same concerns, and broadens the conversation into topics such as metaphysics, spirituality, religious ethics, and political philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

My interest in Tillich is also influenced by Liu and related global discussions. I am exploring how Tillich's theology can inform my practice of Ruism to make this tradition more meaningful in modern society. Moreover, Tillich's theological reflection on human destiny in the twentieth century also drives me to re-examine the intellectual, social, and political transition of modern

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<sup>1</sup> "Confucianism" is a misnomer devised by early Christian missionaries to refer to the Ru tradition with a primary purpose of religious comparison and conversion, just as Islam was once called "Muhammadanism" in a similar historical context. A detailed explanation of the history on the nomenclature of "Confucianism" can be found at Swain Tony, *Confucianism in China: An Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017): 3-22; and Anna Sun, *Confucianism as a World Religion: Contested Histories and Contemporary Realities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013): 45-76. Following the reflective scholarly trend upon the nomenclature, "Confucianism" will be written as "Ruism" or the Ru tradition, and "Confucian" or "Confucianist" will be written as "Ru" or "Ruist" in this chapter. Accordingly, "Neo-Confucianism," which normally designates new developments within Ruism during the Song and Ming Dynasties (960-1644 CE), will be referred to as Ruism in the concerned period.

<sup>2</sup> A most recent example of the scholarship is Keith Chan Ka-fu and William NG Yau-nang, *Paul Tillich and Asian Religions* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2017).

China. There are two central questions. Firstly, why is there such a strong utopianism in modern Chinese politics? Secondly, in order to understand and avoid the disturbing consequences of political utopianism, how can Tillich's thought illuminate our answer to the first question?

I argue that the history of radical modernization in China from 1840 until the 1970s bears a striking resemblance to the revival of Ruism as a dominant intellectual trend of medieval China.<sup>3</sup> We can discern a utopian seed of modern Chinese politics in traditional Ruist spirituality. Tillich's thought on "Spiritual Presence," which is articulated mainly in the third volume of his *Systematic Theology*, can be taken as a remedy for contemporary Ru scholars to recognize the unfortunate nature of utopianism so that Ruism in this modern era can stay more reflective.

### The Radical Modernization of China

Tillich's theological reflection on "Spiritual Presence" is concerned with the political history of humankind in the twentieth century, a major feature of which is the ebb and flow of totalitarian ideologies and regimes. Similarly, in order to apply Tillich's thought to an investigation of modern Chinese politics, we need to briefly recount the process of China's modernization around the same time period.

There are roughly three phases of China's modernization between the 1840s and the 1970s: technological, institutional, and cultural.<sup>4</sup> They all share the same goal to save China from national crisis that was triggered by aggressive western powers. Each phase was launched by its supporters because they thought their predecessors had failed to achieve this goal. Altogether, the unfolding of these phases yields an overall feature of China's modernization: this is an intensifying process of internalization, idealization, and radicalization.

The first phase, or the Self-Strengthening Movement (1860-1894), was technological. It prioritized the acquisition of western arms and technologies for modernization in order to sustain the traditional ideology and institutions

<sup>3</sup> "Medieval China" in the chapter refers to the long period of Chinese history from Tang to Ming Dynasty (618-1644 CE), when Ruism had gradually established its dominant influence in the intellectual world.

<sup>4</sup> Similar ways to periodize China's modernization can be found in Yu Ying-shih, "Radicalization and Conservation in Modern Intellectual History of China," in *Qian Mu and Chinese Culture* (Shanghai: Shanghai Yuandong Chubanshe, 1994), 194-97; and Edmund S.K. Fung, *The Intellectual Foundations of Chinese Modernity: Cultural and Political Thought in the Republican Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 4.

of imperial China. It ended with the defeat of Qing dynasty (1644-1912) in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895).<sup>5</sup>

The second phase focused on institutional modernization starting from the Hundred Days' Reform (1895) and the New Administration of the post-Boxer decade (1901-1911). These movements tried to adapt the old Chinese imperial system into a British-style constitutional monarchy using a form of progressive reformation. The former was thwarted by conservative power in the royal court, and the latter was too late to resolve the problems that had been forming for centuries. In contrast, the Xinhai Revolution in 1911 led by Sun Yat-sen intended to establish a French-style republic through violent revolution. Although it succeeded in overthrowing the Qing dynasty and ended China's millennia-long imperial epoch, the revolutionaries lost their power. China subsequently experienced an extremely chaotic warlord period. Even if the revolutionaries had regained power and established the Nanjing national government in 1927, the resulting polity was a party-state system following the example of the Soviet Union and thus, far from its original, revolutionary, ideal.

