

# Undefined People and the Confucian Populism

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## ABSTRACT

Contemporary populism has been explained by an inherent antagonism between the innocent pure people and the powerful corrupt elite class. This understanding of politics necessarily attempts to define both who the people are and who the enemies of the people are in a political community. This essay analyzes the populist desire to verify the authenticity of the people by drawing on a different version of populism: Confucian populism. With its strong emphasis on the collective will of the people and the optimism about ordinary people's capability of moral self-cultivation, Confucianism seems to meet some of the most important standards of contemporary populism. However, situating the people in a series of ever-expanding concentric circles of relationships, Confucianism undefines the people, resisting the relentless desire of contemporary populism to verify who is the authentic and pure people and who is not. This essay addresses that contemporary populism is not the only way to define populism, but it may be redirected or tamed in a more inclusive and democratic way by learning from a different understanding of "people."

**Keywords:** Populism; Confucianism; People; Mencius

## INTRODUCTION

A series of political events in the U.S. and Europe in recent years have drawn attention to the rise of populist activism in the western world. And in 2016, the national referendum to withdraw from the European Union in the United Kingdom, the victory of Donald Trump in the U.S. presidential election, and the rise of right-wing populist parties in Germany, France, Austria, and Poland are some of the recent examples that right-wing populism has been legitimized in western democracies. While the populist politicians and ruling parties in these countries share a similar set of platforms, scholars have pointed out that populism may not be understood as a coherent political ideology or political philosophy. Instead, populism can be identified with both positive and negative sets of political beliefs. Populism has been above all associated with both direct rule and collective action by the people. At the same time, populism has also been attached to negative sentiments such as anti-intellectualism, anti-elitist, and anti-establishment attitudes: These people, whose voices are often believed to be ignored by the mainstream political and social apparatus, seek to take power back from the dominant elite class, whose members are assumed to run the established institutions of politics, economy, culture, academy, religion, and mass media, through their collective and direct actions. To achieve this goal, the established institutions and legal procedures may have to be destroyed or bypassed. Due to its multifaceted nature, populism has empowered both progressive

and reactionary movements in modern democracy. For example, in the United States, not only the women's suffrage movement and the progressive reforms of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but also the racist reactionary political activism in the south and McCarthyism in the early to late 20<sup>th</sup> century were partially in debt to populism [1-3]. It is not uncommon to witness these negative sentiments and demands in many mainstream political ideologies. However, contemporary populism pushes its lens of perception through the norms of politics and the operation of government in an even more radical direction: an irreconcilable hostility between the ordinary people and the elite class. In other words, contemporary populism is not merely defined with a positive democratic desire for self-governance by the people or with a set of anti-isms. The populist belief has built an inherent antagonism between the innocent pure people and the powerful corrupt elite class. In this sense, contemporary populism finds itself in the political arena of perpetual hostility and enmity between the people and the elites. This understanding of politics necessarily attempts to define both who the people are and who the enemies of the people are in a political community. To verify which people are unadulterated and uncontaminated by the elitist ideology and who have never colluded with them, contemporary populism advances another set of even more controversial questions: Who are the "authentic" and "pure" people? Thus, the never-ending quest for authenticity and purity in people has become characteristic of the contemporary politics of antagonism and enmity.

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

This essay aims to analyze the populist desire to verify the authenticity of the people by drawing on a different version of populism: Confucian populism. Confucianism has been understood as a humanist but also elitist political philosophy, which emphasized the primary role of the virtuous and knowledgeable elites (gentlemen, *junzi*). However, other scholars noted the populist nature within Confucianism as well, which was derived primarily from Mencius' recognition of the people as the ultimate source of political legitimacy. With its strong emphasis on the collective will of the people and the optimism about ordinary people's capability of moral self-cultivation, Confucianism also acknowledged that a certain level of antagonism is inevitable in politics. Confucianism seems to meet some of the most important standards of contemporary populism. These similarities between populism and Confucianism explain why the term Confucian populism has become popular among contemporary Confucian scholars. Despite the conceptual similarities, however, this essay also identifies the fundamental difference between Confucian populism and contemporary populism. Situating the people in a series of ever-expanding concentric circles of relationships, Confucianism *undefines* the people, resisting the relentless desire of contemporary populism to verify who is the authentic and pure people and who is not. In other words, Confucian populism, while sharing the optimism about people's capability for collective decision-making and moral self-cultivation, denies the politics of perpetual hostility and enmity. This does not mean that Confucian populism can "cure" the negatives in contemporary populism. Nor does it suggest that Confucian populism would be a better version of populism. Indeed, the historical examples in real-world politics prove that Confucian populism was just as nativist, protectionist, and isolationist as the contemporary populism we witness now. This essay, rather, addresses that contemporary populism is not the only way to define populism, but it may be redirected or tamed in a more inclusive and democratic way by learning from a different understanding of "people."

