

China's Great Transformation

CHINA'S GREAT TRANSFORMATION

Selected Essays on Confucianism,
Modernization, and Democracy

Ambrose Yeo-chi King



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*China's Great Transformation:
Selected Essays on Confucianism, Modernization, and Democracy*

By Ambrose Yeo-chi King

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Introduction

I took Ambrose King's "Chinese Society" course when I was a freshman at The Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1971. His course is so interesting and stimulating that it unlocked my intellectual curiosity, making me determined not only to major in sociology, but also to specialize in the fields of modernization and development when I took my PhD qualifying exams at UCLA in 1978.

Therefore, I felt deeply honored that Ambrose King asked me to write an introduction for the present volume. This is because King is not only my former teacher, but he also is an esteemed sociologist, a cherished public intellectual, and a superb university administrator. King was one of the founding fathers of the sociology discipline in Hong Kong, a Fellow of Academia Sinica in Taiwan, and the Vice-Chancellor of The Chinese University of Hong Kong. Like many intellectuals of his generation, King is concerned about the new developments in Chinese nation as it sloughed off the old society and the subsequent course that Chinese culture might take.

Titled as *China's Great Transformation: Selected Essays on Confucianism, Modernization, and Democracy*,

the present volume is a collection of King's twelve papers published between 1975 and 1997. These two decades are turning points for China as we observed the following dramatic historical trends: the shift from revolutionary Maoism to Four Modernizations in mainland China; the unexpected democratic transition in Taiwan; and the rise of four little dragons (Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore) in East Asia. Focusing on the cultural dimension, King's papers in this volume are aimed to understand, to interpret, or to explain all these new developments from a historical, comparative framework.

The twelve chapters in this volume centered on the following three themes: (1) Confucianism, (2) modernization, and (3) democracy.

There are four chapters on Confucianism. Chapter 1 articulates an innovative "*relational perspective*" to examine the organic linkages between the individual and society. King argues that Western literature has wrongly presented an "over-Confucianized view of Chinese society" because the individual's action is wrongly interpreted as the result of a complete internalization of Confucian norms and values.

King argues that complete Confucianization is impossible because there are inconsistent values and norms with the Confucian ethics. In addition, the very ambiguity or elasticity of the family group would give individual ample room for maneuver in constructing his social networks. The boundaries of both the family and other groups are thus very much dependent upon the decision of the individual. Thus, King argues for "*self-centered voluntarism*" in Confucian ethic, i.e., the individual's freedom of action in constructing a personal relational network.

Although an individual has considerable social and psychological space for constructing a personal network, the emphasis, however, is placed on the particular relations between oneself and other concrete individuals. Thus, *the individual interacts with others always on a particular relationship basis*. As a result, when the individual faces an amorphous entity called group (or society), he finds himself no longer structurally situated in a relation-based social web. In this group setting, the Confucian values and norms would seem to him not morally abiding and relevant. The Chinese common saying (“if one does not think of his own interest, neither heaven nor earth will save him”), by no means a socially embarrassing statement, only becomes thinkable and understandable in a relation-free context. Using a relational perspective, King is thus able to explain the puzzle why the Chinese individual often ceases to be a “social being” in the true Confucian sense in relation to the amorphous group (or society). According to King, this is because the Confucian paradigm has not provided a “viable linkage” between the individual and the group, and it only focuses on *particular relations between oneself and other concrete individuals*. For example, a Chinese is happy to donate a large sum of money to a charity organization because many of his friends and relatives are members and leaders in the charity organization, but he is not willing to donate a single penny to the same organization if he knows nobody there.

Chapter 2 follows up this line of argument by examining the concepts of face (*mian*) and shame (*chi*) in Chinese culture. Chapter 2 demonstrates that the concepts of face and shame have often been interpreted too rigidly by students of Chinese culture. The tendency has been to speak of Chinese culture one-dimensionally as a

face-conscious one in purely the social sense and a shame-conscious one on the behavioral level.

King argues that Ruth Benedict's single dichotomy between the Chinese *face-shame* complex and the Western *sin-guilt*, one fails to do justice to the complexities of the Chinese understanding of the key terms utilized in posing such a dichotomy. King explains that face and shame are not merely external sanctions lacking potentiality of internalization: the long tradition of intrinsic Confucianism testifies not only to the possibility of their being internalized as individual moral guidelines but insists that internalization is a moral necessity. Thus, King concludes that examining face-shame in a purely *social* sense (a social face) in traditional Chinese society is incomplete. The concept of face-shame also involves a *moral* component (a moral face) which does not require the judgment of others to be lost (audience is not necessary) because it is internalized in the conscience or superego.

Chapter 3 further develops these ideas into the Confucian paradigm of man. The literature depicts Confucianism as a social force that tends to mold the Chinese into group-oriented, or more specifically, family-oriented and socially dependent beings. King, however, challenges this Western presentation of Confucianism because it grasps only a part of total complexity. Chapter 3 attempts to show that the Confucian paradigm of man has a built-in structural imperative to develop a person into a *relation-oriented individual* who is not only socially responsive and dependent but also capable of asserting a self-directed role in constructing a social world.

