

Neo-Confucian Ethics and Economic Development in East Asia: From the Perspective of Confucian Modernity and Political Democracy

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ABSTRACT: It is a theoretical and practical difficulty to re-examine the relationship between Confucianism and modernization in the era of "cultural globalization" and "postmodern". This study claims that the connection between Confucianism and modernization is determined by the continuity of social development and the historical inheritance of culture, based on the historical perspective and the enlightenment spirit of Confucianism. Even at the start of East Asia's modernization, Confucianism's Tradition never entirely faded from history, and Confucianism's involvement in the transformation of East Asian countries from tradition to modernity is obvious. From East Asia's authoritarian politics to Asian-style democracy, East Asia's political democracy is a shadow of Confucianism rather than a carbon duplicate of Western democracy. The new Confucian ethics has its own logic, emphasizing the importance of the self in all sorts of relationships, as well as the sense of obligation, self-control, self-cultivation, consensus, and cooperation. It places a great importance on politeness and education. It is mostly concerned with the credit community and government leadership. The "new Confucian ethics" incorporated some western principles into its ethical structure, resulting in the formation of a new modernity: East Asian industrial civilization, which aided East Asia's economic prosperity. Indeed, Confucian principles have shaped Chinese merchant culture and spirit in both traditional and modern periods, and the birth and shift of new ideas in Confucianism have the potential to disrupt the tradition. Confucianism will confront greater obstacles as well as more development prospects as society develops and there is more interaction, communication, and dialogue among many cultures around the world. Therefore, this paper presents the close relationship between the Neo-Confucian Ethics and the rise of Asia from the perspective of the modernity of the Confucian tradition in East Asia and Asian political democracy. Neo-Confucian Ethics has shaped Asia's industrial civilization, and Asia's economic development is consistent with the philosophical theory inherent in Confucian ethics.

KEYWORDS: Confucian, Rise of East Asia, Neo-Confucian Ethics, East Asian Politics, Economic Development

1. Introduction

The relationship between Confucianism and modernization, and the positioning of Confucianism in Eastern and Western cultures, are questions that have been raised in recent times. Contemporary Neo-Confucianism has responded to this question theoretically, while the history of East Asian countries' groping toward modernization has answered it practically. After the 1970s, Japan and the Four Asian Tigers created a miracle of growth and development in the process of exploring their own new paths that were suitable for the new international environment and national conditions. The miraculous rise of the East Asian region won the respect of the world. This historical event with a sense of renewal has led scholars to re-examine the positive role of the Confucian tradition in the modernization of East Asia. This encompasses not only issues of socio-economic growth and economic development strategies but also deeper issues of political philosophy. Therefore, this paper presents the close relationship between the Neo-Confucian Ethics and the rise of Asia from the perspective of the modernity of the Confucian tradition in East Asia and Asian political democracy. Neo-Confucian Ethics has shaped Asia's industrial civilization, and Asia's economic development is consistent with the philosophical theory inherent in Confucian ethics.

2. Modernity of Confucian Traditions in East Asia

2.1. Historical Perspective

Historically, Tu (2003) divides the development of Confucianism into three periods: Classical Confucianism (starting with Confucius), Neo-Confucianism (the first phase of the Confucian Revival, which began in the Song Dynasty), and Contemporary Confucianism in the 20th century (the second phase of the Confucian Revival). The first phase of Confucianism was limited to China (Tu 2000). The development of Confucianism in the second and third phrase went beyond the scope of China. In the second phrase, Confucianism expanded to East Asia, forming a socio-cultural circle of East Asian Confucian or Confucian East Asia (Tu 2000). In the third phase, Confucianism will be revived from Industrial East Asia and will expand globally to become an important member of the global dialogue of civilizations (Tu 2000). The emergence and development of Confucianism in East Asia was the result of the development of Confucianism in the second and third phrase, and an opportunity for further development.

Prior to the sudden invasion of Western powers in the mid-19th century, the politics, society, and culture of East Asia were highly integrated with Confucianism (Chow 1996), to the extent that the administration, social ethics, and even psychological habits of China, Vietnam, Korea and Japan were characterized by Confucianism in languages and actions. The flexibility of Confucian doctrine and its ability to adapt to various styles of government, education, and organizations (including families) allows it to maintain a coherent worldview in a variety of different contexts (Cheng 1991). Moreover, unlike Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, Confucianism is so much an organic component of East Asian culture and a prominent feature of the Chinese-speaking world that it is often seen as a regional phenomenon rather than a world religion.

