Confucianism and the rise of East Asia

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East Asia is one of the most dynamic regions in the world. Geographically, it includes China, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, North Korea, and Mongolia; culturally, Singapore and Vietnam are part of East Asia because they share the East Asian cultural heritage—Confucianism. This chapter discusses the relationship between Confucianism and the rise of East Asia from both geographic and cultural perspectives, focusing on China, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and Vietnam.

The term “Rise of East Asia” refers to the fact that East Asia experienced fast economic growth from the 1960s to the 1990s. After World War II, the economies of these countries took off one after another. Japan took the lead and became the world’s second-richest and advanced nation in two decades; South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, the so-called “Four Little Dragons,” quickly followed, and finally, China began to rise in the 1980s. All these East Asian countries were the world’s top economic performers in the postwar era. It only took less than half a century from the Japanese economic miracle to China’s rise. East Asia reached a high level of modernization in fifty years, but Western countries took about two centuries to complete the same task. Why were these East Asian countries able to become the world’s fastest-industrializing nations in a short period of time? One explanation is that they benefited not only from the developed nations but also from their common cultural tradition—Confucianism. All East Asian countries are culturally within Confucian order (Morishima 1982, 15). It is Confucianism that shapes social ethical codes and governing principles, and brings about sustained economic progress in East Asia.

Development of Confucianism in East Asia

Confucianism is different from the original teaching of Confucius. The term “Confucianism” was invented by Westerners in modern times to categorize the East Asian cultural tradition from a Western perspective. Confucius, the founder of Confucianism, was born in 551 B.C. during the Warring States Period in which China was in a great transition from a hereditary system to a feudal society. The Four Books (The Analects, Mencius, The Doctrine of Mean, and The Great Learning) and the Five Classics (The Book of Changes, The Book of History, The Book of Songs, The Book of Rites, and The Spring and Autumn Annals) represent the authority
of Confucius’s teaching. Only these works, which recorded Confucius’s teaching, can be categorized as authentic Confucian works. The basic concept of his teaching is based on the five constant virtues: jen (benevolence), yi (righteousness), li (propriety), zhi (knowledge/wisdom), and xin (sincerity). His main teaching comprises three cardinal guides: Ruler guides subject, father guides son, and husband guides wife. All these Confucian principles deal with human relationships and social order. Confucian social utopia is the harmony of the individual, the group, and the country. Therefore, Confucius’s teaching at its inception was not an economic theory but a strong conservative political and ethical philosophy aiming to restore the heredity system (Lin 1942, 3).

The original intention of Confucius’s teaching was to restore trust in the government, transform society into a moral community, bring comfort to the old, have trust in friends, and cherish the young by practicing the five constant virtues. In Confucius’s time, China was experiencing a great transformation from a slavery system to a feudal system. The old social order was broken (li beng) as wars and violence started occurring across the land in the Warring States Period. In Confucius’s eyes, the old social order was the best social order because it was compatible with li (propriety). He was determined to bring society back to the traditional system (fu li). Ke ji fu li—conquer yourself and return to ritual—was his primary motivation and central political ambition. The ultimate goal of Confucian teaching was to maintain traditional social order (Zhou 2016). Thus, the original teaching was not a “precise moral orientation, but a professional training with the general goals of state service” (Nylan 2001). Tu Wei-Ming (2012, 77) points out that “Confucianism is hierarchical oriented political ideology which is essentially the same as Marxism in a political perspective.”

The original teaching of Confucius is transmitted from one generation to another and reinterpreted by intellectuals and politicians in different time periods. The process of reinterpreting his teaching has gone through three periods or three epochs throughout history (Tu 1986, 3). The first epoch, from Confucius’s time to the Tang dynasty (618–907 A.C.), was the formative period of Confucianism. Beginning with the Song dynasty (960–1279 A.C.), Confucianism entered a new stage: Neo-Confucianism or lixue in Chinese. After World War II, the inauguration of democratic systems spread throughout many countries. Western countries, thus, began paying attention to the role of Confucianism, and it entered into its third epoch: New Confucianism on the global stage. During the third epoch, Confucianism made a great contribution not only to Asian countries but also to countries outside Asia (Tu 1986, 19).