The New Cultural Movement started in the 1910s, and it initiated the third and last phase of China's modernization as cultural transformation. Proponents of the New Cultural Movement claimed that neither technological nor institutional modernization would be effective unless it were grounded in the transformation of individual human minds. Since culture was taken to be the greatest influence upon human mind, active intellectuals in this phase strived to select and promote what they considered to be the most advanced modern ideas from western culture to transform the soul of Chinese people. The process included radical antagonism against traditional Chinese culture, especially Ruism.<sup>6</sup>

In this cultural phase, three intellectual trends can be distinguished: liberalism, cultural conservatism, and socialism. Liberalists were convinced that democracy and science are the most modern ideas in the West. They typically

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<sup>5</sup> Details of the historical events mentioned in this section, especially those in the first two phases of China's modernization, could be found in J.M. Grasso, J.P. Corrin, and M. Kort, *Modernization and Revolution in China: From the Opium Wars to the Olympics* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Analyses of the idealization and radicalization of the New Cultural Movement and its influence on the modern intellectual history of China could be referred to Fung, *The Intellectual Foundations*, 37-57; Lin Yu-sheng, *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Radical Antitraditionalism in the May Fourth Era* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), 17-40; and Yu Ying-shih, "The Crisis of Chinese Culture and its Background in the Intellectual History," in *Historical Figures and Cultural Crisis* (Taipei: Sanmin Shuju, 2004), 165-66.

entertained a radical anti-traditional belief that these modern ideas could be gradually imprinted into the Chinese zeitgeist only after the traditional ones had been wiped out. Cultural conservatives felt the same urgency to improve traditional Chinese culture. However, they did not think westernization subsumed modernization. Some values present in Chinese traditional culture were considered as universal and eternal. Hence, they maintained that China's modernization ought to cautiously learn from the West and adapted to preserve Eastern culture. Comparatively, most Chinese socialists were much less patient, and this was particularly true for the Marxist revolutionary socialists. They believed that democracy and science would not function well if grafted onto capitalistic institutions. Instead, communism should be the consummation of human history towards which all societies are striving.<sup>7</sup>

The cultural phase of China's modernization can be divided into two sub-phases. From 1919-1949, all three trends competed and intermingled with each other. An intellectual could be politically liberal and culturally conservative, while simultaneously remaining sympathetic with socialist ideas. However, after 1949, the Marxist revolutionary socialism, culminating in Maoism, overwhelmed all the others.

In my view, the crystallization of China's modernization from the 1840s to the 1970s into Maoist Marxism as its intellectual kernel is characteristic of the whole process. Maoist Marxism is a theory of holism. It categorizes human history into one scheme, uniformly depicts the historical and national identity of modern China, and provides a package of policies intended to resolve the most fundamental issues of Chinese society. Because of this holistic approach, it is radically antagonistic towards both traditional Chinese culture and any element of western culture other than its own version of socialism. Maoist Marxism is also a theory of voluntarism. The key factor for social transformation is not objective reality (traditionally considered by Marxists as necessary for any change of social superstructures), but the knowledge and will of each individual.

Maoist Marxism has a distinct utopian character. Its utopianism not only projects a perfect future as the end of human history that can be finally and fully realized. It also asserts that China can rely on the correct knowledge and will of each individual. And this can be achieved mainly through ideological inculcation and organized mass movements.<sup>8</sup> The latter point speaks to the

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<sup>7</sup> See Fung, *The Intellectual Foundations*, 62-127, 145-58, and 200-55.

<sup>8</sup> About the utopian nature of Maoist Marxism, please refer to Arif Dirlik, *Marxism in the Chinese Revolution* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers,



most influential utopian element of Maoist Marxism, and its consequences were ferociously revealed in the decade of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

After the 1970s, when Deng Xiaoping called for the suspension of ideological controversy and concentration upon the development of national economy, his reform intended to acquire the most advanced technologies and economic policies from the West while maintaining the solidarity of the Chinese Communist Party's leadership, ideology, and institutions. Deng's reform had much in common with the Self-Strengthening Movement, painstakingly repeating the cycle.<sup>9</sup>

### The Revival of Ruism in Medieval China

As inspired by Tillich's spiritual approach to explaining the mechanism of political utopianism (which we will discuss later), our inquiry into the overall features of the process of China's modernization attempts to discover its deeper spiritual drive. While doing so, we find that China's modernization bears a striking resemblance to the revival of Ruism as the dominant intellectual trend in medieval China.