In Confucian paradigm of man, man is socially situated, defined, and shaped in a relational context. In brief, man is a relational being. King emphasizes that the individual is more than a

role-player mechanically performing the role-related behavior prescribed by the social structure. The individual has an active self that is capable of shaping the role-relationship he enters.

The self-oriented precepts became vital for the individual when he was caught in a dilemma resulting from divided loyalties. Confucian scholar-bureaucrats were often under cross pressures coming from the family group (for which the ethical principles were particular) and from bureaucratic organizations (for which the ethical principles were universalistic), the resolution of such conflicting demands required active struggle and individual choice.

Western analysts tend to stress that Chinese people have a strong sense of belonging to a group. Compared with the individualistic culture of the West, this statement can hardly be debated. However, King insightfully points out that in comparison with the Japanese, the Chinese is less group-centered. For example, while in Japan, family ethics are always based on the collective group (i.e., member of a House or a Company), not on the relationship between individuals. In China, family ethics are always based on relationship between particular individuals (such as father and son, brothers and sisters, parents and child, husband and wife). King remarks that perhaps the source of difference between Chinese and Japanese culture is the consideration given within Confucianism to the individual.

The Confucian version of individualism has, however, a relational emphasis. Confucian "individualism" means the fullest development by the individual of his creative potentialities, not however for the sake of self-expression but because he can thus best fulfill that particular role which is his within his social nexus.

This is because the Chinese individual was also locked into a

hierarchical and cohesive family structure. The structural restraints of the Chinese family have produced a tendency to subordinate the individual to the wishes of superiors as well as to those of the group (family). Since the early twentieth century, however, the Chinese family system has been eroded by urbanization and the increasing influence of Western individualistic values. As a result, individual's life space has been extended more and more from this primary group into secondary group. The Chinese individual is no longer tightly locked in a family structure, but finds himself in a quite a new social situation where the individual is given a much broader scope for self-expression.

King also observes that once outside the rigid role requirements of the immediate family structure, the individual self has considerable freedom in constructing the relational network. What cannot be overemphasized is that the boundary of the Chinese relational network is highly elastic in the sense that it can be expanded or contracted according to the decisions of the self. Family is in fact an elastic entity. It can mean only the members of a nuclear family, or it may also mean all members of a lineage or a clan. This ambiguity or elasticity of the family gives the individual ample room for maneuver in kin-relation network construction. It is this vortex of voluntary network building that the Chinese have demonstrated impressive and sophisticated skills, and Chinese culture has developed interpersonal relationships to the level of an exquisite and superb art.

King observes that this culture of network building has not only survived in socialist China but has become increasing rampant. Indeed, the phenomenon is so widespread that a new term, *guanxi xue* (relationology), has been coined for it. King further remarks

that this phenomenon is no monopoly of the mainland Chinese, but is quite widespread in all Chinese communities in the world.

To a certain extent, Chapter 4 builds upon the discussion in the previous chapter to further develop the concept of *guanxi*. Chapter 4 begins with the premises that *guanxi* (personal relationship) is a key sociocultural concept to understand the Chinese social structure and has played a significant role in shaping the social behavior of the Chinese people.

Chinese *guanxi* building is based on shared “attributes” such as kinship, locality, surname, dialects, schooling, and so on, which are the building blocks the individual employs to establish “pluralistic” identifications with multiple individuals and groups. Indeed, network building is used (consciously or unconsciously) by Chinese adults as a cultural strategy to mobilize social resources for goal attainment in various spheres of social life. To a significant degree, the cultural dynamics of *guanxi* building is a source of vitality in Chinese society.

However, for a long time, *guanxi* has been perceived as undesirable or dysfunctional for Chinese modernization and development. *Guanxi*, for example, is deplored by Chinese modernists, Communists or not, who believe *guanxi* is a private and particularistic morality and what China needs is a universalistic morality. However, King points out that, with the Chinese cultural system, there are mechanisms to neutralize or to freeze the practice of *guanxi* (like the employment of an official in his native place was prohibited in the Qing dynasty) in order to carve out room for the universalistic rationality that is necessary for the management of economic and bureaucratic conduct in Imperial China.

King further observes there is no sign that *guanxi* building

is disappearing in modernizing Chinese societies, like Taiwan and Hong Kong. In the modernizing societies where market rationality and law are becoming the predominant values, the scope of *guanxi* practices has been narrowed and circumscribed and its strategy subtly transformed.

