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HOW THE EAST WAS WON: ORIENTALISM AND THE NEW CONFUCIAN DISCOURSE IN EAST ASIA

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Prompted and aided by the rapid economic growth of the region during the past 30 years, a new Confucian discourse is being articulated with increasing frequency and sophistication. Such terms as "Confucian Capitalism" and "Confucian Democracy" have been coined to explain in 'indigenous' terms the rapid economic and political transformation of the countries of the region in recent years. However, this new Confucian discourse has its share of critics, both local and foreign, left and right. Those who advocate a reinterpretation and reaffirmation of Confucian values for the modern world are mainly confronted with three types of criticism; political, methodological, and epistemological. This paper mostly address the third type of criticism which holds that by emphasizing the Confucianism v. West dichotomy one is falling prey to reverse orientalism. This paper responds to this criticism by, first, by providing a brief account of the evolution of the intellectual discourse in East Asia since the 19th century. Then, it will analyze the epistemology of "Orientalism" to see what implications it has for new Confucianism. The conclusion is that the new Confucian discourse is a natural and accurate reflection of the political and economic transformation that the region has experienced in recent decades. It also concludes that the implications, political or otherwise, of orientalism for the new Confucian discourse are none.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a new brand of Confucian discourse has been transforming the intellectual landscape of East Asia. Prompted and aided by the rapid economic growth of the region during the past 30 years, Confucianism has come to attract the attention of 'local' intellectuals in a manner unseen since the final days of the old Confucian world order. Such terms as "Confucian Capitalism" and "Confucian Democracy" have been coined to explain in 'indigenous' terms the rapid economic and political transformation of the countries of the region in recent years. Whereas the Confucians of the 19th century tried to preserve the tradition in the face of the Western onslaught, employing reactionary, nationalist and otherwise defensive rhetoric, the new Confucians strike a more confident note based on a newly found pride in the tradition and its modern and even universal implications.[1] Moreover,

[1]See, for example, *Jontong gua Hyundae* (Tradition and Modernity), a quarterly journal in Korean leading the reinterpretation of Confucianism. The scholars spearheading this move-

the discourse has taken on an international dimension as many Western intellectuals sympathetic to Confucianism and attracted to its moral and political philosophy have joined in the debate. It would seem that we are indeed witnessing the beginning of the "Third Epoch" of Confucianism (Tu-Weiming,1993A).

However, this new Confucian discourse has its share of critics, both local and foreign. Those who advocate a reinterpretation and reaffirmation of Confucian values for the modern world are mainly confronted with three types of criticism; political, methodological, and epistemological. The first criticism, mostly from the 'right', has to do with the purported political motivation behind the advocacy of Confucianism. According to this view the reaffirmation of Confucianism, on the one hand, and criticism of liberalism and human rights, on the other, is but a thinly veiled effort to justify continued authoritarian rule in at least some of the countries in the region.[2] This is the debate that has come to be known as the "Asian Values" debate. I will not respond to this criticism in this paper since I have already done so on earlier occasions (see, Hahm, 1999; 2000a; 2000b).

The second type of criticism that confronts the proponents of the new Confucian discourse concerns the value of Confucianism in explaining the economic transformation of East Asia. These critics claim that Confucianism has no explanatory value, that cultural variables are neither here nor there in explaining what has transpired in the region. This criticism is a meta-theoretical as well as an empirical one. The debate over the theoretical efficacy of cultural analyses has been ongoing at least since Max Weber, and it is not likely to end any time soon. The debate over the role (or lack thereof) of Confucianism in the industrial development of East Asia is not likely to end either, but I will leave the meta-theoretical debate to others. What is clear is that the new Confucian discourse is a type of cultural analysis and in this sense it is a part and parcel of the "identity politics" sweeping the world.[3]

This takes us to the third type of criticism, which I will be responding to in this paper, and which concerns the epistemological position of the East Asian intellectuals who advocate Confucianism. This type of criticism, mostly from the 'left,' argues that theorizing under the 'East v. West'

ment include Chang Hyun-gun, Hahm Chaibong, Jon Byungjae, Kang Jungin, Kim Hyung-chull, Kim Munshik, Kim Seog-gun, Lee Seung-hwan, Lew Seok-choon, Ryu Honglim. See also, Hahm Chaibong (1998); Hahm Chaibong, Hahm Chaihark, David L. Hall (2000).

[2]See, for example, Patten (1998).

