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Taiwan and the Confucian Aspiration: Toward the Twenty-first Century

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This essay concerns what may be surprising to many of us, that the age-old classical Confucianism, so institutionally abused for so long, has something fresh to offer that is revolutionary, wholesome—differing even from the celebrated democratic ideals of the West—for twenty-first century Taiwan. But, to think of it, nothing is more natural than for a cultural fountainhead of the Classics to be precisely anti-antiquarian, forever streaming forth eternally fresh insights to nourish our future. Such a flow is stopped only by our conscious refusal to benefit from nourishment at our root, and only at our own peril.

And the sad story of Chinese people is that they have been stubbornly (for no reason) ignoring classical Confucian insight, by dwelling in agrarian imperialism.¹ In fact the entire human community has settled in a globe of individual-societal *antagonism*, shuttling between its antipodes. The traditional feudalism of China (and of medieval Europe as well) perched at the societal pole; the democratic tradition of the West falls at the individual pole.

Classical Confucianism insists that our individual-social reciprocity is inter-nascent rather than internecine, more ecologically symbiotic than institutionally suppressive; we had better foster such a reciprocity. And this insight, this essay insists, should be the core principle of our co-thriving in the twenty-first century Taiwan and, by extrapolation, in the world tomorrow. We neglect this insight at no less than our own ecological peril.

I. The Problematic of Confucianism Vis-à-vis Taiwan Today

Taiwan in the 1980s has been undergoing various breathtakingly rapid and radical metamorphoses; its democratization of political atmosphere facilitated a vigorous blossoming of economic enterprises and released a tremendous social upsurge of people's vitality hitherto cramped under the regime.² At the same time, wave after wave of various isms come to wash the shore of the island and clamor for the intelligentsia's attention; socialism, world systems, dependency theory, development theory, and the like ceaselessly come to claim a leading role in the theoretical elucidation and leadership of the development of Taiwan.³

Significantly, however, there has been no single movement, great or small, upholding Confucianism as *the* banner under which to lead in social, political, and ideological development. Having been the historical soil in which Taiwan culture was fostered and nourished, Confucianism is yet treated today as a wilted official ideology, merely surviving in the "Basic Curriculum of Chinese Culture," or tossed around among scholars as a mutant factor in Asian industrial civilization, or critically assessed, among scholars abroad, as a causal factor for Chinese despotism (Tu Wei-ming 1984; Tu and Yang 1989).⁴ In short, Confucianism is not the leading principle of Taiwan development but a *problem* to be discussed.

This situation describes two facts of Taiwan today. On the one hand, ignoring Confucianism is a result (hangover, if you will) of its age-old institutional abuses; we are awakened to its perils by having been liberated by Taiwan's industrial-economic miracle from the agrarian order which supported imperialism. We are now suspicious of Confucianism of whatever version. On the other hand, our being uncritically enamoured with imported ideologies shows that, our obsessions with the official Confucian ideology now gone, we are left with an ideological vacuum which we are trying desperately to fill with whatever comes our way.

We are convinced that this social phenomenon portends a crisis. Mere fascination with imported novelty and rootless openness to the unreflected future make Taiwan easy game to be overtaken by, and dissipated in, haphazard ideological whims of the times. The economic prosperity of Taiwan only hides the danger and renders future cultural bankruptcy more thorough and tragic.

We claim that Confucianism truly so called is anything but a historical relic, an old ideology having died a natural death. The following pages show that Confucianism is Taiwan's vibrant root-strength for world democracy, in fact, cosmic ecological democracy, of the twenty-first century. It should be noted that "democracy" here means not "people-power" over the government, but people-rooted [self-] governance. Con-

fucianism represents history-tested insights on systematic ecological symbiosis; it claims that human nature deep in us directly implicates cosmic democracy. Taiwan can neglect Confucianism only at the cost of itself.

We will proceed as follows. First (section II), we elucidate Confucianism as a philosophy of life that overflows from the self into the family (ethics), the state (politics), and heaven and earth (cosmology). A peculiar philosophy of democracy (*min-pen chu-i*), it thus applies at considerable widths and depths beyond the realm of politics. Then we look into repeated corruptions of classical Confucianism as a support of feudal institutionalism in Chinese history (section III), then into how Taiwan is shedding this feudalistic mentality as it rapidly develops towards the post-industrial future (section IV). Lastly (section V), we see the crucial role Confucianism plays in the future of Taiwan.

II. Democratic Implications of Classical Confucianism

Confucianism is a philosophy of unconditional reverence for the autonomous individual in all dimensions—personal, familial, political, ecological. Its central point is unabashed humanism, attended with dynamic socio-cosmic implications and explications.

The Confucian humanistic center is called *jen*, that human core that is the joy and fulfillment of all our desires to be human. Although the humanness of our personhood, what makes us human, is too richly variegated to be summed up in a phrase,⁵ *jen* is not at all far to seek. Confucius's (551-479 B.C.) deep pronouncement, "I desire *jen*, and *jen* is here" (*Analects*, 7/30), at once points to the infrangible dignity of human autonomy ("I desire") and its inner immediacies to the self ("is here").

