In the course of this book, we have moved from the beginnings of Confucianism in a variety of historical contexts toward its modern and contemporary significance in current thinking in both East Asia and the West. This chapter places the work of Jiang Qing, often considered China’s most controversial Confucian thinker, alongside the contemporary conversation on virtue ethics, where we left off in the previous chapter. In the spirit of philosophical exchange, this chapter too will be critical in nature in an attempt to bring the hope for clarity into the dialogue of contemporary Confucianism. It is only through such exchanges that Confucianism can profess to be a globally relevant philosophy.

The Inseparability of Confucian Ethics and Politics

Jiang Qing has made significant contributions to modern Confucian thought by drawing attention to its political tradition and by applying Weber’s concept of “ethics of responsibility” to analyze Confucian political ethics. His construction of political Confucianism, however, appears to be mired in theoretical and practical difficulties. By trying to make an “ethics of responsibility” out of political Confucianism that is entirely independent from the “ethics of conviction” of mind-and-nature (xinxing 心性) Confucianism, it lends itself to a misconstruction of both Weber and the Confucian tradition. In both the ethics of responsibility relies on and presupposes the ethics of conviction, for in Confucianism ethics is always the foundation for politics. As a proposal for a future Chinese government, Jiang has provided a very complex institutional structure that stands little likelihood of ever being implemented—and if it were ever to find itself enacted, it could turn China back to the Middle Ages. Democracy
Certainly has its problems; even though we can witness these almost daily, the elucidations Jiang offers provide no other realistic solutions. By casting democracy as a solely Western phenomenon, he neglects to recognize that Chinese people have been laboring for democracy on their own terms and in their own ways through their own free choices.

In 1989, Jiang Qing published an article in Taiwan’s Ehu Monthly by the title “The Practical Significance of and Problems Facing the Revival of Confucianism in Mainland China.” In this article, Jiang boldly stated that “the greatest problem in mainland China at present is the problem of reviving Confucianism” and that “Confucianism should replace Marxism, be restored to its lofty historical status, and become the orthodox thought representing the life and spirit of the Chinese nation in mainland China today.” This article was severely criticized on several occasions by Fang Keli 方克立, director of the Studies on Modern New Confucian Thought research project in mainland China. Jiang’s ideas clearly touch on a sensitive issue, but it is one that is exceedingly important to contemporary mainland China—that is, with mainland China’s reopening to the world, how are intellectuals and ordinary citizens to reassess the Confucian tradition? In this context Jiang Qing’s ideas have both theoretical and practical significance.

Since the 1989 article, Jiang has published a number of books: Introduction to Gongyang Thought (Gongyangxue yinlun 公羊學引論), Political Confucianism: The Reorientation, Characteristics, and Development of Contemporary Confucianism (Zhengzhi Ruxue: dangdai Ruxue de zhuanyang, tezhi yu fazhan 政治儒學:當代儒學的轉向、特質與發展), and Life Faith and the Kingly Way of Politics: The Modern Value of Confucian Culture (Shengming xinyang yu wangdao zhengzhi: Rujia wenhua de xiandai jiazhi 生命信仰與王道政治：儒家文化的現代價值). In these books he develops his theories of “political Confucianism.” Reading these works might have an unsettling effect on some. Recently Jiang has published Further Thoughts on Political Confucianism (Zailun zhengzhi Ruxue 再論政治儒學), which expands but does not significantly alter his primary arguments.

Some Critiques of Jiang’s “Political Confucianism”

The critiques of Jiang’s political Confucianism center on two points: The first focuses on the theoretical problems in Jiang’s political Confucianism and the second on the structure and feasibility of Jiang’s “Kingly Way of Politics” (or “Confucian constitutionalism”).

Let us discuss the theoretical problems with his political Confucianism first. In his Introduction to Gongyang Thought, Jiang distinguishes two branches of the Confucian tradition. The first is mind-and-nature Confucianism (also
called “life Confucianism” or “inner sagehood Confucianism”), and the second is political Confucianism (also called “critical Confucianism” or “outer kingliness Confucianism”),

Broadly speaking, Confucianism can be divided into political Confucianism and life Confucianism. The former is exemplified by the Han dynasty New Text Confucian tradition and the latter by Song and Ming dynasty study of heart-mind and human nature (心性之學 xinxing zhi xue). Both originate in Confucius, and both reflect one aspect of the master’s teachings; yet, because they focus on different problems and pose different solutions, they are by nature very different and constitute two unique traditions within the history of Chinese Confucianism.

