An Analytic Approach to Contemporary Confucian Revivalism(s)

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Abstract

There are different variants of contemporary Confucianism. This paper offers an analytical tool that allows their comparison as well as differentiation while respecting each's philosophical tenets: a 2×2 matrix. This matrix—a technique usually applied in social sciences—is constructed here from a philosophical perspective. It focuses on two axes of differentiation, each representing a spectrum: The first locates a particular set of ideas and its relationship to Confucianism. This is the axis of inclusion. This axis of the matrix is about the philosophical argument on how a variant counts itself as Confucian. The second axis relates to the role of Confucianism in the public sphere, as advocated by a specific variant. This second axis of the matrix is the axis of intention. This paper applies the matrix on two variants of contemporary Confucianism revivalism, namely those proposed by Fang Keli and Fan Ruiping.

Keywords: contemporary Confucianism, public Confucianism, People's Republic of China, philosophy and social science

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In China, since the early 2000s and even before, there has been a revival of Confucianism.[1] Rather, there are different movements claiming to stand in the tradition of Master Kong's teachings (Fan 2011).[2] These two claims alone offer enough material for a complete research program. This paper, however, will address a specific question that can be posed in different ways: What makes these revivalisms "Confucian"? When or how can the adjective "Confucian" be claimed by or applied to certain forms of revivalisms? Or, how do the different variants of contemporary Confucianism argue their inclusion into that philosophical tradition? Furthermore, since Confucianism understands itself as a moral force within a community with an organization that can be called public, or "political,"[3] there is the aspect of how philosophy and society interact. If there is a Confucian revivalism—in many forms and shades—what it is supposed to do in contemporary Chinese society and in the public, or political realm?[4] There are, therefore, two dimensions for comparing contemporary Confucianisms. First, their self-description as, or in-

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[1] See, for example, Hammond and Richey (2014) and Ai (2009).

[2] It is doubtful whether China had a philosophical concept of Confucianism as a fully-formed and homogenous school of thought. Rather, there were different philosophies claiming some standing in a tradition of the teachings of Master Kong. On the other hand, the term "Confucianism" became more used in China since the 1980s and is now commonly used as a denominator for a kind of philosophy (Ai 2008).

[3] This sentence is intentionally convoluted. It seems anachronistic to apply terms such as "society" or "political organization" to Confucianism, at least in its original form as developed by Kong and his immediate disciples. Even if the Spring and Autumn Period of Chinese history is sometimes described using contemporary terms of political science and philosophy, it isn't clear at all if these terms help or hinder the analysis of social and political interaction. This paper opts for terms with less epistemic commitment; for example, instead of the term "social society," the expression "community" will be used, and the expression "public organization" will be used instead of "state." This loosely follows Tönnies (1957) and Fairbank and Goldman (2006).

[4] Note that this question does not involve any claim on state-consequentialism. Rather, it goes back to Kong's teachings. They were meant to reform the community and the organization of public matters via cultivating the virtues of the people for them to perform their roles virtuously. As Confucianism as such had a role to play as it first entered the scene, it has a role to play today as it is revived (or gains more attention) today. This statement itself can be made of any re-impulsion of Confucianism, which happened—several times—throughout Chinese history.

clusion into, the Confucian tradition; and second, the public role each respectively assigns to Confucianism.

Borrowing a method common to social sciences, this paper analyses these two dimensions using a 2×2 matrix. A matrix sorts phenotypes—here: types of Confucian revival—along—here: two—axes. Each axis is a spectrum identifying differences by degree. A matrix categorizes phenotypes in the space formed by the relative position of the phenotypes to the two axes chosen, i.e. the axes are the independent variables and the phenotypes the dependent variables. The categories stipulated by a matrix are relational and based on family resemblances and not on quantitative or qualitative metrics (Ryan 2006). The 2×2 matrix offered here is an analytical framework for understanding different types of contemporary Confucianism(s) along the logic of family resemblance (and therefore, of family differences) while maintaining the fuzzy ends of each phenotype being compared.

In the matrix offered here, the first axis—the axis of inclusion—explains how specific variants of philosophy argue for being Confucian. The spectrum goes from "persuasive definition" to "proposition." The second axis—the axis of intention—explains the role Confucianism should play in the public sphere according to the different variants of contemporary Confucianisms; it goes from "state religion" to "civic education." The matrix will be further discussed in section two. The comparison and analysis made possible by the matrix can be used in comparing different variants of contemporary Confucianism. As two examples, the matrix will be tested on the thinking of Fang Keli and Fan Ruiping. This occurs in section three. Section four concludes the essay.

The approach offered here has different advantages: First, it allows an overview over the inner-differentiation of contemporary Confucian revivalism(s). Second, it allows for a quick comparison in relation as to how each of its variants argues its being Confucian and imagines the public role of Confucianism in contemporary China. And third, by operating along the logic of family resemblance, the matrix is not exclusive, i.e. it accepts that there are other criteria for comparison while focusing on two of the many. In other words, the

matrix is practical and nonexhaustive. It gives an overview while not excluding further research.

In summary, the aim of this paper is to offer a matrix for comparing contemporary Confucianism(s) in relation as to what makes them Confucian and which role they suppose Confucianism should play in the public sphere in contemporary China. In a first section, a brief overview on the matter of contemporary Confucianism(s) and Confucian revivalism(s) will be given. In a second, the matrix will be developed. The third section applies the matrix to two specific forms of contemporary Confucianism(s), exemplifying how it can be used as a tool to better understand the contemporary revivalism(s) generally and its specific forms. These forms are the thinking of Fang Keli and Fan Ruiping. The fourth and last section concludes this paper.

