

Review of: "A Conception of Yi (): Harmony, Fairness, and Justice in Management – A Prospective Inquiry Framework"

Abderrazak Belabes¹

¹ King Abdul Aziz University

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

A Confucian character of Yi () as an obligation of duty much rather than a theoretical notion of 'justice'

Abderrazak Belabes

Professor of Economics, Islamic Economics Institute, King Abdulaziz University, abelabes@kau.edu.sa

Abstract. The aim of this review is to show the limits of the discourse that identifies the success of the Chinese economic model with the supposed Confucian cultural values of '*harmony, fairness, justice*', constructed in the mirror of Western values, in particular through the triptych of the French Revolution of 1789 '*freedom, equality, fraternity*'. The character Yi () appears twenty-four times in the (Analects) of Confucius (551–479 BCE). This testifies to the central place it occupies in the Chinese philosopher's system of thought and the interest Leong and Kiat (2024) attach to it. However, the translation of this character by the term justice is not satisfactory, as it evokes for Confucius an obligation to act much more than the vague and rather theoretical notion of justice (Che, 2019). Obviously, what applies to the notion of justice is valid for those of harmony and fairness. This invites us to rise to the art of reading well through philology, moving from a literal translation from one language to another to a reading between languages which opens the field to a multitude of interpretations.

Keywords: Mirror Game, Yi (), Obligation of Duty, Justice

After finishing reading Leong and Kiat's (2024) paper entitled '*A Conception of Yi(): Harmony, Fairness, and Justice in Management - A Prospective Inquiry Framework*', a question came to mind: why throughout history have human communities sought to construct an identity in reaction to the hegemonic model through a purely material prism described as civilization, progress, modernization, development, competitiveness? Such an epistemological position can only lead to the maintenance of the model to which we oppose. As Ursula Le Guin writes (1969: 132): "*To oppose something is to maintain it.*"

What is striking at first sight is the perception of the so-called Chinese vision of the world through the economic language of the hegemonic model: rationality, correlation, balance, non-equilibrium, non-equilibrium dynamics, stability, instability, which I has been striving for years to passionately explore to shed light on the underlying epistemological presuppositions, in my advanced microeconomics course, far from any ideological consideration, consist of constructing an identity, by summoning the hegemonic model through a distorting mirror, i.e., a biased image of what it really is in its diversity and

contradictions (Said, 1978; Todorov, 1989). This invites an immersive and reflexive approach (Heyer & Reynaud Paligot, 2017).

The period of transition from one world to another (Todd, 2024) calls for the design of new concepts that meet the challenges humanity faces today. As Antonio Gramsci (1996: 283) said: “*The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born.*” In this transition towards a multipolar world that has shaken up the undivided domination of the hegemonic model and its values, it is necessary to go beyond the logic of binary opposition 'China/West' to explore the affinities between modes of existence (Souriau, 2017).

In this regard, if the approach to the concept of Yi (义) through the prism of mainstream economic language leads to epistemicide, i.e., to the silent death of Chinese knowledge, which goes back millennia, caused by the hierarchization of ways of understanding life (de Sousa Santos, 2017), According to Philippe Che (2019), the character Yi (义) evokes in Confucius an obligation to act much more than the vague and rather theoretical notion of 'justice'.

Let's take a look at an emblematic sentence taken from the Talks of Confucius, and its translation in the sense chosen by Che (2019):

Sentence: (Analects of Confucius: 4.16).

Translation: "A good man knows where his duty lies; a poor man knows where his interest lies".

If we can think that the character Yi (义) covers, depending on the context, different nuances in Confucius, in this passage, it relates to the notion of duty. Everyone must fulfill their duties to themselves, to their family, to society, and ultimately, to “All-That-Is-Under-Heaven” (Tingyang, 2008). This invites us to connect (ما يعاش به) "the world we live from" to (ما يعاش فيه) "the world we live in" (al-Farahidi, 2003: 261).

Conclusion

It is time to depart from the mirror game in the rhetoric of economics (Belabes, 2021). This is true of all contemporary economic discourse that claims to come from a religious, spiritual, moral, or ethical tradition, as was the case for Max Weber (2008) in his book 'The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism'. The transition to a multipolar world requires the development of new tools for analyzing data, which in turn requires a renewal of approaches that make it possible to make data talk rather than subjecting them to a pre-established conceptual model. This shows the importance of al-Taftazani's words written more than seven centuries ago: “*If the meanings are left in their original state, they choose the words that suit them*” (al-Taftazani, 2003, 3: 706).

References

- Al-Farahidi, al-Khalil (2003). (2003). Kitāb al-‘ayn (The book that begins with the Arabic letter ‘ayn). Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah.
- Belabes, Abderrazak (2021). It is the Time to Depart from the Mirror Game in the Rhetoric of Economics, Journal of King Abdulaziz University: Islamic Economics, Vol. 34, No. 2, pp. 163-171.

- Che, Philippe (2019). Faut-il retraduire les Entretiens de Confucius ? », Impressions d'Extrême-Orient, Vol. 9, <https://journals.openedition.org/ideo/833>
- De Sousa Santos, Boaventura (2017). Justice entre connaissances: épistémologies du sud contre l'épistémicide. Madrid: Éditions Morata.
- Gramsci, Antonio (1996). Cahiers de prison. Paris: Gallimard.
- Heyer, Evelyne and Reynaud Paligot, Carole (2017). Nous et les autres. Paris: La Découverte.
- Le Guin, Ursulla (1969). Le Left Hand of Darkness. London: Granada.
- Leong, David and Kiat, Koh Hock (2024). A Conception of Yi (): Harmony, Fairness, and Justice in Management – A Prospective Inquiry Framework. Qeios. doi:10.32388/6W1A65.
- Said, Edward (1978). Orientalism. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Souriau, Etienne (2015). The Different Modes of Existence. Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing.
- Taftazani. Sa'ad al-Din (2012). Al-Mutawal (The Extended). Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah.
- Tingyang, Zhao (2008). La philosophie du tianxia, Diogène, Vol. 221, No. 1, pp. 4-25.
- Todd, Emmanuel (2024). La défaite de l'Occident. Paris: Gallimard.
- Todorov, Tzvetan (1989). Nous et les Autres. La réflexion française sur la diversité humaine. Paris: Seuil.
- Weber, Max (2008). The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.