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Author(s): Tu Wei-ming

Source: *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (Nov., 1996), pp. 12-39

Published by: American Academy of Arts & Sciences

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3824246>

Accessed: 09-05-2019 08:06 UTC

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# Project Report

## Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity

Tu Wei-ming

*Harvard University Press recently released Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity: Moral Education and Economic Culture in Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons, edited by Tu Wei-ming. Mr. Tu, professor of Chinese history and philosophy at Harvard University and director of the Harvard-Yenching Institute, led the 1991 Academy conference out of which the volume grew. That conference was the culmination of a study funded by the Henry Luce Foundation.*

*The seventeen contributors to Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity—philosophers, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and economists—bring their diverse disciplinary and personal perspectives to a consideration of the role of Confucian culture in industrial East Asia. They question commonly held assumptions while exploring the ideas, norms, and values that shape the moral fabric of society in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore.*

*Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity (paperback, \$19.95) may be ordered by calling Harvard University Press at (800) 448-2242.*

*The following report consists of the volume's preface, introduction, and epilogue (reprinted here without endnotes).*

*Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity* grew out of a meeting funded by the Henry Luce Foundation at the home of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (AAAS), May 15–18, 1991. More than twenty scholars from Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, Israel, and North America took part in an intense discussion of papers circulated be-

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forehand. These were subsequently revised by the authors and edited for publication. This book is the work of seventeen scholars in their respective fields, offering different perspectives on the Confucian role in industrial East Asia. Strictly speaking, however, this collaborative effort in its current form is no more than the proceedings of an international conversation which continues to generate new dynamism and create new possibilities. As such, it has all the trappings of an interim report: tentativeness, conflicting interpretations, and divergent perspectives. Its heuristic value, however, is immense, for it represents the current thinking of some of the most sophisticated minds on this vital and intriguing subject.

The question of whether the Confucian ethic has contributed to the rise of industrial East Asia has attracted much public attention and generated a great deal of scholarly inquiry since the 1970s. The issue is significant not only for academicians working on East Asia and nonspecialists engaged in or interested in East Asian affairs, but also for journalists, business executives, and policymakers. The region's ability to sustain the world's highest growth rate since the 1950s has merited serious attention by developmental economists, comparative sociologists, and political scientists. It is not the growth rate itself, however, but the various structural and functional reasons underlying this "economic miracle" and the emerging form of life it engenders that present a particularly thought-provoking challenge to the intellectual community.

When in 1987 a small coterie of Harvard colleagues, at the suggestion of the AAAS, gathered in the Cambridge home of the Academy to explore ways of understanding and studying this phenomenon, the plan was first to assess the overall impact of the rise of industrial East Asia by focusing on Japan in areas such as industry, international trade, global finance, foreign aid, science, technology, art, and literature. The second step was

to consider the implications of the rise of industrial East Asia for mainland China, and eventually to comment on its significance for Western Europe and North America. A line of exploration that would run parallel to this overall plan was for studying the Confucian role in industrial East Asia, involving scholars in the humanities as well as social scientists. The justification was the felt need to appreciate the role of culture not only as a background to, but also as a constitutive part of, economic dynamics. We assumed that any sophisticated analysis of the rise of industrial East Asia must wrestle with issues of moral education, political authority, social solidarity, and religious beliefs.

A generous grant from the Luce Foundation enabled us to launch the Confucian project in 1989 by organizing a workshop to discuss a variety of perspectives on the role of Confucian culture in industrial East Asia. Focusing on topics such as Confucian ethics as a common discourse, cultural identity and social implications, gender and family, community and education, political culture and economic ethics, and popular thought and religion, twenty-seven participants from the fields of anthropology, economics, history, philosophy, political science, religion, and sociology engaged in an intense and provocative exchange of views on the Confucian *Problematik*. The discussions were published in *The Confucian World Observed: A Contemporary Discussion of Confucian Humanism in East Asia*.

Rarely has there been such an opportunity to engage scholars working in many different fields in the kind of interdisciplinary and cross-cultural joint venture undertaken by the AAAS. Before the Academy's project was launched, a concerted effort had been made to wrestle with the mode of questioning based on Max Weber's classic study of the interaction between ethicoreligious values and economic behavior. Under the sponsorship of the Institute of East Asian Philosophies in Singapore, a series of international

meetings was organized to explore ways of addressing Weber's thesis, with particular attention to the East Asian experience. Several of the participants in the Academy's project were present at these meetings.

While remaining true to the spirit of the Academy in associating many specialized lines of concentration by gathering the individuals in whom they are embodied so that the group as a whole is enriched, we were critically aware of the danger that, since each of us is narrowed by our area of specialization, the results of our conversation might lack the coherence needed to set a new agenda for furthering productive scholarship. In retrospect, our sense of the precariousness of the enterprise was not at all exaggerated. The asymmetry between social scientists and humanities scholars, between Japanologists and sinologists, between economists and culturalists, and between idealists and realists was blatantly clear.

Fortunately, all the participants had a genuine desire for interdisciplinary and cross-cultural communication, a strong commitment to work toward a common agenda, and, perhaps most significant, a shared concern for the basic issues involved and a tacitly agreed-upon methodological orientation. Benjamin Schwartz of Harvard University, Peter Berger of Boston University, and Edward Tiryakian of Duke University, the three senior scholars who did not contribute papers but who were enormously helpful in shaping the character of the May 1991 conference, set the tone for the conversation.

