

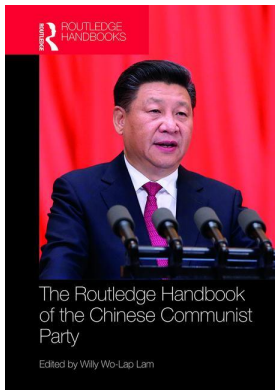
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### **The CCP's exploitation of Confucianism and Legalism**

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# 3

## THE CCP'S EXPLOITATION OF CONFUCIANISM AND LEGALISM

*Delia Lin*

### Introduction

Early Chinese Communist Party (CCP) founders once deemed traditional political philosophies such as Confucianism and Legalism as inappropriate for building a modern, democratic China. Under Mao Zedong, Confucianism was first extolled and then it gradually became an object of condemnation to be purged from society. Since the 1980s Confucian studies and ceremonies began to revive, and today's CCP has taken one step further to seek to implant Confucianism into its official ideology, Marxism. How and why are traditional philosophies such as Confucianism and Legalism playing an unprecedentedly significant role in shaping the ideological landscape of China today? This chapter analyses from a political philosophical perspective the need and tactics of the CCP's exploitation of Confucianism and Legalism. It argues that in Mao's era traditional political philosophies were used as ammunition in the ideological battlefield, and that this pattern is being repeated by President Xi Jinping today. Under the Xi regime, Confucianism and Legalism have become particularly important for two reasons. First, these traditional philosophies are capable of offering a shared fund of political ideas and principles that could justify not only highly centralized authoritarian rule but also Xi's dual rhetoric of "rule by virtue" and "governing the nation in accordance with law." Second, by tapping into these cultural and philosophical roots, the CCP is not only able to legitimize its leadership and governing principles but also claim "cultural self-confidence" in formulating ideologies that are separate from the kind of political liberalism that has dominated Western society. The revival of Confucianism under Xi therefore should be seen as a top-down, conscious and purposeful process of Sinicizing Marxism so as to buttress the party's cultural and ideological legitimacy.

### Confucius: Saint or Satan?

The relationship between the CCP and Confucius has been a complex one. Confucian studies (*ruxue* 儒学) had been the state dogma for over two millennia since the reign of Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty (156 BC–87 BC), hence the central role Confucianism plays in Chinese culture and politics. It is highly likely that as a person of wisdom and discipline, Confucius himself was already proclaimed "saint" by people of his time (Zhou 2010). Han Fei Zi, founder of Legalist political philosophy, who was born around 270 years later than Confucius, referred to Confucius

as a “Saint” (Han Fei Zi, Chapter 49). The “sainthood” of Confucius and his ideas had continued throughout the dynasties, but for the first time was challenged by activists and scholars through the early Republican Era including the initial founders of the CCP. *New Youth*, the magazine established in 1915 by Chen Duxiu, an early CCP leader, became a prime platform where traditional ideas especially Confucianism were critiqued. In 1916 Chen Duxiu published his well-known article “Our Last Awareness” in which he argued that Confucian ethics based on three cardinal ethos (*san gang* 三綱) was geared toward creating a hierarchical system and that it was incompatible with the principles of freedom, equality and independence required for a constitutional republic (Chen 1916). The same issue of *New Youth* published the first half of the two-part “Critique of Confucius” by Yi Baisha, arguably the very first article in modern China devoted to a critique of Confucianism. In the article Yi (1916) argues that while Confucius has been exploited as a puppet by politicians and emperors over dynasties, such exploitation can be attributed to four inherent weaknesses within Confucianism itself. First, the Confucian reverence for those in power creates political dictatorship that fails to pose limits on how power is exercised. Second, Confucian teaching easily leads to dictatorship of ideas as questioning the status quo is not permitted. Third, unlike Mo Zi or Han Fei Zi, Confucius did not have consistent moral or philosophical principles. Confucian teaching, much of which emphasized the suitability to the current situation (*shi* 時), was saturated with contradictory ideas and beliefs. That is why Confucianism can be used and reinterpreted to suit various purposes. Fourth, the Confucian focus on nurturing officials who are capable and loyal servants of the emperor while neglecting the concerns and aspirations of ordinary folks makes people despise the poor and lower classes. These early revolutionaries were well versed in the Confucian canon. Their negative appraisal of Confucianism should be seen from two perspectives. One is that in their quest to build a new, democratic, constitutional republic of China they saw the limitations of Confucianism regarding the cultivation of freedom, equality and independence, which they believed to be prerequisites for a modern republic. They faulted Confucianism for its advocacy of obedience and hierarchy as well as its tendency to nurture political and intellectual dictatorship. Second, the critique was necessary to resist the revival of monarchy promoted by warlord Yuan Shikai (1859–1916) and conservative thinker Kang Youwei (1858–1927), who had used Confucianism as an ideological rationale for reviving the monarchy after Dr. Sun Yat-sen’s 1911 Republican Revolution.