[3]On the relationship between Confucianism and identity politics see Hahm Chaibong, "The Clash of Civilizations Revisited: A Confucian Perspective," in Salim Rashid ed., *The Clash of Civilizations?: Asian Responses* (Dhaka, Bangladesh: The University Press Limited.)

dichotomy, one is actually falling prey to the terms of discourse defined by the West. I will respond to this criticism first, by providing my own version of the evolution of the intellectual discourse in East Asia from the 19th century to the present. Then, I will analyze the epistemology of "Orientalism" as forwarded by Edward Said, on which so much of this type of criticism is based to see what implications it has for new Confucianism. My conclusion will be that the new Confucian discourse is a natural reflection of the fundamental political and economic changes that the region has experienced in recent decades. I also conclude that the implications, political or otherwise, of orientalism for the new Confucian theories are none.

FROM OLD CONFUCIANISM TO NEW CONFUCIANISM

Ever since the encounter with the West in the 19th century, East Asian intellectuals have been struggling to reconcile tradition and modernity. The initial reaction was to affect a compromise by affirming the moral superiority of the East while accepting the Western way in science and technology. Then came the iconoclasm of the May 4th Movement that rejected tradition wholesale in the name of modernization. The nationalist and socialist alternatives were intellectual heirs of the May 4th in the sense that both regarded the Confucian tradition as nothing more than a hindrance to modernization. To be sure, some traditionalists tried to hold on to Confucianism, but as Levenson has pointed out, they did as much to destroy the tradition as the anti-traditionalists (Levenson, 1965: xxix). As in many others parts of the Third World, socialism became the ideology of choice for most East Asian intellectuals because it enabled them to pursue modernization (or westernization) while claiming for themselves and their motherlands a stage of historical development more advanced than those achieved by the capitalist and imperialist West.

However, two major historical events during the 80s forced a fundamental reconsideration of the positions of formerly socialist or otherwise left-leaning intellectuals. With the sudden end of the Cold War and the spectacular rise of East Asia's Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs), many Asian intellectuals were faced with a situation quite unlike any they had faced since their first encounter with the West. On the one hand, the fall of Marxism robbed them of what until then was the most popular and satisfying way of dealing with the West. The de-legitimation of socialism politically, economically, and intellectually, denied them the epistemological and political position from which to criticize the West without having to forsake westernization or modernization.

The rise of the East Asian NICs was just as shocking and just as unexpected as the fall of Marxism. South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong represented the epitome of reactionary, authoritarian, neo-colonial, states. They were "protectorates" of the United States (and Great Britain, in the case of Hong Kong), in the absence of which, their existence itself would have been in serious doubt. They were products of American hegemony in the region, maintained by puppet dictators and American military presence. As such, nothing was to be expected of them. If anything, they were perfect examples of dependent development as indeed, many local intellectuals tried to argue throughout the 1980s. As it turned out, however, the East Asian NICs became the first countries, since the rise of Japan at the turn of the 20th century, to escape from the "periphery" through successful industrialization (Haggard, 1990). Then, to add insult to injury, so to speak, South Korea and Taiwan made a successful transition to democracy. How were they going to explain the fact that the countries thought least likely to achieve economic development or escape despotic rule, succeeded spectacularly while the "existing socialist" countries on which they pinned much of their hope, failed so miserably?

Bereft of the ideology which had sustained them through a century of encounter with the West, the former socialist intellectuals started to turn to discourses which came to be called post-Marxist, postmodern, or post-colonial. The attraction of these discourses was that they allowed them to maintain the anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, anti-Western stance but without having to base them on the science of dialectical materialism and the iron laws of history, now defunct. Instead, the melange of deconstructionist, post-structuralist, and hermeneuticist discourses seemed to provide a different epistemological point from which to criticize the West in all its guises, political, economic, and intellectual.

Thus, a new breed of intellectuals sprang from the ashes of Marxism to oppose the West and its logocentric, phallogocentric, and eurocentric biases. Taking inspiration from the likes of Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Terry Eagleton, and Frederick Jameson, who in turn take their cues from the likes of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida, (with Freud and Marx now revived in their postmodernist, rather than modernist guise,) post-colonialists have located a new epistemological and political position from which to continue to mount their attacks on not only capitalist and imperialist, but now also logocentric, and phallogocentric West.

