

Confucianism and its implications in modern china



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Confucianism is a time enduring philosophy that has stood up to invading clans, war, resentment, enforcement and infringement of new philosophies, and eventually, revival. For almost 80years, up until the late 1970s, Confucianism and its ideas and values have been all but wiped away from China. Though effort was made to remove Confucianism for good from China by the Communist leader Mao Zedong in 1949, the ideas and values were so deeply embedded into peoples mind and the culture that even suppression could not keep it out of the culture and practices. The main factor that has brought Confucianism back into the limelight in China and other East Asian countries is the recent development of economic growth and the possibilities behind why that has occurred. This is a topic that has brought about much dispute among scholars, that is, whether or not Confucianism has played any role in the progress of these countries, especially that of China. It is through the adaptation and re-institution of Confucian ideas and philosophies to that of the modern era that will develop China and create a better society, government, and economy allowing it to grow and prosper.

This is not an attempt to reinstate Confucianism as it once was, but rather the idea of Confucianism going through a modernization process in which one includes those parts that are helpful to society while removing those that are harmful to society. It is not the purpose of bringing back Confucianism as the main and only philosophy as it once was in Imperial China; but rather, the process of incorporating it with modern ideas and into modern context where it will be deemed beneficial to society. This is a relatively new concept that has been present for only about 20years or so.

Due to this, no definite theory has been developed to say whether this is plausible.

When looking at the ideas of Confucianism, one must look at the values that he expresses that are essential to human beings in order to become gentleman. Some of these values are present in every society and in every country. Ideas like jen and the Golden Rule are indispensable to life in almost every society on the globe.

In order to look at Confucianism and evaluate whether it has relevance in the modern era, one must look at the social, political/governmental, and economic aspects that it brings. When doing this, however, one has to be open and willing to account that the ideas of Confucius are present even when they do not seem as though they may be implemented or those persons do not feel that they possess them in a Confucian sense. In addition, you must approach this with the intent to merge ideas together. It is no surprise that philosophies adapt and develop overtime; therefore, one must admit that all societies correlate in some way to each other and to refute that this is true is to refute that both societies are erroneous.

Society is the biggest aspect of life in which Confucianism has tremendous impact on. Not only does Confucianism layout the way one should be, act, and present himself towards and to others; these are the qualities that any civilization basis its self on. A researcher can tell much about a nation by its social well-being or lack of well-being. History can tell a lot about a nation and its society; this can also allow them to see what causes the society to be weak and what causes it to be strong. This can allow one to see whether a

certain philosophy does well in the nation or how its following affects the nation. Neglect of Confucius teachings is often associated with social chaos and sufferings in Chinas history. In short, what this is saying is that Chinas history has shown that Confucianism is the backbone of society and the state; when they are not followed the state is in chaos and when they are followed the state does well. The well-being of the state therefore depends on Confucianism and whether it is followed. This shows that Confucian teachings still have tremendous impact in China. Ideas like harmony, filial piety, and the Golden Mean all are big parts of Chinas culture.

From the beginning of this century until 1977, Confucius had been criticized in mainland China and the Chinese peoples living standard had been under the bottom of the world. In contrast to Chinas performance, Japans success in modernization has been mainly due to properly applying the Confucian principles.

It is not due to the Chinese people that the ideas of Confucius have been strongly criticized; rather, it is a result of Communism. This is due to Mao Zedongs influence when he took over in 1949 and implemented Communist ideas. While doing this, he attempted to get rid of the Confucian idea. Maos reason, along with other Communist revolutionaries in China, for publicly attacking Confucianism was that it was felt as though the social and political ideas were considered authoritative and class-ridden. By bringing in Communism, it gave the Chinese people no room to improve unless the government allowed for it. Therefore, Communism causes the Chinese people to be class-ridden; the very thing they were trying to get rid of. When

people look at China and see that it has not had much progress over the past century, it is evident that they do not look at the true reason behind this fact.

The secret of Japanese success is that it practiced the traditional Chinese principles: social positions are determined by merits and learning and the reason for China's slow economic development until the economic reform is that it had destroyed this traditional Chinese practice.

Confucianism is obviously not the reason for this backwardness; one can look at Japan and the other Asian nations that are backed by a Confucian culture to see evidence of this. Rather, Communism and Mao are holding back or have held back the Chinese.

