

INVENTING ASIAN TRADITIONS: THE CONTROVERSY BETWEEN LEE KUAN YEW AND KIM DAE JUNG

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The invention of traditions belongs among the normal consequences of modernization and nation-building. Intellectuals with political ambitions and politicians with intellectual visions of modernity are using the reflexive acquisition of the cultural traditions of the past for dominating the public interpretation of the symbolic universe of their societies. The historic past offers a rich storehouse of value orientations and symbolic representations which can be selected, interpreted and used for the revival, revision and invention of modernized traditions. The cultural traditions of the past cannot answer by themselves the questions posed in the context of modernization, with its attendant socio-cultural problems and crises. Cultural traditions must be invented in order to give viable solutions for yet unknown crises and break-downs in the process of modernization. In this sense, modernizing nations often deceive themselves about their cultural and historical pasts in order to open the door to a modern future. This paper presents and discusses different interpretations of the Confucian historical and cultural past as the cultural inventions of politicians with intellectual ambitions and visions. Lee Kuan Yew invented his Confucianism to serve as a modernizing ideology of authoritarianism, whereas Kim Dae Jung selected from the Confucian past those value orientations which supposedly shaped an Asian democracy suitable for his own ambitions of power in overthrowing the changing Korean military dictatorships. Reasons for the invention of different versions of Confucianism lie in the formative influences of the context of modernization in Singapore and South Korea, as well as in the diverse courses of the political careers of Lee Kuan Yew and Kim Dae Jung.

INTRODUCTION

Japan's road to modernity and the astonishingly rapid economic development of the Asian mini-dragons in the last decades have confirmed the belief that some characteristics of Confucian ethics may underlie their successful modernization. For example, Morishima (1994: 1-19) as well as Yamamoto (1992: 1-22) and Bendix (1996) argued that Japanese Confucianism was the functional equivalent of the Protestant ethic in the formation of Japanese capitalism. P. L. Berger described the formation of a "non-individualistic version of capitalist modernity" (Berger, 1993: 6) in East Asia, based on the Confucian values of collective solidarity and discipline. Tai Hung-chao (1989) suggested the model of an "oriental alternative" to Western development and Tu Wei-ming hinted at an "alternative vision of

modernity" (Tu Wei-ming, 1996: 7) founded on a network capitalism, supported by family virtues and group solidarity.

My reflections about the debate on "Asian values" are not intended to contribute to this cultural approach to the economic development of East Asia. I address, rather, the public debate on "Asian values" that is taking place among politicians with intellectual ambitions and visions. Following their polemical and twisted arguments about "Asian values," I observe a continuous flow of the invention and discovery of cultural traditions. The invention of a new tradition belongs among the tasks of intellectuals with political ambitions or those of politicians with intellectual aspirations. The scientific approach to the cultural determinants of economic development, meanwhile, is located within the field of scientific argumentation. The borderlines between the two camps are very often blurred and, in most cases, politicians with intellectual ambitions and scientists with intellectual aspirations are to be found on both sides. Lee Kuan Yew and Kim Dae Jung, are two politicians with intellectual ambitions, whose inventions of traditions will be presented in this study.

The debate about "Asian values" clearly demonstrates the importance of the cultural dimensions of the modernization process. The discourse is focused on the existence of specific Asian cultural patterns, which influence and decisively direct the processes of modernization in East Asia. The modernization of East Asia, as claimed by proponents of the "Asian values" argument, will not follow the Western model, but will take a different shape and content, determined within the influence of the cultural universe of Confucianism. One outspoken advocate of "Asian values" even prophesies "that the center of gravity of the world's economy will rest firmly in the Asia-Pacific region" (Mahbubani, 1998: 13-14). Kishore Mahbubani, diplomat of the Singapore Foreign Service, postulates a new cultural renaissance among Asian civilizations. "The major new reality in East Asia is the genuine conviction and confidence among new Asian minds that their day is coming, even if they have to stumble once or twice more before they make it" (Mahbubani, 1998: 12).¹ Not surprisingly, successful economic develop-

¹The prophesied golden future of Asia corresponds to the bleak present of Western countries, particularly the United States. See also Mahbubani (1994; 1995: 103): "an explosion of confidence" and extols the future of Asian societies "that their moment in history has come; they can finally join the league of developed societies." See also the optimistic, opening statement made by Hadi Soesastro (1995: 313): "The Asia of the 21st century is likely to be an Asia which sets the tone, direction, and shape of the Asia Pacific region and becomes the centre of that region. This lies at the heart of a re-definition of Asia." As far as human rights are concerned, Bilahari Kausikan (1993) underlines the importance of different cultural standards to evaluate human rights. "Good government may well require, among other things, detention

ment is taken as a “proof of virtue, a demonstration of moral and cultural superiority” (Huntington, 1997: 104). Yoichi Funabashi (1993: 84-5) speaks of an “Asianization of Asia,” referring to a process of Asian self-discovery (Funabashi, 1993: 79) that resulted in a “new Asian identity” (Funabashi, 1993: 75). Ogura Kazuo (1993: 41) proposes to “transmit to the rest of the world those Asian values that are of universal worth.” Kobayashi (1992) and Yamazaki (1996) voiced their hopes for the development of a new Asian civilization. Shintaro Ishihara (Mahathir and Ishihara, 1995: 21) proclaims that “the Asian century is at hand,” heralding “the end of European modernism, long the dynamic force of global change.” In the same manner, Tommy Koh (1993: 6), a former Singapore ambassador to the United States, expressed Asian values as the Ten Commandments of Asian culture: a true paradise on earth. He praised the balance between individualism, family and society in Asian culture, the reverence to education, the virtues of saving and frugality, the hard work ethic, the practice of national teamwork, the social contract between the people and the state, the citizen as a stockholder in the private and public sector, the morally wholesome environment for the upbringing of children, and last but not least the responsible activity of the press.