What is interesting to note is that the devious practice of *guanxi* for personal or organizational purposes in Communist China has reached an unprecedented level. The widespread phenomenon of “going through the back door” (to get things done through *guanxi*) has indeed become a social epidemic in Communist China since 1978. King explains that a drastic change has occurred in socioeconomic life in post-Communist China. The market is being partially reinstated and civil society is being revived. The often-criticized traditional behavioral norms are now officially sanctioned in privatized, interpersonal relations. During this rapid transition period, when the socialist universalistic values are cast into doubt, and the market is not yet fully operational, *guanxi* blossoms to play a new instrument which enables people to achieve what has usually denied them through normal channels. King concludes that the widely cursed phenomenon of “going through the back door” will not go away easily, not until the day when market rationality is fully operational, and law becomes the rules of everyday political life.

The chapters on Confucianism are followed by chapters on modernization and development in Great China (mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong). Chapter 6 critically examines the concepts of modernization and modernity in its discussion of the construction of a modern Chinese civilization order.

King starts with the premise that any consideration of China's cultural modernity must begin with a rethinking of traditional Chinese civilization in its orientation and the problem it takes that it has to face in the modern age. King characterizes ancient China as a "*civilizational state*," with a peculiar cultural order and made up a world of its own. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Chinese civilizational order was faced with an unprecedented challenge from the West in the forms of imperialism and colonialism, and China responded with the modernization project, the renewal and further development of traditional Chinese civilization.

The first wave of China's modernization was the "*Yangwu Yundong*" (Westernization movement). The early reformers merely saw the material and technological sides of modern Western civilization, putting their efforts on mining and building ships and guns, but they at the same time advocated the preservation of traditional Chinese values. Their slogan is "Chinese studies as essence, Western learning for practical use." Since the New Culture Movements of 1919, however, the urge to develop a powerful and prosperous nation was so strong that even Chinese "essence" was abandoned. New applications and new essences were sought from the West in a modern Chinese civilization. Intentionally China did want to imitate Western modernization, but historically China's modernization did not and could not simply follow the Western route in the twentieth century.

King argues that as a latecomer, China's experience of modernization was radically from that of the West, with regard to the foundation on which the processes began, the agents of the processes, the strategies of development, different intensities of the pressure of time in the course of development, and the cultural

conditions. Even within different Chinese societies, namely Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China, their experiences of modernization were very different. The divergent experience of Chinese modernization would lead researchers calling for a rethinking of the problem of modernization and modernity. Thus, King raises the following intriguing questions: Did the modernization of China follow exactly the same route as that of the West? Is the modernity pursued by or appeared in China a replica of the West? More importantly, can China develop a form of modernity different from that of the West?

Drawing upon the Chinese experience of modernization, King questions the universality of Western modernity as a model. This is because the dominant theoretical view of the literature of modernization wrongly assumes that all societies travel along the same path in modernization, resulting that all modernized societies will become similar. Modernization researchers generally see modernity as the growth of reason, secularization and the development of instrumental rationality, and they define modernity in terms of changes in social processes, such as industrialization and urbanization. In the a-cultural theory of modernity, all culture must inevitably go through this social transformation and any culture will change along the way like the secularization of religions and erosion of the ultimate values by instrumental reason.

However, King remarks that the form of Western modernity takes is not necessarily universal in application. There is “universality” in modernity, but it does not follow that all forms of the modern cultural order are “homogeneous.” For example, capitalism and individualism are inseparable in Western experience. But what one finds in East Asia is a “non-individualistic version of capitalist

modernity.” In addition, King remarks that though China is condemned to modernize, her “modern turn” is as much “destined” as is a matter of choice. The objective of China’s modernization is to construct a new civilizational order and it is not possible that Western modernity has played no role there. Yet, Chinese modernization does not need to subscribe to the whole Western modernity package. Instead, the Chinese should draw upon the cultural tradition of China, and self-consciously adjust and broaden their vision of modernity. King concludes that building a new modern Chinese civilizational order involves not only a process of deconstructing the cultural tradition but also a process of reconstructing it. The new Chinese civilization, after all, needs to be both “modern” and “Chinese.”

Chapter 10 further develops the above idea in studying the modernization of Hong Kong. By the 1990s, Hong Kong has become a modern city and a newly industrializing economy, yet Confucian familial values still played an important role in Hong Kong society. For example, it was a common practice that Hong Kong factory owners hired their children and relatives in their factory.

King argues that the Chinese in Hong Kong no longer live uncritically under the traditional Confucian familistic persuasion, though they remain modern Chinese in the sense that they still, ideologically and behaviorally, attach importance to some Confucian values. But they do not necessarily deem such values intrinsically good in the economic sphere of life. Instead, they have adopted a rational, instrumental attitude toward familistic values (e.g., their children and relatives are hired in the factory because they are seen as cheap and trustworthy workers), thus turning them into a cultural resource to achieve other instrumental purpose like making

profit. Therefore, though a continuous process of cognitive selection, the Hong Kong Chinese have transformed Confucianism into a kind of “*rationalistic traditionalism*.” This cultural transformation, King believes, is an important contributing factor in making Hong Kong one of the most successful newly industrializing societies.

Chapter 7 studies how Hong Kong political system has coped with the problem of stability and, especially, the way it has been coping with the crisis of political integration resulting from rapid industrialization in Hong Kong's march to modernization.