In Communism, the government tells the people how much money they will make, what they will study, and where they will work. Communism does not promote learning and knowledge unless it is what the government sees fit. Confucianism, on the other hand, promotes learning and knowledge. In fact, one of the main values or ideas in Confucianism is the idea of knowledge and learning.

A key reason for the high performance of East Asian students in science, mathematics and classical music is the Confucianist drive for educational excellence.

It is true that Confucius did not promote the idea of learning the sciences specifically; what we should take from this is the idea of learning and striving to learn rather than what we should learn. Any nation whose culture promotes learning like a Confucian nation does is bound to grow and excel; maybe not

now, but undoubtedly in the future. In light of education, Korea also has used the strong Confucian value of education, if not to promote growth economically they do promote growth in education of the masses.

In the main, however, traditional Confucian values have supported Korean growth. The focus on education and self-cultivation within the Confucian tradition as a means for improving both individual and family position in society encouraged the expansion of mass education.

Those who look at Confucianism being the reason that China is behind are not looking at the facts or they would obviously see that Confucianism is prevalent in the economic powerhouses of East Asia known as the Five dragons. These five dragons owe much of their success to the Confucian values such as self-discipline, social harmony, strong families and a reverence for education.

Outside of China, Singapore decided to bring in Confucian thoughts and ideas beginning in the 1970s. This was done in an attempt to strengthen and grow, both in economy and socially. Singapore Senior Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew stated, The core of thoughts of Confucius can help build a harmonious and stable modern society. Confucianism was brought in through the Confucian Ethics campaign that began in 1992 to be implemented through courses in school; this was eventually changed to a shared values idea in order to obtain public support. Even though Confucianism at first got some resistance in Singapore, it is still considered, by the government, the backbone to why Singapore has done well; both economically and politically. Minister of Education Goh Keng Swee stated:

Confucianism in Singapore will not be merely for the classroom. It will be interpreted as a code of personal conduct for modern Singapore and promoted in the form of public debate and discussion over the media.

Along with Singapore, the other East Asian nations have a strong embedded Confucian tradition though most of them have had these values longer.

Another key concept required for a strong society is that of harmony. What this means is that the people must be in harmony with each other and with the government.

Confucianism's definitive aspect involves the Golden Mean applying moderation in human relations and avoiding prejudice. It is a recipe for social harmony as well as a cultural hallmark of a mature democracy.

The idea of the Golden Mean is essentially that of the Golden Rule; that is: Due unto others as others due unto you. When a nation has harmony, then it is bound to grow. Thus, using the Golden Mean, a nation will have harmony and grow. In addition, when promoting harmony, the nation also promotes the idea of filial piety. In filial piety, the key to this is the relationships between people: emperor and minister, husband and wife, father and son, and among siblings and friends. These are key concepts behind all nations if they want to modernize; they must have harmony, filial piety, and the Golden Mean (Golden Rule). The result of these values is a family based or human relations oriented society. If a nation has all of these, then they will have a chance at obtaining a strong and followed government.

Out of a good and strong society, you are bound to get a good and strong government as long as it follows similar rules to that of the society and works for the people. China's past has not had that privilege, at least not for the past half century or so. Beginning in 1949, Communism was the form of government used in China and as we all know, it prevents people from having a voice in the government. Confucius himself did not feel as though everybody should have a part of government, but he did feel that the government should do what was best for the people. Confucianism gave the idea of the Mandate of Heaven. We should not take this literally as it was in Confucius time, but rather take it in perspective of our own time.

the people had the duty to obey and support the government as long as it provided good government. If not, the people had the right to rebel and replace the ruler with someone who had a new Mandate of Heaven.

In a sense, America already has this, the process of impeachment. It is this way that China should look at this. The idea of rebelling is wrong, but making sure that the government is benevolent towards the people is excellent.

What the previous quote in essence is saying is that the people, if ethical and moral, will love the government; if it is not, then it will be despised. The Confucian idea is that its people will love a government that loves and takes care of its people. One that does not, will not. These values are still prevalent today, though they need to be expanded upon in China. China needs to expand on the ideas of human rights.

Confucianism is not simply the advocacy of obedience to government but also the accountability of government. If they really want to learn from

Confucian humanism, they have to open up to more enlightened values, such as freedom of expression, the dignity of the individual and other human rights.