Industrial East Asia after 1960 and socialist East Asia after 1980 experienced a revival of Confucianism, which became a combination of political ideology, academic discourse, business ethics, family values, and a spirit of protest (Angle 2012). Although there are tensions and conflicts rooted in blood ties, the overall pattern of life in East Asia contains consensus structures that are built on values significantly different from those of the modern West, which emphasizes contractual relationships.

2.2. Enlightenment in the Confucian Traditions

In terms of the spirit of enlightenment embedded in Confucian traditions, Confucianism has a spirit of enlightenment centered on “learning to be a man” (Tu 2003). The basic spirit of the Confucian tradition is centered on human beings with intrinsic values. Confucius' so-called “Study for Oneself” is strictly for the completion of one's own personality (Tu 2010). Mencius raised four major issues concerning the human spirits (De Bary 1970). The Confucians of the pre-Qin dynasty actually analyzed the essential value of human beings, the essential value of civilization, the inner spirit of morality, or the essential value of politics (Schefer 2020). Among them, the problem of civilization, morality, and politics is also essentially a problem of human beings. Confucianism is a profound exploration of the complexity of human beings. The Five Classics, in an abstract and symbolic sense, address the emotional issues (The Book of Songs), social issues (The Classic of Rites), political issues (The Classic of History), historical memory (The spring and Autumn Annals), and metaphysical issues (The Book of Changes) of human beings (Nylan 2008).

Man is not a being that can be statutorily defined in a simple way. The humanism embodied in the Confucian tradition is not only a horizontal expansion, but also a deepening process. How to make the individual and society mutually beneficial, make human beings and nature harmonious, make the heart and the way of heaven united are all indispensable concerns of Confucian humanism. Confucianism in Song and Ming Dynasty developed a new type of humanistic spirit on the basis of reinterpreting the original wisdom of pre-Qin Dynasty

Confucianism (Bockover 2012)¹. This new humanism responds to the challenges of Buddhism, Taoism, the examination system, and political culture, draws on the rich resources of traditional Chinese culture, and brings into play a spirit of protest with a critical consciousness. Since modern times, the Confucian tradition has undergone the baptism of liberal democracy, which is a comprehensive and profound value transformation (Yao 1999). Only after being baptized by Western democratic and liberal thinking has the Confucian tradition gradually fought for the right and obligation to criticize the ills of Western culture due to the Enlightenment mentality. There is no doubt that, in the broad sense of humanism, Confucianism affirms the dignity of human beings, the inherent freedom of human beings, and the right of human beings to self-development, emphasizing that human beings should have a conscience, should be rational, and should be an inseparable part of a community. Confucian tradition provides rich symbolic and practical resources for such contemporary issues.

2.3. The Modern Spirit Embedded in East Asian Confucianism

Reviewing the contradictions in the modern Western psychiatric analysis of industrial civilization can help understand the serious problems encountered by mankind today, to which Confucianism can bring in its source of living water to make a creative response. The spirit of the modern West consists mainly of the spirit of science, the spirit of democracy, and the spirit of religious transcendence (Weber 2008). In terms of the spirit of science, science had a great influence in the 20th century because of the major breakthroughs in the growth of technology (Weber & Kalberg 2013). The breakthrough and influence of technology basically hindered the further development of science, and there was a great conflict between science and technology. Therefore, to further develop Confucianism, it is necessary to introduce the spirit of science, but it is also necessary to take into account the dilemma encountered by modern scientific civilization - a technical civilization dominated by instrumental reason. From the point of view of the spirit of democracy, generally speaking, the healthier development of democracy has been in Western Europe. In the Philippines, India, and Latin America, the development of democracy has encountered great difficulties. There is a complex problem in the middle, that is, democracy is based on a pluralistic system of counterbalance. It can be fully developed only if there is a civil society, if there are different pressure groups, if there is a legal concept, if there is a full development of the concept of rights, if everyone is aware of his or her rights and the interests of the body to which he or she belongs, and if he or she is willing to operate through procedural politics and accept the rules of the electoral game (Weber 2008). However, none of these conditions can be contained in democracy as an institution in itself. Therefore, Confucianism can promote the development of democracy and construct a system that transcends existing democracy. In terms of religious transcendence, many Western moral philosophers have always believed that if God did not exist, the entire value system would inevitably collapse. The source of value in the West is transcendent and external. However, the "transcendental external" or "absolute otherness" encounters the difficulty that there is an unbridgeable gap between the mundane world we live in and the transcendental God (Weber 2013). We simply cannot rely on our limited human reason to understand what God is. In summary, all three questions are about what the man is.

