CHAPTER 10
THE CONFUCIAN TRADITION OF CIVIL SOCIETY AS A RICH TERRAIN FOR SOCIOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

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Confucianism As a Set of Non-Juristic, Non-Mercantile Doctrines

When he listed the bureaucratization of China as one of the main culprits for what he saw as the "petrification" of the given system (Weber 1951), Weber was applying a question of universal significance. He had the same concern about the modern West (Roth 1979, pp. 192) and it is this concern that tremendously inspired subsequent sociologists. What he did not take into account is the possibility that some men of intellectual integrity, like Weber himself, may in general arise to countervail such a trend. Confucianism was born as a tradition with that as its leitmotif. The nature of Confucianism can be grasped more effectively by being contrasted with its rival tradition called Legalism (See Yun 1995, pp.196).

Confucianism and Legalism emerged and grew in critical interaction amidst the general bureaucratization of the Chinese polity, which began at around the same time as the bureaucratization of the Roman. The followers of both traditions were mostly aspirants for offices in the bureaucratized governments of Chinese kingdoms. The Legalists firmly advocated "the rule of law" and thereby earned the name. "The rule of law" they espoused shares many ideas with "the rule of law" modern jurists in the West emphasize (Fung 1952, pp.321-336). Despite the many similarities, what the Legalists in ancient China wanted to promote was not the rights of the people but the power and wealth of the prince or the nation as a totalitarian entity. In other words, they remained in the dimension of Machiaveli or Hobbes at best. Yet, they did not fall far behind the Prussian emphasis on *Rechtsstaat*. Whereas the Legalists thus wholly embraced and legitimized the rule of patrimonial bureaucracy, Confucius set out to introduce what would be a self-critique and, at the same time, self-assertion of the literati (See Cheng, 1991 pp.330-331).

Confucius identified the primary role of the literati as the guardian of the people. He exhorted them to assert this role against the kingship. In his doctrines, officials should not cater to the hegemonic or mercantile desires of the king and thereby help inflict pain and trouble upon the people. On the contrary, they should continue to urge the monarch to refrain from the drives for war and extravagance and instead to follow their lead in taking care of the

people. Thus, rather than just serving as cogs in the patrimonial bureaucracy, the literati were meant to be the very agents to lead the bureaucracy and, thereby, the king as well as the people (Metzger 1977).

In the West, when enlightenment thinkers opposed Machiaveli and Hobbes, they did it still in legal terms. They shifted the focus from the power of the prince to the rights of the people. What the Confucians did was to downplay the juristic approach as a whole. Whereas the enlightenment philosophers tried to defend the people in the legal terms of "rights," the Confucians tried to achieve that goal in the more moralistic terms of "righteousness" (See Kwon and Cho 1996).

Affinities between Confucianism and Sociology

If political science and political economy of the classical times were born as outgrowths of the formalistic concern to guarantee the legal and fiscal rights of the people, sociology was born as an endeavor to go beyond those heavily juristic approaches and build a comprehensive foundation for the substantive welfare of the people. The underlying faith was that a design of ideal society can only be built on the studies of bare and sometimes "brute" facts about man and his social existence.

We can draw broad similarities between the Confucian concern with the substantive and the concern of the masters who ushered in the age of sociology. With their concern for the substantive, Marx, Durkheim and Weber all sought to establish a system of propositions that govern the trials of man and his social existence although each named the propositions differently. Likewise with their concern with the substantive, the Confucians conducted an ongoing controversy on "human nature" (See Ching 1985). It was predicated on the belief that effective doctrines on ideal society can be built on the correct understanding of man. The Confucians maintained the belief that it is ultimately man himself that holds the key to utopia. They continued to ponder upon institutional arrangements yet presumed that it is man who will run the institutions and therefore is ultimately responsible for their success or failure. In that context, they insisted on the importance of the cultivation of moral character through education (de Bary 1989). Confucianism was, in a sense, Durkheim's "moral education," and Weber's "ethic of responsibility" combined into a single set of doctrines, as a certain realization of Comte's "religion of humanity."

The Confucian concern with the substantive was also associated with comprehensive approaches to social reality. The absence of division of labor in the Confucian academic endeavors might be due to a number of factors but the natural association between the two modes of inclination seems to have been among the most important. Confucian scholars through the ages maintained the tendency to look at all major aspects of society. This tendency

has deepened over time, eventually producing many Eastern equivalents of Encyclopedists (See Mark, 1977).

The Confucian Tradition of Civil Society

Although both Weber and Confucius wanted to do something about the otherwise monolithic rule of political bureaucracy under their precociously-growing states, the two used somewhat different methodologies to cope with the situation. Weber's methodology was to reinforce the role of politicians against officials, based on parliamentary democracy modeled after the Anglo-Saxon experience (Weber 1946). Confucius, on the other hand, effectively introduced an ethic of at once self-critic and self-assertion of the office-seeking intellectuals. He sought to inject this particular ethic, which was to be called Confucianism or "confession of the literati" as the Chinese word literally means, into the officials and make them politicians at the same time who would check themselves, as it were. Confucian civil society was eventually born as such self-differentiation of the literati.