East Asian countries can be categorized into two different types of political systems: socialist and democratic. Confucianism began in China and flowed into Vietnam and Korea. Although both socialist countries, China and Vietnam, attacked Confucianism during the early communist regimes, they are now restoring their Confucian traditions after a convulsive rejection of their cultural past. Japan has long been a recipient of Chinese culture flow, from the sixth century to modern times. The Tokugawa state (1603–1867) established Confucianism as its ideology, and it gradually grew stronger and was widely spread among the middle strata of the population in the mid-Tokugawa onward, providing a message of self-formation and social construction through teachings about how to conduct people’s lives and govern a society. On the eve of the Meiji Restoration (1868), Chinese learning reached a high academic level. After the Meiji government launched its modernization program, the government still adhered to Confucianism, and it reshaped the Japanese businessman’s personality (Kuo-hui Tai 1989, 75). The basic notions and values of Japanese society were cultivated by Chinese traditional culture, and Japanese-style Chinese culture was increasingly growing during the Meiji and linked up directly with the post-Restoration development.
Confucianism and the rise of East Asia

As early as the second century, South Korea fell into the Han China and was actually under Chinese tutelage until China was defeated by Japan in the end of the nineteenth century. The two countries shared a long cultural commitment to Confucianism. South Korea is the most Confucian country. Many South Koreans consider Chinese traditions to have even stronger influence in their country than in China (Koh 1996, 191). In the fourteenth century, South Korea established a Confucian society—Choson Dynasty (1392–1910)—and Neo-Confucianism became an inalienable part of Korean tradition. When the West demanded that South Korea open its door in the 1860s, Korean Confucianists reacted strongly against the idea (Palais 2002, 515). Following American presence in South Korea, many Koreans showed a new appreciation of their Confucian heritage as part of a reaction against Western materialism and individualism. Today, South Korea still has a vital Confucian tradition as a central part of Korean cultural identity.

Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore share Confucianism mainly because the majority of their populations are ethnic Chinese. All three were Confucian societies before the nineteenth century. Taiwan is the only East Asian region where Confucianism is officially worshipped (Hung-chao Tai 1989a, 3). In Singapore, about 76 percent of the total population was Chinese in the 1980s. Although it used to be ruled by Britain, Japan, and Malaysia, the majority of Singaporeans were influenced by Chinese tradition. After it became an independent country in 1965, Singapore began to redefine its national identity by promoting Confucian values and recruited foreign experts to help the Confucian campaign. In 1982, the government began to promote a Singaporean ethos by announcing a religious curricular program in the secondary schools with six options. Confucianism was one of the options. The government emphasized that Confucianism is the most durable of human social institutions.

Confucianism traveled from China to Vietnam a thousand years ago. In 1070, the establishment of the Van Mieu (Temple of Literature) in Hanoi, a temple of learning dedicated to Confucius, indicated the emergence of Confucianism as a cult. Its development reached a peak in the fifteenth century—the golden age of King Le Thanh Tong—and has extended beyond ruling circles since the fifteenth century. Vietnamese reformers at the turn of the twentieth century drew inspiration from China and continued to develop Confucian values (McHale 2002, 398). Tran Trong Kim (1883–1953), former Prime Minister, attempted to attach a non-Western identity, so-called Confucianism (nho giao), to a Western notion of the “nation,” and nho giao/Confucianism became a mark of the national identity (Taylor 2002, 363). The Temple of Literature in Ha Noi is now a gorgeous shrine of Vietnamese Confucianism in the post-revolutionary era.

Three perspectives

Many Confucian specialists, such as Tu Wei-Ming (1989), Julia Ching (1977), W. M. Theodore de Bary (1989), and Irene Eber (1986), hold a very positive view of Confucianism and appreciated Confucius’s teaching as virtually ageless (De Bary 1991). They believe that Confucianism plays a major role in the development of civilization in East Asia. Yet there are divergent perspectives on the issue of the relationship between Confucianism and the economic development in East Asia.

The first perspective argues that Confucianism provides the core values for the explosive economic growth in East Asia. It has played a positive role in making a good contribution to the economic development in China and to the Asian economic miracle of the early 1990s as well as to the Pacific Rim (Tu 1998, 135). The success of economic development in East Asia should be credited to Confucianism (Glazer 1976, 813). This perspective believes
that the most important experience of East Asia is the acceptance of Confucianism in shaping a human-oriented workforce in the service of industrialization (Hartfield 1989, 110). Specifically, the doctrines of Confucianism, such as benevolence, righteousness, and integrity, are compatible with the central principle of capitalist market economy: fair-competition and exchange. Confucianism played a considerable role in the rise of East Asia and will continue to be a robust force shaping the life of the people in the region. Moreover, it is a glue to combine the two business principles: making profit and conducting moral business.