1. Contemporary Confucianism(s)

This first section gives a nonexhaustive overview on different ways of thinking of contemporary Confucianism(s). It shows that there is no homogenous way of thinking about Confucianism today and that there are different possibilities for conceptualizing as well as articulating it.

The first problem, however, is: there is no Confucian Orthodoxy. Soon after the death of Master Kong, his disciples formed different schools and the inner-Confucian differentiation developed ever since. Just a few centuries after Master Kong's activities around 480 BCE, Hanfei (c. 280–233 BCE), one of his chief rivals, states (50.1):

> In the present age, the celebrities for learning are the Literati and the Mohists. The highest figure of the Literati was K'ung Chiu [Confucius]; the highest figure of the Mohists was Mo Ti. Since the death of Confucius, there have appeared the School of Tzu-chang, the School of Tzu-ssu, the School of the Yen Clan, the School of the Meng Clan, the School of the Chi-tiao Clan, the School of the Chung Liang Clan, the School of the Sun Clan, and the School of the Yo-cheng Clan. Since the death of Mo Tzu, there have appeared the

Mohists of the Hsiang-li Clan, the Mohists of the Hsiang-fu Clan, and the Mohists of Teng Ling's School. Thus, after Confucius and Mo Tzu, the Literati have divided into eight schools and the Mohists into three. In what they accept and what they reject they are contrary to and different from one another but each claims to be orthodox Confucian or Mohist. Now that Confucius and Mo Tzu cannot come to life again, who can determine the orthodoxy of learned men?

The differentiation continues: about Neo-Confucianism—the name commonly applied to the revival of the various strands of Confucian philosophy and political culture from the ninth to the twelfth century —Berthrong (2017) disclaims:

[T]he use of the term "Neo-Confucian" is confusing and needs some careful revision. By Song times, there are some perfectly good Chinese terms that can be used to define the work of these later Confucian masters. There are a number of terms in use after the Song such as *ru* or classical scholar, *daoxue* or learning of the way, *lixue* or the teaching of principle, *xingxue* or teaching of the mind-heart, or *hanxue* or Han learning just to name a few. All of these schools fit into the Western definition of Confucianism, but the use of a single name for all of them obscures the critical differences that East Asian scholars believe are stipulated by the diverse Chinese nomenclature. While Confucians did almost always recognize each other across sectarian divides, they were passionately concerned to differentiate between good and bad versions of the Confucian Way.[5]

As a result, contemporary Confucianism also comes in many forms. For example, in an edited volume, Fan (2011) showcases the inner differentiation of contemporary Confucianism(s) and gives way to thinking about it in three different sociological categories. The first would be the philosophical school of Confucianism. This one focuses on the examination of virtues and roles as well as to the metaphysical inquiries developed by the Neo-Confucians. Then, there is the scholastic tradition of Confucianism. Its focus is on the literary classics, on

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[5] A further and in-depth examination of the diversity of Neo-Confucianism occurs in Angle and Tiwald (2017).

rhetoric and aesthetics as well as on the lives of scholars that produce resources for the community/society and the public body/politics. Lastly, there is the religious aspect of Confucianism, which focuses on private and public rituals as well as ancestry.

There are several criticisms of this categorization; Fan clearly voices them.[6] For example, for Confucianism, even if it has a religious component, it is never just that. It is always also about moral self-cultivation and the correct way to perform roles in the public and private spheres. Similarly, scholarly research cannot be conceived as instrumental for other goals. It can produce resources that are used in different tasks, for example, the steering of the public, or political body. But if it does so, it is because these resources are valuable per se and not because it brings consequentialist values about. Also, even the continuation of Confucian philosophy does not separate it from its application, since Confucianism always also has a pragmatic side.

These criticisms show that it is difficult to separate different veins of Confucianism from the purely sociological perspective, because this view does injustice to many philosophical claims of Confucianism. It separates what belongs together and creates artificial differences. Also, this view leaves many questions that are crucial for the self-understanding of Confucianism open. A different path, then, is clustering Confucianism(s) according to intentions relevant to Confucianism(s)' role in the public realm. Many or most of the actual Confucian tendencies are also concerned with a public role for Confucianism. From this point of view, a different set of three groups can be sorted out—loosely based on Ai (2008, 2009).

"Confucians" would be the first group. They would like to (re-)turn China to (their understanding of) Confucian philosophical-moral-cosmological conceptions. Philosophers belonging to this group could be Jiong Qing, Kang Xiaoguang, Luo Yijun, Bai Tongdong, or Fan Ruiping. The second group could then be called "Liberal Confucians." They combine Confucian moral philosophy with elements such as care for the destitute, popular participation—sometimes even

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6 Fan (2011) criticizes this categorization, because, according to him, there is a Confucian orthodoxy and any separation of Confucianism(s) does not do justice to the orthodoxy.

democracy—or communitarian reform. Philosophers belonging to this group could be Feng Youlan, Tu Weiming, Zhu Bohun, Stephen Angle, or Daniel Bell. Finally, there is a group that can be labeled as "Confucianists." Philosophers such as Fang Keli, Li Jinquan, Qian Xun could be seen as belonging to this group. They generally stress some Confucian tenets like stability, obedience, order, harmony, and (or, but) develop a state-consequentialist program or even want to Sinicize Communism/Marxism by incorporating elements of Confucianism to it.[7] With a grain of salt: While Confucians pursue a restorative program placing Confucianism at the top of ideology, Confucianists use Confucian elements for a state-consequentialist program, and the Liberal Confucians try to solve actual social-political issues through the combination of Confucianism and other ways of social philosophy.

