

THREE ASPECTS OF ASIAN VALUES

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Are Asian Values good or not? Our question starts from this simple and clear point. Before the 'Support of International Monetary Fund' 1997, Asian Values were evaluated as an exemplary and future-oriented social and cultural case by Western scholars. They were surprised at Asian economical development, and want to ask what makes Asian so industrious, faithful and cooperative. Finally they found the answer from the cultural differences between Asians and Westerners-that difference was Confucianism, which most Asian countries inherited from long ago.

'Four small dragons' (Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and South Korea) as they are called actually have a kind of similarity. Although on the point of a philosophical view Confucianism is not a 'very' long tradition in Asia because enormous Buddhist influence has remained strong in the middle of the 10th centuries, everyone is influenced with Confucianism even in the recent time. Confucianism, of course, involved Confucius and his thought, but in this case correctly means Neo-Confucianism which could be representative by Chu Tsi (Zhu Xi: 1130-1200).

Neo-Confucianism was very powerful for after 15th century people, it emphasizes control of emotions, self-cultivation and rites within metaphysical principles. We can call the philosophical tendency of that period 'Fundamental Confucianism'. Notwithstanding, Neo-Confucianism was secondary. It was a little far from original Confucianism. In short Neo-Confucianists wanted to build their own world over the Buddhist remnants like practical asceticism, for example, 'Calm Seat' (Jing Zuo) in Neo-confucian word is correspondent to 'Seat Zen/dhyana' (Zuo Chan) in Buddhism. When Westerners watched Asian developments at first glance, they caught this kind of cultural features and defined it as 'Asian Value'.

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Actually the word of ‘Asian Value’ became a new name of Confucianism among the ‘four small dragons’. However there is a secret garden which was made by Lee Kwan Yew, the Prime Minister of Singapore. He wanted to justify his long-term seizure of power, so he began to promote Asia’s own value which was difficult for Western people to understand. He loved his country very much, at the same time he loved his chair of power.

I remember some scholars were invited to Singapore and had a good chance to proclaim the value of Confucianism as one of the Asian traditional inheritances. For instance, Tu Wei-ming is the most famous scholar who persists in promoting ‘Asian Values’. He advocated it as ‘The Third development of Confucianism’: the first development belonged to Confucius; the second belonged to Neo-Confucianism¹; Now is the third period of Confucian development, he thinks. Tu Wei-ming’s project was very issuable and successful, as a result, many Asian Confucian Scholars and time-honored traditionalists were assentive to his advocacy.

Regrettably, however, the Asian monitorial crisis had no sooner occurred than the positive attitude to Asian Value changed. It was a really unbelievable situation. Westerners began to demonize the bad points of Asian Values: it has no creative thinking; it is a mechanism of oppression; it constrains innovations and so on. Why did they change their mind? What’s wrong with Asian people?

At that time I recognized that the consequent is very important and Westerners were scratching the surface of Confucianism. When Westerners were laying excessive emphasis on Asian Values, even I, an Asian, was in doubt about it because not a few *undevelopmental* Confucian countries were existing, for instance, China, Vietnam and North Korea.

One of the richest men in the world is George Soros who manages international Capital. He was a student of Karl Popper (1902-1994) a liberalistic philosopher who denied any kind of enemies against “Open Society”. The Korean former president Kim Dae Jung had to receive him first as Kim had won election. But Mahathir the Prime Minister of Malaysia was different. He rather took a frontal clash to Soros, and insisted that Asia has her own Value.

1 There is one difference between Korean and Chinese point of view, Most Koreans think Chu Tsi is the successor of Confucius, but Chinese New Confucian thinkers of modern age included Tu Wei-ming and his teacher Mo Jong-san think that man is Wang yang-ming being against Chu Tsi.

I. CRUEL ORIENTALISM

Samuel Huntington wrote an extreme serious scenario as a part of his book “Crush of Civilizations” about a world war in the future. It will be the Third World War. The content is very simple. As Japan could not enter into American and European economic boundaries, they wanted to go back to Asia and shake hands with China for an attack on the Euro-american economic system.² The reason was because China and Japan have the same cultural base of Confucianism, so they could be naturally friendly regardless of their past wars and also wanted to make contact with Muslims. In the result, Japan, China and Islam intended an offence on the Americans and Europe 문. In a word, it is hostility between Christianity and the others. This scenario which looks like a Hollywood movie is representative of a Westerner’s point of view. Why do they think like that? What makes them so nervous?