It can be argued that early critiques of Confucianism by revolutionaries who had fallen under the sway of Western ideas about democracy, civil liberties and science were motivated by an active, genuine dialogue with their own cultural and philosophical heritage. These unorthodox reassessments were generally balanced and analytical; they also included acknowledgment of the merits of Confucianism and its contribution to Chinese culture and history.

Mao Zedong, however, seemed to have gone down a different trajectory of relationship with Confucius and Confucianism. He is known to be an ardent reader of Chinese classics especially Confucianism and yet his readings in Marxist classics were not very extensive (Holubnychy 1964; Xing 2011). Holubnychy (1964) has made a study of references and quotations in all four volumes of Mao’s published works and the resulting approximate classification shows that the top three sources of references come from Stalin (24 percent), Confucian and Neo-Confucian writings (22 percent) and Lenin (18 percent). References from Marx and Engels are the least, only 4 percent. Young Mao Zedong worshipped Confucius. In his article published in *New Youth* on the importance of sports and physical education, Mao (1917) placed Confucius in parallel with Śākyamuni, founder of Buddhism, and Jesus Christ, and acclaimed them “saints” and “great thinkers.” As Mao accepted Marxism and communism as his dominant ideology, his vision was to create a Chinese version of Marxism that was deeply rooted in age-old Confucian

ideas. In his speech at the Sixth Plenary Session of the Sixth Central Committee of the CCP in 1938, the conference that established Mao's unrivalled preeminence within the leadership, Mao stated that the CCP members must study China's "historical heritage" and "preserve the precious legacy from Confucius to San Yat-sen" (Mao 1938) in order to adapt Marxism and Leninism to the specific conditions of China. Mao was also a vehement opponent of "liberalism" (*ziyou zhuyi* 自由主义), claiming it was originated from the selfishness of the petite bourgeoisie who placed their personal interest first (Mao 1937). In his article "Against liberalism" (1937) Mao calls on CCP members to place revolutionary goals as their life's first priority and to subsume their personal interests and aspirations under the demands of the revolution. As I shall discuss later, this belittling of self-interest and glorification of the public interest echo both Confucian and Legalist theories.

Mao's positive attitudes toward Confucius and Confucianism, however, undertook an about-turn in his ideological construction after the People's Republic was founded. In his praise for socialist communes established in Confucius' hometown Qufu, Mao (1955) made a point that socialism is much more superior to the teaching of Confucius who neglected agricultural productivity. He advised those who intended to visit the Confucian temples in Qufu to visit the Qufu communes instead. Then prior to the launch of the Cultural Revolution, Mao had classified traditional political philosophers into opposing ideological camps. He was fond of Emperor Qin and his Legalist advisors whereas Confucianism represented by Confucius and Mencius was placed in the enemy's camp. "Confucius and Mencius were idealism (*weixin zhuyi* 唯心主义)," said Mao to then president of the democratic republic of Vietnam Hồ Chí Minh on his visit to China on June 13, 1965 (Xu 1995: 171). "Xun Zi was materialism (*weihu zhuyi* 唯物主义) and was the left wing of Confucianism. Confucius represented slave owners and aristocrats while Xun Zi represented the landlord class," Mao added. Xun Zi was the teacher of the two Legalist founders, Li Si and Han Fei Zi. Under Chinese socialism, materialism was and still is considered as absolute truth whereas idealism is fallacious and anti-revolutionary. Through this statement, therefore, not only was Confucius defined as a philosophical bugbear but also ideologically dangerous owing to the fact that the Sage was deemed a right-wing defender of the interests of aristocrats and slave owners, the worst enemies of the people.

