

Department of Public and Social Administration

Postgraduate Work Display

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Ti-Yong Polarity as a Conceptual Tool to Examine and Reconstruct Confucianism

The past has seen many unfortunate events in China that can be directly or indirectly attributed to Confucianism. While some have been advocating a wholesale discard of Confucianism in attempts to start anew on a blank slate, more people try to reach some kind of compromise, usually in the form of either injecting new thoughts from other cultures into Chinese thought or by exporting Confucian values to other creeds. A very popular kind of compromise comes in the form of adopting “Eastern learning as *ti* (substance, body) and Western learning as *yong* (applications, uses).” (*Zhongtixiyong*) Broadly speaking, “Chinese substance and Western function” seeks to retain Confucianism as the *ti* of an Eastern nation while integrating Western *yong*. Historically, *zhongtixiyong* and its variants have been rejected because one cannot just detach the *ti* from *yong* and vice versa. Nevertheless, being unable to make a real separation does not prevent us from making a conceptual distinction. There is an exciting prospect in the form of a reconstructed *ti-yong* polarity to examine Confucianism both from within and without. Maintaining the fact that *ti* and *yong* are inseparable in real life, I instead posit a conceptual distinction between the two.

To sum up, this research project seeks to examine the philosophical exposition of the Confucian conceptualization of *ti-yong* and offer an alternative conceptual framework to interpret Confucian *ti-yong* relations. This framework would be useful for enhancing our understanding of Confucianism and the effects of its teachings on the past and present, as well as showing the possibilities Confucianism can further adapt and contribute to the challenges of the future.

It is hoped that this contribution would be a useful and original one for this problem of how countries can maintain their indigenous traditions in the midst of learning from other more advanced nations. This is something we have been grappling for a long time, and no satisfactory solution has hitherto been offered. This problem is especially significant for Hong Kong as its predominantly Chinese Confucian values are constantly challenged by new values, due to its position as the crossroads between East and West.

The research methodology comprises of investigation of primary and secondary Confucian literature in both English and Chinese.