Edward Said who was not born in the Western world criticizes all sorts of cultural phenomena in a word of ‘Orientalism’. At this case, Orientalism is a malicious notion just as ‘Mongolism’. As you know, Mongolism is a kind of disease which is called ‘Dawn Syndrome’, but according to Westerner’s eyes the patient looks like Mongolian. It is the proximate reason why prejudices against Orientals are called as Orientalism. The roots of Orientalism is very deep and strong except for the Enlightenment Age which saw writers like Voltaire (1694-1778). Many philosophers evaluated the Asian world as the Being absent and stagnant. This kind of ill attitude on Asia seems to be a tradition of contemporary Western philosophy from Hegel (1694-1778) on through Marx (1818-1883) and to Weber (1864-1920).

The Asian world was a leader of this world until the 17th century. After the scientific revolution in the 17th century, the position was reversed because of the development of transportations and weapons. Even though the Chinese invented the mariner’s compass and explosives, Europeans still produced ships and guns. Those kinds of engineering developments made Europeans leaders of the world in those centuries.

Let’s come back to Max Weber. I think that the notion of ‘Asian Values’ as a matter of fact came from him for some reason and other. Weber desired to find the morality of immoral Capitalism on the basis of Protestantism. Generally speaking, he considered that the Capitalism was derived from Protestant’s asceticism including moderate living and hard working, but it also means that he was gravely doubtful of the morality of Capitalism as much

2 Japan attempted ‘out of Asia into Europe’ at the gate of the modern age.

as he explained the moral origin of Capitalism. I think it is the real reason why Weber intended to link Capitalism and Christianity.

What do scholars, who are emphasizing Asian Values, desire to say? They also hope to explain the economic development of Asia and its origin which contains religious beliefs and rules of behavior as Confucianism. In this case, Confucianism is exactly correspondent with Protestantism. As you know, Weber was a professional investigator of Chinese religions. Western scholars who believe in Asian Values, especially those who were naturally born Chinese speakers, maintain the deep relationship between Confucianism and Capitalism. I think it was an analogy of Confucianism and Protestantism. The most important difference between the two is Orientalism. Some men loved Oriental culture very much, but the other men do not even though they knew a lot.

In the Western world, ‘Orient’ means Turkey and its nearby countries, for instance, ‘Orient Express’ indicates the deluxe train from Paris to Istanbul, but in the Far East Asia Orient almost means China, Japan and Korea only. India is a symbol of ‘Orientals’ geographical extent for each other. Orientalism should be overcome by Asians, and Asians must have their own huge atlas. We have to face Westerner’s Orientalism and also face another Orientalism of East and West Asians.

II. THE THIRD VALUE

Indonesia is a Muslim nation of Asia which also has a considerable amount of Chinese Confucians and Buddhists. In that place, we can see the amalgamation of Confucianism and Islam. In China there are a lot of Chinese Muslims whose name is ‘Pure Truth’ (Qing Zhen). Their Noodles with beef are very famous. Everywhere and every time you can come across Chinese Muslims on the street. If you have been in West China, the possibility of meeting one would increase.

Before the early 13th Century, Muslim philosophers were the greatest in the East and West. Many parts of Western Europe belonged to the Islamic World, and scholars exercised their influence over the whole world, for example, Al-Farabi (Alpharabius, Lat.: 878-950) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes, Lat.:1126-1198). Few Korean scholars have delved into Arabic philosophy.³

3 In the recent time (2005), an important article of Averroes was translated in Korean by Dr. Lee Jae Kyung.

Regrettably Korean has no idea of Turkish Tradition though we know a ‘Turkish Bath’.⁴

Thirty years ago every Korean had to learn about ‘Kemal Pasha’(Mustafa Kemal; Ataturk Kemal: 1881-1938) as a greatest leader and Soldier of Turkey, although we did not know what Pasha means, because former President Park Jung Hee who was a soldier before a coup d’état became eager to be compared with him. Owing to Ataturk Kemal, however, even common educated people cannot read Arabic Characters and their ancient classics with Original words as the result.

Nowadays Korea is a complex of East and West civilizations, you can see any kinds of religion in Korea. Recently, Turkey also shows the world a tolerance of religion between Muslim and Christianity. I think this indeed is the third value of Asia. We can meet each other under the name of Asia and study together on Arabic thinkers from the middle ages up to the present and from al-Farabi to Mustafa Kemal. In addition, I would like to say the languages of Korean, Japan and Turkey have similar grammatical structure as they are part of the Ural-Altai linguistic family.

I hope Turkey will be standing on one of the nations promoting Asian Values in her own way through the meetings between the Far East Asia and the Far West Asia. Rudyard Kipling (1881-1938) who was born in India said, “East is East, West is West.” But East is not East, West is not west any longer in both of the Far Asias.

4 Because ‘Turkish bath’ of Korea has not only steam room but also red light room, Ambassador of Turkey have ever protested against that wrong usage of ‘Turkey’ this word in popular Korean to Korean government, Therefore that strange word does not exist anymore.