

Ear to Asia podcast



Title: Xi Jinping and China's Confucianist revival

Description: Confucianism is experiencing a revival in China, with President Xi Jinping now publicly endorsing Confucius' millennia-old principles of personal morality, social order and justice. So what's behind the fresh embrace of a philosophy once shunned by Mao Zedong? China watchers Dr Delia Lin and Dr Craig Smith join Ali Moore to delve in to the past, present and future of Confucianism in China.

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Ali Moore: Hello, I'm Ali Moore. This is Ear to Asia.

Michael Schumann in the Hong Kong Foreign Correspondents' Club: Yes, Confucius is back in modern China.

AFP news agency: The ancient teachings of Confucius, which center on peace and social harmony, are enjoying an officially backed renaissance, and it's a program that's proven extremely popular.

Huey Fern Tay from the Australian Broadcasting Corp: Some researchers say Confucius' teachings on respect and order fit in with the official emphasis on social stability and harmony. Confucius is being rebranded as a moral compass and a solution to a spiritual void.

Michael Schumann in the Hong Kong Foreign Correspondents' Club: I think the question for China is that, does this Confucianism cultural revival by the government, which Xi Jinping is attempting to do, does it actually serve the purpose it's meant for?

Ali Moore: In this episode, what's behind the revival of Confucianism in China? Ear to Asia is the podcast from Asia Institute, the Asia research specialist at the University of Melbourne. In Ear to Asia we talk with Asia researchers about the issues behind the news headlines in a region that's rapidly changing the world. The Chinese philosopher, politician, and teacher, Confucius was born some 344 years before China got its first Imperial Dynasty. Yet, in the well over two millennia since, Confucius' principles on personal morality, social order, justice, and governmental conduct have continued to inform and influence societies and those who rule them in China and many countries nearby.

Mao Zedong broke the mold, allegedly having said he wanted to smash the grip of Confucius on China and ignite revolution. But since 2014, China's current leader, Xi Jinping, has been re-stoking the embers of a dormant Confucianism, declaring that the principles of Confucius hold the key to understanding the national characteristics of the Chinese people and that it underpins the spiritual outlook of present-day Chinese. What is it about Confucianism that has long attracted China's ruling elites? How are contemporary Chinese leaders applying or exploiting the principles of Confucius to shape Chinese society? And to what extent does Confucianism resonate with ordinary Chinese citizens today?

In this episode of Ear to Asia, China specialists Dr. Delia Lin and Dr. Craig Smith discuss the past, present, and future of Confucianism in China. Both

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Delia and Craig are based at Asia Institute of the University of Melbourne. Welcome to both of you.

Craig Smith: Thank you, Ali.

Delia Lin: Thank you, Ali.

Ali Moore: Delia, let's start in the present, Xi Jinping and the resurgent focus on Confucianism. How do Confucius' principles shape the political landscape of today?

Delia Lin: To a great extent, I must say. Xi Jinping certainly is known to be fond of Confucianism, and under his leadership that Confucianism has enjoyed revival in China in all aspects. We have seen Confucian institutes built around the globe as part of softer power-building, and also politically Xi Jinping has used a lot of Confucian references to justify his governance in China. And there was a book published of all Xi Jinping's quotations that he has used. It was published, I think, in 2015. Correct me if I'm wrong. And it's a book published by People's Daily, which has included about 300 quotations that Xi Jinping has used in his speeches.

Ali Moore: We'll look in a minute at exactly what, I suppose, the principles are. But it's not just Confucianism. Is it? It's also tied in with legalism. Tell us a little about that.

Delia Lin: There are many classical political philosophies in China, which developed during Spring and Autumn in the Warring States period, and we call it "A Hundred Schools of Thoughts," but not really a hundred of them, and two major ones were Confucianism and legalism. So, a lot of people would say ... Would argue that Xi Jinping is fundamentally a legalist, because he really focused on harsh enforcement of law. But at the same time many people would argue that he's also a Confucian, in a sense that he really bringing ... Governing the country by moral virtue into the governance, into the ideological landscape.

