

you have to try to export it to the rest of the world, sometimes by force, such as the Crusades in the Middle Ages. That view is no longer so strong in the West, but there is still this kind of legacy that our view about morality and politics is the one universal view that should be exported abroad by whatever means, sometimes including military means.

That's a very dangerous view. My own view is that we do have some universal values. For example: Don't kill innocent people. Don't torture people. Slavery is bad. There are also what we call positive rights, like rights to basic material well-being. And it's OK to try to universalize those rights. But on how to select political leaders and how to organize one's economy — those can be very particular in different cultures and societies.

I think it's very dangerous if the West seeks to export those kinds of values. At the very least, there should be more serious effort to understand the political ideals that often motivate people here in China.

**Q: You mentioned in your book that there is nothing wrong with promoting Chinese ideas abroad so that foreigners can better understand what's going on in China, but this should be done in the right way. Could you elaborate?**

**A:** Sometimes it's the low-hanging fruit of how to translate some of the terms and ideas. In my book, I discuss translation issues for the term "harmony," or *he* (和), in Chinese. There's clear distinction between *he* and *tong* (同), like *junzi he er bu tong*, or "exemplary persons pursue diversity in harmony but not sameness/uniformity/conformity (*tong*)." This saying from the "Analects of Confucius" is well known to all Chinese intellectuals.

So we can translate *he* as "diversity in harmony" rather than uniformity, sameness or even conformity. But in the West, there's not that clear distinction between *he* and *tong*.

So when people in the West hear that China values harmony, they often think that it means that

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everybody should try to think and act in the same way. It's almost exactly the opposite meaning of *he*.

That's why we should translate terms in a way that doesn't lead to such misunderstandings because clearly the Chinese idea of *he* values and, in fact, celebrates diversity.

So those are some of the terms that literally are lost in translation. There are lots of things that need to be improved in intercultural communication.

**Q: Do you think Confucianism is still important for China or the rest of the world, for that matter? What should be done to spread its message?**

**A:** Confucianism is one of many traditions in China, and it's the one that has been most influential, at least politically. It was devalued for much of the 20th century, because Chinese intellectual reformers blamed it for China's poverty and relative backwardness compared with Western countries. But more recently, there's a view that countries with Confucian heritage, including China, South Korea and Singapore, actually developed quite rapidly in an orderly and peaceful way. And maybe Confucian heritage has something to do with that.

For example, Confucianism is a very diverse tradition but, generally speaking, it's this-worldly. And it promotes constant self-



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improvement, with high value placed upon education and concern for future generations. All these values probably contribute to a relatively peaceful and orderly form of modernization.

The Confucian tradition should not be studied in isolation. In China, it has often been mixed with other traditions, including Buddhism and Taoism. It's important to examine these traditions. If the concern is intellectual history, fine. You just look at what people said and why they said it. But if the concern is about thinking what lessons Confucianism offers today, then it's important to interpret these traditions in a comparative context. And sometimes the traditions need to be modernized in a way that adheres to central values.

**Q: Could you talk about your academic pursuits this year?**

**A:** I'm now at the University of Hong

Kong, where I am writing a book and teaching. If you really want to promote ancient traditions, including Confucianism, in a way that engages modern university students, it's best if we present them as though they are part of larger debates. I'm trying to show that fascinating ancient debates on issues like what counts as a "just war" or how to minimize corruption in government are still relevant today.

I'm currently writing a book showing how these debates in the Warring States Period (475-221 BC) are diverse and engaging, but also have some lessons for dealing with contemporary challenges.

**Q: Do you already have a title for the book?**

**A:** Probably the title will be "Talking about Politics," with the subtitle "Why Ancient Chinese Political Debates Matter Today." I hope to finish a draft this year.