Historically, after Western powers expanded to Asia, intellectuals in East Asia, especially in China, Korea, and Vietnam, blamed the failures of Confucianism in response to modernization. The turning point in this is the Opium Wars. China’s loss in the Opium Wars brought it a territorial loss of Korea and Taiwan and resulted in reparations to foreign countries of over 750 million taels of silver as well as a loss of control of its major national industries, such as customs, postal systems, banks, telegram services, and railroad services (Hartfield 1989, 95). In Korea, the rise of nationalism in 1896 was associated with the rejection of Confucianism (Palais 2002, 495). It in some sense collapsed during the period of the fall of premodern times. However, after East Asia regained confidence from their economic success in the 1960s, they felt it was necessary to redefine their national identity by reinterpreting Confucian values (Rozman 2002, 11). Since the 1980s, the Chinese government has started to promote the renaissance of Chinese traditional cultures, resulting in the rise of Guoxue fever, and Confucianism has become a sub-political culture as an alternative to the faith crisis of Marxism-Maoism and the CPC’s legitimacy.

The second perspective asserts that Confucianism represents the cultural backwardness in Asia, viewing it as the basis of political authoritarianism, the model of crony capitalism, and an obstacle to economic development. This perspective contends that Confucianism and modernity were antithetical and incompatible, and suggests that Confucianism has a zero-sum game view of the economy because it downgrades profit-making. In this sense, it is a hindrance to modernization. According to Zhu Xi, the great Confucian scholar of the Song Dynasty, obtaining business achievement through calculation is selfish; such an endeavor is a world apart from the way of the sages. Confucianism generally “held commercial activity in low esteem primarily because the profit motive was regarded as morally tainted, and the search for wealth promoted selfishness over the public good and profligacy and ostentation over frugality” (Palais 2002, 492). Although Confucianism did not block economic development, it undoubtedly inhibited the shift from an agrarian economy to an industrial economy. Some scholars believe that it and modernity were antithetical and incompatible. Modernization encourages anti-tradition, including Confucian ideology, in the name of modernity, secularism, and science. When alive, Confucianism inhibits capitalism; when dead, it facilitates modernization (Siu-lun Wong 1989, 167). This explains why China failed to achieve modern economic growth and Korea (Duncan 2002). Young-Job Chung goes further by noting that the negative economic consequences of Confucianism were more pronounced in Korea than in the China of the past because “Confucian teachings rejected training in economist for the pursuit of wealth and held business people in low esteem the ruling elite, yang-ban, did not allow themselves to participate in profit-making enterprises” (Chung 1989, 152). Thus, Confucianism is required to overcome the Asian traditional culture and in order to boost Asian economy (Kim 1997, 78).

The third perspective rejects the cultural argument, arguing that neither Confucianism nor its derived values played a principal role in the Asian economic miracle, although it plays a secondary role. Its influence in the East Asian economy has been exaggerated and misconceived, even though it shaped the past (McHale 2002, 397). James B. Palais (2002, 507)
points out that Confucianism remains influential, but “I cannot see that it deserves much credit for the state-led industrialization program or the emergence of the great modern capitalists.” This perspective also disagrees that Confucianism should be seen as responsible for the stagnation of economic development. The conferees and discussants in the conference of Asian Confucianism held in University of California, Los Angeles in California in 1999 agreed that “Confucianism itself was neither responsible for, nor the cause of, the Asian economic upturn before 1997, nor for the downturn in 1997–99” (Elman 2002a). Therefore, scholars around the world have tried to establish a variety of connections between Confucian value and modernization but have arrived at no consensus (McHale 2002).

Confucianism and the rise of East Asia

Regarding the causes for the rise of East Asia, while some emphasize the role of the state, markets, or geopolitics, others focus on culture. To be sure, many have observed that Confucianism played a significant role in this rise. In what sense does it contribute to this? It is necessary to look into two aspects of Confucian roles during the rise of East Asia. At the national level, government has used Confucianism to shape their national identity and develop their own model of economic development; at the enterprise level, business organizations have used Confucian values/elements to cultivate the spirit of employees and organizations in order to create highly efficient productivity.