In this framework, these three groups still face the opposition of Communists/Marxists of different nuance. Communists/Marxists uphold class struggle and scientism, as well as the leadership of a party that selects its cadre on the basis of commitment and office. That means that these Communists/Marxists cannot accommodate Confucian principles such as the Way (*dao* 道) because it is transcendent, roles (as an ethical concept) because it undermines class-struggle, virtues because they are based on "princely behavior," or rites since they have at least a transcendent connotation and are a tool for molding virtues. While it is true that Communism/Marxism in China has been able to accommodate inner differentiation and reforms, it is also the case that the Communist Party is and remains a revolutionary party. Revolution also means disagreement with Confucianism.

In 2010, Bell writes, "Communism has lost its capacity to inspire the Chinese. But what will replace it? And what should replace it? Clearly, there is a need for a new moral foundation for political rule in China, and the government has moved closer to an official embrace of Confucianism" (2010, 92). Wu (2014), in analyzing 228 articles in

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[7] Two caveats apply here: First, this list is highly abbreviated and selective and is here just for example's sake. Second, Chinese surnames are written before given names and "western" given names are written before surnames.

the *China Daily* between 2000 and 2009, concludes that the Communist leadership uses Confucian ideas, values, and language either for their own ends or for strengthening the communist case. So, perhaps, there is room for an arrangement between Communism/Marxism and Confucianism.[8]

There are plenty of examples for the communist leadership employing Confucianism at large. President Hu's eight honors and shames (*barong bachi* 八榮八恥) in 2006, President Xi's eight musts (*bagebixu* 八個必須) in 2015, or the posters spread along China's big cities recalling the eight virtues of civility; they are not Confucian per se, but they intentionally borrow Confucian concepts and language. Also, in the opening ceremony of the 2008 Olympiad in Beijing, passages from the *Analects* were read out loud. And even the XXIV World Congress of Philosophy, which took place in 2018 in Beijing, has "Learning to be Human" as a theme. There are equally plenty of examples for philosophers who consider themselves as standing in the Confucian tradition, using official and party platforms to propagate their message.[9]

This sketch of contemporary Confucianism(s) is instructive in at least three ways: First, it shows that there is a diversity of discourses about contemporary forms of Confucianism; this discourse is diverse in at least two ways, one, what specific variants of Confucianism argue for, and two, which role specific variants of Confucianism want Confucianism to play in the public, or political, organization of China. Second, there is potential for a pragmatic arrangement between (some variants of) Confucianism and the Communist Party. Third, within contemporary Confucianism itself, there is enough dynamics and differentiation to accommodate this arrangement.

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[8] This paragraph doesn't claim that this arrangement is new; it only claims that it exists.

[9] There are many examples more that cannot be discussed here. Yan and Bramwell (2008) examine how Confucian rituals, for example in Qufu, are being refitted to yield to a Communist ideal, especially to cater to domestic tourism in China. Wallace (2016) and Louie (2011) examine the use of Confucianism as a strategy in external relations and business. And finally, there are plenty of examples today of how schools are re-reading Confucian texts, people and institutions are inventing Confucian rituals such as weddings, ancestral worship ceremonies, and the like explained in the vast works of Billioud, for instance in Billioud and Thoraval (2015).

And then again, the categories mentioned above—"Confucian," "Liberal Confucian," "Confucianist"—do not do justice at all to this inner dynamics and differentiation. Some philosophers may be at ease with their inclusion in one group—Bell (2010) labeled his Confucianism "left" and Angle (2012) "progressive"—and others would strongly object. Tu doesn't see his approach as a "liberal" variant of Confucianism but as "orthodox" (for example, 1985). Similarly, Fang claims not to be just using Confucianism in today's China, but he, too, understands his approach as a bona fide variant of Confucianism. What is the result of this discussion? As this section was introduced, it claimed to give a brief overview of contemporary Confucianism(s). This overview served the purpose of showing that the inner-Confucian differentiation is real, dynamic, and ongoing in contemporary China. Then, this section showed that contemporary Confucianism(s) in China often faces an arrangement with the Communist Party. Lastly and more important for the goal of this paper, this section also showed that it seems difficult to find any common core to all of these ways of understanding Confucianism.

The next section offers an analytical tool that helps assess the different variants within the Confucian family.[10]

2. A Tool for Analyzing Contemporary Confucianism(s)

This section develops a 2×2 matrix that explains, first, how different variants of contemporary Confucianism make their argument for them being Confucian, and second, which role a specific variant claims Confucianism ought to play in the public sphere.

A matrix is a tool commonly used in social sciences. It compares family resemblances and differences of phenotypes by placing them in a space formed by two (or three) axes. Depending on where

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[10] Some—for example, Ivanhoe—would claim that Confucianism cannot be state-consequentialist; however, some of the contemporary Confucians seem to endorse this. They, however, don't do it directly or causally, they just point out that if actions have good consequences for the general good, this might be a sign that they are virtuous, too (Billioud and Thoraval 2015).

the phenotypes are located in this space—relative to the axes and relative to other phenotypes—family resemblances and differences between them become apparent. The matrix does not (necessarily) metricize the differentiation; it compares in virtue of the relative place of the phenotype in the matrix and towards others therein. One reason is that the matrix accepts that any phenotype has fuzzy ends. Instead, it focuses on providing an overview that itself can initiate further research. Also, a matrix does not claim exclusivity: the phenotypes, as dependent variables, are being analyzed in the light of chosen independent variables. A matrix has no inherent way of stating which set of independent variables work best; it allows for the same phenotypes to be analyzed with different sets of independent variables (Ryan 2006).[11]

The matrix offered in this paper is constructed from a philosophical perspective. Its axes frame the spectra of differences in contemporary Confucianism mentioned above: One axis defines the spectrum of how a variant of Confucianism constructs, or argues for, its own belonging to Confucianism. This is the axis of inclusion. The second axis relates to the role of Confucianism in the public sphere, as advocated by a specific variant. This second axis of the matrix is the axis of intention. Each axis of the matrix is conceived as a spectrum allowing for a difference of degree on its spectrum. The next two subsections will each develop one axis of the matrix. The use of the matrix as an analytical tool will be applied to two examples in Section 3.

