Breaking the Mold: Normative Hybridity as the Key to Contemporary "Non-Western" Political Theorizing

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W *hat normative compass can appropriately ground a theory for contemporary "non-Western" societies? This question has become urgent amid the pressure to decolonize political science and academia. The hybridity of numerous contemporary non-Western societies means that political theorists cannot refuse to engage with either Western-originated or premodern Indigenous concepts and ways of thinking that bear on the local public culture. However, these normative strands alone are unsuitable for grounding a contemporary theory. This methodological dilemma can be overcome if theorists adopt normative hybridity as a methodological stance. Normative hybridity suggests that hybridity is not only a feature of the theorist's context of reference but should also be their modus operandi. Normative hybridity already underpins relevant works in contemporary Confucian political theory. Drawing from these works, I illustrate three methods to apply normative hybridity to theory building. This novel methodological approach uniquely addresses current political theory discussions and influences non-Western policymaking.*

INTRODUCTION

The quest for methodological approaches to guide theory building for present-day *non-Western* societies has become central in contemporary political theory.[1] This quest is urgent for at least three reasons. First, using exogenous concepts and conceptual frameworks to produce new normative models for the non-West can reinforce Eurocentrism, allowing these principles to continue uncritically to shape knowledge production and its transmission in non-Western societies (Mignolo 2002; Quijano 2000; 2007). Second, using Europe- and America-centered norms and conceptual frameworks to analyze politics in societies with different historical and sociocultural backgrounds risks misrepresenting political situations. Often, these analyses arrive at the same conclusion: Non-Western societies systematically fail to meet universal normative standards (Nigam 2020, 31). Third, and more worrisome, Western-originated political categories are the principal normative base of political reforms in postcolonial societies. This often leads to political interventions that are not only out of touch with the conditions of postcolonial societies but they have pernicious effects on the local populations.[2]

To address these issues, several political theorists are advancing methodological proposals to break away from the restricted patterns of theory building. For example, Adom Getachew and Karuna Mantena (2021) propose *conceptual reanimation*, a contextually grounded methodological approach to avoid colonial biases and Eurocentrism. Conceptual reanimation invites political theorists to reformulate and retheorize universal concepts according to their instantiation in postcolonial contexts (2021, 372). For example, by exploring how democracy has been expressed in the political practices of postcolonial contexts, theorists can learn something "essential" about the "nature of democracy" (2021, 377). For African philosopher Kwasi Wiredu, the reconstruction of fundamental political ideals and the search for new political normative meanings relevant to postcolonial Africa should be grounded in *mental decolonization*. This methodological approach aims to rediscover Indigenous intellectual elements and opposes the uncritical assimilation of European categories and modes of conceptualizations (Wiredu 1996; 1998). Recently, African political theorist Uchenna Okeja (2022) has proposed grounding contemporary political theory for the African continent on what he calls *conceptual creativity*. This theory-building method involves amalgamating efforts to extract concepts from Indigenous precolonial sources

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[1] I use the term *non-West* in a political sense, not as a "residual category" referring to what is *not West*, but to indicate the life-words that have undergone the repercussion of the epistemic violence of the modern West (Nigam 2020, 21).

[2] See, for instance, Dembele and McMahon's (2005) analysis of how specific assumptions about "liberalisation," "progress," and "privatization" influenced many World Bank's and International Monetary Fund's unsuccessful economic interventions in African states; or Autesserre's (2009) analysis of the influence of crucial categorical assumptions and political principles on the failure of international intervention on Congo's violent transition to democracy.

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of knowledge alongside integrating significant contemporary sources (2022, 141).

The quest for methodological approaches to guide theory building for present-day non-Western societies is not limited to political theorists concerned with postcolonial societies. For instance, Chinese and comparative political theorist Leigh Jenco (2007; 2015; 2016; 2020) claims that political theorists should consider non-Western ways of thinking and life as sources of inspiration for less Eurocentric political theorizing. For Jenco (2007; 2015), alternative approaches to politics and knowledge production can be found primarily in the methods of inquiry of premodern and nineteenth-century Chinese intellectuals, such as the Neo-Confucian scholar Wang Yangming (1472–1529) and the Western Learning (Xixue) project—a series of intellectual debates that took place in China from the 1860s to the 1920s regarding the possibility of gaining and advancing different kinds of knowledge that were initially produced in Europe. According to Jenco, the work of these Chinese intellectuals is relevant for contemporary debates because they elaborated sophisticated methodological proposals to open their native intellectual traditions to new ways of thinking and conceptualizing.

Despite these searching debates, the quest for a methodological approach that could guide theory formation for contemporary non-Western life-words remains open. The need to produce political models relevant to contemporary societies urges theorists to focus on the specificities of today's non-Western societies. To this end, Getachew and Mantena (2021) correctly maintain that context matters, but contextual sensitivity cannot be defended at the expense of normativity. The ultimate goal of contemporary political theorists is prescriptive: they strive to generate normative guidance for present and future societies. Yet, it is unrealistic to believe that premodern Indigenous intellectual resources could ground contemporary theory, as suggested by Jenco (2007; 2015), Okeja (2022), and Wiredu (1998). Even if Indigenous intellectual resources still influence contemporary ways of life, Western-originated concepts and ways of thinking have irrevocably altered numerous local public cultures, becoming the basis of their political institutions.

This paper thus offers a novel solution to this methodological problem by offering contemporary non-Western political theorists a solid methodological standpoint to generate relevant political theories. The methodological dilemma of various contemporary non-Western political theories can be overcome by adopting *normative hybridity* as a methodological stance. Normative hybridity suggests that hybridity is not only a feature of the political theorist's context of reference but should also be their methodological stance. Normative hybridity is a dynamic and flexible methodological approach grounded on multiple normative sources. It invites the theorist to create new normative paradigms by synthesizing normative elements from native premodern non-Western traditions and the fundamental Western-origin conceptual elements that have been integrated into local political practices. Significantly,

normative hybridity overcomes some of the limitations of recent methodological proposals (Getachew and Mantena 2021; Jenco 2007; 2015; Okeja 2022), and it is already at the basis of several works in contemporary Confucian political theory. Drawing from some of these works, I illustrate three methods to apply normative hybridity to theory building: *Internal conceptual reconstruction*, *Weak normative twining*, and *Strong normative twining.*

The paper develops as follows. Section "The methodological challenge for contemporary non-western political theory" explains the methodological dilemma of contemporary non-Western political theory. Section "Normative hybridity as a methodological approach to political theorizing" presents a methodological solution to this dilemma: normative hybridity, and shows how this methodological approach is more agile than recent alternative proposals. Finally, drawing from recent works in Confucian democratic theory, I illustrate three methods to apply normative hybridity: internal conceptual reconstruction (section "Conceptual hybridity: internal conceptual reconstruction") and strong and weak normative twining (section "Framework hybridity: strong and weak normative twining").

