Confucianism in modern China

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CC6307 The Changing Chinese Institutions / Professor XIAO Hong
4/4/2014
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Introduction

For the past few decades, various countries in Asia such as China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore have experienced remarkable development and growth. At the same time, there have been active studies on the Asian developments which focused on Confucianism. The tendency for Confucian movement and traditional cultural admiration can be seen in both government and people especially in modern China.

This paper attempts to analyze the situation and the role of Confucianism in modern China from various angles. This review will explain the significance of Confucianism in modern China and examine the “practice of Confucianism” from three points of view. The three points are political, Chinese awareness and social or market economy. In this modern age, the core values of Confucianism have widely changed due to factors such as social problems in modern China and globalization. We will clearly show that the meaning and form of Confucianism has changed and evolved into a variety of forms by touching social problems and situations in modern China, the theoretical meaning of Confucianism and an opinion survey study.

Discussion

China’s remarkable economic progress has been supported by various factors such as cheap and plentiful labor and advancements in science and technology. This progress has resulted in a rapid increase in the number of high-income class population of China. Besides that, this rapid growth has also resulted in a lot of problems such as serious corruption,
lowering of morals, increasing of income gaps, high unemployment and environmental pollution.

Confucianism in modern society

Since the country adopted an economic reform which opened China’s economic markets in 1978, it has been drastically changed Chinese values. It is related to Deng Xiao Ping’s (邓小平) theory called “the idea of making some regions rich faster than other areas.” Okazaki (2004) argues that the reform to move forward to transition to a free market economy causes the Chinese people to have low moral values which raises the tendencies to revive traditional culture or Confucianism. This is also brought by both the Chinese people who have distrust in the nation and the government that is trying to improve the situation. From 1990s onwards, they continue to face challenges to integrate traditional culture and creating a new Chinese nationalism in both official and unofficial sectors.

Ogata (2004) discussed about Jiang Qing’s (蒋庆) New Confucian movement and Kang Xiaoguang’s (康晓光) theory of Confucianism as a state religion. Jiang Qing (蒋庆) is a contemporary Confucian in China. He criticized the New Confucianism which he claimed to be influenced by Western liberal democracy and proposed an alternative known as Constitutional Confucianism or Political Confucianism. His proposal for the Constitutional Confucianism is based on GongyangZhuan (公羊传); a commentary in the classical ancient Chinese book Chungiu. He argues that political and social problems in China are to be solved based on authentic Confucianism.

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1 The theory called "market-opening reform policy (改革开放)" was kept up Deng Xiao Ping who was head The National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (中国人民政治协商会议全国委员会). In this theory, He aimed at opening China to foreign investment, the global market and limited private competition.
On the other hand, Kang Xiaoguang’s idea focuses on the cultural aspect of Confucianism. According to him, Confucianism as a “modern religion” in the 21st century does not exclude Western culture, but an integration of both Asian and Western cultures. He also argues that it should be part of the strategy or cultural nationalism. In addition, Ogata (2004) contended that the trinity relationship of ethnicity, culture and nation is the product of modernity and should be used as a good opportunity to restructure and to adapt to modern social life by reviving Confucianism as a “modern religion”. His theory observes cultural authority as “cultural resources” which can confront the ideologies of modernized nation which spreads not only among Confucians but also through the whole nation.

According to Huntington (1996), cultural confrontations between societies were one of the main causes for oppositions in the modern world after the Cold War. He also adds that each culture plays an important role in international politics. These advancements of cultural diversity were also used to extend political influences and governmental actions were not anymore only directed by power, benefit and interests but also include culture. He also proposed “regiona lism” as one of the reasons or cultural expansion. The development of regionalism in the recent years can be seen around the world as cultural conflicts and cultural revivals. Religion revivalism also occurs in every society. New attitudes toward religion were brought into the modern society through this way. It is thought that these movements were caused by factors such as an opposition towards societal reformation that was already modern, resisting westernization and the drop in influence of ideologies by the end of the Cold War. These tendencies are highly remarkable throughout Asia and he has indicated many similarities in modern China.

