

# The *Lǐ yì* 禮義 (Rites and Morality) Aspects in *Wángzhì* 王制 (The Rules of a True King) by Xun Zi 荀子 A Contemporary Interpretation in Xi Jinping's Policy

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## ABSTRACT

Xun Zi was a Confucian philosopher who lived during the Warring States Period and contributed to the Hundred Schools of Thought. The famous classical "Xunzi" book was traditionally attributed to Xun Zi. This book consists of thirty two chapters philosophical essays on specific topics ranging from economic and military policy, through the justification of traditional authority and institutions, to action theory and the philosophy of language, among them was the ninth chapter of essays with the title of *Wángzhì* 王制 (The Rules of a True King). The *Wángzhì* 王制 was consist of nineteen paragraphs divided into four main idea topics. These paragraphs refer to the main guidelines of *lǐ yì* 禮義 (rites and morality) aspects as Confucianism values along with Xun Zi's thought through the *Wángzhì* 王制 text would be the main subject discussed in this article, subsequently, would be correlated with Xi Jinping's policies at the present time. Data were collected from the annotated copy of manuscript of "Xunzi" and textual analysis by referring to classical and modern Confucianism elucidations. Research findings that the official political interpretations from the Xi Jinping and P.R China particularly follow Xun Zi's classical elaboration of these *lǐ yì* 禮義 (rites and morality) aspects. For example, Xi Jinping often emphasized China as "Prosperous, Harmonious, and Civilized" country by referring to traditional Confucian thought. Xi Jinping strives to correlate the traditional Confucianism thought during the dynastic era with the certain situation of modern China, Xi would like to revives the traditional value under his governance framework, nevertheless, there would be many adjustments and changes in the application of these two aspects by accordance to the concrete situation of modern China today. This article would finally reveal how's Xi Jinping and P.R China utilizing the traditional values by elaborating on modern China with the aim to actualize the "China Dream".

**Keywords:** Xun Zi, *Lǐ yì* 禮義 aspects, Confucianism, Modern China, Xi Jinping's policy

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Xun Zi or Xun Kuang was known as one of the three great Confucian philosophers (*Rújiā* 儒家) of the Chinese classical period, along with Kong Zi and Meng Zi. Unlike other Confucian philosophers who believed in the innate goodness of human, Xun Zi tends that humans are bad, therefore the aspects of rites and morality are needed along with people who could apply them and a good state's political system to guide humans into the right path and turn them into good beings with high virtue [1]. Xun Zi expressed his views as well as contributed to the development of Confucian thought in major work in the compilation of a book entitled "Xunzi 荀子", this book consists of a compilation of 32 chapters of essays that were recompiled by a librarian from the Han Dynasty (*Hàn cháo* 漢朝) named Liu Xiang (*Liú xiàng* 劉向). Compared to previous Confucian philosophers, Xun Zi tended to write about government and economic policies,

one of his writings was known as *Wangzhi* 王制 (*The Rules of A True King*) which highlights Xun Zi's views on aspects of rites and morality<sup>1</sup> in the society's state and political system, including the legitimacy of a leader to manage, control the state as well as guide the people to create a harmonious society and a prosperous state.

As suggested by the title, Xun Zi urged the stakeholders to put forward fair and humane policies in governing the country. Therefore, Xun Zi highlighted the aspects of rites and morality, the political system, and leaders, by controlling these three important constituents aimed at regulating the country's political system, limiting the power of leaders, and the distribution of obligations to the people. Xun Zi believes that the country would be harmonious, peaceful, and prosperous if the leaders were able to apply these values. For Xun Zi, the *lǐ yì* aspect as a Confucianism value were the keys for a successful leader and the government authority. In his writings, the main function of the *lǐ yì* aspect requires

<sup>1</sup> These aspects are known as *lǐ yì* 禮義.

people to occupy different positions according to their ability, moral virtues, and commitment to work hard, not just because of family connections. Thus, the *li yi* aspect would exist to sort society hierarchically with clear differences in rights and obligations [2].