THE METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGE FOR CONTEMPORARY NON-WESTERN POLITICAL THEORY

Several contemporary political theorists aim to develop normative models to guide non-Western societies and avoid coloniality and Eurocentric biases. Their aim reflects the broader ambition of the discipline of political theory to be "united by a commitment to theorise, critique, and diagnose the norms, practices, and organisation of political action […] in the past and *present*" (Dryzek, Honig, and Phillips 2006, 4, my emphasis). According to these scholars, theorizing is not only an intellectual pursuit but also a demonstration of their political and moral commitment to making positive contributions to their societies.[3] In their view, theorizing means creating normative guidance for their sociopolitical contexts.[4] However, developing a relevant theory for present societies requires the theory to

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[3] For instance, the development of a normative system to provide prescriptive direction to the present and future African societies is the central aspiration of contemporary African political theorists, such as Eze (2008; 2010), Gyekye (1997), Mbembe (2001; 2022), Menkiti (1984; 2002), Okeja (2022), Taiwo (2004), Wiredu (1996; 1998). Likewise, in Confucian political theory, prominent East Asian or East Asia-based political theorists, such as Bai (2019), Bell (2006; 2015), Bell and Pei (2020), Chan (2014), Ci (2019), Jiang (2012), Kim (2014; 2016; 2018; 2023), Kwon (2022), O'Dwyer (2019), and Tan (2004) have given considerable weight to the advancement of political theories specifically tailored to the needs and circumstances of contemporary East Asian societies.

[4] The academic stance of these political theorists sharply contrasts with the notion of theory recently proposed by Jenco who argues that theories consist of "the deterritorialization of ideas to produce new and broader insight into social and political conditions *elsewhere*" (Jenco 2016, 4, my emphasis).

exhibit a certain degree of sensitivity to the sociopolitical context and ways of life the theory refers to. Drawing from historian and postcolonial scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty's research on postcolonial India, this section argues that this "contextual sensitivity" requirement poses a strong methodological challenge to the future of non-Western political theory.

In his seminal book, *Provincializing Europe*, Chakrabarty acknowledges the pernicious aspects of coloniality and Eurocentrism in contemporary political theorizing. At the same time, he argues that contemporary postcolonial scholars cannot easily reject European- and American-derived ideas and conceptual frameworks because the latter remain the "silent referent" for much of non-Western ways of life (2000, 28). Today, it is "impossible to think of anywhere in the world without invoking certain categories and concepts, the genealogies of which go deep into the intellectual and even theological traditions of Europe" (2000, 4). To understand Chakrabarty's claim, consider his discussion of the modern subject in postcolonial Bengali literature. In his view, the new ideas and ways of thinking that British colonial domination brought to Bengal have meshed with native intellectual and cultural ways of thinking and life. This encounter irreversibly altered the Bengali subject and public culture. For example, before colonial rule, widowhood was never addressed as an issue in Bengali society, but the encounter of Bengali intellectuals with British literature led to a new literary sensitivity to the figure of the Bengali widow (2000, 118). The latter became the new subject of modernity, characterized by a complex internal struggle between sentiments and reasons (2000, 131). The forbidden romantic love of the Bengali widows was even developed into the subject of some of the first modern Bengali novelists, such as Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838–1894), and Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay (1876–1938).[5]

Chakrabarty's ideas have become known to numerous political theorists through the works of Comparative political theorist Jenco, who has articulated her methodological position in contrast to Chakrabarty's stance. In a series of works, Jenco famously argues that Chakrabarty suggests that European- and American-derived concepts and conceptual frameworks are sufficient to understand non-Western life-words or formulate normative recommendations for changing them. "Eurocentrism […] becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy on this view" (Jenco 2020, 62), and in his view: "Indian and other 'non-Western' forms of philosophy and social inquiry […] are simply unable to be resources

for critical thought in the present, in the same way, that Western thinkers might be" (Jenco 2015, 3).

This is an unfortunate misrepresentation of Chakrabarty's view. Chakrabarty's point is not that Eurocentrism is inevitable but that the encounter of European ideas and concepts of political modernity with local practices and intellectual traditions of precolonial India has created unique forms of hybridity, new intellectual and social practices, ways of life incommensurable to both Western and premodern Indigenous traditions. In the same page cited by Jenco, Chakrabarty states that "[European thought] is both *indispensable* and *inadequate* in helping us to think through the various life practices that constitute the political and the historical in India" (2000, 6, my emphasis). This is because "universal thought was always and already modified by particular history, whether or not we could excavate such pasts fully" (Chakrabarty 2000, xiv). So, the problem with Jenco's critique is not only that it presupposes the presence of a pure Eastern culture unmodified by Western ideas and ways of life (El Amine 2016, 105) but overlooks that, for Chakrabarty, the rise of a new modern Bengali subject does not confirm the universalism of European categories and sensitivity. While it shares traits and practices with both the Western modern and the native premodern subjects, it is impossible to appropriately understand it through the standards of Western modern or native premodern Indian political thoughts (Chakrabarty 2000, 144, 148). The new Bengali modern subject is a "mobile point" of multiple and incommensurable practices (2000, 114, 144, 148). Notably, for Chakrabarty, the same hybridity also characterized the meanings of Western-origin political concepts, such as "democracy" and "equality," "citizenship," "civil society," or political approaches, like "liberalism" and "nationalism," that have come to shape the political and legal institutions of modern India as well as its public discourse. While these European ideas and ways of thinking were imported to other historical contexts, like colonial India, they never became universal ideals because they always developed new meanings by imbibing the local culture and sociopolitical practices (2000, xiii).[6]

Chakrabarty's analysis of the hybridity of postcolonial politics and ways of life sheds light on the root cause of the methodological problem of various contemporary non-Western political theorizing. On the one hand, context sensitivity requires political theorists to pay attention to both the premodern Indigenous intellectual resources and Western-originated political concepts and ways of thinking that influenced contemporary non-Western societies. But, on the other hand, the creation of normative models relevant to these contemporary societies cannot rely solely on conceptual and epistemic retrieval of Indigenous intellectual

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[5] The impact of global capitalism on colonial societies like India is another central element of Chakrabarty's reflections. Against Marxist approaches to history that view development as a monistic and linear progress, Chakrabarty argues that global capitalist modernity generates a heterogeneity of ways of life incommensurable to one unique conception of linear history. For a discussion of Chakrabarty's view on global capitalism and his critique of Marxism, see Murthy (2016).

[6] Chakrabarty's view has been defended more recently by other non-Western political theorists. For instance, reflecting on contemporary India, Aditya Nigam maintains that coloniality has disrupted native political cultures and interfered with the development of *new* ways of thinking, concepts, and practices of knowing (2020, 22).

resources or Western-originated intellectual elements because hybridization has irreversibly altered the local political culture and native ways of life. Under these circumstances, it is still being determined what normative framework should guide the development of a theory that gives prescriptive direction and, at the same time, is relevant to these societies. Neither Western normative frameworks nor premodern conceptual apparatus seem fully adequate. These political contexts are "mobile points" like the modern Bengali subject in postcolonial Indian literature, and because of their hybridity, these societies cannot be fully captured through native premodern or foreign political conceptual standards alone; the theorist can neither wholly follow Western and premodern Indigenous normative frameworks and concepts nor can they completely dismiss them.

