Persistent Conflicts between Confucianism and Democracy

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There are a range of different relationships between Confucianism and democracy. This essay examines four models of the relationship between Confucianism and democracy: *conflictive, compatible, hybrid,* and *critical*. The article describes the background and key characteristics of each model and uses an empirical approach to test the claims of each model against reality. Empirically, the conflict model is much more accurate than the other models. It is largely true and relevant today, and it can even apply to the other three models, that is, all three models have some element of conflict or tension between Confucianism and democracy.

Keywords: Confucianism and Democracy; Conflict model; Compatibility model; Hybridity mode; Critical model

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I. Introduction

Confucian societies are associated with a diversity of political regimes.[1] Liberal democracy has been established in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, where there are regular and fair elections, competing political parties, and independent judicial powers. Singapore has an illiberal democracy, while China, North Korea and Vietnam have maintained one-party domination. This suggests that there are a range of different relationships between Confucianism and democracy in the real world.

Moreover, there is a diversity of changing attitudes toward Confucianism in East Asia. In North Korea in 1953-55, Kim Il Sung developed his *juche* ideology after returning to the practical learning school of reformed Confucianism.[2] In the 1960s Park Chung Hee

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[1] Confucian societies are defined as those in which varieties of social rituals, clan and kinship, education, and family life are all influenced by, and exhibit strongly, Confucian characteristics. See Anna Sun, *Confucianism as a World Religion: Contested Histories and Contemporary Realities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

[2] Alzo David-West, "Between Confucianism and Marxism-Leninism: Juche and the Case of Chong

promoted Confucianism in order to further economic development in South Korea.[3] In Taiwan, Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) promoted Confucianism in the 1960s and 1970s, but in the late 1990s, Lee Deng Hui turned to Japanese culture. Confucianism had been associated with mainland culture, so when the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) came to power, it emphasized indigenous culture and deliberately played down Confucian culture. In Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew promoted Confucianism actively in the 1980s and 1990s, but the official promotion of Confucianism has since declined. Singapore had promoted the Confucian idea of the philosophical sage who is capable of ruling, but now Singapore follows market principles to recruit top political leaders by offering the highest salaries to public leaders. In China, Mao Zedong rejected Confucianism but today Confucianism has been blessed as "national essence" despite that Confucianism is not an official ideology. Vietnam also gave up Confucianism, and even abolished the Chinese characters under French colonization. Neo-Confucianism developed in Hong Kong in the 1960s-1970s, but now its followers are only few. Instead, the young generation is developing its own unique Hong Kong identity, which means de-emphasizing Confucianism, as it is associated with mainland culture.

Scholars have conceptualized four ideal-types of relationships between Confucianism and democracy, namely, *conflictive, compatible*, *hybrid*, and *critical*. In the past, debates have focused on whether Confucianism is in conflict or compatible with democracy. In recent years, there has been an attempt to *go beyond these conflict and compatible models* to explore alternative ways of thinking. Logically, a compatibility model implies a sort of hybridity. Indeed, Sungmoon Kim has moved the debate to a new question of "the particular mode of

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Tasan," *Korean Studies* 35 (2011): 93-121.

[3] Tomasz Sleziak, "The Role of Confucianism in Contemporary South Korean Society," *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 66, no. 1 (2013): 27-46.

Confucian democracy" that is appropriate for East Asia.[4] This question leads to the normative consideration of a particular *hybrid* model and a subsequent question. If democracy and Confucianism can be blended, how can Confucianism improve and enhance democracy? Such a question leads to the *critical* model.

The hybrid model is contrary to both the conflict and compatibility models and occupies a middle position. It examines the complex institutional and behavioral practices of democratization in East Asia and holds that its practice is always a mix of Western and Confucian cultures. This model is used to describe the mixture of democracy and Confucianism in a variety of ways at different levels.

The critical model reverses conventional thinking, and turns the logic upside down. In both the conflict and compatibility models, democracy is the judge and final truth, while Confucianism is deemed passive: either it should be abandoned for the sake of democracy, or modified to make it compatible with democracy. Conversely, in the critical model, the Confucian point of view, rather than the Western one, is central. From the former viewpoint, Confucianism is regarded as the active arbiter of the political norm rather than as a beneficiary or passive listener. From a Confucian perspective, electoral democracy has many deficiencies and flaws, and deliberative democracy is a more acceptable form of government and decision-making.