The paradox in industrial civilization is still the recognition of "man" in "modernity". The first is the contradiction between the rate of economic development and the quality of life (Sternberg 2011). It seems that the higher the rate of economic development, the more human beings are harmed. Second, in the process of democratization, different kinds of authority are challenged (Sternberg 2011). The emergence of civil society seems inevitable, but an unhealthy civil society does not eliminate the ills of monopoly. We often subjectively envision that all good values complement each other, yet, in fact, many good values are in great conflict with each other. More noteworthy is the crisis caused by the corruption of various authorities. The deep reflection on "man" and studying to be a man" are the cornerstones of the modernization of the Confucian traditions and the foundation of East Asian modernity.

3. Political Democracy in East Asia

3.1. Politics of Authority in East Asia

Generally speaking, scholars generally consider the political system in East Asia to be a neo-authoritarianism rather than a democracy (Goh 2002). In the Western context, "authoritarianism" is a pejorative political term. However, when people use the concept of so-called neo-authoritarianism, they are referring to a transformed authoritarianism, a political system that achieves a combination of authority and freedom (Li 2015). In East Asia, there has historically been a highly centralized system, and in Confucianism, a strong sense of elitism is reflected. The combination of this centralized political system and a strong elite consciousness in the modernization of East Asia with Western ideas of democracy and freedom has resulted in the emergence of a new authoritarian political system.

While the contemporary neo-authoritarian system of government in East Asia is far removed from the pluralistic politics of the West, it is also very different from the centralized political systems of the past. It is a system that combines the advantages of traditional Eastern culture and modern Western culture in favor of the development of the country and the region, thus forming its own political and cultural system. The most prominent point is that although East Asian countries (regions) do not have a democratic and liberal political system in the Western sense, they have established a very sound legal system (Whittall 1991). For example, Singapore, Hong Kong and other countries are examples of the so-called "no democracy, no freedom but the rule of law" (Guang-qing 2011), while Japan, Taiwan and Korea are examples of what is called "a collectivist rule of law" (Thompson 2004). This kind of political system, which blends East and West cultures, provides an excellent cultural foundation and institutional environment for the modernization of East Asian countries (regions). In fact, this system is quite modern, as it is the product of the combination of Western civilization and traditional Eastern civilization.

The neo-authoritarian political system played a rather positive role in the rise of East Asia. On the one hand, it maintained the basic order and authority, and created a stable peaceful political and social environment for the rise of East Asia. At that time, the primary concern in East Asia was not freedom, but the establishment of a legitimate public order. One can certainly have order without freedom, but one cannot have freedom without order. Authority must exist before we can talk about limiting it. On the other hand, while maintaining the basic political order, the neo-authoritarian political system with elitism also promotes the modernization and industrialization of the whole country from the level of government-led economy, and has achieved remarkable results (Sim 2006). The distinctive feature of the East Asian modernization model is "authoritarianism + economic development".

The role of the neo-authoritarian political system in East Asia cannot be achieved without cultural background and conceptual support. In East Asia, Confucianism has been a strong supporter of the new authoritarian system, and has ultimately contributed to the formation of a "holistic call mechanism" for government.

3.2. Asian-style Democracy

Neo-authoritarianism has played a positive role in the political stability and economic development of East Asian countries, promoting the modernization and industrialization of East Asia and accomplishing the miraculous rise of East Asia. If this system is already applicable to East Asia, do we still need to propose "Asian-style Democracy"? Given the predominance of democracy in the world today, any examination of the moral foundations of politics must undoubtedly take into account the role that democracy plays in legitimizing political institutions (Kim 1997). In today's world, the acceptance of the concept of democracy has become nearly absolute. In other words, despite the impressive achievements of neo-authoritarianism in East

Asian countries, the political legitimacy of East Asian governments, which are based on neo-authoritarianism as the foundation of their statehood, is constantly under attack from the democracy of the world. However, the political legitimacy of East Asian governments, which are founded on neo-authoritarianism, is constantly challenged by the modern concept of democracy. Therefore, the tension between the two has undoubtedly become a common concern for East Asian governments and scholars.