If China does this, then the people will not be able to claim that they have no human rights and the Tiananmen Square incident of 1989 and others that could rise like it would not happen.

In order to cause this to happen, the Chinese must have a good system for electing politicians. The Confucian system, being the examination test, is not the best way. Nonetheless, it does present a good consideration: China should make sure that those running for politics know about the history of China's politics and governmental procedures in order to govern well by implementing the examination system. However, this is not the examination system of Confucianism, but rather an examination system that would involve knowledge that all interested in politics should know about the nation. Then, they should bring in the idea of voting. In this, they would use the democratic form of voting. Deng Xiaoping states:

On how Confucianism could reconcile with democracy, he said it gave an underlying moral framework to the one-man-one-vote system and the market. This would encourage the voter to calculate not only in his self-interest, but also that of his community.

Using this philosophy, the people would have to choose from those who knew the background of their nation and whom they feel would benefit the community, not just their own desires. This would be beneficial to America as well; rather than voting for particular party candidates, vote for the person

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who will benefit the society the most. Instead, most people feel that their particular party will benefit people the most and therefore vote for their party.

Different forms of government have governed China over the course of its history. It has had imperial rulers, Communist, dictatorships, and socialism. Presently, China has socialism as its basis, but with the incorporation of Confucianism, it would provide a much stronger foundation for Chinese and Vietnamese society in the next century than class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat. This might be a good idea especially since Confucianism could add a humanism lacking in the old socialism. Some feel that even the unification of democracy and Confucian values would be good for China; however, this would not work due to its culture. Democracy is, in a way, the same as Confucianism in the aspect of electing a leader by the fact that The ruler is to provide the conditions for the people to live a happy life. It is not difficult to see that the genuine purpose of democratic voting is to elect such a Confucian leader. In any sense, Confucianism would unquestionably bring values and ethics that could be the bases of the entire political structure as well as social structure making for a strong, people oriented nation. To go along with the idea of politics, what would ultimately develop is a strong economy.

Many people claim that there is no relevance between a philosophy (or way of life) and economics. They dispute the lack of connection between a nations (or a persons in the sense of business) virtues and the economic progress that it makes or lacks.

Confronted with the success of countries with economic policies as diverse as those of Taiwan and South Korea, some academics have looked to culture for an explanation and concluded that Confucian ethics, stressing the claims of the community over the individual, are the key.

This idea of the community over the individual is an idea that Confucius strongly promoted. In any economy, the way to grow and prosper is to put the community over that of the individual. However, people say that this idea is holding China back, or that it gives them a backwards movement. Max Weber was a strong advocate of this idea stating that, Confucianism was largely responsible for the economic backwardness of China. If the community is put over the individual in this sense, then there is no evidence that would lead towards backwardness; rather, all the evidence leads forward. This leads to the idea of Confucian ethics. The Confucian ethics that apply here would include work ethic, knowledge or learning, and putting the well-being of others in front of that of oneself (this could also be taken as benevolence or jen). The work ethic that is expressed in Confucianism and desire for knowledge and learning are prevalent in some of China's bordering nations, who largely, have a strong Confucian background. These countries have shown rapid economic growth and have Confucian values deeply submerged in their culture. Along with these values, the idea of filial piety flows over into the economic portion.

The way that filial piety coincides with economics is through business. In order to have a strong business, it must have the relationships between boss and employee and other relevant relationships. This allow for a strong

business and strong atmosphere to work in. Thus, the family structure underlies the business, governmental, societal structures of the Chinese.

When looking at Confucianism we must realize that in its original form, it is foolhardy to think that it can be applied in its original form as it was in Confucius day. We must look at it with an open-mind in order to bring it in to light of modernization and the modern world in general. While looking at in the perspective of modern China, it is evident that these values are still present. In addition, when you take in to account Confucianism's values and presence in every society, in every part of the world, it is impossible to think that Confucianism holds back or will hold back China or any other nation.

it is simple, flexible, and consistent with a reasonable interpretation of our own fundamental traditions. In confused times like our own we would do well to consider it; even if it does no more immediately than add to our stock of ideals, we should remember that ideals are eventually decisive.

It is through the adaptation and re-institution of these Confucian ideas and philosophies to that of the modern era that will develop China and create a better society, government, and economy allowing it to grow and prosper. It is only through this re-institution and interpretation that we will fully be able to appreciate Confucianisms affects on a nation.

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