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Book Review

Philip J. Ivanhoe and Sungmoon Kim, eds., (2016) *Confucianism, a Habit of the Heart: Bellah, Civil Religion, and East Asia.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. 236 pages, $80.00, ISBN: 9781438460130 (hbk); $24.95, ISBN: 9781438460123 (pbk).

This well-edited volume is a succinct, multifaceted, and timely reflection on the role of contemporary Confucianism as a civil religion in East Asia. It weaves together various takes on Confucianism by Chinese academics at Western institutions, Chinese and Korean scholars in China, and Western scholars in China, the United States, and Europe, thereby elucidating the phenomenon of the recent revival of Confucianism from different vantage points. The ten chapters range from case studies of particular manifestations of Confucianism in individual countries, such as China, Japan, and South Korea, to discussions of Confucianism's potential role as a civil religion both in East Asia and globally. Given the high degree of conceptual coherence between the chapters and the relatively short length (only 236 pages), *Confucianism, a Habit of the Heart*, reads more like a monograph than many other loosely edited volumes of collected conference papers, which were presented at the conference "A Habit of the Heart: Confucianism and Contemporary East Asia" convened by the editors in 2011 in honor of Robert Bellah.

The book revolves around Robert Bellah's notion of a "civil religion," which the editors aptly compare to one of Alexis de Tocqueville's "habits of the heart," understood as "the underlying, unofficial, often unselfconscious assumptions, orientations, beliefs, practices, symbols, and styles of reasoning that inform, shape, and guide life in society" (p. 2). In this sense, a civil religion contrasts sharply with a state-sponsored religion, which tends to consist of self-conscious, institutionalized beliefs and practices mobilized for political ends, such as the formation of national identities and international deployment of soft power. To varying degrees, the ten chapters explore the extent to which

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revivals of Confucianism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries can be seen as manifestations of a "civil religion."

Chapter 1, "Confucianism as Civil Religion," by Fenggang Yang (a professor of sociology and director of the Center on Religion and Chinese Society at Purdue University) places his discussion of Confucianism as a civil religion in the context of the revival movement in China sometimes referred to as neo-Confucianism. Although Yang considers himself a neo-Confucian, his emphasis on reviving Confucianism as a *civil religion* sets him apart from other self-proclaimed neo-Confucians whose aim is to establish Confucianism as a *state religion*. Instead, he argues that a civil religion based on elements from Confucianism and Christianity has the potential "to serve well not only China or the greater China but also much of East Asia, the Transpacific region, even 'all under Heaven'" (p. 26).

In Chapter 2, "The Revival of Confucianism in the Sphere of Mores and the Reactivation of the Civil Religion Debate," Sébastian Billioud (professor of Chinese studies at the University of Paris-Diderot) provides a two-pronged account of the current and future place of Confucianism in what he calls the "sphere of mores" in China. First, he uses case studies of individuals who are personally engaged in the revival of Confucianism at the grassroots level by organizing "classics reading sessions for children" or adult study groups of the classics that explore the Confucian tradition for individual moral and spiritual development. Second, he provides a brief intellectual history of the impact of the writings of Confucian revivalists, such as Mou Zongsan, Wang Caigui, and Jiang Qing, on the re-emergence of Confucianism as a source of inspiration for spiritual self-cultivation. He acknowledges recent politicized efforts by the Chinese government to actively promote Confucianism as a core element of national identity, but he concludes with the tentative prediction that Confucianism in the future may be most influential in China as a civil religion.

