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# Stated Meeting Report

## A Confucian Perspective on the Rise of Industrial East Asia

Tu Wei-ming

In 1939, Charles A. Moore, an enterprising intellectual and editor of *Philosophy East and West*, convened the first East-West Philosophers' Conference at the University of Hawaii. The aim was to explore the significance of eastern ways of thinking for the development of a global consciousness, a sort of "synthesis" of the ideas and ideals of East and West. Subsequent East-West Philosophers' Conferences were held in 1949, 1959, and 1964. These conferences moved ahead considerably from the initial "synthesis" approach to an examination of specific philosophical *Problematik* from different cultural perspectives. In 1969, after the death of Professor Moore, Abraham Kaplan of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor directed the Fifth East-West Philosophers' Conference on the theme "The Alienation of Modern Man." I attended that conference as a junior fellow, which meant that I could take part in the meetings mainly as a disinterested observer, occasionally asking questions and offering short comments. For six weeks, with the help of plenary speakers such as Rollo May of the United States, Nathan Rotenstreich of Israel, Daya Krishna of India, Nishitani Keiji of Japan, Yi Sang-eun of Korea, T'ang Chün-i of Hong Kong, and Thomé Fang of Taiwan, the participants struggled to make some sense out of "alienation" in a comparative civilizational perspective. Having encountered serious difficulty in rendering "alienation" into meaningful concepts in East Asian languages, a Japanese sociologist jokingly remarked that "the current trend is for some avant-garde thinkers to advocate the importance of alienation as a collective experience to qualify Japan as really modern." The lack of con-

ceptual resources for the Chinese, Japanese and Korean philosophers to reflect on alienation from their indigenous cultural roots was a surface manifestation of questions of translatability and commensurability of culturally specific notions across linguistic boundaries. Ironically, in recent years, specifically since 1985, scholars in the People's Republic of China have been debating the relevance of alienation in a socialist society and the term (*i-hua*), a contemporary Chinese coinage to be sure, is understood in the Marxist context. Indeed, the functional linguistic equivalent of alienation in Chinese, Japanese, or Korean is by now so much a part of the intellectual vocabulary that the "alienation of modern man" is no longer a conceptual abstraction but a lived reality in East Asia as well. However, the frustration (I am tempted to say alienation) that the participants of the Fifth East-West Philosophers' Conference experienced was so intense that it virtually put a stop to the on-going conversation for almost twenty years.

A Sixth East-West Philosophers' Conference is now proposed to be held in Honolulu in 1989 on the general theme of "Culture and Modernity." My colleagues and I, who are responsible for the organization of the conference, have decided that the conference should focus primarily on "The Authority of the Past," examining such basic concepts as appropriation and interpretation, canon and creativity, continuity and discontinuity, tradition and progress. We envision the interplay of multiple themes across three broad areas of cultural interest: art and religion, morality and political institutions, and science and technology. Issues that are relevant to all these areas include the interpretation of literary, scriptural, testimonial and legal canonical texts; the historicity of human practice in art, ethics and science; the claim that traditional institutions make upon the present; and the legitimation of culture in terms of artistic creativity, scientific theory, or sacred and secular authority. Among the representative

questions that could be addressed within the above framework, the following are pertinent to my presentation this evening: What are some of the central religious concepts of "self" that are evolving in Asia? Are "rights" necessary for a sound social/political order? What differing conceptions of justice, fairness and procedural due process might emerge in cross-cultural encounters? What models of "modernization" are most appropriate for developing societies? How can the traditional values of Asian cultures provide new directions for Western as well as Asian economic development?

With this introductory note, let me share my "Confucian" perspective on the rise of industrial East Asia.