East Asia's neo-authoritarianism based on elitism is definitely not a democracy based on individualism in the Western sense. However, in order to ensure that the legitimacy of this political system is not challenged and thus continues to maintain political and social stability, and in order for the system to be further accepted by the world, it must be democratized or at least compatible with democracy. This is the theoretical dilemma that contemporary East Asian neo-authoritarianism encounters that is difficult to resolve. The concept of so-called Asian-style democracy is an attempt to resolve this dilemma. We can see from the concept of Asian-style democracy itself that those who propose it try to emphasize the democratic nature of Asian political systems while at the same time emphasizing the Asian character of the democracy (Thompson 2015). Under this concept, one can see the differences between the political systems and concepts of the East and the West. First, the Asian model of democracy tends to emphasize the role of the collective rather than the individual, which is the most important characteristic of this system. The goal of Asian-style democracy is to establish a "good government" that overrides society, that is, a moral government that meets the needs of national economic development and maintains social stability. There is a huge difference between this sense of democracy and the Western sense of democracy, and Confucianism is the main ideological source of this difference. We can attribute it to a differential democracy, different from the Western one (Thompson 2015). The idea of Asian-style Democracy has received a great deal of attention from various fields to heads of state to academic elites, who are involved in discussions and research. If this idea can take hold, it will undoubtedly be a subversive challenge to the modern model of democracy modeled on the West, as well as a full-scale rebound of traditional East Asian political culture and political thought with Confucianism as its core. Generally speaking, if we take Western democracy as a reference point, then the lack of democratic consciousness is one of the characteristics of traditional Confucianism and the continued development of East Asia in the 21st century depends to a large extent on its degree of democratization. However, if we take the East's own tradition as a reference point, Confucianism has many systematic resources that can be used in modern times, especially as the intellectual and theoretical basis for "Asian-style Democracy".

4. Neo-Confucian Ethics and the Rise of East Asia

4.1. Neo-Confucian Ethics and Industrial East Asia

4.1.1. From agricultural Ethics to Industrial Ethics

The Neo-Confucian Ethics is a creative response to the Western Onslaught (Angle 2009). This new Confucian ethic has already incorporated some Western values into its ethical structure. The Neo-Confucian Ethics is shaping a new modernity: East Asian industrial civilization or Industrial East Asia. The entrepreneurial spirit represented by Industrial East Asia and the particular political development path guided by the social organization of East Asia, together with the predominantly Confucian cultural values, have created a form of life different from that of the West (Makeham 2010). This phenomenon posed a great challenge to the entire Western economic theory. The formation of Industrial East Asia is inseparable from the challenge of Western modernization and their creative response. The rise of Industrial East Asia was the result of the combined effect of Western modernization challenges, as well as an opportunity for the revival of a New East Asian Civilization or Neo-Confucian Civilization. Although the Confucian tradition

has undergone many twists and turns since the Opium War, it has not disappeared from East Asian civilization, and it still has great social power.

How can Confucian ethics be transformed from an agricultural ethic to an industrial ethic? From the unconscious level, Confucian ethics has been used and strengthened in the process of modernization with its factors favoring industrialization and economic growth (Tu 2020). The factors that are not conducive to industrialization and economic growth are unconsciously suppressed and removed. This is the relationship between the Protestant ethics and the capitalist spirit, as Weber (2013) metaphorically put it. On a reflective level, any living culture should be able to thoroughly criticize its own negative aspects and at the same time be able to introduce other sources. Only by being able to critically inherit and develop can it deeply introduce the spiritual values of Western culture, including Christian civilization, science, democracy, and freedom, etc.; at the same time, by being able to severely reject the superficial phenomena caused by Western civilization, can it critically introduce the spirit of modern Western civilization in a healthy way.

4.1.2. Neo-Confucian Ethics

In the 1960s, most Western sociologists and philosophers, as well as Taiwanese, Japanese, and Korean scholars, considered Confucianism and rapid modernization to be mutually incompatible (Tiwald 2011; Rozman 2002; Palley 1992; Sonoda 1991). The main reason, they argued, was Confucianism's emphasis on harmony, collaboration, collectivity, social stability, a humanistic rather than technical education, and history and culture in a broad sense (Ibid.). By the late 1970s, the situation had changed dramatically. The leaps and bounds of economic development in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore after the Second World War led people to question earlier assumptions. They came to feel that a different ethic was at work. The economic development of East Asia exhibits characteristics that are quite different from those of the West. Egoism, or the value of simple individualism, was not valued at all (Huang & Chang 2017). Instead, the emphasis is on loyalty to the company, coordination within the collective environment, and cooperation. And education is highly valued. The remarkable fact is that these are the very values that in the 1960s were considered harmful to, or incompatible with, modernity. Today, these values are recognized by many experts as important factors that have contributed to the successful development of many regions in East Asia.