As described by Jiang Qing in his *Introduction to Gongyang Thought*, political Confucianism originates in Confucius, is carried on by Mencius and Xunzi, and is later transmitted by Gongyang scholars in the Han dynasty including Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145–86 BCE), Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179?–104? BCE), and He Xiu 何休 (129–182). Nevertheless, Jiang insists that political Confucianism is not equivalent to a “politicized Confucianism” in which the monarchy is considered absolute, eternal, and holy. In Jiang’s view, it is rather the Han dynasty Zuo zhuan 左傳 and Old Text school that exemplify this kind of politicized Confucianism, which is an alienated, that is to say, an ideological form of Confucianism. Simply put, the difference between political and politicized Confucianism is that the former takes a critical stance toward practical politics, whereas the latter is what Max Weber would describe as Machtpolitik. Thus, says Jiang, “political Confucianism is neither a type of political pragmatism nor a type of political romanticism. Rather, it seeks a middle path that both embraces lofty ideals and respects concrete realities.”

Jiang Qing also makes use of Weber’s distinction between an “ethics of conviction” (Gesinnungsethik) and an “ethics of responsibility” (Verantwortungsethik) to explain political Confucianism. In response to Lin Yusheng 林毓生, who believes that Chinese culture favors an ethics of conviction, Jiang stresses that life Confucianism is a study of mind and human nature, and of inner sagehood, and offers little use to an ethics of responsibility. Lin Yusheng thinks that life Confucianism represents the entirety of Chinese Confucianism and encompasses the entire Confucian tradition. This would naturally lead to the conclusion that Chinese culture has a highly developed ethics of conviction but lacks an ethics of responsibility. However, if, along with life Confucianism, we acknowledge political Confucianism...
as part of the tradition—the part concerned with politics and including abundant resources of an ethics of responsibility—we can avoid mistaking the part for the whole and the misunderstanding of Chinese culture to which this gives rise.\textsuperscript{14}

In support of this view, Jiang enumerates nine basic concepts of an ethics of responsibility:

1. An ethics of responsibility holds that the world is essentially irrational, refuses to acknowledge the universe as a rational moral organism, and objects to the imposition of reason, morality, or purpose on history or the world.

2. An ethics of responsibility holds that, in practical politics, the relationship between intentions and results is paradoxical: Good intentions do not necessarily bring good results and can bring bad results. Therefore, the behavior of those in power should be judged based on this complex relationship between results and aspirations (intentions).

3. An ethics of responsibility holds that political agents must take responsibility for the foreseeable consequences of their actions and must not shift this responsibility to God, the will of heaven, other people, or society: Good intentions and proper action do not absolve one from responsibility for said consequences.

4. An ethics of responsibility holds that in practical politics there is a tension between ends and means, arising from the frequent need to use morally questionable means to achieve benevolent ends. Consummate political skill is needed to dispel this tension and find a “middle path.”

5. An ethics of responsibility holds that political problems are different from the problems in life, in that government possesses the power of external compulsion (military power), which makes government a unique and independent category, and political ethics is different from personal ethics.

6. An ethics of responsibility holds that military power is the foundation, that compulsion is the primary tool of practical politics, and that a dialectical relationship exists between the two—that is, military might and compulsion are demonic powers that are “necessary evils” but also “proper and legitimate” means of bringing about the good. The use of military power and compulsion in practical politics should be understood dialectically.

7. An ethics of responsibility holds that the world is not perfect, and
neither is politics. The people whom one encounters in politics are normal, flawed people, and this is reflected in government. Political goals are constrained by reality, and there is a gap between the real and the ideal; thus, when making political decisions, real situations must be taken into account, and politicians must be willing to compromise on their ideals, beliefs, and ultimate goals, and to use gradual, practical, effective, and moderate means to achieve their aims.

8. An ethics of responsibility holds that practical politics is extraordinarily complex and in constant flux, and it is difficult to create static norms for political behavior. Therefore, politicians must bring complex ways of thinking and deep wisdom to bear on their political duties and seek to resolve unforeseen problems creatively and flexibly while remaining true to fundamental principles and beliefs. Inflexible, unconditional, and “all or nothing” approaches based on simplistic thinking must be avoided when dealing with political problems.