In the *Wangzhi* text, the word *li yi* is frequently found in the paragraphs and translated as “ritual and morality”. The word *li* 禮 in English is often translated as courtesy, manners, and etiquette. *Li* is a fundamental value which should be abiding by the human in establishing relationships with other humans, in this context, it is referring to a form of humanity and truth. The earliest use of the term of *li* refers to a ship stretching two jade strings offered to the spirits, then it also refers to the wine served to the ancestral spirits, subsequently, the word *li* refers to all sacrificial affairs to the ancestral spirits. By the time of aristocracy and the rise of the state, the term of *li* continued to be used from generation to generation to preserve aristocratic rule and the patriarchal clan system. Along with the development of science and generation, the use of the term of *li* was changed and developed, and so gradually formed the various kinds of *li*, one of them was the *li yi* <sup>2</sup> [3]. The word *yi* 義 itself is interpreted as an attitude of benevolence, honesty and justice. According to the strokes component which consist of a ‘lamb’ on top of ‘I’ that formed from a ‘hand’ and ‘arrow’. The strokes order of the *yi* 義 character shows an obedient sheep who is bowing down, it is appropriate to representing the significance of *yi* 義, when righteousness is upheld, ‘I’ would not be privileged the sake of morality. Therefore, in it is simplified character, the ‘I’ stroke has omitted and only has three simple strokes which symbolize benevolence, honesty and justice. Thus, *Li yi* are not only intend to control human actions, but also as a medium in educating human moral values and virtues [4].

In the past two decades, the revival of the *li yi* aspect as a Confucianism value which were harshly criticized by the China Communist Party from the establishment of communist regime in 1949 has accelerated in P.R China today and become a crucial component of the intellectual public sphere. Since then, the party-state has promoted a succession of official slogans, including “Hexie Shehui” (和諧社會 Harmonious Society), “Hexie Shijie” (和諧世界 Harmonious World), “Xiaokang Shehui” (小康社會 moderately prosperous society) and “Zhenxing Zhonghua” (振興中華 Revitalization of the Chinese nation), these terms have been identified with the official endorsement of ideological Confucianism undertone. These slogans are referred to the significance of

<sup>2</sup> Scholars believe that in Confucian culture, ritual has at least six different implications, these are ritual and morality (*li yi* 禮義), rites and music (*li yue* 禮樂), ritual ceremonials (*li yi* 禮儀), customs (*li su* 禮俗), ritual regulations (*li zhi* 禮制), and the Confucian ritual religion (*li xiao* 禮孝).

educating the Chinese in China’s refined traditions and the possibility of establishing a socialist system with Chinese characteristic<sup>3</sup> [5]. The revive of the Confucian tradition in P.R China can be ascribed to the general role played by tradition in politics as Xun Zi stated before in the dynastic era, there are several roles that tradition plays politically. In other words, the purpose of this article is to study the strategic contribution of the traditional Confucian values in response to the P.R China rhetoric and slogans nowadays.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The causal nexus of this article is that the merger and adjustment between the traditional Confucian values during the dynastic era and the modern P.R China under the Socialist-Communist presidential governance framework is a major topic which always discussed on book and journal nowadays. The following sections will present some previous work on the rise of Confucianism to politics in P.R China.

The article “*Xunzi’s Moral Analysis of War and Some of its Contemporary Implications*” written by Aaron Stalnaker [6] discussed that Xun Zi argues for the Confucianism value of ideal conception of society, combination of moral vision and political realism, combined with Xun Zi advocacy of strong political authorities that nevertheless rule justly in service to the common good. Stalnaker concluded that the legacy of Xun Zi’s and Confucianism value in his analysis of statecraft would be the light this shines in contemporary Chinese political culture. In contemporary terms with the rise of Confucianism, powerful P.R China motivated to seek social harmony and ‘stability’ can serve to keep liberal countries from getting fat and corrupt, and vice versa.

