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The Inversion of Public and Private: a Mechanism of Moral Practice in Contemporary Chinese Society

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Abstract

One lens that has long been used to examine the Chinese concepts of the public and the private is morality and its public and private boundaries. From ancient times to the modern era, public morality and the political morality of the state have been closely connected. Intellectuals of recent times have, with growing influence, linked the establishment of public morality with the identity and revitalization of the state. According to the philosophies of "establishing the public and abolishing the private" and "subsuming the private to the public," which became dominant ideologies after the creation of the modern Chinese state in the last century, the private morality of ordinary citizens is viewed as subject to control by an authority. Due to the delegitimization of private property and the perceived threat of private interests at that time, private morality did not establish its own foundation or clear boundaries. Public morality has consistently and forcefully integrated with private morality, resulting in the frequent merging of the public and the private, making it difficult to distinguish between the two. Moreover, traditional concepts of the sacred have not kept pace with modern changes, and the relationship between public and private morality has thus become more complex, leading to numerous challenges in governing Chinese society today.

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Distinguishing between public and private morality has long been a significant topic in moral philosophy. Scholars tend to divide morality into public (*gong* 公) and private (*si* 私) based on context and social groupings. Public morality refers to the political and social morality used in the public sphere, while private morality refers to the morality adhered to in the private lives of individuals.

Some argue that the root of the distinction between public and private morality in China lies in the modern tendency to prioritize political public morality over the private morality of the individual, leading to an imbalance between the public and the private.[1] This imbalance can be traced back to the Confucian concept of "making all-under-Heaven one's family" (*jia tianxia* 家天下).[2] This does not, however, imply a direct connection between private morality and public morality. For the early Confucians, the public nature of virtuous action was understood through personal moral cultivation. There is thus a need to understand the early Confucian discussion on morality in the contemporary framework of separating public from private morality, and to clarify the ethical significance of private morality in a social context and the ethical function of public morality in a political context.[3] What has been traditionally emphasized is the connection between public and private morality, rather than their differentiation. The differentiation only emerged in the modern era.[4] The focus of scholarly discussion has often been on the types of public and private morality and the issue of their imbalance. Scholars have sought to resolve the conflicts between public and private morality, ultimately considering the

1 Chen Lai 陳來, "Zhongguo jindai yilai zhong gongde qing side de pianxiang yu liubi" 中國近代以來重公德輕私德的偏向與流弊, *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲, no. 1 (2020): 5–23.

2 Cai Xiangyuan 蔡祥元, "Rujia 'jia tianxia' de sixiang kunjing yu xiandai chulu: yu Chen Lai xiansheng shangque gong si de zhi bian" 儒家"家天下"的思想困境與現代出路—與陳來先生商榷公私德之辨, *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲, no. 3 (2020): 5–11.

3 Ren Jiantao 任劍濤, "Gujin zhi bian yu gong si dexing de xiandai lijie" 古今之變與公私德行的現代理解, *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲, no. 4 (2020): 5–22.

4 Xiao Qunzhong 肖群忠, "Xiandai Zhongguo ying bingzhong gonggong daode he geti meide: dui Chen Lai, Cai Xiangyuan liangwei xiansheng de huiying" 現代中國應並重公共道德和個體美德—對陳來、蔡祥元兩位先生的回應, *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲, no. 4 (2020): 23–31.

state to be the final arbiter when such conflicts arise. This is the backdrop against which modern scholars discuss moral practice in contemporary China.

The key issue is that the relationship between public and private spheres and their accompanying moral practices, from traditional to contemporary Chinese society, not only pertain to how traditional cultural beliefs are understood but are also closely related to the modern revival of Chinese civilization. Chinese cultural beliefs have an inherent logic of going from cultivating (*xiu* 修), to ordering (*qi* 齊), to governing (*zhi* 治), to bringing peace (*ping* 平). However, once Chinese people step outside their homes, whether in a traditional or contemporary context, they can directly transition from the individual and family to the state and all-under-Heaven (*tianxia* 天下). There is almost no notion of "society" intermediating personal cultivation and the ordering of the family, on the one hand, and governing the state and bringing peace to all-under-Heaven on the other. This has influenced the overarching structure of public and private morality in modern Chinese contexts, making it difficult to distinguish between political public morality, social public morality, personal morality, and national morality.

The primary task of Confucian moral development is to distinguish between the private and public realms and to clarify the boundaries between family and state.[5] Throughout history, however, Confucianism has repeatedly emphasized "establishing the public and controlling the private" (*ligong kongsi* 立公控私) and has advocated for "complete public-mindedness without private interests" (*dagong wusi* 大公無私), thereby reinforcing the public morality at the expense of the private.

There is a fundamental question that contemporary discussions need to address: do the Chinese people lack a notion of private morality, or do they lack a notion of public morality? In tandem with establishing the public and controlling the private, can traditional Chinese ethics maintain a notion of private morality and private rights? If, from ancient times, the sacred ideal of *tianxia*-ism (*tianxia zhuyi* 天下主義) had always embedded within it a relationship between public and private morality, then how does this distinction between public and private morality become manifest? This article holds that before asking whether public or private morality is more important, we may draw on the notions of actors and moral principles found in the analytical framework of moral sociology. We first examine the overlap and disparities between traditional and modern connotations of public morality. We then explore the problem of the blurred boundaries between public and private

5 Cai Xiangyuan, "Rujia 'jia tianxia' de sixiang kunjing yu xiandai chulu," 5–11.

morality. Finally, we discuss how, in the context of *tianxia*-ism, "Heavenly moral virtue" (*tiande* 天德) created an integrated moral structure of the public and the private, while also allowing private morality to remain dynamic over the past three thousand years. Eventually, this led to an inversion of the moral relationship between the public and the private, resulting in the contemporary moral dilemma where public morality is upheld, yet the balance between public and private morality has been difficult to establish.

The problematic nature of the interactions and transformations between universal moral principles and individual moral actions is due to there being a shared sacred origin among public and private morality and concrete moral actors and universal moral principles. This in turn generates the complex relationship and tensions between public and private morality.