The rise of industrial East Asia to become the most dynamic developing area of the world today is apparently due to the sustained economic growth of Japan and of the so-called "four dragons" (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore) in the last four decades since the Second World War. This phenomenon has fascinated economists, political scientists, sociologists and anthropologists. To the economist, the competitive edge of the Japanese exporting capacity in virtually all forms of sophisticated modern enterprise (with the notable exception of military hardware), the aggressiveness of the South Korean government in overhauling the infrastructure of its heavy industries, the ability of Taiwan to maintain a relatively equitable income distribution despite rapid growth, the nearly perfect market mechanism of Hong Kong and the well-calibrated measures of official intervention in Singapore pose intriguing questions at both practical and theoretical levels.

To the political scientist, government leadership, the process by which new policies are introduced and implemented, the patterns of authority that enable official directives to have broad popular support and the bureaucratic procedures that seem to have significantly undermined the principle of efficiency as well as other salient features of

industrial East Asian societies provide food for thought. To the sociologist and anthropologist, the family-centered social structure, the clan organizations, the human networks based on numerous primordial ties, the relationship between the ruling minority and the populace, the educational system, the folk traditions, the interplay between rural and urban communities, and popular religions offer rich resources for generating new interpretive schemes and testing old ones.

However, since economic, social and political factors are not only intertwined among themselves but also interact in a complex mode with the cultural arena, to probe the values that have motivated East Asians to excel in capital formation, industrial management, commercial transaction, innovative technology and the like has also attracted much scholarly attention. Historians, philosophers and comparative religionists, in their probing of the shared spiritual orientations of industrial East Asia, have identified a number of remarkably pervasive tendencies. These include the idea of the self as a center of relationships, a sense of the community of trust modelled on the family, the importance of an established ritual in governing ordinary daily behavior, the primacy of education as character building, the importance of exemplary leadership in politics, the aversion for civil litigation, the belief in consensus formation and the practice of self-cultivation. The value system that seems to be most compatible with these features is commonly labelled "Confucian ethics."

This is understandable because historically, prior to the impact of the West in the mid-nineteenth century, Confucian culture seems to have dominated East Asian education both for the elite and the general public as well as family relationships, social organizations and bureaucracy at both central and local levels (China since the thirteenth century, Yi Dynasty Korea since the fifteenth century, and Tokugawa Japan since the seventeenth century). Even in worldviews and cosmolo-

gies, Neo-Confucian metaphysics seems to have left an indelible imprint in the verbal expressions and thought patterns of East Asia. Yet, the claim that Confucian ethics has been instrumental in developing the functional equivalent of the "Protestant ethic" in East Asia will have to be substantiated by a series of focused investigations; indeed, in addition to other relevant historical forces, i.e., Japanese colonialization, it is necessary to analyze the catalytic and intervening factors, such as the geopolitical situation, the labor market, international finance, American foreign policy, fear of Communist expansion, the institutional structure and the like.

Confucian ethics is but one of several major spiritual traditions of East Asia, and its "modern fate," to borrow a phrase from Joseph Levenson's thought-provoking study of Confucian China, has been the most disastrous. To study Confucian ethics in the context of the East Asian religious situation as a whole may help us to identify both its strengths and weaknesses in an increasingly pluralistic universe. Buddhism, Taoism, Shamanism, Shintoism, Christianity, Islam and folk traditions are all relevant in this connection. Karl Jaspers' seminal study on the Axial Age, in which he observes that the world religions as we know them today were shaped in their core values during a single period in the first millennium B.C., may provide a background understanding for our endeavor. His assertion that in three geographic areas — China, India and the eastern Mediterranean — a major "breakthrough" of human consciousness occurred without a discernible influence of one area on another can serve as a sharp contrast to the current situation that the confluence of all major global forces (secular as well as spiritual) characterizes the dynamics of industrial East Asia.

Although the benefit of a more sophisticated and deeper appreciation of Confucian ethics as the functional equivalent of the "Protestant ethic" in industrial East Asia is

obvious, it is not the main focus of my presentation. After all, as Max Weber perceptively remarked, the spirit of capitalism in Protestant Europe was partly an unintended consequence of Calvinism. The acquisition of wealth as a manifestation of one's religious worth was originally taken to be a cloak lightly placed on the shoulder of the faithful. It was much later that institutionally and psychologically the quest for money eventually became an "iron cage" imprisoning many of the zealous in this single-minded pursuit. Confucian ethics, as well as other major religious teachings in human history, does not take the quest for material wealth as intrinsically valuable. The internal dynamics of the Confucian tradition as a form of life will have to be studied and its prospects for "creative transformation" analyzed.