This essay examines *the four models of thinking on the relationship between Confucianism and democracy*. It aims to test these four models against the empirical reality and to find out which model holds the most explanatory power (I will not engage in a normative justification here).

It should be noted that these four models apply different definitions and understandings of Confucianism. For example, the conflict model

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[4] Sungmoon Kim, *Confucian Democracy in East Asia: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, March 2014), 247.

focuses on the key questions of Confucian power values, power relations and power structures; the compatible model stresses Confucian perfectionist ideas, education and the examination system; the hybrid model looks at Confucian public reasoning and consultation or other elements; and the critical model returns to the Confucian ontology and an ideal of kingly-based political order. When scholars discuss the complex relationships between Confucianism and democracy, they sometimes talk to different aspects of Confucianism so that while they seem to engage in a debate, they in fact pass each other because they are not using corresponding definitions of Confucianism. However, it is impossible to impose one single definition of Confucianism on the scholarly debate as Confucian traditions are so rich that they defy any simplistic definition. Instead, I propose that we at least use the same research method. Here I use the empirical approach to test the claims of each model against the empirical reality, disregarding any differences in the applicable definitions of Confucianism.

The essay has two main sections. The first describes the background and key characteristics of each model, and introduces scholars who advocate different models with great variation. The second section is the empirical test of the four models.

II. The Four Models of the Relationship between Confucianism and Democracy

1. The Conflict Model

Scholars committed to the conflict model believe that all of the ideological structures of Confucianism and democracy are in conflict. In this model, Confucianism is seen as a product of an agricultural society which constructs a political order to meet its specific social and economic conditions, while liberal democracy is the political construct of an industrial society seeking to meet modern conditions such as the rise

of commerce and individual interests. Theorists who work from the conflict model hold that the original ideas of Confucius do not harmonize with liberal ideas.

According to Huntington, the core values of Confucianism, for example hierarchy, elitism, and sage-ruling, are incompatible with liberal democracy.[5] Such views stress the negative and inhibiting factors of Confucianism, including orientations of authoritarian statecraft, collectivist hierarchical behavioral traits, and the unequal distribution of power.

Three key concepts from Confucius's original doctrine—*Ren* (benevolence, or humaneness, or simply goodness), ritual, and the gentleman—indicate a political order in which the rule of the gentleman prevails, duty is central, political inequality is taken for granted, moral concern overrides the political bargaining process, and harmony prevails over conflict. This, it is argued, conflicts with a democratic order in which the rule of law prevails, rights are central, political equality is taken for granted, the political bargaining process overrides moral consensus, and conflict is seen as a normal condition of political life. The Confucian notion of the sage undermines the idea of equality. The Confucian idea of harmony undermines the necessity of conflicts. The Confucian ideal of *Ren* is incompatible with utilitarian calculation.[6]

In Confucian culture, the government has to proceed on the basis of harmony rather than conflict (which leads to suppression of dissidents and renders compromise morally repugnant); the interests of the collective must not be challenged by lesser groups and individuals (which is less favorable to the action of individual citizens); and, finally, rights must be treated as something granted by the state, not inherent in

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[5] Samuel P. Huntington, "Will More Countries Become Democratic?" *Political Science Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (1984): 193-218.

[6] Guy S. Alitto, *The Last Confucian: Liang Shuming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

the person (which is less favorable to the institutional protection of individual rights).

2. The Compatibility Model[7]

Those who adopt the compatibility model hold the view that some elements of Confucianism are compatible with democratic ideas and institutions.[8] Chinese scholars such as Liang Shuming, Yu Yingshi, Chung-ying Cheng, and Lin Yusheng have emphasized aspects of compatibility between Confucianism and liberalism.[9]

The Confucian idea of *Minben* and the idea of heaven in relation to the idea of people are seen as supporting democratic institutions. In particular, the principle of people can be used to support democratic ideas including votes, parliament, and parties. The tradition of local gentry (*shenshi* class) can be interpreted as a self-governing local community, a sort of local autonomy, and even a primitive form of local democracy. This idea of leaders coming from and representing the local community is argued to have facilitated the development of local-level

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[7] William Theodore de Bary, *The Liberal Tradition in China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1983); Andrew Nathan, "The Place of Values in Cross-Cultural Studies: The Example of Democracy and China," in *Ideas across Cultures: Essays on Chinese Thought in Honor of Benjamin I. Schwartz,* ed. Paul Cohen and Merle Goldman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 293-314; Edward Friedman, "Democratization: Generalizing the East Asian Experience," in *Politics of Democratization: Generalizing the East Asian Experience,* ed. Edward Friedman (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 27-28; and Baogang He, "Dual Roles of Semi-Civil Society in Chinese Democracy," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 29, no. 1 (1994): 154-171.