The arduous task of transforming the papers into a conference volume, however, required not only the collaboration of the authors but also the painstaking efforts of two friends and fellow students of East Asian culture. Brian Hoffert, a graduate student at Harvard, ably edited all the papers and then stored the entire manuscript in the computer while he was finishing his M.A. in philosophy at the University of Hawaii; and Nancy Hearst, librarian of the John King Fairbank

Center for East Asian Research, scrupulously went over the manuscript before it was submitted to the press for copyediting. I am indebted to them for their thoroughness and professionalism. I also thank Corinne Schelling of the Academy and Terry Lautz of the Henry Luce Foundation for their continuous support. David Xiaokang Chu of the Cultural China Program at the East-West Center, under a generous grant from Lawrence and Mary Rockefeller, Henry Rosemont of St. Mary's University, and Rosanne Vaughn Hall of Cambridge have spent inordinate amounts of time and energy helping to shape the manuscript. I gratefully acknowledge their friendship and encouragement. Finally, I am saddened to report that one of our contributors, Edward Shils, passed away on January 23, 1995. The *New York Times's* obituary, with extensive information on his brilliant career, appeared the next day. His piece for our volume, a major effort to learn from the Confucian tradition, reflects his lifelong commitment to understanding the social role of the intellectual in a comparative perspective. As his assistant, Christine C. Schusenberger, notes, "Confucianism and civil society in the tradition of Chinese intellectuals" became one of Professor Shils's consuming scholarly preoccupations toward the end of his life. We are in his debt.

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This is not a book on Confucianism—Confucian thought, Confucian ethics, or Confucian theory in practice. Nor is it a book on the defining characteristics of the Confucian tradition and its modern transformation. Rather, it is an inquiry into the dynamic interplay of intellectual, social, political, and economic currents in Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore), with particular attention to the cultural implications of the rise of industrial East Asia. The contributors take the Confucian dimension as the point of entry for our inquiry. Confucian concerns (i.e.,

self-cultivation, regulation of the family, social civility, moral education, well-being of the people, governance of the state, and universal peace) provide a general framework for our joint venture. The Confucian *Problematik*—how a fiduciary community can come into being through exemplary teaching and moral transformation—underlies much of the discussion.

Our inquiry is guided by a critical consciousness that leads us to question all unexamined assumptions about the rise of industrial East Asia. We do not as a group subscribe to any one thesis or hypothesis as the best way to understand its cultural implications. Since our primary purpose is to comprehend, we hope collectively to bring new insights to this multifaceted phenomenon through our varying interpretations. Our strategy, then, is not to seek consensus but to provide an open forum to accommodate several seemingly conflicting lines of thought. While we are acutely aware of the need for significantly different perspectives, our intent is to explore those ideas, norms, and values that underlie the moral fabric of East Asian societies. It is certainly advisable, at this early stage, not to tie up loose ends prematurely in studying such an immensely complex phenomenon as the rise of industrial East Asia, an area that continues to undergo unprecedented transformation. By characterizing our endeavor as an attempt to probe the Confucian traditions of East Asian modernity, we mean to show that there are different ways to conceptualize the Confucian heritage of modern East Asia, and that this points toward the need for reexamining the whole idea of modernity.

As this digested conversation indicates, there is as much contested interpretation as there is “fusion of horizons” on virtually all aspects of the Confucian thesis. For instance, is Confucian ethics a common discourse in industrial East Asia? We find that the answer varies according to academic discipline, regional specialization, and personal judgment.

Historians, especially intellectual historians, tend to stress the common heritage and shared spiritual orientation, whereas anthropologists are wary about making broad generalizations and prefer to offer “thick descriptions” of the local scene. Japanologists, while acknowledging the ubiquitous presence of the Confucian pattern of behavior, tend to minimize the prominence of Confucian thought in Japan’s modern transformation. The relevance of Confucian ethics in the economic ethos and political culture of Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and overseas Chinese communities is taken for granted by sinologists, but there is no consensus on the role and function of the Confucian ethic in the modern transformation of these societies.

It ought to be noted, however, that it was the towering figure of American Japanology, Edwin Reischauer, who, in his seminal essay “The Sinic World in Perspective,” first emphasized the pervasiveness of the Confucian mentality in contemporary East Asia, including Japan. Though mindful of Japan’s uniqueness, Reischauer insisted on situating Japan in the East Asian cultural universe to show that its economic dynamism indicates not merely exceptionalism but a pattern of modern transformation encompassing the whole of East Asia. Putting the Sinic world in perspective thus provides a proper context for understanding Japan, the Four Mini-Dragons, overseas Chinese communities, and, eventually, socialist East Asia (mainland China, North Korea, and Vietnam).