2.1. The Axis of Inclusion

This axis explains how a variant argues for its being Confucian, even if it holds specific contents that are new, unusual, or contradictory

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[11] Take the BCG portfolio analysis for example—probably the most widely-used matrix. On the one axis, it shows the growth rate of a market and, on the other, the market share of an enterprise. In this space formed by both axes, the matrix analyzes where a firm's products stand relative to growth and market share. Of course, it is not the only way of analyzing products, and the matrix does not deny that profits, innovation, environment impact, and so on are important dimensions of the portfolio of a firm. But it reduces the analysis of the products to the two axes mentioned. The intention is to provide a practical overview.

to the usual Confucian tradition. The two "typical" positions on this spectrum are "persuasive definition" and "proposition." Both denote how the (self-)ascribing of a specific variant to Confucianism occurs.

The term "persuasive definition" was introduced by Stevenson (1938) as part of his emotive theory of meaning. It is a form of stipulative definition, which purports to describe the "true" or "commonly accepted" meaning of a term, while in reality stipulating an uncommon or altered use, usually to support an argument for some view or to create or alter meanings.[12] The terms thus defined will often involve emotionally charged notions that allow for some degree of interpretation (Bunnin and Yu 2004). A typical example of "persuasive definition" is calling an angry person "frank" or "open."[13]

A different, Confucian-inspired example for persuasive definition is: A Confucian father asks his equally Confucian son to go and buy him a pack of cigarettes. Based on the virtue of "filial piety" (*xiao* 孝), the son should do as told. What if the son refuses the father's wish?[14] The father could confront him and say, "You are not being filial." But then, the son could answer, "What you call filial means being reckless, what I call filial means doing what is in your best interest. If I buy cigarettes and you smoke, you can die of cancer and that is not in your best interest. Refraining from smoking is in your best interest; and me not buying your cigarettes helps you in refraining from smoking and pursuing your best interest. Caring for you. That is what I call being filial." In this example, the son uses "persuasive definition" twice. First, in showing that the father's understanding of filial piety is wrong and, second, explaining what he understands as being filial. Note that there is no intention to deceive each other. Both

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[12] Often, the term is also used in discovering definist fallacies. An example of such is calling a Legalist a person that hasn't yet realized the many mistakes of Hanfei. In this paper, the term "persuasive definition" is being used without any negative connotation and without the aim of exposing fallacies, but as the valid construction of an argument.

[13] Indeed, it could be argued that this is part of the very foundation of Confucianism. Consider Kongzi's claim in the *Analects* 7.1, "I transmit rather than innovate. I trust in and love the old ways."

[14] This example goes back to Carine Defoort.

accept filial piety, and both are moved by it. It is the exact content of filial piety in this situation that is being discussed when using "persuasive definition."

There are two components of "persuasive definition" that are relevant here. First, it can only be used if the term to be defined has an emotive value, i.e. puts a description into motion. Confucianism is the case for many reasons. The philosophy that goes back to Master Kong is geared towards moving people in the direction of moral self-cultivation, virtues, and roles. Also, many people have many (mostly positive) feelings towards Confucianism. Generally, it is regarded as an important (moral) achievement of Chinese culture. Second, because of the diversity, inner differentiation, and dynamics explained in Section 1, the exact meaning of the term "Confucianism" allows for some degree of interpretation. As such, Confucianism fulfills the two conditions for being used by "persuasive definition."

In this case, some contemporary variant of Confucianism can self-ascribe itself to Master Kong's teachings by stipulating how its tenets follow the sage's. For example, an actual version of revivalism could claim that what rulers were to Master Kong is now the Chinese Communist Party or that Master Kong's preference for virtues does not entail a necessary demise of laws. "Persuasive definition" even leaves enough room for the reconciliation of some Communist/ Marxist thoughts with Confucianism, for example regarding equality, the value-theory of work, or harmony as social synthesis. On the other hand, "persuasive definition" is not a free pass for masking any single thought as Confucian. While the technique allows for wide interpretation, it still maintains the core of the definition. So, it is impossible to count Hanfei as a Confucian or to claim that the Cultural Revolution was based on Confucian beliefs. Even those tenets of Confucianism using "persuasive definition" have to find a way of arguing their standing towards role, rites, virtues, self-cultivation, and education.

The second "typical" point on the axis of inclusion is "proposition." In contemporary philosophy, there are many uses of the concept of "proposition." Unsurprisingly, there are many criticisms of it, too. It can refer to the primary bearers of truth-value, the objects of belief

and other "propositional attitudes" (i.e., what is believed, doubted, etc.), the referents of that-clauses, or the meanings of sentences. Under "proposition" this paper understands sharable objects of the attitudes and the primary bearers of truth and falsity (Soames 2010). In this sense, this definition can even adjust to Quine's (1970) criticism and subscribe to his preference for a "sentence" as a unit of meaning without free variables, i.e. a statement that must be either true or false.

