

## Rethinking Confucianism and Democracy

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**Abstract :** Around the mid-1980s, Confucianism was reintroduced into China from Taiwan and Hong Kong as a result of China's policies of reform and openness. Since then, the revival of neo-Confucianism in mainland China has accelerated and become a crucial component of the public intellectual sphere. The term xinrujia or xinruxue, loosely translated as "neo-Confucianism," is increasingly understood as an intellectual and cultural phenomenon of the last four decades. The Confucian scholarship is in the process of restoration. This paper examines the Chinese intellectual discourse on Confucianism and democracy and places it in comparative and theoretical perspectives. With China's rise and surge of populism in the West, particularly in the US, the leading political values of Confucianism could increasingly shape both China and the world at large. This state of affairs points to the need for more systematic efforts to assess the discourse on neo-Confucianism and its implications for China's transformation. A number of scholars in the camp of neo-Confucianism maintain that some elements of Confucianism are not only compatible with democratic values and institutions but actually promote liberal democracy. They refer to it as Confucian democracy. By contrast, others either view Confucianism as a roadblock to democracy or envision that a convergence of democracy with Confucian values could result in a new hybrid system. The paper traces the complex interplay between Confucianism and democracy. It explores ideological differences between neo-Confucianism and liberal democracy and ascertains whether certain features of neo-Confucianism possess an affinity for the authoritarian political system. In addition to printed materials such as books and journal articles, a selection of articles from the website entitled Confucianism in China will be analyzed. The selection of this website is due to the fact that it is the leading website run by Chinese scholars focusing on neo-Confucianism. Another reason for selecting this website is its accessibility and availability. In the past few years, quite a few websites, left or right, were shut down by the authorities, but this website remains open. This paper explores the core components, dynamics, and implications of neo-Confucianism. My paper is divided into three parts. The first one discusses the origins of neo-Confucianism. The second section reviews the intellectual discourse among Chinese scholars on Confucian democracy. The third one explores the implications of the Chinese intellectual discourse on neo-Confucianism. Recently, liberal democracy has entered more conflict with official ideology. This paper, which is based on my extensive interviews in China prior to the pandemic and analysis of the primary sources in Chinese, will lay the foundation for a chapter on neo-Confucianism and democracy in my next book-length manuscript, tentatively entitled Chinese Intellectual Discourse on Democracy.

**Keywords :** China, confucius, confucianism, neo-confucianism, democracy

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