Based on this ideological categorization of Confucius in the 1960s, the "Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius" campaign (*pilin pikong yundong* 批林批孔运动) from 1973 to 1976, initiated by Mao and his wife Jiang Qing, came as little surprise. In her analysis of this political and ideological campaign, Xing Beinan (2016) has revealed an interesting detail of why Lin Biao and Confucius became objects of condemnation together. Unable to find evidence through Lin Biao's history that would prove that he had long held anti-party beliefs, the CCP used handwritten notes containing quotes from Confucius and Mencius found in Lin Biao's home as important proof of the ideological roots of Lin Biao's alleged anti-party actions. In Mao's era, be it a friend or enemy, Confucianism had been used as ammunition in the ideological battlefield.

### The revival of Confucianism and Chinese classics in post-Mao China

History seems to be uncannily repeating itself. Mao's early ambition of localizing Marxism through injecting elements of Chinese classics into the Western creed is being realized at full throttle under the party and government led by President Xi Jinping. Once again Confucianism is used to do battle with the Western ideology of liberalism.

It must be noted that the revival of Confucianism under the current government is not a new, sudden phenomenon. Confucius and Confucianism have been enjoying increasing

government-endorsed acknowledgment in the cultural, educational and political arenas in the Post-Mao era. Annual activities commemorating Confucius' birth have been held since 1984 and were attended by government officials with ever more seniority (Yuan 2014). In 1989, Wu Xueqian, then member of the CCP Politburo, attended the 2540th anniversary of Confucius' birth. Between 1995 and 2009, the commemorating openings were attended twice by Li Ruihuan and Jia Qinglin, the 6th and 7th Chairmen of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. Confucius has been presented to the outside world as a cultural symbol of China. Starting in 2004, over 500 Confucius Institutes have been built across the world to promote Chinese language and culture, admittedly a means of delivering Chinese soft power (Xinhua Wang 2016). Despite the increasing concerns in Western countries over academic freedom due to the establishment of Confucius Institutes at education institutions (see, for example, Cohen 2016), the Hanban (the abbreviated Chinese word for the Office of Chinese Language Council International, which oversees all Confucius Institutes) has the ambition to establish 1,000 Confucius Institutes outside of China by 2020 (Xinhua Wang 2016). In 2004, then President Hu Jintao launched the "Harmonious Society" national development strategy. Couched in Confucian language, the concept and strategies of the "Harmonious Society" represented a more serious move toward a Confucianist approach to politics and governance.

Accompanied with the official launching of the "Harmonious Society" discourse was the government-backed "Chinese classics fever" (*guoxue re* 国学热), that is, a fervor for studying classical Chinese books such as the *Analects of Confucius*. Since January 10, 2005, *Guangming Ribao*, or *Guangming Daily*, one of the key national newspapers, has added a new page called *guoxue ban* (Chinese classics page) specially devoted to articles on traditional learning.

Confucian revival reached new heights after Xi Jinping's speech at an international conference commemorating the 2565th anniversary of Confucius' birth on September 24, 2014. It marked the first time that a Chinese president formally attended celebrations marking the birth of Confucius. In the same year the CCP publicly ordered its officials nationwide to attend lectures on Confucius and other classical Chinese thinkers (Page 2015). Xi himself has been such an ardent user of classics quotes that in 2015, *People's Daily* Press compiled a volume containing a collection of 274 classics quotes used by the president taken from 70 of his speeches since 2012 (*People's Daily* Editorial Department 2015). *People's Daily* reports that of the nearly 300 quotes by President Xi, Confucianism is the most quoted philosophy, followed by Legalism (*People's Daily* 2015).

A search on the number of articles on *People's Daily* from 2000 to 2015 containing the keyword *nijia* (Confucianism, the Confucian School), *nuxue* (Confucianism, Confucian studies) or *guoxue* (Chinese classics), shows that the use of the three keywords has been increasing over time, but surged in 2004 and 2014, especially 2014 (see Figure 3.1). This shows that 2004 and 2014, especially 2014, marked a dramatic increase in the promotion of Confucianism and the learning of Chinese classics.

Confucianism is increasingly becoming central among the learning of Chinese classics endorsed by the CCP. A further search on the Chinese classics page of *Guangming Daily* from 2013 to 2016 shows that the percentage of articles on Confucianism is on the rise annually, reaching 54 percent in the second half of 2015 and 51 percent in the first half of 2016 (see Figure 3.2).