Surely “the claim that Confucian ethics, as reflected in government leadership, competitive education, a disciplined work force, principles of equality and self-reliance, and self-cultivation, provides a necessary background and powerful motivating force for the rise of industrial East Asia” [to quote Peter L. Berger and Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao, *In Search of an East Asian Development Model*] has yet to be substantiated. Nevertheless, the benefit of addressing the issue is obvious. The difficulty of confronting the



role of culture in industrial East Asia is, of course, enormous, but by focusing our attention on the Confucian role, we are compelled to wrestle with the question instead of relegating it to the background or to a residual category. Already this "Confucian hypothesis" has stimulated an impressive array of productive research and will continue to challenge us to formulate more comprehensive and refined interpretations.

Among the conceptual resources widely tapped for this kind of inquiry, the Weberian mode of questioning, as demonstrated in Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, looms large in our discussion. But the method of finding the functional equivalent of the Protestant ethic in the "modernized" or "vulgarized" Confucian ethic is too facile, simpleminded, and mechanistic to merit serious attention. This observation is not meant to downplay the importance of a work ethic in East Asian productivity. In fact, several significant empirical studies have helped us to understand the correlation between value orientation, attitude, and performance in East Asian industry, and the Confucian ethic is often identified as a positive factor in these studies. Nevertheless, the inadequacy of regarding the Confucian ethic in East Asia as the functional equivalent of the Protestant ethic is obvious: what it manages to reveal may turn out to be misleading, but what it inadvertently conceals is at times vitally important. After all, Weber's brilliant study of the psychocultural conditions that made possible the development of the spirit of capitalism was, in his view, only a preliminary step toward estimating "the quantitative cultural significance of ascetic Protestantism in its relation to the other plastic elements of modern culture."

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* Weber indicates that he is critically aware of the requisite intermediate steps involved in the kind of cultural study for which his was a mere beginning:

The next task would be rather to show the significance of ascetic rationalism, which has only been touched in the foregoing sketch, for the content of practical social ethics, thus for the types of organization and the functions of social groups from conventicle to the State. Then its relation to humanistic rationalism, its ideal of life and cultural influence; further to the development of philosophical and scientific empiricism, to technical development and to spiritual ideals would have to be analyzed. Then its historical development from the mediaeval beginnings of worldly asceticism to its dissolution into pure utilitarianism would have to be traced out through all the areas of ascetic religion.

What Weber outlined was his vision of the rise of the modern West, a vision pregnant with fruitful ambiguities and far-reaching implications for comparative civilizational studies. Understandably, Weber's well-known interpretive stance on Confucianism served as a point of departure for the entire discussion, notwithstanding the obsolescence of many of his empirical observations. For example, Weber's concluding remark in *The Religion of China* is still highly suggestive:

The Chinese in all probability would be quite capable . . . of assimilating capitalism, which has technically and economically been fully developed in the modern culture area. It is obviously not a question of deeming the Chinese "naturally ungifted" for the demands of capitalism. But compared to the Occident, the varied conditions which externally favored the origin of capitalism in China did not suffice to create it. Likewise capitalism did not originate in occidental or oriental Antiquity, or in India, or where Islamism held sway. Yet in each of these areas different and favorable circumstances seemed to facilitate its rise. Many of the circumstances which could or had to hinder capitalism in China similarly existed in the Occident and assumed definite shape in the period of modern capitalism.

Evidently there is fluidity in Weber's char-

acterization of the genetic reasons for the development of capitalism. As Wolfgang Schluchter notes, since Weber was mainly concerned with a specific historical question—namely, why industrial capitalism emerged in the Protestant West—his interpretation leaves open the possibility that different forms of capitalism might grow out of a variety of cultural traditions in response to the challenge of the modern West. This may be what prompted Peter Berger [in his book *The Capitalist Revolution: Fifty Propositions About Prosperity, Equality, and Liberty*] to characterize industrial East Asian capitalism as a “second case.”

Our venture to explore the Confucian influence in Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons is part of this international collaborative effort to come to terms with the rise of industrial East Asia as a cultural phenomenon as well as an economic and political process. Our decision to involve scholars from different academic disciplines, with different regional specializations and working at different levels of generalization and in different styles of explanation, was predicated on the assumption that, since the subject has attracted much attention from policymakers, the mass media, and the general public, it is imperative that we continue our brainstorming to raise thought-provoking questions. Our purpose, then, is to achieve a broad grasp of the interplay between cultural values and the economic, political, social, and ethical life of East Asian peoples.

The underlying assumption that culture matters and that economic facts and political institutions are laden with cultural values was neither trivialized nor relegated to a residual category. While opinions varied in assigning specific weight to the Confucian factor in explaining the dynamic transformation of industrial East Asia, there was a remarkable convergence of views on the need to problematize the Confucian hypothesis and to provide sophisticated cultural and historical background to the Confucian thesis in cur-

rent interpretive literature on East Asia in the English-speaking community. Imagine a reporter from Beijing who intended to write a series of articles on the American economy, polity, and society during the highly energized 1994 election season, yet who not only was unfamiliar with Christian symbols but insisted on the irrelevance of the Protestant tradition to his journalistic task. Would we have much faith in his ability to present culturally sophisticated reports on the current American scene, including the presidential debates?

Surely, just as it is conceptually vague and misleading to label American society Christian, it is neither instructive nor correct to characterize any East Asian society as Confucian. Still, cultural sensitivity and cultural competence, as reflected in either a general theory or an empirical investigation, are desirable and often necessary. I mention this, of course, not to conflate knowledge about Confucian ethics with sensitivity to and competence in East Asian culture, but to acknowledge that familiarity with Confucian ethics can serve as a litmus test for judging intellectual seriousness in approaching East Asia as a subject in comparative civilizational studies.