However, while the intellectuals of the left were trying to grapple with the reality of economically and politically successful East Asia and the fall of socialism, others began to fashion another theory to better explain the

improbable success of East Asian NICs. First, with the destruction of the 'left v. right' dichotomy many began to return to an older dichotomy, namely, 'tradition v. modernity.' To be sure, the tradition v. modernity problematic was never far from the minds of East Asian intellectuals, but during the Cold War, the left v. right dichotomy had become the overwhelming. However, with the end of the Cold War, the tradition v. modernity problematic that lay close beneath the surface began to re-emerge. Secondly, the rapid rise of the Confucian discourse was aided and abetted by the rediscovery of the rich tradition of classical scholarship, both in East Asia and in the West, which continued largely unabated through all the political upheavals of the past century. The combination of these two factors produced the new Confucian discourse that now tried to account for the success, not failure, of East Asia. The new Confucian discourse is undergirded by the classical and modern intellectual resources of both the East and the West.

The new Confucian discourse represents a new reality and a new theory. Now, for the first time in over a century, East Asian intellectuals could affirm their tradition and modernity at the same time. Now, East Asian intellectuals could begin to reinterpret the Confucian tradition for its modern as well as postmodern implications. Confucianism can now be viewed as a way of life and thought that can not only foster modernization, industrialization, and democratization, but also go beyond the deficiencies of liberal, market oriented, and individualistic Western modernity (Hahm, 2000).

THE ORIENTALIST FALLACY

As Arif Dirlik notes, there is a sense in which the East Asian NIC's 'saved' capitalism. When the US and Western Europe were foundering economically, plagued by stagflation and a major downturn during the 1970s and 1980s, the economies of Japan and the East Asian NICs were steaming ahead full-speed. When other Third World countries were achieving dependent development at best while remaining confined to the 'periphery,' the East Asian NICs seemed to be achieving 'independent' economic development. The catch, of course, was that this was based not on the Western model, but a East Asian one. However, from the perspective of the intellectuals of the left, such fine distinctions were hardly relevant. To them, all that the East Asian NICs did was to breathe life back into a capitalist world system. As for the new Confucian discourse that arose in response to the success of the East Asian NICs, it represented the worst of all worlds in that it was not only a version of capitalism but also one that tried to combine it

with the most reactionary, feudal tradition.

The economic crisis that hit the region in 1997 has breathed life back into leftist discourse. It is now argued that the fall of Asian capitalism or Confucian capitalism was inevitable based as it was on pre-modern institutions and practices such as cronyism. On this point, there is a happy confluence between the 'right' and the 'left.' The 'right' argues that the Asian model and values should be replaced with the revived American ones. The 'left' argues that the East Asian NICs have saved world capitalism, now revived in the guise of 'globalization'; only to become its victim.

The 'leftist' sense that globalization is merely a revival of the capitalist world system led by the U.S. is reflected in the post-modern or post-structuralist criticism they bring to bear on the epistemological aspect of this debate:

> … geography of Asian revival has been informed very much by the geography of Orientalism. It is no coincidence that the revival has expressed itself in terms of geographical regions that were in the first place products of EuorAmerican spatializations of Asia in Orientalist scholarship and, subsequently, the area studies of post World War II vintage that were informed by the global strategic interests of the United States (Dirlik, 1999: 176-7).

As is well known by now, "Orientalism" is "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident.'(Said, 1978: 2)" Moreover, it is "the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient — dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (Said, 1978: 3)." Underlying this discursive 'institution' is "the ideal of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and culture (Said, 1978: 7)."

The power of this discourse is such that it is not enough to try and overcome it by simply affirming the "Orient" or the "East" over the "Occident" or the "West." This is because the "Orient" or the "East" "was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action (Said, 1973: 3)." It is the creation of the West. As such, to affirm the "East" is not to overcome Orientalism, but to affirm it, albeit negatively. Those who try to affirm and reinterpret the Confucian tradition of East Asia, then, are also affirming or employing the Orientalist discourse as set up by the West: "what most appeals to Asianness share in common is a reification of Asia, that is often accompa-

nied by an Occidentalism that is hardly distinguishable from Orientalism." (Dirlik, 1990: 180) A clear indication that the advocacy of Confucian values is of Western origin is that it has been given crucial impetus by Western intellectuals such as Herman Kahn, John Berger, and Samuel Huntington (Dirlik, 1999: 176).

By advocating a reinterpretation of one's tradition, one is thereby introducing an intellectual discourse dear to the West. To a certain extent, this is true. As all good deconstructionists know, to affirm one of the pair of dichotomy such as "male v. female", "reason v. emotion", "white v. black", or "east v. west" one is not thereby overcoming the dichotomy. The point would then be to find an epistemological position that would be completely independent of the terms of discourse set up by the West.