1 Actors and Moral Principles: an Explanatory Framework

Moral principles are those based on moral consciousness or conceptions of good and evil.[6] Broadly speaking, morality is itself a set of principles. In the face of these principles, individuals tend to feel a sense of obligation to obey due to social pressure imposed on the individual by a "shared moral consciousness" or "collective consciousness."[7] Morality primarily consists of principles governing the relationship between the individual and society. The institutionalization of these principles strengthens the individual's sense of duty. Structurally, morality has an institutionalizing function and serves both as an internal social control and an external authoritative force. Moral principles, in the narrower sense, refer to the underlying structure of morality. Within this sense of the term there is a division between the universal and the specific, and it is closely related to the power status of moral actors. When individuals identify with and practice a particular moral rule, this represents an acknowledgment of, and submission to, the authority of the moral rule and its creators.

As a result, the significance of morality, whether public or private, does not lie in the definite goal of an action, but in the provision of a reservoir, or toolbox, of habitual norms and life skills to help moral actors navigate different conditions in constructing their actions and value objectives. Moral principles do not constitute a unified structure for action or organization. If they did, they would require the power of a strong state. Moral principles may be

6 Tong Shijun 童世駿, "Lun 'guize'" 論 "規則", *Dongfang faxue* 東方法學, no. 1 (2008): 4–13.

7 Chen Tao 陳濤, *Tu'ergan de daode kexue: jichu ji qi neizai zhankai* 塗爾幹的道德科學：基礎及其內在展開 (Shanghai: Shanghai sanlian shudian, 2019), 126.

hierarchical, private, or public in nature depending on the social situation in which they manifest. Public and private action strategies are reflected in the outcomes of moral action, based on the choices made and the resources used. This determines the public and private norms of moral practice.

The key point is that moral actors are the agents of moral choice and the flexible practitioners of moral principles. The identity, status, and capabilities of individual moral actors determine their selection of moral principles. This directly influences the formation and functioning of those norms. Moral actors tend to choose their preferred modes of moral practice based on their identities and what is beneficial to them, and a distinction between private and public morality is thus formed. As a result, there is a shared foundation for integration across individual moral actors and public moral actors, and there are tensions between public and private morality.

From the perspective of moral sociology, all moral authority originates from society.[8] Morality is composed of a normative system of predefined behavioral expression. It prescribes how individuals should act in any given situation. Moral actors are both the creators of moral principles and the subjects of moral practice. Moral principles are constantly evolving and being reproduced. They cannot be reduced simply to the combination of individual actors' characteristics and motivations, nor can they be treated merely as the result of collective constraints imposed by society on individuals. Dependent on the actions of individuals for their maintenance and reproduction, moral principles become public value structures through practice. The blending of public and private morality thereby manifests across both institutional and informal domains, and across explicit principles and tacit norms.

In the sociological interpretation of morality, universal moral principles are inherently linked to their specific historical contexts. As the sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) pointed out, for a thorough understanding of conventions, institutions, laws, or moral principles, one must uncover their earliest source. Social phenomena are comparable to organic phenomena in that although they are not entirely determined by inborn attributes, these attributes have significant influence on every aspect of their development.[9] This suggests a fundamental question regarding the relationship between public and private morality: by whom are moral norms established? Are they shaped by individual moral actors, or do they emerge as collective covenants of society and the state?

8 Émile Durkheim, *Moral Education*, trans. Everett K. Wilson and Herman Schnurer (New York: The Free Press, 1961), 91.

9 Émile Durkheim, *Incest: The Nature and Origin of the Taboo*, trans. Edward Sagarin (New York: Lyle Stewart, 1963), 13.

Tracing the origins of public and private morality in China, we find that both derive from the sacred structure of Heavenly moral virtue. Heavenly moral virtue and its practical functioning construct the ontological framework that links moral actors and moral norms. It vests moral actors of various roles and ranks with moral legitimacy or other public and private attributes. This article holds that, with the relationship between moral principles and the sacred resource of Heavenly moral virtue as a foundation, the dynamic of public and private morality originates from the strategic actions and resource allocation of moral agents. Moral principles are hence the "principles of principles," transcending models of family and state. They are directed towards an overarching sacred structure and the various degrees and ranks of differentiation and reproduction that it generates. They ultimately facilitate a moral logic of bidirectional inversion, from "inwardly private and outwardly public" (*nei si wai gong* 内私外公) to "the realization of the private through the public" (*yi gong jian si* 以公踐私).

2 Heavenly Moral Virtue: the Sacred Origin of the Public-Private Continuum

The foundation of Chinese public morality is deeply embedded in sacred concepts dating back three millennia, such as the "Mandate of Heaven" (*tianming* 天命) and "Heavenly moral virtue." This conception of morality emphasizes the capacity to "align with Heaven" (*pei tian* 配天). Concealed within it are tensions between public and private domains. What appears, on the surface, to be faith in the Mandate of Heaven is in fact a moral practice of aligning with Heaven through moral virtue. However, according to tradition, only exceptional individuals are capable of aligning with Heaven by means of their moral virtue, not ordinary people.

In terms of moral sociology, the Mandate of Heaven doctrine that was prominent during the revolutions of Emperors Tang of Shang 商湯 (r. ca. 17th c.–ca. 16th c. BCE) and Wu of Zhou 周武 (r. 1046–1043 BCE) represents a universalist moral order vested with the public nature of all-under-Heaven. According to this doctrine, "Heaven above is without partiality; it assists only those with moral virtue," and, "one whose moral virtue aligns with Heaven and Earth does not treat the throne as private property; such a person is rightly called the sovereign."[10] The Mandate of Heaven is the sacred source of Chinese moral order. The morality of the Mandate of Heaven was thus the most crucial

10 Xu Jian 徐堅 et al., "Diwang bu" 帝王部, in *Chuxue ji* 初學記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 9.195.

public component of this divine structure, and gradually evolved into a sacred resource that reconciled the tensions between public and private morality. This elevated regard for state governance and public morality to a sacred level. As a result, the belief in the Mandate of Heaven became infused with the virtuous action of humans, giving rise to the religious ethical doctrine which stated, "Heaven bestows its Mandate upon the virtuous."[11]

In this way, the "supremacy of the public" took form, encapsulated by the phrase, "eliminating private desires through public-mindedness, the people will submit with their whole hearts."[12] This moral tradition of "eliminating private desires through public-mindedness" implies that the "public" equates to justice, and thereby precludes all private interest. From the Spring and Autumn (770–476 BCE) and Warring States (475–221 BCE) periods to unification under the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE), this moral tradition evolved into an institutional framework that held the state in the highest regard.[13] Consequently, the subordination of private to public and the political morality of the state became the defining characteristics of public morality in the Chinese context, and formed the foundation for regulating the private morality of the common people.