INVENTING TRADITIONS

Within the sociology of cultural processes of modernization, such demands on cultural uniqueness and cultural superiority are defined as the reflexive acquisition of cultural tradition. This reflexive acquisition of the cultural past, as observed in the case of the “Asian values” debate, represents not a totally new historical phenomenon but one that occurs in all modernizing contexts. Its presence in the context of Western modernization is evident in the French idea of a civilizing mission (*mission civilisatrice*), the German insistence on the importance and uniqueness of “*Kultur*” (Elias, 1994: 7-33), or Russia’s self-definition as the “Third Rome” which must

tion without trial to deal with military rebels or religious and other extremists; curbs on press freedoms to avoid fanning racial tensions or exacerbating social divisions; and draconian laws to break the power of entrenched interests in order to, for instance, establish land reforms.” Kausikan does not mention the problem of defining, for example, “exacerbating social divisions.” Seen from a non-governmental perspective, it can signify protest against a corrupt regime which tries to stabilize a profitable state of social division (exploitation).

²Since the Congress of the Peoples of the East, Baku September 1920, which followed the failed revolutions in the West, the Leninist and later Stalinist strategy was committed to train cadres of leaders to preach the gospel of the universal salvation of mankind, especially in the Third World (See Riegel, 1999).

redeem the whole world from sinful unrepentance. Berdiajew (1934: 22) has shown that the myth of the "Third Rome" was imitated by the missionary activities of the Communist International², which sought to liberate the enslaved, suffering masses from the yoke of imperialist rule. Other historical precedents of the reflexive acquisition of cultural traditions to serve present purposes are, to cite only a few, the African conception of "*Négritude*" invented by Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor (1964), or Gandhi's triumphant assertion that Indian civilization was presumably equipped with "the tendency ... to elevate the moral being" while Western civilization tends "to propagate immorality" (Gandhi, 1967: 256). With the invention of the formula *wakon yosai* ("*Japanese spirit, Western learning*") Japan accomplished successfully a presumed continuity of its cultural tradition by modernizing its technological civilization. In a similar way, at the end of the nineteenth century, China tried but failed to modernize. The slogan of the self-strengthening reform movement "*Chinese learning for substance, Western learning for function*"³ was not accompanied by a nationalism preaching cultural superiority and mobilizing the grass roots of a peasant society (de Bary, 1988: 80-89). Generally, one can find in all modernizing contexts patterns of the invention of traditions for the purpose of presenting an alternative way to modernity. All of these cultures and societies faced the dilemma of changing their cultural directives and horizons without losing their identities in the streams of time and history.

Usually, intellectuals in the broadest sense of the term feel obliged to appropriate the discovery of the historical past to serve present purposes and attain future of modernity. They feel entitled to interpret the symbolic universe of cultures and present a cohesive and convincing historical map of their beginnings and future developments. Therefore, intellectuals have a formative influence upon the public interpretation of the symbolic world of their societies.⁴ If these intellectuals act additionally as politicians, they can and will use their visions of culture and history to remould the fabric of societies threatened by uncontrolled changes in their normal functioning. The invention of traditions is a normal outcome of the processes of change within the cultural universe of a society. Very often, the ambition to recover at least some parts of the imagined common ground from which the history of the endangered culture originated leads to the purposeful manipulation

³The *t'i-yung* philosophy was essentially promulgated by traditionally minded but reform oriented Confucian scholars and administrators (See for example Ayers 1971: 137-95 and Levenson 1972: 109-16).

⁴Karl Mannheim (1964: 573-75) describes this process as the public interpretation of the symbolic world ("*öffentliche Weltauslegung*").

of people in the quest for votes, money or fellowship. As long as voters and followers believe in the reality of the invented traditions, however, these traditions will represent a social construction of undisputed reality⁵ in consequence. Thus for example, Ghandi's invention and imagination of the tradition of a morally superior had very real consequences both for its representatives and for the Western peoples stigmatized as morally inferior.

Invented traditions, Hobsbawm (1994: 1) explains, "normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past." The assumed continuity with the historic past "is largely factitious" (Hobsbawm, 1994: 2). It is "factitious," I would like to add, in so far as the interpreting intellectuals try to invent and imagine a cultural world which, in their view, represents a social and cultural reality of its own. Whenever a cultural tradition is reflected in a systematical way and is transfigured as a cultural object to be explained formally and reasonably legitimized, the invention process of a tradition begins. Normally, people who live the cultural tradition of their society are not interested in their objectification by systems of explanation and legitimation. They take the cultural tradition for granted and try to live up to the standards of its values and social norms. At the onset of the tradition invention process, the architects of the imagined world of the historical past must seek support from those who believe in the reality of the offered cultural invention.