King argues that Hong Kong's political stability in the last hundred years could be accounted for primarily by the successful process of “*administrative absorption of politics*.” It is a process through which the British governing elites co-opt or assimilate the non-British socioeconomic elites (mostly Hong Kong Chinese businessmen) into the political-administrative decision-making bodies, thus attaining elite integration on one hand, and a legitimacy of political authority on the other. However, once Hong Kong undergoes rapid industrialization, urbanization, and social mobilization whereby the apolitical strata are politicized, it is not elite integration but elite–mass integration which becomes necessary for a stable political system. Hong Kong in the 1960s and 1970s has undergone the process of social mobilization. King laments that Hong Kong in the 1970s is no longer just an economic city but also a political city, because more people, especially the young generation, demands ever-increasing participation in the political decision-making process. The basic problem of legitimacy in Hong Kong in the 1970s lies not in the lack of elite consensus, but in the elite–mass gap, as exemplified by the riots of 1966 and 1967.

The Hong Kong Government's response to the political crises was not more democracy, but the creation of the City District Officer (CDO) Scheme. Although the CDO Scheme is effective in bridging the information gap which result from misunderstanding of goals (or interests) between the rulers and the ruled, King argues that it is too much to expect it to reconcile the conflict arising from incompatibility of goals (or interests) between the governors and the governed. Therefore, it cannot be very useful as an administrative absorber of community politics as such; and this will become more evident when community life becomes progressively politicized in scale with rapid urbanization and the rising young generation entering the political strata. King remarks that how Hong Kong can maintain a viable political system poses a question of the first order to the students of the science of governing.

Aside from Hong Kong, Taiwan is another Chinese society which is undergoing the process of modernization. Chapter 8 focuses on the democratic transition of Taiwan because the relationship between modernization and democracy has long been one of the central interests for students of modernization and development.

King remarks that in the earlier phase of modernization, roughly up to the mid-1970s, the development-oriented, authoritarian power of the Guomindang (GMD) regime in Taiwan did not face any serious society-wide or structurally-based political protests and challenges. Its legitimacy was, in a large measure, justified by its capability in producing a very successful and equitable economy.

However, in the later phase the very success of economic development produced a number of structural forces, including especially a growing middle class, which began to affect Taiwan's

liberalization and democratization. As a result of industrialization, a new political culture that is more congenial to democracy has been evolving since the 1970s. Thus, Taiwan seems to be the working example of the Lipset's democracy theory that economic progress should bring in its wake democratic inclinations and a healthy surge of pluralism, which in time will undercut the foundations of the authoritarian rule common in developing countries.

Nevertheless, King argues that Taiwan's transition to democracy would not be likely without the democratic engineering from above (particularly that of the charismatic leader of President Chiang Ching-kuo). In addition, Taiwan's half century-long history of holding elections at local and provincial levels had institutionalized the values and "rule of the game" of democratic participation and competition. King concludes that Taiwan democratization—which took place in a unique social-historical context—had no paradigm to follow. Taiwan was a heroic, non-paradigmatic search for democracy, and her case is not likely to be made a paradigm of democratic transition.

Chapter 9 studies the same topic (the democratic transition of Taiwan) but examining it from the angle of the transformation of state Confucianism and the restructuring of state–society relation in Taiwan. In other words, Chapter 9 aims to analyze the transformation of Taiwan's state system, which shows a marked discontinuity with the state Confucianism of Imperial China. The focus is on the state–society relationship and changes in it.

King points out that from the Han dynasty onwards, Confucianism became what can be called "*institutional Confucianism*" (IC) as the result of the mutual penetration of the cultural system and the political system.

IC refers to an institutional cultural complex. It refers to political institutions, including imperial authority as the keystone of the state system, the imposing bureaucracy as an instrument of the imperial state, the literati and gentry as a status group linking the state with society. All these institutions were intermingled with Confucian cultural values.

As the keystone of the state system, imperial authority was embodied in the concept of a cosmically based universal kingship. The legitimacy of the universal king was based on the “Mandate of Heaven.” Under the vast heaven, the universal king had all-encompassing jurisdictional claims over the sociopolitical life of the people. Since imperial power was a religiously consecrated structure, it precluded the possibility of the development of a powerful priesthood or independent religious force. Since the universal king had all-encompassing jurisdictional claims, no independent or resisting forces were allowed to exist in Imperial China.

In addition, since state institutions (kingship and bureaucracy) were permeated by Confucian ethical values, to say the state has an all-encompassing jurisdictional claim on the sociopolitical life of the people is tantamount to saying that the state has a comprehensive responsibility to provide for, to enrich, and to educate the people. Whether from the viewpoint of power or duty, the state had an interventionist or transformative stance toward society. King labels this cultural ethos of the imperial state as “*state Confucianism*” to highlight its interventionist or transformative stance toward society.