There is an article written by Lu Leng & Salzman [7] entitled “*The Renaissance of Confucianism in Contemporary China from the Perspective of Terror Management Theory*” discussed the Confucius philosophy in emphasizing social order, family harmony and moral instruction and transformation sit well with the Chinese government’s development plan. Lu and Salzman’s research pointed out that while contemporary Chinese people spend many years creating booming economy, technology and national power, they spend little time becoming a cultural entity, therefore, the revive of traditional Confucianism provides an enormous impetus to the national rejuvenation in front of the rising

<sup>3</sup> Yet several bureaucratic intellectuals at the party’s top think-tank, the Central Party School, argue that these terms, originating from one of the Five Classics of the Confucian canons. They also said that the official approval of these slogans results from their support for a mixture of China’s tradition, including Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism.

tide of cultural globalization, which would lead P.R China to realize the “China Dream”.

Moreover, the article “*Belt and Road Initiative: A Spirit of Chinese Cultural Thought*” by Muhammad Asif and Yang Bo Ling [8] says that 21<sup>st</sup> century of P.R China Yi Dai Yi Lu (一带一路 Belt and Road Initiative) is an infinite game with Confucian thought. BRI will not only provide a source for carrying of goods and other materials, but also will transfer of social customs, language, and beliefs among other countries. People to people contact would raise their philosophy that will developed and expand a term of self-cultivation as well as others, in perspective of economic benefits, cultural and environmental awareness. The BRI philosophy of the Confucian sage emphasized to build harmony in the world through transforming society. Harmony is a significant strategy that gathered the whole world under an umbrella and enables to understand the issues and provide a peaceful solution to create a harmonious world.

In short, the book “*Lost Soul: Confucianism in Contemporary Chinese Academic Discourse*” by John Makeham [9] highlights two important contributions to the study of contemporary Confucianism. First, he steers the study away from the narrow focus of intellectual genealogy and philosophical arguments that is common in many studies of contemporary Confucianism. Throughout *Lost Soul*, Makeham stresses that the philosophical movement of New Confucianism was only a part of a broader Confucian revival that shaped the cultural landscape of China. Second, Makeham links contemporary Confucianism to Chinese nationalism. He points out that the Confucian revival helps to create a “ruxue-centered Chinese cultural nationalism” that promotes Confucianism as “a cultural formation fundamental to the identity consciousness of the Chinese (Zhonghua) nation”.

This research applies a qualitative approach. Data are collected from various references such as books, articles, and the internet, all of which suit its focus. The steps applied in this study is by reading, translating, and analyzing the core meaning of the *Wangzhi* 王制 text then summed it up and connect it with Xi Jinping’s rhetoric and slogan nowadays.

### **3. THE CORE VALUES OF CONFUCIANISM IN THE WANGZHI 王制 TEXT**

The *Wangzhi* 王制 text, which is divided into four main ideas, refers to the main guideline that applies to leaders, officials, and the citizens. The text advocated the *li yi* aspect as a main guideline in the to create an ideal state condition. The first main idea advises that whomever who would be involved in the world of politics and become a leader, they shall be able to evaluate the good and bad sides of the citizens in their country based on the *li yi* aspects of themselves, therefore it would be easier for the leader while execute the social stratification

and establishing social hierarchies. Through the second main idea, this text encourages the leaders who have ascended to the throne to remain mandated by always based on the *li yi* aspect of carrying out their duties, so that the outcome of their performance would benefit the country and prosper the citizens. Besides, the text added that a trustworthy leader would always get the sympathy and support of the citizens. Therefore, leaders who maintain the mandate in serving the country are the same as maintaining their position. The third main idea emphasized the leader or stakeholders were selected based on their capabilities which sustain them to execute this big responsibility, hence there are perspective of values that are as important as capabilities, namely the *li yi* aspect or moral values shown by a leader and stakeholders through their actions. The leader or stakeholders who instill aspects of *li yi* or moral values in themselves are those who nurture and love on one another according to *wu lun* principles, have a transparent work manner so as to avoid corruption, collusion and nepotism practices in the government environment, uphold the legal protection by manifesting the justice and siding with the citizens. While the fourth main idea explains that the ideal state begins with a situation in which humans as the most perfect living beings who are created with desire and lust shall be able to conquer this human nature. At this stage, the leader is responsible for teaching the *li yi* aspect as an effort to control human desires so that they could be managed properly. The values of morality or the *li yi* aspect would affected as to limit the human ego in pursuing worldly desires and build potential human being who would become the main support for realizing the purpose of becoming an ideal state.