The implication of Chakrabarty's analysis extends to normative projects for non-Western societies that Europeans had not formally colonized. Consider the case of contemporary East Asian societies, such as China, South Korea, and Japan. Their encounter with European imperialism and modernity was significantly different and relatively less dramatic from the experiences of some South Asian, African, and Latin American societies. However, European conceptions of progress and modernity have also irreversibly disrupted the conceptual frameworks of East Asian intellectuals and affected the conditions of their societies, creating new political institutions, ways of thinking, political concepts and ambitions, and practices of knowing.[7] This does not mean that European conceptual elements were passively and uncreatively absorbed. For example, Sungmoon Kim, reflecting on the future of East Asian political theory, clarifies that his normative model aims "to be a political theory that makes sense to and can effectively guide the political lives of men and women who exist in East Asia, *struggling between a modernity of Western origin, of which liberalism and (representative) democracy are defining elements, and a traditional way of life strongly influenced by Confucianism*" (Kim 2018, 190, my emphasis). Similarly, Chinese-origin philosopher Tu Wei-ming believes that Western-originated conceptual apparatuses have become an inevitable element for contemporary theorizing in East Asia. Western ideas of modernity are "an inextricable dimension of our common heritage in the 'global village'" (1989, 84). However, by themselves, they are inadequate to interpret contemporary East Asian consciousness because "we have enough indications to know that this [contemporary East Asian consciousness] is *new*" (Tu 1989, 89, my emphasis). Chinese intellectual historian and literary scholar Wang Hui seems to agree with Chakrabarty on the heterogeneity of universal ideals when he argues that "[p]lurality in unity is a global phenomenon (2023, 12). In modern times, Chinese traditions and ways of life have absorbed several institutions, political ideas

(e.g., Marxism), and social organizations derived from the West (Wang 2023, 12). However, Wang adds, this encounter has never been a "one-way relationship," Chinese ideas and political situations influenced the political culture of others, such as "[t]he events of 1968 in Europe, the Maoist movements in South Asia and Latin America" (2023, 12).

For these East Asian political theorists, contemporary East Asian consciousness consists of new hybrid social practices, political norms, and institutions derived from the encounter of native life practices and conceptual frameworks with elements that originated from European experiences. None of them excludes Indigenous traditions like Confucianism which continue to influence contemporary East Asian societies and political culture.[8] However, to the extent that contemporary East Asian life-words are intellectually hybrid, premodern intellectual traditions *alone* are an inadequate normative resource for theorizing about contemporary East Asian politics.

The above discussion on hybridity shows that Jenco's method-centered approach is unsuitable for contemporary non-Western political theorizing. Jenco argues that the methods of inquiry of premodern and nineteenth-century Chinese intellectuals indicate the correct methodological approach for contemporary political theory formation. Because these intellectuals were involved in the "intellectual negotiation of their own traditions with new foreignness" (Jenco 2007, 746), their works can be critical "to render *culturally*-others as well as historically-other thought capable of disciplining the present and future production of knowledge" (Jenco 2015, 11). However, the conditions for knowledge production for contemporary non-Western political theorizing radically differ from those of Wang Yangming and the Chinese thinkers involved in debates concerning Western Learning. The methodological proposals of these Chinese thinkers were tailored to answer to their particular historical and political situation: they "personally confronted the historical processes that supposedly culminated *in the displacement* of "precolonial," "Indigenous," or "traditional" modes of thought by the terms of Enlightenment modernity" (Jenco 2015, 2, my emphasis). This historical and political situation radically differs from the one faced by contemporary non-Western theorists because multiple intellectual traditions have *already* shaped most contemporary non-Western societies' cultural and political backgrounds. Thus, Jenco is correct in arguing that the political can be theorized without European categories, but she is wrong to think that such an avenue is open for most contemporary non-Western political theorists. To the extent that

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[7] For an excellent description of this intellectual encounter and its powerful creative aspect in mainland China, see Jenco (2015).

[8] Consider the case of South Korea. While having adopted Western-style liberal democratic institutions and many citizens' deep attachment to democratic values and Western-origin religious doctrines, Confucian mores and habits still significantly shape the lives of many Koreans (Kim 2009; 2014; 2018). For empirical findings on the influence of Confucian ideas and mores on contemporary South Koreans' ways of life, see Doh (2011) and Koh (1996).

European-derived fundamental political concepts and conceptual frameworks irreversibly altered non-Western contemporary politics, shaping ways of life and institutions of many East Asian countries, to "seek an *absolute* alternative to Western categories" (Jenco 2007, 743, my emphasis) makes little sense.

NORMATIVE HYBRIDITY AS A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO POLITICAL THEORIZING

Normative hybridity overcomes the methodological dilemma for contemporary non-Western political theorizing by focusing on how multiple normative elements can be creatively combined to generate new political standards. This requires political theorists to mix normative elements that initially belonged to different intellectual traditions that partly resonate with the sociocultural elements of the non-Western society of the theorist. By doing so, hybridity is not only a feature of the political theorist's context of reference but also the central feature of her modus operandi. Normative hybridity encourages a "fusion style of thinking" (Chakrabarti and Weber 2016), that is, a way of theorizing the political in which normative elements from different philosophical traditions are brought together not for the sake of the effects of the comparison but to create an original prescriptive political model (Chakrabarti and Weber 2016, 19).

Normative hybridity does not entail that valuable contributions to theory formation cannot be drawn from intellectual resources beyond those that bear on the chosen contemporary sociopolitical context. However, to be relevant for contemporary hybrid sociopolitical contexts, theory formation should be grounded on the normative elements that already have a strong bearing on contemporary politics. Furthermore, it does not exclude the possibility that normative ideals can be derived from resources other than ancient texts, including the contributions of contemporary thinkers, journalists, politicians, or even social customs. In practice, adopting normative hybridity as a methodological stance in political theorizing for contemporary India would require, at the minimum, integrating elements of Indigenous intellectual traditions with European-originated elements that have become an integral part of contemporary Indian politics and culture, such as ideas like "democracy," "secularism," or "nationalism." Similarly, developing a contemporary political theory relevant to East Asian countries must engage with Indigenous intellectual traditions and Western-origin elements that have shaped these countries' contemporary public cultures and political and legal systems.

One could argue that normative hybridity is intrinsically problematic. Once the theorist aims to craft a political theory for a pluralistic contemporary society by partly grounding the theory on a premodern ethical doctrine, they put themselves in the difficult position of justifying this doctrine's legitimacy and political plausibility to contemporary audiences.[9] However, this challenge applies virtually to all political theorists endorsing specific political values. For example, Marxist, liberal, communitarian, utilitarian, libertarian, or contractarian theorists all believe that their doctrines have something normatively valuable for contemporary societies and, therefore, must justify them to the unconvinced.

But why normativity in the first place? Why not simply build from existing elements of the hybrid society? A similar suggestion has been advanced by Getachew and Mantena (2021) through what they call *conceptual reanimation*. The latter invites the theorist to reformulate concepts, such as democracy, based only on analyzing the conditions of political practices in non-Western political life-words. "The wager is that by examining how democracy works in historical spaces far removed from its supposed origins or ideal-typical form, something truer about the dynamics of democracy might be revealed" (Getachew and Mantena 2021, 377).