The concept of morality or moral virtue (*de* 德) serves as the intermediary variable that links the Mandate of Heaven, revolution (literally "the overcoming of the Mandate"; *geming* 革命), the altering of the Mandate (*gaiming* 改命), and the receiving of the Mandate (*shouming* 受命). *De* is also the key to bridging public and private morality, to determining the ethical legitimacy of "the great public" (*dagong* 大公), and identifying the affront to justice posed by the "private self" (*siji* 私己). The "Liyun" 禮運 chapter of the *Liji* 禮記 states that, "When the Great Way prevails, all-under-Heaven is shared by the people; the virtuous and worthy are selected, stress is laid on trustworthiness, and a harmonious atmosphere is cultivated."[14] This vision, along with later Confucian ideals of "benevolent governance" (*renzheng* 仁政) and rule by moral virtue (*dezhi* 德治), places Heaven (*tian* 天) as the highest moral standard, integrating public

11 Li Xiangping 李向平, "Rujiao 'tianming' guan ji qi xinyang fangshi: jianlun dangdai Rujiao xinyang fangshi de zhuanxing" 儒教"天命"觀及其信仰方式—兼論當代儒教信仰方式的轉型, *Zhongguo wenhua* 中國文化, no. 1 (2015): 79–89.

12 *Shangshu zhengyi* 尚書正義, in *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏, ed. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 18.502a.

13 See Liu Zehua 劉澤華, "Chunqiu Zhanguo de 'li gong mie si' guannian yu shehui zhenghe" 春秋戰國的"立公滅私"觀念與社會整合, in *Gongsi guannian yu Zhongguo shehui* 公私觀念與中國社會, ed. Liu Zehua 劉澤華 and Zhang Rongming 張榮明 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2003), 37.

14 Zhu Bin 朱彬, *Liji xunzuan* 禮記訓纂 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), 331.

and private morality. It allows the private individual to be cultivated into a sage, to discipline the self for the sake of the public, to the point where the public is upheld and the private forgotten. Legalist thought similarly emphasizes the establishment of the Son of Heaven (or "sovereign"; *tianzi* 天子), the enforcement of state law, and the enactment of public interest. Mohist thought further interprets Heaven as the ultimate embodiment of impartiality and selflessness. These perspectives each further the position that aligns moral virtue with the Mandate of Heaven, and that Heaven selects only the virtuous.[15]

The Mandate of Heaven, Heavenly moral virtue, and *tianxia*-ism constitute the foundation and pathway for the construction of the sacred dimension of Chinese morality. They are also the most enigmatic and profound characteristics of Chinese thought. Heaven transcends kinship-based family ethics while also extending their function and status, giving rise to the dual construction of Heavenly moral virtue and ancestral status. Through state integration, this dual structure developed into the moral status politics of traditional China, or public morality. Rooted in Heavenly moral virtue, public morality and the political morality of the state constitute a moral framework in which national politics serves as the locus of public morality. Only if one has Heavenly moral virtue can one hold political office. This is a manifestation of the moral legitimacy received from Heaven by "those who received the Mandate" following the Tang and Wu revolutions. Conversely, it seems that those who hold office may themselves attain Heavenly moral virtue, like kings who receive the Mandate. This reinforces the notion of Heavenly moral virtue becoming the commanding seat of politics. In this moral system, with Heavenly moral virtue at its center, the relationship between public and private morality is that of an integrated whole. The clearest defining feature of this moral system is the public nature of Heavenly moral virtue.

The Mandate of Heaven is a structure that thoroughly integrates public and private morality. Although the Mandate of Heaven encompasses both dimensions of private and public morality, the Son of Heaven, as the ultimate holder of governing authority, can only align with Heaven by cultivating moral virtue and protecting the people. As the sacred symbol of Heavenly moral virtue, the Son of Heaven naturally became the sole intermediary in the traditional Chinese moral system to embody the Mandate of Heaven or Heavenly moral

15 See Zhang Xiaomang 張曉芒, "Xianqin bianxue faze shilun" 先秦辯學法則史論 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1996), 90–94; cited in Zhang Xiaomang 張曉芒, "Kong Mo gongsi guan de butong zouxiang" 孔墨公私觀的不同走向, in *Gongsi guannian yu Zhongguo shehui* 公私觀念與中國社會, ed. Liu Zehua 劉澤華 and Zhang Rongming 張榮明 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2003), 97.

virtue, and to communicate with Heavenly moral virtue. His role, whether in the public or the private sphere, was a manifestation of morality. Ultimately, under the demand for a parallel structure between family and state, private morality had to be subsumed under the domain of the public.

The moral virtue of the Mandate of Heaven, or Heavenly moral virtue, functioned as the mediator between public and private morality. Its formation and endurance over two millennia directly shaped, and constrained, aspects of the dual relationship between public and private morality, namely, the subordination of private to public and the inversion of public and private. The authority and public nature of Heavenly moral virtue became manifest as relating to the state and politics. This caused the belief in, and practice of, the Mandate of Heaven and Heavenly moral virtue to be laden with strong characteristics of a "state faith." Heavenly moral virtue represented a supreme and ideologized moral authority. However, the sacred structure of Heavenly moral virtue also exhibited a distinct and powerful sociological duality. This duality was supplementary and complementary. Like the five phases (*wu xing* 五行), it involved mutual generation and overcoming. It reproduced itself cyclically through the duality between universal publicism and the particularism of private morality. We may call this the parallel structure of the public and private, an inversion in the form of mutual generation and overcoming.

Heavenly moral virtue can be either public or private. The moral virtue of those who receive the Mandate and ascend to kingship can align with Heaven, and it is thus the utmost public morality. For those who attain political status due to their moral virtue, however, their moral virtue remains a private attribute. Those who can connect with Heaven can transform their individual private morality into a supremely public political morality. One whose private morality aligns with Heaven can also assume the role of a great figure possessing extraordinary endowments, and can shape public moral norms, which constitute models of moral practice for ordinary society.