Although the state in Imperial China has the right and the duty to intervene in the socioeconomic activities of society, in reality the generalized power of the state was rather limited. The state’s penetration into society reached at most to the county level. Below

that level, informal government, which is represented by traditional elite groups (such as the gentry) and a variety of social institutions (e.g., the clan), tended to dominate the local scene.

King points out that the modernization which has taken place in Taiwan in the 1950s led to the fundamental transformation of state Confucianism. A civil society has emerged owing to the development of a market economy and political pluralism. A new state–society relation has come into existence. In the process of transformation, the GMD state played a dominant and guiding role in developing strategies for the economy. The Taiwan state's people-oriented developmental and transformative strategies toward the economy and society were reminiscent of the Confucian tradition, but Confucianism was no longer the state ideology in modern Taiwan.

Thus, King acknowledges that “institutional Confucianism” as existed in Imperial China has been fundamentally restructured in Taiwan in the process of modernization. Institutional Confucianism has now become what may be called “*intellectual Confucianism*,” which means nothing more than a philosophical-cultural system (like liberalism, Hegelism, and so on). King points out the story of state Confucianism and its transformation is still an unfolding process. It is part of the great drama of China's search for political modernity.

The last chapter (Chapter 12) discusses all the three themes—Confucianism, modernity, and democracy—in this volume. It starts with a critical assessment of “*liberal democracy*” and asks the question: Is liberal democracy universalizable?

King argues that “liberal democracy” is paradoxical because the relationship between liberalism and democracy has been a

deeply ambiguous one. Liberalism has provided not only the necessary foundation for, but also a significant constraint upon democracy in the modern world.

King said that there are actually two different types of democracy in history, namely, *Athenian democracy* and *liberal democracy*. While democracy first made its first appearance in the Athenian city-state, liberal democracy did not emerge in Europe until the seventeenth century. Athenian democracy, which manifested itself in the universal device of having the people manage their own affairs, was grounded in a sense of community. It was a form of collective existence—a community ruling itself. Athenian democracy's legacy to posterity is the concept of "rule by the people," which has indeed become the ground of legitimacy for any kind of government called a democracy. In contrast, liberal democracy was grounded on the individual and the existence of basic individual human rights superior to those of the state and community. Liberalism affirms the basic worth of individuals as the ultimate and irreducible unit of society. In other words, the individual is conceptually prior to the society. Individual rights are cherished and respected, but those rights are not defined in "social" or "communal" terms.

King argues that the liberal idea derived from the West is culturally and historically specific. And a democracy based upon such a culturally specific principle can hardly claim to be intrinsically universal in nature. Therefore, while non-Western societies have no difficulty in accepting democratic values, they are very uneasy with, if not downright hostile, to liberal values because liberalism breaks up the community, undermines the shared body of ideas and values, and places the isolated individual above the community.

Students of East Asia modernization believe that the eco-

conomic success of East Asia is linked to its distinctive social and cultural feature, which include a very strong achievement-oriented work ethic, a highly developed sense of collective solidarity, and the enormous prestige of education. East Asian societies, following the success of economic development, have made a fundamental shift in their political orientation. Some of their authoritarian systems have undergone a basic transformation toward democracy.

King argues that although institutional Confucianism is long dead, Confucian ethics and values are still a living cultural force. For East Asia, if democracy is going to be fully developed, it has to come to terms with Confucianism.

Thus, King argues that East Asian democracy does not necessarily follow the Western model of liberal democracy. Indeed, East Asian countries are consciously or unconsciously searching for an alternative to Western liberal democracy. East Asian democracy may meet the "formal requisite of democracy" but differ significantly from the Western democratic systems. For example, an East Asian type of political system may offer democracy without turnover, and it may represent an adoption of Western practice to serve not Western values of competition and change, but Asian values of consensus, collective solidarity and stability.

The adherence to values of consensus and collective solidarity may strike the Western observer as very different from his accustomed democratic values and conduct. Could it be that East Asia has successfully generated a non-individualistic version of capitalist modernity or capitalist democracy? If so, the linkage between modern capitalism, democracy, and individualism have not been inevitable or intrinsic; rather, it would have to be interpreted as the outcome of contingent historical circumstances.

King concludes that Asian democracy, by which he means a “democratically Confucian” political system, is still in its early stages of developing and unfolding. But King predicts that if there is to be a viable alternative to liberal democracy provided by the non-Western world, it will take the form of “Asian democracy.”

All in all, the twelve chapters in this volume are very well written. It is indeed a pleasure to go through the chapters because I find them interesting to read and full of insightful ideas. King is a sophisticated researcher. He always provides a comprehensive analysis and presents a balanced review of controversial issues. King obviously is a culturalist and a scholar in the modernization camp, but he at the same time voices many sharp criticisms on the modernization theory and offers a fresh reinterpretation of Confucian culture. For example, King questions the universalistic assumption of the modernization school and contends that it is wrong to assume all countries will move along the same path to adopt the Western model of modernization. Even though King is a culturalist and emphasizes the role of culture in societal transformation, he never takes culture for granted but examines it as a dynamic historical process always subject to change and embedded in political economy and social institutions (like institutional Confucianism).