1 The greatest role for Confucianism is a part of national identity. All East Asian countries have shared main Confucian values and created their own model of economic development, so-called an affective model/oriental model of economic development, which emphasizes human emotional bonds, group orientation, and harmonious relations because Asian people prefer to be more concerned with human affairs and the social conditions they live in. This model is different from the Western development model, which stresses efficiency, individualism, and dynamism (Wu and Tai 1989, 7).

Japan became one of the most advanced countries in two decades after World War II and emerged as the second richest country in the world by the 1980s. The model of Japanese economic development largely relies on a social structure and a value system. The dominant pattern of feelings binding Japanese together is the Confucian concept of loyalty. Confucianism focuses on patriarchal relationship, which requires individuals to engage in self-cultivation in order to accept authority of the superior. To Japanese, the relationship between individuals is one between the subordinate and the superordinate. Japanese relations are a harmonious social environment based on those who are higher in rank (sempai) and those lower in rank (kouhai). Japanese people live essentially in a vertical society (Nakane 1970). The country of Japan is essentially a Japanese Inc. Confucianism is the spirit of the Japanese Inc.

Korean economy began to take off after the devastation of the Korea War and achieved a remarkable success in several decades. The rapid pace of Korea’s modernization relied on the top-down methods supported by Confucian patriarchal ideology. The state-led development is the key to South Korean economic success. It was Park Chung Hee who implemented such a system and led South Korea from 1961 until his assassination in 1979. Confucianism certainly played a role in his public acceptance. The government redefined Confucian values by arguing that “the original Five Relations were meant to be horizontal as well as vertical relationships, or by asserting that filial piety is the basis of a universal love for all munity” (Duncan 2002, 452).
Singapore is a city-state with a size of 238 square miles and a population of 2.5 million in which it is easy and amenable to adopt a centralized administration system based on Confucianism. Singapore is an administrative state (Bellows 1989, 195). After Singapore became an independent country in 1965, the government subscribed to a new Confucian spirit, emphasizing hierarchy, order, reciprocity, and loyalty. This spirit has contributed to the achievement of Singapore as a new nation. Accordingly, Singapore’s government has pursued interventionist economic policies and devoted enormous resources to economic infrastructure for business investment. Since the mid-1960s, Singaporean government has actively introduced foreign investment, even allowing solely foreign-owned enterprises.

The true spirit of Confucianism is about the establishment of a hierarchical social system based on Confucius’s doctrine of the five relationships, which requires the subordination of the son to the father, the wife to the husband, and the subjects to the rulers. According to Confucianism, the father is the head of family; in the big family of a nation, the emperor is the father of the nation. The state/government in Chinese, guo-jia, means “nation-family.” For the same reason, the head of an enterprise is the father of the organization. The relationship between individuals and enterprises is the same as the family relations. Business enterprises fundamentally rely on their employees, but the relationship between employees and their employers can significantly affect employees’ career. Asian people maintain their tradition and are supposed to uphold the interest of group/enterprise and the nation (Kuo-hui Tai 1989, 70). Many East Asian people have become to accept the relationship between the employer and his employees as something equivalent to those between the emperor and his ministers, and between the father and his children.

The experience of the rise of Asia shows that strong family ties are not a barrier to modern economy but promote stable employment, high productivity, and high employee morale and satisfaction. The family spirit profoundly influences Japanese economy. The spirit of Japanese success is the group-directed quest for knowledge, relying on state benevolence, family solidarity, and company paternalism. Paternalism and social harmony play a role in the stable operation of companies in Japan. Many Japanese enterprises are successful because they reject the notion that personal feelings have no place at work and develop a feeling of trust and intimacy among their employees (Hung-chao Tai 1989b, 22). William Ouchi, the founder of Theory Z of Ouchi, characterizes it as “Japanese Management,” which increases employee loyalty to the company by providing a job with a strong focus on the well-being of the employee, both on and off the job. Tetuo Ohsone (1983), a union leader at the Mazda Company of Japan, puts it this way, “our basic philosophy is that the improvement of living standards of union members is closely related to the expansion of the company itself.”