Normative hybridity recognizes that the observation of the particular sociopolitical conditions of contemporary non-Western societies should influence theory formation. However, normative hybridity views contextuality alone as insufficient for contemporary theory formation. Normativity permeates and guides the production of theories and the so-called scientific and objective political analyses. So, the theorist cannot simply build from existing elements found in the hybrid society when it comes to theory formation because normative categories structure the theorist's understanding of the world and shape their political theorizing. A discussion of the normative background of these premodern elements is required to ensure that assumptions, without any investigations, do not drive one's analysis.

For example, consider the theorist engaging in *conceptual reanimation* (the theory-building method proposed by Getachew and Mantena) of the concept of democracy. Their normative assumptions will influence their decision about what features of the observed political context (e.g., party competition, political participation, civil society, periodic elections, public deliberation) should be considered democratic and what democratic features are more essential than others. Thus, the crucial question for non-Western political theory is not *whether* normative categories should guide the analysis of non-Western politics but *how* normative standards must fulfil this role. Failing to see the influence of normative elements on contextual observation may risk perpetrating coloniality by unintentionally allowing Eurocentric conceptual categories to determine the theorist's creative process.

This leads to the suggestion that normative hybridity's reliance on the concept of hybridity may be contentious. In Indigenous political theory, hybridity can be seen as the damaging effect of the forced

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[9] Kim raises this methodological objection against contemporary attempts to reconstruct Confucian political theories (Kim 2018, 191).

replacement of the Indigenous legal and political structure by the Colonial powers with the "institutions, laws, and values of the colonizer" (Jackson 1992, 3).[10] From this perspective, normative hybridity risks passive acceptance of the disruption and injustice that the West brought to non-Western societies. Indirectly, it can even support cultural assimilation, a move that has evoked calls for the right of independent sovereignty, by Indigenous activists and scholars like the pioneer in Indigenous studies Vine Deloria Jr. (1933–2005) and Audra Simpson (2000; 2014), or calls for "Indigenous resurgence," by Indigenous scholars like Taiaiake Alfred (1999; 2005), Glen Sean Coulthard (2014), and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2011; 2017).

It is not within the scope of this paper to resolve the intricacies and sensitivity surrounding the debates on hybridity; the claim for sovereignty is controversial in Indigenous political debates. For instance, Alfred (1999) and Dale Turner (2001) maintain that the concept of sovereignty and the framing of the Indigenous groups' aspirations in terms of "claims" are alien to Indigenous political thought and reveal the influence of Western ideology on the debate on Indigenous politics. Notwithstanding the complexities underlying hybridity, various postcolonial theorists have attributed a positive connotation to hybridity. For Homi Bhabha, hybridity can be interpreted as a response of postcolonial societies against the imposition of European hegemony and modernity (Bhabha 1994, 6–7), while for others, hybridity reveals the power of minority and subaltern groups to redesign social imaginaries (Werbner 2015, 1).

However, in response to the threat of diluting Indigenous cultural practices, I must emphasize that I do not claim that hybridity is a "normative good" in all political contexts nor deny the necessity of reparative justice to the disruptive effects caused by Western colonialism on Indigenous groups. Normative hybridity is a modest attempt to offer a methodological proposal for theorizing the political future when hybridity is no longer reversible and the politics and native ways of life have permanently changed, as none of the existing predominant conceptual frameworks adequately make sense of these political realities.[11] To this end, the inherent skepticism of Indigenous political theorists toward hybridity may be unfounded in sociopolitical contexts where the right for self-determination of native people is uncontested. Because numerous Indigenous people continue their struggle to reclaim their lands and resources and to free themselves from colonial domination, the central concern for Indigenous theorists revolves around the question of freedom from settler-colonial rule. Cultural appropriation, on the one hand, and cultural assimilation, on the other, threaten the survival of First Nations' culture. In this context, skepticism toward calls for hybridity is reasonable. For instance, Coulthard argues that First Nations in North America can win their fight for recognition only by a "fundamental break with the background structures of colonial power" (2014, 39), because colonial domination does not affirm itself only through the use of violence, but also through the production of "forms of life that make settler-colonialism's constitutive hierarchies seem natural" (Coulthard 2014, 152).

However, the contexts of reference for Indigenous theorists significantly contrast those explored in the previous section. In numerous postcolonial or non-Western countries, like India and other East Asian nations, normative hybridity may not be viewed as a threat to cultural preservation since these are sovereign nations where the rights to self-determination and land ownership are not contested. Similarly, normative hybridity does not necessarily foster cultural appropriation in these contexts. If we consider cultural appropriation as the act of members of a dominant cultural group to silence and speak for individuals who are already socially marginalized, the marginalized group loses special credibility regarding their experience (Matthes 2016). However, it is unclear how this credibility deficit can occur in sociopolitical contexts where the native non-Western scholars are not marginalized but instead represent the large majority of experts with robust epistemic authority.

These considerations bring us to the question of how normative hybridity can be applied to theory building. As a methodological approach, normative hybridity sets the way (or strategy) to conduct research. However, it is not a method because it does not provide the political theorist with specific means to develop a new normative proposal.[12] So, assuming that the question of our interest is how to produce a political theory for contemporary non-Western societies, it remains to be seen what methods of theory-building political theorists can use to realize normative hybridity.

Normative hybridity can be applied to two levels of theory building: at the conceptual level and framework level. In the first case, the theorist adopts normative hybridity to creatively redefine and refashion public political concepts and fundamental political ideas of a given sociopolitical context, such as "political equality," "liberty," or "political participation." In the second case, normative hybridity applies at the level of the normative framework. In this case, the theorist adopts this methodological approach not to develop

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[10] Similarly, in the Latin American context, hybridity is associated with a racial concept referring to the by-product of colonial cultural appropriation, marginalisation, and extermination of Indigenous ways of life (Kraidy 2002, 319).

[11] Cultures are always hybrid to a certain extent, but hybridity also exists in various degrees, with certain degrees being more socially and politically relevant than others. Conceptually, one can imagine a binary distinction between hybrid and non-hybrid but, in practice, there are multiple types of hybrid subjects (Marotta 2020, 2). This is why proponents of hybridity theories refuse to consider hybridity as a mix of two separate cultural entities and consider cultures as evolving "constantly" and "organically" (Werbner and Modood 2015, xiv).

[12] Kerry Howell aptly distinguishes "methodology" from "method" in the following way: "[M]ethodology is defined as the research strategy that outlines the way one goes about undertaking a research project, whereas methods identify means or modes of data collection" (Howell 2013, x).

new meanings of public political concepts but to define their relations. In this latter case, the theorist aims to create a new political model or coherent "political vision" for the contemporary non-Western polity.

It is possible that a political theorist who aims to engage in this normative task can also choose to engage with normative hybridity at the conceptual level at some point. For instance, they can create a new theory of democracy starting from proposing a new meaning of equality. This new concept of equality can, in turn, help the theorist reassess the relationships and values of other critical conceptual elements of a democratic theory, such as political participation and deliberation. However, applying normative hybridity at one normative level does not necessarily require applying normative hybridity at the other normative level. The choice between these two normative tasks depends on the theorist's goal (e.g., they can focus their analysis on equality alone or develop a new theory of democracy by connecting multiple concepts in a novel way).

