

WANG, Canglong. 2023.
The Rise of Confucian Citizens in China: Theoretical Reflections and Empirical Explorations.
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The resurgence of Confucianism in twenty-first-century China, prominent both in the Party-state centre of power and at the grassroots level, is profoundly reshaping citizens' values and practices. *The Rise of Confucian Citizens in China*, by Canglong Wang, delves into this multifaceted revival and explores its implications for citizenship in contemporary Chinese society. Drawing on ethnographic research of Confucian classical education and engaging the literature in interdisciplinary citizenship studies, Wang's work offers a thought-provoking analysis of the relationship between Confucianism and citizenship, and proposes the "Confucian citizen" as a new kind of civic subject that demands theoretical and empirical reckoning.

This book is organised in two parts. The first three chapters theoretically examine the productive tension between Confucianism and citizenship, teasing out the multiplicity of meanings within each seemingly unified concept. This theoretical disambiguation opens up space for bridging Confucianism and citizenship. The next three chapters ethnographically explore how Confucian activists engaging in classics reading (*dujing* 讀經) education strive to reconcile the seemingly paradoxical demands of educating Confucian individuals and cultivating Chinese citizens. The ethnographic analysis reveals the promises and challenges of bottom-up Confucian citizen formation projects.

Chapter One begins by reviewing a wide range of conceptualisations of Confucianism and citizenship. Using a fourfold theoretical distinction between A) liberal Confucianism and B) illiberal Confucianism on the one hand, and C) thin citizenship and D) thick citizenship on the other hand, the author accounts for contemporary scholarly interpretations of the relationship between Confucianism and citizenship through three models: (1) the incompatibility model (B x C); (2) the compatibility model (A x C); and (3) the reconstruction model [(A + B) x D] (p. 22). Wang suggests that the reconstruction model enables scholars to theoretically capture the civic implications of both liberal and illiberal forms of Confucianism, and proposes the notions of "*junzi* (君子, virtuous

person) citizen" and "*tianxia* (天下, all-under-heaven) citizenship" at the intersection of Confucianism and thick citizenship (p. 34-7).

In Chapter Two, the author conducts a comparative analysis of two archetypal subjects: *junzi*, "the idealized figure of Confucian personhood," and citizen, "the subject of modern politics" (p. 38). Wang argues that although the *junzi* and the citizen are distinct from the politico-legal perspective (*junzi* as subjects of power over "the governed common people" (p. 64) versus citizens as subjects of rights with equal politico-legal status), these notions are potentially compatible from the moral-ethical perspective. Confucian ethics and modern civic ethics appear to share similar key attributes, such as the Confucian cardinal virtue of *ren* 仁 (benevolence) and "the Western ethic of compassion" (p. 60), as well as the "Confucian *junzi*'s appreciation for freedom of will" (p. 61) and the civic ethic of individual autonomy. Through a "thick citizenship" framework that links the politico-legal dimension of citizenship with the moral-ethical dimension, Wang proposes the possibility of integrating the attributes of *junzi* and citizen in contemporary China.

Chapter Three delves into a theoretical discussion of this potentiality and identifies two pathways towards integration: (1) cultivating civic *junzi*, where civic virtues supplement the subjective underpinning of the Confucian *junzi*; and (2) cultivating the *junzi*-style citizen, where Confucian political-moral ethics supplement the subjective underpinning of the thick citizen. Wang believes that it is more feasible to cultivate the *junzi*-style citizen, given the ongoing individualisation of contemporary Chinese society and the increased awareness of individual rights and autonomy.

In the ethnographic chapters, Wang explores the complexity of the relationship between Confucianism and citizenship in the revival of Confucian classical education, which he believes is contributing to "the rise of a new civic type, 'Confucian citizens,' in present-day China" (p. 89). Between 2012 and 2015, Wang conducted fieldwork at a private *dujing* school on the Southeast coast of China. Through a critical analysis of the discourses and practices of teachers, parents (Chapter Four), and students (Chapter Five), Wang reveals a pervasive civic awareness (expressed in terms of identities, rights, responsibilities, and actions) that has often been overlooked by previous studies of the Confucian classical education movement. At the same time, he highlights the discursive, practical, and institutional dilemmas that students and their families face at school and in the wider society. In Chapter Six, Wang examines the pedagogical challenges of combining nationalist and cosmopolitan orientations in a school that aspires to cultivate "cosmopolitan citizens with the national identity of Confucianism" (p. 156).