Two significant and far-reaching official projects to promote Confucianism and Chinese classics learning were accomplished in 2016. The first was the National Chinese Classics Centre, one of the three major cultural projects under the 12th Five-Year Plan (2011–2015). The Centre was established at the Beijing Olympic Park on August 30, 2016, with a total building area of 81,362 square metres and a height of 68 metres (*Xunjie Jiaoyu* 2016). The second was that the Ministry of Education launched after seven years of preparation a series of textbooks for

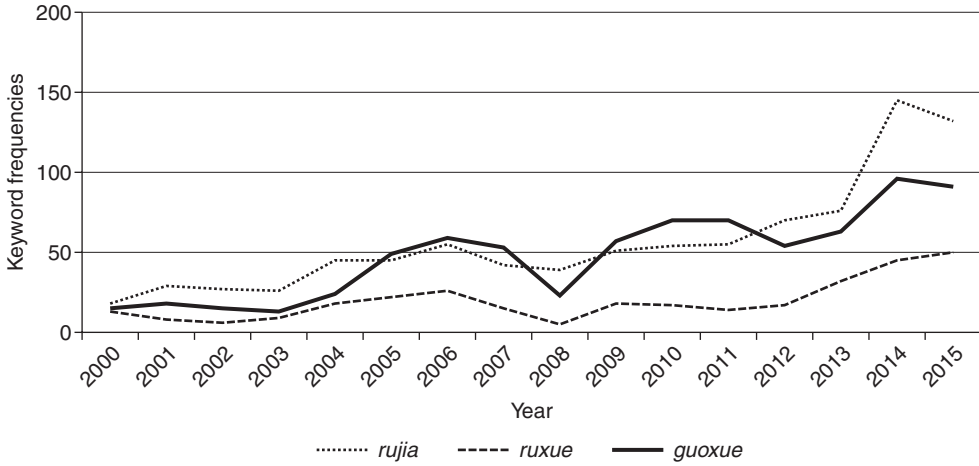


Figure 3.1 The number of articles containing *rujia*, *ruxue* or *guoxue* as the keyword in *People's Daily* (2000–2015).

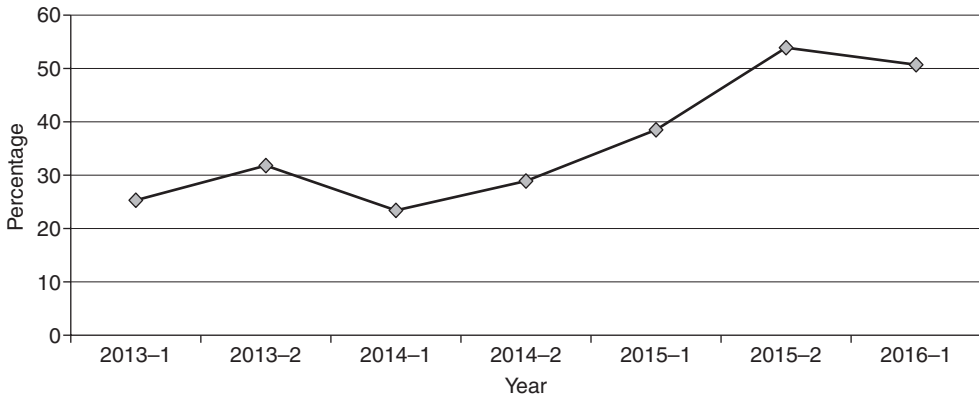


Figure 3.2 The percentage of articles on Confucianism on the Chinese classics page in *Guangming Daily* (2013–2016).

teaching Chinese traditions. Originally a project under the 11th Five-Year Plan (2006–2010), this set of textbooks are to be used from kindergarten through high school aiming at cultivating “perfect character” (*wanmei renge* 完美人格) among young Chinese (*Xunjie Jiaoyu* 2016). Canonical Confucian texts comprise the majority of the book list.

