Impact of globalization on Confucianism in contemporary Chinese society

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Term paper
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Introduction

In the modern world the phenomenon of globalization influences almost all aspects of humans’ everyday life. Confucianism didn’t avoid the influence of globalization aspects as well. Such aspects of globalization as rapid development of communicational technologies, transport, deeper interconnections between different states on cultural and economic levels, development of international organizations and business impose numerous effects on Confucianism and its dimensions in contemporary Chinese world.

I think that this topic is significant because examining modern changes in Confucianism, brought by globalization, can to some extent help us to understand changes that happen in contemporary Chinese society, especially in life of individuals, which reflect to the political behavior trends of the state. It will become evident that Marxist ideology is losing its fashion in the society and Confucianism can play partially replacement role. At the same time I will show that official acceptance of Confucianism and its recent institutionalization as a religion has features of a new state ideology. I will also provide an evidence of contribution of globalization aspects into rapid development of this phenomenon. I am going to show how modern phenomenon of Confucianism influences Chinese society today, and discuss future perspectives of its development.

First I will examine major cultural values brought by Confucian philosophy in the Chinese society. Filial piety and role submission are the major cultural features of individuals and nation generally that separates it from the Western world. Next, I will examine the phenomenon of neo-Confucianism, see how Confucianism evolved and revived in contemporary China. I will look at the interactions of Confucianism and the state and public and examine how
globalization aspects and modernity influenced these interactions. Finally, I will look at modern phenomenon of Confucianism in a religious dimension, as religion can serve as a reflection of modern cultural and social trends in a contemporary society. I will investigate to what extent Confucianism can be used in religious dimension and possible future of its development in this dimension.

I will argue that:

- Globalization aspects didn’t make much changes in the understanding such cultural values as filial piety and role submission. At the same time these aspects contributed to diversifying of roles. Generally, these cultural features are very relevant in contemporary Chinese society.

- Globalization aspects and political conditions influenced much the perception of Confucianism by the state and public. It contributed into diversification of dimensions of Confucianism.

- There is a high possibility that Confucianism may become a civil religion, which allows people to accept this phenomenon with a variety of perceptions on individual level. Because there will never be a determined and universal explanation for religion, there must be a freedom in determining it at least personally.

**Filial piety and role submission in a contemporary Chinese society**

To understand the behavior of Chinese society and state, its reaction on globalization aspects, the way how nation deals with modernity challenges, and the difference between Western world, it is essential to understand core cultural values of Chinese society which largely influence its behavioral features. The core cultural features of Chinese nationalities
can belong to the Traditional culture values group, which is largely based on the Confucian values. Filial piety occupies a large space in Confucian philosophy and is considered to be one of the core features that influences Chinese society and individuals, besides, separates it from the Western world. There are five traditional forms of behavior under filial piety that still influence individuals in contemporary Chinese society, they are: support of one’s parents; honor, revere, and obey to one’s parents; producing heirs; ancestor worship; and offering memorial service and sacrifice for dead parents.

Submission of roles, which has its roots in filial piety, is another very important cultural feature for modern Chinese society. It is stated that submission of roles (Hsiao) does not connote power; instead it connotes the injunction, “submit the roles of life.” This cultural feature relates to an individual subordination and obedience not only in his family circle, but on a general level, in a global society. Thus, it is possible to say that if this feature was already applied on a global level long time ago; there is a little influence on it due to globalization aspects. Hence, it becomes obvious that the concept of filial piety and submission of roles can be applied not only to analysis of family life, but also to analysis of contemporary society.

I cannot see any structural difference which globalization aspects could bring into these cultural values. At the same time effects of modernity and globalization contributed into formal replacement of roles in for example business or governmental circles.

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Phenomenon of Confucianism in modern China

Whether cultural values constituted by Confucian philosophy stay relevant in contemporary Chinese society, the phenomenon itself is highly influenced by globalization and political aspects. In this part I will focus on modern interpretations of Confucianism, the role of this phenomenon in contemporary Chinese world, and examine most vivid dimensions in which it is perceived by the state and public today. I will show that Confucianism can be used not only as a philosophy in academic circles, but also as a variety of instruments used by the state or in business. These features, at the same time will illustrate how Confucianism found its solutions on questions of Western modernity and revived in recent years.

Confucianism plays an ambiguous role on a contemporary arena. Some people think that Confucianism is used by the government to support authoritarianism in a dimension of new national ideology, others argue for Confucian democracy, while some people consider it irrelevant. Generally, if we apply this role to PRC, we can see that some scholars see the role of Confucianism as its use by CCP as justification of defending of conserving Chinese culture on one hand, and more liberal development of culture through Confucianism, on the other. Some scholars make distinction between new Confucianism and earlier one; it states that the difference is in the ability of new Confucianism to respond to Western modernity; a response that is culturalist in asserting the primacy of culture and explanation of problems posed by Western modernity to China, and in solutions it provides.

“Confucianism testifies to the role of traditions in shaping the modernization process and defining the meaning of modernity: modernization is culturally differentiated, and there are multiple modernities rather than a singular modernity defined by the West.”


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The idea that Confucianism constitutes the variety of modernities makes Confucianism transform into a variety of instrument that have to deal with finding the solutions to the questions of these modernities. In other words, this interpretation of Confucianism divides it to different dimensions, each of which has to deal with certain modernity in its own hypostasis.

One of the vivid dimensions of phenomenon which is officially supported by state is Confucianism as a “national learning”. “Traditional Culture” became the core of curriculum in the patriotic education in China. In this sense there is a high possibility that Confucianism may become a new state ideology, replacing Marxism, at the same time supporting authoritarianism in the country. I basically agree with those scholars who do not see Confucianism as a new CCP’s ideology, because Confucianism is already integrated into ideology of the capitalist globalization.