We must not underestimate the complexity of the methodological issues involved in addressing the Confucian role in East Asian societies, itself a fine art, because that role is both elusive and pervasive. We are, on the one hand, at a loss to identify and define how the Confucian ethic actually works in economic organization, political ideology, and social behavior. And yet, on the other hand, we are impressed by its presence in virtually every aspect of interpersonal relations in East Asian life. Understandably, the authors of this volume have chosen a variety of methods to investigate the phenomenon. The range of options includes the core curriculum in moral education, ancestral veneration in family ritual, styles of protest among the intelligentsia, symbolic resources in the development of a civil society, the formation of a

political ideology, and networking in economic behavior and organization.

If we try to look for an integrated pattern to tell us the precise boundaries and significance of the Confucian influence in industrial East Asia, we are most likely to be disappointed. At the same time, while we frankly admit to an asymmetry in style, method, and level of analysis, we maintain that *Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity* offers a many-faceted conversation rather than discrete monologues. Indeed, there are so many points of convergence and intersections of communication that it is not farfetched to claim that this book represents a new attempt by like-minded scholars to come to grips with moral education and economic culture in contemporary East Asia. The broad picture that emerges from the contributors' focused, sometimes highly specialized studies is, in Jürgen Habermas's expression, a lifeworld, significantly different from our own in the West (specifically Western Europe and North America) and yet modern in every sense of the word.

Two implications are worth mentioning. First, there is the fascinating phenomenon of traditions in modernity. The question in what sense has the Confucian ethic contributed to the economic dynamics of industrial East Asia seems less interesting than a much more profound subject of investigation: How does the Confucian tradition, in belief, attitude, and practice, continue to impede, facilitate, and guide the modern transformation in East Asia, and, in the process, how is it being rejected, revitalized, and fundamentally restructured? The limited Weberian project of searching for the functional equivalent of the Protestant ethic must be subsumed under Weber's general comparative civilizational perspective—namely, given the vital importance of the value orientation in economic development, what can the Confucian influence in industrial East Asia tell us about the relation between tradition and modernity?

Weber's assertion [in *The Sociology of Re-*

*ligion*] that since “the impediments to the development of capitalism must be sought primarily in the domain of religion,” Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and, by implication, all indigenous religious traditions, unlike Protestantism, are detrimental to the modernizing process initiated in Western Europe and must therefore be thoroughly revised. A more reasonable position is to argue for the transformative potential of all these major ethicoreligious traditions. What the experience of development in industrial East Asia suggests is not the passing of a traditional society but the continuing role of tradition in providing the rich texture of an evolving modernity. Confucianism—and, presumably, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and indigenous religious traditions (for instance, those of the Maori)—may have impeded the modernization of a traditional Oriental society in the Occidental sense. But the modernization of a Confucian society—or, for that matter, a Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist, or Maori society—requires the continuous participation and creative transformation of its ethicoreligious traditions. Since the rise of industrial East Asia indicates the authentic possibility of a Confucian spirit of capitalism, it may not be outrageous to imagine a Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist, or Maori spirit of capitalism.

This inevitably leads to the second implication: Can the modernization process assume cultural forms different from those identified as characteristically Western since the period of the Enlightenment? In other words, are market economy, democratic polity, and individualism so essential to the modernist project and so integrated as three inseparable dimensions of modernity that no society can ever become modernized without simultaneously being Westernized? The rise of industrial East Asia, at a minimum, has significantly complicated the Weberian picture of modernization as rationalization, a sort of unfolding of the Enlightenment mentality. Indeed, no matter how diverse and

complex we imagine the West to be (Weber's concept is certainly sophisticated enough to accommodate many conflicting trends), the inclusion of the East Asian experience in the picture of modernity makes it extremely difficult to interpret modernization in light of exclusively Western symbolic resources. Once we begin to acknowledge the compatibility of a market economy and an authoritarian state, recognize the centrality of family virtues to social solidarity, appreciate the fruitful interplay between group consensus and personal independence, construct ideas of civil society based on indigenous categories, and employ new conceptual apparatuses such as network capitalism to understand a different kind of economic dynamics, we are well on our way to an alternative vision of modernity.

In the East Asian cultural context, government leadership is deemed indispensable for a smooth functioning of the domestic market economy and vital for enhancing national comparative advantage in international competition. The central government is expected to have a holistic vision of the well-being of the nation and a long-term plan to help people maintain an adequate livelihood so that they can attain their aspirations of human flourishing. Strong government with moral authority, a sort of ritualized symbolic power fully accepted by the overwhelming majority, is acclaimed as a blessing, for it is the responsibility of the ruling minority to translate the general will of the people into reasonable policies on security, health care, economic growth, social welfare, and education. Indeed, political leaders (including civil servants) in East Asia often possess a commanding influence in the public sphere. They may not be able to dictate the agenda or control the outcome of a public debate, but their voice normally overpowers the voices of other sectors in the society, such as the mass media, the business community, and the intelligentsia. Either in self-understanding or in public image, the political leader ought to be a teacher as well as an exemplar and a public

servant. Indeed, scholars, journalists, and entrepreneurs often cultivate their most cherished and coveted personal ties with members of officialdom. The Confucian scholar-official mentality still functions in the psychocultural construct of East Asian societies. The best minds in business, the media, and the academic community are often readily available for political appointments.