As a result, King asks thoughtful research questions, offers original interpretation, and opens up new frontiers for researchers in the fields of Confucianism, modernization, and democracy. For instance, King articulates an innovative “*relational perspective*” to understand Confucianism. The Chinese individual is not so fully oriented to group as the Japanese do. Instead, the Chinese individual is committed to group only when he develops a particular rela-

tionship with other individuals in that group. I think King is one of the first researchers to discuss the ambiguity and contradiction of liberal democracy. His formulation of “Asian democracy” (a political system with democratic institutions embedded in Confucian values) will open up new frontier in the study of democracy in the modern world.

Even though some of the chapters were written several decades ago, I find their analyses quite timely and highly relevant to understand the contemporary development of East Asia. I think King's selected essays included in this volume stand the test of time.

For example, Hong Kong recently is experiencing a political crisis, as a new generation youngsters protesting against Hong Kong and mainland government and advocating the separation between Hong Kong and mainland China after the Umbrella Revolution. Researchers wonder whether the recent political crisis in Hong Kong is similar to “the elite–mass gap” that King talks about in Chapter 7, and whether the Hong Kong officials would set up a new institution (like the City District Office Scheme) to bridge the gap between the Hong Kong government and the post-nineties young generation. Researchers also wonder whether the present political crisis can be resolved by strengthening the functions of political communication, political socialization, and political integration in Hong Kong society.

Another example: the chapters in this volume also helps us to understand why the Chinese is so good in cultivating *guanxi* in Chinese communities all over the world, and why *guanxi* became so widespread in China after 1978. King's observation that “the widely cursed phenomenon of ‘going through the back door’ will not go away so easily until market rationality and the rule of law is

firmly established in the Chinese economy and society” remains as valid today as the chapter was written in the early 1990s.

In sum, I strongly and enthusiastically recommend this volume to those who are interested in studying Confucianism, modernization, and democracy in mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. I am thankful to Ambrose King to have a chance to read the book manuscript before it appears in print.

Alvin Y. So

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October 2017

1 The Individual and Group in Confucianism: A Relational Perspective

Confucius developed a humanistic ethics in a man-centered world.¹ For a Confucian, the basic concern is the social life here and now. How to establish a secular harmonious world is the basic theoretical and practical question the Confucians have to address. Confucians focus on the organic relationship between the individual and society and consider the two inseparable and interdependent. As we shall see, the problem is that “society” is only vaguely defined, as is the idea of “group” if one is referring to a unit larger than the family.

Ren, “perfect virtue” (James Legge), or “benevolence” (D. C. Lau), is the highest attainment of moral cultivation.² In Confucian ethics, *ren* can only be achieved by the efforts of the individual self (*ji*). This means that Confucius regards the individual as an active self which is capable of reaching a state of moral autonomy and achieving sagehood. The cornerstone of Confucian ethics, *shu*, or “reciprocity,” in the last analysis can only be accomplished or performed by the individual self.³ According to Confucius, *shu* means that “what you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.” In fact, *shu*, or the emphatic capacity to take the role of others, is the architectonic concept in Confucian ethics.⁴

In this sense, Confucian ethics is heavily characterized by what may be called “self-centered voluntarism,” which we will discuss later. Not surprisingly, Confucianism is distinctly concerned with the concept of self-cultivation.⁵ Indeed, the moral autonomy of the self is unequivocally affirmed by Confucians. To be a gentleman (*junzi*), one must be able to assert oneself against all kinds of pressure, from both within and without.

Let us turn our attention to the relationship between the individual and the group. To start with, Confucians never see the individual man as an isolated entity; man is defined as a social being.⁶ Indeed, as Hu Shi quite correctly states, “In the Confucians’ human-centered philosophy, man cannot exist alone; all actions must be in a form of interaction between man and man.”⁷ Without doubt, “to be a man among men” is Confucius’s fundamental aim. There can be no fulfillment for the individual in isolation from his fellow men. Men would be nothing if it could not be placed in the context of the social world. The fact is that “*ren* can only be cultivated and developed in inter-human relationships, i.e., in a social context.”⁸ From the Confucian viewpoint, the most fundamental relationships are the *wulun* (five social dyads, or five cardinal relations). These five relationships and their appropriate tenor are *qing* (affection) between parent and child; *yi* (righteousness) between ruler and subject; *bie* (distinction) between husband and wife; *xu* (order) between old and young; and *cheng* (sincerity) between friends.⁹ The five cardinal relations have been considered the basic norms of Chinese social order. C. K. Yang writes:

These five cardinal relations, centering upon kinship ties, formed the core of social and moral training for the

individual almost from the beginning of his consciousness of social existence until he became so conditioned to it that his standard of satisfaction and deprivation was based upon it.¹⁰

The five cardinal relations thus comprise the “central value system,” to use Bellah’s concept, of Confucian society.¹¹

