

# The Relationship between Neo-Confucianism and Science

—A Problematique to Tackle on this Question—

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Why the *Confucian* countries such as China and other Asian states could not bring forth the modern science? This question has been considered an aporia for a long time. And many a scholar has answered that: Neo-Confucianism (or its reign) was the biggest factor which hindered those countries in their scientific progress. And further, it was the greatest obstacle to accept the modern science later on. Each answer is, we may say, worthy of being considered; however, it seems to me that the aforementioned question is not an aporia but a silly question, and therewith each answer must be reconsidered before it will go out of use. In this regard, reconsideration entails self-reflexion/criticism upon the obsession of the west-centric modernism or Orientalism.

I would rather cross-question; how or why the *Confucian* countries could and should bring forth the modern science? It is no use answering this question—it is beyond reason. The Confucian countries has had the highly developed science of their own. It goes without saying that Neo-Confucianism had contributed much to the development of science. Neo-Confucian methods of learning, for instance, Zhu Xi's doctrine of *gewu* (格物; the “investigation of things”) and *qiongli* (窮理; the “plumbing of principle”), which evoked the scientific mind and evolved natural science in a Neo-Confucian way, have decisive relationality with the modern Western methodology of science.

Seemingly most of the ifalic countries except Japan, in the late nine-

teenth and early twentieth century, had failed in accepting the modern science. But we cannot say that Neo-Confucianism was the greatest cause of failure. On the contrary I think Neo-Confucianism would have contributed toward accepting and developing the modern science, unless Western countries and Japan had committed an evil act in terms of imperialism. Imperial countries would not permit the *Confucian* countries to go to the way of selection or rejection by harmonizing the modern with the traditional science or civilization. In this sense, the negative side of the modern/modernity was the greatest cause of the Confucian countries' failure. I think it will be the task of the 21st century to reevaluate the scientific thinking and method of Neo-Confucianism for further developing a 'new science.'