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### Public Reason Confucianism

“Public reason Confucianism” is a particular style of Confucian democratic perfectionism that calls on an active role for the democratic state in promoting a Confucian conception of the good life; at the heart of which are such values as filial piety and ritual propriety. It is also fully compatible with core values of democracy such as popular sovereignty, political equality, and the right to political participation.

Sungmoon Kim presents “public reason Confucianism” as the most attractive option for contemporary East Asian societies that are historically and culturally Confucian.

SUNGMOON KIM is Professor of Political Theory at City University of Hong Kong.

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# Public Reason Confucianism

*Democratic Perfectionism and Constitutionalism  
in East Asia*

SUNGMOON KIM  
*City University of Hong Kong*



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## Acknowledgments

This book's motivation was to provide a philosophical foundation for my political vision that I presented in my earlier work *Confucian Democracy in East Asia: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2014). One of the most frequent questions I have received since the publication of *Confucian Democracy* has been how I can reconcile the apparently nonneutral promotion of Confucianism in my democratic theory and my embracement of public reason, a philosophical apparatus commonly associated with state neutrality. Relatedly, some Confucian critics have noted that my suggestion to differentiate between civic virtue and moral virtue has strong resonance with the Rawlsian strategy, aimed at state neutrality, and is difficult to harmonize with the old paradigm of Confucian virtue politics in which no distinction between moral virtue and civic virtue is posited. In this book I attempt to offer a principled rejoinder to this misgiving by articulating the perfectionist dimension of my democratic political theory and examining its constitutional implications.

At the heart of my project is to justify a particular mode of Confucian democratic perfectionism – what I call *public reason Confucianism* – in which perfectionism is intertwined with partial comprehensive Confucianism in mediation of public reason, understood as the reason of democratic citizens. I argue that if the idea of Confucian democracy is reformulated in terms of public reason Confucianism and Confucian democratic perfectionism is reconceived from the broader perspective of democratic constitutionalism, the practical distinction between moral virtue and civic virtue becomes an unavoidable feature of the modern democratic and constitutional Confucian polity. I hope that readers can not only see clearly how some of the most challenging philosophical

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questions arising from *Confucian Democracy* have been attended (and resolved) in the course of my exploration of public reason Confucianism but further understand its contributions to democratic constitutionalism that is most attractive in East Asia's Confucian societal context.

In writing this book, I have incurred numerous debts. My colleagues at the Center for East Asian and Comparative Philosophy (CEACOP) and the Department of Public Policy at City University of Hong Kong have been my most vigorous conversation partners and they offered many useful comments throughout the manuscript-writing process. I would like to thank Youngsun Back, Ruiping Fan, Eirik Harris, Richard Kim, and Hsin-wen Lee for their friendship. I am particularly grateful to P. J. Ivanhoe for extensive written and verbal comments on the earlier versions of the manuscript. I am also grateful to Jong-cheol Kim at Yonsei Law School and his Social Science Korea (SSK) project team who visited CEACOP to discuss my idea of Confucian democracy; to Albert Chen, Chaihark Hahm, and Marie Seong Hak Kim, who participated in the "Confucianism and Constitutionalism" workshop held at City University of Hong Kong in 2015 and offered valuable suggestions on my formulation of public reason Confucianism; and to participants in the "Political Theory and Theorizing East and West" workshop held at City University of Hong Kong in 2015 who critically discussed the early version of Chapter 6, including Elton Chan, Joseph Chan, Yvonne Chiu, Jane Mansbridge, Al Martinich, Rahul Sagar, and Justin Tiwald. A debt of gratitude is owed to many others who have read or simply discussed various parts of my argument and offered helpful suggestions and criticisms. They include: Tongdong Bai, Benjamin Barber, Daniel Bell, Thomas Christiano, John Dryzek, David Elstein, Sandra Field, Owen Flanagan, Jeff Flynn, Baogang He, Jung In Kang, Bihwan Kim, Chandran Kukathas, George Letsas, Chenyang Li, Michael Slote, Rogers Smith, Sor-hoon Tan, Christina Tarnopolsky, David Wong, and Bernard Yack. Last, I would like to thank Robert Dreesen, my editor at Cambridge University Press, for believing in this project and the three anonymous reviewers for their critical suggestions.

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A slightly different and shortened version of Chapter 2 was previously published under the same title at *American Political Science Review*, 109:1 (2015), pp. 187–200 and I am grateful to Cambridge University Press for permission to reprint the essay here. A substantive portion of Chapter 4 was published under the title of “Civil Confucianism in South Korea: Liberal Rights, Confucian Reasoning, and Gender Equality,” in Sungmoon Kim (ed.), *Confucianism, Law, and Democracy in Contemporary Korea* (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2015), pp. 105–124, and my thanks are due to Sarah Campell, the editor at Rowman and Littlefield International, for permission to reprint parts of the essay here. Finally, a portion of Chapter 6 is based on my article entitled “Confucianism, Moral Equality, and Human Rights: A Mencian Perspective,” published in *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 74:1 (2015), pp. 149–185. The relevant portion has been reprinted with permission from John Wiley & Sons.

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