9. An ethics of responsibility holds that only those people who possess an enthusiasm for their work and a selfless sense of responsibility, and are capable of maintaining an impartial faculty of judgment are qualified to dedicate themselves to government.15

Next, Jiang demonstrates that political Confucianism as embodied in Han dynasty Gongyang thought fulfills each of these nine criteria and is in fact an ethics of responsibility.16

Jiang emphasizes the place of political Confucianism in the Confucian tradition and its role in political criticism, but this area has been overlooked in previous research. As a result, Confucianism is often understood simplistically as supporting monarchic or autocratic ideologies, and Jiang’s work has helped clear up this misconception. However, Jiang’s understanding of the relationship between mind-and-nature Confucianism and political Confucianism is problematic. Within traditional Confucianism, distinctions do exist between inner sagehood and outer kingliness, between the study of ren 仁 (humaneness) and the study of li 礼 (rites), and each has a place in Confucius’ teachings. But the relationship that holds within each pair is one of inequality and subordination. In the Analects, Confucius asks, “When we say, ‘the rites, the rites,’ are we speaking merely of jade and silk? When we say, ‘music, music,’ are we speaking merely of bells and drums?” (Analects 17.11). In Analects 3.3, he poses the question “A man who is not humane—what has he to do with ritual? A man who is not humane—what has he to do with music?” He also agrees with Zixia 子夏 that “it is the rites that come after” (Analects 3.8). Confucius also acknowledges that “the Yin followed the rituals of the Xia, altering them only in ways that we know. The Zhou followed the rituals of the Yin, altering them only in ways that
we know. If some dynasty succeeds the Zhou, we can know what it will be like even a hundred generations from now” (Analects 2.23). From these quotes we can see that for Confucius ren had a higher status than li, since ren is what gives meaning to li. Or, to put it another way, li is the objective instantiation of ren in a specific time and place. As such it thus changes and evolves. In sum, ren and li are brought together in a hierarchical and unequal relationship.

Apparently, for Jiang, mind-and-nature Confucianism is to political Confucianism as ren is to li. If this is the case, he is obliged to acknowledge the hierarchical relationship between mind-and-nature Confucianism and political Confucianism, with the former subsuming the latter. Yet, when Jiang emphasizes their “equal standing”17 and “complementary relationship,”18 he does not feel the need to explain their “integration,” because, in his view, these two Confucian traditions are fundamentally dissimilar “in origin, in methods, in their view of human nature, in their concern for society and social reality, in their attitudes toward rites and music, in their understanding of history, and in their ideals.”19 Since Jiang believes that both traditions originate in the teachings of Confucius, he must also believe that these two aspects of Confucius’ thought are inconsistent with each other. One wonders if he would be willing to accept this conclusion. In his book titled The Historical World of Zhu Xi (Zhu Xi de lishi shijie 朱熹的歷史世界), published in 2003, Yu Ying-shih shows conclusively that Confucians of the Song and Ming dynasties never gave up on the idea of “outer kingliness,” and so Song and Ming Confucianism cannot be dismissed as being simply “mind-and-nature Confucianism.”

Jiang’s claim that Han dynasty Gongyang thought includes an ethics of responsibility is well-founded and can serve as a corrective to Lin Yusheng.20 I have argued previously that the Gongyang texts reveal that Han dynasty Gongyang thought also contained an ethics of conviction.21 We also find evidence of both an ethics of conviction and an ethics of responsibility in Confucius and Mencius.22 As mentioned above, Jiang Qing believes that political Confucianism and life Confucianism both originate in Confucius and both reflect one aspect of his teachings. Unless Jiang is willing to maintain that Confucius’ thought lacks consistency, it must be shown somehow that an ethics of conviction and an ethics of responsibility can in theory be united; further explanation would be needed to show how it could happen in practical terms. This is a theoretical question that Jiang’s exegesis must address.

Resolving the Issue

In order to resolve this theoretical problem, we should turn to Weber’s discussion of ethics of conviction and ethics of responsibility.23 “To put it succinctly, Weber mentions this pair of concepts a number of times, but his treatment of
them is inconsistent. Sometimes he says that there is “an irreconcilable opposition” between the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility, whereas other times he says that “there is no absolute opposition” between the two and that “they are mutually complementary.” These contradictory statements lead to two completely divergent readings. Underneath the contradiction and confusion, Weber’s intention is to show that, on the level of political ethics, the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility are incompatible. In other words, people involved in politics must choose one or the other.