There are three phases to the revival of Ruism in Medieval China that parallel the process of China's modernization: literary (technological to a certain extent), institutional, and intellectual.<sup>10</sup> These were driven by similar concerns. Ruist literati needed to tackle with dynastic crises which were caused by deteriorating domestic political environments and the aggression of the ethnic minority groups from northern China. Internalization and idealization are responses in both. In its last phase, there was even a hint of moral utopianism. The three phases can be briefly described as follows.

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2005), 19, 47, 120-33; Maurice Meisner, *Marxism, Maoism, and Utopianism* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), xi, 18, 22-25, 38-61, 59-72, 89-109; Fung, *The Intellectual Foundations*, 262; and Lin, *The Crisis*, 4.

<sup>9</sup> Dirlik has a similar observation in Dirlik, *Marxism*, 232.

<sup>10</sup> This way of periodization is mainly inspired by Yu Ying-shih, *The Historical World of Zhu Xi: A Research of the Politics and Culture of Scholar-Officials in Song Dynasty*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Sanlian Shudian, 2004), 39-56, 328-46; and its vol. 2, 411-22. It can also be verified by Peter Bol's narrative of the medieval revival of Ruism in Peter K. Bol, *"This Culture of Ours": Intellectual Transitions in Tang and Sung China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992). I name the third phase of China's modernization as "cultural" in order to stay in tune with the New Cultural Movement and the Cultural Revolution which are both hallmarks of this phase. However, as analyzed before, the greatest influence of this phase is to import new ideas from the West and thus, intellectual.

In the early Tang Dynasty (618-907), Chinese culture was syncretic and balanced. The royal court sponsored the compilation and annotation of a magnificent collection of classics from different traditions, including Ruism, Buddhism, and Daoism. It also encouraged expression of these substantial ideas in various refining artistic forms.<sup>11</sup> Tang's culture valued the Ruist ideal of the virtuous person: "to blend properly one's substance and refinement."<sup>12</sup> Tang's decline was caused by the An-Shi Rebellion in 755, when local warlords captured the capital and ousted the emperor. This dynastic crisis triggered the Movement of Ancient Prose, the first phase of Ruist revival in medieval China.

The Movement of Ancient Prose, launched by Han Yu (768-824), affirmed that the prevalence in early Tang of the Buddhist, Daoist, and other similar ideas had deviated from the Way of ancient sage-kings, contaminated people's morality, and hence, led to Tang's declination. In order to revitalize the dynasty, people, especially the literati, needed to recapture and internalize the original Ru ideas which had achieved their paradigmatic expressions in the Pre-Qin period (before 221 BCE) and the Han Dynasty (202 BCE - 220 CE). The concrete method to achieve this goal was to re-adopt the literary craft of "ancient prose" which was much plainer and more philosophically grounded than the flowery "rhythmical prose" popular in Han's time.<sup>13</sup>

The Movement of Ancient Prose in the early Song period (960-1279 CE) maintained the same motif and methodology as its predecessor in Tang. Its proponents searched for ideas in Ruist classics in order to bring peace and order to Song's politics and strived to develop the correct way to compose literature in order to transmit these ideas. Although this movement had its political appeals, they had not yet been put into practice in the institutional level. Its investigation into early Ruist classics touched some philosophical topics, but the movement had not delved into the nature of human heartmind (xin) and its metaphysical foundation as later Ruist reformers did.<sup>14</sup> In this sense, the Movement of Ancient Prose was a reformative movement of literary technique led by the literati elite,<sup>15</sup> and merely involved the initial and surface aspects of Ruism's revival. As technological reform, it is analogous to the first

<sup>11</sup> See Bol, *This Culture of Ours*, 84-107.

<sup>12</sup> Analects 6:16, 1n, in *A Source Book of Chinese Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Wing-Tsit Chan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 29.

<sup>13</sup> See Bol, *This Culture of Ours*, 130-36.

<sup>14</sup> A detailed explanation of Ru philosophy in its Song and Ming period will be presented in the next section.

<sup>15</sup> See Peter K. Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008), 52-55; and Yu, *The Historical World of Zhu Xi*, vol. 1, 39, 95, 328-38.

phase of China's modernization. It transformed Chinese culture from a syncretic balance between substance and refinement to the preponderance of idea over its artistic expression.<sup>16</sup>

Several major defeats by the northern regimes of ethnic minority quickly deepened Song's dynastic crisis. This triggered the second phase: the political reform of Wang Anshi (1021-1086). Based upon a philosophical re-interpretation of Ruist classics, especially the *Zhou Book of Ritual*, Wang Anshi proposed various political, economic, military, and educational reforms under the aegis of his emperor. He also attempted to ground institutional reforms on his understanding of human nature and its cosmological conditions. However, political reformation failed to overcome the imperial court's conservative power.