Chapter 3, "The Revival of Confucianism in Mainland China: The Vicissitudes of Confucian Classics in Contemporary China as Example," by Guoxiang Peng (Distinguished Professor of Chinese Philosophy, Intellectual History, and Religions, Zhejiang University), does not directly engage with the question of Confucianism as a civil religion. Instead, Peng explores the changing uses of and attitudes toward Confucianism from the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 to the present day through an overview of the main shifts in the appraisal of the Confucian classics. Peng conveniently divides this period into three stages: (1) the Maoist period from 1949 to the 1970s, when Confucianism was repressed by the government as reactionary and Confucian classics could not be studied; (2) the period from 1978 to 2000, when "the government started to reassess Confucianism, and Confucian studies gradually became a major

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field in the academic world" (pp. 72-73); and (3) the period from 2000 to the present, when the "fever for national learning" (*guoxue re* 國學熱) moved out of academic circles and finally gained popularity among a significant number of ordinary people. Peng observes that, at a grassroots level, an increasing number of parents make their children attend classes to recite the classics, and adults form Confucian reading groups devoted to the study of them. He concludes by assessing the extent to which the increasing commercialization and politicization of the classics may be harmful to a revival of Confucianism as a key element of Chinese culture.

In Chapter 4, "The Politics of Confucianism in Contemporary China," Anna Sun (assistant professor of sociology at Kenyon College) explores the question of whether Confucianism is a religion from three different angles before discussing the current and future status of Confucianism as a civil religion in the concluding paragraph. First, Sun cites an example of the Chinese government's incipient treatment of Confucianism as one of the "major religions" in China and explores the significance of classifying Confucianism as a religion. Second, Sun discusses the "politics of the religion question" with respect to Confucianism. She suggests that, after decades of repression during the Maoist era, beginning in the 1990s the Chinese government has "rediscovered Confucianism, with the hope that it is something that can be used and controlled at will, a perfect cultural symbol and political tool on the international stage, with an aura of 'religion' yet without any actual religious organization that the state has to deal with" (p. 90). Third, Sun analyzes the potential for "Confucian fundamentalist activists such as Jiang Qing and Kang Xiaokuang [who] insist on the necessity of installing Confucians as a state religion" (p. 91) to become a source of conflict with the state. In her study of Confucianism as a civil religion, understood as a "religious collective consciousness without the association with a specific religion" (p. 93), Sun provides a particularly useful survey of the views of Sébastian Billioud, Fenggang Yang, and Robert Bellah on this question. By integrating her article firmly into the context of the rest of the edited volume, she contributes greatly to the conceptual coherence of the volume as a whole.

Chapter 5, "Obstacles to the Globalization of Confucianism," by Richard Madsen (Distinguished Professor of Sociology, University of California, San Diego), is a brilliant study of three factors that have prevented Confucianism from reaching the same level of global influence as Buddhism and Daoism, which, unlike Confucianism, have large numbers of followers and practitioners in the West. First, the dominant modern conception of Confucianism as the national religion of China that emerged in the nineteenth century was consciously stripped of mystery and superstition in order to present it as a worldly

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religion of the ruling elite. Making Confucianism both nationalist and elitist contributed to its subsequent communist vilification as a reactionary form of traditionalism from the May Fourth (1919) movement to the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989. Even after the Chinese government embraced Confucianism as a cornerstone of national ideology and international soft power, the "connection of Confucianism with Chinese nationalism will probably still continue to make Confucianism seem alien to non-Chinese" (p. 103). In contrast to Daoism and Buddhism, which have been indigenized by a large number of Western followers, Confucianism is often viewed as a marker of Chinese identity, both politically and philosophically, that "sets Chinese (and to some degree Koreans, Vietnamese, and Japanese) apart from Europeans" (p. 100). Second, the "communal Confucian ideology" (p. 104), which prioritizes the group (family, community, etc.) over the individual is often seen as incompatible with the "dominant culture of individualism" (p. 103) in the West. In contrast, "although neither Buddhism nor Daoism is fundamentally individualistic, certain aspects of both traditions can couple with Western individualism" (p. 104). Third, "in China and in other parts of Asia, Confucianism has … been transformed into a political ideology for authoritarian governments, who increasingly argue that their version of order-producing Asian values is superior to the democratic models of the West" (p. 107). Madsen's main argument is that these three factors demonstrate why Confucianism has not (yet) reached its full potential as a contributor to a global civil religion.