The lack of clear boundaries between public and private in East Asian societies, occasioned by the pervasive influence of politics in all segments of the lifeworld, may not conform to the Western model of modernity, with its highly differentiated spheres of interest. It is, however, wholly commensurate with the centrality of the family in East Asia, not only as a basic social unit but as a metaphor for political culture. The structure and function of the family varies substantially among Chinese, Japanese, and Korean societies, but the family's supreme role in capital formation, power politics, social stability, and moral education is comparable in all East Asian communities. The classic Confucian vision that "only when families are regulated are states governed" (stated in the opening passage of the *Great Learning*) is still taken absolutely seriously in East Asian political culture. The idea of the state as an enlarged family may have lost much of its persuasiveness, but the metaphor of the family is widely present in all forms of social organization. Moreover, family-style connectedness is characteristic of many prominent modes of interpersonal communication based on educational, territorial, and religious ties. The lack of development of Western-style civil society rooted in voluntary associations is clearly attributable to the saliency of this noncontractual, extra-legal, and ascriptive networking.

Implicit in the significance of the family for social intercourse is the idea of duty. The sense that one is obligated to, and responsible for, an ever-expanding network of human relatedness may not be a constraint on one's independence and autonomy. On the con-



trary, since personal dignity is predicated on one's ability not only to establish oneself but also to take care of others, one's level of independence and autonomy is measurable in terms of the degree to which one fulfills obligations and discharges responsibilities to family, community, state, the world, and Heaven. The psychological mechanism reflected in the fear of losing face in public, which is often accompanied by a profound sense of personal guilt, is deduced from this. As the eminent New Confucian thinker Tang Junyi (T'ang Chün-i, 1909–1978) perceptively notes, duty consciousness prompts East Asian moral and political leaders to act so as to enhance the public good. The difficulty East Asian societies have in developing a sophisticated legal system based on human rights lies not only in the absence of a juridical tradition but also in the strong presence of a different style of moral reasoning.

A significant and captivating aspect of this alternative East Asian vision of modernity is the communal spirit. Although, as many observers of the industrial East Asian scene have noted, "individualism has flourished as growth has occurred; [and] hedonism has also increased, in the sense of viewing happiness not as a reward for hard work but as a natural right that is also a goal in itself" in Japan and elsewhere [to quote Herman Kahn and Thomas Pepper in *The Japanese Challenge*], the trends that were expected to change the social structure of the East Asian workplace do not seem to have fundamentally undermined the power of the communal spirit. Consensus as a preferred way of decision making, negotiation as a conventional method of resolving conflict, informal arbitration as a frequent substitute for formal legal procedures, and, as a last resort, the common practice of mediation through third parties rather than direct confrontation between rivals are all symptomatic of an overriding concern for group solidarity in politics, business, and society at large in East Asia. In this particular connection what Japan and

the Four Mini-Dragons symbolize is a less adversarial, less individualistic, and less self-interested but highly energized and fiercely competitive approach to modernization.

It is vitally important to note that the East Asian form of modernity is in a substantial way "Western." After all, it has been the result of a conscious response to the challenge of the modern West since the mid-nineteenth century. Without the Western model, including the Dutch, British, French, German, and more recently American examples, East Asian societies would not have embarked on a restless march toward modernization. What would East Asia have become had the imperialist powers never imposed their way of life on the Land of the Rising Sun, the Hermit Kingdom, and the Middle Country? Although the region most likely would not have developed the "capitalist spirit" as Weber understood it, the overwhelming presence of the modern West for more than a century makes this kind of counterfactual supposition historically insignificant, if not theoretically inconceivable. Indeed, East Asian intellectuals have reluctantly but thoroughly accepted modern Western nations as the initiators, executors, and judges of the international rules of the game in foreign trade, diplomacy, power politics, military confrontation, and transnational communication for so long that they themselves have taken it for granted that modernization, in theory and practice, is synonymous with Westernization. The record number of industrial East Asian leaders in academia, politics, business, the mass media, and the military who were educated in the United States since the end of the Second World War further enhances the impression that Westernization is, by and large, Americanization.

The rise of industrial East Asia, paradoxically, signifies the continuous vitality and dynamism of modernization as Westernization. This is clearly evidenced in the persuasive power of market economy and democratic polity and the attendant Enlightenment val-

ues, such as progress, equality, liberty, human rights, individual dignity, and due process of law, in the psychocultural construct of the East Asian intelligentsia. Modernization as Americanization is perhaps most obviously demonstrated in the receptivity of East Asian youth to American popular culture and the susceptibility of the East Asian general public to American consumerism. The commanding influence of American higher education, however, especially research universities, on the East Asian natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities may have been the single most important factor in perpetuating the image of the United States as a future-oriented global intellectual leader in East Asian minds.