In the contexts of the "Mandate of Heaven" and "Heavenly moral virtue," "Heaven" connotes the public and the universal. "Mandate" connotes the individual transformation of ever-twisting contingency. More crucially, what mediates the relationships between Heaven and the Mandate, and between the public and the private, is the concept of *de*, which ultimately determines the nature of the balance between the public and private dimensions. Heavenly moral virtue becomes a symbol vested with universal significance in the construction of state authority. Through the everyday interactions of ordinary people, morality becomes a classificatory tool distinguishing public virtue from private ethics, the legitimate from the illegitimate, and righteousness from corruption. This function of classifying the public and the private

through the medium of moral interactions is essentially an expression of the Mandate of Heaven and Heavenly moral virtue, integrated into state power and acting as a form of universalism (Heaven) in the mode of a particularistic faith (the Mandate). Through its mode of "universal particularism," Heavenly moral virtue transforms universal moral significance into an exceptional form of individual consciousness. It is an expression of universalist content through particularistic means.[16]

The dual nature of the Mandate of Heaven and Heavenly moral virtue is manifest in the realm of concrete mechanisms as a blurring of the boundaries between public and private in lived experience, in the ambiguous relationship between universal moral virtue and individual private morality, and in the alternation between the universality of Heavenly moral virtue and the privateness of the moral virtue that aligns with Heaven. This constitutes the sacred origins of the indistinctness of public and private in Chinese cultural beliefs. Heavenly moral virtue can act as a transformative mechanism that simultaneously produces public and private characteristics. It is at once public and private. Along with revolutions and the altering and receiving of the Mandate, its stability corresponds to the stability of state power. Along with the overturning and reconstruction of power structures, it re-emerges as the inversion of the moral relationship between the public and private.

For millennia, Heavenly moral virtue and the modes of practice enacted by its moral agents have shaped the moral and sacred principles set by the Chinese "moral person" (*daode ren* 道德人). Those who can embody Heavenly moral virtue are the practitioners of public morality, while those who fail to do so are private individuals who betray public morality. These sacred moral principles, structured around the profound tension between public and private morality, have had a lasting influence on the social consciousness of countless individuals over the past three thousand years, and they continue to exert a powerful yet elusive transformative power.

3 Public Morality: an Interpretive Method for Heavenly Moral Virtue

According to tradition, public morality originates from the Mandate of Heaven and Heavenly moral virtue. It was held that "Heaven [or "the sky"] does not cover partially," illustrating its public nature and determining the legitimate succession of monarchic authority. "The legitimacy of monarchic authority

16 See Li Xiangping, "Rujiao 'tianming' guan ji qi xinyang fangshi," 79–89.

was determined by Heaven,"[17] and the Chinese concept of the "public" thereby contains a strong element of the Heavenly.[18] The notion that "Heaven is the public" integrates the supernatural with state worship, thereby providing a foundation for the legitimacy of state public power and serving as the sacred model of public morality. The understanding of public morality by later generations, therefore, is a manifestation of Heavenly moral virtue.

The early kings combined political and religious power, sanctifying governance and politicizing sacred authority.[19] In traditional China, *gong* (public) was an honorific title of the ruler or referred to communal institutions and resources. The ancient character for *gong* indicated ceremonial spaces, such as a sacrificial square or the ruler's palatial courtyard, and a sacrificial procession. After the Warring States period, additional connotations of *gong* emerged, including the royal gates, the court, common land, and being open to the public. From this it came to mean equitable and just. Hence, *gong* is the opposite of "private," implying equitable distribution.

When the concept of the public was personified, the ruler and Son of Heaven became its embodiment, while the state and official power came to represent the public itself. As a result, the public nature of leadership itself became the moral principle that legitimizes the authority of those in power. The promotion of a monarchic system of moral governance implies that the ruler is both the executor and the embodiment of public will. Wherever the private opposed the public, it also opposed official authority, and the foundation for individual morality was thus suppressed. As a result, the controlling influence of state morality on private morality was both broad and profound, and the boundary between the legitimacy of public and private morality in society was difficult to delineate. Across the traditional parallel structure of family and state, the nationalist revolutions of recent eras, and contemporary national economic frameworks, a fully independent sphere of "society" is difficult to observe.[20] The "state" and "society" are not of the same form. Under

17 Goukou Xiongsan 溝口雄三 [Mizoguchi Yuzo], "Zhongguo sixiang shi zhong de gong yu si" 中國思想史中的公與私, in *Gong yu si de sixiang shi* 公與私的思想史, ed. Zuozuomu Yi 佐佐木毅 [Sasaki Takeshi] and Jin Taichang 金泰昌 [Kim Tea-Chang], trans. Liu Wenzhu 劉文柱 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2009), 41.

18 Ibid., 42.

19 Li Xiangping 李向平, "Wangquan yu shenquan: Zhoudai zhengzhi yu zongjiao yanjiu" 王權與神權—周代政治與宗教研究 (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 1991), 8.

20 Li Xiangping 李向平, "'Xinyang queshi,' haishi 'shehui quexi?': jianlun shehui zhili yu xinyang fangshi sirenhua de guanxi" "信仰缺失"，還是"社會缺席"？—兼論社會治理與信仰方式私人化的關係, *Huadong shifan daxue xuebao* (*zhexue shehui kexue ban*) 華東師範大學學報（哲學社會科學版）, no. 5 (2015): 107–16.

the control of traditional public morality, private morality lacks a legitimate mode of expression. Without a distinct sphere of "society" mediating between the individual and the state, society's internally generated moral relationship between the public and private is either replaced or dominated by political morality.

Thus, with regard to moral legitimacy and its evolution, the issue in traditional Chinese morality is not an underdevelopment of public morality but the absence of a "society" that mediates between the state and the individual. In the framework of the family-state structure and the transformation of filial piety into loyalty, the relationship between public and private morality resembles concentric circles, like the layered structure of an onion. It is not a differentiation of public and private carried out by distinct social institutions. In the process of self-cultivation, ordering one's family, governing the state, and bringing peace to all-under-Heaven, lies a distinction between personal identity and moral cultivation. This is determined by whether one can enter the political elite, transform the private into the public, and become an embodiment of public morality. The social transformations of recent eras have prompted intellectuals to reevaluate the relationship between public and private morality, calling attention to the shortcomings of emphasizing public morality, awakening the nation in an effort to collectively achieve national salvation.

Chen Duxiu's 陳獨秀 (1879–1942) assertion that "ethical awakening is the final awakening for our people,"[21] captures the essence of China's social transformation. In *Xinmin shuo* 新民說, Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929) defines public morality as "everyone treating their community with kindness," and private morality as "everyone striving for the perfection of their own character." Accordingly, patriotism is the highest form of public morality. If public morality is not established, the nation's fortune declines.[22] Thinkers advocating for political reform dismantled the old moral order with the help of state power and implemented a moral reconstruction;[23] this was the reconstruction of public morality.