Confucian officials would assert themselves relative to the kingship through bureaucratic processes. But Confucianism invested the literati with an additional dimension of self-affirmation. It is to lead the autonomy of society relative to the bureaucratized state itself. In this context, the same status group of literati (See Chang 1955) were differentiated into two subgroups: literati with office, i.e., officials, and literati without office, or "backwoods literati," as they were stylishly called. The "backwoods literati" were to play the role of social leaders for the local communities they belonged to. Based on the authority derived from their Confucian learning, these "private" individuals were to lead the local people toward the Confucian way of life. Instead of operating the state as bureaucrats, they would lead society as *notables.* And organizations, such as community compact and community office, soon became available through which they were to lead their local communities. In fact, Confucianism placed as much emphasis on this role of social leaders as on the role of civil servants. In Korea, many prominent scholars refused to enter the government and chose such a life (See Han 1983, pp. 89-114). As a consequence, in the last dynasty of Korea, a society emerged as a separate entity vis-à-vis the state. It was a society self-governed by its "spiritual" leaders. The society not only enjoyed a high degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the state but also sought to influence its policies through nationwide networks of communication, which even led to the formation of political parties (Yi, 1994; Cho 1989, pp.151-168, Jernet 1982, pp.305). The government became the place where their parties met and fought (Yi 1989). In this sense, it was a certain equivalent of civil society in the West. The elite that would lead it was very close to the main body of the elite which would lead civil society in nineteenth-century Germany.

In nineteenth-century Germany, the modern bourgeoisie in its proper sense was in such a weak state of development that it was not able to confront the existing aristocracy. In its place, a class of intellectuals known as "cultured citizens" (*Bildungsbürgertum*), grew fast to confront the old elite. As men of culture, the class considerably resembled the Confucian literati although it consisted of men of more specialized education than had been the case with the latter, as is correctly contrasted by Weber (1951:121). One major group within the class was officials in the fast-growing bureaucratic apparatuses of the state. Often united with the aristocracy, this officialdom became the very culprit for the monolithic rule of the bureaucratized state (Rosenberg 1958). And within the broader group of "cultured citizens," men like Weber arose who would self-impose the mission to save civil society from such a monolithic rule of bureaucracy. That Weber offered manifest and mature analyses of the relationship between formal and substantive rationality (Schluchter 1983) might suggest the generalization that the more acutely intellectuals feel the need to defend civil society from an otherwise overbearing political bureaucracy, the more clearly sociology's concern with the substantive becomes delineated.

Affinity between the Confucian Heritage and Sociology

The intellectual heritage associated with the Confucian tradition of civil society has provided favorable soil for sociology in Korea. Even in the traditional era, it was this Confucian version of civil society that served as the haven for the rich scholarship that might well be termed "proto-sociology" (Kim 1984, Kim 1988). Thus, the majority of the great scholars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, who are known collectively as the Practical Learning school, were literati without office and lived as leaders of the Confucian version of civil society. They were primarily motivated to defend the people of their civil society from the threats of the encroaching state and economy. They lacked political power and economic means yet they possessed an equal status based on which they could rather proudly criticize the given arrangements. In part because of their lack of power and means, they tried to reinforce the credence of their criticisms by basing them on thoroughgoing studies of personality, the family and kinship, and various environmental influences in addition to the surface phenomena themselves as well as the interconnection of those various phenomena. The Confucian concern for the people, for the substantive, and for the comprehensive was thus reinforced by their social presence rooted in Confucian civil society.

Once sociology proper came from the West, it was again this same heritage that welcomed it and met the challenge. What was left of the fundamentally Confucian outlook in the minds of the intellectuals of Korea had sustained those potential questions they eventually found in sociology. With the concern for the people, the substantive, and the comprehensive, those who took

sociology as their mode of approaching social reality began to study the deep societal infrastructure which had not received the attention it deserved in the course of recent economic development. Despite their small numbers, they succeeded in galvanizing the flow of everyday as well as academic discourse in the direction of bringing these issues to center stage. Sociology's capacity to grasp the deep layers of social reality and the researchers' ability to mobilize this capacity undeniably played important roles here. But no less important is the role played by the common Confucian outlook left in the minds of the general audience and, especially, in the minds of those numerous "petty" intellectuals residing in the scattered niches of the modern metamorphosis of Confucian civil society. The researchers struck the right chord, which triggered waves of repercussions on the flow of discourse in and out of sociology. The Confucian concern, however, also made them somewhat dissatisfied with the current state of sociology and made them seek certain improvements.