[8] See Albert H. Y. Chen, "Is Confucianism Compatible with Liberal Constitutional Democracy?" *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 34, no. 2 (2007): 195-216.

[9] Chung-Ying Cheng, "Transforming Confucian Virtues into Human Rights," in *Confucianism and Human Rights,* ed. William Theodore de Bary and Tu Weiming (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 142-53; Lin Yusheng, *Zhongguo chuntong de chuanzaoxing zhuanhua* [The crisis of Chinese consciousness: Radical antitraditionalism in the May Fourth era] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1988).

democracy in China.[10]

Other Confucian political institutions can also be transformed into something to support democratic development. The Confucian institution of *Xuetang* (学堂) is a public forum in which the intellectual elite discuss and debate moral, social, and political issues, which can be transformed into a modern civil society. The Confucian tradition of scholarly criticism could be transformed into a formal opposition force, if the practice of criticism were afforded genuine political significance. Confucian tolerance of plural religions could promote liberal toleration. As Daniel Bell argues, it would be possible to take the Confucian idea of gentry and institutionalize it as a Confucian chamber in a democratic assembly.[11] The balance-check system could be transformed into a modern power-check system, and the examination system could be developed into a system of equal access to public office and as a way of ensuring a meritocracy. Confucianism provides for equal opportunity for political positions, which are open to all scholars through an examination system. All these elements of Confucianism could be compatible with liberal democracy.

Fukuyama finds that the Confucian examination system, focus on education, fairly egalitarian income distribution, relative tolerance, tradition of dissent and protest, and tendency toward egalitarianism are not only compatible with, but also actually promote, liberal democracy.[12]

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[10] John Fincher, *Chinese Democracy: Statist Reform, the Self-Government Movement and Republican Revolution* (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1989), 231.

[11] Daniel A. Bell, *Beyond Liberal Democracy: Political Thinking for an East Context* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

[12] Francis Fukuyama, "Confucianism and Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 2 (1995): 20-33.

3. The Hybrid Model

Each generation in different East Asian societies undertakes the imperative task of offering varying versions or proposals of why and how Confucianism should be combined with democracy in modern times and develops different ideas of political hybridity. To blend Confucianism and democracy, one easily can imagine the different combinations leading to Confucian communitarian democracy, Confucian elite democracy, Confucian consultative democracy, and Confucian electoral democracy, although this list is not exhaustive.

China has made persistent efforts to combine Confucianism with democratic values and systems throughout its history.[13] For example, Sun Yat-sen in the 1920s developed the idea of five divisions of power in his constitutional design, based on the Western idea of three divisions of power and drawing on Confucian traditions by adding the Examination Yuan, which is responsible for the nation's civil service system, and the Control Yuan, which is the highest watchdog organization of the state, exercising powers of impeachment, censure, and audit. Liang Shuming in the 1920s-1940s attempted to integrate democracy into the program of village reconstruction and advocated the neo-Confucian model of democracy. This model combined Western notions of rights and liberty with the Chinese emphasis on responsibility and ethical education, and Western majority rule with Chinese ethical rationality, while criticizing Western individualism and substituting it with advocacy of communitarianism.[14] In Hong Kong in the 1960-70s, Mou Zongsan, a new Confucian scholar, developed the doctrine of "Self-Generation of Democracy," which attempts to overcome the weakness of Confucian representation. According to Mou, *Ren* does not directly need sages or

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[13] Baogang He, *Rural Democracy in China* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 222-27.