In the view of Cheng Yi (1033-1107), the inability of both the Movement of Ancient Prose and Wang's reform to deal with the crisis was due to an inadequate moral philosophy that was too adulterated by Buddhist and other non-Ruist elements. Cheng argued that the dynasty ought to concentrate upon rectifying people's heartmind, thus equipping each individual with the right moral ideas, before any political reform could succeed. The idea of "pattern-principle" (li) in Cheng's philosophy refers to the way that a set of cosmic and human realities dynamically and harmoniously fit together, upon which an individual's moral behavior depends. Accordingly, Cheng defined "Learning of Way" as a process of internalizing right moral ideas through an investigation of the pattern-principles of things. In contrast with the "Literary Learning" of the previous movement, the "Learning of Way" devalued the necessity of cultural refinement for understanding moral ideas.<sup>17</sup> With this new idea of learning, the medieval revival of Ruism embarked upon its final phase: intellectual.

According to the traditional historiography of Ruist thought, this intellectual phase can be further divided into two sub-phases: the Cheng-Zhu school of pattern-principle and the Lu-Wang school of heartmind. Wang Yang-ming (1472-1529), argued that access to innate goodness does not come from the cumulative investigation of many pattern-principles in external things, but from the momentary attainment of the innate "conscientious knowing" within human heartmind.<sup>18</sup> Later, a more left-wing school of Wang

<sup>16</sup> See Bol, *Neo-Confucianism*, 56.

<sup>17</sup> See Yu, *The Historical World of Zhu Xi*, vol. 1, 45-52, 108; Bol, *This Culture of Ours*, 305-26; and Bol, *Neo-Confucianism*, 163-67.

<sup>18</sup> About the Difference between Zhu Xi and Wang Yang-ming, please also refer to Barry C. Keenan, *Neo-Confucian Self-Cultivation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011), 13.

followed his teachings of the completeness and the continuous presence of the conscientious knowing, but held that there is one dimension of human heart-mind which has the potential to encompass all the pattern-principles of things in the cosmos, and which enables humans to respond appropriately to all cosmic and human events.<sup>19</sup> More importantly, the potentiality of this dimension of human heartmind can be fully realized at any moment of everyday life.<sup>20</sup> This left-wing school of Wang resonates with Mao's voluntarist Marxism as a way of moral utopianism.

### The Utopian Seed in the *Great Learning*

Why did China's modernization from the 1840s to the 1970s and the revival of Ruism in medieval China experience very similar phases: technological, institutional, and intellectual? Why were both processes equally oriented to internalization, idealization, and in varying degrees, utopianism? And why did both of them, if assessed by their own initial motives, ultimately fail? We can best answer these questions by analyzing one of the most important Ruistic canons, the *Great Learning*, because this reveals the spiritual root of holistic thinking. In doing so, we discover the relevance of Tillich's thought to contemporary Chinese politics and culture.

Han Yu, the originator of Ruism's medieval revival, used the text of the *Great Learning* to denounce the infringement of Daoist and Buddhist ideas on the literati. After the annotation by Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi, the text was considered "the gate through which beginning students enter into virtue" and occupied a foundational position in the Ruist canonical system of Four Books.<sup>21</sup> Until 1905, when the Ruist civil examination was officially abrogated, this Chen-Zhu interpretation of the *Great Learning* was received as orthodoxy. Most of the active intellectuals in early modern China, including opponents of Ruism, studied the text as part of their early education. Given the centrality of the *Great Learning* to Chinese intellectual life, the text is, therefore, the best choice for analyzing the spiritual rationale undergirding both the medieval revival of Ruism and China's modernization.

<sup>19</sup> See Ji Wenfu, *The Left-wing School of Wang Yang-ming* (Taipei: Wanjuanlou Chubanshe, 1990), 17.

<sup>20</sup> See Qian Ming, *The Formation and Development of the School of Wang Yang-ming* (Nanjing: Jiangsu Guji Chubanshe, 2002): 172-76; and Peng Guoxiang, "A Debate of the Ready-Madness of the Conscientious Knowing in Middle and late Ming," *The Sinological Studies* 11 (2003/06): 15-46.

<sup>21</sup> See Daniel K. Gardner, *Chu Hsi and the Ta-hsueh: Neo-Confucian Reflection on the Confucian Canon* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 4, 18-19.