### Populism and the authentic people

Populism has been identified in the context of other comparable or contrastable political ideologies or a set of conceptual and political features. For example, Jeffrey Bell, one of the most important academic references in populism, defined populism as "optimism about people's ability to make decisions about their lives...and pessimism about an elite's ability to make decisions affecting themselves [people] [4]. In the same vein, Antoine Bevort [5] associated populism with the notion of "the power of the people," signifying people's direct participation in making decisions about their lives. Koen Abts and Stefan Rummens [6] confirmed that populism can be a central reference of the sovereign rule of the people. The strong faith in the popular will and political equality has attached populism to a nostalgic idea of direct democracy. Indeed, almost every democratic resistance and revolution would not have been possible without mobilizing this populist passion. Populism has become one of the most promising political norms in the age of "innate equality." Ordinary people, not a small group of elites, will determine a community's way of life and the standards that affect each member of the community [7].

However, populism is not explained by only positive and democratic ideas. Populism has been more often affiliated with anti-democratic political movements, such as racism, chauvinism, and collective violence toward racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants,

and foreigners. The populist frenzy in the western world since the 2016 Brexit referendum and the U.S. presidential election has led pundits to condemn populism as the "evil triplet," that is, "nativism, protectionism, and isolationism" [8]. Fareed Zakaria [9] pointed out that Trump's right-wing populism was not an outlier in contemporary western politics. In contrast to the common belief that populism gains power only in politically unstable and economically underdeveloped countries, white populism has become the main political driver in almost all western countries, even Germany and France, where economic growth has been robust and the states have successfully provided many protections for the working class. William A Galston [10] warned that the populist conception of politics in which all legitimate power must flow from the people has threatened "the ensemble of principles and institutions that comprise the liberal dimension of contemporary democracy."

These seemingly contradictory interpretations of populism have complicated how democracy has perceived the causes and effects of populism. Due to this complexity and confusion around contemporary populism, Jan-Werner Müller [11] argued that populism cannot be defined with "a particular social base or a particular set of emotions or particular policies." According to Müller [11], populism has usually been misunderstood as the negation of representative democracy which is assumed to be dominated by the corrupt political elite class. Or, populism has been falsely associated with all the negative "anti-isms," such as anti-immigration, anti-multiculturalism, anti-liberalism, anti-free trade, anti-intellectualism, and so forth. For example, populism does not necessarily reject the idea of representative government per se, as long as people are represented by some "authentic" and "faithful" representatives who precisely mirror people's will and want. Although populists would want to narrow the distance between citizens and government and rely as little as possible on their representatives, populism and the principles of representative democracy are not entirely antithetical to each other. In fact, the populist politicians who claim to represent those true, pure, and authentic people enjoy absolute support from the masses [12]. These populist politicians are usually charismatic, and their rallies are packed by fanatical supporters. Being anti-immigration and anti-free trade are not peculiar to populism, either. Many mainstream parties, including leftist parties, have adopted at least some versions of those so-called populist platforms. Likewise, populism cannot always be identified with a specific portion of a population – blue-collar workers, the uneducated, the poor, the rural residents, and so on. Until the recent rise in populism, these people usually supported traditional political parties on both sides. Also, the current populist movement in the western world has increasingly appealed to those who identify themselves as middle class, not as being at the bottom of society [13].