[14] Hung-yok Ip, "Liang Shuming and the Idea of Democracy in Modern China," *Modern China* 17, no. 4 (1991): 481-487.

statesmen, but first institutionalizes itself through a constitution. This is an indirect way for neo-Confucianism to use its own internal logic to generate democracy.[15]

It is clear that within the last decade, the processes of Chinese local democratization and the development of village elections, the struggle for human rights, the establishment of deliberative forums, and the growing intra-party democracy reveal that there is, in practice, a mixing of Chinese traditions and new democratic institutions. This gives rise to the hybrid model for rethinking the relationship between democracy and Confucianism in contemporary China.

Sungmoon Kim has developed an idea of Confucian democracy which advocates "moral criticism and rectification of government" and is based upon a set of Confucian public reasons such as "filiality (*xiaoti* 孝悌), trustworthiness (*xin* 信), social harmony (*he* 和), respect of the elderly (*jinglao* 敬老), and respectful deference (*cirang* 辭讓)."[16]

In Singapore, Sor-hoon Tan blends the ideas of Confucius and Dewey, two great philosophers separated by more than 2,500 years. Tan injects Dewey's ideas of government by the people, participation, and collective inquiry into Confucianism. Tan's ideal Confucian democracy is a "harmonious community in which every member contributes, participates, and benefits according to his or her abilities and needs."[17]

Chung-Ying Cheng outlines a Confucian way of democratization, that is, democratization via government for the people who are "ruled with their ends and needs satisfied by a ruler," and a Confucian

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[15] Mou Zongsan, *Zhengdao yu zhidao* (政道与治道) [The law of politics and the law of governance] (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1974). Lin Anwei criticized Mou for failing to demonstrate how democracy could be developed out of Confucianism. See John Makeham, *Lost Soul: Confucianism in Contemporary Chinese Academic Discourse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 179.

[16] Kim, *Confucian Democracy in East Asia*, 90, 284.

[17] Sor-Hoon Tan, *Confucian Democracy: A Deweyan Reconstruction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 201.

philosophy of virtue, which is seen as "a dynamic agency of democratization that is also bidirectional: virtues to become powers and powers to become virtues."[18]

4. The Critical Model

The last two decades have witnessed the development of critical Confucianism and this can be understood as a manifestation of a post-colonial discourse in East Asia.[19] With the revival of Confucianism in the 1990s[20] and the rise of China, some Chinese have become more confident in their Confucian traditions. They have criticized electoral democracy and developed a new critical model for rethinking the relationship between democracy and Confucianism.

Kang Xiaoguang (康晓光) questions the effectiveness and legitimacy of electoral democracy, and advocates benevolent government and Confucian mechanisms for the expression of public opinion.[21] Jiang Qing rejects the will of the people as the source of political legitimacy and seeks legitimacy "established on transcendent sacred origins" and "extolling unification" (*dayitong* 大一统).[22] Jiang Qiang advocates a nonelected body for Confucian scholars in Confucian constitutionalism.

The critical school takes a Confucian-centric approach and uses the criterion of Confucianism to judge and evaluate democracy. This

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[18] Chung-Ying Cheng, "Preface: The Inner and the Outer for Democracy and Confucian Tradition," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 34, no. 2 (2007): 152, 154.

[19] For a critical model, see Shu-Hsien Liu, "Democratic Idea and Practice: A Critical Reflection," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 34, no. 2 (2007): 257-275.

[20] Makeham, *Lost Soul*.

[21] Xiaoguang Kang, "Confucianization: A Future in the Tradition," *Social Research* 73, no. 1 (2006): 86-94.

[22] Jiang Qing, *Zhengzhi ruxue: Dangdai ruxue de zhuanxiang, tezhi yu fazhan* [Political Confucianism: The development, characteristics, and reorientation of contemporary Confucians] (Beijing: Shalian, 2003).

approach takes varying attitudes toward democracy. It has at least three options: *abandoning* some democratic principles if they are not compatible with Confucianism; *absorbing or mixing* democratic elements if they are compatible; and *improving and enhancing democracy* through Confucianism.

Confucianism can offer a package of democracy reform programs including duty-based rights; communitarian care; the promotion of a public spirit; the introduction of a remonstration system into parliament to improve the two-party system; and the promotion of scholarly rulings, which is relatively better than the ruling power of the wealthy.