The *Great Learning* was originally written for the ruling class, although it was considered later to be a general guideline of education for all people. The two paragraphs that epitomize the holistic mode of thinking are as follows:

4.1 If an ancient person wished that all people under Heaven manifest their luminous virtues, he would first govern his state well. 4.2 If he wished to govern his state well, he would first regulate his family. 4.3 If he wished to regulate his family, he would first cultivate himself. 4.4 If he wished to cultivate himself, he would first rectify his heartmind. 4.5 If he wished to rectify his heartmind, he would first make his intentions sincere. 4.6 If he wished to make his intentions sincere, he would first extend his knowledge. 4.7 The extension of knowledge consists in the investigation of things.

5.1 When things are investigated, knowledge is extended. 5.2 When knowledge is extended, intentions are sincere. 5.3 When intentions are sincere, the heartmind is rectified. 5.4 When the heartmind is rectified, the person is cultivated. 5.5 When the person is cultivated, the family will be regulated. 5.6 When the family is regulated, the state will be governed well. 5.7 When the state is governed well, there will be peace under Heaven."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> This translation is adapted from Chan, *A Source Book*, 86; Keenan, *Neo-Confucian Self-Cultivation*, 38; and Gardner, *Chu Hsi and the Ta-hsueh*, 91-92. The original text according to Zhu Xi is in Zhu Xi, *The Complete Works of Master Zhu*, vol. 6 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2002), 17, in compliance with which I mark the order of each sentence by the first number representing the paragraph and the second for the sentence. The use of "he" highlights the importance of individual and keeps in line with the historical context, rather than showing any sexual bias of mine. My philosophical interpretation of the text is based upon Zhu Xi's and Wang Yang-ming's common understanding. However, in case there is a significant discrepancy between them, I will explain it explicitly. Zhu Xi's understanding of the *Great Learning* could be found mainly in these texts: *The Great Learning in Chapter and Verse*, in Zhu, *The Complete Works*, 13-28; *Further Questions about the Great Learning*, in Zhu, *The Complete Works*, 505-47; the fourteenth to eighteenth rolls of the *Classified Conversations of Master Zhu*, in Zhu Xi, *Classified Conversations of Master Zhu* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1998): 249-427. Wang Yang-ming's mature understanding of the text which pivots upon the term "the extension of knowledge" could be found mainly in *Letter in Reply to Gu Dongqiao*, in Wang Yang-ming, *The Complete Works of Wang Yang-ming* (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1992): 41-57; *Letter in Reply to Vice-Minister Luo Zheng-an*, in Wang, *The Complete Works*, 75-78; *A Preface to the Ancient Version of the Great Learning*, in Wang, *The Complete Works*, 242; *Inquiry on*

The pivotal term in this textual chain is in 4.5, *cheng yi*, to make one's intentions sincere. *Yi* implies an intentional response of human heartmind<sup>23</sup> to external things when they affect it. The standard by which to judge the sincerity of intentions is whether they can be held in public as in private. The teaching about *cheng yi* is related to a specific method of moral discipline: *shen du*, vigilant solitude. A person with vigilant solitude is able to live by moral rules even in private. Their pursuit of morality would be voluntary, i.e., for the sake of oneself rather than for the sake of others.

Nevertheless, although sincere intentions are usually attached to spontaneous emotions, the sheer spontaneity of emotions does not guarantee that the accompanying intentions are sincere. This is because people's judgement of the nature of affecting things could be wrong, and their following emotions would be consequently inappropriate. Therefore, the text teaches that *cheng yi* should be premised upon *zhi zhi*, to extend one's knowledge. The knowledge to be extended is about pattern-principle, which, as mentioned above, designates the way that a set of cosmic and human realities dynamically and harmoniously fit together. Because no pattern-principle of anything can be fully clarified without a comprehensive grasp of all the pattern-principles of its related things, the process of extending one's knowledge must lead to an ecstatic fulfillment of human spirituality, i.e., a penetration of human heartmind into the One pattern-principle of all under Heaven. For Zhu Xi, this ecstatic fulfillment is characterized by a sagely omniscience through which all the qualities of the things in the world and all the operations within human heartmind are thoroughly understood.<sup>24</sup> For Wang Yang-ming, the fulfillment is a feeling of mysterious union of the human heartmind with all under Heaven, and consequently, manifested as a sagely omnipotence through which all evolving things in the cosmos can be appropriately responded.<sup>25</sup>

In short, one's intentions would be sincere if spontaneous emotions were grounded upon the knowledge of the pattern-principles of things. One would thus find their genuine self, or, in terminology of the *Great Learning*, a person would manifest their luminous virtue. One would also be dedicated to helping others to manifest their luminous virtue as well. The *Great Learning* instructs

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*the Great Learning*, in Wang, *The Complete Works*, 967-73. An analysis of the development of Wang Yang-ming's thought of the *Great Learning* in contrast with Zhu Xi could be found in Qian, *The Formation*, 38-84.