The architects and the believers of invented traditions begin to form social groups and institutions which confirm their social reality. The invented traditions become institutionalized. Books about the historical origins are written, pamphlets with slogans of cultural superiority are distributed, symbols of glorious past are discovered and venerated, monuments to the founders of nations are erected, rituals of unanimity are exercised, and supposedly old remnants of the lost traditions are stored in sacred locations.⁶ Through the process of institutionalization, the rich reservoir of traditional beliefs and habits are translated into systems of culture worked out by ideological specialists and venerated by believing communities. At this stage of institutionalization the invented and imagined cultural tradition represent a "fait

⁵The social construction of ideological or cultural realities also requires some institutional arrangements to support the imagined world of the cultural past. Here I am reflecting on the beginnings of this process of social construction of "Asian values." For a general outline of this approach see Berger and Luckmann 1966.

⁶In Levenson's term, the tradition becomes "musealized" (1972: 76-82), referring to this process of the objectification of the historical past. But this "musealization" will not end, as Levenson suggested, with petrification. Even "musealized" cultures can be awakened from the death of scientific and ideological ossification.

social" in the Durkheimian (Durkheim, 1963: 3-14) sense.

In this respect, cultures originate from the imagination of symbolic world-views. The historic past serves as an "unchanging and invariant" point of reference which stands in contrast to "the constant change and innovation of the modern world" (Hobsbawm, 1994: 2). The motivating causes for invention of traditions are obvious: people, especially intellectuals and political leaders with intellectual visions and aspirations, look back to an age of security and granted certainty which seemingly guaranteed stability within the confines of order and harmony. In times of rapid and dramatic socio-cultural change, the proven traditions of the historic past are used to master the modern, seemingly threatening social patterns that disrupt orderly life of the social body. The historic past offers a rich storehouse of value orientations and symbolic representations which can be selected, interpreted and used for the revival, revision and invention of modernized traditions. Especially relevant in this context are those value orientations and systems of meaning which 1) symbolize "social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities" (Hobsbawm, 1994: 9 and 2) establish or legitimize "institutions, status or relations of authority" (Hobsbawm, 1994: 9). For the envisaged reconstruction of society and culture are 3) those important value orientations "whose main purpose was socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems and conventions of behaviour" (Hobsbawm, 1994: 9). Thus, the invented tradition attains the dignity of longevity and proven social order and harmony. It serves also as a medium for solving the unknown and disturbing social problems associated with the spread of modernity. Especially in the case of modern nation-building, 4) symbols, rituals and value-patterns are to serve as a new focus for collectively shared feelings of identification with "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1996: 7) of social collectivities created under the pressure of incentives for modernization.

Modern nation-states are pressured to invent symbols, rituals and identification patterns in order to create a sense of community among their citizens, "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each" (Anderson, 1996: 7). The reconstruction of the cultural roots of modernizing nation-states cannot follow the procedures of historically reliable description and reproduction of the cultural past of the former social collectivities of which they are comprised. The context of modernization challenges the historical past, which cannot be immediately and in one way reproduced from cultural resources, but must be selectively imagined and recreated in a way unknown to earlier times and historical mappings. The cultural past and tradition do not automatically offer successful models of

modernization. Modernizing agents search for viable solutions, that are not embedded in the cultural traditions of their nation-states. These cultural traditions represent many dimensions and meanings, orthodox and heterodox beliefs for interpretation and refutation and sacred scriptures in which to discover hidden meanings and promises of salvation. Answers to the new questions posed in the context of modernization are not readily found. "Every tradition, given though it is, opens potentialities for a diversity of responses" (Shils, 1983: 44). Modernizing nation-states are prone to self-deception about their cultural and historical past in order to open the door to a modern future.

In this respect, Japan provides an instructive example. Not surprisingly, in times of emergency and crisis, as in the 1930s, the intellectuals of the Japanese conservative front "discovered" *one* tenet out of their cultural tradition: namely *wa* (harmony). This cultural slogan was selected from the rich repertoire of cultural meanings of the past and chosen as basis of the seemingly threatened national consciousness. *Wa* was presented as the only possibility to achieve "order and harmony in a vertical and hierarchical relationship" (Kimio, 1998: 45). *Wa* had to serve as the moral legitimation of the integration of a militarized society disciplined for war and imperialism.

The invention of traditions evolves through a process of social construction. The process of social construction is conducted as 5) a competition among modernizing elites for the cultural hegemony to influence and dominate the choice of paramount symbols, rituals and patterns of collectivity and undivided commitment to the modernizing nation-state. Only those parts of the cultural traditions were selected by the respective modernizing elites which promise a reasonable solution for solving the modern drama of uncertainty and social anomie (Durkheim, 1960: 281-85), a social world without guiding social norms and obligations. The historic past seen through the selective mind of agents of modernization is supposed to give a new design of morality and social cohesion. Through the social process of inventing traditions, it is hoped that the renunciation of the traditional world of order and harmony in order to gain the promises and advantages of a secular modernity will be avoided. The power interests and the cultural horizons of the modernizing elites shape and influence the different versions of invented traditions suited for political legitimation and cultural dignity.

LEE KUAN YEW: AUTHORITARIAN CONFUCIANISM

In a conversation with Fareed Zakaria, the managing editor of *Foreign*

Affairs, Lee Kuan Yew, the former Prime Minister of Singapore, presented a classic example of an invented tradition. In this interview, Lee Kuan Yew (1994) presented himself skillfully as a paragon of the wise, elderly statesmen, a senior minister. He offered a modern version of the classical traditional Chinese sage-king whose ethical reasoning was supposed to direct and influence the thoughts and habits of his government officials who, for their part, were obliged to transmit modern instructions to the subjects of the royal reign. For his case, Lee utilized the myth of the wise sage-king Yao (cf. de Bary, 1991: 1-23), who not only represented personally the classical Confucian virtues of government, but who also tried to communicate to his ministers the task of moral self-cultivation as a model for emulation. In a modernized society, the Confucian sage-king made use of the modern mass media: in this case an interview in a highly esteemed journal addressed to a sophisticated audience.