If we assume that the rise of industrial East Asia represents a process of modernization significantly different from the West and yet historically and structurally linked to the "spirit of capitalism," as exemplified in Western Europe and North America, how do we explain this new type of psycho-cultural dynamics? To understand these dynamics, it is important to explore the spiritual resources, as well as institutional innovations, that underlie the work ethic, authority patterns, social cohesiveness, motivational structure, value orientation, and worldview. While this may not provide us with any certainty in formulating our explanatory model, it will surely enhance our background knowledge and even direct us to what Michael Polanyi calls the "tacit dimension" of the form of life East Asians take for granted as intrinsically meaningful.

My talk this evening is simply to take an initial step in exploring the psycho-cultural dynamics of industrial East Asia with special reference to the prominent role of Confucian institutions. I am not looking at institutions as static structures but as value-laden processes. I do not attempt to identify direct causal relationships but to offer perspectives

on Confucian institutions as networks of human interaction, arts of negotiation, patterns of symbolic control, and rules of social discourse.

It is important to note at the outset that since Japan and the Four Dragons have actively participated in a concerted American effort to fight against the perceived Communist expansion in the Pacific region, many of their vital industrializing institutions have been substantially, if not thoroughly, shaped by the American presence. The perception that the post-Confucian states have been junior partners of the United States in a joint effort to preserve and develop a form of life worth living is already outmoded, but the cultural elites in these societies have been so immersed in the American value of freedom, democracy, peace, progress, and prosperity that they are often more familiar with American liberal democratic rhetoric than with the ethico-religious underpinnings of their own indigenous cultural traditions. I am not asserting that they are thoroughly "Americanized," but suggesting that psychologically they have exhibited a collective will to "domesticate" the American way of life. It is perhaps farfetched to say that an intellectual in Japan or any of the Four Dragons must demonstrate a basic knowledge of how American society works in order to be taken seriously as being modern, but at least this much is certain: there has been a genuine desire to learn about the United States, as if the prospects for survival in the future depend upon it.

I wish to highlight the American presence in the East Asian consciousness both as an historical fact and as a symbol for modernity. The realization of this consciousness is important for understanding the revitalization and reformulation of traditional institutions in these post-Confucian states. Indeed, a distinctive strength of these states is their willingness and ability to combine foreign science, technology and political organizations with institutional and spiritual resources from their



own traditions. For decades the post-Confucian states have advocated the idea of going abroad to learn from the West firsthand as an important national goal. The most brilliant minds in these societies have accepted the fact that in a long-term perspective learning from abroad is essential for both social well-being and personal development.

The tacit acceptance of the United States and the industrialized Western European countries as the innovators, executors, and judges of the rules of the game in the international order fashioned by the Faustian spirit of the West and justified by the Social Darwinian dictum of the survival of the fittest has never been fully appreciated by them. In fact, many Asian intellectuals find that the international order that has been imposed upon the world since the "western wind" invaded East Asia in the mid-nineteenth century is brutally exploitative, unjust, and unstable. Yet the fall of imperial China from being the Middle Kingdom to the "Sick Man of the East" in two generations and the rise of the United States from a divided country to a superpower in less than a century are obvious examples that nations, like species, must enhance their competitiveness to survive and flourish in a volatile world. The tension between what the world is and what it ought to be is immense.

To revitalize and to reformulate Confucian institutions such as the central bureaucracy, the educational system, and the social structure including family and local self-governance has understandably been an urgent national concern in China, Korea and Japan for at least a century. The failure of China's self-strengthening movement and the success of Japan's Meiji restoration have been part of this process which continues to gain momentum, especially in recent decades. For our immediate purpose, the intriguing question is, why are the very institutions which both Asian and American scholars considered detrimental to modernization in as late as the 1960s now perceived to have embodied the

strength that has made the post-Confucian states so competitive in the international arena?

