

ANNE CHENG LECTURE SERIES

(COLLÈGE DE FRANCE)

Virtue and Politics

September 2 Virtue and Politics I: Ancient Chinese Conceptions

What kind of influence or coercion might be exerted on a human community so as to make it rally to a leader or, at least, accept a minimal degree of consensus? This is a question that was raised at a very early stage in China and has never ceased ever since to nourish philosophical inquiries as well as institutional practices. Whereas political theories in Europe, starting from ancient Greece and Rome, have endeavoured to devise conceptual models for achieving order to be enacted in the body politic, various traditions in China, notably Confucian, have conceived of the internal diffusion of an organizing principle radiating from the centre. Such a conception has led to the vision of an organic world animated by a 'harmonious' or self-regulating principle, rather than to the definition of a distinct political space within which citizenship is thought of in terms of specific functions and responsibilities. The founding political myths of ancient China have tended to fuse virtue and politics into one, posing a serious problem for the constitution of a nation-state in the modern era.

September 3 Virtue and Politics II: Contemporary Debates in China

For the past hundred years or so, ever since the early 20th century, the issue of the possibility for China to develop a democratic political system has been hotly debated, both by Chinese and Western theoreticians. Among the numerous propositions that have emerged, one of the most prominent is the attempt made by some "new Confucians" (most of them chose to leave Communist China after 1949) to delve into the resources offered by the Chinese intellectual tradition with a view to dig out indigenous antecedents of democracy. Ever since the 1980s, when mainland China jumped in its turn on the "new Confucian bandwagon", such mobilization of traditional culture has taken a rather more aggressive turn, with the search for a specifically "Chinese way". Central to this revival of a Chinese political way of thinking is the canonical text of the *Great Learning*. By establishing a continuity between ethics and politics, it raises, however, a number of problems and contradictions which shall be discussed in the course of this presentation.

16:00-18:00, September 2-3, 2011

Auditorium, 3rd Floor, Administration Bldg, University of Tokyo, Komaba

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