

Recent Developments of Traditional yi/li Debate within Public Discourse of the PRC

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Introduction. Ever since Deng Xiaoping stated that the Reform and Opening up policy does not condemn people's striving for material wellbeing, the traditional dispute on "righteousness" (yi) versus "profit" (li) or "debate about righteousness and profit" (yi li zhi bian 义利之辩) has picked up momentum in Chinese society. The modern development of the debate is an example of how the Chinese traditional concepts are updated and reinterpreted according to actual domestic political tasks.

Aim, Material and Methods. The aim of the study was to examine the texts of the PRC politicians, academics and journalists in order to find out the official position towards the dichotomy of "profit" (li) and "righteousness" (yi) within contemporary Chinese political discourse. Political discourse analysis has been chosen as the theoretical framework of the research. The research relies on three distinct types of material: a) the texts selected from the official CPC list of "the most important speeches by [the General Secretary of the CPC] Xi Jinping"; b) analytical publications; c) the Chinese classics.

Results. Traditionally, to illustrate the Confucian position on the supremacy of "righteousness" (yi), the following "Lunyu" quote is being put forward as proof: "The man of virtue is conversant with "righteousness". The small man is conversant with "profit"." Also Mencius quote "Let your Majesty also talk about "benevolence" and "righteousness", and these shall be the only topic. Why must you talk about "profit"?" has historically been considered as the ultimate illustration of the anti-"profit" position of Confucianists. The main question addressed in the modern debate is whether Confucian thought contains a contradiction between "righteousness" and "profit", "profit" being the goal of the "small man", the derogatory opposite of the "man of virtue", as it has been interpreted especially during the Song dynasty and on, or rather does it allow for both concepts to coexist, or, the third option, "profit" is quality preferred over the "righteousness".

Rather surprisingly, opposite to the traditional approach, in Chinese society and even in academic circles in today's China, it is being emphasised that, according to the "Lunyu", the pursuit of "profit" (li), it is natural and benevolent to want better living conditions for oneself, and it can be pursued as long as it does not entail any unethical behavior. In other words, wanting material gain is natural and therefore positive, only under circumstances of the gain risking towards being unethical does the dichotomy between "profit" (li) and "righteousness" (yi) arise and the choice has to be made in favor of "righteousness" (yi).

Conclusions.

1. Although no explicit instructions on the prioritising "righteousness" (yi) or "profit" (li) have been found during the preliminary research, it is, however, clear that in the political communication of the PRC the concept "profit" (li) itself does not carry any negative connotations; textual analysis suggests that it is being used in a neutral-towards-positive context.
2. In the most important texts of Xi Jinping the concept "profit" (li) is closely related to the political course of socialism with Chinese characteristics.
3. Links to the authority of Confucius and Mencius are provided by PRC scholars. They theoretically substantiate the fact that Confucius and his follower Mencius allegedly defended the concept of "profit", but admitted that sometimes "profit" (li) has to be adjusted with the help of ethics, i.e., "righteousness" (yi).

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