On the other hand, this paper does not operate with the predicates "true" or "false" but with "Confucian" and "not Confucian." A "proposition," here, means that some specific variant positions itself as Confucian. It becomes then a matter for the discourse about that proposition to establish whether it really can be considered Confucian. A "proposition" does not allow a variant to reinterpret an idea as Confucian, rather it puts the variant in the place to demonstrate why its ideas belong to Confucianism. As such, it is much stricter in allowing variants to count as Confucian, and, even more, it stipulates a burden of proof; namely the proof of belonging to some Confucian "orthodoxy."

Yet, how does on prove that a variant belongs to some sort of Confucian orthodoxy if section 1 makes the case that there is no such thing? There are two ways of responding to this objection. The first is pointing out to the necessary bilateral relationship of a proposition, as understood here. Since it is not about re-interpreting Confucianism but stating a variant as Confucian, this statement still needs approval of the discourse about this variant. It is the discourse at large that vouches for the predication of the "proposition." Second, even if there is no orthodoxy, there are some core concepts of Confucianism. Yet, another potential way of doing this would be to point not to core concepts of Confucianism but to core texts, or particular past interpretations (be it Zhu Xi, the Gongyang Commentary, and so on). In its rigid sense, "proposition" means sticking to this core.

Returning to the example given before: the son, in claiming that he thinks that filial piety means doing what is in the best interest of the father, even if it is not apparent to the father himself, might be faced with such an answer: "No, what you are doing, son, is mixing concepts thus violating names. Filial piety involves you doing as told.

If you disagree and deem your disagreement sufficiently important to be voiced, do so politely and I explain my reasons to you. Maybe you can convince me and maybe I can convince you, but should our disagreement persist, you should still do as told. That is the nature of filial piety." Here, the father is just saying that he does not accept the son's "proposition." Under "persuasive definition" it is possible to accept the son's argument; under "proposition," it is not.

The axis of inclusions, as any axis in a matrix, is a spectrum that allows for gradualism. At the one end, there is the most rigid notion of "proposition," or "sentence." At the other end, there is the most permissive notion of "persuasive definition." And most variants in the analysis of contemporary Confucianism are in between these ends.

2.2. The Axis of Intention

The second axis of the matrix addresses the intention of the specific variants of contemporary Confucianism. Intention, here, denotes what role the specific variant is supposed to play in the public body. Master Kong can be seen as a teacher, a philosopher, but also as a social reformer. His intention was to restore the order of the Way, and he developed (or systematized) a series of concepts, relationships, and techniques for this. Depending on how to assess Confucius' teachings, his intention was to develop the virtues of the people in order for them to play their roles, to specify the role-obligations, to make it clear how rituals define lives, or all of those. But generally speaking, Master Kong was not about only those elements. He believed that, through this way, there will be a comprehensive betterment of the community and the public body (Tu 1998). Applied to contemporary China, Confucian revival(s) share the same aim, making Chinese society and politics better. The "typical" positions in this axis, defining the spectrum between them, are "state religion" and "civic education."

In this paper, the expression "state religion" has been chosen, because it is at the same time both overarching and permissive. It is overarching in mobilizing emotions and symbols (in this case: for Confucianism), it is overarching in aligning the whole of the state with the Confucian claim, and, finally, it is overarching by institutionally

merging the official China with Confucianism. This term is also permissive to allow inner differentiation, for example, accepting that Communism/Marxism still has a role to play (subordinate or equal to Confucianism), by allowing for private views differing from the officials and by allowing non-Confucian systems of belief and morality to exist, if only under Confucian protection.[15]

The idea of "state religion" does not imply an exclusivity of Confucianism in China, but, as it is adapted to this paper, it entails that some variants of contemporary Confucianism argue for a ritual, moral, factual, or otherwise stipulated priority of Confucianism over other teachings. Some argue for exclusivity.

These variants of Confucianism will usually call for state symbols and rites to be reshaped or adapted to Confucian elements, but some will even go farther and demand the state itself to subscribe to Confucian thoughts. Also, these "state religion" variants of Confucianism do not stop short of stipulating how the organization and governance of—possible new—institutions of the state in adhering to the Confucian "state religion" are. In short, "state religion" takes a top-down view of the role Confucianism should play; it should encompass all of the state.

The other "typical" point of this axis is "civic education." Civics can be understood as the study of good citizenship and proper membership in a community (Heater 2004). Master Kong's *Analects* can be read as a guide in such studies. After all, his emphasis on virtues and how a person should perform certain roles in a community are exactly what the definition entails. Moral self-cultivation can be

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[15] Note that "state religion," here, does not relate to "civil religion," as coined by Bellah (1967). He understands "civil religion" as the implicit religious values of a nation, as expressed through public rituals, symbols (such as the national flag), and ceremonies on sacred days and at sacred places (such as monuments, battlefields, or national cemeteries). But Bellah would not use the term applied to any formal or institutional entity. In the genesis of the term, symbols like the tomb of Chairman Mao, statues of Master Kong, or rendering flowers in the Day of Ancestors could be part of the implicit religious values of a nation, when coming "bottom up" and not engineered by the state. Yang (2016) modifies Bellah's (1967) idea to allow for a formalization of "civil religion" and explores how Confucianism became or becomes the dominating idea of a society.

understood as a continuous study in good citizenship and virtuous interaction in the community.