At the beginning of the interview, Lee deplored “the erosion of the moral underpinnings” (Lee, 1994: 112) of Western society which having lost its “ethical basis” (Lee, 1994: 112) had to accept “guns, drugs, violent crime, vagrancy, unbecoming behavior in public — in sum the breakdown of civil society” (Lee, 1994: 111). Lee aspired instead to “a well-ordered society so that everybody can have maximum enjoyment of his freedoms. This freedom can only exist in an ordered state and not in a natural state of contention and anarchy” (Lee, 1994: 111). Asian societies, Lee explained, developed a different sort of civil society free of the moral shortcomings of Western political culture. The individual in Asian society is not prey to moral and social anarchy, but lives protected in the midst of family, extended kinship, “friends and the wider society. The ruler or the government does not try to provide for a person what the family best provides” (Lee, 1994: 113). In the eyes of Lee, ancient Chinese moral philosophy imparts the best instructions for conducting an orderly and decent life under modern conditions. The traditional Confucian ethic praises the moral obligation of personal self-cultivation (*xiushen*), which can only be pursued within the confines of the family (*qijia*), whose well-being must be looked for. In addition, if the self-cultivated person cares for his country (*zhiguo*), then the life under Heaven becomes peaceful and harmonious (*pingtianxia*) too.

The historical past of traditional Confucian culture serves as an invariant anchor in the search for a solution to the modern predicament. It is interesting to note that Lee chooses only those Confucian values and ethical requirements from the rich cultural Confucian tradition were of use in mobilizing forces for the modern goal of nation-building. For Lee, the traditional Confucian concept of self-cultivation serves as cultural capital to be

used to spur a well-trained and educated population to master the challenges of modernity. "Then you have to educate rigorously and train a whole generation of skilled, intelligent, knowledgeable people who can be productive" (Lee, 1994: 114). Lee embodies a modernization elite who must serve as a moral leader for the future of modern society founded on technology and global communication and finance.

The close combination of Confucian morality and modern technology, Lee proposed, is reminiscent of the old dream of *Saint-Simon*, who prophesied a modern civilization under the benevolent leadership of technocratic experts, driven by the Christian ideals of brotherly love and solidarity (cf. Manuel, 1956). Despite their close affinity, *Saint-Simon* could not succeed, in one respect: to gain the power to realize his *Nouveau Christianisme*, a utopian vision of a society organized as an experimental workshop in the grip of a modernizing technocratic elite.

Quite in contrast, as prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew attained the power to construct the social fabric of a small city-state suited to his ambitious modernizing goals. Since the PAP (People's Action Party) came to power in 1959 and the faction of Lee Kuan Yew's fellowship dominated Singapore's policy, "policy-making was entrusted to the technocrats, who were empowered to interpret the interests of the state and achieve economic goals" (Chew, 1994: 939). Of decisive importance for this technocratic elite was the political stability to satisfy the demands of international capital for safe, reliable havens for export manufacturing (Chew, 1994: 940). The construction of a complicated democratic system of checks and balances (Chew, 1994: 941) seemed to hamper the abilities of this technocratic elite to act swiftly in the face of the changing demands of international capital flow and manufacturing. Under these conditions, the moulding of a *kiasu* culture⁷: characterized by anxiety and conformity, discouraging individual initiative and spontaneity: seemed to fit into a policy of forced industrialization within a short period of time.

Not surprisingly, in early 1982, the government of Singapore started a

⁷*Kiasu* means literally "scared to lose." "This culture is characterized by strict conformity to norms and laws, exaggerated respect for superiors, fear of giving offense or appearing uncooperative, and dread of victimization. At the heart of *kiasu* is a feeling of helplessness and fear in the face of an overpowering political and power structure that the average person cannot hope to participate in, penetrate, or even understand. Its effect is to instill in the people a willingness to conform to, and in fact depend upon government-sanctioned directions and policies in all areas of civic, political, economic, and personal life, even marriage and procreation, personal courtesy, and diet. In areas in which there is no officially sanctioned law, however, the *kiasu* individual behaves in a boorish, inconsiderate, and destructive manner" (Chew, 1994: 947).

policy of moral education to induce Confucian ethics, not only in the schools but within the nation as a whole. Following the first phase of successful industrialization and nation-building in the late 1970's, Singapore experienced a collective sense of moral crisis. Alarmed by the first indications of social problems (crime, delinquency, drug abuse, abortion, and divorce) normally associated with Westernization (Kuo, 1996: 296), the government of Singapore sponsored the revitalization of its own cultural tradition in order "to retain and revive traditional Asian values, to build up the confidence in one's own culture, and to strengthen a sense of identity" (Kuo, 1996: 297). Without going in detail, the whole campaign to install a Confucian ethical system in Singapore failed to achieve its goals. Although the Confucian ethics were firmly rooted within the Chinese population,⁸ its planned introduction as a nation-wide moral ethical standard evoked resentment among minorities of other religious affiliations. Even in the schools, the results of the promotion of Confucian values were disappointing. In 1989, "only 17.8 percent of third-year students, practically all of them Chinese, chose Confucian ethics as their RK option. The figure ... compared poorly with the enrollments in Buddhist studies (44.4 percent) and bible knowledge (21.4 percent)" (Kuo, 1996: 306). Since 1990, therefore, the teaching of religious knowledge has been suspended as a compulsory subject and has been offered as optional.