How to interpret this wholesale and unprecedented return to cultural roots under President Xi? Guo Yingjie (2016) has offered an illuminating interpretation from the perspective of nationalism. Guo postulates that Chinese nationalism can be split into cultural nationalism and political nationalism. Whereas cultural nationalism is aimed at maintaining cultural autonomy, unity and identity by defending a distinctive and historically rooted way of life, political nationalism seeks to reconstruct political authority of the state by placing China’s cultural heritage within a new culture that is congenial to state building. Guo argues that from the early twentieth century to the late 1980s these two types of nationalism contended with one another with the

former being dominated by the latter. This, however, has changed under President Xi. What we are witnessing is an attempt by the authorities to reanchor political norms and institutions on cultural roots – and to derive sustenance and legitimacy from them. The CCP is not only justifying China’s political system, values and development model on the basis of “national conditions”; it is also doing so on the back of age-old Chinese traditions.

While agreeing with Guo Yingjie’s observation of the CCP putting together a potent cultural underpinning for its political superstructure, I argue that this phenomenon should be understood as an attempt by the Xi-led party to project a novel ideological universe of discourse that can rival Western political liberalism. Before I elaborate on this point, I would like to outline, from a political-philosophical perspective, how and why Confucianism and Legalism are capable of offering a shared fund of political ideas and principles congenial to a highly centralized regime – as well as Xi’s dual rhetoric of “rule by virtue” and “governing the nation in accordance with law.”

### What can Confucianism and Legalism offer?

Confucius has a dream. He calls it *da tong* (大同), literally meaning the Grand Unity. It is also known as “One World” in English. It is a vision of global unification oriented to civic equality and self-government. For Confucius, it is the kind of governance that is guided by the *Grand Path* (*da dao* 大道), the way of Heaven, that he believes is the bequest of the ancient god-kings. *Da tong*, for Confucius, is a world of ultimate harmony, peace, happiness and equality, but the world Confucius actually faced then was one that was sinking into endless wars and violence.

The Confucian approach to realizing the utopian vision of *da tong* can be best summarized by what political philosopher Yang Yang (1995) first called in the early 1990s: integration of politics and religion/education (*zhengjiao heyi* 政教合一). *Zhengjiao heyi* is the Chinese term used to refer to the political system in Europe prior to separation between church and state. While admitting that Confucianism may not be a religion per se, Yang uses the *zhengjiao heyi* concept to argue that the moral, ethical, sociological and spiritual space that Confucian political philosophy occupies has elevated it to the realm of a religion, so much so that those in political power assume the kind of absolute moral authority that is typically exercised by religious leaders. Yang Yang’s thesis of *zhengjiao heyi* has been widely used by scholars in China to describe Confucianist political theory.

The Confucian paradigm of *zhengjiao heyi* is consistent with the Confucian definition of human nature as a summation of virtuous traits bestowed by Heaven. The Confucian thesis of human nature being good, however, does not lead to a confidence in the benignity of character attributes bequeathed by the “state of nature.” On the contrary, Confucianism insists on the elimination of “animal instincts” within human nature. Confucius and his disciples teach that progress for humanity is only possible through abandoning the animal essence of the human make-up – and to embark on a ceaseless cultivation, refinement and transformation of the self from inside out so as to realize the maximum moral potentials of human nature. It is therefore the primary political responsibility of virtuous emperors to guide their subjects to exercise *li* (礼 decorum and ritual propriety) so as to nurture a perfect moral character. The Confucian utopian vision places perfect morality and the practice of decorum and ritual propriety (*li*) on the same metaphysical level as Heaven and the Way (*dao*). Any transgression of the prescribed decorum and ritual propriety will not be tolerated and a person who does so will be judged and treated as a “sub-human.”

The ruler, who is construed as internally a saint, naturally becomes the nation’s moral teacher under the so-called *junshi heyi* (君师合一) principle. The Confucian ethos of internally a saint



and outwardly a king (*neisheng waiwang* 内圣外王) creates a model of authority recognition: it establishes the Chinese political-cultural norm whereby a regime's mandate to rule relies on its moral authority. In other words, political legitimacy is established through establishing moral authority. Pan-moralism (*fan daodehua* 泛道德化), that is, a tendency to justify political agendas through a moral purpose, and pan-politicization (*fan zhengzhihua* 泛政治化), that is, a tendency to treat moral choices, however trivial or personal, as a political issue, are the twin processes within a state governed by Confucian principles. The dual pan-moralism and pan-politicization processes underpin a public culture marked by suspicion and intolerance of doctrines other than state orthodoxy, which must be embraced by the masses.