<sup>23</sup> Since Ruist philosophy typically espouses intelligence is inseparable from emotion, the center of human consciousness is termed as (xin) and translated as heart-mind.

<sup>24</sup> Zhu, *The Complete Works*, 20.

<sup>25</sup> Wang, *The Complete Works*, 966, 972.

one to "love and renew the people" in order to "regulate one's family," "govern one's state well," and ultimately, "bring peace throughout all under Heaven." The process can be envisioned as expanding concentric circles through which a cultivating virtuous person at the center helps to transform the moral characters of their neighbors by the method of *shu*. *Shu* means "to help the others to establish what one establishes oneself, and to help the others to accomplish what one accomplishes oneself," and "do not do to others that one does not want to be done."<sup>26</sup> In the *Great Learning*, this method is called the Way of Measuring-Square, because it is taken to be the measure of human relationship.<sup>27</sup>

Although Zhu Xi and Wang Yang-ming disagree significantly on their understandings of the last two terms of the quoted text: *zhi zhi* (extension of knowledge) and *ge wu* (investigation of things), they both share an ecstatic optimism, either in the way of a cognitive (Zhu) or a performative (Wang) penetration of human heartmind into all the pattern-principles of all under Heaven. They also share the belief that peace between states and order within a state are ultimately dependent on the moral self-cultivation of either the individual as a sagely emperor who orchestrates society from above or as ordinary people sustaining the Way from below.

In general, the *Great Learning* grounds moral rules on the knowledge of cosmic realities in each individual's mind so as to construct an "anthropocosmic" worldview.<sup>28</sup> We can interpret the first five steps, from "investigation of things" in 5.1 to "cultivate one's person" in 5.4, as religious because moral rules are based on the knowledge of cosmic realities. It is during the process of human interactions, rather than in the introspective self-cultivation of a solitary person, that ethical problems actually arise. Therefore, the sixth step in 5.5 to "regulate one's family" is ethical. The seventh step in 5.6 and 5.7 to "govern one's state well" and "bring peace throughout all under Heaven" is political. In this way, the *Great Learning* establishes one spiritual fulcrum in each individual's mind which fulfills their religious, ethical, and political concerns all at once. We can now answer our original questions.

Why does China's current modernization in question reflect its past medieval revival of Ruism in its orientation towards internalization and idealization? It is because under the influence of the *Great Learning*, major participants of these two historical events shared the same belief that the solution of

<sup>26</sup> *Analects* 6:28, 15:23, in Chan, *A Source Book*, 31, 44.

<sup>27</sup> Zhu, *The Complete Works*, 24.

<sup>28</sup> See Tu Wei-ming, *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 9.

political crises at the state level depends upon a thorough grasp by each individual of a single correct doctrine about how to tackle those crises. Why does the current modernization have similar radical and utopian phases? It is because both historical events share the same belief that there is a single correct doctrine that enables humans to fulfill multiple goals and resolve disparate problems all at once.

Both contemporary and past movements assumed that the way of spiritual life can be fully realized through individuals' voluntary efforts regardless of the contextual restraints. Both movements ultimately failed. The obstacle for Ruism's medieval revival was that unruly elements of the state could not be managed by a moralistic statecraft. The obstacle for contemporary Maoist Marxism is that voluntaristic holism denies the possibility of progressive reformation through the cooperation of people with their pluralistic ideas and diverse backgrounds.

The text *Great Learning* affirms that we can fulfill our political and ethical concerns if and only if we have fulfilled our religious concerns. There may be good reasons to believe that the peace among states and the order within a state are ultimately dependent upon voluntary moral practice of each individual which can be enhanced by their religious belief. Nevertheless, it is overly optimistic and unrealistic to think that this is the only means to bring peace and order to states. By the same token, a well-cultivated virtuous person cannot guarantee that their family members will become equally virtuous merely because of their moral influence and religious charisma. In other words, politics, ethics, and religion should be seen as three intricately interconnected, yet fundamentally different areas of human life. Their relationship is not as simple and monolithic as the *Great Learning* envisioned.