South Koreans believe “their country not only as closer to China than Japan, but in administrative culture and familism more Confucian than China” (Rozman 2002, 21). Korean Confucian family values, such as filial piety, proper order between senior and junior, and loyalty to the state, used to be utility for the maintenance of Park’s autocratic political regime. In 1968, the Korean presidential Charter of National Education called for diligence, thrift, loyalty, and education. In the late 1970s, Park Chung Hee began to revitalize Confucian values of filial piety and loyalty as the hallmarks of Korean-style democracy. The soul of the Korean culture is ulti—a deeply held system of morality, integrity, and loyalty—and the idea of ulti is compatible with Confucian family spirit (Chung 1989, 154). Korean people believe that as long as there is the state, the ethic of loyalty must endure; and as long as there is the family, the ethic of filial piety must persist (Duncan 2002).
Most of Taiwanese entrepreneurs were small-business owners, and about 78 percent of them employed fewer than ten workers in the 1960s and 1970s. They were considered as family business and very traditionalistic. The qualification of seniority is highly valued being a prerequisite for Taiwanese elite (Li 1989, 34). Young people with less experience seldom can elevate their social status no matter how hardworking they may be. In Hong Kong, about 50 percent of factories were considered family-owned enterprises in 1978. These businesses required a stable workforce, so benevolent paternalism played a critical role in retaining worker force. However, the family enterprises have both economic strengths and weaknesses, i.e., familism easily breeds widespread nepotism (Siu-lun Wong 1989, 175).

Three factors, hardworking, saving, and education, are especially important to the economy in utilizing natural resources for production. All these three endeavors are motivated by the individual in a cultural context. The family spirit is closely relevant to the three factors (Chung 1989). First, individuals’ willingness to devote their work and society is one of the preconditions to modern economic development. Generally, East Asians have a diligent attitude toward work with a relatively low pay partly because the cultural and social atmosphere of the company was influenced by Confucianism (Hung-chao Tai 1989b, 20). Second, in order to assure their family members’ necessary means to live on, traditional Asians are willing to forsake current spending for personal enjoyment. Confucianism has developed a sense of diligence and frugality among Asian people, so they practice a frugal life to maintain high savings. This tradition helped accumulate wealth and enable them to launch successfully a labor-intensive industry in the early stage of industrialization. In turn, the large amount of domestic savings helped to restrain inflation, reduce the cost of capital borrowing, and increase in business investment (Hung-chao Tai 1989b, 24). Third, in East Asia, the main channel of elevating individuals’ social status for glorifying their family is receiving formal education. Confucius espoused the idea of universal education. According to Confucius, education is for all without class distinctions. Educational achievement is vital to income distribution and economic growth. This distinctive feature showed in almost every East Asian country during the rise of East Asia. China established the earliest educational system and the first civil service examination system in the world. In China today, the governments and enterprises still follow the tradition to recruit elites through the examination system. Education is highly valued in Japan and Korea, which enables the government to recruit well-qualified personnel for public services. In Korean tradition, being a cultured man, like junzi (gentlemen) in China, was considered the highest personal accomplishment. The cultured man was self-cultivated by high moral standards and cardinal virtues, such as patriotism, filial piety, and loyalty. Only the cultured man could be raised to a position of true dignity, secure an appointment to a public office, and glorify his ancestors and his posterity (Chung 1989, 152). In Taiwan, education is an important qualification for promotion and the only means for young people to elevate their social status regardless of their family origin. This Confucian value encourages Taiwanese to acquire knowledge and skills for modernization (Yi-ting Wong 1989, 114).

Confucianism alone cannot fully explain the rise of East Asia

Search for the causes of the rise of East Asia should be directed to all possible factors. The role of Confucianism cannot fully explain the rise of East Asia. There are other factors that contribute to the economic miracles. China is the birth place of Confucianism, but it does not necessarily mean that Confucianism should receive much credit for China’s rise in the
post-Mao era. China demonized Confucianism in the first thirty years of the communist regime and did not begin to promote the state-sponsored Confucianism until the middle of the 1980s. This means that the government still viewed Confucianism as feudal remnants when China initiated the modernization program in 1978. China’s fast economic growth in the past thirty-five years has basically relied on the reform and open-door policy to generate Chinese people’s enthusiasm and attracted a large amount of foreign investment. Many observers have agreed that the postwar Japanese economic miracle has benefited from external factors: “American economic assistance and military spending during the Korean and Vietnam Wars and a world market” (Hartfield 1989, 99). Pragmatism also helped Japanese economy. Japan was willing to borrow and adopt Western science, technology, and democratic system.