Despite the failure of the nation-wide campaign to promote Confucian values, Lee insisted in his 1994 interview with F. Zakaria on the overall importance of the family as representative of Confucian values. According to Lee, the rise and fall of dynasties in the long history of the Chinese civilization has left the family as the only institutional arrangement within which its culture can survive (Lee, 1994: 115). Only a family-oriented Confucian ethic would therefore guarantee its survival under modern conditions. Hopefully, the Confucian family ethic,⁹ proven over the turbulence of more than a thousand years, will also serve as a cultural backdrop for an age of electronic technology and products. Optimistically, Lee asserted that the Confucian virtues of "value in learning and scholarship and hard work and thrift and deferment of present enjoyment for future gain" (Lee, 1994: 116-17) would launch a promising future of science and technology.

⁸But this Chinese majority is divided into six major groups, each of whose dialect is unintelligible to other groups. Mandarin serves as a *lingua franca* between the different dialect groups (Tu Wei-ming, 1991:11).

⁹Through all his official pronouncements, Lee insisted upon value patterns as the cornerstones for successful modernization. Cf. for example his speech on the Commonwealth Government Conference (1971) (Josey 1997: 595-96).

The successful launch of the industrial future within one generation confirms his conviction that culture is of decisive importance in determining and driving historical development. "Again we were fortunate we had this cultural backdrop, the belief in thrift, hard work, filial piety and loyalty in the extended family, and, most of all, the respect for scholarship and learning" (Lee, 1994: 114). Japan has demonstrated, Lee emphasizes, that a non-Western country can modernize without becoming Westernized. "Japan has become an industrial society, while remaining essentially Japanese in its human relations" (Lee, 1994: 118).

Apparently, Lee invented a Confucian tradition. He selected from the Confucian tradition but one cord from the complicated tissue of cultural traditions and interpretations of the historical past of the Chinese civilization. This selective act of interpretation was deemed the solution for the modern predicament. In the case of Singapore, Lee was concerned with building a modern, multiethnic nation consisting of an overwhelming majority of Chinese people. He did not share the ambition to dominate a universalistic Confucian kingdom, considering all surrounding states as culturally inferior but capable of assimilating its civilization. Lee, the founding father of Singapore, also took into account the precarious situation of his nation-state. Lee asserted that, as a small city-state, Singapore could preserve its identity, even when surrounded and sometimes besieged by envious nations of different cultures and aspirations, only by the enforced development of science, communication and capital flow. A highly qualified population would therefore be needed to counter the pressures from within and without to persist in an age of globalization and electronic communication.¹⁰

The financial crisis of East Asia did not change Lee's belief in the normative influence of "Asian values." Lee contented that corruption, nepotism — the whole network of *guanxi* — belonged to the characteristic "Asian values." The main reason for the currency crisis "lies in the unequal capabilities among the financial systems in these countries, and the speed and power of capital movements into and out of their economies" (Lee, 1998: 5). Where the moral integrity of the government was not undermined by corruption and nepotism, Lee claimed, the financial crisis had only minor effects. "In the troubled countries, politicians and public officials have exercised power and responsibility not as trust for public good, but as an opportunity for private gain" (Lee, 1998: 5). Where the Confucian value of responsible govern-

¹⁰Lee surmised that the success of the Singapore model held many dangers, that could threaten successful societies: corruption, consumption without hard work, disintegrating family ties and traditional values—a nightmare to Lee's future visions (See Kwang, et al., 1998: 187-91).

ment for the public good was practiced: as in Singapore or Hong Kong “Asian values have not degenerated into abuses of public office” (Lee, 1998: 5).

KIM DAE JUNG: CONFUCIANISM AS ASIAN DEMOCRACY

In his rejoinder to Lee Kuan Yew’s praise of Asian virtues as an alternative to Westernization, Kim Dae Jung, at that time a Korean “dissident, human rights activist, and presidential candidate during a political career of more than four decades”,¹¹ invented the tradition of *Asian democracy*. Kim sharply criticized Lee’s authoritarian posture. He characterized Lee’s government intervention into the daily affairs of the citizens of Singapore as “an Orwellian extreme of social engineering” (Kim, 1994: 190). Kim even accused Lee of applying almost totalitarian methods of government. “The fact that Lee’s Singapore, a small city-state, need a near-totalitarian police state to assert control over its citizens contradicts his assertion that everything would be all right if governments would refrain from interfering in the private affairs of the family. The proper way to cure the ills of industrial societies is not to impose the terror of a police state but to emphasize ethical education, give high regard to spiritual values, and promote high standards in culture and the arts” (Kim, 1994: 191).