Confucianism rejects the idea of the neutrality of the state. In liberal theory, states take a neutral position to set up rules and procedures and punish those who break those rules. Liberal states, however, have no right to impose a particular moral life on individuals. Asian countries challenge the idea of the neutrality of the state because the substantial concern about the good life is, for them, a moral issue, while substantial justice is a principle of how to organize a society. This argument allows and justifies the right to interfere in and to dictate the moral life of individuals, such as by imposing moral education. For instance, the department of education in Singapore organized and produced a textbook for the Confucian moral code. Zhejiang Province in China has a law to punish those who do not save the life of a person who is in danger. In China, the politics of example promotes good standards through the mass media, talking more about positives, such as how employees find a new job through self-effort, rather than the unemployment rate. The moralist approach to politics may improve the quality of politics, but in so doing, it may well constrict the bargaining power of politics, and thus repress negative liberty.

Confucianism challenges the liberal neutrality principle on the grounds that it does not allow for the moral significance of supererogation. Acts are said to be supererogatory if their performance is praiseworthy and yet it is not morally wrong to omit them. There is no

obligation to act in a supererogatory way in the framework of rights-based morality. As Joseph Chan asserts, rights constitute neither human virtues nor virtuous relations. In a healthy close relationship, parties should best ignore rights and focus on the norms of mutual caring and loving. It is better to repair problems in a relationship by refreshing the partner's commitments to the ideal of mutual caring, rather than by introducing or invoking rights.[23]

III. Empirical Testing

1. The Conflict Model

The conflict model has been confirmed by the histories of East Asia in different Confucian societies. Japan's moral culture was pre-eminently Confucian in 1890, when Tani Kanjo and Torio Koyata, conservative nationalists, argued that the constitution and the Imperial Diet would give rise to an unhealthy sense of individualism among the Japanese, making each of them think only of himself or herself. As a result, the development of Japanese parliamentary institutions was to some extent limited by these ultra-conservative attitudes.[24]

In modern China, Yuan Shikai (袁世凱) used Confucianism to suppress democratic movements in the 1910s and restored the imperial system. Chiang Kai-shek also employed Confucianism to contain the trend toward democratization in mainland China in the 1930s-1940s and in Taiwan in the 1970s.

In South Korea, Confucianism was actively promoted by military leaders such as Park Chung Hee. As Kim Kyong-dong demonstrates, two negative elements of Confucianism—orientations of authoritarian

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[23] Joseph Chan, "An Alternative View," *Journal of Democracy* 8 (1997): 35-48.

[24] R. H. Mason, *Japan's First General Election* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 122-123.

statecraft and collectivist hierarchical behavioral traits—have been used by the political elite in their effort to maintain authoritarian rule and arrest the process of democratization.[25] The East Asia Barometer Survey conducted in South Korea in February 2003 revealed that attachment to Confucian values makes it harder to reject authoritarian rule than to embrace democracy.[26]

The conflict model was further established in Singapore in the 1980s and 1990s when Confucianism was used to argue for Asian values and against Western democracy. Confucian respect for authority does not favor an opposition movement, which is interpreted in Singapore as an attempt to undermine authority. It is believed that Confucianism operates in politics as an overriding ideology and set of moral codes to regulate political behavior and ensure discipline and loyalty.

In contemporary China, the Confucian idea of *Ren* is openly used by Kang Xiaoguang to justify what he calls the Chinese "benevolent authoritarian polity."[27] Chen Ming endorsed new authoritarianism in order to secure some sort of funding and political patronage for *ruxue*.[28] Xi Jinping has often used Confucian terms and phrases in his speeches. Confucianism has become a source of cultural conservatism and has played out the same "Beijing Opera" of inhibiting democratic movement in contemporary China.

Take the example of the Chinese Communist Party's ban on "factional" activities. It denies the existence of any form of factionalism, because in elite politics Confucian philosophical reasoning is that politicians represent the interests of the whole community while factions

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[25] Kim Kyong-dong, "Social and Cultural Developments in the Republic of Korea," in *Democracy and Development in East Asia,* ed. Thomas W. Robinson (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 1991), 137-154.

[26] Chong-Min Park and Doh Chull Shin, "Do Asian Values Deter Popular Support for Democracy in South Korea?" *Asian Survey* 46, no. 3 (2006): 341-361.

[27] Xiaoguang Kang, "Confucianization."