### **4. XI JINPING’S SLOGANS AND MODERN CONFUCIANISM**

The 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the China Communist Party in 2012, P.R China inaugurated President Xi Jinping. In his speech, Xi Jinping put forward the concept of the “China Dream” which shall be achieved during his reign. According to several international newspapers, the Chinese dream is often associated with the rise of the idea of Synocentrism and Modern Confucianism. The China Dream initiated by President Xi refers to the collective aspirations of the “Great Nation Awakening” with the achievement of high productivity, healthy and fortunate life. Xi emphasized clearly that the China Dream is the dream of all Chinese society which would only be achieved through socialism with Chinese characteristics. From an international point of view, the China Dream could be seen as a continuation of China’s peaceful and harmonious development strategy.

“文以载道，文以化人。当代中国是历史的延续和发展，当代中国思想文化也是中国传统思想文化的传承和升华，要认识今天的中国，今天的中国人，就要深入了解中国的文化血脉，准确把握滋养中国人的文化土壤。”

(Trans) “Literature are for conveying truth. Literature are for cultivating fine personalities. Present-day China is the extension and development of the China of the past. The ideology and culture of today’s China is also the continuation and sublimation of traditional Chinese ideology and culture. To understand present-day China, to know the present-day Chinese, one must delve into the cultural bloodline of China, and accurately appreciate the cultural soil that nourishes the Chinese people.” [10]

Xi Jinping always praise China’s last thirty-five years of extraordinary development, which started when Deng Xiaoping proposed the opening of the Chinese economy and society to the world market. We thus see, at least in these President’s speech, during recent years the new focus has been on the shaping of a fair society, with this being achieved by: promoting culture and values, the only two weapons that can safeguard long-term growth and fight corruption (Ambrogio, 2017:115). This could be the answer to the “China Dream” slogan as the goal of his mandate, a dream of prosperity and harmony that necessarily needs Chinese traditions, values and the close study of ancient texts. Furthermore, Xi highlighted the role of culture and tradition as the common link among all Chinese, and therefore as the real Chinese identity.

“研究孔子，研究儒学，是认识中国的民族特性，认识当今中国人精神世界历史来由的一个重要途径。春秋战国时期，儒家和法家、道家、墨家、农家、兵家等各个思想流派相互切磋，相互激荡，形成了百家证明的文化大观，丰富了当时中国人的精神世界。”

“Studying Confucius and Confucianism is an important approach to understanding the national characteristics of the Chinese as well as the historical roots of the spiritual world of the present-day Chinese. In the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, Confucian, Taoist, Mohist, Agriculturist, and Warist schools of thought contended and compared notes with each other, presenting the magnificent cultural landscape of the contention of a hundred schools of thoughts, enriching the spiritual world of Chinese of the time.” [10]

Xi’s concept of the “China Dream” that he most directly employs Confucian ideology, using the phrase “Great Harmony under Heaven”, or *Tianxia Datong* (天下大同), to describe it. This is a Confucian phrase, and one that is based on other fundamental concepts in Confucianism such as the ‘mandate of heaven’ and ‘sage kings’. According to The Analects, Great Harmony is achieved when a wise ruler, based on the sage kings of three ancient dynasties, is morally just and follows the Way, or *Dao* (道) and carried out the *li yi* aspect as mentioned in the *Wangzhi* text. Xi frames his Chinese dream ideal around Confucian ideology; specifically, around the concept of *Datong* (大同), or “Great Harmony” [11]. Great Harmony is described in *The Book of Rites* as being the ideal utopia, which is that this ideal world can only be attained when the ruler is morally just

and be able to control the human desires, on the other hand, the attitude and behavior of the citizen are shaped through character education based on traditional Confucianism values which are still relevant to China today.

