Reseach Proposal-The influences of Confucianism in modern Chinese society.

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1. Topic of inquiry

The influences of Confucianism in modern Chinese society.

2. Research Question

Is Confucianism an effective measure to strengthen governmental administration?

3. Rationale

There are some signs of revival of Confucianism for the past few decades in modern China. One of the factors for this phenomenon is the decline in the unifying power of communism after the Cold war with the introduction of a free market economy. This then resulted in a rapid development in China’s economy which also resulted in various problems in the Chinese society such as serious corruption, lowering of morals, increasing income gaps, high unemployment and environmental pollution.

These problems forced the Chinese government to consider a new ideology in order to calm public dissent and to regain support. Thus, Confucianism was chosen as it is easily understood and accepted by the Chinese people. Moreover, it can also be used to promote patriotism among the people. The Chinese government’s use of Confucian thought as one of the means to strengthen their administration was accomplished by maintaining social order through conventional morals and ruling benevolently over the people.

Is the promotion of Confucianism an effective breakthrough for the modern Chinese society’s development and stability? In this research, I will attempt to show clearly the effectiveness and shortcomings by analyzing actual cases for both the government and the people. In addition, I will analyze the effectiveness of Confucianism not only as a political tool but also as a religion.
4. Methodology

Existing research will be used to examine the effectiveness and shortcomings of the safeguard measures based on Confucianism from various perspectives and also analyze the actual social system, campaigns and problems within the civil society. In addition, an opinion survey of the Chinese people on when and how the Chinese people felt the influence of Confucianism in their daily lives will also be conducted.

5. Evidence

The effectiveness of Confucianism can be analyzed from three perspectives. The perspectives are Confucianism’s complement with socialism, complement to the lack of religious faith and providing justifications for a bureaucratic and an authoritarian management system.

5.1. The Chinese Government Policies and Confucianism?

Firstly, the relevance between the management of the communists and Confucianism will be discussed. There are a many communist ideas that are based on Confucianism in the political party’s platform. The few that are emphasized are “Well-off society (小康社会)”, “Harmonious society (和谐社会)” and “Governing by virtue (以德治国)”\(^1\).

5.1.1. Well-off society (小康社会)

A “well-off society” is a Chinese classical concept that basically means a life of leisure. It is a standard of living where people can obtain the necessary amount of food,

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clothing and shelter together with cultural and leisure time. Jiang Zemin (江泽民)\(^2\) declared that China has achieved the primary stage of a well-off society in 2001 and will be “a complete well-off society” in 2010. This objective has been handed down to Hu Jintao (胡锦涛)\(^3\) and Xi Jinping (习近平)\(^4\).

5.1.2. Harmonious society (和諧社会)

After Hu Jintao’s administration, the concept of a “harmonious society” has been emphasized. They proposed a guiding principle of a “balanced and sustainable development” to fulfill the concept. Specifically, there are five key tenets or ‘harmonies’ of development which are “harmony of urban and rural areas”, “harmony of regional development”, “harmony of economy and society”, “harmony of human and nature” and “harmony of domestic and overseas areas”. Nivison (1996) argues that this concept of harmony is based on the Confucianism thought of he (和).

5.1.3. Governing by virtue (以德治国)

Yan (2011) showed that in order to maintain social stability, it not only requires heteronomy (punishment to illegal actions) but also autonomy and morality. However, the decline of moral sense has been obvious in modern China. According to Bell (2008), it caused the decline of communism and allowed utilitarianism to gain favor. In 2000, Jiang Zemin said that moral standards and laws should be combined and taken into account in

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\(^2\) Jiang Zemin (江,*民*) is a Chinese politician. He served as the Secretary General of the Communist Party of China from 1989 to 2002, President of the People's Republic of China from 1993 to 2003 and Chairman of the Central Military Commission from 1989 to 2004.

\(^3\) Hu Jintao(胡锦涛) is a Chinese politician and served as a paramount leader of China from 2002 to 2012, the offices of Secretary General of the Communist Party, President of the People's Republic and Chairman of the Central Military Commission.

\(^4\) Xi Jinping (习近平) is a Chinese politician. He served the Secretary General of the Communist Party of China, the President of the People's Republic of China, and the Chairman of the Central Military Commission.
making state policies hence “governing by virtue”. Secretary General Hu Jintao also handed down this policy and proposed a moral standard called “The Eight Honors and Eight Shames (八荣八耻)

Yan (2006) from Xinhua News Agency provided a translation of this moral concept. “This socialist core value system was determined as importance of creating a socialist harmonious society and the Eight Honors and Shames are as follows: Love the country; do it no harm, Serve the people; never betray them, Follow science; discard superstition, Be diligent; not indolent, Be united, help each other; make no gains at other's expense, Be honest and trustworthy; do not sacrifice ethics for profit, Be disciplined and law-abiding; not chaotic and lawless, Live plainly, work hard; do not wallow in luxuries and pleasures.”

The traditional Confucian concept regarding honor and disgrace can been seen in this guiding principle.

5.2. Complement with socialism

The similarities between Confucianism and socialism can be seen in modern China’s official policies such as “socialism” or “Chinese market economy”. On the other hand, there were tendencies to reevaluate Chinese traditional values, especially Confucianism. Official Communistic slogans such as “The honor to serve people”, “The honor to respect science”, “The honor to be honest and keeping trust” and “To value fidelity above profits” can be seen everywhere. The first and second slogans are from the basic principles of socialism while the third and fourth are from Confucianism thought. It shows that socialism and Confucianism could very well be the two sides of a coin.
5.3. Complement to the lack of religious faith

Loden (2006) argues that modern China is currently facing a lack of religious faith among its people due to the rapid economic growth. Power and benefit becomes the major driving force that can influence people which brings along various problems such as corruption and large disparities between the rich and the poor. In addition, it is also resulting in the rise in mental problems that are straining relationships and the people are losing faith in communistic faith. In order to overcome these negative effects of rapid economic growth both the government and the people have turned to Confucianism.

5.4. Justification for a bureaucratic and authoritarian management system

The Chinese communists have strengthened their bureaucratic and authoritarian management system through the one-party rule by taking in only the elites and they try to improvement the welfare of its citizens in order to gain support from them. According to Bell (2003), such method of governing has its roots from Confucianism where it is ideal that the government is composed of wise men.

In spite of that, the misalignment between the government and the people continues to grow and confrontations are also increasing between them. To put a stop to the problem, the government has placed emphasis on democracy and stated its stand that is: “power for people, sympathy for people, benefits for people”. According to Goldin (2011), they have inherited and developed Confucian democracy that has a definition where people is first, nation is second and a monarch is last. In addition, the Confucian perspective focuses on the leader’s motive regardless of how the governmental position was obtained. It is much more convenient for the Communists as they are able to avoid a fair and equitable election.
6. Significance

This research attempts to analyze the relationship between modernization and Confucianism and to propose a concrete image or example in the society. In addition, it will clearly show the significance and essence of Confucianism in modern China. This research will also consider social changes in other Asian countries not only as the result of economic development but also as a part of cultural reconstruction.

Bibliography