Among the five cardinal relations, three belong to the kinship realm. The remaining two, though not family relationships, are conceived of in terms of the family. The relationship between the ruler and the ruled is conceived of in terms of father (*junfu*) and son (*zimin*), and the relationship between friend and friend is stated in terms of elder brother (*wuxiong*) and younger brother (*wudi*). True enough, the true cardinal kinship relations are only the major family relationships, and there are many more. In the *Erya*, the oldest dictionary of the Chinese language, there were more than one hundred specific terms for various family relationships.¹² Many non-family social relationships were patterned after the family system in terms of structure and values. For example, the relationship between teacher and student operated on a simulated father-and-son basis and thus formed a quasi-kinship bond. The Chinese family system as such was thus viewed as “the social system of China.”¹³ Talcott Parsons has termed China a “familistic” society, one in which the family, and the kinship system deriving from it, has an unusually strategic place in the society as a whole.¹⁴

In the Confucian family system, the father-son relationship is most important. The principle of *xiao* (filial piety) is at the very center of personal, family, and social existence.¹⁵ While there are other cultural ideals in the Confucian teaching, “filialism was the source of the predominant identity of traditional China,

a basic ideal against which any other form of self-image had to be judged.”¹⁶ It should be mentioned that in the Confucian value system, each individual role is not placed in an absolute hierarchical context. The five pairs in the five cardinal relations were originally symmetrical (i.e., equal) relationships. But in the influential *Xiaojing*, the *xiao* concept was pushed into the center of the Chinese ethical system. There was no recognition of the independent existence of the individual, the individual was submerged into the familistic ethics.¹⁷ The symmetrical father–son relation thus became asymmetrical in nature.¹⁸ Furthermore, this asymmetrical authority relationship, which became a socially accepted version of the Confucian family ethics, was given institutional support by the Chinese legal system. Throughout the dynasties, as is well documented and argued by Qu Tongzu, Chinese laws underwent a process of “Confucianization” where by the hierarchical harmony of the family was upheld as an unquestionable value.¹⁹ John C. H. Wu writes:

Traditionally, a Chinese seldom thought of himself as an isolated entity. He was his father’s son, his son’s father, his elder brother’s junior . . . in other words, an integral member of his family. He was a concrete individual person who moved, lived, and had his being in the natural milieu of the family. . . . Each family had a head, to whom his wife, his children, his daughter-in-law, his grandchildren, and the domestics owed unquestioning obedience. I know of no other system of law that is so meticulous in enforcing the duties of filial piety.²⁰

To be sure, the individual is not wholly absent in the Chinese family. This is true particularly in comparison with the role of indi-

vidual in the Japanese family, where the individual was completely submerged by the family as a unit.²¹ However, the emphasis on hierarchical harmony in the Chinese family inevitably tends to place structural constraints on the individual. Kenneth Abbott writes: "Individualism exists, but it is interiorized and cannot be socially expressed. . . . Self-cultivation differs from self-actualization in that the first is orderly and the second is spontaneous."²²

In the family, the individual is hesitant to take a self-assertive stand for fear of being viewed as disruptive of harmony. Richard Wilson argues that the Chinese social system is distinctive in its singular focus on group loyalty and the intensity with which ideals of loyal behavior (such as sacrifice for the collective good) are held.²³ Regarding the status of the individual in the family, C. K. Yang's analysis finds that

the Western concept of individualism . . . runs directly counter to the spirit of the traditional Chinese family and is incompatible with the traditional loyalty to it. . . . Self cultivation, the basic theme of Confucian ethics traditionally inculcated in the child's mind from an early age, did not seek a solution to social conflict in defining, limiting, and guaranteeing the rights and interests of the individual or in the balance of power and interests between individuals. It sought the solution from the self-sacrifice of the individual for the preservation of the group.²⁴

Yang's analysis shows that individual autonomy was indeed emphasized in the Confucian conception of man. But the basic fact is that the individual had to be socially and structurally located in the family, which was the primary social reality for Chinese in tradi-

tional times. The family, not the individual, was continually stressed as a hierarchical whole. Liang Shuming's claim that "the greatest shortcoming of Chinese culture is that the individual can never be discovered" is therefore understandable.²⁵ Zhang Dongsun also views the individual in Chinese culture as a "dependent being."²⁶

Indeed, it is no accident that Kang Youwei saw the "abolition" of the traditional family as a condition for proper performance of modern public duties,²⁷ and that Tan Sitong vehemently attacked the *gangchang* (moral laws) and made an uncompromising call to "burst out the net" of Confucian social bonds.²⁸ During the May Fourth Movement, a cultural attack was launched on filialism, resulting in a questioning of the Confucian family norms of obedience and authority, at least in the intellectual circles.