Legalism, on the other hand, holds that human actions are driven by self-interest and this cannot be changed by education and other remedial measures. A sovereign, therefore, should not lead through moral aspirations but through balancing subjects' and the ruler's interests using standardized rules that equally apply to everyone. The legalist founder Han Fei Zi has no trust in "smart" government officials who would always use their resources to satisfy their personal and family's interests before serving the public interest. Therefore he calls for absolute power and authority to be bestowed on the ruler, so that he is equipped to tackle fraud and deception of canny officials who appear to be prudent (*zhi* 智) (see Han Fei Zi, Chapter 47). Han repudiates the kind of pedagogy and rites Confucius deemed necessary to maintain personal relationships or to serve family interests; instead, he advocates the concept of *gongyi* (公义), which places the ruler's and the nation's public interest over different types of personal interest (Han Fei Zi, Chapter 19).

As political philosophies, Confucianism and Legalism both center on the problem of order but they propose very different architectures for maintaining order. The former relies on orderly social relationships enforced by doctrines of moral codes and modes of behavior (*li*) to be affirmed by the masses who are led by supposedly morally superior leaders in the hierarchy (i.e., the king, the magistrate, the father, the husband, the teacher and the older brother). The latter, however, is skeptical of any form of self-claimed altruism or morality and instead advocates uniformity of law (*fa* 法) enforcement. Law and society in imperial China was characterized by what Tung-Tsu Ch'ü (2011) aptly terms the Confucianization of law, defined by Bodde and Morris (1967: 29) as "the incorporation of the spirit and sometimes of the actual provisions of Confucian *li* into the legal codes."

I have argued that the political theory behind President Xi's governing strategy of "governing the country according to law" (*yifa zhiguo* 依法治国) can be coined "Confucianized Legalism" (Lin in press), that is, incorporation of the spirit and sometimes of the actual provisions of prescribed moral rules into law enforcement. At the Fourth Plenum of the Eighteenth CCP Central Committee, party authorities for the first time made "governing the country according to law" (*yifa zhiguo*) the leitmotif at a plenary session. The Fourth Plenum Decision – CCP Central Committee Decision Regarding Some Major Questions in Comprehensively Promoting Governance According to the Law – marked a new CCP governing strategy of relying on law enforcement to maintain order and stability, coupled with absolute authority and leadership of the party. As Trevaskes (2016) rightly observes, President Xi's "governing the country according to law" is not a new idea of rule of law rather a greater accentuation of the dialectical unity of party leadership and the rule of law. The *Decision* declares that the party's leadership is the most essential characteristic of and the most fundamental prerequisite for socialist rule of law. The narrative is that only if the party leads every aspect of governance through law-making, law reform and law enforcement can the people become the masters of the nation and can social order be maintained. This would have been of little surprise to Han Fei Zi, who advocates the organic synthesis of tough laws and absolute power of the ruler so as to minimize obstruction from local officials who are prone to corruption.



The dual emphasis on moral influence expressed in the *Decision* shows a strong Confucian orientation. The *Decision* states that rule of law and rule by virtue (*yide zhiguo* 以德治国) must be integrated with one another and that dual emphasis must be placed on the normative role of law and the educational function of morality. Morality includes “socialist core values, Chinese traditional virtues and morals, social morals, professional ethics, family virtues and morals, and personal character” (Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu quanmian tuijin yifazhiguo ruogan zhongda wenti de jue ding 2014). The *Decision* explains the dialectical relationship between rule of law and rule by virtue as follows: rule of law is to reflect moral concepts, therefore the propelling role of law must be strengthened through moral construction; morality is to nurture the spirit of rule of law, and therefore the supporting role of morality must be strengthened through constructing the culture of rule of law. All this, as the *Decision* states, is to realize the complementary relationship between law and morality, and between rule of law and rule by virtue. Demonstrated here is the supremacy of morality and the use of law to reinforce moral values prescribed by the ruling party. At its core are pan-moralism and pan-politicization and the belief that order and stability can only be brought about through banishing alien creeds and ideologies.