This ambitious book advances a post-orientalist perspective on citizenship studies (Isin 2012) with far-reaching implications. It challenges the implicit and explicit Western-centrism of contemporary citizenship studies, which exaggerates the East-West ontological distinction by essentialising citizenship as a uniquely Western creation rooted in European political-intellectual traditions (Guo 2022). Wang demonstrates commendable analytical rigour in comparing key concepts with different historical origins and genealogies (*junzi* and citizen), steering clear of both dualistic approaches (which assume fundamental distinction) and reductionist approaches (which assume fundamental equivalence). His ability to disaggregate and map the key components of

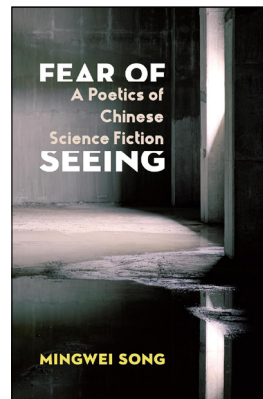
Confucianism and citizenship allows him to provide a nuanced view of the diversities and complexities inherent in both concepts. However, the book occasionally falls into convoluted formulations that might alienate general readers. In terms of content, Wang may need to further clarify how the “Confucian citizenship” model accounts for individual differences in socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. This is particularly important given the pressure for identity homogeneity and ideological conformity in the Party-state’s citizen formation agenda. In addition, I think Wang should have further elaborated on the notion of “*tianxia* citizenship,” which seems to have significant conceptual promise but is only mentioned in passing (p. 36-7).

The Rise of Confucian Citizens in China is an insightful and provocative book that sheds light on the social transformations underway in China and the theoretical transformations underway in post-orientalist citizenship studies. Despite some dense academic language, it is a valuable resource for scholars and anyone interested in understanding the cultural-political landscape of contemporary China. “In addressing the relationship between China and the West,” Wang observes, “the critical issue is the handling of the connection between the local and global perspectives” (p. 83). I believe that this book delivers on this critical issue by meticulously balancing historical specificities with conceptual commensurabilities. In a global discursive environment fragmented by dualism and nativism, I highly recommend this book, not only because it contributes to bridging two foundational concepts in human political thinking, but also because it prompts reflection on the commonality of human aspirations and the diversity of human strivings.

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SONG, Mingwei. 2023.
Fear of Seeing: A Poetics of Chinese Science Fiction.
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In recent years, Chinese science fiction has enjoyed a remarkable boom in political, editorial, media, and scientific circles. This craze is reflected in growing recognition within the literary and academic fields, along with an increase in academic books and articles. Among the monographs that stand out in this context, Pr. Mingwei Song’s *Fear of Seeing: A Poetics of Chinese Science Fiction* is probably the most significant and recommendable across all languages, thanks to its extensive range of themes, its historical erudition, and its conceptual creativity.

A professor at Wellesley College (USA), Mingwei Song is a specialist in Chinese literature and intellectual history. He is notably the author of a Chinese-language monograph on the new wave in Chinese science fiction (2020), and has recently coedited with Nathaniel Isaacson and Hua Li the collective book *Chinese Science Fiction: Concepts, Forms, and Histories* (2024).

Fear of Seeing is in part an anthology of Mingwei Song’s pioneering articles previously published independently. However, the author also offers new research avenues by drawing on recent works by new generations of Chinese authors. The title of the monograph openly draws inspiration from a 2002 short story by writer Han Song 韓松 titled “The Fear of Seeing” (*kan de kongju* 看的恐懼). In this story, Han Song tells of a baby born with ten eyes on its forehead. A scientist manages to connect the baby’s brain to a device that projects its visual perception onto a screen, revealing a misty grey mass rather than the familiar scene of the bedroom. The scientist concludes that the baby perceives the “true” appearance of the world, chaotic and shapeless, as opposed to the illusion perceived by “normal” people. Thus, Song chooses in his book to focus on the question of the representation of the visible and the invisible, and the anxiety it generates, in Chinese (and more largely Sinophone) science fiction literature. The author organises his reflection into nine chapters, two excursuses (unfortunately too brief), and an epilogue, which is more personal but highly relevant.

The first chapter revisits what Song defines as the “new wave” of Chinese science fiction, which emerged in the late 1980s. He