The success of modernization in any society cannot be achieved without spiritual resources. In response to the rise of East Asia, Peter Berg (1988) has even coined a new term "a modern capitalism" or "second-wave of modernity ". This particular type of capitalism emphasizes the self as the center of all relationships, a sense of obligation, self-restraint, self-cultivation, agreement, and cooperation. It places a high value on education and manners and it focuses on credit community and government leadership.

A single cause-and-effect relationship is not the only way to understand the interrelationship between Confucian ethics and East Asian entrepreneurship. In the case of Confucian ethics, its values have been accepted and digested by many East Asian countries. These values are essential to East Asian success. However, we cannot regard East Asian success as the fruit of Confucian ethics to the exclusion of other factors. The Confucian ethics that embodies the "East Asian entrepreneurial spirit" is a "new Confucian ethics (Barbalet 2014). This new Confucian ethic does not reject Western ideas of rights, individual dignity, autonomy, or competitiveness in a healthy and positive sense. This Neo-Confucian Ethics contributes to a new type of capitalism in East Asia. Although it is essentially the same as the Western work ethic, it has a very different structure and spiritual orientation. Unlike the Protestant ethic, which emphasizes a sense of individual rights, its basic point is the emphasis on "responsibility". It promotes not individualism, but our commitment to a larger entity. This entity can be our family, our company, our collective or our nation.

4.2. Neo-Confucian Ethics and Economic Development in East Asia

Historically, the traditional Confucian ethics has been subject to various criticisms and reproaches because it did not produce the spirit of capitalism in the Weberian sense. However, in the context of the rise of East Asia, Weber's judgment has been greatly challenged, as modern Neo-Confucian scholars have responded on two historical levels: the Confucian ethics before encountering with the West and the Confucian ethics after encountering with the West. The former, for example, is Yu Ying-shih (1967), who argues that the secularizing tendencies of traditional Chinese religion led to the awakening of the merchant spirit in the Song Dynasty. The development of Confucianism in late Ming Dynasty likewise reflected a new developmental trend. The latter, according to Tu Weiming (2020), argues that Confucian ethics in modern times has undergone a great transformation due to the challenge and impact of Western culture and values. This transformation has resulted in the emergence of the so-called Neo-Confucian Ethics. In fact, Confucian ethics has played a significant role in shaping the culture and spirit of Chinese businessmen, both traditionally and in modern times, and the emergence and transformation of heretical ideas within Confucianism has also made it possible to break with tradition.

It can be seen that there are two main differences between the East Asian model of economic development and the West, one being the government's attitude toward the economy. Under the Western market economy model, the government mainly acts as a "watchman" and does not interfere too much in the economy. "Economy" and "democracy" are the two pillars of Western society as a whole, and they have tried to change other developing countries with them. However, in East Asia, government intervention and economic domination became a dominant form and had the amazing effect of promoting rapid economic take-off. On the other hand, the influence of Confucian culture affects the economic development. According to Weber (2013), Western capitalism originated from the Protestant ethic, while East Asian modernization partly originated from the Neo-Confucian Ethics the different cultural traditions led to completely different development concepts and paths. The former is a pioneering capitalism based on individualism, while the latter is a later capitalism based on collectivism. We can see how these two aspects are reflected in the economic development of Korea. Confucianism did play a positive role in Korea's government-led industrialization based on factor accumulation, as it reduced the cost of government arrangements and accelerated factor accumulation (Robinson 2014). The "government-led" and "Confucian culture" became the main factors that distinguished Korea and East Asia as a whole from the developed countries of the West in their rapid rise. The rise of Confucian capitalism in East Asia will fundamentally reshape the world economic, political, and cultural order constructed by Western Protestant capitalism, and thus change the foundations of the existence of Western universal values and universal consciousness based on Western centrism. Moreover, this would certainly revolutionize the Euro-American-centered economic theory that has been in place until now.

5. Conclusion

The economic miracle created by the East Asian model has shocked the world and brought a rare opportunity for the revival and rebirth of the ancient cultural traditions of East Asia. Confucianism, as the common cultural background of East Asia, has laid the cultural foundation and philosophical support for the emergence and development of the entire East Asian miracle, thus providing the basic political order, moral foundation and ethical values for real political and social life, and achieving effective social integration, cohesion and development. In this process, Confucianism has increasingly become the carrier of self-awareness and self-worth in East Asia, and has become the ideology and cultural resource that distinguishes and confronts Western civilization in East Asia. Therefore, the positive role of Confucian philosophical thought in the rise of East Asian civilization is an undeniable fact, and this influence will continue to persist.

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