

The importance of understanding trust in Confucianism and what it is like in an AI-powered world

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Since the revival of artificial intelligence (AI) research, many countries in the world have proposed their visions of an AI-powered world: Germany with the concept of “Industry 4.0,”¹ Japan with the concept of “Society 5.0,”² China with the “New Generation Artificial Intelligence Plan (AIDP).”³ In all of the grand visions, all governments emphasize the “human-centric element” in their plans. This essay focuses on the concept of trust in Confucian societies and places this very human element in the context of an increasingly AI-powered world.

It is not a secret that public perception plays an important role in determining the success and failure of government and business strategies. The Covid-19 Pandemic in 2020 is a salient example of how crucial public trust plays in fighting the spread of the new corona virus⁴. Clearly, the long-term success of any organization depends on building credibility and trust with their stakeholders. The literature provides concrete evidence of the importance of trust in forming business partnership⁵, in participating in political processes⁶, in forming attitudes toward social and governmental institutions^{7,8}. All of the studies highlight the cultural specificities that influence how people form their trust in different Confucian societies. For example, Vuong and Tran (2009) explain trust

in Vietnamese society implies “a relationship in which one can entrust their work to the hands of someone that he/she knows and is confident about” (p.74)⁵.

As such, we would expect in the context of an increasingly AI-powered world, understanding cultural nuances of trust is important to all interested parties: government, private companies, educators, start-ups, etc. For example, although the Social Credit System in China raises so many red flags in Western media, the Chinese public did not have a strong negative reaction as revealed by credible studies of Western academics³. And then, in China, researchers have observed a public perception that the government can collect mass data. In contrast, the public demands the government to admonish private tech companies concerning their use of personal data¹⁰.

To understand the interplay of trust with the public perception towards AI and AI-related issues, I propose the following research areas:

1. What is the causal/ correlational relationship between trust and public perception?
2. How is public perception formed with respect to government policies relating to AI?
3. How is trust leveraged to provide legitimacy for certain AI practices, for example, data collection, facial recognition, etc.?
4. Can the nuances of trust in Confucianism help explain how governments in Confucian societies combat fake news and misinformation?

Table 1: Difference elements that should be studied in the investigation of trust in Confucianism in the context of an AI-powered society

Data	Design	Governance
AI		
Trust in Confucianism		Public perception
Stakeholder		
Consumers, Users, Citizens	Businesses	Government

In table 1, I summarize the different elements that should be studied while we investigate the concept of trust in Confucianism in the context of AI-powered society. It will be an inter-disciplinary project, crossing the boundaries of philosophy, cultural and media studies^{10,11}, affective computing¹², digital sociology¹³, and computational social sciences^{14,15}.

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