Although it is not easy to define what populism is and to identify its particular political visions, populism, especially its contemporary version, is known for one distinctive doctrine that separates it from other traditional political ideologies: the fundamental and irreconcilable antagonism between the innocent pure people and the powerful corrupt elite class. In addition to the corrupt elite class, contemporary populism has identified another enemy of the people: The unauthentic and impure people who coexist within the people but do not share – or are believed not to share – their common interests and identities. The elites would not be able to exercise their dominance over the people without support from their accomplices. The accomplices look like ordinary people, but

they are colluding with the elite class for their own political and economic gains. Populism does not simply represent the will of the people. Populism exclusively focuses on the will of the “true,” “pure,” and “authentic” people. In other words, the desire to “verify” who the real, pure, and authentic people are and who are not is a fundamental question the populists relentlessly ask. Only authentic and pure people are qualified to speak and act in politics and be the voice of all other impure people. Corrupt elites must be silenced. According to Judis [12], both leftwing populism and rightwing populism share this radically antagonistic version of politics. Leftwing populism may be more aligned with traditional democratic and liberal agendas, while rightwing populism has allied itself with traditionally authoritarian and conservative policies. However, both versions of populism share the same political hostility against the top and irreconcilable antagonism between the people and the elite class. Thus, rightwing populism is triadic while leftwing populism is dyadic, assuming that rightwing populists are more inclined to target the third group who are neither the true and genuine people nor the elite class [12]. The third group consists of those who do not share, or are believed not to share, the common denominators that define the authentic people, such as a shared culture, language, national identity, economic interests, and so forth. These are the unauthentic people, which includes immigrants, ethnic and racial minorities, sexual minorities, and political dissidents. Elites have conspired with these unauthentic and impure people to oppress the true and authentic people. However, leftwing populists do not entirely welcome this third group, either. The desire to verify the authenticity of the people, furthermore, exists in leftwing populism as well. For instance, while hesitating to get entangled with the populist Farmers’ Alliance, Samuel Gompers, the founder of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), did not hide his hostility toward the newly arrived “un-American” Asian immigrants. Gompers even warned that any union that granted union membership to Asian workers would be punished: “Your Union must guarantee that it will under no circumstances accept membership of any Chinese and Japanese” [14]. U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders, a self-proclaimed democratic socialist, voted to kill the 2007 bipartisan immigration reform bill and has continuously criticized the H1B visa program, blaming foreign guest workers for lowering the wages of average American workers [15]. In fact, the leftwing populist Sanders and the rightwing populist Trump share more in terms of their immigration, trade, and health care policies [4]. In other words, to varying degrees, both leftwing populism and rightwing populism believe in the existence of a third group, that is, the unauthentic and impure people, and suspect possible collusion between the corrupt elites and the third group.

In his defense of populism, Jacques Rancière [16] argued that the term “populism” or “populist” was invented by the elite class as a derogatory term to refer to the people who are “nice enough to vote for [the elites]...but ultimately ignorant, backward, and obedient to the very basest desires.” To Rancière, the so-called populist desires were in fact instigated by the elite class – both conservative and liberal – in an attempt to disqualify the people from ruling themselves: Condemning people’s recklessness and incompetence, as observed in the example of Brexit, the elite class denies “the power of those without any particular qualification,” those who are not rich or educated [17]. However, Rancière and other advocates of populism who identified it with democracy tended to ignore or downplay the populist desire to separate the authentic people from others: When they define who the authentic people are, they have

also effectively defined those who are not the genuine people. As Müller noted [11], the populists insist that “the [authentic] people must be extracted within the people.” The elite class may not be the only responsible group who are eager to verify who has the right to command and who are entitled to rule. The same, if not stronger, desire to verify the authenticity of the people is clearly found within the people themselves. The true, authentic, and pure people must exercise the exclusive right to run the government, and the unauthentic people, such as immigrants, racial and ethnic minorities, political dissidents, and their collaborators in the establishment should be disqualified in politics and silenced by the direct and collective action by the people. Democracy, especially the versions of direct democracy that emphasize people’s direct and collective action, may benefit from the populist zeal for political participation and the actions of ordinary people. At the same time, democracy must be aware of the destructive and divisive desire within populism, which continuously intensifies the politics of enmity, hostility, hatred against the so-called unauthentic and impure people who have been defined arbitrarily. Populism may enhance democracy only if it recognizes and rectifies its violent desire to definitively understand the people. In this context, a different version of populism developed in a different cultural background may provide new insight into a positive relationship between populism and democracy.