Of central importance to Kim’s bitter rejection of Asian authoritarianism based on Confucian values is his concept of an *Asian democracy*. Democratic institutions and ideals, according to Kim, are not the ingenious inventions of Western societies, but can be found long ago in the rich cultural traditions of Asian civilization. Locke’s contract theory could not claim priority to the idea of government by consent of the people. “Almost two millennia before Locke, Chinese philosopher Meng-tzu preached similar ideas. According to his ‘Politics of Royal Ways’, the king is the ‘Son of Heaven’, and heaven bestowed on its son a mandate to provide good government, that is, to provide good for the people. If he did not govern righteously, the people had the right to rise up and overthrow his government in the name of heaven. Meng-tzu even justified regicide, saying that once a king loses the mandate of heaven he is no longer worthy of his subjects’ loyalty. The people came first, Meng-tzu said, the country second, and the king third. The ancient Chinese philosophy of *Minben Zhengchi*, or ‘people-based politics’, teaches that ‘the will of the people is the will of heaven’ and that one should

¹¹These were the introductory notes describing the political biography of Kim Dae Jung by the editors of *Foreign Affairs*. See Kim (1994: 189).

'respect the people as heaven' itself" (Kim, 1994: 191). Furthermore, Kim Dae Jung turned to Tonghak, the native Korean religion, which supposedly advocated the principle that, "man is heaven", inspiring and legitimizing the uprising of nearly half a million peasant in the revolt of 1894 (Kim, 1994: 191).

Apparently, Kim evoked the rebellious past of the Tonghak religion to legitimize his egalitarian aspirations. Tonghak ("Eastern Learning") evolved as a millenarian and syncretist social movement organizing a military-led rebellion against exploitation by the ruling *Yangban* officials (cf. Lee, 1984: 281-8). At the beginning, the founder of Tonghak: Ch'oe Che-u (1824-1864) selectively blended the doctrines of Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, along with shamanistic practices into one "*Bible of Tonghak Doctrine*" and "*Hymns from Dragon Pool*." Despite its strong opposition to the influence of Catholicism ("Western Learning"), Tonghak adopted Catholic organizational schemes and methods and agreed with its strongly egalitarian doctrines, which were in strict opposition to the practiced inequality of differing status hierarchies of the Confucian order (Lee, 1984: 258). As a millenarist and nativist protest movement, Tonghak did not strive to preserve the Confucian model of social control by a morally qualified elite, and likewise did not tolerate Western religious influence (Catholicism). It is highly questionable if the Tonghak movement and religion could serve as a model for an *Asian Democracy* based on Confucian values.

Kim's appraisal of the Confucian past encompasses not only the realm of democratic ideals but also the machinery of democratic institutions protecting democratic rights and ideals. He refers to the government of the Chin Dynasty, which supposedly "practiced the rule of law and saw to it that everyone, regardless of class, was treated fairly" (Kim, 1994: 192). Whereas other historians (Rubin, 1976: 55-88) of Chinese history and culture would treat the emperor Chin-shi huang-ti as a precursor of modern totalitarian rule, Kim insists on a positive estimation of that rule. Additionally, he presented the Chinese examination system as an institution requiring very modern performance and achievement testing, even for high-ranking officials, "thus guaranteeing equal opportunity and social mobility, which are so central to popular democracy" (Kim, 1994: 192). In this 'popular democracy,' Kim suggested, "freedom of speech was highly valued" (Kim, 1994: 192). Confucian scholars remonstrated erring monarchs and "powerful boards of censors acted as a check against imperial misrule and abuses by government officials" (Kim, 1994: 192).

The discovery of "*popular democracy*" in the Confucian legacy is not new. Sun Yat-sen, for example, found the roots of his doctrine of *san-min-chu-i* in

the Confucian virtues of filial piety (*hsiao*) and humanity (*jen*), used to create a modern nation whose subjects should transpose their family loyalty to the modern Chinese nation-state. Sun Yat-sen, hope that the intended cultured renovation of the Chinese nation would also gain support based on the long history of human rights, constituting a popular sovereignty within the framework of the Chinese dynasties (Sun Yat-sen, 1963: 93; Yu Ying-shih, 1989: 94-98).

Four years later, during a trip to the United States, this time as President of the Republic of Korea, Kim returned to the issue of "Asian values." Receiving an award from the International League for Human Rights, Kim once more stressed the importance of a cultural tradition supporting human rights. He warned that those who "argue that human rights and democracy may be sacrificed for economic development" (Kim, 1998a). Even in the face of the East Asian financial crisis, Kim firmly believed that only a mobilization of democratic elements within the Asian tradition could help to overcome the enormous problems of the near future (Kim, 1998b). In an earlier speech, Kim had traced the economic failure back to the neglect of democratic reform. "The new administration of the Republic of Korea holds the development of democracy simultaneously with the establishment of a free market economy as its most important objective. The major cause of the current economic crisis in Asia, I believe, lies in the fact that we did not pursue these two parallel" (Kim, 1998c). The obvious economic progress made under the authoritarian rule of his predecessors, Kim considered as temporary and short-lived (Kim, 1998d). "Such a growth model brought temporary, superficial economic growth. But its limits were clear. The government-led economy not only weakened growth potential by distorting the distribution of resources, but it also aggravated the imbalances in the distribution of economic rewards and strengthened the corrupt, collusive links between politicians and businessmen. Such collusion, combined with government-controlled financing, gave rise to moral hazard among companies and banks. Competitiveness deteriorated greatly, exports slowed, foreign debts snowballed. The foreign exchange crisis came as a matter of course" (Kim, 1998d). To Kim, the authoritarian model of development¹² supported by an intimate network of effective links between government, industry and finance and legitimated by the mobilization of Confucian patterns of obedience and submissive fellowship was a story of failure, not of success.¹³

¹²Kim did not consider the different phases of state controlled economic development under the exigencies of a forced modernization policy. For a balanced view on this issue see Eun Mee Kim, 1993 and Cotton, 1992.