So, I think a fair judgment would be that he's both a Confucian and a legalist. And if you look at Imperial China over 2000 years of dynasties, where you can actually see these resilient Confucian legalist state in China.

Ali Moore: So, for Xi Jinping, is it about anchoring his idea of a China model in Chinese tradition?

Delia Lin: Xi Jinping's era is different from his precedents. For instance, from Hu Jintao, from Jiang Zemin or from Deng Xiaoping, in a sense that he's really promoting this China model of governance in a more proactive and explicit way. So, for him this China model grows out of, in his own words, Chinese soil. And what it means is that Chinese traditional political ideas have given this model life and also legitimacy.

And in order to make people understand what he's doing, where he's going, he always refers back to those traditional ideas and actively promote it, so

that his governance would resonate with the majority of people, and also making people believe that the Communist Party, even though the Communist Party leads all, leads all above everything, even law, but it has that moral authority to do so. And that's exactly what Confucianism can offer.

Ali Moore: Craig Smith, do you agree with that analysis?

Craig Smith: Yes, I do, but I would say that also when the government is looking back to Confucianism and trying to bring it into a contemporary setting, they're inevitably cherry-picking and choosing things that are going to benefit the regime, are going to benefit the Communist Party. There is a little bit of danger for the Party as well. In the last 20 years or so ... This hasn't just started with Xi Jinping ... We've seen this new interest in Confucianism. And I think the statue of Confucius that some of you might remember was set up right by Tiananmen Square in 2011 is an interesting case for that.

They unveiled this fantastic statue, and then suddenly it disappeared. And it did turn up a few months later a little bit further away from the seat of power, let's say, not directly across from Mao. So, there's been not really an ambivalence, more of a need to control the discourse on what Confucianism is and how it works with the Party today.

Ali Moore: Before we look at, I guess, the pros and the cons from a governance point of view, Craig, how easily definable is Confucianism? I understand that there's actually some 60 different words in Chinese that all translate into that single English word.

Craig Smith: Yeah, that's right. It's a very difficult thing to define. It's difficult to define in Chinese and in English, because ... Well, just like any sort of ideology or system of thought that has been around for millennia, there's a lot wrapped up in it. And even thousands of years ago, when Confucius was still alive, there were many different aspects of it. So, there is the idea of governing society. The connections between individuals, between the individual and the ruler, there are five different connections actually that were outlined to make society work together harmoniously.

But in addition to that, you have a lot of rules for the individual. How can we be essentially good, moral, ethical people? That's another side of it. And then beyond that there's a lot of things that good Confucians are supposed to do. The rites involving-

Delia Lin: Decorum and [crosstalk] propriety [crosstalk].

Craig Smith: Or where you can use it. So, there is a lot wrapped up in the English word Confucianism.

Ali Moore: So, what are the tenets, if you like, of the Confucius canon that are of benefit to someone like Xi Jinping, Delia?

Delia Lin: Good question. Again, that's very difficult to tease out exactly what aspects that is going to benefit the Chinese Communist Party to rule for today. But I guess despite all those different versions of Confucian political philosophy, or maybe we should say political philosophies, there are definitely commonalities in them. Confucianism is a political philosophy and a social ethic in one. I think that's a special thing about Confucianism, that it affects not just governance but also people's everyday lives. Confucianism basically focuses on morality.

So, morality is really the keyword in Confucianism, but then we need to understand morality. Again, it's very difficult to define. It's very different from this great moral virtue that we usually know, that individual moral principles. So, what Confucianism does is that apart from all other aspects, is that to focus on the importance of morality in governing the people. To focus on the important of customs in governing the people. So, instead of trying to refine the institution to make the officials, for example, as corrupt, Confucianism would focus on cultivating the moral ... How should I put it? The moral standard of the officials.

Ali Moore: The moral high ground is where they sit.

Delia Lin: The moral high ground. Exactly. So, believing that only if you can transform the officials and the general public into morally beings, can you provide good governance.

Ali Moore: So, does that put someone like Xi Jinping in the role of both political leader but also moral leader?