### Confucian populism and the will of the people

Confucianism has been known for its humanist approach toward fundamental political questions about the state, government, power, law, and justice. However, the relationship between Confucianism and modern democracy has not been solidly established. Some scholars have found a positive relationship between traditional Confucian values and modern democracy [18-20]. Due to Confucianism’s strong emphasis on the moral and traditional dimensions of human life, others understand that Confucianism may be associated with the republican or communitarian version of democracy, but not with liberal democracy [21-23]. On the other hand, many scholars are still suspicious of the egalitarian, sexist, and exclusive nature of Confucianism [24,25].

It is beyond this essay’s scope to analyze the hermeneutics of comparative political theory or how to read Confucianism from a comparative perspective. However, criticizing Confucianism as an undemocratic political philosophy, just because Confucianism does not clearly spell out some of the contemporary democratic terms including equality, individual freedom, and political participation, is not a fair critique. Confucianism may not be precisely translated with the language of modern politics that is indispensable to understand contemporary democracy. However, this does not necessarily mean that Confucianism is not receptive to or denies equality, individual freedom, and political participation. Confucianism, when it is situated in a modern context, cannot be completely separated from the language of modern democracy. Whereas Confucianism cannot be converted into a democratic theory or be receptive to every single contemporary democratic idea, its ideas still can communicate and interact with modern political vocabulary and be able to sustain its unique voice. Confucian vocabulary may not find a perfect translation in our dictionary, but its conceptual equivalence can be found in this modern context.

The term “Confucian populism” is a good example of how Confucian terminology can communicate with a contemporary political vocabulary while still keeping its own uniqueness though it may not have perfectly morphed into its contemporary conceptual

counterpart. As Mark Setton [26] puts it, “Confucian tradition as it unfolded...contained significant streams of thought that departed rather dramatically from the dominant emphasis on hierarchy and differentiation.” Drawing on Confucius’ and Mencius’s emphasis on the will of the people (*decrease* public opinion) as the ultimate source for political justification, Confucian scholars recently have found significant similarities between Confucian populism and contemporary populism [26-28]. The populist root in Confucianism can be traced back to *Shujing* (*Book of Documents*), one of the Five Classics in Confucianism. In *Shujing*, people are described as the foundation of a state and thus the ultimate source of political justification: “The people are the root of a country;

The root firm, the country is tranquil [29]. While the will of Heaven may be a more fundamental source for political justification, Setton [26] noted that the will of the people is so closely identified with the will of Heaven that those two wills were almost indistinguishable in real Confucian politics. According to *Shujing*, “That which the people desire, Heaven by necessity follows,” (*Shujing* 6:5) and “Heaven sees as my people see; Heaven hears as my people hear.” (*Shujing* 6:7) The will of the people was the only tangible way to figure out what the will of Heaven was.

Mencius developed his version of populism based upon this Confucian tradition. Believing that every person, not just an educated noble class, had a fundamental moral sense for “benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and right and wrong,” Mencius was optimistic about the people’s potentiality to make a right decision in their individual and political life [30]. Mencius wrote that “The people are the most important, the altars to the land and grain are next, and the ruler is the least important. For this reason, one who wins over the common people becomes the Son of Heaven” [31] It may be questioned, though, if Confucianism involves political equality, since Mencian populism did not develop into a representative theory, delegating the political authority to rule the people to the elected representatives [27]. Nevertheless, scholars indeed have found a conceptual root for egalitarianism in Confucianism. As Bruce Brooks and Taeko Brooks noted, the basic tenet of Confucian populism is that the people are the foundation of the state and that the test of a state is its ability to protect and provide for its people [32]. The will of Heaven may remain as the ultimate source for political justification, but Heaven has always spoken through the people. Therefore, the people and the ruler, or the ruling class, cannot be unequal. Van Hensbroek [33] illuminated that Confucian populism explicitly underscores that “the powerful can only legitimately derive their power from the subordinate.” Mencius even advocated the people’s right to revolution and tyrannicide: “One who mutilates benevolence should be called a ‘mutilator.’ One who mutilates righteousness should be called a ‘crippler.’ A crippler and mutilator is called a mere ‘fellow.’ I have indeed heard of the execution of this one fellow Zhou, but I have not heard of it as the assassination of one’s ruler.” Robert Eno confirmed that Mencius claimed that Heaven only worked through the action of the people, and in this way, “the will of the people has divine status in Mencius” [34].