This misguided form of holism, so to speak, implies that we people could fulfill our multiple concerns and resolve our disparate problems all at once if and only if we adopt in our mind one single, correct, all-encompassing doctrine. In my view, this explains the extreme reaction of Chinese intelligentsia to dynastic and national crises, and the erroneous assumption that the overall transformation of individual minds is the best way to resolve those challenges. This form of spirituality, with its misguided conception of pluralistic and changing social realities, explains both past and current dilemmas facing China.

#### Ultimate Concern and Preliminary Concerns

Paul Tillich's theology, and especially his pneumatology, helps us understand and correct the unfortunate impact of Ruism on Chinese politics and culture.



Tillich's definition of religion as Ultimate Concern is based on his ontology. He affirms that the philosophers' absolute (*logos*) and religionists' absolute (*pathos*) ought to be identical. Therefore, the concept of Ultimate Concern involves two series of conditions. First, there are conditions of reality. Ultimate reality conditions all other realities without itself being thus conditioned. Second, there are conditions of human concerns. The unconditionality of ultimate reality implies that the concern about it is also ultimate. Hence, ultimate concern places an unconditional demand upon all preliminary concerns so that if a person has to make choices about their concerns at crucial moments of life, the ultimate concern is the one thing they should never surrender.<sup>29</sup>

The process of moral self-cultivation in the *Great Learning* is easily aligned with Tillich's understanding of Ultimate Concern. The Ruist thinkers tried to ground the demand of political and moral rules on the pattern-principles of things generated by the all-encompassing, and constantly creative, cosmic power. In the *Great Learning*, the One pattern-principle of Heaven, which includes and coheres with the many pattern-principles of things, is ultimate reality. On the other hand, individuals can satisfy ethical and political concerns if and only if they grasp the pattern-principles of things. "Extension of knowledge" is the way the fulfillment of all other preliminary concerns is conditioned.

However, although Tillich maintains that religion as Ultimate Concern provides "depth, direction and unity" to all preliminary concerns,<sup>30</sup> he never asserts, like the Ruists did in the *Great Learning*, that the fulfillment of Ultimate Concern is both the necessary and sufficient condition for fulfilling preliminary concerns. In other words, what the fulfillment of Ultimate Concern could furnish is the "meaning," but not the "means" of the fulfillment of preliminary concerns. In this sense, Tillich does not oversimplify the interconnection between piety, morality, and earthly happiness.

For Tillich, the fulfillment of ultimate concern takes a form of momentary and ecstatic religious experience during which the divine Spirit is manifested in the spiritual dimension of human life. In this moment, humans as finite beings are grasped by the infinite creative power of God as the ground of being. As a consequence, they will be transformed into their New Being as an essential union with God without removing their own existences and enliven themselves in a dynamic and harmonious communion with all other

<sup>29</sup> See Paul Tillich, "The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion," in *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 1-2, 22, 105; and Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 11-14.

<sup>30</sup> Tillich, "The Two Types," 105.

creatures without losing their own uniqueness. Spiritual Presence, as the consummation of humanity's deepest concern, reveals the ideal for human life while simultaneously offering assurance that the ideal could become actual.<sup>31</sup>

According to Tillich, human life is a "multidimensional unity," and therefore, the fulfillment of ultimate concern can never be full and complete. Unity has five dimensions: inorganic, physical, psychological (together, these two constitute the organic dimension), personal and spiritual. Because each of these dimensions is indispensable to and coexists within an individual's life, changes in one dimension will not necessarily block the intrinsic qualities of another dimension. Therefore, if Spiritual Presence grasps a person in the spiritual dimension of life, creating an unambiguous presence of meaning, this can impact, but not abolish, the nature of the other dimensions. The subject-object split in all dimensions other than the spiritual guarantees that human life is never divested of ambiguities, including even those most unambiguous ecstatic life moments. As a consequence, Tillich argues that the presence of divine Spirit in human life is always fragmentary. The perfection of human personality should not be envisioned as full realization of the unambiguous presence of meaning at ecstatic moments of life. Rather, a person ought to, under the guidance of the ideal informed by the unambiguous manifestation of Spiritual Presence, continue to fight the ambiguous, transform the ambiguous, and create new manifestations of the unambiguity within ambiguities, despite the fact that any success in this process will only take place fragmentarily and anticipatorily.<sup>32</sup>