Delia Lin: As a moral teacher, a moral leader as well. That's exactly right. So, it's not just Xi Jinping but the Chinese Communist Party, actually. So, Xi Jinping is the supreme leader of the Party, but it's the Party ... Perhaps one can criticize Xi Jinping but one should not criticize the Chinese Communist Party because it is almighty and all-moral being, even though it's not a human being, it's like God. So, that's how it works. And Confucianism definitely can provide that kind of political idea. If that kind of idea was presented in Australia, I don't think people would buy it. But when that idea was presented in China the majority of the people would buy it because it's so familiar. That kind of paradigm of thinking is familiar.

Ali Moore: So, Craig, given the way that Delia paints it, where are the risks? She talked about risks for the government in pursuing a focus on Confucianism. Where do they lie?

Craig Smith: Well, the importance for the government right now is maintaining that control over the discourse. So, since the 1980s you've had a lot of people really interested in Confucianism, and part of this is government-supported. But initially it didn't really come out of that. It came out more of the rise of China accompanied by a newfound respect and confidence in Chinese traditions. So, you had quite a lot people suddenly going to Confucianism and writing about it.

And now, what we talk about as the New Confucians, especially mainland New Confucians, that have come around since maybe the late 1980s and '90s, but have been accelerating and getting larger and larger, there's quite a lot of different forms of that and not all of them are entirely supportive of Marxism, of the Communist Party, of the ... What we can now say are the traditional ideals of new China. For example, one of the most interesting characters is Jiang Qing, who has brought up these really different ways of looking at government.

He's talking about replacing the current government, over a long period of course, and having Confucians actually running the government at the top, working together with elected officials and working together with leaders from society and religion in China. And this is not what the Communist Party is interested in.

Ali Moore: Indeed. I was going to say, that's an enormous challenge for the Communist Party. We heard in the introduction there some of the quotes from Xi Jinping about Confucianism. How does he marry that with some of these other interpretations and ideas that are coming off the bases of the same philosophy?

Craig Smith: Well, I think clearly what the Communist Party is trying to do and what they have to do is make sure that they turn the focus to what they want to do to this relationship between the people and Xi Jinping. They want to avoid getting into the more religious side of Confucianism. A lot of people are actually interested in Confucianism being a state religion, and Jiang Qing is one of those people.

Delia Lin: And Kang Xiaokang as well.

Craig Smith: Yeah. Kang Xiaoguang is probably the biggest proponent of Confucianism as a state religion.

Delia Lin: As a state religion.

Craig Smith: But even those ideas of a state religion, how can Confucianism be a state religion?

Delia Lin: Yeah. Who's the god? Whose god?

Craig Smith: It's really difficult to imagine, and this is nothing new. I studied early 20th century Chinese history and this has been around ... There was Kang Yaowei, was the first one. In early 20th century he wanted to build these state religions and had a lot of support. But to bring it up now again it feels a little bit ... I don't want to say dishonest, but it's hard to imagine that their heart is really in Confucianism as a religion.

Ali Moore: It also seems an unusual concept, given that we're talking about, I guess, an ideology of governance. We're talking about a philosophy. Why does it have to become a religion?

Delia Lin: People are attracted to that idea because they really want their spiritual pursuit or their spiritual needs to be anchored somewhere. Whereas in China it's very difficult because Christianity is looked at suspiciously by the government because it was God. So, when you have God, then who do you plead allegiance to? So that's always the question, and Chinese Communist Party are not allowed to be Christians. If you are a Communist Party member, then you should not have any religious belief at all. So, your only sort of religious belief has to be Confucianism.

And also it has to do with the Chinese understanding of what religion means, because traditionally China didn't really have religion, the kind of religion that we know in the West. Religion in China is actually a kind of teaching. That means teaching. The word religion actually means teaching as well. So, for any Chinese if there was a doctrine that provides you with all those spiritual needs that you have, and provides you with all those moral needs that you have, then it can be counted as religion.

So that's why a lot of people are so attracted to Confucianism because it's so strong, and people resonate with it. Why not just make a state religion so that everybody would have some kind of moral codes to refer to when they're confused? So, I guess that's one of the reasons why they want to set it up as a state religion.

