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Confucius in the Modern East Asian Household: Prospectus

Research Question

This thesis will be a quantitative study of the role of Confucian morality in molding the evolution of family life in nations that have experienced or are experiencing economic booms. This research seeks to provide a balanced and comprehensive picture of the role, both positive and negative, that Confucian morality plays in contemporary East Asian society, particularly within the family unit.

Academic Relevance

Though many articles and dissertations on Confucian thought and late 20th century economic development already exist, most focus on portraying Confucian morality (sometimes even lumped into the nebulous concept that is "Asian values") exclusively in either a positive or negative light. Furthermore, such qualitative, normative studies are often based on a few carefully selected cases, leaving them vulnerable to contradiction. My goal with this research is to produce a statistical analysis of Confucianism that, instead of prescribing the "positive" and "negative" aspects of the belief system, simply notes which elements of traditional Confucianism have been distorted or exaggerated and which elements have been downplayed or no longer exist. I chose three countries for this study because each has its own unique brand of Confucianism. As the birthplace of Confucianism, China was an obvious choice. Taiwan differs from China in that their traditions have been steeped in half a century of democracy and Western influence, possibly meaning a different role for Confucian principles. Finally, South Korea is unparalleled in its preservation of a Confucian social hierarchy and in Confucian ritual; Confucianism is present there in a way that hasn't been seen in China since the early Qing Dynasty. Thus this study will be comprehensive in both its breadth and depth.

My Interest and Experience in the Topic

My interest in this subject stems from two particular interests, namely Confucianism and the effect of unprecedented economic growth on a nation's social fabric. Just as my senior thesis is the culmination of my work at the Croft Institute, so too is my ability to read the original Analects and Chinese academic articles a pinnacle of my study of Chinese. Thus I would like very much like to incorporate my Chinese ability into my work on this question. Furthermore, in order to boost the credibility of my findings from mere reasoned opinion to a statistically-backed argument, I intend to provide a quantitative statistical analysis of social trends in China, South Korea, and Taiwan during their most intense economic development periods and to examine the extent to which these trends are caused by Confucian thought. Finally, as a frequent traveler to East Asia and an enthusiast of East Asian culture, there is an element of personal interest in gaining deeper insight into the modern incarnation of a philosophy often said to be instrumental in shaping the East Asian mind.

Sources

The main source I will use to define Confucianism will be a study by Tak Sing, et al. attempting to measure how Confucian the Chinese are¹. I intend to only use the study's definition of Confucian principles; their methodology, while superficially similar to my proposed research, will not be replicated by my research since I plan to use survey data rather than opinion polls to draw my conclusions and the scope of my research will be broader than just China. I also intend to use the original text of "The Analects"² to buttress my choices of social indicators to represent Confucianism. I will use official government economic figures to measure economic growth, from the official websites of the China³, Taiwan⁴, and South Korea⁵. My sources for social indicators

1 Tak Sing, Cheung, Chan Hoi Man, Chan Kin Man, Ambrose Y. C. King, Chiu Chi Yue, and Yang Chung Fang. 2006. "How Confucian are Contemporary Chinese? Construction of an Ideal Type and its Application to Three Chinese Communities." *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 5, no. 2: 157-180. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 12, 2010).

2 孔丘, 论语 李家秀. 乌鲁木齐: 新疆人民出版社, 2001.

3 中华人民共和国国家统计局. <http://www.stats.gov.cn/>

4 *National Statistics, Republic of China*. <http://eng.stat.gov.tw/mp.asp?mp=5>

5 *Statistics Korea*. http://www.kostat.go.kr/nso_main/nsoMainAction.do?method=main&catgrp=eng2009

will primarily be Asiabarometer⁶ for general statistics on all three countries; a study on urban Chinese family life⁷, since rapid growth has occurred almost exclusively in Chinese urban areas; Korea Barometer⁸, for detailed statistics relating to South Korea; and the Taiwan Social Change Survey, for statistics relating to Taiwan⁹. My sources for determining the bounds of each country's period of rapid growth will be historical textbooks on China¹⁰, South Korea¹¹, and Taiwan¹².

Methodology

In my research, I will use Tak Sing's study as my baseline for Confucianism's formal virtues¹³ and then extrapolate from those virtues the social indicators with which I will measure each nation's Confucian character. I plan to select two to three representative regions from each country for measurement based on which regions showed the largest amount of growth according to official statistics. For each region in each country, I will use regression analysis to analyze whether there's a relationship between my independent "economic development" variables such as income, life expectancy, and literacy rate and my dependent "Confucian/non-Confucian" variables such as work hours, school hours, community service, plastic surgery rates, and ancestor veneration. After obtaining and comparing the results within countries, I will spend a little time drawing conclusions as to which nations exhibit the strongest Confucian leanings and a lot of time developing explanations for any distortions from Confucianism as it was traditionally followed in each nation.

6 *AsiaBarometer: Surveys*. <http://asiabarometer.org/>

7 Xie, Yu, and Zhongdang Pan. Study of Family Life in Urban China, 1999 [Computer file]. ICPSR28143-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2010-05-26. doi:10.3886/ICPSR28143

8 *KoreaBarometer*. <http://koreabarometer.org/>

9 *Taiwan Social Change Survey*. <http://www.ios.sinica.edu.tw/sc/en/home2.php>. July 28, 2010.

10 Roberts, J.A.G. *The complete history of China*. Stroud: Sutton, 2003.

11 Jacobs, Norman. *The Korean road to modernization and development*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985.

12 *Taiwan: from developing to mature economy*. Gustav Ranis. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1992.

13 As opposed to substantive virtues which change over time, explained in Tak Sing, et al. p. 162.

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