Guan et al. (2015) formulate how Confucianism aims at educating the person with a bottom-up approach. It is through the constant civic education of people that the people perform their roles in a community and the political body emerges from the interconnectedness of these roles and exchanges. This is also the idea of "civic education" used in here. Therefore, variants of Confucianism sharing "civic education" stress the educational value of Master Kong's teachings and aim to use the bottom-up approach first with the person, then with the family, and, finally, with smaller networks. For sure, these variants are aware of the public dimension of their project and aim at influencing the public body. But their key point is the civil education of the people, the families, and the small-scale networks. In "civic education," it is through the aggregation of these circles of self-cultivation that Confucianism influences the public body.

The variants of Confucianism that share "civic education" will usually emphasize aspects of how to cultivate virtues, which virtues are important in today's environment, which roles can be discerned and played by the citizens, what is the role of institutions, and how to act conforming to the rites in the contemporary day-to-day. These variants of Confucianism also are also concerned about the role party cadres—and eventually other leaders of society and politics—should play and how they should be prepared for their roles.

Also, the variants of Confucianism sharing "civic education" might further emphasize the schooling of children, the (academic) learning of Confucian and classic texts, and especially the role of rituals in society. Rituals, as they are integral to Confucianism, are a particular source for forming the civil person—and not only as a display of official, state, or power. "Civic education" variants also tend to focus on the personal and small-scale types of ritual.

Again, this axis, as any axis of a matrix, is to be understood as a spectrum. On the one end is the most extreme possible form of "state religion," which merges Confucianism and the People's Republic of China in a Confucian political body. On the other end, there is the narrow focus on personal moral self-cultivation with limited inter-

action in family and community. In between, there is enough room for nuance of the specific variants of Confucianism.

With this, the 2×2 matrix is fully developed. It consists of two axes, each explaining one of the philosophically fundamental questions about contemporary Confucianism. The one axis explains how a specific variant constructs its argument in order to count as Confucian. It can use "persuasive definition" to keep the emotional force of Confucianism while redefining some of its aspects. Alternatively, it can make use of a "proposition" claiming to be Confucian and awaiting feedback from the general discourse if it is accepted as such. The other axis shows which intention a specific variant of Confucianism has with respect to the role Confucianism should play. It can aim at an overarching, comprehensive program converting all of China to Confucianism as a form of "state religion." Or it can aim at the moral self-cultivation of the person, as a form of "civic education." The matrix differentiates different types of contemporary Confucianism in relation to where they can be positioned in the space formed by these two axes. As such, the matrix provides an overview that is at the same time practical and can point to further research. The next section tests the matrix using two contemporary Confucian thinkers.

3. The Matrix at Work

As the previous section developed the matrix, this section applies the matrix to two different contemporary thinkers. These are Fang Keli and Fan Ruiping. They have been chosen not because they are well known and representative contemporary Confucians in China. With a certain level of abstraction, the matrix is going to be applied to their oeuvre in order to understand what type of Confucian project they pursue. The aim of this section is to show how the matrix can be employed.

3.1. Fang Keli [16]

It seems odd to use Fang Keli 方克立, a self-declared Marxist and critic of (new-) Confucianism, as an example here. But after all, the Dean of Graduate Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and member of the Office of Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council, lead two Confucian research projects from 1986 to 1990 and from 1990 to 1995, resulting in the publication of over 400 papers and numerous other works. These projects were funded party by the state and partly by the Communist Party of China. Moreover, Fang spoke variously on the compatibility of Confucianism and modernity.

Fang's variant believes that studying Confucianism functions to serve the political authority of the Chinese Communist Party. While Fang severely criticizes "traditional" Confucianism, he thinks that a modified Confucianism that supports the Communist/Marxist political ideology of China can be a valuable resource for the country's future (1989). Fang argues for cultural nationalism to strengthen spirit and legitimacy of the political system, preserving the authority of the Chinese Communist Party.

Fang (2007) particularly values some of Confucianism's cultural inheritance, including its moral values, human ideals, and concept of a harmonious society,[17] because it was directly related to the creation of Marxism with Chinese characteristics. He even considers Confucianism the only gateway to Communism/Marxism in China or that Communism/Marxism is the only alien ideology to flourish, because it is attuned to Chinese cultural concepts, namely to Confucianism (1988). But he cautions that although the study of tradition is important, tradition has to be approached critically in order to identify and absorb the best elements fit for a modern society with a modern culture and reject "feudalist dregs."

True to his belief that Marxism is a strong and politically superior ideology and the only one that was capable of fundamentally trans-

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[16] The outline of this sub-section as well as the data are from Makeham (2008).

[17] Interestingly, whereas the concepts of harmony and harmonious society predate Master Kong, they are relatively new to Confucian philosophy (Solé-Farràs 2008).

forming Chinese society, Fang Keli insists that the relation between Marxism and Confucianism is that between mainstream ideology and supporting ideology. Research and study of Confucianism cannot be divorced from Marxism and should be approached only from the Marxist point of view of class-society and class struggle, because Confucianism was born in a society that was marked by class struggle. Confucianism must be placed and studied in relation with the ideological struggle existing in contemporary Chinese society.

Which tenets of Confucianism seem especially important to Fang? On the one hand, he stresses the idea of social harmony, humbleness, selflessness. On the other hand, he re-interprets most of the Confucian claims about the family and roles as obligations towards the larger family, i.e. society and the state, and roles not as an ethical category but as a role—more like a job—assigned to the person by the state (1988, 1989). Fang also re-reads Confucian virtues as laws. His interpretation is that virtues neither tell people what to do nor are dependent on context and roles. Rather, they inform the state and its cadres about how to formulate good laws and rules (2007). Lastly, Fang is not interested in adapting the structure of the Chinese state or of the Communist Party to cater to some Confucian desiderata. He maintains that the actual structure works well and that it is this actual structure that can incorporate Confucianism and be used to strengthen its legitimacy and discipline the people (2007). How can the matrix be applied to analyze Fang's variant of Confucianism?