Facts speak loudly in this case. We have been compelled to refine, if not to fundamentally change, our conceptual apparatus to explain them. They seem to signify a new phenomenon which has seriously challenged theories of modernization based on Weber's seminal idea of "instrumental rationality." However, if this were simply a temporary economic challenge, the intellectual import would be limited, but with the emergence of a sense of urgency that a significant re-organization of value priority in the West is in order, the challenge becomes profoundly meaningful. What actually happened in the United States, not to mention England and other European nations, in the last two decades makes simple-minded any attempt to define modernity as diametrically opposed to tradition. Traditional features of the human condition such as ethnicity, mother tongue, family ties, ancestral home, and religious faith have all become important areas of concern in any sophisticated analysis of the modernizing process in the world. The search for roots and the necessity for a global consciousness, contradictory as they may appear, are both powerful persuasions in a highly modernized society.

From this perspective, seemingly outmoded Confucian institutional imperatives and preferences have reemerged as more sophisticated ways of dealing with an increasingly complex pluralistic world than the single-minded attention to instrumental rationality and its attendant features such as efficiency. The human factor, especially the non-quantifiable affective dimensions of human relatedness, is considered paramount. Practical and communicative rationality with emphasis on the wisdom of common sense and reasonableness is highly valued.

At the level of central bureaucracy, although measures of democracy such as constitution, election and universal representation are widely accepted as defining

characteristics of a modern polity, the basic Confucian idea that government assumes full responsibility for the well-being of the people remains persuasive in East Asia. Thus, in the post-Confucian states, governments are omnipresent, if not omnipotent. The idea that the central government has the responsibility to play a maximum role in the life of the people is predicated on the belief that politics is far from being a contractual framework for the purpose of providing law and order in society; comprehensive leadership is obligated, in a classical Confucian sense, "to provide, to enrich, and to educate" the people. Bureaucrats are not merely government functionaries but leaders, intellectuals and teachers. The rise and fall of dynasties in imperial China often depend on the quality of its scholar-officials; so do the fortunes of modern states, as many East Asian intellectuals observe.

The emphasis on government leadership is a salient feature of East Asian political culture. Political authoritarianism, with its negative manifestations such as hierarchical and patriarchal domination and its positive contributions such as a pervasive sense of responsibility, is still highly visible in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore. A government's effectiveness and benevolence are often judged by its leadership's ability to exercise power through authority in an impartial and thus democratically acceptable manner. Japan's success in forming broad consensus, the conflict and tension between the central government and the intelligentsia in South Korea, Taiwan's relative progress toward an "open society," Hong Kong's ability to maintain a delicate economic and political balance despite obvious contradictions, and Singapore's style of one-party rule, divergent as they are, do not invalidate the basic premise that politics means comprehensive leadership and that the central government is the proper focus of power. The fear that total chaos may result if there is a fundamental restructuring of the top leadership is a

daily anxiety. Any change in the key political players of the power game is of grave national concern.

The success of Japan and the Four Dragons in transforming themselves into what Chalmers Johnson characterizes as “development states” with single-minded attention to wealth and economic power may have a great deal to do with the authority of the central government to forge bonds of trust with the business community, the intelligentsia, the working class, and the populace as a whole. However, this concerted effort to achieve vertical integration makes it difficult to develop Western-style democratic institutions and ideas such as civil society, loyal opposition, an independent legal system, rights consciousness, a sense of privacy, and individualism. As a result, the political pluralism that is needed for developing a full democracy is difficult to achieve in industrial East Asia. Japan is a notable exception, but even in Japan the relationship between the dominant party and the bureaucracy is so closely linked that political leadership is assumed by exemplary bureaucrats. Indeed, as Ezra Vogel points out, the elite in Japan still believe that one of the highest callings is to become a bureaucrat. For the law school students at Tokyo University, the most competitive examinations are for those joining the major ministries in the central government. The transfer of political power from one-party rule to participatory democracy in South Korea and Taiwan, currently underway, may fundamentally change the social and economic landscapes of these societies in the near future. However, it is unlikely that a new political culture will emerge in which the role of the central government is minimized to allow the development of an adversary system.