Nevertheless, the modernizing experience in industrial East Asia seriously challenges all the conceptual apparatuses that have been used to characterize Western-style modernity. The modern West may have prompted East Asia to modernize in the initial stages, but as the process gathered momentum, a variety of indigenous resources were mobilized. The structures that emerged, therefore, appear significantly different from those in Western Europe and North America. It seems that the social and cultural capital that has sustained the economic dynamism of Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons has been at least commensurate with Confucian ethics, if not thoroughly Confucian in nature. Even if Weber was correct in assuming that Confucianism had impeded the development of modern industrial capitalism in traditional East Asia, the thesis that the Confucian ethic is incompatible with the spirit of capitalism is untenable. On the contrary, it has been shown that the Confucian ethic is not only compatible with the capitalist spirit but may actually have helped industrial East Asia to develop a different form of modern industrial capitalism. Indeed, attempts have been made to argue a much stronger hypothesis—namely, that the capitalism rooted in Confucian ethics may turn out to be more consequential for the

twenty-first century than the classic capitalism fashioned by the inner-worldly asceticism of the Puritan ethic. The implications are profound and far-reaching. The contributors to *Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity* are particularly interested in two of these implications: the role of tradition in modernity and the ways in which the modernizing process may assume several different cultural forms.

In our conference we did not intend to cover, even in bold outline, all the salient features of East Asian modernity. By focusing our attention on the Confucian dimension, we wanted to probe the cultural resources that made modern industrial East Asia distinctive. We are admittedly far from able to make any definitive statements about either the modern transformation of Confucian humanism or the nature of East Asian modernity as shaped by Confucian traditions. As part of an ongoing international conversation, we have nevertheless taken an important step toward setting up a long-term comprehensive agenda for a systematic inquiry into the cultural significance of the rise of industrial East Asia for comparative civilizational studies. Especially noteworthy is our pioneering attempt to formulate a method of interdisciplinary and cross-cultural communication so that the kinds of issues mentioned herein may be addressed appropriately and persistently.

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In this volume our explorations of Confucian traditions in East Asian modernity complicate, if not refute, the common impression that modernity is either a conscious rejection or an unintended departure from tradition. The continuous presence of Confucian ideas and practices in Japan and the Four Mini- Dragons as unreflected habits of the heart or as a deliberate reappropriation of cultural values for social development calls into question the thesis that the advent of modernity entails the passing of traditional society. We

authors are enjoined by the findings of our venture to appreciate the vitality of the Confucian tradition, the dynamism of East Asian modernity, and the complex interaction between indigenous cultural resources and the models of economic, political, and social transformation imported from the modern West. Indeed, the industrial East Asian case raises challenging questions about the modernization process as it historically originated from the unique Western European experience. The emergence of an East Asian form of modernity, while deeply rooted in the Enlightenment mentality of the modern West, exhibiting a style of life significantly different from that of Western Europe and North America, impels us to consider the possibility that the modernizing process may assume different cultural forms and to reexamine the idea of modernity as a norm, a standard of inspiration, or an emergent global phenomenon.

If we assume, as the East Asian example dictates, that traditions shape the modernization process and, in a substantial way, define the meaning of being modern, what is the status of the claim that modernity must be conceived in terms of three inseparable dimensions: market economy, democratic polity, and individualism? Surely the case at hand enhances the conviction that a market economy, as a powerful engine of modernization, is a constitutive part of modernity. In light of the political change and social transformation as a result of the marketization of the economy in virtually all communist countries in recent years, we must acknowledge the enormous influence of market forces in a fundamental and irreversible restructuring of the industrial East Asian societies since the end of the Second World War. Indeed, the single most important variable differentiating *industrial* East Asia from *communist* East Asia has been the adoption of the market as a mechanism for integration into the global economy. The relative success of the People's Republic of China, as compared with the dif-

difficulties in the former Soviet Union, in revitalizing its economy through the market mechanism further shows that the wisdom of Adam Smith, while historically and culturally specific, does have global appeal.

It is worth noting, however, that the market economy, as it has been practiced in East Asia, is not at all incompatible with strong and comprehensive government participation. Often, political leadership provides necessary guidance for a functioning market. In both domestic coordination and foreign competition, economically sophisticated government officials are often instrumental in allowing for the smooth functioning of the system and for creating an environment for healthy growth. Collaboration between officialdom and the business community is the norm in East Asian societies, and the pervasive and fruitful interaction between polity and economy is a defining characteristic of East Asian political economy. The idea that, from the economic point of view, government intervention is always unwelcome and, at best, a necessary evil is alien to East Asian thinking; the well-established practice of official involvement in private enterprises is shown even in negative examples of collusion between bureaucrats and entrepreneurs. The authority of the government in adjudicating economic matters may take different forms—direct management (Singapore), active leadership (South Korea), informed guidance (Japan), passive interference (Taiwan), or positive noninterference (Hong Kong)—but the presence of the government in all weighty economic decisions is not only expected but desired by the business community as well as the general public.