Guohong (2013) uses the Confucius Institute (孔子学院) as an example of the spread of Confucianism. The Confucius Institute is a Chinese institute that has established many educational institutions such as universities all over the world. The number these institutions
are rapidly increasing and there are over 280 of them in 2010. In her article, her analyses proved that China is beginning to reconsider their culture with economic development and seeking toward a cultural power called “soft power” to meet economic targets.

These changes can also be seen in modern China’s domestic policy. Okazaki (2004) takes Wen Jiabao’s (温家宝) 2003 lecture in the University of Harvard- entitled “Directing the eyes toward China”. Wen Jiabao made reference to traditional Chinese culture and said that “Chinese people have great traditional cultures from Kongzi (孔子) to Sun Yat-sen (孙文). They have valuable democratic features. They carry out important tasks to protect the nation and to connect society.” This shows that he places a high value to Confucianistic ideologies and it is now thought to be the most effective way to measure and shape up an organized society.

The Confucian Society

Many literatures have concluded that the Chinese are still influenced by Confucius’ teachings. Little, & Reed (1989) states that a Confucian society is a society that values duty more than rights, places importance on people rather than law, value social order between people more than material possessions, and knows the concept of complementary or reciprocal relation. Being wary of westernization or individualism is an inherent feature of this society.

Hong (2005) showed that such features remain deeply rooted in present Chinese ideologies and society. The human rights policy preferences between Chinese and Westerners were compared based on the World Values Survey (WVS) with responses from four

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2 Weiming, Tu (1994). "Historical Significance of the Confucian Discourse".
Tak Sing Cheung, Hoi Man Chan1, Kin Man Chan1, King, Ambrose Y. C., Chi Yue Chiu, Chung Fang Yang (2006). “How Confucian are Contemporary Chinese? Construction of an Ideal Type and its Application to Three Chinese Communities”
countries (China, Britain, United States and Sweden) which was carried out from 1990-93. The analysis of the article focused on the policy preferences in the areas of “social security and individual autonomy”, “social equality and personal freedom”, “respect for authority and individual development”, and “the power of the state and the choice of the individual”.

She concluded that there were consistent and important cross-cultural differences in policy preferences. The Chinese were more concerned with social and economic rights and they value social order and economic development more than Westerners do. On the other hand, they were much less concerned with political and civil rights. The Chinese also value social equality more than individual freedom compared to the Westerners. At the same time, a great majority of both Chinese and Westerners are supportive of the human rights movement. However, the Chinese showed lower support and have a higher disapproval rate for the movement compared Westerners. The Chinese showed a much lower support for individual development compared to an overwhelming majority of Westerners that supports it.

This article clearly shows that the differences between Chinese and Westerners could be explained in terms of “Confucianism”, “Theory of collectivism and individualism” and “Modernization theory”. The Chinese’s concerns with social order and economic growth clearly override other development goals for the country which is contrastive to the Westerners that are more concerned with shared governance as an important social order. This Chinese’s concern and attitude for social order is surely derived from Confucianism.

This social order still can be seen in the modern Chinese society. The most typical is filial piety. Filial piety is at the center of Chinese philosophical discourse and is deeply rooted in a mainly Confucian culture. Li (1997) describes this social order as a requirement for perfect virtue (仁), self-realization of being filial is not only for the sake of our parents but it is also for our own sake, and Confucian duty ethics. Li also states that the law in China
states that parents have a legal obligation to raise their young, and grown children have a legal obligation to support their aged parents. It reflects a Chinese social value which proves that the teachings of Confucianism influence the Chinese nation and much of their social order or duty are unconsciously based on it.

Conclusion

In the course of my paper, it should be become clear that there are two sides in Confucianism; as social and political tools and the source of people’s way of thinking which still lived from old times. Though the two sides seem to be quite contrary as modern Confucianism has such diversity. As tools, it is very practical and restrictive which is useful the sake of solving real problems in modern China. It has nothing to do with studies or theory of Confucianists of modern times and has a strong influence in the postwar period. On the other hand, the distrust for government has grown among the Chinese public hence they are turning to Confucianism as religion for guidance.

This situation shows that modern China has struggled to be consistent in both keeping economic growth and construction of new principles of morality or public policy. Various authors mentioned that Confucianism can change modern China in both positive and negative ways. It is important that Confucianism should be considered more in various aspects.
Bibliography