Elasticity of the Group

The strong group orientation of the Chinese is treated as an almost unequivocal fact by most, if not all, social scientists, particularly sociologists. The group, so the sociologists of Durkheimian persuasion would argue, has an autonomous life of its own, external to the individual. The Chinese family as the predominant social unit has a structural force which bends the individual to a role of dependency. This sociological fact can hardly be denied. There is a limit, however, to the function of social structure in shaping the individual's behavior. The structural conception of human society, though not wrong, is simply not sufficient. H. Blumer writes from a symbolic interaction viewpoint: "Social organization is a framework inside of which acting units develop their actions. Structural features, such as 'culture,' 'social system,' 'social stratification,' or 'social roles,' set

conditions for their action but do not determine their action.”²⁹

A structural analysis of Chinese behavior (especially Chinese family behavior) will tend to produce an over-Confucianized view of Chinese society. By “over-Confucianized” we mean that the individual’s action is consciously or unconsciously interpreted as the result of a complete internalization of Confucian norms and values. The fundamental weakness of the structural conception of Chinese society lies in its failure to recognize that the individuals who comprise the society have selves, which are particularly stressed, as shown above, in Confucian ethics.

The Confucian concept of *zhengming* (rectification of names), which means the correspondence of names and reality, aims at achieving social harmony through a well-defined role system. In the Confucian’s ritualistic social relations, each person is assigned a proper place. A considerable amount of conduct can thus be explained by roles. But, as Dennis Wrong rightly argues, a human being is never merely a role-player,³⁰ and Chinese behavior cannot be understood through the sheer analysis of the Confucian values and norms. This is true not only because a complete Confucianization is impossible, but also because there are inconsistent values and norms within the Confucian ethics. Indeed, there are tensions and conflicts between Confucian cultural aspirations and structural norms. The conflict between loyalty and filial piety,³¹ the conflict between universalistic virtue (*gong*) and familistic morality,³² and the very basic tension between *ren* and *li* (propriety)³³ are cases in point. Most conspicuous is the conflict between the value of individual autonomy and the norm of familial obedience. All of these tensions and conflicts occur “when cultural values are internalized by those whose position in the social structure does not give

them access to act in accord with the values they have been taught to prize.”³⁴ These are examples of “sociological ambivalence” par excellence, to use Merton and Barber’s terminology.³⁵ The concept of sociological ambivalence makes a significant contribution to the understanding of the dynamics of the structure of social roles.³⁶ It helps make more intelligible behavior that cannot simply be attributed to fixed Confucian roles and prescriptions. Ralph Turner’s conception of role-making is another important corrective to the static and overly deterministic conception of roles.³⁷ Turner views the role relations as “fully interactive” rather than merely the extension of normative or cultural deterministic theory; actual role transactions are more or less the result of a stable working compromise between ideal prescription and a flexible role-making process—between the structural demands of others and the requirements of one’s own purpose and sentiments.³⁸ In the analysis of Confucian role behavior, Turner’s dynamic view of roles is essential, particularly because of the fact that Confucianism attaches a good deal of autonomy to the individual self. The Confucian *ji*, a dynamic entity, is capable of modifying and creating its role relations with others. This recognition of the voluntary nature of the self and the dynamic of role structure is particularly important when we begin to examine the relation between *ji* (self) and *qun* (group).

Confucians classify the human community into three categories: *ji*, the individual; *jia*, the family; and *qun*, the group.³⁹ For a Confucian, the emphasis is on the family, and for this reason Confucian ethics have developed an elaborate role system on the family level. Relatively speaking, the Confucian conception of *qun* is the least articulate. It should be pointed out that, conceptually, the family is also a group. For the purpose of analytical distinc-

tion, “family” might be termed “familial group,” while the *qun* is a “non-familial group,” or simply “group.” Insofar as Confucian theory is concerned, there is no formal treatment of the concept of *qun*. *Qun* remains an elusive and shifting concept. Fei Xiaotong correctly argues that the boundary between *ji* and *qun* is relative and ambiguous; in the Chinese tradition, there is no group boundary as such—the outer limit of the group is the vague concept of *tianxia*.⁴⁰ Barbara Ward has also pointed out that one feature of Chinese social structuring is the relative lack of clear boundaries for defining an “in-group.”⁴¹ Even the term *jia*, which describes the basic social unit, is conceptually unclear. Sometimes it includes only members of a nuclear family, but it may also include all members of a lineage or a clan. Moreover, the common expression *zijiaren* (“our family people”) can refer to any person one wants to include; the concept of *zijiaren* can be contracted or expanded depending upon the circumstances. It can theoretically be extended to an unlimited number of people and thereby becomes what is called *tianxia yijia* (“all the world belongs to one family”).⁴² The fact that “group” has no definable boundary has, I would argue, significant theoretical implications for the consideration of the issue of holism versus individualism. The very ambiguity or elasticity of the family group would give the individual ample room for maneuver in constructing his network of kinship relations. The boundaries of both the family and other groups are thus very much dependent upon the decision of the *ji* (self).

According to Benjamin Schwartz, there is a set of polarities in the Confucian social ethics. A central one is the polarity of self-cultivation (*xiushen*, or *xiuji*) and the ordering and harmonizing of the world (*zhiguo ping tianxia*).⁴³ The *Problematik* of Confucianism