¹³See also Kim (1998e) "The ideas that democracy is unsuitable for Asia and that 'Asian val-

Consequently, Kim demanded a “sweeping change in society” (Kim, 1999: 274). He even went so far as to call for a “Second Nation-Building Movement. This movement invites all citizens to become active agents of national reform. Every citizen should strive to create a new Korea under the slogan ‘let us participate, live right, work hard again’” (Kim, 1999: 274).

Kim’s invention of the Korean tradition of Confucianism did not begin with the controversy led by Lee Kuan Yew in 1994. In a speech given in October 1983 at the Asian Legal Center at Harvard University, Kim (1987a) outlined the history of the Korean native religion and Confucianism from the perspective of discovering early traces of an indigenous democratic development. Here again, Kim mentioned the *Tonghak* peasant revolution of 1894 and its emancipatory demands on land reform, its alteration of class system, the cleansing of its government, its popular participation in local self-government and its amelioration of the situation for women (1987a: 175). “Respect for the integrity of the individual and the demand for social justice” (1987a: 175) are the main characteristics of the popular tradition of democratic development. Additional ingredients of the *Tonghak* tradition, as explained by Kim, are the rejection of military rule, the desire for peace with neighboring nations and a strong drive for learning and education (Ibid.: 176-7). Kim stressed the democratic components of Korean Confucianism such as “pragmatism, rationality, a ‘people-first’ principle, orderliness, and especially respect for the freedom of expression” (1987a: 178). Kim conceded that freedom of expression was an exclusive right of scholars and bureaucrats — the *Yangban* — but, despite this restriction, he preferred to speak of a democratic tradition insofar as these *Yangban* were capable “of providing criticism and advice to the monarch” (1987a: 179). The systems of local government and civil service examinations and lent additional support to the tradition of people’s democracy (1987a: 181).

The selective use of an elitist Confucian model for the present democratic aspirations of Kim is remarkable. For example, the early Choson dynasty paid little attention to the will of the people, nor did it tolerate an institutionalized and democratic opposition exercised by opposing scholars and bureaucrats. Instead, the king formed the central apex of power whose duty was “to display exemplary behavior and an irresistible civilizing influence

ues’ are different from those of the West have been widely espoused for a long time. Authoritarian rulers in Asia have even gone so far as to claim that democracy is an obstacle to economic development.” Kim was confirmed in his conviction by the resignation of Suharto. “The (Indonesian) situation shows the miserable state of politics promoting so-called Asian values, which advocate that democracy can be sacrificed to achieve economic development.” Source: *Korea Herald*, 23 May 1998. Internet version.

on his subjects" (Deuchler, 1992: 109). The same applies to the scholar-official who "fulfilled a prominent role as a morally superior man (*hyon*) who was called upon to lead the ignorant masses" (Deuchler, 1992: 109). Not surprisingly, this Confucian model of rule by superior men leading and mobilizing the Korean population was chosen by Park Chung Hee during his military dictatorship, in order to obtain the obedience and social conformity of the peasantry during his campaigns for modernization (cf. Jones 1995: 69). According to Kim, the indigenous democratic tradition failed to modernize, however, not because of its own shortcomings, but rather because of exogenous factors that prohibited the growth of modern forms of democratic representation. "The explanation lies in the cold war, the division of Korea, the development of enormous military establishments in South and North Korea, and in American and Japanese support for authoritarian government in South Korea" (Kim, 1987a: 185).

The invention of Ki'm's *Asian Democracy within the Korean tradition* reflects the bitter experiences of his political biography. The myth of an *Asian Democracy* served as a principle of legitimacy directed against authoritarian rule executed by military dictatorship. Kim Dae Jung presented himself as a politician of inner conviction and dedication to the overall important goal of democratizing the Korean political system. He propagated an ethic of inner vocation (*Gesinnungsethik*), uncorrupted by the daily necessities of political affairs and power struggles and directed only toward the achievement of his own convictions and inner beliefs (cf. Weber, 1958). In his various biographical accounts, Kim identified himself almost totally with the bitterness (*han*) of the frustrated hopes of the Korean people due to the failed realization of human rights and democratic development, "a *han* of all conscientious people seeking freedom, justice, and respect for human beings" (Kim, 1987b: 68).

In his impressive diary written during his forced imprisonment (1980-1981) that resulted from the faked accusation of inciting the Kwangju uprising, Kim (1987c) revealed a complex blend of Confucian and Christian personality traits. In his letters to his family, he admonished his sons to follow traditional Confucian patterns of relentless self-cultivation and emulation of the good example set by his father.¹⁴ Kim even took into account the Confucian tradition as a basis for rapid industrialization in Korea, a reason-

¹⁴In a typically Confucian manner, for example, Kim wrote, to one of his sons, "What is most important is endeavoring to perfect your character. It is not philosophers who have reached the summit of learning who are respected and emulated. Rather, it is the saintly characters who loved their neighbors and devoted themselves to, and worked for, humankind" (Kim, 1987c: 257).

ing similar to most proponents of Confucian capitalism. He mentions "the rationalism, practicality, and secularity of Confucianism" (Kim, 1987c: 246) as conducive to modern industrial society. Additionally, "the highly hierarchical consciousness and system of Confucianism blend with modern industry, which demands militarylike discipline and order for the sake of productivity" (Kim, 1987c: 246). Despite some noteworthy negative features, Kim explained, the Confucian family ethic and sound political knowledge, educational achievements counted as precious human capital for industrialization (Kim, 1987c: 246).