Unifying beliefs and thoughts are of particular importance to a rationale of “rule by virtue” that echoes a Confucian way of integrating politics and religion/education into one (*zhengjiao heyi*). On February 28, 2016 the CCP Central Committee issued the Education Scheme for All Party Members. The latter are asked to pursue “studies of the Party Constitution and Party Regulations, [and] of the series of [Xi Jinping] speeches [so as] to become bona fide party members.” This is the so-called “two studies and one become” (*liangxue yizuo* 两学一做) campaign that is being implemented on a regular basis across the board. The content of the first series of “studies” includes: clarifying basic criteria of party members; establishing behavioral regulations; studying the party Constitution line by line; studying the history of the party as well as exemplary revolutionary figures; studying party laws and regulations; learning lessons from corrupt officials who have broken the law and party rules, such as Zhou Yongkang, Bo Xilai, Xu Caihou, Guo Boxiong and Ling Jihua; and living by principle (Tu jie 2016). The second series of “studies” means studying Xi Jinping’s speeches on reform, development and stability; on domestic politics and foreign affairs; on defense and governing the party, the nation and the military; and on the new concepts, thoughts and strategies of governance. “Becoming a bona fide party member” means to possess “four emphases and four have’s” (*sijiang siyou* 四讲四有) in their spirit and character – “emphasizing politics, having faith; emphasizing regulations, having discipline; emphasizing morality, having good conduct; emphasizing selfless dedication, having [politically correct] action” (Tu jie 2016). This dual strategy of using law to harness political power – a legalist stance – and imposing moral principles through education – a Confucian method – underpins the governing philosophy of Xi Jinping.

### **Establishing cultural and ideological legitimacy of the CCP: Sinicizing Marxism**

It has become evident that Xi Jinping’s highest priority is to maintain and enhance the legitimacy of the CCP so as to ensure its “perennial” rule. The unprecedented revival of Confucianism and Chinese classics should not be seen as motivated by mere nostalgia for a lost tradition though it may be couched as such by propagandists. The turn toward Confucianism is a carefully crafted project to establish cultural and ideological legitimacy of the CCP; the key approach, in Xi’s own words, is to “Sinicize Marxism” through Confucianism (Xi 2014a).

What is important to bear in mind is that Xi Jinping’s political dream goes beyond establishing legitimacy of the CCP. His ultimate goal is to create a discourse and reality of the “China

model,” one that is opposed to the Western model of liberal democracy. This China model consists of a highly centralized, authoritarian socialist regime led by the CCP. Xi Jinping’s argument is based on traditional and cultural determinism. He argues that liberal democracy of the West stems from ancient Greek concepts of democracy and is therefore suitable for Western society. A different ruling blood line runs through China’s body politic and governs its people; China therefore must choose a different path, that is, a socialist regime based on a socialist core value system (*shehui zhuyi hexi jiazhi tixi* 社会主义核心价值观体系) that is administered by the CCP. As Xi Jinping said to Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras, “Your democracy is ancient Greek and Roman democracy. That is your tradition. We have our own tradition” (Xi 2014b). Xi Jinping cited the example of the death penalty. Many Western countries have abolished the death penalty from the perspective of human rights, Xi argued, but if a “referendum” were carried out in China, many Chinese people would reject abolishing the death penalty as the view that murderers are the most evil and must pay back with their lives is deeply rooted in Chinese tradition (Xi 2014b).

In his address to the Confucius Research Institute in Qufu in 2013, President Xi emphasized that four aspects must be stated clearly in promoting Confucius and Confucianism across the world. First, every country and nation differs in their historical tradition, cultural heritage and national conditions and therefore must choose their unique path of development. Second, Chinese traditional culture contains the deepest spiritual pursuit of the Chinese people and has nurtured the nation from generation to generation. Third, Chinese traditional culture is the extraordinary strength of the Chinese nation and its most profound cultural soft power. Fourth, socialism with Chinese characteristics has profound historical origins and broad realistic foundation: it is deeply rooted in Chinese culture, it reflects the will of the Chinese people and it is therefore suitable for China and for the advancement of society (Xi 2014b). Xi emphasizes that one must hold a Marxian historical materialist (*lishi weiwu zhuyi* 历史唯物主义) stance toward Confucian theories (Xi 2014b), which shows his conviction in tailoring the past for today’s political purposes.

Calling for political pluralism (*zhengzhi de duoyuan xing* 政治的多元性), Xi is asking the world to accept the set of ideas and governing principles of Chinese socialism. His political ambition is to create a Sino-centric discourse and Chinese civilization in parallel with the Euro-centric Western civilization. Once accomplished, all the criticisms on and suspicions of one-party rule from the standpoint of liberty, human rights, individualism will be resolved once and for all. “Western” concepts are deemed irrelevant as China, which will be run based on its own deeply rooted governing principles.