Another important dimension to human life is historical. Tillich's thought about the fragmentary manifestation of divine Spirit in the ecstatic moments of an individual's life is brought into his reflection on the destiny of human history based on themes in traditional Christian eschatology. For Tillich, since Spiritual Presence is the actual, albeit incomplete, realization of the ideal of life, the aim of human history is also revealed through it. It is unnecessary, however, to interpret traditional Christian symbols of eschatology as "the last" in any temporal sense. Instead, the eschaton of human history which could be fragmentarily realized in the form of Spiritual Presence is the aim of history in the normative sense. Tillich believes that there is no perfect temporal state of human history for which all humans should strive. Otherwise, the state of human history, concrete and finite, would be unduly considered infinite, and thus, become a false and demonic object of ultimate concern. According to Tillich, what humans should pursue is to fully devote themselves

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<sup>31</sup> See Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 11-128, 137, 143, and 222.

<sup>32</sup> See Tillich, 11-30, 71, 222-41, 276.

to realizing a better state of human society under the guidance of the already experienced ideal of Spiritual Presence. Nevertheless, since the realization of the ideal is always partial and fragmentary, we should acknowledge that even if a better state of human society can be accomplished, it would not be worshiped but criticized, and if necessary, rejected.<sup>33</sup>

In general, Tillich envisions human history as a two-dimensional dynamic process. The vertical dimension, as momentary realization of an ideal in the form of Spiritual Presence, needs to be manifested as actual improvements of human conditions in the horizontal dimension. Meanwhile, the development of human society on the horizontal dimension requires the continuous guidance and infusion of prophetic power from the fulfilled ultimate concern on the vertical dimension.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, the unambiguity of the fulfillment of ultimate concern can only be manifested in the ambiguities of the fulfillment of preliminary concerns either for an individual or for human history. The condition of ultimate concern upon preliminary concerns is at best necessary, but absolutely not sufficient.

Tillich's thoughts about fragmentary Spiritual Presence in an individual's life is a powerful antidote to the Ruist type of moral utopianism that affirms the complete realization of an ideal of human life for specifically cultivated persons and at specific life moments. Correspondingly, his philosophy of history through his reinterpretation of Christian eschatology is also a powerful corrective to the Maoist-Marxist type of historical utopianism that affirms the full realization of a perfect state of human history relying upon the inculcated knowledge and will of each individual.<sup>35</sup> The moral type of utopianism in Ruism is an intellectual and psychological preparation for the process of China's radical modernization. However, the Maoist-Marxist historical type of utopianism is only possible once the spiritual dimension of Ruism is misunderstood or jettisoned. Now that the revival of Ruism is becoming a noticeable social phenomenon in contemporary China and other areas of the globe, Ruist scholars would be inspired by Tillich's reflection on spirituality and politics. They can advance the self-transformation of Ruism in a more mindful way. In particular, I believe Ru scholars' work can focus upon the following

<sup>33</sup> See Tillich, 307, 320, 358-59, and 373; and Paul Tillich, "The Political Meaning of Utopia," in *Political Expectation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 177-78.

<sup>34</sup> See Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, 420; Tillich, "The Political Meaning," 179.

<sup>35</sup> Scholarly reviews on Tillich's thought of utopianism can be found in Raymond F. Bulman, *A Blueprint for Humanity: Paul Tillich's Theology of Culture* (New Jersey: Associated University Press, 1981), 69, 78; and Ronald H. Stone, "On the Boundary of Utopia and Politics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich*, ed. Russell Re Manning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 208-21.

two facets so as to constructively reconsider the Ruist legacy as inspired by Tillich's thought. First, resources within Ruism which are more conducive to the critique of moral utopianism can be uncovered.<sup>36</sup> Second, the contemporary revival of Ruism should promote religious and cultural pluralism, and thus contribute to more inclusive domestic or international politics. To the latter facet, the cross-cultural study of world religions and philosophies will remain essential.

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<sup>36</sup> I made an endeavor to uncover some of these resources in my dissertation "A Study of Comparative Philosophy of Religion on 'Creatio Ex Nihilo' and 'Sheng Sheng' (生生, birth birth)," Boston University, 2018. Recently, I also find one contemporary Ruist philosopher, Tang Junyi (1909-1978), shares a similar view of philosophy of history to Tillich's. Please see Thomas Frohlich, "The Challenge of Totalitarianism: Lessons from Tang Junyi's Political Philosophy," in *Confucianism for the Contemporary World: Global Order, Political Plurality, and Social Action*, eds. Tze-ki Hon and Kristin Stapleton (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017), 131-66. My review of this book can be found at the journal of *Philosophy East and West*, issue of July 2019.

## WHY TILlich? WHY NOW?

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