[28] Makeham, *Lost Soul,* 197.

seek to articulate only their own narrow interests at the expense of the broader general interest. In addition, the Confucian-inspired aversion to competition makes the Chinese hierarchy even more distrustful of factionalism. It then attempts to remove the causes of factionalism, which leads to the inexorable destruction of liberty.

2. The Compatible Model

Democracy can be, and has been, established in Confucian societies. However, the success of democratic transition and consolidation in Confucian societies depends on the separation of Confucianism from politics (this means that Confucianism does not openly interfere in politics) and the mixing of Confucianism, Buddhism, Western Christianity, and democratic cultures in South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan. Successful democratization requires that there is an end to the official ideology of Confucianism and a change in the political structure by which Confucianism enjoys the privileged position.

The roles played by actual actors, and their associated cultures, in democratic transitions and consolidations in East Asia must be examined. In particular, one cannot overlook the role of Confucianism's counterpart, Christianity, otherwise we miss one of the most important set of real life developments. Christian actors and churches have played a greater role in pushing for, and demanding, democracy in Taiwan and South Korea. Many key leaders, such as Chiang Ching-kuo, Lee Teng-hui, and Kim Dae-jung, are Christians.

A new interpretation of this seeming compatibility reveals the complex and subtle relationship between democracy and Confucianism. At least three factors explain their apparent compatibility. First, Confucian society has undertaken a dramatic transformation. According to the 2005 census, only 0.2 percent of contemporary South Koreans identified as adherents of Confucianism, but 29.2 percent considered themselves Christian. During the democratic transition, Christian groups

were more active than the Confucian groups who were demanding democracy in the 1980s. Moreover, liberal intellectuals who pushed democratization in both South Korea and Taiwan received their education in the West.

Second, one significant, but less emphasized, transformation is the retreat of Confucianism as a state ideology. One of the reasons why contemporary Confucianism can co-exist with democracy in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan is that Confucianism has retreated from politics and become a doctrine of private life, as demonstrated by the Confucian heart-mind doctrine developed in Hong Kong and Taiwan in the 1980s. When the political value of Confucianism receded, a Confucian personal ethic and customs indeed helped to build democratic institutions. In this way, Confucianism does not conflict with liberal democracy directly and the transformation of Confucianism has converged toward democracy. Contemporary Confucianism constitutes less of an obstacle to democracy than Islam, for example, because the former retreated from politics, while the latter is still very much part of the political machinery.

Third, center-peripheral relations come into play. The South Korean and Japanese version of peripheral Confucianism was found to be much easier to adapt to and then adopt because of the cultural and political changes that had occurred, rather than because of some fit with Chinese indigenous Confucianism. In South Korea and Japan, Confucianism can be more easily given up and discarded because abandonment does not carry with it issues of national pride, Confucianism having been "borrowed" from China in the first place. Thus, Korea was the first to abandon the examination system in East Asia and now is taking the lead in synthesizing liberalism and Confucianism in East Asia. It was likewise easy for Japan to borrow democratic institutions from the West because some elements of Confucianism could be abandoned quickly, without a sense of intellectual guilt. It has been much harder and slower for indigenous and orthodox Confucianism in China to accommodate democratic institutions than it was for the peripheral Confucianism of

Korea and Japan.

3. The Hybrid Model

Within modern representative institutions, there are Nominated Members of Parliament (NMP) in Singapore, and nonelected functional representatives in Hong Kong and in China. In particular, the NMP system can be seen as a modern revised version of Confucian remonstration crafted onto a modern parliamentary system. There is also hybridity in national and local politics. Bell articulates a Chinese model of Confucian democratic meritocracy, that is, "democracy at the local" and "meritocracy at the top."[29] By contrast, in South Korea, national democracy co-exists with a strong local Confucian culture in Andong, which has been the center of Confucianism since the ascent of the Joseon Dynasty.

On the surface, the existence of a variety of hybrids in real life confirms the validity of the hybrid model. Yet a deeper examination shows the school of hybridity is not impressive. At the intellectual level, many writings have just repeated what has been said before, such as the major theme of the necessity and feasibility of hybridity. Very few have designed experiments to test which kinds of hybridity are workable or unworkable. What is required is to study how democracy and Confucianism are blended to promote hybrid rigor and to avoid hybrid degeneration.