It may seem unreasonable to directly compare Confucian populism, a political philosophy developed in East Asia 2,500 years ago, with contemporary populism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century western democracies. While the two versions of populism cannot be equated with each other, it is also true that Confucian populism and contemporary populism share one of the most fundamental principles of populism: an ultimate belief in the will of the people. Hence,

it is not an overstatement that Confucian populism can still be discussed in the context of contemporary populism. In other words, Confucian populism, especially its Mencius version, though not equivalent, can be conceptually compared to contemporary populism. Despite the commonalities between the two versions of populism, Confucian populism differentiates itself from its modern counterpart when it resists the most urgent desire in contemporary populism: the desire to verify the authenticity of the people. In contrast with contemporary populism that defines the friends and enemies of the people, Confucian populism *undefines* the people and confuses the demarcation between the friends and enemies in democratic politics. Confucian populism ultimately challenges the politics of enmity and hostility that is prevalent in contemporary populist politics.

### Confucian populism: Extension of benevolence and the undefined people

While Confucian populism has set the highest emphasis on the will of the people in the political process, Confucianism does not attempt to clearly define who the people are or what kind of people it is discussing. Perhaps it is because Confucianism was founded and developed during the Spring and Autumn Period and the ensuing Warring States Period when multiple states fought either to dominate each other or simply to survive. Confucian scholars were not interested in offering some “realistic” strategies or tactics to win a war, but rather tried to offer a different kind of answer to bring peace and prosperity to the whole of China and indeed, to the whole of humanity. However, the fact that the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period were the times of *realpolitik* indicates precisely that the Confucian project would not have been convincing to the rulers and the people. Gaining and maintaining power by any means necessary was justified during that period. War, deceit, betrayal, and assassinations were common. Strong states always preyed upon weak ones, and people were ready to do whatever it took to survive. It would be naïve to assume that people living in that political turmoil and chaos were not interested in the politics of enmity and hostility. It was a wartime and people were desperate to identify who their friends were and who the enemies were, and ultimately, who the true, authentic, and pure people were and who was not. Still, Confucianism was silent on these realistic questions. Confucianism refused to define the authenticity of the people. Confucianism confused the line between friends and enemies. The resistance to the populist desire for verification stands out in Mencius’ philosophy. Mencius believed all human beings had moral equality. All humans were capable of moral perfection. What all the legendary emperors and saints such as Yao and Shun demonstrated was the moral potential within every single person. In that sense, the people and emperors were not unequal. While Mencius followed the traditional classification of people as gentlemen (*junzi* 君子) and petty people (*xiao ren* 小人), those two types of people did not signify different and separate political classes, such as the elite class and the people. Confucian gentlemen are not superior to petty people in terms of their political, economic, or social status. They are neither richer nor more knowledgeable than any other ordinary man. This classification only shows that different people are in the various stages of moral perfection due to their different political and social circumstances and different degrees of personal effort. In a conversation with one of his disciples. Mencius elaborated:

Mencius’ disciple Gongduzi asked, “We are the same in being humans. Yet some become great humans and some become petty

humans. Why?” Mencius replied, “Those who follow their greater part become great humans. Those who follow their petty part become petty humans.”

For Mencius, every human being has potential to achieve moral perfection but each person cultivates it in a varying degree [30]. This is why the concept of “extension (*ju* 舉)” is important. Mencius thought that one must find a moral sprout within himself, cultivate it, and then extend it to broader relational circles around himself, to his family, relatives, friends, countrymen, and ultimately all human beings in the world. One must practice a moral and virtuous way of life from close relations, which is natural and hence, easier, but eventually, this moral principle must extend to all people, regardless of their social, political, economic status, and even their cultural and national identities. These ever-expanding concentric circles of human relations around a person confuses the solid line between the authentic people and the unauthentic people, and between friends and enemies – the very line contemporary populists desperately attempt to draw.