Although Liang Qichao confined self-cultivation and ordering of the family to being merely the foundational virtues for governing the state and bringing

21 Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀, "Wuren zuihou zhi juewu" 吾人最後之覺悟, *Qingnian zazhi* 青年雜誌 1, no. 6 (1916): 6–9.

22 Liang Qichao 梁啟超, *Xinmin shuo* 新民說, in *Yinbingshi heji* 飲冰室合集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989), 6: 12.

23 See Li Zehou 李澤厚, "Makesi zhuyi zai Zhongguo" 馬克思主義在中國 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1988), 80–82.

peace to all-under-Heaven, yet he emphasized that "without private morality, one has no place to stand."[24] He rejected the idea that public morality was the ultimate conclusion of private morality or that it was the morality of the modern state, thereby emerging from the dilemma of the traditional Heavenly moral virtue framework in which public and private morality were indistinguishable. He identified the potential manifestation of the dual nature of the moral relationship in which public and private morality would become reversed.

Liang Qichao held that humanity possessed ten virtues, which were structurally opposed yet mutually generative in consciousness. In terms of the relationship between public and private morality, he affirmed the value of private morality, contending that self-interest was not inherently immoral. Without a concern for the self, individuals would abandon their rights and responsibilities and would have no means of self-sufficiency. With this he noted that he would sooner say Chinese people were lacking in private morality than in public morality.[25] Western political systems, this view held, were grounded in civil rights, which were reinforced by the striving of citizens for these rights. The so-called excessive self-interest of the Chinese people was, by contrast, not true self-interest. For Liang, public and private morality formed a structurally unified system in which they were opposed in form, but were mutually generative in spirit. Chinese people were found to be deficient in both public and private morality. A lack of private morality means that public morality is without its source of strength. The attempt to interpret Heavenly moral virtue by means of public morality led to the fundamental failure of subordinating private to public in Chinese culture. This failure stemmed from the fact that the manifestation and embodiment of Heavenly moral virtue depended on the private morality of specific individuals.

The ethical tradition of integrating public and private morality has persisted into the contemporary era, manifesting in a deficiency of social public morality. Essentially, this is an issue of the erosion of social subjectivity within the logic of a strong state acting upon a weak society. The government, as the agent of both state power and citizens' rights, increasingly bureaucratizes various aspects of daily life. In a society primarily structured around a market economy, the government does not need to regulate professional morality, as industry organizations have their own requirements for the workplace. Similarly, familial virtues should be ensured by cultural traditions rather than

24 Liang Qichao, *Xinmin shuo*, 12.

25 Liang Qichao 梁啟超, "Shizhong dexing xiangfan xiangcheng yi" 十種德性相反相成義, in *Yinbingshi heji* 飲冰室合集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989), 1: 42–51.

state mandates.[26] The misalignment between the legitimacy of the domains of political morality and social public morality can lead to severe consequences during periods of social transformation, such as the disintegration of collective identity among the populace, the atomization of private relationships, and the emergence of a moral vacuum.

4 Private Morality: a Sacred Tool of Governance

The Tang and Wu revolutions established a sacred moral structure and set of norms, primarily enacted through the moral character of sages and sovereigns. This gave rise to a moral pathway that integrated the Mandate of Heaven with moral character. This structure and its corresponding norms, originating from the Tang and Wu revolutions, are the sacred foundations of Chinese morality. Embedded within them is a mechanism for the inversion of public and private morality, shaping public and private moral practice at various levels. Within this framework, the public is regarded as sacred, while the private is denigrated as immoral.

The Mandate of Heaven becomes manifest differently in people of different moral character. This reflects the hierarchical nature both of the Mandate of Heaven and of moral character. The higher one's moral character, the closer one comes to the Mandate of Heaven, and the more pronounced one's public characteristics become.

As a result of this moral principle, the boundary between public and private morality in Chinese society is indistinct. The public and the private can interchange, depending on the person, time, and place. At times, the public can be leveraged for private gain, as in the phrase "availing of the public to aid the private" (*jiagong jisi* 假公濟私), while in other instances, private individuals may act purely in the public interest, expressed by the phrase "complete public-mindedness without private interests."

The relationship between the public and the private is integrated in Heavenly moral virtue. This is reflected in the underlying assumptions and transformations of Chinese ideals of moral practice. Heavenly moral virtue is not only the fundamental moral concern of Chinese people; it structures the inversion of the public and the private. In it, the orderliness and mutuality of their relationship are dissolved.

26 Chen Lai, "Zhongguo jindai yilai zhong gongde qing side de pianxiang yu liubi."

Traditional public morality has an egalitarian tendency, which suppresses the development of private morality. This results in fluctuations of public morality that mirror the rise and fall of state power. Public morality emphasizes a balance between human desires and the patterns of Heaven, but also entails the oppression of private interests. The inversion mechanism in the relationship between public and private ensures that even when public morality is dominant, individuals remain cognizant of private motives.

The inversion of the public and private relationship manifests in a dual nature of the "private" and "public." Given the absence of an intermediary between the public and private – particularly when officials act as moral intermediaries – there is a fluid transformation between the public and private domains. The logic governing the public sphere is almost indistinguishable from that of the private sphere; any deviation from the public good is seen as self-interest and condemned as such.

In this phenomenon of opposing and mutually penetrating public and private spheres, there is a tension between the public and the private. A moral paradox arises for the self, existing as it does simultaneously as a private and public entity.

According to the logic that links Heaven, the Mandate of Heaven, and the public, the private dimension of the self is ultimately embedded in the public. Although this contestation between public and private generates various forms of conflict, ultimately they complement each other.

Private morality is not synonymous with selfish private interests. It refers to an individual's moral character and integrity. It consists of the beliefs and principles that guide personal cultivation and private life.[27] In China, public and private morality mutually supplement and complement one another, sometimes co-existing in a single act. This is an illustration of the inversion of public and private morality and the mechanism that publicizes private morality – a method of governance in Chinese society. Private morality stems from the Mandate of Heaven and Heavenly moral virtue, possessing both universality and specificity. It embodies the highest public values and is realized in the moral action of individuals.

Private morality, as a tool for governance, is constrained by the value system of the family-state parallel structure. It not only includes moral practices like self-cultivation and ordering the family, but also involves individual autonomy.

27 Gong Changyu 龔長宇, *Daode shehuixue yinlun* 道德社會學引論 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2012), 193.

The legitimacy of actions stemming from individual private morality, however, was seemingly absent in traditional China.