One of the main aims of Chapter 6, "Beyond a Disciplinary Society: Reimagining Confucian Democracy in South Korea" by Sungmoon Kim (professor of political theory, City University of Hong Kong), is to propose an account of "the sudden disappearance of the discourse of Confucian democracy in Korean academia and civil society in the early 2000s" (p. 115). The essay offers a critical analysis of the concepts of "postmodern Confucianism" and "Confucian democracy" as defined in the work of Hahm Chaibong, a prominent representative of Korea's neo-Confucians. Kim argues that Hahm's "overemphasis on self-discipline … made his vision of Confucian democracy less politically robust as democratic theory …, thus failing to come to terms with the active participatory citizenship and strong democratic civil society" already established in the Korean political landscape (p. 115). Hahm's "Confucian democracy" failed because he made it indistinguishable from "Confucian capitalism," which is more concerned with the "governability of individual subjects" (p. 129) than with protecting the rights of citizens. Kim concludes the chapter with a call for rethinking the idea of "Confucian democracy" in a way that is more consistent with the actual democratic practices of civil society in South Korea,

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while still being grounded in "Korea's Confucian culture, in which Koreans are still deeply soaked" (p. 132).

Chapter 7, "The Experience of Village Leaders during the Saemaul Movement in the 1970s: Focusing on the Lives of the Male Leaders," by Do-Hyun Han (professor of sociology, Academy of Korean Studies), offers the most focused subject matter and, at thirty pages, is also the longest. This allows Han to place his case study of interviews with ten Saemaul movement village leaders in a specific historical context: the state-sponsored revival of Confucianism as a civil religion for political aims, such as building local infrastructure and improving the standard of living in the villages. Han argues that the success of the Saemaul movement "depended directly and critically upon the underlying traditional Confucian beliefs, commitments, and practices of those who carried it forward" (p. 139)—that is, on a distinct Korean manifestation of Confucian civil religion. Selected from among the common members of the village communities, the Saemaul village leaders underwent a two-week government-sponsored training program that transformed them into Confucian "gentlemen" [*junzi* 君子] who inspired "by deed, word, and personal example, a larger social transformation" (p. 147). The leaders generally connected "the cause of their commitment and sacrifice to the supportive leadership of President Park Chung-Hee" (p. 159). However, the vision of the Saemaul leaders "went beyond their village to the nation, which resembles the Confucian expansion from self-cultivation through governing the family to governing the nation and bringing harmony on the earth" (p. 159). In this sense, Han concludes, the Saemaul leaders can "be defined as incarnations of the spirit of community or priests of the Korean civil religion" (p. 162) in Bellah's sense of the term. Han's essay is a delightful and highly readable study of the manifestation of Confucianism as a civil religion in the Saemaul movement. However, the writing is at times repetitive and could be pruned down a bit so that the length of this chapter matched that of the others.

In Chapter 8, "Contemporary Japanese Confucianism from a Genealogical Perspective," Takahiro Nakajima (associate professor of Chinese philosophy, Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia) provides a brief historical overview of what he calls "the Confucian boom in Japan" in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Most manifestations of contemporary Japanese Confucianism focus on the *Analects* and the idea that "a true Japanese 'national character'" can be found in the study of this text. A common theme is that in "the past" the Japanese possessed a firmer command of the Confucian spirit that has since been lost. Thus, many contemporary Confucian revivalists hope to restore this national Confucian spirit through various forms of *kyōyō-shugi*

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教養主義, or *kyōyō*-ism (educationalism), either as self-cultivation projects or officially institutionalized in school curricula. Some thinkers, such as Shirakawa Shizuka, Katō Tōru, and Kaji Nobuyuki, propose making Confucianism a religion. In contrast, conservative nationalist thinkers such as Yasuoka Masahiro (1898-1983) see Confucian-inspired *kyōyō* 教養 more as a project aimed at restoring the true national spirit of Japan by curbing the corrosive influence of decadent, leftist trends. Nakajima ends the chapter by suggesting that the future of Confucianism in Japan lies in what he calls "critical Confucianism." However, because critical Confucianism is defined only as the attempt "to deconstruct the modern problematic of Confucianism and find a new approach to Confucianism" (p. 179), it is not entirely clear what such a project would entail.