The author has been personally involved in deliberative democracy experiments in China for the last twelve years, which has provided a unique opportunity to reflect on the role of Confucianism in the hybrid model of Confucian consultative or deliberative democracy. The development of Chinese deliberative democracy in the last decade has

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[29] Bell, *The China Model*, 168.

drawn heavily on the Confucian tradition of public consultation, blended with Western theories of deliberative democracy and social science methodology for deliberative polling.[30] Take the example of Wenling city, in which, from 1996 to 2000, more than 1,190 deliberative and consultative meetings were held at the village level, 190 at the township level, and 150 in governmental organizations, schools, and business sectors. From 2005 to 2009, Zeguo township of Wenling city, Zhejiang Province, held a series of public consultations, utilizing deliberative polling techniques, which were directly inputted into the township budgeting process.[31] Such meetings are called *kentan*, meaning "sincere heart-to-heart discussions," imbued with a special local flavor drawn from Confucian tradition. In this mixed practice, Western deliberative democracy and Chinese Confucian elements make their own distinct and unique contributions. This practice of local deliberative democracy is neither purely a Chinese local phenomenon nor merely the result of Western influence.[32]

While it is a hybrid practice, the proportion of Confucian elements, however, is smaller. When the author helped the local officials to facilitate a deliberative forum on rural women's demands for equal payment,[33] the author was struck by the absence of Confucian language, the domination of individualist thinking among citizens, and the language of rights and equality in the official document. Some would demand high compensation by using the language of rights, while refusing to pay their contribution. This led to the postponement of some

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[30] Chen Shengyong, "The Native Resources of Deliberative Politics in China," in *The Search for Deliberative Democracy in China,* ed. Ethan Leib and Baogang He (New York: Palgrave, 2006).

[31] Baogang He, *Deliberative Democracy: Theory, Method and Practice* (Beijing: China's Social Science Publishers, 2008).

[32] Baogang He, "Deliberative Culture and Politics: The Persistence of Authoritarian Deliberation in China," *Political Theory* 42, no. 1 (February 2014): 58-81.

[33] Baogang He, "Deliberative Democracy and Deliberative Governance: Towards Constructing a Rational and Mature Civil Society," *Open Times,* no. 4 (2012): 23-36.

public projects at the expense of others and made it difficult to make these embryonic democratic institutions viable. At the same time, however, the resolution mechanism through villages' elders, families, and close social relations is still implemented in traditional ways.

In Wenling, villages have promoted Confucian principles through a public display of Confucian values and stories. However, apart from the elders' forum or committee, most deliberative institutions are related to the socialist system. Confucian deliberative democracy has not been fully established as a form of institutional hybridity; this means that Confucianism has not played a significant role in the hybrid model.

4. The Critical Model[34]

The empirical evidence that Confucianism plays a role in enhancing and improving democratic life is lacking or is not substantive in East Asia. The idea that Confucianism can improve democratic life is not new. Japanese Confucian scholars advocated such an idea when Japan introduced Western-style elections and parliament in 1890. Similarly, Taiwanese Confucian scholars held the same view in the 1980s when Taiwan embarked upon democratization. However, there is very little empirical evidence to support the claim that Confucianism has played a significant role in improving and enhancing democratic life. Ironically, with democratization aided by the independence movement, Confucianism has been marginalized and even regarded by some radical DPP members as belonging to the culture of outsiders.

Take another example of Sun Yatsen's theory of the five powers. To improve democratic institutions, Sun institutionalized the Confucian examination and control system in the modern democratic constitution. However, this mix of a Western division of powers with Confucian

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[34] Makeham, *Lost Soul*, 265; Jiang Qing, *Zhengzhi ruxue*.

practice did not pass the test of history. While the three divisions of power operate in Taiwan, the Examination Yuan and Control Yuan became less important and were marginalized. For example, in the wake of democratization, the appointment of the chief justice was approved by the Legislative Yuan rather than Control Yuan.

