



Confucian Adaptation and Vitality in the Twenty First Century
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作者: Mary Phillips

Abstract:

Historically Confucian contributions placed great emphasis on balance between old and new. In the context of theories of development and social change during this time of cultural reconstruction, this study explains how Classical Chinese intellectual debates and tensions continue to be relevant to and how they differ from experiences of and models formulated by the Western world. This paper makes the argument that Confucianism, more than any other intellectual, religious or ideological discipline, is the thread running through Chinese identity that is central to the unification of Chinese civilization over the past millennia, and will strive to show how Confucianism can find compatibility with the Post Modern dialogue and thus influences change.

Introduction

Having survived brutal attempts at total eradication, beginning with the Qin, and most recently as a result of the intrusion of Western Values, do Confucian ideals remain pervasive in Chinese conscience at the turn of the Twenty-First Century? Perry Link states it simply, "It would be naïve to suppose that such a long tradition has suddenly disappeared."¹ This paper explores how to conceive of a Confucian model that challenges Western theories of development and social change. The Post Modern era has raised many fundamental questions concerning the relationship between culture, politics and social stability which has resulted in a period of cultural reconstruction.² Today, technological advances, the Chinese assimilation of Western ideology, and changes in Chinese economic, political, and social policies are bringing the East and West to a new level of contact and communication. As Cold War assumptions fade and new paradigms emerge, the question is how Confucian adaptation generates China's new vitality and dynamism in the Twenty First Century. The hypothesis of this paper is that a clear and identifiable pattern of development emerges from the pages of Confucian intellectual thought, one that can be applied to the Post-Modern dialogue. This study suggests that Chinese development, up to and including the present, can be explained by the Confucian ideological superstructure."³ We will describe how the Confucian contribution places great emphasis on balance between old and new. This study contends that the rise of the Zhou ideal, and the persistent drive to unify and perfect society within a fixed geography of vast resources are embodied in Confucian humanism which remains extant.⁴ Thus, we will show how China's transition to modernity is being pursued in a uniquely Chinese fashion by comparing and contrasting it to the Weberian model and by illustrating how Confucian humanism and the Global humanitarian movement are compatible. Drawing on core Confucian assumptions, it will be argued that China's transition is following a longitudinal pattern that previously paralleled the dynastic cycle, and that modern development in China has been and will continue to be different from any other development model commonly expounded by Western social scientists. Confucianism is not the only Chinese worldview: however, because it has been and continues to be operative in Chinese identity and is defined by assumptions that affect social, political, and

economic stability, mobility and change, this study considers it more than any other Chinese world view to be the driving model of change. This paper considers Chinese identity inseparable from Confucian values. While the Marxist ideology is overarching in Chinese society at this juncture in time and space, it is beyond the scope of this paper because it is Western. Our perspective is to consider how indigenous Chinese thought is the ongoing core that drives change in China. The challenge has been to explore Confucianism in terms of power and change in relation to Western development models, in spite of the cleavage between Chinese and Western thought.

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