In Chapter 9, "The Bildungsroman of the Heart: Thick Naturalism in Robert Bellah's *Religion in Human Evolution,*" Yang Xiao (professor of philosophy at Kenyon College) offers a succinct overview of the "general theory of human nature as 'habits of the heart' or culture" that forms the core of Bellah's seminal work *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to Axial Age* (2011). As summarized by Xiao, in Bellah's "nonreductive humanistic naturalism" (p. 186), civil religion should be understood as a "cultural system." He compares *Religion in Human Evolution* to Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Both are universal histories of religion as culturally embedded systems in which "nothing is ever lost" (p. 192). It is in this sense that we should understand Xiao's characterization of *Religion in Human Evolution* as "a Bildungsroman of the human spirit on a truly global scale" (p. 194). By providing a succinct and enlightening introduction to the core ideas of Bellah's *Religion in Human Evolution*, this chapter connects the discussion of the contemporary Confucian revival in East Asia in Chapters 1-8 to Bellah's discussion in Chapter 10 of the possibility of a global civil religion and Confucianism's contribution to it.

The final chapter, "Can We Imagine a Global Civil Religion?," by the late Robert N. Bellah (who was Elliot Professor of Sociology at the University of California at Berkeley), explores the extent to which one could argue that the beginnings of a "global civil religion" already exist. In the process, he also touches on the role of "habits of the heart," derived from the Confucian traditions of East Asia, may play in such a global civil religion. The idea of a global civil religion may at first seem impossible to reconcile with the cultural and religious fragmentation of the contemporary world that political scientists such as Samuel Huntington have characterized as a "clash of civilizations." Nevertheless, as Bellah astutely observes, despite all the cultural variation, our increasingly globalized world is built on international networks and systems that can only function on the basis of globally shared values and practices.

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Global trade and financial systems are based on a certain degree of shared respect for property rights and the basic rules of international law and the worldwide market culture. However, according to Bellah, the current global "worship of Mammon" (p. 208) is also the root cause of two of the biggest threats to humankind: increasing inequality and the destruction of the environment. To solve these problems, Bellah suggests that humanity needs to transcend the confines of nation-states in order to form a "global civil society with a spiritual dimension drawing from all the great religions of the world" (p. 219), which would be characterized by "an obligatory cosmopolitan solidarity" (p. 213). That is, the question we need to ask is: "Could we as Americans or Chinese accept the notion of a common global membership such that we would be willing to give up something of ours for the sake of Mexicans or Vietnamese?" Here is where Bellah suggests that Confucian notions of the communal self, where the individual is always defined in relation to a larger community (family, village, nation, world), can function as an antidote to modern Western individualism, which, according to Bellah is the cause of many problems facing contemporary humanity.

I have only two main criticisms. First, because this volume is based on essays collected to honor the work of Robert Bellah, it lacks a review or critical appraisal of his theory of religion. Second, the volume lacks chapter on Confucian revival and civil religion in Taiwan. Because Taiwan did not undergo the Cultural Revolution and suppression of Confucianism due to communist ideology, the trajectory of Confucianism as a civil religion in Taiwan has taken a path that differs from Mainland China. Although Taiwan is mentioned briefly in some of the chapters, the volume suffers from the absence of at least one chapter on the role of Confucianism as a "habit of the heart" there.

In sum, *Confucianism, a Habit of the Heart* offers a highly readable view of the role of Confucianism in East Asian civil societies. Its appeal stems not only from the quality of the individual chapters but also from the fact that some are by scholars who are also personally and professionally invested in the promotion of Confucianism as a civil religion.

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