There are still two issues to be resolved. One is the issue of ideology. The official ideology of the CCP still is Marxism, which is a Western idea. If tradition determines a nation’s future, how can one justify a borrowed guiding ideology? The second is the issue of consistency of the CCP. If Xi were to create a discourse and reality called the “Chinese model,” this has to be a consistent story told by all CCP leaders. For example, how to tell the story of Mao Zedong, whose ideas conflicted with those of later CCP leaders? Xi Jinping’s solution is to play up the Sinicization of Marxism (*zhongguo hua de makesi zhuyi* 马克思主义中国化). In his 2013 speech marking the 120th anniversary of the birth of Mao Zedong, Xi praised Mao as being “the great pioneer in Sinicizing Marxism” (Wang 2014) while at the same time referring to his attachment to Confucianism as a young Communist. This way, the succeeding state ideologies, such as the Deng Xiaoping Theory, Jiang Zemin’s “Theory of the Three Represents” and Hu Jintao’s “Scientific Outlook on Development,” became an extension of Mao Zedong’s contribution to the Sinicization of Marxism. In 2014 Xi officially added cultural confidence to the three “confidences,” namely, confidence in the [socialist] road, confidence in the [socialist] theory and

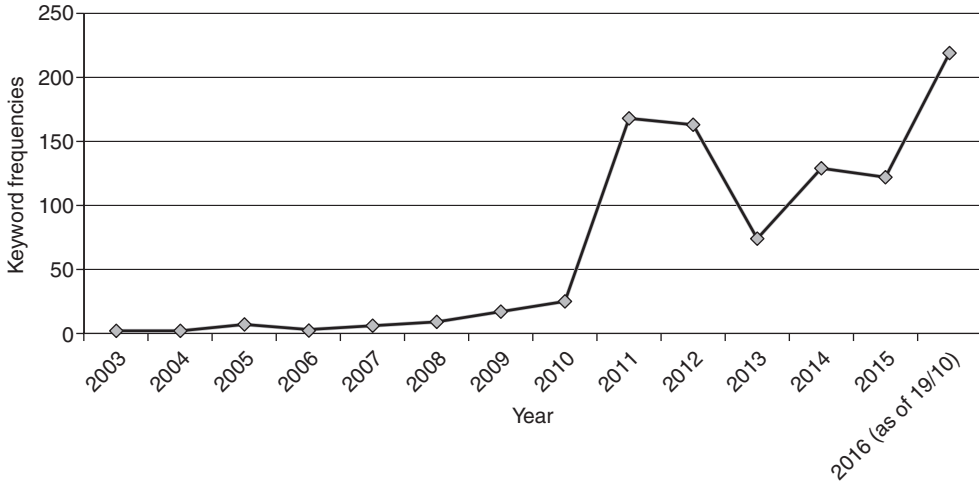


Figure 3.3 The number of articles containing *wenhua zixin* as the keyword in *People's Daily* (2000–2015).

confidence in [socialist] systems. Figure 3.3 shows the trajectory that the phrase “cultural confidence” has traveled on *People's Daily* from 2003, when the term first appeared, to 2016. A surge in the use of the term occurred in 2011, from 25 articles to 168, and the term became a catchphrase again last year, already appearing 219 times as of October 19, 2016, as opposed to 122 in 2015.

## Conclusion

As political philosophies Confucianism and Legalism are capable of supporting a highly centralized authoritarian regime and they have provided ideas and governing principles that underpin the socialist rule in China, past and present. On the other hand, they have been used as ammunition in the ideological battlefield to reject political liberalism that has dominated Western society. Today's unprecedented revival of Confucianism and Chinese classics should be seen as part of a systematic effort by the current government to gain discursive authority of legitimacy for the CCP and the Chinese socialist regime. This will only result in an increasingly dogmatic insistence on the moral high ground based on a rigid claim of excellence for the Chinese way of governing – and an outright rejection of universal liberal principles. It remains to be seen how this will affect China's relations with countries – both in the West and in Asia – that are practicing political liberalism and democracy. It also remains to be seen how an increasingly authoritarian rule can co-exist with increasing economic freedom of the people, who would demand civil liberties that are outside the parameters of Confucianism and Legalism.

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