The Confucian Heritage and the Call for Coordination

Division of labor among social sciences reached its peak in America in the mid-twentieth century. Under the system, sociology has studied the phenomena that belong to "the social," largely as a residual category left aside by economics and political science (Block 1990). Thus, sociology has concentrated its study on the family, the city, social stratification, population, religion, crime and the like. Through it, however, sociology has discovered so many precious facts about phenomena which are so crucial to the social existence of man but which have so long been unheeded. The division of labor might have borne similar fruits to other disciplines, too. As was said, political science and political economy were born largely as outgrowths of the formalistic concern to guarantee political and economic freedom. By concentrating on separate realms, their formalistic analyses must have intensified. But at the same time, by investigating the separate realms more deeply, they could uncover scores of valuable things that had before been unknown. Thus, this set of "sciences" has actually made big strides in materializing "the substantive."

If we exchange those discoveries among disciplines, we will be able to make further rounds of progress in materializing our concern with the substantive. Yet being separated too much, each discipline has approached a limit from which only formal · rationality can be increased without any corresponding addition in substantive rationality. The hyper-differentiation of social sciences might have something to do with the too comfortable differentiation that has taken place between the state and civil society in America (See Parsons 1977). It continues to make most intellectuals in America settle smugly in the divided trenches and pay no serious attention to the calls for cooperation.

As the antagonism between an encroaching state and the cherished civil society in Germany stimulated Marx and Weber to inquire into the realm of the substantive, a similar antagonism that we face in post-Confucian society today is pressing sociologists to go beyond the conventional approaches of sociology. For some time, in Korea, it generated an atmosphere in which the achievements of the conventional system were totally rejected by young intellectuals. Instead, the Marxian bias against "formal equalities" was rather wholly embraced. As a consequence of the youthful rejection, a chasm was abruptly formed between the old and new approaches. Since the experience of the Soviet system has been more vividly conveyed, however, dialogue has increased between the two camps in recent years. The experience of the Soviet system which failed to live up to its ultimate concern, that is, the concern for the welfare of the people, has conveyed the message that formal equalities are a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for the substantive welfare of the people. But that is exactly the lesson that we should have drawn from our experience of the Confucian system in the past.

Chances are that the Confucian consciousness or rather "subconsciousness" might more easily be redeemed by the lesson we drew from the Soviet system. That is because of the innate Confucian inclination of defending society from the danger of a totalitarian state. We might accordingly be inclined to attend more sincerely to the formal devices designed to protect civil society from the state and the market. Yet, the Confucian concern with the substantive will no more allow us to reify civil society than it will allow reification of the state or the market. Rather, civil society may well serve as the starting ground from which we shall embark on the process of coordinating them all. We do not know whether and how soon we will be able to complete the journey through what Wallerstein referred to as the nineteenth-century paradigm to the stage of historical comprehension of the whole (Wallerstein 1991, Lee 1996). Yet, we do know that the dialogue between the Confucian concern with the substantive and the achievements of the conventional system will continue to grow in the future. This way, the Confucian heritage of civil society will serve as a rich terrain for sociological discourse in East Asia to continue the journey toward a more integrated frame of social sciences.

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CHAPTER 11
WHY DO WE NEED A REFLEXIVE SOCIOLOGY IN EAST ASIA?

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Basic Concepts Defined

Let me briefly define three basic concepts that I shall use in this paper: 'rush-to development', 'risk society', and 'reflexive modernization'. Rush-to development (1) refers to a specific developmental strategy that the state purposively pursues to accelerate economic growth in the quickest way by mobilizing all the available resources to obtain such objectives as the increase of per capita GNP and exports. The South Korean experience since the 1960s is a good example.

The concept of "risk society,"(2) in turn, refers to the variety of pathological consequences of this instrumental modernization which rapidly changing East Asian societies face these days. Risks are here understood as institutionally and politically constructed, not simply technically determined. Risks may be very high where irresponsibility and corruption, for example, remain deeply embedded in bureaucracy as we find in many East Asian countries.

Finally, "reflexive modernization" is proposed in this paper as an alternative concept to the rush-to development. Reflexive here means a deliberation of the side-effects of modernization. Such deliberation would require a number of institutional modifications and reforms by which "a contradictory symbiosis between modern and anti-modern", or "an half-modern society" can be elevated to an higher level of social formation "on the basis of further modernization and radicalization of modernity". (3) The primary focus of this paper will be on South Korea, but its implications can be easily extended to many countries in East Asia.

Modernization Revisited

There are three unambiguous reasons why East Asia has become a topic of global discourse today. The first is related to the economic development of East Asian countries. According to the data of World Bank and Asia Development Bank, the GNP per capita annual growth rate from 1980 to 1991 was as high as 9.8% in Taiwan, 8.7% in the Republic of Korea, 7.8% in China, 5.9% in Thailand, 5.6% in Hong Kong, 5.3% in Singapore, whereas the average annual growth rate of all other developing countries in all regions is only 1.3%.(4)