In the following sections, I will discuss applications of normative hybridity to these normative levels. Using insights from contemporary research on Confucian democracy, I will contend that normative hybridity can be expressed by what I call *Internal Conceptual Reconstruction* at the conceptual level and *Weak* or *Strong Normative Twining* at the framework level.

CONCEPTUAL HYBRIDITY: INTERNAL CONCEPTUAL RECONSTRUCTION

Internal conceptual reconstruction can be used to develop an alternative political vision for existing political concepts. When fundamental Western-originated political concepts have been absorbed by the local public culture and political and legal institutions, internal conceptual reconstruction suggests using native conceptual resources to align the meaning of these political concepts to the hybrid local culture. Native intellectual resources that resonate with the local public culture are used to create a new hybrid political idea to meld the foreign-originated concept into the sociopolitical context. Through dialectic negotiation, the theorists revise the Western-origin fundamental political concepts that have come to shape the non-Western life-words. They do so by critically assessing the political concept from the standpoint of Indigenous traditions that still bear on the local public culture and their normative judgment. The result creates a new stage for the Indigenous traditions, a stage where the latter encounter new societal-political conditions and foreign ideas, and pluralizes the terms of the political debate.

Various Confucian political theorists have performed internal conceptual reconstruction to renegotiate Western-origin political concepts that have become fundamental in the politics of East Asian societies of the Confucian heritage. Although none of these scholars has expressed their intention to use this theory-building method, their works reveal that they have engaged in internal conceptual reconstruction. The objective of most of these scholars is to address

"the frustrating reality that the (more or less) democratic institutions that they (or their leaders) have imported from the West do not work as the theories of liberal democracy claim" (Kim 2014, 10). While they believe that Western-origin political concepts, such as political equality or human rights, have become fundamental values of East Asian democratic societies, they disagree with the liberal justification of these ideas and argue that conceptions different from Western ones and more attuned to the Indigenous cultures of East Asia are possible and morally desirable. In their view, Confucianism is an invaluable creative source for theory productions as it is one of the most ancient East Asian intellectual traditions that have profoundly influenced East Asia's cultural and political life. To fulfil their normative goal, several Confucian democrats use Confucian conceptual resources to develop new political paradigms for contemporary East Asian societies.

Consider Stephen Angle's (2012) reconstruction of the moral value of political participation from and methodically justified by classical Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism. Ancient Confucianism opposed people's political participation. *Tian* (天) was viewed as the normative order of the cosmos and the ultimate source of political authority of the ruler. In contrast, the people were the intermediaries of *Tian* (天). The people as masses (*min* 民) could not develop a critical perspective on politics nor had the right to engage in political affairs. They only collectively expressed *Tian* (天)'s degree of approval of the incumbent ruler, like thermometers (Angle 2012, 40). Angle's argumentative strategy for developing a Confucian concept of political participation pivots on the redefinition of the political role of the people. He does so through the Neo-Confucian idea that identifies *Tian* with "coherence" (*li* 理), the structure of the cosmos that explains how all things are interrelated (2012, 48). Given that today's coherence may represent not a mystical entity but rather how things are and what is truly valuable (Angle 2012, 56) in today's politics, coherence is revealed through people's different perspectives and points of views (Angle 2012, 50). Today, each individual is capable of developing a unique judgment on the world based on their experience and social progress can be achieved through the expression and integration of people's perspectives (Angle 2012, 51).[13]

This justification for political participation shows that people's participation in political affairs is instrumental to the Confucian goal of revealing coherence. Political participation can also be conducive to individuals' moral development since it encourages them to engage in social relations of caring for others—a fundamental aspect in the Confucian ideal of self-cultivation (Angle 2012, 55). Angle's internal

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[13] This favorable judgment of the people's critical capacities is not entirely against ancient Confucianism because some passages of the *Mencius* represent the people as individuals with a potential for moral cultivation (the ultimate goal of the Confucian life) that can lead them to develop a moral agency equal to the Chinese mythological sage kings (Angle 2012, 40).

reconstruction of political participation also refashions the meaning of political participation. A Confucian idea of political participation goes beyond the political practices, like voting and participating in protests, that mainstream Western political theory often associates with political participation. Because Confucianism does not make a sharp distinction between the personal and the public sphere, Confucian political participation is a wider concept, encompassing individuals' daily engagement in activities that most mainstream Western political theories would not view as political, such as one's involvement in the management of garden clubs or blogging about one's own experiences (Angle 2012, 56).

Another example of internal conceptual reconstruction is Kim (2014)'s Confucian popular right to political participation. Kim begins with the Mencian idea of egalitarian dignity and expands upon it to make a case for the equal right to become public officials, ultimately culminating in the right to political participation under contemporary East Asian political circumstances. Kim argues that while the ancient Confucian masters never considered individuals as free and equal, a Confucian idea of political equality can be reconstructed from Mencius' idea of "equal moral potential." The latter views every human as being born with the equal ability to develop morally and the potential to become a sage (Kim 2016, 210, 215). This fundamental natural moral equality undergirds human dignity and offers the conceptual background to defend a particular concept of political equality, according to which any virtuous individual must be granted equal opportunity to become a political official, despite their background and socioeconomic situation (Kim 2016, 221). This opportunity depends on people's fundamental moral equality and warrants them a right to political participation (Kim 2016, 222).

Kim's internal conceptual reconstruction results in a Confucian conception of right to political participation, which significantly differs from most Western democratic theories. Unlike the concept defended in Western republicanism, the Confucian right to political participation does not entail citizens' entitlement to collective self-government nor the prerogative of any layperson to participate in critical public decisions (such as constitutional decisions) (Kim 2016, 223). However, it attributes collective political agency to people and ensures they can keep the ruler accountable (Kim 2016, 223). While we cannot assess the plausibility of these normative proposals in this paper, Angle's and Kim's analyses are examples of conceptual internal reconstructions. By using Confucian ideas, they both attempt to critically reformulate the meaning and normative justification of a fundamental Western-origin political concept that has come to shape many contemporary East Asian societies.

To grasp the potential of conceptual internal reconstruction, compare it with a similar methodological proposal: Okeja (2022)'s theory-building method *conceptual creativity*. According to Okeja, colonial-driven conceptual loss has led many contemporary Africans to a situation of "cognitive disorientation"; they struggle to find adequate concepts to name African political experience (2022, 132). This disorientation contributes to the "political failure" of contemporary African politics by making it harder for Africans to find normative paradigms that effectively respond to their political problems and express their political aspirations (Okeja 2022, 131). To overcome this problem, Okeja proposes to apply the method of conceptual creativity. This method aims to provide "the basis for imagining a coherent political ideal capable of responding to the phenomenon of political failure" and grounds a conception of political philosophy for contemporary Africa (Okeja 2022, 135). Conceptual creativity focuses on concepts; it refashions, rethinks, and merges "paradigms of Africa's traditional and modern conceptual resources" (Okeja 2022, 141). This dynamic fusion involves the amalgamation of efforts to extract concepts from previous sources of knowledge alongside the integration of contemporary sources of significance (Okeja 2022, 141). It merges "attempts at conceptual retrieval with contemporary sources of meaning" (Okeja 2022, 141).