Closely linked to this perception of politics as the arena in which vital decisions with long-term effect on the health of the nation are made is a strong belief in meritocracy through competitive examination. The faith

in the malleability and improvability of the human condition through communal self-effort underlies East Asian educational philosophy. "Education without class distinction," a commitment that Confucius himself made to his students, has become an article of faith which assumes that public education, often administered by the central government, is a fundamental obligation of the leadership to the general populace. Since East Asian societies are hierarchically structured, education is, in practice, elitist, but through the application of stringent standards of objectivity to all nationwide examinations, education also provides the best channel of upward social mobility as the universally accepted basis for leadership recruitment.

The fiercely competitive examination system is only a part of the educational process, for schooling is broadly conceived as a humanizing enterprise. Education is culturally specific: it involves an elaborate design to teach children to be Japanese, Koreans, Chinese, or Singaporeans according to a societal norm informed by a strong patriotic sense of cultural identity. The ritualization through which these children become fully participating members of society is defined in terms of moral education which is often initiated, developed, and implemented by the central government.

Since the primary purpose of Confucian education is learning to be human as a member of a "fiduciary community" (a community of trust), self-cultivation, the development of one's inner strength for the purpose of assuming responsibility for oneself, one's family, and society at large, plays a pivotal role. Whether or not self-cultivation is the functional equivalent of the Protestant work ethic in the Confucian calling is "to establish others for the sake of establishing oneself, to enlarge others for the sake of enlarging oneself." This is not altruism, but a holistic view of the self as a center of relationships, which serves as the philosophical basis for organic group solidarity. The psychological

dynamics generated by this vision of the self is often misconceived as the sacrifice of the individual for the collectivity. Yet Confucians perceive that the relationship between self and society is not adversarial and that the real struggle in self-realization is between the possessiveness of the private ego and the open-mindedness of the true self. The conflict between self and society can be minimized and a sense of mutuality enhanced if the participating members are willing to make adequate personal sacrifice to insure that egoistic desires do not significantly undermine the corporate spirit. Leadership entails the ability to elicit an internalized sense of loyalty to the communal goals. It need not be charismatic but it must earn the respect and trust of the group.

Charisma is at best a mixed blessing in the Confucian style of leadership. The Confucians find the art of argumentation characteristic of the Greco-Roman idea of statesmanship suspect. The trust that the leader earns is derived from his (and nowadays also her) foresight, trustworthiness, endurance, and human care. His or her rhetorical skill as a communicator is secondary. Indeed, the preference for a community of trust rather than an adversary system is so overwhelming that the paradigmatic practitioner in adjudicating conflict in the United States—the lawyer—does not play a key role in civil disputes in East Asia. Rather, mediation is often a preferred course for resolving disputes.

This emphasis on trust is particularly evident in local governance. The Confucian preference for self-reliance based on neighborhood associations with participation from a highly decentralized police organization is widely practiced. Major cities in East Asia are relatively safe because, in addition to strict gun control laws, life in these immensely populated metropolises is coordinated according to the modulated rhythms of a variety of small and essentially self-sufficient neighborhood communities. The police under normal circumstances are not seen as an alien force

but an integral part of the community. This relationship is reminiscent of the Confucianized legalist system, *pao-chia*, with its emphasis on mutual assistance and mutual defense.