Culturally, Korea was influenced by China but, economically, it may be influenced more by Japan (Palais 2002, 515). In the forty years of Japanese occupation, Korea benefited from Japanese financial contribution and also modeled Japanese modernized system by establishing market-oriented economic institutions and the legal system (Chung 1989, 159). After the end of the Japanese occupation, the United States introduced modernization to South Korea. With the flow of US military personnel, Koreans got an opportunity to learn about Western culture and industrialization. American financial aid and private investment provided South Korea with the necessary capital for the reconstruction of Korean economy (Chung 1989, 159). South Korea remains under the US military umbrella. It is impossible for South Korea to succeed without the open market of the United States.

Taiwan does not have traditional advantages in rich natural resources and large domestic market. To overcome these limitations, Taiwan relies on foreign trade as the main driving force behind its economic development (Yi-ting Wong 1989, 118). The partial credit of the Taiwanese economic growth should be given to US aid, which not only stabilized Taiwan’s economy but also helped the island to launch its export program (Kahn 1979). However, with the improvement of relationship between Taiwan and Mainland China, Taiwan’s economy has become increasingly relying on the market in the mainland. During the rapid economic growth in Hong Kong, a large number of refugees in the postwar Hong Kong were an industrial asset because some of refugees were the eldest sons who were in charge of their family business with technical and management knowledge. In addition, the colony established a good governmental structure with mature legal system, which promoted industrialization. The unique urbanism also contributed to Hong Kong’s economy. Hong Kong’s border with the Mainland China was strictly guarded, preventing the Mainland Chinese from flowing into Hong Kong, so Hong Kong created for itself a separate urban identity, which engendered a feeling of solidarity and a common orientation toward economic achievement (Siu-lun Wong 1989, 185). It is worth noting that Hong Kong cannot survive without the market of the mainland and other part of the world (Kuo-hui Tai 1989, 89).

Like Hong Kong, the British government created the Singaporean civil service system. Since Singapore became an independent country, the focus of civil service system has been shifted to economy, i.e., develop well-being and national identity, and cultivate ethical behavior among the citizenry (Bellows 1989, 197). Singapore’s economy greatly benefits from its geographic location because it is situated at a strategic mid-point between the East and Europe. There is no deep-water port in the area except at the mouth of the Singapore River. This is the second busiest port in the world, so it makes possible for Singapore largely lives on its trade and commerce (Bellows 1989, 211).
Final remarks

China is the cradle of the original teaching of Confucius. The development of Confucianism is a process of reinterpreting the original Confucius’s teaching in China and beyond. Confucianism has been indigenized in East Asian countries. Confucianism is not one but many. Confucianism is a living tradition and, accordingly, it is multidimensional and multi-layered (Herr 2011, 83). Thus, it is necessary to discuss the relationship between the role of Confucianism and the rise of East Asia in a historical and geographic context. All East Asian countries have reinterpreted Confucianism in order to fit their own agendas during the rise of East Asia (Lee 2006). They have selectively adopted different elements of Confucianism more amenable to its specific needs. Confucianism has been used for democratic societies, authoritarian regimes, and communist countries, to serve different economic and political needs. In this sense, there is no a unified development model of East Asia.

Today it is clear that China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam have always adapted Confucianism to suit the interest of their social elites and political leaders. Japan did not simply copy Confucianism but practiced Confucian ideas in the Japanese context, i.e., Japan selectively adopted the elements of Confucianism to fit its modernization, and Confucianism becomes Japanization of Confucianism (Elman 2002b, 16). In the 1930s, the movement of Confucianism became a strong supporter of the Great Japanese Empire by advocating the importance of Eastern thought. Japan’s modernization in the postwar era is a dramatic example of a cultural synthesis (Pepper and Kahn 1979). Confucianism is already polluted by its version of Westernization (Kim 1997, 77). During the Japanese occupation in South Korea, the Japanese supported Confucianism as a means of inducing obedience and loyalty to Japanese authority (Palais 2002, 497). In the 1960s, the Park regime used Confucian values to legitimize his authority and prevent anti-government student movement—minjung civil movement (Duncan 2002, 454).