Private property is the material foundation for individuals to enter the public realm. However, according to a famous passage from the *Book of Odes*, "Under the vast sky, there is no land that does not belong to the king,"[28] private property lacks legitimacy. Private morality has gradually come to be regarded as a symbol of selfishness. Only an "absence of the private" can be constitutive of the sanctity that constructs sovereign or public power. Different levels of power deploy different techniques for governing the private.

The private is both a tool for governance and a result of the sanctification of power. In China, the "private person" does not refer to the individual, but rather to the "private" that lacks individuality. The "public self" (*gongji* 公己) is the self that comprises relationships. Fei Xiaotong 費孝通 (1910–2005) and Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 (1893–1988) have distinct views on whether the Chinese are selfish, but both aligned with the view that there is a moral norm that dictates that the private lacks individuality. The individual is embedded in relationships and in the "other" of those relationships. In both family and state, individuals are subject to hierarchical moral norms.

Understanding the smallest unit of the "private" can start from the concept of the "self" (*ji* 己), that is, the individual self. However, the Chinese public is difficult to delineate, because what is not the "self" is considered "public." Even the self can be differentiated into the public self and the private self.[29] Confucian practices like overcoming the self (*keji* 克己) and watchfulness over the lone self (*shendu* 慎獨) are aimed at managing the five Confucian relationships, in which the hierarchical relationship between ruler and subject is equivalent to the relationship between the state and the individual, resulting in the transformation of the public and private into a hierarchical relationship. The relationship between public and private morality is thus almost equivalent to a hierarchical moral relationship, thereby leading to an imbalance in the equilibrium between public and private norms.

28 Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Shi sanjia yishu* 詩三家義集疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 739.

29 See Li Qi 李琪 and Luo Muyuan 羅牧原, "Gongsi huafen de lilun lüyou: Zhongguo tongxing hunyin zai sikao" 公私劃分的理論旅遊—中國同性婚姻再思考, *Shehuixue pinglun* 社會學評論, no. 3 (2016): 85–96.

5 The Heart of the Sage: Mediator of the Inversion of Public and Private

Traditionally in China, only the sage can achieve a balance between public and private morality. The sage is a unique moral agent whose authority transcends universal moral principles. This authority is derived from the Mandate of Heaven and Heavenly moral virtue. The actions of the sages are in accordance with the supposition that the Mandate of Heaven is in constant flux and only assists those with moral virtue.

According to Durkheim, "it is a dangerous illusion to imagine that morality is a personal artifact; and that consequently we have it completely and from the beginning under our control, that it is never anything but what we wish it to be."[30] In China, there is a complex relationship between moral agents and moral principles. The latter are personified and undefined. The mediation between the public and private is the core principle set by the identity and resources of the moral agent. Through the heart of the sage, the inversion of public and private morality can be realized. Public and private morality – as well as the boundary between them – become unimportant, as moral principles are transformed into a hierarchical system of governance that includes the Son of Heaven and the sage, and below them the noblemen, scholars, farmers, artisans, and merchants.

While the works of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) profoundly influenced the way Europe addressed the problem of social order as early as the 17th and 18th centuries, the issue of the "public sphere" in modern China emerged only after the Xinhai 辛亥 Revolution (1911), at which point the Mandate of Heaven and Heavenly moral virtue disappeared. During this period, politicians and intellectuals criticized the Chinese people for lacking public morality. They tended to approach the relationship between the individual and the state through their own political or intellectual perspectives, often adopting a logic of one side's sacrifice being another side's gain, or one-sidedly emphasizing either "eliminating the private and upholding the public" or "eliminating the public and upholding the private" as strategies for reconstructing national politics.

In China, the structure of the public and private is sacred, thus requiring that the heart of the sage acts as the moral principle by which interaction, mutual reinforcement, and even inversion between the two can be realized. The purely private is relegated to a realm outside morality and virtue. Despite the differences among human hearts and minds, all are expected to submit to

30 Émile Durkheim, *Moral Education*, 119.

a unified moral principle – the heart of the sage is the means by which particularity can be integrated into universality.

"The heart of Heaven and the heart of the sage are in fact one with the hearts of all-under-Heaven."[31] The sagely heart functions as the overarching structure of the sacred order in Chinese civilization. It shapes how individuals can transcend individuality to attain sagehood, linking the family and state with all-under-Heaven, and facilitating the descent of the sacred mode of Heavenly moral virtue. The tension in this sacred moral doctrine lies in how the sagely heart is used to overcome the private heart. This is essentially a governance technique by which state power regulates moral cultivation of the body and mind, thereby encouraging the formation of China's sacred structure of a "great unity" (*da yi tong* 大一統).

A defining characteristic of the sagely heart is its capacity to accommodate the tension between the public and the private. The sage has the capacity to adopt the Mandate of Heaven as a personal disposition and internalize Heavenly moral virtue. In doing so, the distinctions and the tensions between public and private become internalized in the heart of the sage and in worthy and enlightened virtue, and no longer reside in the domains of public and private or the boundary between them. The heart of the sage represents an ethics of identity that corresponds to an ethics of innate knowledge (*liangzhi* 良知). It is broadly encompassing but lacks a practical mechanism for integration into the daily lives of ordinary people, instead only acting normatively on the populace.

The morality of the private can be directly connected to public morality, but the crucial factor is that sages and great figures alone can connect the public and private. The private dimension of the common people and ordinary individuals is seen as deviant or improper. The dictum "The root of all-under-Heaven lies in the state; the root of the state lies in the family; the root of the family lies in the individual,"[32] establishes a pathway that links all-under-Heaven and the state with the practices of self-cultivation, ordering, governing, and bringing peace. This is a pathway open only to the morality of sages and great figures, and it is the most critical mediating variable between the public and private.

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31 Li Xiangping 李向平, "Zhonghua wenming de 'shengxin xinyang' jiegou: Huineng Chanzong yu Yangming Ruxue de shengxinguan bijiao" 中華文明的"聖心信仰"結構—慧能禪宗與陽明儒學的聖心觀比較, in *"Shaolinsi yu Chanzong zuting" yantao hui* "Chanzong zuting" *luntan lunwenji* "少林寺與禪宗祖庭"研討會《"禪宗祖庭"論壇論文集》(Dengfeng 登封, July 2019).

32 *Mengzi jizhu* 孟子集註, in *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集註, ed. Zhu Xi 朱熹 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 7.278.