The problem with this criticism is that it is itself beholden to yet another type of Western discourse, one that imagines an "outside", the "archemedian point", the "bird's eyes-view," the "noumena". Nothing less than a point completely un-beholden to any Western discourse would do. However, this desire to get outside is itself a typically Western ideal at least since Plato. Indeed, the point of the postmodern criticism of the logocentric and/or metaphysical bent of Western discourse is to show that there is no way to escape the discourses to which we are beholden. As deconstructionists point out, the act of deconstruction is never, and can never be, complete. It is different from "destruction" precisely in the sense that it cannot be a one shot deal where you can wipe the slates clean of Western prejudices.

Even if, for the sake of argument, we grant that it is possible to do so, what explanatory value and power would that 'native' theory have? Can this theory, outside and completely independent of the influence of Western theoretical discourse, explain things better than the "western" ones? More importantly, if 'nativity' is the sole or the most important criterion by which to chose a theory, what becomes of liberalism, democracy, socialism, progressivism, Marxism, and capitalism? Are these not also theories imported from the West? What about nationalism? Is not nationalism the invention of Westerners? How far back do we have to go to find a truly native theory?

POLITICAL, NOT EPISTEMOLOGICAL RESISTANCE

The most powerful acts of criticism, resistance, and defiance comes from those who have been designated as the "lesser" of the dichotomies who then embrace and empower that definition, using it as the starting point of their resistance. Thus, "females", "blacks", "non-whites", "non-Westerners" are able to resist 'male-dominance', white oppression, and Western imperi-

alism by not denying the plausibility of the respective dichotomies but embracing it and then turning it around to their own advantage. The Civil Rights Movement and Affirmative Action were only two of the best known examples of how some measure of equality and justice can be achieved by empowering 'blacks' and 'women.' Postmodernists can argue all they wish that one should not simply give credence to the white-non-white or West-East pairs by defining oneself as non-white or the East. However, the real empowerment has come from taking on those dichotomies, not by taking the ultra-liberal or postmodern view that such distinctions can and should be deconstructed.

Revealing the historical, narrative structures by which such dichotomies have come into existence, a la Derrida and Foucault is a fascinating project. To learn that such discourses were created by "power/knowledge", and not pure knowledge is also interesting. However, political opposition and empowerment comes not from deconstructing the discursive practices and the dichotomies that they have been built upon but by embracing it by reversing the order.

Edward Said's book has had an enormous impact on how non-Western intellectuals view themselves and their work. Said has done more than anyone else to sensitize non-Western intellectuals to the power and scope of Orientalist discourse. However, there are two aspects of his analysis that warrant further reflection. One is that he does not show how it is possible to overcome orientalism. Indeed, Foucault's theory of discourse upon which Said so heavily relies on, itself does not posit an 'outside':

> We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a filed of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. These 'power-knowledge relations' are not to be analyzed, therefore, not only the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system, but, on the contrary, the subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations (Foucault, 1977: 27-8).

Said clearly acknowledges this.: "No one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of a society (1978:

10).” Again,

> For if it is true that no production of knowledge in the human sciences can ever ignore or disclaim its author’s involvement as a human subject in his own circumstances, then it must also be true that for a European or American studying the Orient there can be no disclaiming the main circumstances of his actuality: that he comes up against the Orient as a European or American first, as an individual second (Said, 1978: 11).

This is clearly a Foucaultian position regarding the production of truth and knowledge. The point of Foucault’s theory of discourse is that there are no “outside” positions free of power. All discourses, whether intended as an imperialist fabrication of the colonial people, or the work of a conscientious intellectual trying his/her best to be objective, are prejudiced, orientalist. That is why Foucault uses the term “power/knowledge”. To use the Gadamerian language, all knowledge is “prejudiced.” On the epistemological level, we are all prejudiced.

However, curiously enough, Said then goes on to criticize Foucault for the very epistemological insight that he himself finds so attractive and useful.:

> Many of the people who admire and have learned from Foucault, including myself, have commented on the undifferentiated power he seemed to ascribe to modern society. With this profoundly pessimistic view went also a singular lack of interest in the force of effective resistance to it, in choosing particular sites of intensity, choices which, we see from the evidence on all sides, always exist and are often successful in impeding, if not actually stopping, the progress of tyrannical power (Said, 1986: 151).

“Moreover”, says Said, “Foucault seemed to have been confused between the power of institutions to subjugate individuals, and the fact that individual behavior in society is frequently a matter of following rules and conventions (Said, 1986: 151).”