Ali Moore: And Craig, you talked about the need to control the discourse, if you like, particularly from the new Confucius. If you look at the argument about religion and the other interpretations, how influential are those arguments outside the intellectual sphere, if you like?

Craig Smith: Right now I wouldn't say they're as influential as other groups. Traditionally when we look at intellectual spheres in China, if you looked at it 20 years ago or even 10 years ago, everybody said there are two major camps. There are the liberals and then there are the new left. And the liberals, as you can imagine, are all those people who are interested in opening up markets but also in having more rights and things like that. And then the new left are broadly those who are supportive of the Party, or those who are interested in different kinds of socialism.

And then, once the new Confucians started coming around, people started turning to that as a more Chinese answer to things. And I think the religious side of things has only been coming about recently, but it's accelerating. So, even though it's not quite as powerful as, say, the liberals and the new left, there's a lot of interest and it's getting bigger and bigger. So, when you say, "How influential is it?" It's how influential can it become. Already a lot of schools have been opening up, private schools that teach Confucianism, and we're getting into the thousands now of these private schools. Some of them are very small. Some of them are very, very small.

Delia Lin: Mm-hmm (affirmative). That's finishing schools mostly.

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- Craig Smith: Yeah. But they teach them how to recite the Confucian classics, they teach Confucian morality. So, this is interesting as a phenomenon to look at, thinking, what's China going to look like 20 years from now?
- Ali Moore: But there's a really obvious question there and it's one you posed yourself. It's, who decides what's taught?
- Craig Smith: Well, in the schools themselves they're trying to stick more towards the classics, although once we get into the public schools then it could be a very different matter altogether. And it's not really there yet, because this interest ... Xi Jinping's interest in Confucianism is very, very new. Although, we've had Confucian discourse in the Communist Party for a long time, so these ideas of harmony, they've been around for awhile. Xi Jinping likes to talk about a moderately prosperous society. These ideas that he's taken from classical Confucianism have been used by all leaders of the Communist Party for decades.
- Ali Moore: It's this specific reference, if you like, that is the more recent development?
- Craig Smith: Yes. It's the more explicit references that are more recent, I would say.
- Delia Lin: Yeah. And also you use it as ideological ammunition to oppose alternative philosophies, such as liberalism - political liberalism. So, that's pretty new in Xi Jinping's era, because before the revival of Confucianism started in 1984 after Mao's death and also the beginning of China opening up, and with Mao Zedong, his relationship with Confucianism is a very interesting one. So, in his early days, before the People's Republic of China was set up, in his young days he was actually a known advocate for Confucius and also Confucianism. He loved Confucianism.
- And then, only after the People's Republic of China was built up and he needed a new ideology, not Confucianism but socialism. But his goal was really to adapt socialism or Marxism to the conditions of China. So, in his complete works of Mao Zedong, people have done research and seeing that actually the top three references that he referred to was Stalin, Confucius, and Lenin. So, 24% from Stalin, and 22% from Confucius, and 18% from Lenin. And Marx and Engels actually ranked the lowest of the references he referred to, and 4%.
- But then his attitudes shifted. So, this revival of Confucianism actually happened after Mao's death, way after him in 1984. But it's different in Xi Jinping's time because it's really used consciously as ammunition, fighting, battling liberalism.
- Ali Moore: You're listening to Ear to Asia from Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne. I'm Ali Moore and I'm joined by China watchers, Dr. Delia Lin and Dr. Craig Smith. We're talking about the Confucianism revival in China. Delia, when you talked there about the mixed approach to Confucianism that Mao had, how difficult does that make it for current leaders if they're presenting a consistent story of continuity, if you like, when at times it has been bad and now it is good.