Yet people who read Weber often overlook the fact that the ethics of conviction can be understood on two different levels. Like Weber, we could understand the ethics of conviction on the level of “special ethics” (here political ethics) to be a political principle that ignores the foreseeable consequences of actions and focuses solely on the purity of conviction. Or, on the level of “general ethics,” we could understand ethics of conviction as the opposite of an “ethics of consequences” (Erfolgsethik). On this level, an ethics of consequences would claim that the ethical value of an act depends on its potential consequences or desired aims. An ethics of conviction, however, holds that the ethical value of an act depends primarily on the agent’s intentions and not on the potential consequences or desired aims. They represent two fundamentally different approaches to ethics and are logically incompatible. Kant’s ethics is commonly seen as the canonical ethics of conviction. But it is important to note that an ethics of conviction so understood need not necessarily reject all consideration of an action’s consequences. Thus, from a logical standpoint, an ethics of conviction is capable of coexisting with an ethics of responsibility. This is clearly demonstrated in Kant’s ethics. It should also be pointed out that, on the level of general ethics, Weber’s ethics of responsibility presupposes the Kantian ethics of conviction, without which it would be indistinguishable from the “power politics” that Weber himself despises. Only in this sense can the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility be reconciled and these theoretical problems put to rest.

Jiang follows Weber in explaining the relationship between these two types of ethics as a “dialectical relationship,” and he even stresses their connection; yet his treatment of this issue creates the distinct impression that the two are clearly distinct and incompatible. It is for this reason that he completely rejects the possibility of deriving political Confucianism from life Confucianism, thereby depriving Confucius’ thought of its consistency. This represents the biggest theoretical shortcoming in Jiang’s political Confucianism.

The Structure and Feasibility of Political Confucianism

Next we turn to the structure and feasibility of this political Confucianism. On the basis of the claims discussed above, Jiang criticizes the Hong Kong and
Taiwan New Confucians for only being familiar with the traditions of mind-and-nature Confucianism and not with those of political Confucianism. He further charges that their wish to develop democratic systems from Confucianism is equivalent to doing away with the particular characteristics and positions of Confucianism and drawing China ever closer to Western culture. In other words, New Confucianism is in fact “Westernization” in another guise. Instead, he advocates making full use of the traditional resources of political Confucianism and “establishing a political system with Chinese characteristics, … in concrete terms, a political system that realizes aspects of Confucian thought such as the spirit of ‘rites and music’ [li yue 礼樂], the ideal of ‘the kingly way,’ the wisdom of ‘the great unity’ [dayitong 大一统], the doctrines of the ‘three eras’ [sanshi 三世], and the ‘emperor as the highest rank’ [tianzi yijue 天子一爵].”

In his book *Life Faith and the Kingly Way of Politics*, Jiang proposes replacing Western democratic government with “the Kingly Way of Politics.” In his view, the advantage that the kingly way offers over democracy is that democracy, in terms of the problem of political legitimacy, emphasizes only legitimacy based on the will of the people, whereas the kingly way of governance derives its legitimacy from three sources: legitimacy based on the will of the people; transcendent, sacred legitimacy; and historical and cultural legitimacy. These three sources make for balanced governance. Working from these sources of legitimacy, Jiang lays out a tricameral legislature with the “House of Profound Confucians” (*tongru yuan* 通儒院) representing transcendent, sacred legitimacy; the “House of the People” (*shumin yuan* 庶民院) representing legitimacy based on the will of the people; and the “House of the Nation” (*guoti yuan* 國體院), which represents historical and cultural legitimacy. The legislature would select members of the executive system, who would be responsible to the legislature. Among these three bodies, only members of the House of the People would be elected, whereas members of the House of Profound Confucians would be nominated and appointed internally, and members of the House of the Nation would be appointed by a hereditary Duke Yansheng 衍聖, Confucius’ lineal descendant.

In his book *Further Thoughts on Political Confucianism*, Jiang proposes the notion of “constitutional Confucianism,” which, in addition to the tricameral legislature, also proposes the establishment of a “Grand Academy Directorate” and a “republic under a symbolic monarch.” For Jiang, the Grand Academy Directorate is the “form of oversight and control,” and the republic under a symbolic monarch is the “form of government” appropriate to constitutional Confucianism. He opposes the Western idea of “popular sovereignty” and maintains that “the fundamental principle of constitutional Confucianism can be summed up in the single notion of ‘heavenly sovereignty.’” The Grand Academy is a traditional Chinese institution, and it is on the foundation of this “tradition of scho-
lastic governance” that he proposes the Grand Academy Directorate. According to Jiang’s plan, the modern Grand Academy will have supreme authority in six different areas: political oversight, education and testing, protocol and rituals, dismissal of government officials, arbitration, and cultural preservation.\(^{35}\) Jiang stresses that, because the Grand Academy has these six powers “with respect to legitimate ‘sovereignty,’ that is, with respect to constitutional governance, it is the nation’s highest authority.”\(^{36}\) The Grand Academy consists of a libationer and grand academicians, the latter being selected and appointed by the former. Thirty Confucians nominated by the House of Profound Confucians and by the Confucian community at large will come together to form the Confucian Committee, which will in turn select the Grand Academy Libationer by anonymous ballot. The Grand Academy academicians can be appointed by the government, by popular nomination, by the modern civil service exam, or by the Grand Academy Libationer.\(^{37}\) The republic is presided over by a “symbolic monarch,” Duke Yansheng, representing the “national essence” and acting to protect and promote China’s spiritual welfare, historical continuity, sanctity, dignity, values, and loyalty.\(^{38}\)