In several extended reflections on the long history of the rise and fall of various Confucian dynasties in Korea, Kim showed more refined judgement concerning the positive and negative sides of the upper ranks of Confucian government officials. On one hand, Kim castigated the Confucian officials for their "lack of spiritual and material readiness for modernization, the period of decay after the long reign of the Yi dynasty, the extreme poverty of the masses, the sweeping corruption of national politics, the reactionary politics of Confucian officials who stubbornly depended on foreign powers, the greed and exploitation by the in-laws of the royal family, and incompetence" (Kim, 1987c: 211). As in a mirror, the moral decay and political repression attributed to the military dictatorship of Chun Doo Hwan were reflected in the imprisonment of Kim Dae Jung. Kim used the Confucian past as a moral lesson of history, written in his prison letters, in order to portray and accuse a corrupt and repressive regime in modern times.

On the other hand, Kim contrasted this gloomy portrait of the Confucian past with a shining model of moral excellence, wisdom and courage. He presented the Confucian official Taewon'gun as moral guide to emulate. "He repudiated the influence of the in-laws of the royal family and the struggle among the four factions. He enacted bold recruitment policies and massive closing of traditional schools as well as reform of finance and taxation, including the elimination of tax evasion by the powerful and the removal of corrupt officials who were giving the nobility hemp and cotton instead of military service, tax reduction, which enabled him to leave the state treasury with a surplus after his ten-year reign, and social reforms such as the suppression of arbitrariness by the nobility, simplification of dress, encouragement of color, and prohibition of extravagance by female entertainers" (Kim, 1987c: 211).

It comes as no surprise that Kim Dae Jung identified his political role that of a sincere man of uncorrupted vocation and dedication to the highly praised moral models set by Confucian officials, who had stood and worked for popular well-being and the democratic modernization of Korea. The glo-

rious Confucian past demonstrated by courageous, wise and uncorrupted Confucian scholars-officials gave Kim Dae Jung the moral superiority with which to blame and accuse his political opponents as military men organizing a repressive and illegitimate dictatorship. Kim sought moral leadership over his political rivals in the historical past of Confucian traditions. The hardships of his imprisonment and the allegedly alliance with the few morally perfect Confucian government officials of the past signified a bright future for the lonely political prisoner who selected and invented a Confucian tradition in order to survive and triumph. The Christian concepts of martyrdom (Kim, 1987c: 144), of sin and absolution (Ibid.: 164-65), of suffering and salvation (Kim, 1987c: 165-66), widely discussed and delineated in his prison writings, conferred the invention of a Confucian tradition by this prominent Korean dissident with a modernized destination of an uncertain future. A sense of mission, proudly enunciated, resulted in the correspondence of his beliefs with the Confucian past and the Christian present. "Therefore, I am determined to dedicate myself completely, with all my heart and effort, to doing Our Lord's work, which is to save this world by making freedom, justice, and peace a reality and to save the souls of all men and women through our faith" (Kim, 1987c: 322). However, in his last autobiographical portrait¹⁵ Kim (2000) described vividly his Confucian education at the village and district level but avoided to mention any Confucian values to be mobilized for the building of a modernizing Korean nation. His sole legacy for the future lay in his Christian desire to act, dedicating his life to his mission to lead Korea to democracy.

CONCLUSION

It is at once interesting and fascinating to see the manner in which both Lee Kuan Yew and Kim Dae Jung 'discover' different layers of meaning and legitimizing principles in the same Confucian cultural tradition. Lee invented the tradition of Asian authoritarianism and Kim imagined the Korean history of peasant revolts against injustice and exploitation by the governing elites. Both the speaker for the people and the representative of the government appeal to a Confucian legacy of protest and submission, and each claims himself to be the true guardian of the venerated historical past. In

¹⁵This autobiography was published in Korea in 1997 as "Na-eui Sam, Na-eui Kil" (Seoul: Sanha Publishing). I would like to thank Dr. Chun Bok-Hee (The Kim Dae-jung Peace Foundation, Seoul) for this information. The Kim Dae Jung Peace Foundation also supported my research with a generous donation of several important books and pamphlets written by Kim Dae Jung.

both cases, it matters little if the scientifically operating humanities confirm or refute the invented traditions of myths concerning the power of the Asian people or of authoritarian rule. The architects of the invented traditions of popular revolution or of government by submission insist upon their different interpretations. Each side finds support by quoting selected key terms and sentences, and by mobilizing scientific experts and ideological partisans to confirm their respective interpretations of the Confucian past. The bitter fights of interpretation between the different camps of political architects, scientific interpreters and ideological crusaders of cultural traditions are taking place on the same common ground of one Confucian cultural tradition. This Confucian cultural tradition cannot speak for itself, however, it offers different layers and sediments of cultural meanings and axiomatic principles directly or indirectly woven into a long history of interpretation and legitimation generated by different social groups, institutions and political elites. Each of these social and cultural actors evokes a unique view of history and culture, without consenting to the opposing and conflicting goals, values, norms and behavior patterns of rivals for the hegemony of interpretation. The competition on the field of interpretation (cf. Mannheim, 1964: 573-5) within *the Confucian universe of discourse* to gain the hegemony of cultural interpretation will continue and keep the cultural past alive.

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