While the central government is omnipresent and its responsibility for the well-being of the country totalistic, its actual mechanism of control is highly decentralized. Often ideological pressure generated by social consensus functions as the main deterrent against deviant behavior. The psychology of guilt and shame is often mightier than brute force. When a person becomes an integral part of a thick network of human relationships informed by familial, communal, and national sentiments, his accountability as a full participating member of society is greatly enhanced. His sense of work and dignity is predicated on his ability to transform his primordial ties into vehicles of self-expression and self-realization. Personal bonds, which Weber considers incapable of meeting capitalism's strict demand for efficiency, often provide the basic trust as a reliable way of sharing information, generating capital, and maintaining stability in commercial transactions. This partly explains why personalized ritual rather than impersonal law is so pervasive in delivering effective sanctions in highly complex East Asia economies and polities. It is not at all incongruous to see gigantic East Asian economic organizations, based on ascriptive family connections and close friends with emphasis on personal leadership, as well as, for that matter, a flourishing "free market" coexisting with regular government guidance.

The Confucian emphasis on mutuality and harmony in society, mistakenly characterized by Weber as "adjustment to the world," is predicated on a strong preference for transforming society from within. The lack of radical transcendence in Confucian metaphysics does not necessarily mean that the Confucian personality does not have the leverage to deny society any ultimate meaning and thus

develop an adversary relationship to the status quo. The Confucians, by regarding the secular world as sacred, always perceive tension between what the human condition is and what it ought to be. They also believe that they, as action intellectuals, must make a difference by improving the situation near at hand so that the gap between the ideal and the actual can be bridged. Cultivating their personal lives and harmonizing their family relationships are integral parts of their political mission to transform the world.

Family, in the Confucian perspective, is an indissoluble basic unit of any civilized society. Primordial ties in the human community such as the five basic relationships (between ruler-subject, parent-child, husband-wife, siblings, and friends) are taken seriously as defining characteristics of being human. The centrality of the family in Confucian political, social, and religious thought is a natural consequence of the Confucian imperative that self-realization takes communal participation as its point of departure.

In the post-Confucian states, family continues to serve as a vital institution for social cohesiveness, moral education, spiritual growth and, not infrequently, capital formation. Networking through the basic human relationships is a fine art; the calculating mind may, in the short run, benefit from a deliberate manipulation of these cherished relationships, but the real “winners” in this complex structure are often those who value dynamic and fruitful human interaction for its own sake.

If we want to penetrate the psycho-cultural construct of the Japanese, Koreans, Chinese, or Singaporeans, we need to relegate our instrumental rationality to the background and first try to appreciate their sense of value priority. A new mode of understanding is required. Yet, face-to-face communication as a strategy of research may not work unless we are critically aware that their willing participation in, or at least their tacit understanding of, this intellectual venture is absolutely



necessary. If we address the basic institutions in the post-Confucian states not only as mechanisms for achieving societal goals but also as repositories of deep-rooted beliefs, we may begin to see the reasons for the dynamism of these post-Confucian states.

In short, a critical analysis of the role and function of the Confucian institutions in Japan and the Four Dragons can help us to better understand the *modus operandi* of these societies. It may also impel us to address the general question of tradition in modernity. As we become cognizant of these salient features in East Asia which cannot be apprehended through a conceptual apparatus informed by instrumental rationality, we may want to raise issues about the underlying value assumptions in our own interpretive framework.

Obviously, the rise of industrial East Asia raises fundamental questions about economy, polity, society, and culture in a global context. Economically, does this new capitalism, as contrasted with the classical capitalism originated in West Europe, signal a new age, the age of the Pacific Rim for example, in human history? Or is it merely an epiphenomenon which can be adequately explained in terms of the available European and American developmental models? Politically, are we witnessing a process of democratization based more on consensus formation than on an adversarial relationship which gives a new shade of meaning to participatory democracy? Or are we observing the continuous presence of hierarchical authoritarian control of political elite under the disguise of majority rule? Socially, do family cohesiveness, low crime rate, respect for education, and high percentage of saving relative to other industrial societies indicate an ethos different from the individual-centered "habits of the heart"? Or do they simply reflect an earlier stage of modern transformation which eventually will lead to anomie and alienation? Culturally, are they successful examples of combining advanced technology with age-long ritual practices, or

are they passing phases of traditional societies? These questions are of great interest to scholars in both social sciences and the humanities. They have already evoked strong sentiments in the intellectual community and they should be put on the agenda for public discussion. In short, the rise of East Asia challenges our deep-rooted conceptions of economic development, political modernization, social integration, and cultural change.