Delia Lin: I mean if you look at the history of the Chinese Communist Party, if you look at it ideologically, there were so many contradictions and so many conflating ideas, so it's not new to the Chinese Communist Party. They always have a way to produce that consistency. And I guess that consistency that they're producing is to say that aligning with Mao Zedong's idea is that we needed to use socialism, or needed to use Marxism, but needed to adapt it to the Chinese condition. So, that's one way of saying it, to say that that's consistent with Mao Zedong. Mao Zedong did it one way, we're doing it this way, but still we are adapting, we are still holding Marxism and socialism, but we are adapting it to the Chinese condition and we are trying to make it fit the Chinese situation.

Ali Moore: But we are making it fit, I'm sure. The message is that [crosstalk].

Delia Lin: Exactly. Controlling the discourse is-

Craig Smith: It works really well to have this historical narrative. We're still marching towards a utopia, which utopia it is, well, that might be a little bit different but the terminologies never change. I mean, interestingly, the Communist terminology for these stages towards utopia are taken from the Confucian classics. So, even when Mao was talking about this future Communist utopia-

Delia Lin: Communism.

Craig Smith: ... back in the 1920s, 1930s, he was using Confucian terms, which he borrowed from Kang Yaowei, who we mentioned earlier.

Delia Lin: Datong (大同). Yeah.

Craig Smith: A great concept of that datong and xiaokang (小康). These are steps towards utopia.

Delia Lin: And that's a Confucian idea.

Craig Smith: Confucian ideas that were brought up again in the 20th century by people who wanted to start up Confucianism as a religion.

Ali Moore: Do you think that when Xi Jinping says, "Confucius is key to understanding the national characteristics of the Chinese people," do you think, Craig, that's right?

Craig Smith: I think it's convenient. I think that it's very useful to put it onto a figure like Confucius, because Confucius is someone that can be easily adapted to their ideas of power. Is it right? Well, no. I don't think that you can encapsulate an entire nation in the idea of one person or even one ideology. But I'm not really surprised by it. I think it's a smart thing to do. I think it's the right thing to do to maintain power.

Delia Lin: And also to control that discourse, to say, "Well, this is who we are, and we've never changed. We are just Confucians, a bunch of Confucians, and we have to follow a particular way of governing. And we have to reject liberalism because we're not brought up that way." So, to say that liberalism is irrelevant to China because we are Confucians. And ironically this is opposite to what Mao Zedong said, of course, during the Cultural Revolution. Mao Zedong would be saying that of Confucianism, and he supported those autocrats and he supported so-called, "bad liberal ideas."

Where Xi Jinping now is saying that it doesn't. To say that the very reason for us to reject liberalism, political liberalism, is because we come from a very different tradition. But if we really look at tradition seriously, and that's something that's lacking in China. There's no discussion, there's no debate over this.

Ali Moore: Well, indeed we've talked about how difficult it is to pin down, to very clearly say exactly what we're talking about. But how instilled is Confucianism in the average Chinese citizen if such a being exists? And if it is, what does that mean? Is more about moral code than anything more specific?

Delia Lin: Yes, moral code and also what is right and wrong in everyday life. So, suddenly if we really look at influence of Confucianism in Chinese society, it's huge. So, people may not quote Confucian canon, they may not quote exact words, or they may not have read really Analects of Confucius in great detail, but that kind of moral code, that kind of what is right or wrong, is carried on from generation to generation. Everyday behavior, what is decorum. So, for example, respecting the parents regardless. You don't argue with them.

And even students here feel the pressure in obeying their parents. Even though they don't like a particular discipline, they have to study into it because their parents make them to. So, if we talk about everyday behavior, it's certainly there, and also willingness to give up their power to authority, and that's very much in Confucianism as well. And this conflation between power and authority, how to manage their own life when there is authority there and how to stand your ground, very difficult on how to respect your own individual interests.

And also when there is conflict between individual interests and the public good or portrayed public good, where do you stand? So, all that sort of things are very difficult for all the Chinese people to navigate and perhaps we can argue that's from Confucian beliefs.

Ali Moore: Do you see it as that intrinsic?