The morality required for an individual to become a sage is known as individual morality or private morality, while the morality necessary for collective survival is referred to as mutually generative morality or public morality.[33] In China, the distinction between public and private is relative: when one stands within any circle of people and looks inward, one may regard it as the public.[34] The evaluation of publicness or privateness is inherently connected to one's status and identity. In the relationship between ruler and minister, the ruler and everything associated with the ruler pertains to the public, while the corresponding private realm is associated with corrupt or immoral qualities. If the ruler is ignorant and incapable, it will be difficult for ministers to protect his public image and authority. If ministers act with a private heart, the state will descend into chaos; if they align themselves with the public nature of the ruler, then all-under-Heaven will be brought into great order. This is entirely dependent on the good heart of the sage or the sovereign.

The heart of the sage can act as a mediator for the inversion of public and private. This is because the nature of the sage's heart is such that it can reach both the public nature of all-under-Heaven and observe the privateness of human nature. Taking the privateness that is the nature of the heart, and leveraging the sage's identity, the private gains legitimacy and becomes a moral resource of the public. The boundary between the public and private thus ceases to exist. The question of what it means for the "private" to be private becomes a matter of whether it can align with the principles of the public. The moral cultivation of the individual is embedded in this process, gaining a sanctity that transcends the social through the heart, words, and actions of the sage. Individuality, and even community, are thus transcended. The sage thereby becomes an object of reverence, gaining universal recognition, obedience, awe, emulation, and faith. The inversion of public and private morality is thus fully realized.

In traditional society, one person could represent all-under-Heaven and govern the people, attaining universal public recognition and moral adherence. The key to the governance of the state lay in the heart of the ruler. As Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) emphasized, a single mind can bring about the flourishing of a state or its demise, and this lies between the public and the private.[35] If

33 Zuozuomu Yi 佐佐木毅 [Sasaki Takeshi] and Jin Taichang 金泰昌 [Kim Tea-Chang], *Oumei de gong yu si* 歐美的公與私, trans. Lin Meimao 林美茂 and Xu Tao徐滔 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2009), 235.

34 Fei Xiaotong 費孝通, *Xiangtu Zhongguo* 鄉土中國, rev. ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2013), 28.

35 Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Lunyu jizhu* 論語集註 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1992), 128.

ministers and subjects remain loyal, their private desires can be led toward legitimate public benefit at the behest of the ruler, who will use this moral virtue to bring into accordance the desires of all-under-Heaven and integrate everything in his realm in a productive direction. The politics of the human heart and mind is thus established. The private interests of ministers and subjects can lend themselves toward positive contributions, and the private heart of the sovereign can also be converted into the highest good and the highest public sphere. This is the most profound aspect of the inversion mechanism of public and private morality.

From ancient to modern times, in the reflexive relationship that takes place within the heart between the great (public) self and the small (private) self, the equilibrium between public morality and private interest is highlighted by the inversion of pubic and private. In Confucian thought, the private self must submit to the public self, and the small self must serve the great self. The sage and the nobleman, in receiving and reforming the Mandate of Heaven, are endowed with sanctified moral character within the sacred cyclical structure of power. Hence, they become moral exemplars and objects of reverence for the common people.

The primary mechanism for the inversion of public and private morality lies in the stemming of all authority from Heaven. Only the Son of Heaven, or the sovereign, can embody the will of Heaven, which is "publicness." The succession of imperial power and the history of transitions between dynasties reflect the personification of "all-under-Heaven being for the public" (*tianxia weigong* 天下為公) and its integration with "all-under-Heaven being for the self" (*tianxia weiwo* 天下為我). In this structure, acting "for the public" is illuminated, while acting "for the private" is obscured. The sociological essence of this system is the parallel structure of family and state expressed through public authority. Although emperors throughout history ostensibly pursued "all-under-Heaven for the public" as a moral ideal and sacred symbol, the outcome was often "all-under-Heaven for the private."[36] The internal logic that connects Heaven and the sanctification of ancestors mirrors that which governs the sanctification of public authority. For the first emperor of a dynasty, once he has laid claim to all-under-Heaven, his own person becomes "Heaven." For subsequent emperors, however, the character for "Heaven" requires the addition of the character for "ancestor" (*zu* 祖). This reinforces the sacred family-state parallel structure that exists within the kinship genealogical structure. This is what is known as all-under-Heaven. The emperor legitimizes his

36 See Ge Jianxiong 葛劍雄, "'Tianxia wei gong' heyi cheng le 'tianxia wei wo'" "天下為公" 何以成了 "天下為我", *Tongzhou gongjin* 同舟共進, no. 9 (2007): 46.

own sanctity by means of the Heavenly ancestor's sanctity, and, through the sage's heart, actualizes the inversion of public and private morality.

The sacred logic of the family-state parallel structure and the unity of public and private constitutes a fundamental moral principle of the Chinese people. It not only grounds the moral ideal of being "for the public" in the practice of settling oneself and establishing one's fate, it also channels the sage's private dimension into the state-sanctioned system of moral education that extends to all-under-Heaven, based on the principle that the sage instructs through the sacred way.

6 Lack of Private Morality as the Downfall of Public Morality

Chinese people have long established a connection between wealth and morality. This has led to concepts of "being inhumane in becoming wealthy" and "being inhumane in becoming poor." However, this kind of thinking is flawed because wealth itself is neither inherently good nor evil. The pursuit of wealth is a driving force for social progress. The issue lies not in wealth, but in the people who pursue it.[37]

Research shows that in 1978, public wealth accounted for 70% of China's wealth and private wealth accounted for 30%. However, by 2015 these proportions had reversed, with public wealth standing at 30% and private wealth 70%, thus indicating that China had become a mixed economy.[38] However, the mindset of "looking down on people's poverty and resenting people's wealth" and the moralization of wealth and poverty have caused private wealth to lack legitimacy. In China, the relationship between the public and the private is not simply a relationship of state and society, or collective and individual. Rather, it is determined by how actors apply moral principles to self-assign public and private characteristics.

Public and private morality are not inherently opposed, but two sides of the coin that is morality. They can give rise to, and transform into, one another. However, the question remains of how to establish the relationship between public and private morality and the boundary between them. Only when

37 Tang Haiyan 唐海燕, "Caifu zhuiqiu zhengdangxing de fazhan lunli yuanze tanxi" 財富追求正當性的發展倫理原則探析, *Lunlixue yanjiu* 倫理學研究, no. 2 (2011): 125–28.