“己所不欲，勿施于人。中国需要和平、爱好和平，也愿意尽最大努力维护世界和平，真诚帮助仍然遭受战争和贫困煎熬的人们。中国将坚定不移走和平发展道路，中国也希望世界各国都走和平发展道路，大家一起把和平发展的理念落实到自己的政策和行动之中。”

“Don’t do unto others what you don’t want others do unto you. China needs peace, loves peace, is also willing to do its utmost in preserving world peace, and sincerely help people haunted by war and poverty. China will resolutely follow its path of peaceful development, and hopes all countries in the world commit to such a path and implement the idea of peaceful development in our respective policies and actions.” [10]

The return of China’s crowning moment is closely related to the contribution of Confucianism into Chinese civilization. In the past, China was known as a civilized nation that upheld the Hundred Scholars. During this 21st century, Xi tries to restore that glory as China’s economic revival. This is what they pointed out as the Great Awakening of the Chinese Nation. The political action taken by China in achieving the “China Dream” are by promoting peripheral diplomacy, as China’s commitment to multilateral cooperation, and a firm political stance. In his foreign policy, Xi Jinping campaigned for “Community of Common Destiny” in the 18th Chinese Communist Party National Congress 2012. The community of common destiny aims to share solutions and problems with other countries. The spirit of the community of common destiny leads to the formation of a world together based on the core values of *tian xia wei gong*. China continues to intensify the understanding of the common destiny between countries so that the country has a shared responsibility to unite in resolving the problems, striving for joint development, and timeless harmony [12]. The concept of community of common destiny was then poured into the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). BRI aims to accommodate the interests of developing countries in dealing with uneven problems of development. In addition, BRI is also a phase of application of socialism with Chinese characteristics [13].

“中国人民正在为实现“两个一百年”奋斗目标而努力，其中全面建成小康社会中的“小康”这个概念，就出自《礼记·礼运》，是中华民族自古以来追求的理想社会状态。使用“小康”这个概念来确立中国的发展目标，既符合中国发展实际，也容易得到最广大人民理解和支持。”

“The Chinese people are working hard for fulfilling their “twin centennial goals”, of which the concept of “xiaokang”, or a relatively well-off life, an ideal state of society the Chinese nation has been after since ancient

times, originated from The Book of Rites•Evolution of the Rites. Using the concept “xiaokang” in defining a national development goal not only conforms to reality of the country’s development, but is also conducive to mustering the broadest public understanding and support.” [10]

The "China Dream" of achieving “Twin Centennial Goals” and “Xiaokang” certainly carries great historical value. The construction of BRI cannot be separated from the historical phase that has been passed by China. The BRI development design program is the most tangible manifestation of achieving the goal of awakening the Chinese nation. China would like to revive the pride and glory that was once achieved through the Silk Road. With the implementation of BRI, the relationship between China and countries in Asia or other developing countries through this route will have an important influence in facilitating China to realize its awakening in accordance with the ideals of “China Dream”. In connection with efforts to realize China's national awakening through the construction of BRI, China has made significant changes in the direction of its diplomacy and foreign policy. China's priority in its diplomacy is to establish good relations with developing countries, especially countries which directly bordering with China. This priority can certainly be understood in relation to China's BRI development program. Xi pointed out that in the global developments, China shall not put aside the views and values that characterize China. In determining the direction of its development, China shall consider the domestic and international interests, and shall uphold the principle of peaceful development. In addition to prioritizing peaceful development, in this new diplomacy China has also developed the concept of “win-win cooperation” in dealing with the surrounding countries. The concept of cooperation is based on friendship, harmony, mutual benefit and inclusiveness. Such cooperation shall be based on the principle of upholding the law, respecting the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries, and respecting the independent choice of other countries.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Conceptually, slogans can be used as a means to achieve certain political goals. Xi Jinping reformulated the existing concept of China's national awakening to achieve his political goals and strengthen his position as China's new leader. Xi Jinping summarized the formulation for the national awakening of the Chinese nation in the form of the "China Dream" slogan. Xi Jinping used the Chinese Dream to gain citizen support and legitimize his position as leader. This goal was achieved by arousing a sense loving the homeland and nationalism in the hearts of the people, in addition, Xi also revives the traditional values of Confucianism as nation's moral values. Security, prosperity and common welfare are more important and shall take precedence over the individual in accordance with the Confucian values that are held regarding the system of governance and values of life.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Material preparation, data collection and analysis were performed by Anthea Rienata and Adrianus L. G. Waworuntu. The first draft of the manuscript was written by Anthea Rienata and all authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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