

Recent “Just War” Commentaries in the People’s Republic of China

1. Readers in Australia will be aware that the use of military force is frequently discussed in moral as well as legal terms. Much of the discussion uses the categories developed over centuries in the “just war” theory. The theory is of interest not only in Australia, but also in Asia. Even Singapore’s chief commando Colonel Noel Cheah has recently written on “The Application of the Just War Tradition in Contemporary Wars between States”.
2. An example of interest in the mainland of China is that in just a few months scholars have published a number of comments on the “just war theory”, and to reflect its content. The examples listed come from journals in Shanghai, Beijing, and Xian.

Zhou Guiyin, of the Faculty of International Relations in the Nanjing International Relations College has written on “China, the USA and the morality of war: towards a comparative analysis of the ‘justice’ of the Korean War” published in the Shanghai journal *International Relations*, 2004, no 2, pp 58-64.

Wu Zhengyu, of China Renmin University’s International Relations Faculty in Beijing, has written “An Analysis of the Current Significance of the ‘Just War Theory’” published in *Contemporary International Relations*, 2004, no 8, pp12-17.

Zhou Guiyin and Sheng Hong, both of Nanjing International Relations College have co-authored “The Theoretical Tradition of the Just War Theory in the West and its Debates” in *Studies of International Politics* 2004, no 3, pp22-30.

Wang Haiping has written on *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* in “Two Important Categories of Just War Theory in the West: Right to Resort to War and War Laws” published in the *Journal of the Xian Politics Institute of the PLA*, 2004, no 3 pp67-71.

3. Three of these articles are simply descriptions or analyses of the “just war theory”. But the article by Associate Professor Zhou Guiyin is particularly interesting because it seeks to put forward a *Chinese* approach to the justice of participation in the Korean conflict.

In the second part of his article, Professor Zhou bases China’s views on justice partly in the Confucian tradition, and in particular the notion of *ren* 仁, which can be variously translated as compassion, humanity, or benevolence. The word is rich in meaning, and highly developed over centuries of Confucian and neo-Confucian thought. In the fourth part of his article, he turns to more modern views on justice, based on the rightness of wars of liberation, socialist unity, and China’s own self-defence.

Professor Zhou’s sense of history is interesting. He attributes to China’s leaders in the 1950s a reliance on Confucian morality. This is, I think, an anachronism. In China,

Confucianism had come under attack particularly since the May 4 movement of 1919. China's Communist leaders took over the idealism of the May 4 movement, and saw themselves as heirs to its theoretical and practical condemnation of Confucianism. This would have been the prevailing approach to Confucianism in the 1950s. The condemnation continued until its peak in the Cultural Revolution. Since the Cultural Revolution the Chinese Communist Party has changed its position, and gradually drawn on the traditional principles, using phrases such as "the traditional moral excellence of China's peoples". But it would be anachronistic to ascribe this position to China's leaders fifty years ago.

Other comments could be made about Professor Zhou's article on the morality of the Korean War, a war in which Australian forces participated, a war which has not yet formally ended. But this short note is limited to his ethical discussion.

4. There is a need for opening up dialogue along both the lines suggested by Professor Zhou's article. Policy-makers who would rely on the just war theory can expand their horizons to include traditional Confucian ethics, which are important even beyond the bounds of the People's Republic of China. A recent work exploring traditional ethics is Edmund Ryden: *Just War and Pacifism: Chinese and Christian Perspectives in Dialogue*, Taipei, Ricci Institute, 2001. But it is not enough to consider only Confucian ethics. The People's Republic of China is the largest remaining communist state, and it is attempting to create a new socialist ethic. Although changes in Russia and Eastern Europe have made the study of communist ethics less popular in Europe, it is still important in Asia. Policy makers and scholars alike would be interested to understand how this new thinking in China concerning justification of the use of armed force has been shaped by the early years of communism, and how it is shaping now.

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