The socialist countries have the similar experience. North Korea has utilized the Confucian value system to reinforce the Chuch’ê ideology—the official state ideology of North Korea—and defend the Kim’s Kingdom’s transition from Kim II Sung to his son Kim Jong II (Kang 2011, 65). Vietnam does not follow the same trajectory as in other East Asian countries because the Vietnamese believe that “Confucianism as a key to economic success must be modified by the desire for national exceptionalism, the originality of the Vietnamese way” (McHale 2002). Vietnamese Marxist nationalists have modified the Confucian framework and reinterpreted Confucianism in agreement with Marxist ideas. Since the early 1990s, the Vietnamese Communist Party has integrated Vietnamese traditions into a new culture. In China, the purpose of restoring Confucianism is obviously for legitimizing the one-party system and strengthening belief system because of epidemic corruption and the demise of Marxism.

Therefore, Confucianism in the post-Confucius era was not a unitary school of thought but has a variety of traditions due to different interpretations in different historical contexts (He 2012, 131). All these interpretations reflect the needs and concerns of each generation of the cultural community. Reinterpreted Confucianism in each country “may contain some truth, but no one interpretation may capture the whole monolithic and unchangeable” (Herr 2011, 83). Without a doubt, there is no a unified and transcendent Confucianism; and contemporary Confucianism does not necessarily represent the original teaching of Confucius. Conceptualization of a transnational Confucianism is “historically simplistic and politically misleading” (Elman 2002c, 518).

The rapid economic surge in East Asia between the early 1960s and the 1990s was largely driven by both domestic impetus and international assistance. Confucianism has played a role in the rise of East Asia, but it is still debatable on whether the role of Confucianism is a primary
driving force of the rise of East Asia. Many believe that the fast-growing economy in East Asia has been fundamentally driven by domestic economic policy, market system, and international assistance. It would be a mistake if we overstated the role of Confucian legacy during the rise of East Asia.

The discussion of this chapter is only limited to the relations of Confucianism to economic development. However, modernization is an integrated concept that includes both prosperous economy and modern democracy. Eventually, an authoritarian regime is unable to sustain its economic development and enrich both material and spiritual life for their own people. Thus, it is too early to conclude that Confucian value is universal and the China model/East model is an alternative model to the Western model. There are four theories on the issue of the relationship between Confucianism and democracy: conflict model, compatible model, hybrid model, and critical model—constrain democratic system. While Huntington (2007) argues that the core values of Confucianism are not compatible with liberal democracy (2007), Fukuyama (1995) asserts that the Confucian values, such as the examination system, education, fairly egalitarian income distribution, relative tolerance, tradition of dissent and protest, and tendency toward egalitarianism, are not only compatible with but actually promote liberal democracy. Although many scholars have adopted a compatibility approach and believe Confucianism is positive in relation to democracy (He 2012, 132), it remains questionable on whether Confucianism is compatible with modern democracy.

It is worth noting that one basic characteristic of the rise of East Asia is the decline of the common East Asian cultural heritage—Confucianism. Despite persistent attempts to revive Confucianism from different directions, the tendency of the decline will irresistibly continue. To be sure, Confucianism is not dead but will continue to play a role in East Asia and beyond. Questions raised here are: Where is Confucianism heading? Will Confucianism be able to survive in the twenty-first century? It seems that New Confucianism is emerging in China and other East Asian countries. Confucianism, together with socialism and liberalism, has become one of the three dominant intellectual trends in the post-Mao China (Tu 2012, 78). Confucianism is likely to play a major role in shaping China's cultural identity (Tamney 2012, 96). President Xi Jinping in his recent book, *The Governance of China*, uses Confucian ideas to explain his own political and social philosophy (Caplan 2015). However, some Chinese scholars have exaggerated the role of Confucianism, e.g., Kang Xiaoguang believes it is necessary to establish a benevolent government based on Confucian principles. Kang suggests that China should Confucianize the Chinese civil service system and the Chinese Communist Party. According to Kang, if the New Confucian movement succeeds in the future, it is likely to shape the fate of not only the Chinese nation but also the entire world (Kang 2012, 72). As a matter of fact, there are many uncertainties in the future of Confucianism. Only one thing we are sure of is that Confucianism will never go away (Sun 2013). Nevertheless, the future of Confucianism depends on whether it can provide effective responses to the problems that have been generated by modernization and globalization, namely political reconstruction, cultural identity, and religious faith (Ming 2012, 110). The success of revitalizing Confucianism also depends on how to reinterpret Confucianism in a specific national context.

**Bibliography**