While the practical value of a critical analysis of Japan and the Four Dragons for addressing immediate national concerns (e.g. enhancing American competitiveness in international markets) is apparent, the more enduring intellectual significance of understanding industrial East Asia is to help us gain a truly ecumenical perspective on the geopolitical scene, broaden our knowledge of radically different styles of life in an increasingly pluralistic world, and develop a critical understanding of our own strengths and limitations in a comparative context.

Twenty years ago, the organizers of the First East-West Philosophers' Conference may have been guilty of imposing a parochial modern Western concept, namely "alienation," on a meeting with due respect to indigenous sensibilities of both Eastern and Western traditions. Ironically, as East Asian societies have become apparently more westernized, their articulate minority have accepted alienation as a fact of life. Sophisticated analyses of alienation along Marxist and non-Marxist lines have appeared in print in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. However, the domestication, as it were, of alienation by Asian intellectuals does not necessarily mean that they fully understand both the positive and negative implications of alienation as a social force. In fact, very few of them appreciate the "liberal" argument that a sense of alienation from society is an inevitable consequence of individual freedom. The uniquely Western idea twenty years ago is now a commonly used conceptual apparatus in analyzing Asian societies, but its subtlety is

somehow lost and its persuasive power diminished. Meanwhile, the cluster of ideas organized around “instrumental rationality” in the Weberian sense, which for more than two decades has guided discourse on modernization, has itself undergone a major transformation. In post-industrial or even post-modern rhetoric, dichotomy between tradition and modernity is no longer clear-cut. Primordial ties such as race, language, gender, home land, and religion, which for centuries have continued to define the human condition still feature prominently in the public sphere. It is no longer possible to relegate them into the background as residual cultural forces which merely symbolize emotional attachments to the past.

As we now focus our attention on the “authority of the past” for the Sixth East-West Philosophers’ Conference, our thoughts are drawn to a host of timely questions. In addition to those mentioned in the beginning of this presentation, they include issues that reformulate our global consciousness. Do the new types of cultural awareness, partly as the result of new technologies, render obsolete the usual categories of “modernization”? For example, the successful computerization of Chinese characters renders highly problematic the old belief among westernizers in East Asia that the Latinization or elimination of ideograms is a necessary step towards cultural modernity. Can we broaden the concept of rationality to include “reasonableness” in daily human communication so that our understanding of the “life world” informed by Asian spiritual values will not suffer from an unexamined bias against “Oriental mysticism”? The continuous presence of *zazen*, *t’ai-chi*, *kung-fu*, and other spiritual practices on university campuses in North America and in Europe signifies that the ancient arts that guide our self-knowledge can peacefully coexist with the modern science that governs our academic inquiries. We have yet to find a linguistic and cultural form in which such a coexistence can be appraised for its intrinsic

value without either romanticizing it as an intriguing paradox or rejecting it as a dispensable epiphenomenon.

In conclusion, let me point to several other areas that demand our attention. What are some of the likely ethical issues that new forms of technology in medicine, business, finance, and so forth will pose for both Western and Asian societies? Are the challenges put by “feminists” to Western forms of theism meaningful in Asian religious contexts? How will East Asians respond to charges against patriarchic authoritarianism? And, finally, if pluralism in aesthetic and religious judgment is considered legitimate, especially in cross-cultural contexts, how can pernicious relativism be avoided? Whether or not we will be able to find solutions to these issues, the mode of questioning itself clearly indicates that a communal critical self-awareness is emerging; as a result, we must go beyond questions of wealth and power to comprehend the rise of industrial East Asia not only as an economic and political reality but also as a form of life laden with ethico-religious implications.

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