Craig Smith: I think these kind of things are difficult to look at. To look and people and say, "Yeah, that's Confucianism and it's an intrinsic quality in the Chinese people," or something like that. When we look at Western societies and Western societies that are often no longer Christian, we can say, "Oh, yeah, they still have Christian values." But these kind of values of filial piety and

stuff, they certainly are there in China, but these are also universal things. And I think that to say that China is still Confucian today ... If you took somebody from 19th century China and took them here and said, "Is China a Confucian society?" They would go, "No way."

So, things have really changed, and when we say there's still Confucianism in China today, I think we're just saying there are still elements of that kind of moral code, but it's definitely diluted and changed. That's why people are interested in it today, and that's one of the good things. If we're talking about people are interested in Confucianism to create a new moral and ethical society, that could be very positive. What do you think about that, Delia?

Ali Moore: Delia is sitting here smiling.

Delia Lin: Yeah. Well, absolutely, if you pick some of the words from ... I don't know, is that Confucius and there's nothing wrong with that, and Confucius says that out of three people one can be your teacher, so you always need to learn, you always need to discuss. And Confucius did encourage discussion, encouraged cultivation of morality. There's nothing wrong with that. If anybody, like Jiang Qing, who wants to really convert himself into a pure Confucian in his own way, and he suddenly is doing that, that's all fine. For me, that's a private thing.

But if you make it a prescribed moral principle that everybody should do that, and if you do not do that, then you're a bad person and you need to be put into prison and you need to be punished by law, that's problematic. And that's why I say this whole advocate for Confucianism as a state religion or as a state dogma is dangerous for society, for governance. It's because that really is taking people away from their individual rights, and really taking people away from any liberty they deserve to be an individual in their society.

Craig Smith: Right. So, the danger is when we get down to talking about morality and ethics, we're also talking about morality and ethics in relation to authoritarian government, whether we're talking about it today or we're talking about it 500 years ago. That is definitely the danger of having a state religion or a state ideology.

Ali Moore: And Delia mentioned before the conflation of power and authority. The model of leadership advocated by Xi Jinping and the central authority, if you like, does it sit well with Confucian thought? And I'm thinking not so much just central authority, but the endless nature of it, the lack of focus on the individual. Do all of those things work in his favor?

Craig Smith: Well, Confucianism can work to support that, but also, as Delia mentioned earlier, a lot of this comes from the more legalistic traditions that came about around the same time, shortly after the first advent of Confucian ideology, so in about 200 B.C., let's say.

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- Delia Lin: I agree with Craig in saying that Confucianism does support, can support Xi Jinping in that. But if you talk about centralized power, that's why I think a good way of analyzing Xi Jinping is from both Confucian and legalist perspectives.
- Ali Moore: Because if it was just Confucianism it would only be moral, it would not be legal.
- Delia Lin: No. Exactly. It would not be legal, but Xi Jinping really has got both, so if some people were to say that there's no really rule of law in China, it's ruled by law and they're ruled by moral virtue. For him, both are equally important. So, again, that's the contribution of Xi Jinping. Before him, ruling by virtue has always been important, but it was Xi Jinping who really elevated the status of ruling by virtue. And that's important, because to justify an absolute, absolute power of the Chinese Communist Party, he has to paint the Party as the all-moral being. Without that, then, there is no political legitimacy in there.
- But centralized power really comes from legalism, because legalism has an opposite opinion on morality to Confucianism, saying that morality is an individual issue. So, the leader should really not touch, should not impose any moral principles. It's useless.
- Ali Moore: It's fundamentally different view.
- Delia Lin: A fundamentally different view on morality in saying that morality has absolutely no place in governance, in politics. Politics is all about rewarding people who have done the right things and punish people harshly if they have done the wrong things. That's it. It's simple like that. So, that's the fundamental principle of legalism, and legalism really promotes centralized power. The ruler have to have absolute power. Why? Because the officials are not to be trusted. They're prone to corruption. So, that's why the ruler has to really concentrate all power into one.
- And so, Xi Jinping used that, and in fact in one of his recent speeches he actually quoted the legalist canon to say that all power needs to be concentrated into the Party. So, that bit is definitely a legalist idea.
- Ali Moore: In many ways, or in some ways, is it possible, Craig, to say from a historical perspective it's more about using what suits from the past as opposed to what's dominant from the past?
- Craig Smith: Yeah. Definitely. You can go to the past and you take what you can to use it for today. That's true anywhere. And Confucianism is the smart move to take for today's China, because it ensures the legitimacy of the Communist Party. It ensures that from a moral perspective, a traditional perspective, it both looks back to China's past and it looks forward to China's future as a great power. So, it's very easy to take the elements you want out of it and think about how to work today with today's China. And the most important thing, of course, is that it is very Chinese. And so, it supports nationalism today and it gets support from nationalism.