38 Tuomasi Pikaidi 托馬斯・皮凱蒂 [Thomas Piketty] et al., "Zhongguo ziben jilei, siyou caichan yu bu pingdeng de zengzhang: 1978–2015" 中國資本累積、私有財產與不平等的增長：1978–2015, *Caijing zhiku* 財經智庫, no. 3 (2019): 5–46.

public and private morality are each assigned their proper station can people lead meaningful and orderly lives.

Concepts like "complete public-mindedness without private interests" and "establishing the public and eliminating the private" can easily be exploited by certain individuals in positions of power or by special interest groups if the boundaries between public and private are blurred. In the pursuit of private gain through the deprivation of others, there arises a transgression of public-mindedness.[39] When private morality is underdeveloped, the implementation of public morality relies only on authority, leading to the loss of individual autonomy. This has resulted in a characteristically Chinese private morality that does not advocate a love of reputation, rights, or freedom, but instead fosters a slave-like morality.[40] Today, when private morality is lacking, it is difficult to establish public morality.

A review of ancient and modern literature reveals that the prototype of China's moral principle of indistinguishable public and private spheres stems from the sanctity of the Mandate of Heaven and Heavenly moral virtue. The ruler uses the private to constrain the private, establishes public authority, and transforms the Mandate of Heaven and Heavenly moral virtue into techniques for governance in the family-state model. A moral hierarchy of governance is thus created. A lack of private morality, and its subordination, leads to a failure to establish public morality.

Private morality does not inherently pose a threat to public morality. However, without a clear and stable private domain, private morality becomes an obstacle to public morality. Political and social public morality each have their specific contexts; and private morality regulates itself in deference to public morality, protecting individual inner values and autonomy.

The difference between individual and collective morality seems at first to be a difference between public and private morality. In fact, public and private morality becoming manifest in practice as a moral hierarchy stems from the hierarchical structure of Chinese society, divided into moral ranks including the Son of Heaven, the sage, the nobleman, scholars, farmers, artisans, and

39 Ge Quan 葛荃 and Zhang Changhong 張長虹, "'Gongsiguan' san jingjie xilun" "公私觀" 三境界析論, in *Gongsi guannian yu Zhongguo shehui* 公私觀念與中國社會, ed. Liu Zehua 劉澤華 and Zhang Rongming 張榮明 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2003), 350.

40 According to Ma Junwu 馬君武, "So-called 'private virtue' in China is more than sufficient for cultivating obedient and cautious slaves, but insufficient for nurturing energetic and enterprising citizens." See Ma Junwu 馬君武, "Lun gongde" 論公德, in *Ma Junwu wenxuan* 馬君武文選, ed. Zeng Degui 曾德硅 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2000), 189.

merchants. Overlooking the distinction between public and private leads to rules of moral uniformity.

The traditional principle of prioritizing the public and suppressing the private originates from a despotism that holds power above all else and relinquishes individual rights. Across the state and civil society, the blurring of the boundaries between the public and private is essentially a conflict between the moral principles of different entities and hierarchies of power. The government incorporates civil society into the scope of the controlling public morality of the state, blurring the lines between public and private. Speech and actions that do not align with the identity politics are viewed as illegitimate private acts that corrupt the moral order.

The rate of development of public morality is an important measure of the civilization of a nation and the moral cultivation of its citizens. Traditional standards for assessing public morality are no longer applicable in modern social structures. These standards must be comprehensively rebuilt based on the relationship between public and private morality and their boundaries. Contemporary society must redefine the boundaries between public and private morality to ensure that public and private morality are each assigned their proper station. The lack of a foundation for private morality in modern moral principles makes it difficult for public moral actions to be expressed through the agency of moral actors.

Defining private morality, private rights, and selfishness, and distinguishing between them, are prerequisites for determining whether the moral principles of contemporary Chinese society can constitute a universal consensus of value. It is also essential for correctly understanding the complex interrelations between public and private morality. Introducing the concept of "beneficial interest" can dissolve the binary opposition between public and private morality, distinguish between selfishness and self-interest, and affirm the dual legitimacy of public and private interests. This allows us to move beyond the politicization of the moral and the moralization of the political. New moral principles are required that recognize the legitimacy of private self-interest. As Mencius said, "If one is to practice humane governance, it must begin with the demarcation of the fields."[41] One must take legitimate self-interest as essential for public societal benefit.

There is an urgent need for the establishment and refinement of private rights. Legitimate private interests must be protected and the sanctity of public interests ensured. Private interests must also be prevented from encroaching

41 Zhu Xi, *Mengzi jizhu*, 256.

on public interests and from excluding public morality in favor of self-interest. Moral principles must achieve a rational balance between public and private interests and cultivate an open and healthy social mindset. When private rights are legitimately protected and the power that does this does not infringe upon public interests, nor vice versa, only then can private morality be properly established, in a manner that complements public morality and resists selfish interests and egoism.

Moral principles are the deep structure of public and private morality. While there are distinctions between public and private, and between universality and specificity, morality is composed of countless specific norms, and it is these that can guide human behavior in various contexts.[42] The capacity of the social realm to distinguish between public and private morality and identify their boundaries is the result of modern civilized society's division of labor and differentiated lifestyles. In modern civilized society, the private domain is organized around the individual. In this context, "private morality" refers to individual moral cultivation. A complete process of moral cultivation includes moral understanding, emotions, intentions, and behavior.[43] It is mutually supportive and complementary to private rights.[44]

The reconstruction of morality in modern society should not rely on moralistic politics as the sole legitimate source. In establishing social order, fairness and justice should not be subject to an egalitarian moralism. In the mindset of public order and moral practice, achieving a situation where law prevails in the private and order in the public requires the collective effort of moral actors – state, society, family, and individuals. Through this, the justice and equality of a modern civilization can become the sole intermediary for the transformation of public and private morality among the Chinese people.

Translated by Rory O'Neill

42 Émile Durkheim, *Moral Education*, 26–27.

43 Gong Changyu, *Daode shehuixue yinlun*, 142.

44 Jiang Ping 江平 once said: "The flourishing of private rights is essential for China's true rejuvenation. Or rather, China's rejuvenation depends on private rights truly taking root in people's minds. However, for private rights to take root in China, many difficulties and obstacles must be overcome. … The greater challenge China faces is still the liberation of private rights from public power and the protection of private rights through public power." See Jiang Anjie 蔣安傑, "Changle wuji lao fuding: zhufu Jiang Ping jiaoshou 80 sui shengri" 長樂無極老復丁—祝福江平教授80歲生日, *Fazhi zixun* 法制資訊, no. 12 (2009): 34–39.