Mencius’ concept of the “extension” of benevolence is different from Mozi’s moral philosophy. For Mozi, the founder of Mohism and who debated with Confucian scholars, there are no concentric circles but only one circle around a person. That person must treat every relation impartially and equally. His concept of “universal love” signified the impartial application of the principles of love and affection to every human being to the exact same degree. If one favored one of his relations to the others, he was not practicing benevolence but rather, destroying it. Mozi [35] wrote, “One must treat one’s friend’s body as if it were one’s own, and one must treat one’s friend’s parent as if he or she was one’s own,” While Mozi’s moral philosophy shared the same goal with Mencius, that is, “procuring benefits for the world and eliminating its calamities through benevolence, Mencius considered Mozi’s impersonal and impartial application of benevolence was not only unrealistic but also inhumane: “Mozi is ‘impartial caring.’ This is to not have a father. To not have a father and to not have a ruler is to be an animal. Mencius acknowledged one’s natural affection for his close relationships. It was only natural and humane for a person to care for his family, relatives, friends, and neighbors ahead of his countrymen in other villages and provinces, and his countrymen ahead of “all in the Four Seas.” Benevolence and compassion eventually extended to all humanity only after being cultivated and practiced in his close relationships first.

One example of the extension of the principle of benevolence is well illustrated in *Mencius*. At the beginning of *Mencius*, a set of dialogues about a technique for cultivating benevolence take place between Mencius and King Xuan of Qi. One day, the king saw an ox that would soon be sacrificed to ritually anoint a bell with its blood. Feeling pity for the innocent ox, the king ordered that the ox should be spared and that it should be exchanged for a sheep. The bell should be anointed to properly worship Heaven, which was the right thing to do for a benevolent king to fulfill ritual propriety. However, a benevolent king cannot bear the death of an innocent animal when he sees its frightened appearance. The king finally ordered the replacement of the ox with a sheep. The king seems to find a creative solution in the midst of moral conflict because he saved the innocent life and worshiped Heaven. However, that may not have been the case. After all, a sheep is an innocent animal too, and the king exchanged the ox for a sheep simply because the king had not seen the sheep. The king saved an ox, but the sheep’s blood was shed and its scream was heard. The

king really “pretended” to be ignorant about the consequences of his own decision.

While the king could have been criticized for being a moral hypocrite, as all lives are equally valuable, Mencius was delighted because he found from the king’s decision a moral sprout to be cultivated and “extended”: compassion. Mencius said to the king:

Your conduct was a technique of cultivating benevolence. You saw the ox but had not seen the sheep. Gentlemen cannot bear to see animals die if they have seen them living. If they hear their cries of suffering, they cannot bear to eat their flesh. Hence, gentlemen keep their distance from the kitchen... He simply took this feeling and applied it to that. Hence, if one extends one’s kindness, it will be sufficient to care for all within Four Seas. If one does not extend one’s kindness, one will lack the wherewithal to care for one’s wife and children. (Mencius 1A7; translation modified)

Gentlemen are not ignorant of the sufferings of animals in the kitchen; they simply avoid watching them being butchered. Once they hear the cries of the innocent animals they will not be able to eat the meat. Some may call this moral hypocrisy, but Mencius thinks that this pretended ignorance was an important technique to cultivate the sprout of benevolence. A gentleman should not be satisfied with saving animals or staying away from the kitchen. This pretended ignorance is just a temporary means toward a more cultivated, developed, and extended application of an important moral principle: compassion that will extend to all people “within the Four Seas.” A person’s compassion, developed from one small and trivial occasion, must extend to all humanity.