Conceptual creativity comprises five steps. The first step is *Recognition of a dormant potential.* In this step, the philosopher recognizes an element of the premodern Indigenous tradition that has the potential to contribute to or destabilize the contemporary approach to politics in some way. The second step is *Imaginative competence.* Through the knowledge of local experiences, the theorist relates the concept with relevant elements of the local cultures or conditions. *Abstraction fluidity* is the third step of conceptual creativity. The theorist redesigns the concept to ensure that it is relevant to the issues of contemporary societies, thus producing a new orientation to reality. This methodological step aims to produce "raw materials" that can stand up to reason, logic, and scientific knowledge (Okeja 2022, 147). The fourth step is *Hypothesizing through analogy and logical inversion.* The theorist asks themself what can be done with the raw materials identified through abstraction fluidity, and, by doing so, the theorist attempts to find new parameters to rethink the raw materials and break away from old ways of thinking. Finally, in the last step, *Contextual independence*, the theorist moves from context-specificity to abstract normativity to ensure that the concept is not tied to only a specific context but can be relevant to multiple situations.

Compared to conceptual internal reconstruction, conceptual creativity is a suboptimal method to develop political ideals that can impact or change contemporary non-Western societies and overcome the cognitive disruption of contemporary Africans. A return to conceptual resources of the past could be justified and effectively solve the disruption caused by colonialism if contemporary non-Western societies lacked political ideas or visions. But we learned that this is not the case; cognitive disorientation happens because none of the predominant concepts and ideals adequately make full sense of these realities. If that is the case, the pressing priority for political theorists should be to "attune" and "restore" the main concepts that already dominate the public space with the aim of

setting a comprehensible direction for the present dysfunctional political institutions. In other words, as suggested by internal conceptual reconstruction, the focus should be on the political concepts of the disoriented contemporary citizens and the ideas driving the debate and political reforms in the dysfunctional society. Premodern intellectual resources remain of central importance, but they should be used to refashion and rethink these ideas to ensure they are effectively attuned to the hybrid nature and aspirations of contemporary postcolonial society.

To understand the difference between conceptual creativity and internal conceptual reconstruction, consider the case of "nonviolence" discussed by Okeja (2022, 153). According to Okeja:

> "The concept of nonviolence, for instance, became a tool of social transformation in the United States, even without the cultural presuppositions that accompanied its understanding in India. This was attained because civil rights activists infused into the concept new meaning that was powerful enough to command people to reorient themselves to reality. Not only did the concept shatter ossified racist belief systems; it produced moral empowerment that enabled oppressed African Americans to make progress in their struggle for equality and racial justice" (2022, 153).

Okeja argues that creating a new concept of nonviolence (an instance of conceptual creativity) was instrumental to the successful fight for civil rights in the United States. However, there are reasons to believe that internal conceptual reconstruction, not conceptual creativity, explains the conceptual refashioning process behind the pacifist movements. Arguably, the activists' interest was in redefining their idea of political activism via new conceptual resources brought by the idea of nonviolence. Gandhi's idea of nonviolent civil resistance became a powerful source of inspiration for many Afro-American activists in search of new ways of protesting and creating resistance against racial injustices while, at the same, remaining faithful to Christian values, such as equality and peace (Chakrabarty 2013, 11). Their main aim was to find a new understanding of political activism that could allow the movement to achieve its objective and not make the concept of nonviolence fit for the American society of the 1960s.

FRAMEWORK HYBRIDITY: STRONG AND WEAK NORMATIVE TWINING

Normative twining applies normative hybridity at the framework level. It develops a contemporary political theory inspired by a premodern Indigenous theory, paired with a more recent political normative theory. Its goal is neither to replicate foreign normative frameworks nor to revive and refashion traditional premodern normative elements with a dormant potential. Normative twining aims to create a new political vision that offers new normative guidance that resonates with its hybrid political culture to solve the non-Western society's political challenges.

In normative twining, the theorist develops a new normative ideal by pairing a premodern theory with what I call a *normative twin*. This normative twin is a contemporary political theory that, unlike the premodern theory, engages with multiple political challenges affecting contemporary societies (e.g., voters' ignorance, civil society's values, moral pluralism) but simultaneously shares several basic normative assumptions with the non-Western premodern tradition. Normative twining does not imply that the two theories contain concepts with similar meanings (e.g., the two theories attributing the same meaning to the "ethical good life"). What matters is the similarities in the relations among concepts, not their meanings (e.g., both support an ideal of the ethical good life and claim that the state must somehow ensure people can pursue it). Because it is up-to-date with contemporary political issues and presents substantial normative resonance with the premodern tradition, the normative twin guides the theorist in critically analyzing the premodern normative materials toward producing a new hybrid political theory.

The political theorist can use normative twining if they are committed to a premodern intellectual tradition and believe that such premodern tradition still has some bearing on their society's political culture. However, the theorist knows that this premodern tradition alone would be inadequate to develop a political vision for contemporary societies because some political issues affecting contemporary society are alien in the premodern theory. In other words, because it was developed in a different sociopolitical context from the contemporary one, the premodern tradition presents problematic normative lacunas that prevent it from offering normative guidance to the solution to address the challenges facing these societies. For instance, imagine that the premodern theory holds some bearing on the way of life or political beliefs of many members of contemporary society. However, the latter is based on a democratic form of representation, with democratic institutions having strong support in society but neither democracy nor representation had ever been a concern in the premodern tradition. At the same time, these normative gaps are not found in some foreign contemporary political theories. For this reason, these foreign contemporary political theories can offer some elements to fill up the normative lacunas in the premodern tradition.

Two variants of normative twining are possible: *strong* and *weak* normative twining. Both versions of normative twining assume normative similarities between the normative frameworks of the two theories such that the premodern Indigenous theory and its normative twin similarly connect multiple concepts. However, they assume different degrees of structural similarities: strong normative twining presupposes structural identity between two philosophical frameworks (that is, there are almost no variances between the frameworks of the two theories), while weak normative twining allows for partial structural similarity because some differences between the two theories are present at the framework level.

In principle, there is no reason to prefer one method over the other. Weak normative twining and strong normative twining represent equally reasonable ways to mix normative elements. The choice between these two methods depends on which one allows the theorist to better develop a new contemporary political theory, given the specific aspects of the premodern tradition and normative twin. But how do these two methods work in practice? The observation of recent developments in Confucian political theory can again be helpful, even though none of the Confucian theorists I will mention defines their theory production method in terms of normative twining.

For example, it is clear in Sor-hoon Tan's monograph *Confucian Democracy: A Deweyan Reconstruction* that she uses weak normative twining to develop a Confucian ideal of democracy for contemporary East Asia. Confucianism is the premodern tradition, and John Dewey's political philosophy is the normative twin that allows Tan to create a new Confucian theory of democracy. So even though democratic rule was never a primary concern for ancient Confucians, the "resonance" between Dewey's pragmatism and ancient Confucianism permits the articulation of a new democratic ideal (Tan 2004, 15).