Ali Moore: Who was he? The question I perhaps should have asked from the very beginning. Who was this man who was able to give such wisdom?

Craig Smith: It's interesting because of course it wasn't really a religion at all. He was a man who was interested in influencing the rulers of the time, and one of the way he did that was he compiled a lot of texts. He compiled five classical books. So, he didn't write all this stuff. A lot of the stuff he just found from old sources, and just like Chinese people today who are looking back to Confucianism, he was looking back. And he said, "A thousand years ago everything was much better. They really had control over society, they were doing the right things." So, he was looking back to ancient texts or texts about history and showing how society should be in his time.

Ali Moore: Which gives it an even longer back story, doesn't it?

Craig Smith: Oh, yeah.

Delia Lin: Yeah. Basically to create a future from the past. So, look back at the past to build the future, which fits Xi Jinping quite well, because Xi Jinping has got this China dream. So, in order to realize this China dream, which he definitely will, we need to look back at how China became glorious before.

Ali Moore: So, here's a tough followup question for both of you. Delia, if, as you see it, Xi Jinping is using Confucianism to root in the past his China model, and his China model is, I suppose, a direct challenge to liberal democracy as an alternative model, is it a positive or is it a negative? A good thing or a bad thing?

Delia Lin: For whom? So, for the people I think it's a bad thing, because I see it really in conflict of what people want. In conflict with the growing consciousness of rights and individualism in Chinese society because of the opening up of economic freedom, and people would like a system that would respect them as individual. That would create dignity for all, not just for the elite. So, people are having this consciousness and if you look at everyday democracy movement it's there. People would like a system, would like a theory, that would facilitate that need. China has so many opportunities to do so, to deliver that, but Xi Jinping has decided to turn around and go the other way.

So, suddenly it will create more and more problems in society because people are not happy at the way it's going when they don't know when they will be the next person to be targeted. They don't know when what they say would be against the moral code prescribed by the government, even though they mean well, don't know when they will be the next person to be in the jail. So, no one wants to live in that insecurity. That's something that the government definitely needs to address if they really want to move forward.

Craig Smith: So, that's one perspective, but there's an optimistic perspective to look at this and say, if you look at how China has been changing and how it's going

to continue to change over the next years, there is a new moral emphasis in China and in that respect things can be better. I mean Xi Jinping is serious about controlling corruption. Crime is way down. Certainly in many respects the standard of living has really gone up, and it will continue to do so under these Confucian ideals. So, they are sacrificing a lot of liberal rights, but there are positives.

And if the people are able to hold Xi Jinping and the Communist Party to these Confucian ideals, then he has to follow the wang dao, he has to follow the kingly way and be a good ruler. So, maybe we can find something positive out of this. But, yeah, there's a lot of negatives too.

Ali Moore: You're having a bet each way? Thank you so much to both of you for your brilliant analysis on what is a very interesting topic. Thank you very much.

Craig Smith: Thank you.

Delia Lin: Thank you, Ali. Thanks for having us.

Ali Moore: Our guests today on this episode of Ear to Asia, Dr. Delia Lin and Dr. Craig Smith of Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne. Ear to Asia is brought to you by Asia Institute. You can find more information about this and all our other episodes at the Asia Institute website, and be sure to keep up with every episode of Ear to Asia by following us on the Apple podcast app, Stitcher or SoundCloud. And it would mean a lot to us if you'd give us a generous rating at iTunes or like us on SoundCloud. Of course, let your friends know about us on social media.

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