In another example, Mencius discussed a story about how Confucianism confused the established friend-enemy distinction. Yugong Si received an order from his king to kill Zizhuo Ruzi who had just invaded Yugong Si’s country, the state of Wei. Yugong Si chased and finally spotted Zizhuo Ruzi. Although Yugong Si had a perfect chance to kill Zizhuo Ruzi, Yugong Si could not kill Zizhuo Ruzi: Zizhuo Ruzi was the master of Yin’gong Tuo, who taught archery to Yugong Si. In other words, Zizhuo Ruzi was Yugong Si’s master’s master. A passage in *Mencius* reads:

Yugong Si replied, “I am merely a petty person, but I studied archery under Yin’gong Tuo. Yin’gong Tuo studied archery under you. Master, I cannot bear to take your Way and turn it against you. Nonetheless, what I do today is service to my ruler. I dare not cast it aside.” So he pulled over some arrows and hit them against the wheel of his chariot, breaking off their tips. He then shot off a set of four arrows and only then returned.” (Mencius 4B24)

Yugong Si disobeyed his king’s order to kill Zizhuo Ruzi and instead shot him with arrows without tips. It was wartime, and Yugong Si not only deceived his king but also betrayed his own people by sparing the enemy of the state who happened to be Yugong Si’s personal acquaintance. Not only was he a traitor, but Yugong Si could also be an example of a corrupt elite who colluded with an enemy of the people, putting his personal relationship with a foreigner over the authentic people. For Mencius, however, this story is an example of extending one’s compassion even to the enemy, overcoming the natural or primordial desire to identify and eliminate the enemy.

The Mencian concept of “extension” is what distinguishes it from contemporary populism as it challenges the politics of antagonism and enmity supposed by contemporary populism. Mencius did acknowledge the natural bond and affection within the close

relational circles. Unlike contemporary populism, however, Confucian populism does not lock itself into existing immediate relationships. It does not antagonize others who are outside the native, established, and primordial boundaries. Confucian populism, rather, extends the concept of the people itself. A gentleman practices benevolence within the smaller circles around him, his family, relatives, friends, neighbors. However, eventually, he must extend one's love, affection, friendship, and compassion to all people in the world, overcoming any archaic and primordial boundaries. In other words, a "primordial and archaic man" must be "transformed into a moral person" [36]. Otherwise, he will be called a petty person. The lines between friends and enemies may exist among petty persons, but gentlemen know no such demarcation. Gentlemen are ignorant of who "their" people are and who are not, and who the authentic people are and who are not. Confucian populism does not recognize those questions.

### Conclusion: Confucian populism and its limits

In Confucianism, people are encouraged to extend the principle of love, affection, friendship, and compassion to all humanity. The concentric circles of human relations start from one's natural, primordial, more intimate relations such as family and relatives, but ultimately extend to larger circles, even beyond national and cultural identities. In this way, "people" cannot be defined or figured out. For Confucian gentlemen, all human beings are ultimately their friends to whom they extend their love and compassion. While Confucian populism shares the ultimate optimism about the people's ability to make decisions and the innate equality among them, its *dis*understanding and *dis*defining of people makes Confucian populism separate from its contemporary counterpart. Still, Confucian populism is not a version of cosmopolitanism or world citizenship. As we saw from Mencius' critique of Mozi's "universal love," Mencius did not believe that benevolence and compassion can be applied to every person to the same degree at once. This kind of impartial and even mechanical application of benevolence would not be possible. Mozi's "universal love" was a denial of natural and humane affection to more personal and close relations. While one's benevolence and compassion should ultimately extend to all humanity beyond personal and individual affection and even beyond one's nationality, they must be cultivated first in one's more natural and intimate relations. Confucianism does not believe that national and cultural differences must be eliminated or overcome. Confucianism may not deny nationalism, patriotism, or cultural identity per se. Yugong Si did not just let Zizhuo Ruzi escape. He did shoot Zizhuo Ruzi, though his arrows were without tips. People are, indeed, bound by their identities and defined by the relationships they hold dear. However, these relationships do not define people. Once people learn and practice humanity and benevolence in smaller relational circles, they must extend them to all others outside the primordial relationships. Mencius praised Yugong Si because he was a perfect example to show how to extend benevolence and compassion while still respecting one's public duty.