Before ending the discussion of Jiang Qing’s constitutional Confucianism, it should be pointed out that Jiang’s ideas are similar to those already put into practice in Iran’s Islamic Republic, with Confucianism replacing Islam as the founding principle. As briefly outlined above, the power relations among the tricameral legislature, the Grand Academy Directorate, and the republic under a symbolic monarch are so complex as to make Jiang’s plan seem infeasible. It is true that the modern democratic electoral system easily slides into vulgar or populist politics, but can we believe that the appointment methods of the House of Profound Confucians, the House of the Nation, and the Grand Academy really avoid the exchange of favors and arbitrary decisions by individuals? More important, it must be asked whether China currently possesses the necessary historical and social conditions for the implementation of this kind of system. On one level, it seems to be nothing more than a utopian fantasy. Attempting to restore Confucianism to the status of national ideology in modern China would be very much like attempting to restore the ideal of Caesaropapism in the West, which renders the scheme an impractical and temporally dislocated exercise.

Jiang Qing appears to be dissatisfied with Western democracy, but would he really prefer a return to monarchic or aristocratic rule? Jiang describes his ideal “Chinese-style political system” as the “Kingly Way of Politics,” “ritual government,” “nonaction government,” or “great unity government,”\(^{39}\) and it appears that he has no intention of returning China to an absolute monarchy. He admits that “from a historical perspective, ever since the Han dynasty, political thought has been dominated by classical texts, and to a large extent Confucianism has been transformed into a political ideology solely in the service of
the monarch—that is to say, politicized Confucianism has become dominant, and the tradition of political Confucianism has nearly disappeared.”⁴⁰ In other words, Jiang’s model of a “Chinese form of government” is a utopian ideal that has never been put into practice in the entire history of China. It consists of abstract principles with no specific content. Jiang repeatedly insists that the political rationality on which political Confucianism is based, as opposed to the moral rationality that underlies mind-and-nature Confucianism, has a real, objective existence,⁴¹ yet all he seems to offer as a solution is a utopian vision. Can we not hope for more?

The utopian nature of Jiang’s political Confucianism can also be seen in his criticism of Mou Zongsan, who appealed to “the self-negation of liangzhi [original knowing]” to explain the practical necessity of “developing democracy out of Confucianism.” In his critique of this New Confucian project, Jiang also criticizes Mou Zongsan’s “self-negation of liangzhi,” asserting that liangzhi can only be “presence” but cannot “negate itself” and that Mou’s ideas violate Wang Yangming’s “theory of liangzhi.” Jiang’s suggestion is to apply Yangming’s “direct outer kingliness” to modern situations and create an age of charismatic Confucian “sage kings” to reenchant what Weber has called a “disenchanted” age devoid of prophets. In that way the possibility of achieving inner sagehood and outer kingliness would be opened up today, attaining virtue and becoming a sage—the traditional ideals of Confucian ethical philosophy. That is to say, to turn Wang Yangming’s efforts to extend liangzhi and recover one’s original mind, and thereby to attain sagehood, into more than just conceptual exercises and empty talk.⁴²

Could this be the “political rationality” that Jiang is so insistent upon? In this passage, he admits that Wang Yangming’s ethical philosophy can be put to use in the present day; but isn’t this at odds with the sharp distinction he previously made between mind-and-nature Confucianism and political Confucianism?

By comparison, the democratic way supported by the New Confucians is more indicative of a “political rationality.” The modern Western democratic system may be a historical contingency, but it is continually being refined in the crucible of history. Over the past several hundred years, Chinese intellectuals and the Chinese people have struggled for democracy not solely because of pressure from powerful Western cultures but by their own rational choice. Recognizing democracy as a common ideal for all people is not inimical to developing democratic practice in harmony with the Chinese tradition, nor is it equivalent to abandoning what is essentially Chinese and surrendering to Western culture. In many ways, it is to bring Confucianism to the contemporary world.