“National learning” becomes complicit with both the power bloc at home and the ideology of global capitalism abroad. In this sense, “national learning” and global neo-Confucianism are ideological bedfellows under the same roof of a nationalism that debunks the revolutionary legacy in the service of global capitalism.”


Another dimension of Confucianism which emerged from the development of business is its use as a corporate culture. A lot of scholars and respected businessman state that Confucianism, as a corporate culture, contributed much into the East Asian economic miracle. The instillation of role submission, perception of the company as a family, piety to the state and bosses helped to keep the working hours long and the wages low. In this dimension, indeed, Confucianism is used majorly among Asian corporations; but as the diffusion of this phenomenon is global, the influence of it on business becomes stronger in East Asia generally.

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8 - The Pacific Century: Big Business and the Ghost of Confucius, Video, 1992 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3OeQcOr0syQ
In this paper I would like to focus on religious dimension of Confucianism, because among other its dimensions, this one is reflecting more clearly the social changes, cultural trends and individual’s needs in self-cultivation and ideology.

Confucianism in its religious dimension

Confucianism in the Chinese world today remains an ambiguous phenomenon in terms of its perception as a religion, teaching, philosophy or a set of ethical rules. Phenomenon of Confucianism went through a lot of barriers and difficulties with its perception from the state and society before becoming an officially recognized Institutional religion in China, at the same time in other Chinese nation’s states like Taiwan it was already used as a semi-religion for a long time at schools, by government, or by various sects. Nowadays establishing Confucius temples, worshipping, and promoting religious rituals became a usual practice in China. Largely because of official support of the state and individuals a lot of new rituals like wedding ritual in a Confucian temple, writing pray cards (which has its roots in Japanese Shinto religion), or worshipping Confucius in a way how it is done in diffused religions in China have emerged recently. The revival of Confucianism as a religion clearly indicates the influence of globalization aspects on Confucianism and on religion generally in China. The impacts can be described as follows:

- Religion itself and Confucianism particularly becomes more relevant than diverse. At the same time its practices diversifying rapidly with the regard to current changing conditions.

- Globalization challenged the state to become more tolerant to religion.

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- Globalization reshapes religious practices, helps to find new aims in believing, challenges to negotiate with the state on new terms.

- In case of Confucianism, globalization challenged the state to recognize it officially and challenged the society to rethink its status and accept it as an orthodox religion.

Speaking of the future of Confucianism in a religious dimension, there are three possible most popular permutations of Confucianism in contemporary China. First, (and it is a reality today) is that Confucianism can be an Institutional religion like those which are officially recognized by the state. Second, it can take more dominant position and become a ‘national or state religion’ (in this case it should accomplish 3 tasks: promote cultural heritage, mobilize society, and recreate a system or set of new institutions). Third, is something between first two options, Confucianism can cast as “civil religion”12.

I think that among these permutations, the most dangerous might become if Confucianism will become a “national teaching” or “national learning”, as discussed in the previous part. In this case, with its development, it can lead the country into another nationalistic trap, or to a next shift of an ideology; in both cases with such a political regime there will be no positive influence on interactional level between the state and the society or on the international level. Besides, I don’t think that it is likely to happen because not all people will find Confucianism as purely religious movement, and if such a shift is likely to happen it will become easy to find parallel strings in modern Chinese history, in other words the process will look very politicized, which will not find much support on a public level.

Whether the first option is already a reality, most likely option for transformation is becoming a “civil religion”, which allows people to accept this movement with a variety of perceptions on individual level. Because there will never be a determined and universal

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explanation for religion, there must be a freedom in determining it at least for yourself. Thus, the form of religion which allows people a wider range of its understanding is more likely to survive.

Indeed, Confucianism is a universal phenomenon in a sense that it could be used as a part of national ideology and as an instrument for self-cultivation. Such combination of intensive promotion of Confucianism as new Institutional religion with features of self-cultivation and national ideology and integration of it into corporate culture with the help of globalization processes unsurprisingly lead to emergence of new ways of practicing Confucianism. Thus, we can see the growing influence of Confucianism in contemporary Chinese society, and from my point of view it is likely to exceed. The problem which might arise from the combination of using Confucianism as a part of states ideology in terms of “national learning” and its injection into religious dimension may result into emergence of a tremendous nationalistic institutional mechanism that might be hard to be controlled even by the state.

Conclusion

This research paper showed the relevance of phenomenon of Confucianism in contemporary Chinese society. It showed that the aspects of globalization didn’t influence much such core cultural values as filial piety and role submission which have its roots in Confucian philosophy. According to interpretations of neo Confucianists it became possible to draw a parallel between globalization aspects and multiple modernities, which at the same time contributed to the diversification of Confucianism dimensions and perception of this phenomenon in a variety of hypostasis. I showed three most vivid dimensions of Confucianism today: “national learning”, Confucianism as a corporate culture, and the religious dimension of the phenomenon. I focused primarily on the religious dimension because it can indicate the current social moods, cultural trends and reflects individual’s needs in self-cultivation and ideology. I argued that this dimension is the most rapidly growing and developing movement.
Confucianism, supported as an institutional religion by the state, in a combination with other dimensions may lead to establishment of a “civil religion”. In this case Confucianism may obtain new interpretations and perceptions, thus grow its influence on the society. Generally, I stated that globalization aspects didn’t have much impact on cultural values brought by Confucius, and this is one of the reasons why Confucianism is still relevant; at the same time I argued, that its ideological side experienced much of the impact. It experiences a diffusion of its perceptions among individuals and in official circles. But can we say that modern status of Confucianism with a variety of dimensions is a transition period? If the phenomenon will transform into a “civil religion” will the interpretations change and the multiplicity of modernities will become limited?

References:


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3OeQcOr0syQ