Extending benevolence beyond the natural boundary is difficult. King Xuan of Qi himself failed to practice benevolence beyond the boundary of his kingdom. In contrast, he continuously invaded other neighboring states, such as Qin, Chu, and Wei. And the war with Wei provided the beginning of Qi's collapse. In real-world politics, Confucian populism has failed to resist the violent and chauvinistic versions of traditionalism, nationalism, and patriotism. Confucian populism has been associated with several violent xenophobic and reactionary anti-government uprisings

in the early 19th and 20th centuries in East Asia, such as the Im-O Military Revolt in Korea (1882) [37], the Donghak Peasant Revolution in Korea (1894-1895) [38], and the Boxer Rebellion in China (1899-1901) [39]. While all these revolutions began in an attempt to take political power away from the corrupt political elites who colluded with the western imperialist powers and give it into the hands of the common people, those populist uprisings turned into massive violence toward the moderate reformists and innocent foreigners. A more recent example would be the rise of "Asian values" theory. Several authoritarian leaders in Asia have attempted to justify their oppressive political regimes with the language of Confucianism. According to C.Y. Hoon, [40] the "Asian values" theory makes four claims: First, human rights are not universal and neither can they be globalized; Second, Asian societies are not centered on the individual but on the family. The nation is like a big family; Third, Asian societies rank social and economic rights over an individual's political rights; Finally, the right of a nation to self-determination includes a government's domestic jurisdiction over human rights. As such, speaking of the "fundamental difference between Western concepts of society and government and East Asian concepts," Lee Kuan Yew [41], the former prime minister of Singapore, argued that "Eastern societies believe that the individual exists in the context of his family. He is not pristine and separate. The family is part of the extended family, and then friends and the wider society." Mahatir Mohamad [42], the former and current prime minister of Malaysia, warned against the "moral decadence" of western societies, where individualism, liberalism, cultural relativism destroyed traditional moral values: "The community has given way to the individual and his desires. The inevitable consequence has been the breakdown of established institutions and diminished respect for marriage, family values and elders, as well as important customs, conventions and traditions. While Lee and Mohammad seem to follow some of the teachings of Mencius, such as the importance of family values and loyalty to one's country, they twisted Mencius' more important teachings - the extension of benevolence and compassion.

### CONCLUSION

Ignoring the broader circles of human relations and the compassion for all humanity, those authoritarian leaders urged that extension had a fatal end, that is, the already existing political boundaries. Blind loyalty to country and unconditional submission to traditional values replaced the fundamental Confucian principles of benevolence, love, and compassion. These "Asian values" arguments, ironically, sound like some of the negative arguments of contemporary populism previously discussed: nativism, protectionism, and isolationism. In other words, the populist desire to verify the authenticity of the people may survive in Confucian populism, if people are not vigilant enough to fight the desire and not diligent enough to try to extend benevolence and compassion as far as they can. In this sense, the most important question left answered would be: How can Confucian populism be positively realized and actualized in real politics, in such a way that it challenges and destabilizes the relentless desire of contemporary populism to verify the authenticity of the people?

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37. The Im-O Military Revolt was a military coup by soldiers of the Korean old army. The revolt broke out in part because of Emperor Gojong's support for reform and modernization, especially his favoritism to the modernized new army and the Japanese military advisors. Joined by the wider Korean population and Confucian scholars who had been alienated by the social reforms and modernization policies, the rioters attacked, lynched, and killed high-ranking civil officials, the new army soldiers and officers, and Japanese diplomats and military advisors.
38. Donghak Peasant Revolution in Korea first started as a revolt against a corrupt magistrate in Gobu, a small county, but soon turned into a massive armed uprising against the government, especially the government officials who supported modernization and westernization of Korea. The revolt was led by the leaders of the newly founded Donghak Eastern Learning religion, most of which teachings were founded upon Confucian populism, egalitarianism, and anti-foreign and anti-imperialist sentiment. See Setton M for the detailed relationship between Confucian populism and Donghak thought. 2000.
39. Boxer Rebellion in China was a violent uprising by the members of the League of Harmony and Justice, also known as the "boxers" due to their practice of Chinese traditional martial arts. While it first started as a patriotic anti-imperialist movement, the Boxer Rebellion eventually turned into mob violence and terrorism towards not only foreign civilians and missionaries but also Chinese Christians. 1899-1901.
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