



Confucian Adaptation and Vitality in the Twenty First Century

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Tang Tsou explains how China had to solve in decades problems that the West encountered and dealt with serially over the centuries: commercial revolution, industrial revolution, the Enlightenment, political revolutions, and the more recent, incremental changes and reforms within the political, social, and economic realms.²⁰

Ultimately, this study suggests that the Confucian model of self-cultivation accounts for Chinese collective consciousness, identity and cultural values. Further, while other ideologies have had an impact, including indigenous contending schools (particularly, Legalism and Daoism) as well as foreign ideological influences (notably, Buddhism and the more recent Enlightenment mentality) this evidence suggests that Confucianism is more influential in terms of power, social mobility and change. Self-cultivation is the crucial concept in the Confucian model, and this research shows that it is central to social and political development. The critical point of departure is that the Confucian assumption of the self did not engender an idea of self-interest as it is thought of in Western individualism or democratic liberalism.²¹

The intention of this conceptual framework is to link Confucianism to social structure, even though China was at no time ideologically homogenous; and some discussion of contending schools is important to our argument. Furthermore, these ideas and actions are extant in Chinese collective consciousness today, regardless of whether the Chinese consider them "Confucian." Our work supports the claim that with the Song advent of the Neo-Confucian link of state ideology and the literati scholar-officials to positions of government, the ideal of self-cultivation and the actions identified above permeated all of society from the top down and worked toward harmonious relationships. Although the highly contentious debates between scholars within the Confucian school are acknowledged, this study attempts to identify the social phenomenon of the scholar tradition, as the uniquely Chinese cultural identity that remains extant in the memory, consciousness, and habits of Chinese people; and that it is manifested in social and political reform.

In Sum

The Post Modern dialogue is useful in explaining how Confucian ideals remain pervasive in Chinese conscience at the turn of the Twenty-First Century. This study offers evidence of a pattern of harmonic reform, syncretism, and cultural recovery based on parallels to the dynastic cycle and intellectual shifts. Set in a long historical context, this pattern was and continues to be in response a contingency of accidents in time and space that manifest a succession of chaos and collapse, whether the result of inferior of inferior interior rule, or territorial intrusions. The concern here has been the pattern of intellectual response, not a survey of dynastic rise demise.²² The remarkable aspect we find is that on each occasion of dynastic collapse, order and unity over this large land mass was eventually restored in some form by the reinstatement of the Confucian

system. The pattern is in stark contrast to the rise and fall of Western empires that emerged as economic power centers, then collapsed, followed by the rise of a new cultural economic center in another geography in a concession of points moving westward on the globe---Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Rome, Europe, and on to the Americas. In the case of China, the centralized core continues to survive after a succession of intrusions

The Post Modern context of humanitarianism has spawned new social conscience.

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