Similarly, Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons all embrace democratic aspirations defined in terms of the electoral process. Democratic polity as a salient feature of modernity is fully recognized in industrial East Asia, not merely as an imported Western institution but also as a universal aspiration for realizing values derived from the Enlightenment, such as lib-

erty, equality, human rights, rationality, and due process of law. The vibrancy of the East Asian economy may not be a direct consequence of political liberalization, but the close affinity between market economy and democratic polity is undeniable. It is not at all farfetched to suggest that even if democratization did not produce the East Asian economic miracles, it provided an essential favorable condition for sustaining the vibrant economies. The question of the linkage between market economy and democratic polity in terms of temporal priority and logical sequence may be controversial, but, beyond doubt, there is an interdependence, mutuality, and complementarity between them. The industrial East Asian case solidly confirms that modernization as well as democratization, while originating in the modern West, is universally applicable. It is possible that a market economy may not lead directly to a democratic polity, but it is inconceivable that economic strength can be sustained without substantial progress in democratizing the overall political structure.

The universal applicability of democratic polity notwithstanding, the East Asian manifestations of the democratic idea strongly suggest that democratization as a process is not necessarily incompatible with bureaucratic meritocracy, educational elitism, and particularistic social networking. The Western democratic experience itself has been significantly shaped by traditions of pragmatism, empiricism, skepticism, and gradualism as in the English case; anticlericalism, rationalism, culturalism, and the revolutionary spirit as in the French case; and romanticism, nationalism, and ethnic pride as in the German case. The Confucian faith in the betterment of the human condition through individual effort; commitment to family as the basic unit of society and to family ethics as the foundation of social stability; trust in the intrinsic value of moral education; belief in self-reliance, the work ethic, and mutual aid; and a sense of an organic unity with an ever-extending network

of relationships all provide rich cultural resources for East Asian democracies to develop their own distinctive features.

It is true that Confucian rhetoric, as in a discussion of Asian values, may be used as a strategy for criticizing the indiscriminate imposition of Western ideas on the rest of the world. The new agenda for broadening human rights—from the exclusive emphasis on political and civil rights to the inclusion of economic, social, and cultural rights—may very well be perceived as a strategic maneuver engineered by Asian leaders to divert attention from blatant human rights violations by authoritarian regimes. While the need for East Asian societies under the influence of Confucian culture to free themselves from nepotism, authoritarianism, and male chauvinism is obvious, democracy with Confucian characteristics is not only imaginable but also practicable. The strong thesis that Confucian democracy is an oxymoron seems simplistic. Although authoritarian equality, like cruel kindness, is a contradiction in terms, a democracy supported by a trustworthy source of power and informed by an ever-present moral authority is certainly conceivable and, under certain conditions, may even be highly desirable.

In the modern liberal-democratic perspective, the Confucian tradition clearly suffers from manifold shortcomings. Yet, what is lacking may not necessarily be required for growth into a mature democracy *if* complementary ideas can be generated and comparable structures developed. In its overall spiritual orientation, the Confucian tradition lacks a strong commitment to individualism. The issue of individualism as a reflection of the modern ethos is complex. But, undeniably, the dignity, autonomy, and independence of the person are greatly valued in all modern societies. If a Confucian society, based on its cherished value of “learning for the sake of oneself” and the moral imperative of continuous self-realization, can generate concepts of basic liberties and rights and de-



velop a legal system to protect the privacy of its citizenry, its belief in the person as a center of relationships rather than as an isolated individual may be conducive to stable democracy.

In its basic beliefs the Confucian tradition lacks ideas of radical transcendence, positive evil, and transcendental rationality. As a result, Confucian societies may not have rich resources for checking abuses of power by autocratic or paternalistic regimes. Modern Confucian societies must learn to appreciate the psychology of suspicion in conceptualizing the proper relationship between the government and the governed. Lord Acton's liberal dictum that "power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely" is particularly instructive to East Asian intellectuals, who have been too much seasoned in the Confucian scholar-official mentality to cultivate a critical spirit against the dictatorial tendency of strong rulership. The idea of God as the Absolute has been, by and large, effective in rendering all worldly structures of power relative in the West. The unintended healthy consequence of subsuming political authority under a more transcendent framework of meaning is eminently suited as a prescription to the East Asian vulnerability to authoritarianism. Yet the Confucian theory of the Mandate of Heaven, based on the ethic of responsibility of the elite, is more congenial to democratic polity than, say, the divine right of kings. The Confucian ideas of benevolent government, the duty-consciousness of the elite, and the right of the people to revolution are all consistent with democratic demands for civility, impartiality, and public accountability. Actually, the Confucians are noted for their commitment to cultivating the value of reasonableness in ordinary daily human interaction, for they believe that true social harmony is attainable only through communication and negotiation.

In its political philosophy the Confucian tradition lacks concepts of liberty, human rights, privacy, and due process of law. The

Confucian predilection for distributive justice, duty, public-spiritedness, and ritual may have undermined the East Asian capacity fully to integrate freedoms of individual expression, inalienable political and civil rights, respect for the private sphere, and an independent judiciary. In a complex modern society, however, we can no longer afford to underscore the value of liberties without considering adequate political measures for protecting the economically disadvantaged. The ills of an inefficient welfare system notwithstanding, the government must ensure that vicious competitiveness enhanced by market forces does not lead to unbearable inequalities. This requires the cultivation of a strong sense of culpability and responsibility of business and government to the well-being of society at large. The Confucian concern for duty is not at variance with the demand for rights. Actually, for a discourse on self-interest and privacy to have the salience it deserves, the development of a public sphere, where the spirit of impartiality is respected, is both desirable and necessary. Paradoxically, the formation of a civilized mode of conduct (a fiduciary commitment to the public good) by legal professionals may still be the most effective way to curtail concern for self-interest.