Regarding the axis of inclusion, Fang makes it clear that he is not a Confucian. Still, he also claims to use Confucian thought in his philosophical analysis. As seen above, Fang holds to different basic tenets of Confucianism, but he also re-interprets some. Taking such a fundamental concept as the family and expanding it to incorporate society and the state is as such a wide-ranging change of Kong's teachings. Additionally, claiming that the basic relationship of father and son can be read nowadays as one of the magistrates to the people is an exercise in "persuasive definition."

Many other interpretations of Confucianism Fang offer make use of "persuasive definition." For example, when he states that the institutions of the Chinese state and the Communist Party are fit to

incorporate and foment Confucianism, he is at the same time re-defining these structures as Confucian and making the claim that Confucianism necessarily means statist structures. Of course, this is well in line with his program, but it is also relying on the emotive use of different concepts—Confucianism, structures, cultivation—and reshaping them to fit a very specific understanding; one that has not been there before.

The question of structures leads to the second axis of the matrix. Of course, Fang is trying to motivate and mobilize Chinese people. He is also putting a special emphasis on how to educate them in order to make them good citizens of the People's Republic. At a first glance, this seems to tilt Fang toward "civic education." But on the other hand, all the roles his variant of Confucianism should play are carefully engineered and steered by the state and its structures. Fang wants to incorporate some Confucian tenets in order to make the state stronger and increase its legitimacy as a structure but also as a cultural achievement of China. In this case, it is best to understand his approach as "state religion."

"State religion" means that the variant is geared towards an offi-cial, top-down approach, i.e. it is the state's task to define what Confu-cianism is, to foment it, and to pass on Confucian values to itself and to the people. According to "state religion," the state will also use Confucianism in a symbolic and ritualistic way in order to create an emotional bond between its structures and the people and itself, thus increasing legitimacy. These are the roles Fang foresees for his variant of Confucianism, although he places more emphasis on the state-led education of the people and less on the symbolic and emotive use of rites. Also, for Fang it is very clear that it is the Communist/Marxist state that employs Confucianism. Confucianism, here, becomes a "state cult."

In summary, Fang uses Confucian thought in a statist approach. Since he often re-defines or re-interprets Confucian ideas and, at the same time, wants the state to engineer and steer Confucianism in China, Fang's variant can be localized in the quadrant formed by "persuasive definition" and "state religion." However, his relative position within this quadrant shows some proximity to the next one

formed by "persuasive definition" and "civic education," since his state maintains its actual structure and main ideology and uses Confucianism to educate the people.

3.2. Fan Ruiping

Fan Ruiping 范瑞平, a current professor of philosophy at the City University of Hong Kong and an alumnus of the Graduate School of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, began his professional training in medicine and switched to philosophy later. His affinity with the healthcare sector at-large is apparent in his many publications on bioethics, medical ethics, and parental care. Fan also self-identifies as a Confucian, having published two important books on contemporary Confucianism: "The Renaissance of Confucianism in Contemporary China" (2011, as editor) and "Reconstructionist Confucianism" (2010). As a token for his variant of Confucianism, Fan states in the introduction of his second book (2010, xi-xiii).[18]

The term Reconstructionist Confucianism identifies the project of reclaiming and articulating moral resources from the Confucian tradition so as to meet contemporary moral and public policy challenges. The reader will find that the problems facing the West will look different when seen from a Confucian perspective. This is the case because Confucian thought invites one to step outside of the individualistic moral discourse of the West with its accent on individual rights, equality, autonomy, and social justice, and instead to approach moral challenges within a moral vision that gives accent to a life of virtue, the autonomy of the family, and the cardinal role of rituals, the social rites that define and sustain social interactions. The Confucian moral paradigm is not that of the contemporary liberal individualist West.

As it was done in the previous sub-section, the matrix is going to be applied for gaining a better understanding of Fan's argument for inclusion (the first axis) and intention (the second axis). On the level of inclusion, the quoted passage makes it very clear that Fan is searching

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18 For simplicity's sake, the Chinese passages in this quote are omitted.

for Confucian core concepts in their undiluted or unenriched forms. He makes it clear that Neo-Confucianism erred, that many variants of Confucianism are too lenient in incorporating alien, i.e. Western,[19] elements. He even claims that Confucianism has been colonized by the West and disrupted by Communism/Marxism. Instead, Fan turns to the Confucian core concepts, virtues, ritual, role, education, as well as self-cultivation. But he is not only ready to go back to the core concepts. Many more have to be re-instituted according to him.

Examples of the Confucian concepts and institutions Fan wants to re-establish are the family with its typical role partition—father and son, husband and wife, older brother and younger brother—role based-communitarianism with its typical moral and ritual obligations, as well as the idea of the *junzi* 君子 as a leader. The *junzi* is a person that knows how to behave in society, i.e. knows what roles to play, how to play them and decides, which course of action to take in the function of the roles involved in the making of a decision and the effects the decision has. Furthermore, the *junzi* nurtures those feelings and virtues that make it more possible for him to play the roles he plays in society. Because the *junzi* not only sees beyond her or his self-interest but primarily focuses on roles in society. The *junzi* is exemplary, educated, self-cultivated, and, because of it, able to lead.