The person confused here is not Foucault but Said. Said is confusing the epistemological point with a political one. Foucault is making a point regarding the manner in which all knowledge is produced, including his own, and by extension, Said’s own. Said thinks Foucault is making a political point, or at least one with clear political implications. Having shown so brilliantly how power and knowledge conspire to produce “regimes of truth”, Said thinks that Foucault owes it to us to show how to resist them as well. Said is committing a category mistake.

What then is the normative or political import of this knowledge? None.

If all our knowledge is based on 'power/knowledge', indeed is made possible by it, knowing this does not give us any leverage vis-a-vis our epistemological situation. If it is an objective description of our epistemological situation, then by the same token, it is not something that can be overcome, no matter how much we will it. What then does orientalism tell us non-Western intellectuals? Nothing. It warns us of a mistake that we all make the moment we start thinking that knowledge is itself the product of "power/knowledge." As such, there are no theoretical or normative leverage to be gained from this knowledge of our epistemological situation.

The violence is not being perpetrated on an epistemological level, but rather on the practical, political one. That "liberal cultural heroes like John Sutart Mill, Arnold, Carlyle, Newman, Macaulay, Ruskin, George Eliot, and even Dickens had definite views on race and imperialism" can be "quite easily found to be at work (Said, 1978: 14)." A deconstruction of the Orientalist discourse is not needed to realize this. As Said acknowledges, the works of the likes of Noam Chomsky has shown the relationship between "objective knowledge" and power quite clearly (Said, 1978: 11). What possible additional political angle can the knowledge of our epistemological situatedness or prejudice provide?

Another aspect of Said's Orientalism theory that is ironical is that Said himself is a product of a thoroughly Western education. As he himself professes, he was not even aware of his Palestinian identity until he heard Golda Meir declare "There are no Palestinians." He is a Christian who spent early childhood in Egypt, attending Christian schools, who then went to a boarding school in New England, and then Princeton and Harvard for higher education. Immediately upon receiving his doctorate, he has been a professor of English and Comparative literature at Columbia University. His greatest theoretical inspiration comes from Michel Foucault, a professor of College de France, an institution as deeply implicated in the creation of the Orientalist discourse as any other. In what way does he represent the "Asian" or "oriental" intellectual, staking out a position "outside" the dominant Western intellectual discourse, including Orientalism that he has so forcefully described?

All this is not to say that there is no point to criticizing what we have come to call "orientalism" or imperialism or colonial discourse. We clearly need to do so, and we continue to do so. For example, the term "Asia" or even "East Asia" might indeed be historically and culturally non-existent region, the product of Western hegemonic world-view rather than a local reality. It is indeed necessary that we make the distinctions and apply "strategies of analysis that not only factor in historical conflicts, modern

nationalisms that expressed themselves in renunciation of this common legacy, and intra-East Asian imperialism (Dirlik, 1999: 180)." Moreover, it is true that "merely to claim cultural identity against the 'West' is no longer sufficient, not only because the 'West' is already an inextricable part of East Asia, but also because such claims may only serve to perpetuate social injustices and oppressions in a new cultural guise." (Dirlik, 1999: 187) However, the point is that considering our epistemological situation does not do the job for us. Our task, as non-Western intellectuals criticizing the west-centric, logocentric, phallogocentric discourses, is not an epistemological one but a political one. We need to find out actual prejudices, repressions, and oppressions, write about them and criticize them. We cannot hide behind an epistemological position which would criticize all such efforts by revealing their purported epistemological co-optations by orientalism or Occidentalism.

CONCLUSION

What does it mean to be an intellectual in the post-modern, post-industrial, post-Marxist, post-Cold War, post-Confucian, globalizing East Asia? All the traditional dichotomies that have hitherto informed the epistemological and normative positions of critical intellectuals world over have been nullified during the last decade of of the 20th century. However, Joseph Levenson's description of the East Asian intellectual's epistemological predicament was remarkably accurate and it continues to be so. Many East Asian intellectuals chose Marxism because it enabled them to do two things: espouse western modernity but at the same time claim for themselves an ideal that even the West has not been able to achieve. For the post-industrial, post-Cold War, post-Confucian intellectuals of East Asia, the problematic may not have changed all that much. It is still a matter of how best to deal with the West without self-alienation, how to assert and affirm one's cultural identity without thereby denying the fruits of industrialization, modernization, and democratization. In this age, the answer would seem to be Confucian Capitalism and Confucian Democracy. Although these may not be the perfect epistemological and political solutions they seem to make the most sense. The sense of their appropriateness comes from the political and economic situation we find ourselves in, not an epistemological one.

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