Perhaps the introduction of a Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP) in Singapore can be regarded as evidence to support the claim that Confucianism can improve democratic life, as the NMP proposed a nonpartisan nomination and purely deliberative debate. However, it is arguable whether this NMP institution can be considered a Confucian or modern practice, or whether an NMP helps to improve party politics empirically. A cynical view is that the NMP was first used by the ruling party in 1990 to deal with an embarrassing image problem, as very few opposition party members were elected (two in 1984, one in 1988, and four in 1991) and the government needed a modicum of opposition voice to show that Singaporean democracy was working.

Confucian democratic perfectionism and public reason Confucianism[35] must be institutionalized yet their institutional designs must pass the knavery test, that is, they can survive and operate successfully if everyone is assumed to be knavish.[36] Confucian perfectionism might overestimate the good aspects of human nature, and overlook bargaining and material exchange in real politics. So-called "public reason Confucianism" is merely an ideal version; in the practice of public consultation or deliberation in Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and China, the traditional Confucian hierarchical culture inhibited the development of genuine deliberation, and the way in which ordinary

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[35] Joseph Chan, *Confucian Perfectionism: A Political Philosophy for Modern Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014); Sungmoon Kim, *Public Reason Confucianism: Democratic Perfectionism and Constitutionalism in East Asia* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[36] Baogang He, "Knavery and Virtue in Human Institutional Design," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 37, no. 4 (2003): 543-553.

people engage in public discussion is far from a normative prescription of Confucian public reasoning.

In the near future, there may be a test of whether the Confucian-centric approach might be a source of a "civilizational clash." East Asia is comparatively better than Islamic countries at developing coexistence with Western civilization. Among many reasons, perhaps, one is the retreat of Confucianism from political life into private life. In addition, Confucianism does not pose a political challenge to the Western order. East Asia does not have any political party using the term Confucianism. In contrast, there are many parties using the adjectives "Islamic." Without a political party, Confucianism has a limited role in political life. Moreover, unlike Iranian constitutionalism in which the religious leaders hold ultimate authority over the elected president, Confucianism does not enjoy a privileged place in any constitution in China, Taiwan, South Korea, or Japan. The hybrid model of Iranian democracy is a combination of spiritual authority with elected secular authority. Such a pattern of political hybridity does not exist in Northeast Asia. The hybrid model of Confucian democracy has different features and characteristics.

However, some Confucian activists might push the Confucian-centric approach into an extreme position, arguing that the refusal of democracy is necessary to defend a Confucian way of political life. If China not only promotes its self-realization and appreciation of Confucian civilization, but also promotes a new political order which is largely based upon a nonelected legislative body of Confucian scholars and upon the contested notion of Way (道) as an alternate source of legitimacy, this might constitute a new source of civilizational conflict. If this happens, it only will provide further evidence of the conflict model, rather than prove the validity of the critical model.

IV. Conclusion

Empirically, the conflict model is much more accurate than the other

models. It is largely true and relevant today, and it can even apply to the other three models, that is, all three models have some element of conflict or tension between Confucianism and democracy.

The compatibility argument does not disprove the conflict model. The co-existence of democracy and Confucian society in Taiwan and South Korea has depended on the condition that Confucianism has retreated into the private sphere. Under the seemingly smooth combination of democratic and Confucian elements, there are still subtle tensions. One may argue that the apparent compatibility is plausible simply because the core areas of conflict between democracy and Confucianism have been overcome by cultural transformation and the retreat of Confucianism into private life. Therefore, at a deeper level, the compatibility model supports key aspects of the conflict model.

Despite many scholars having pursued a variety of hybrids between Confucianism and democracy, most remain at the point of intellectual advocacy, many repeat what has been said earlier (the core argument is the same with variation of language, terms, source, argumentation, and style), and most have not engaged yet in political experiments. Moreover, the hybrid model lacks clarity with respect to what dominates in the mixed model and how different elements operate in practice. There is no strong empirical evidence of working mechanisms. Behind the hybrid, there are still tensions between democracy and Confucianism.

The critical model goes beyond the conflict and compatibility models. It offers a fresh perspective by reversing the conventional wisdom about the negative or secondary role of Confucianism and reconstructing Confucian democracy. The critical model can play dual and conflicting roles: on the one hand, it can develop and promote a desirable Confucian democracy, yet, on the other, it may be used to inhibit democracy if it is co-opted as a narrow definitive feature of Chinese nationalism. If the critical model were co-opted to suit the predilections of the authoritarian state, the validity of the conflict model would be enhanced.

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