Tan's normative project aims to answer a real pressing political question on the future of democracy in East Asia. Several Asian countries are persuaded that socioeconomic development does not require "blindly copying Western nations" and "are looking for their own paths" (Tan 2004, 2). While Asian societies have absorbed different forms of knowledge from the West, they continue to preserve their distinctive cultures to various extent and believe that their cultural traditions can indicate the right direction for their "soul-searching" (Tan 2004, 6). In this context, democracy is a central topic of debate. Several East Asians are committed to democracy but are reluctant to adopt Western-style liberal democracy; "they prefer Asian democracies—of which Confucian democracy is a possibility" (Tan 2004, 6).[14] Tan's philosophical project aims to show why and how Confucianism can present such a political possibility. In line with normative hybridity, Tan attempts to achieve this goal by searching for "a synthesis of two traditions" (2004, 6). This requires her to engage with the Confucian tradition creatively and less exegetically because she is "concerned with what Confucianism could mean *now* and in the *future*, not with what Confucianism is essentially" (Tan 2004, 9, my emphasis). She aims "to understand the past, texts, and events in new ways conducive to finding better alternatives for the future" (Tan 2004, 9).

Tan's choice of Dewey's understanding of democracy is based on political and normative grounds. First, Dewey's criticism of several Western liberal approaches to democracy resonates with many Asians'

ambition to depart from Western-style liberal democratic models (Tan 2004, 2, 9). Second, the two philosophies share fundamental normative assumptions: They both support a social conception of the individual; both theories have the idea of community with a central space; furthermore, both philosophies consider the question of "How should one live?" as ultimately inseparable from the one of "How should we live together?" (Tan 2004, 15). Thus, by synthesizing these two philosophies, a novel Confucian ideal of democracy that takes the idea of "a community of flourishing, unique persons" at its core can emerge (Tan 2004, 15).

Using Dewey's philosophy as a guide, Tan starts by redefining the idea of the Confucian self as a unique and social individual who is not devoid of agency (as traditionally believed). According to this creative reconstruction, the Confucian modern self differs from the idea of the autonomous self of several Western liberal theories. For example, Tan argues that in Dewey's pragmatism *choice* means "intelligent deliberation" (2004, 47), and it has a crucial political value given that it is the beginning of action (2004, 45). Confucianism has internal resources to develop a similar idea if we consider specific passages of the *Analects* and the meaning of the ancient character *xue* (學 learning) that used to symbolize the beginning of personal development but also the broad meaning of "becoming aware" (Tan 2004, 47). The rest of the book is dedicated to reinterpreting normative elements of the Confucian tradition in a democratic-participatory way to show the possibility of Confucian democracy in more detail. As in Deweyan philosophy, where the self is not radically distinct from the others, Tan asserts the value of a participatory political community that promotes individual creativity and political participation toward the full development of the self.

As I have pointed out, weak normative twining does not imply disregarding possible structural differences between the two theories; we see this in Tan's work. For instance, Tan maintains that there are substantial differences between Dewey's and a Confucian theory of deliberative thinking because Confucianism lacks a coherent theory of inquiry or a theory of ends and means (2004, 48). For Tan, the differences between ancient Confucianism and Dewey's pragmatism are equally crucial in the theory-formation process because they can create an ideal of democracy that is unique from both a Confucian and a pragmatic perspective. In so doing, these differences become instrumental to the Confucian scholar because they help reconstruct a paradigm of democracy (something foreign to ancient Confucianism). But they are also valuable for the Deweyan pragmatist since they point to alternative opportunities for Dewey's project of democracy (Tan 2004, 16). This points to a crucial aspect of normative twining that we discussed above, namely the method's goal to create a *new* normative framework from the creative fusion of two theoretical structures. To this end, critics have noted that it is hard to say whether Tan's theory is more Confucian or Deweyan (Kim 2018, 29–30). Nevertheless, this is precisely the desired outcome of normative twining.

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[14] To this end, Tan seems to believe that Confucian ideas are still relevant to East Asian society's political culture, although such tradition alone would be insufficient to develop a political vision for contemporary East Asia.

The normative authority of Tan's model has not been left unchallenged. For example, David Elstein has argued that, among all Confucian theories of democracy, pragmatist theories like Tan's are the most contentious. "These pragmatists offer the most radical understanding of democracy of all, since […] [d]eweyan democracy is not really about governmental institutions or political practices at all. Democracy is about having an informed, cooperative community working together to resolve common problems, a 'communicating community'" (Elstein 2010, 429). It is unclear why the soundness of an argument should be contingent on academics' endorsement. Nonetheless, pragmatists do not underestimate the need for democratic political institutions. They instead contend that these alone are insufficient to have democracy; in other words, democracy is not reducible to elections and majority rule (Dewey 1946, 207–8).

In contrast to Tan's weak twining, Joseph Chan is guided by strong normative twining in his construction of a Confucian perfectionist political theory. Chan's philosophical undertaking is motivated by the political situation in contemporary China: as China is searching for a new political vision to guide it in the future, Chan's project aims to determine whether Confucianism can represent a relevant political philosophy for today's China (Chan 2014, xi). The project explores the implications of this premodern tradition for several fundamental issues of contemporary politics, such as authority, democracy, human rights, civil liberties, and social justice (Chan 2014, xi). More precisely, Chan aims to determine "how to develop a viable method of governance that retains the spirit of the Confucian ideal and at the same time effectively addresses the problems of nonideal contemporary situations" (Chan 2014, 17).

Chan's conviction of Confucianism's normative potential for shaping the future of Modern China stems from two factors. One is the failure of multiple schools of thought in pursuing this goal. After Western liberalism, even Marxism today has little appeal to the Chinese people. Another factor to consider is the renewed interest in politics and society for Confucianism (Chan 2014, xi). However, it is widely believed that because China and the world have dramatically changed in the past century, Confucianism can gain political significance in contemporary China only through substantial revision and appropriate integration with other political philosophies to effectively address the political challenges of a modern society (Chan 2014, xii). These reasons propelled Chan to adopt a doctrine other than Confucianism to achieve his normative goal.

According to Chan, ancient Confucianism and perfectionist views—such as Aristotelian political philosophy and Joseph Raz' perfectionist theory—differ in substantive content, but "their structural features are strikingly similar" (2014, xiii). These structural similarities are evident at the ethical, political, and societal levels:

> On ethics, these traditions of thought base ethical judgments about values, virtues, and norms—in short, conceptions of the good life—on their understanding of

human nature or humanity (I call this ethical perfectionism). On society, these theories regard social groups and institutions as important sites where people develop the ethical capacities and skills necessary for the good life (social perfectionism). On politics, these theories hold the view that one of the major aims of the state is to help people pursue the good life by means of law, education, rituals, provision of resources, and coordination of social groups and their activities (political perfectionism) (Chan 2014, xiii).