This approach is best described as a "proposition." And since proposition warrants for the response of the discourse in order to be confirmed, the academic critique of Fan's approach very often disagrees with him and the path he chose to take. But there is no criticism so far denying the Confucianism of his approach. On the contrary, he often faces criticism for being too "orthodox."[20]

On the level of intention, the quoted passage makes it evident that Fan's variant of Confucianism aims at the person and especially the family. Family is the key point in Fan's intention. Confucianism works its way with a bottom-up approach into the community and

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[19] It is doubtful if there is anything that corresponds to the notion of the "West"; as it is doubtful if there is anything that might describe with enough precision "Western" concepts, "Western" thinking, or "Western" philosophy. Nonetheless, Fan uses the term.
[20] See, for example, Angle (2010) or Minzner (2013).

society, and it influences the public body through these networks. Fan explicitly mentions the Confucian civil society being based on the family. Similarly, in the remainder of his book (2010), he offers Confucian solutions to larger-scale issues like business ethics, environmental care, or bioethics by going back to the level of Confucian values in the family. As mentioned earlier, the Confucian family is a hierarchical body defined by roles, rites, and virtues. In the family, every member has a place and obligations related to the place they occupy in the hierarchy. Following this, if everyone knows his or her place in family, they automatically know their places in society, the economy, the government, and so on. Fan is indirectly referring to an older Confucian theory about what the public body—in Fan's words: civil society—is. This theory imagines it as the sum of three concentric circles, the family, community, and nation; whereby the family stands at the core of the circle. It is that core that marks or determines one's role in society, and it is the family that educates people in their respective roles.

Fan's variant of Confucianism can therefore be counted to the area of "civic education," since it stresses the person and the family, letting the rest of society and the public realm being influenced by that basic unit. Being a good, civic citizen is, for Fan, the constant self-cultivation in virtues and rituals while performing roles, most importantly, in the relationship of the family.

Overall, Fan's variant can be placed in the quadrant formed by "proposition" and "civic education." Its relative position within the quadrant is tilted to the end of each axis. This is because of his "purism" in formulating what Confucianism is and his strong orientation towards the family in formulating the intention of how Confucianism acts and influences society.

3.3. The Matrix at Work

The matrix developed here is a tool for better understanding different variants of contemporary Confucianism, their similarities and difference in the light of how they argue for their own being Confucian and which public role they assign to Confucianism. The matrix compares

focusing on two important elements of the contemporary discussion: how is Confucianism articulated and which public role ought it to play. Primarily, the matrix describes, sorts out, and compares. However, by focusing on the two philosophical questions, the matrix goes beyond "mere" comparison. In order to arrange the phenotypes in it, the matrix requires a philosophical analysis of the phenotypes themselves. The matrix being applied here to just two variants of contemporary Confucianism focusses the discussion of these variants on two philosophically relevant questions; this is its main advantage. This advantage has at least three specific features:

First, it offers a non-reductionist analytic framework for philosophical comparison, it differentiates the main—but not all—tenets of these variants: Without understanding, for example, how Fan Ruiping sees himself as a Confucian, it is not possible to pinpoint his relative location on the axis of intention; without analyzing the arguments of Fang Keli for Confucianism as a state-cult, it is difficult to discern whether he aims at civic education or state religion.

Second, by arranging these variants or phenotypes within the space formed by its axis, the matrix is able to show the relative distance in the philosophical arguments of each tenet. Here, Fang Keli and Fan Ruiping show maximum distance on the axis of inclusion— the first being an example of "persuasive definition" and the second one of "proposition"—but a certain proximity on the axis of intention —the first being a proponent of Confucianism as a state cult, which is less strong than "state religion" but not yet in the field of "civic education," where the second is clearly positioned.

Third, the comparative and explanatory power of the matrix grow with the number of different variants of contemporary Confucianism with are included into its framework. The inclusion of many phenotypes allows a philosophical discussion of their respective inclusion and intention; by arranging them within the fields formed by the matrix, their relative distance to each other, i.e. their similarities and differences become the result of the matrix. This, on its own, can again focus further research on how the distance can be explained. Analyzing a sufficiently large number of variants using this matrix is, however, work that remains to be done.

4. Conclusions

Revivalism is truly Confucian, because it looks back at the past. Furthermore, it regards history as a source of wisdom and authority, especially moral authority. Revivalisms are Confucian, because they don't only look back at the past but try to emulate (parts of) it. But what is specifically "Confucian" about Confucian revivalism? In many ways, contemporary Confucianism(s) and Confucian revivalism(s) are a re-discovery of Master Kong, the tradition that goes back to him, the dialogue between core concepts and their application to today's problems—inequality, moral crisis, legitimization of the political structure in China, nationalism, among others—and a negotiation with the Chinese state and the Communist Party.

The overall conclusion of this paper is that contemporary Confucianism(s) and Confucian revivalism(s) come in different shapes and forms—but that this diversity can be assessed by family resemblances. The matrix developed here is a tool for better understanding them, their similarities and difference in the light of how they argue for their own being Confucian and which public role they assign to Confucianism. The matrix itself is an analytical tool with the goal of providing an overview on family resemblances and differences.

The approach offered here has different advantages. First, it allows for an overview of the inner differentiation of contemporary Confucian revivalism(s). Second, it allows for a quick comparison in relation to how each of its variants argues its being Confucian and imagines the public role of Confucianism in contemporary China. And third, by operating along the logic of family resemblance, the matrix is not exclusive, i.e. it accepts that there are other criteria for comparison while focusing on two of the many. In other words, the matrix is practical and non-exhaustive. It gives an overview while not excluding further research.

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