In its institutional structure, the Confucian tradition lacks a mechanism of checks and balances against autocracy, an adversarial division of labor within a constitutional framework, loyal opposition, and total political participation. Authoritarianism, whether harsh or lenient, continues to haunt East Asian democracies. The penchant for consensus formation undermines the dynamism, engendered by a creative tension inherent in an adversarial system, of East Asian political culture. The patient tolerance and informed understanding of the role and function of the loyal opposition characterized by most Western democracies is yet to have a presence in East Asia. Multiparty elections have already become a reality of life for all of

industrialized East Asia. Even the people of Singapore and Hong Kong are experienced in voting. Nonetheless, while the political process within a constitutional framework is being worked out in most industrial East Asian societies, it will take years to create an ethos of civility and openness in intraparty communication. The idea of government of, by, and for the people is no longer wishful thinking in Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons. But democratic polity, far from being fully integrated into the ordinary way of life, remains contentious, disruptive, and even explosive.

In interpersonal praxis the Confucian tradition lacks the concepts of social contract, civil society, and public sphere. Still, the fruitful human interaction involved in "network capitalism," which has successfully extended to virtually all corners of the global community, suggests that the ethical requirements of complex business transactions, such as trust, reliability, responsibility, and obligation, are rooted in Confucian culture. Although without a well-developed legal system, this way of generating wealth is hardly universalizable, it has already created a unique style of economic and social development with far-reaching implications for the rest of the world. The emergence of public institutions in business, mass media, academia, religion, and the professions, independent of the political center and yet instrumental in shaping its long-term policies, has enabled industrial East Asia gradually to develop full-fledged civil societies. While it is difficult to predict the course of action of these emerging institutions, which have made the idea of civil society intelligible to East Asian intellectuals, the increasing pluralism inevitably leads to new constellations of thought, religion, ethics, aesthetics, and worldviews. Whether or not a truly functioning public sphere adjudicated by communicative rationality will come into being in each of these newly industrial countries, the density of the human network and the complexity of the cultural texture

have made them a remarkably modern exemplification of “organic solidarity,” in Emile Durkheim’s conception of division of labor as a necessary condition for modernity.

The foregoing discussion of the limitations of the Confucian tradition in the liberal-democratic perspective and the possible Confucian responses to the Enlightenment mentality suggest a new ethical-political horizon. Its uniqueness can be revealed only in sharp contrast to an old and still influential interpretive position:

The verdict that Confucianism is incompatible with science and democracy, the two defining characteristics of the modern West, renders it inconsequential or irrelevant to China’s modernization (that is, Westernization) has been the consensus of the Chinese intelligentsia, representing a variety of [ethical-]political persuasions (such as pragmatism, liberalism, anarchism, socialism and constitutional monarchism) since the May Fourth Movement in 1919. Understandably, Levenson, in his classical trilogy on Confucian China, concludes that its modern fate was sealed. [Tu Wei-ming, “Historical Significance of the Confucian Discourse,” *China Quarterly*, December 1994]

East Asian intellectuals are actively involved in probing the Confucian tradition as a spiritual resource for economic development, nation-building, social stability, and cultural identity. But the echoes of the iconoclastic attacks on Confucius and Sons still reverberate in the halls of academia and in the corridors of government throughout Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons. Paradoxically, the Confucian personality ideals (the authentic person, the worthy, or the sage) can be realized more fully in a liberal democratic society than in either a traditional imperial dictatorship or a modern authoritarian regime. East Asian Confucian ethics must creatively transform itself in light of Enlightenment values before it can serve as an effective critique of the excessive individualism, perni-

cious competitiveness, and vicious litigiousness of the modern West.

Another challenge to Confucian self-reflexivity is the gender issue. The time is ripe for feminist critiques of the Confucian tradition and possible Confucian answers to such a mode of inquiry. The absence in this volume of focused investigations by scholars, especially feminist scholars, on gender (with the notable exception of Robert Smith's chapter) does not at all indicate our lack of effort or enthusiasm to engage feminists in this joint intellectual enterprise; we are critically aware that, without special attention to the gender issue, our views, divergent as they are, remain one-sided. This is particularly regrettable because the Confucian conversation can be greatly enriched by feminist discourse with its emphasis on relationship, context, history, sympathy, and holism.

As East Asian societies have begun conscientiously tapping their indigenous cultural resources to shape their own versions of modernity in response to the challenges of capitalism, science, and democracy from the modern West, they may discover that the feminist philosophy of life presents the most daunting challenge to their Confucian habits of the heart. Indeed, the vitality of the Confucian traditions in East Asian modernity in large measure depends on their transvaluation of male-centered dispositions into an inclusive, humanistic project embodying the perspectives of both women and men. It is not enough for the Confucian traditions to adapt themselves to capitalist economy and democratic polity; they must also adapt to and help create a new vision of the lifeworld: family, workplace, power, authority, social intercourse, and self-understanding.