For Chan, the structural similarities justify the reconstruction of a Confucian political theory through a perfectionist conceptual framework for contemporary times. Thus, even if the notion of the good life is never mentioned in the Confucian classic texts, and Confucian and Greek ancient philosophies appear to support different conceptions of the good life and moral virtues, the political thought of the early Confucian masters can be considered a perfectionist philosophy. Like ancient Greek and Western contemporary perfectionist philosophies, ancient Confucianism also views material well-being, moral self-cultivation, and virtuous social relationships as critical components of the Confucian good life (Chan 2014, 32).[15] In practice, the perfectionist lens helps Chan develop a Confucian perspective on multiple political issues alien to the premodern tradition. These comprise issues of political authority and institutions, and questions concerning the relations between the state and the people, such as human rights and social justice. The result is a reconstruction of "both Confucianism and liberal democratic institutions, blending them to form an outline of a new Confucian political philosophy" (Chan 2014, 17). Chan's proposal for a bicameral legislature that mixes democratic and meritocratic elements is an example. According to Chan, elections are a suboptimal model for choosing politicians. To this end, Chan proposes a bicameral legislature in which a democratically elected chamber is flanked by a chamber whose members are selected based on their virtue and competence. According to Chan, this proposal resonates with the Confucian belief in the need for virtuous persons in power and, at the same time, effectively addresses the problems of democracy in nonideal contemporary situations.[16]

An essential difference between Chan's and Tan's normative twining is that, for Tan, Confucianism is not a form of pragmatism, so she limits herself to stressing significant structural correspondences between Confucianism and Dewey's pragmatism and reconstructing Confucian political philosophy through the Deweyan lens. In contrast, at the outset of his research project, Chan assumes a normative structural identity between

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[15] Notably, besides Chan, other Confucian philosophers have drawn parallels between ancient Confucian and Greek philosophies. For instance, Angle and Slote (2013) and Van Norden (2007) argue that Confucian ethics is a form of virtue ethics.

[16] Despite the originality of this proposal, I believe such a legislative system would have significant epistemic limitations in practice and these limitations can undermine the performance of the bicameral system in nonideal situations (Ziliotti 2023).

Confucianism and its normative twin. This qualifies Chan's theory-building method as an instance of strong, not weak, normative twining. All in all, Tan's Deweyan Confucian democratic theory and Chan's Confucian perfectionist theory demonstrate that normative twining can produce political theories that address contemporary political issues by creatively intertwining resources from premodern Indigenous resources with structurally similar contemporary philosophical frameworks. Identifying structural similarities with another political theory helps the theorist understand what normative principles the premodern Indigenous resources could generate about a particular contemporary political issue that was never considered in the Indigenous tradition but is sufficiently discussed in the twin contemporary philosophical tradition.

It is also valuable to note that although both Chan and Tan choose normative twining of Western origin, the origins of the contemporary political framework on which the normative twining pivots are irrelevant. As I have pointed out before, normative twining does not aim to reproduce foreign concepts and conceptual frameworks but to use them to creatively produce new normative frameworks that could address contemporary societies' political challenges and issues. Of course, normative twining is no guarantee for the political legitimacy of a theory. The theorist who engages in normative twining offers the public new ideas and visions, but the legitimacy of the latter ultimately depends on the public's endorsement. The fact that Tan and Chan proposed different reconstructions of classical Confucianism indicates that debates on Confucian political theory are far from being resolved. However, these disagreements do not suggest a problem in the theory-building methods used by these contemporary Confucian scholars (the primary concern of this paper). Instead, they show that despite following a similar method to make Confucian philosophy relevant for contemporary East Asians, these scholars support different political values and interpretations of the Confucian classics.

Of course, adopting normative twining is no guarantee for success, and the theorist's normative sensitivity remains crucial for developing a sound theory. For example, Kim argues that despite their differences, both Chan and Tan fail to respond to value pluralism and, like ancient Confucianism, their theories tacitly assume ethical monism (Kim 2014, 113, 117–8). Assessing Kim's critique would take us too far from the objective of the present paper. But even if Kim were correct, such a problem would not arise from the method of normative twining but from the judgment of the theorist engaged in theory building. Indeed, for Kim, "Chan's Confucian perfectionism is monistic and […] is likely to suppress pluralism" (2014, 118). However, the problem does not necessarily depend on Chan's commitment to Confucianism because monistic ethics is not always repressive of pluralism (Kim 2014, 118), nor is the problem dependent on perfectionism (the normative twin Chan has chosen) because perfectionism is not necessarily incompatible with pluralism (Kim 2014, 118).

Finally, it is important to note that normative twining and normative hybridity do not necessarily require the use of ancient text as a source for theory building. Even though both Tan and Chan use ancient texts to develop their theories, normative ideals can also be derived from other kinds of resources. An important example of normative hybridity of this kind is *public reason Confucianism* (Kim 2015; 2016; 2023). Kim's political theory for East Asia is based on the interaction of public reason theories and the Confucian way of life practiced by many contemporary East Asians. According to this innovative theory, the relevant Confucianism for establishing a political order that is attuned to the needs and aspirations of contemporary East Asia is not the one found in ancient texts, which many East Asians no longer consider relevant. Rather, it is the one reflected in the public reasons exchanged by East Asian citizens to justify their views to one another.

CONCLUSION

How to develop normative political models for contemporary non-Western societies while avoiding coloniality and Eurocentrism? This question has engaged contemporary political theorists across the globe after a general agreement that the validity of a theory rests on the country's socioeconomic context. The diversity in several contemporary non-Western societies means that theory formation cannot wholly follow Western normative frameworks and concepts nor premodern indigenous intellectual resources, but theorists who aim to develop meaningful guidance for contemporary non-Western societies cannot entirely disregard these normative resources either.

This paper has proposed a novel methodological approach to overcome this dilemma. Normative hybridity invites theorists to consider hybridity as a feature in their context of reference and the central feature in their research methodology. The mix of normative elements that initially belonged to different intellectual traditions but partly echoes the sociocultural elements of the non-Western society will guide the theorist to seek out the relevance of the theory to the designated context of reference. In addition, the theorist's judgment will ensure the normative value of the theory. Because political theorizing can apply normative hybridity to either the conceptual or framework level, the paper has discussed three methods through which normative hybridity can be expressed: internal conceptual reconstruction at the conceptual level, and strong and weak normative twining at the framework level. I do not claim that these three methods exhaust the possible ways normative hybridity can be pursued in theory formation nor do I believe ancient philosophy is the only rightful inspirational source for philosophers aiming to propose new normative paradigms for contemporary non-Western societies. However, the examples discussed illustrate three promising ways in which theorists can develop theories for contemporary non-Western societies.

This new knowledge offers a novel solution to contemporary debates in political theory, but it also has implications for theoretical discussions in the decolonial movement and methodological debates in Western political theory. Similar to the latest normative interventions in the decolonial debate (Mignolo 2011; Nigam 2020; Sousa Santos 2016), this paper shows that the non-West is a powerful normative reserve holding knowledge, capable of producing valuable methodological innovations to produce new normative directions that could be specific and relevant to contemporary societies. From this perspective, normative hybridity points to the communal goals among political theorists who aim to produce normative models for the non-West and to foster mutual learning. While theory formation for the non-West is the main focus of this paper, adopting normative hybridity as a methodological approach can also benefit Western political theorists. It is evident that given the increasing multiculturalism of contemporary Western societies and the enormous normative value of combining elements from different intellectual traditions, even Western political theorists have compelling practical and philosophical reasons to hybridize their modes of inquiry.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

FUNDING STATEMENT

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

The author affirms this research did not involve human participants.

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