The self is here uppermost, as Confucius on another occasion sighed, "People of old learned for [the enhancement of] themselves; now they learn for [the approbation of] others" ("Hsien Wen," 25). Such a solid autonomy of the self is immune from nefarious negligence in the others' eyes, and so "People do not know [me] and [I] do not feel-hurt" ("Hsüeh Erh," 1). It is small wonder that such a "learning for oneself" became the fundamental ideal for education during the Sung and Ming dynasties (de Bary 1983:21-42).

One can see, then, that Confucian learning is not an amassing of knowledge but an enhancement of the self toward the sagely wise. It is a short distance from this sagely autonomy of humanness to the equality of all people. For everyone is endowed with the same connate dynamism of self-transcendence, advancing *through* one's specific status toward the fulfillment of the heaven and earth.

Mencius (371-ca. 289 B.C.) caught this grand equality when he exclaimed, quoting Yen Yüan's words, saying, "What [kind of] man was

Shun [the sage]? What [kind of] man am I? He who exerts himself would also be so [as he was]" (*Mencius*, "T'eng Wen Kung," 3A1). Hsün Tzu (fl. 298–238 B.C.) echoed this sentiment when he said, "All people walking on the road can become Yü [the sage]" (*Hsün Tzu*, "Hsing E"). And the "road" finally signifies the Tao. It is, then, logical for Confucius to courageously declare, "Humans can magnify the Tao; the Tao does not magnify humans" ("Wei Ling Kung," 25).

Human ecological "equality" is thus "through one's specific status"; this is a peculiarly Confucian equality. It means not "everyone is indifferently equal" but "every person carries the whole dignity of the family, the state, and of heaven and earth." Confucian equality is not an indifferent uniformity of atomistic individuals, each going his own way in total disregard of others, but persons in their interpenetration and reciprocity of ontological stages. What does all this entail?

To begin with, the dignity of an *individual* person consists in a stage-by-stage development from the self through the family, the state, to all under heaven, and finally to heaven and earth. But these "stages" express not (only) a historical development but mutual ontological reflections and penetrations. That is, the dignity of an "individual" person has the weight of all things under heaven, and heaven and earth themselves. Mencius said that "All things are complete in me" ("Chin Hsin," 7A4).

This means that the individual is at root a crystallization of the *family*. A person is worthy of respect as a father, or a son, in the family. The individual is as important as the family to which he belongs—up paternally and down filially for nine whole generations. Violation of the law is a disgrace to no less than the violator's nine generations which should therefore carry the whole gravity of his punishment, sometimes to the point of receiving the death penalty. The usual explanation from prudence—that unless nine generations are exterminated, the series of revenges would be endless—is finally predicated upon this serious family solidarity. The family is as great as each individual who shoulders it, and the individual is as great as the family to which he belongs. We understand Mencius, then, when he said, "There are three [things] unfilial, of which having no posterity is the greatest" ("Li Lou," 4A26).

This also explains the cosmic-ecological seriousness of filial obligations—the family. For the family patterns heaven (father) and earth (mother), as the *Classic of Filiality* (*Hsiao Ching*) expounded. And the (clan-)state is governed, of course, by "the Son of Heaven," with the decree no less than of heaven itself; the dignity of the sovereign is coextensive with the familized heaven and earth, for the Son of Heaven is father to his people.

At the same time, surprisingly enough, it is the *people* who are ruled who confer this mandate of heaven to govern them on the Son of Heaven.

The *Shu Ching* (the oldest extant collection of public decrees and announcements, that is, of publicly embraced ideals) is quite explicit on this. The sovereign does well to take care of his people as if taking care of his own disease and of his own baby ("K'ang Kao"). For "Heaven is sharp-eared, clear-sighted, as my people are [over you, O Ruler]"; "Heaven confers praise or blame on you according to how my people wish to confer on you." ("Kao-yao Mo").

And Mencius explicates this sentiment: "Heaven looks as our people look; Heaven listens as our people listen"; the people are the ears, the eyes, and the mouth of Heaven ("Wan Chang," 5A5). And so, the very survival of the sovereign depends on the consent of the people. This sovereign-subject reciprocity is radically democratic to the point of being revolutionary. Mencius said to King Hsüan of Ch'i, "When the sovereign regards his subjects as his hands and feet, they regard him as their bosom and heart; when he regards them as dogs and horses, they regard him as any fellow man; when he regards them as dirt and grass, they regard him as a robber and enemy." ("Li Lou," 4B3)

Sometimes Mencius was even blunter:

King Hsüan of Ch'i asked, "...May a subject assassinate his sovereign?" [Mencius] said, "He who robs *jen*—natural benevolence—we call a robber; he who robs *i*—natural righteousness—we call a ruffian. The robber and ruffian we call a [mere] fellow. I have heard of murdering the fellow Chou [the tyrant], but yet to hear about assassinating a sovereign." ("Liang Hui Wang," 1B8)

These passages were so outrageous to the imperial ears that they were ordered by Emperor T'ai-tsu (r. 1368–1398) of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) in 1394 to be expurgated. Imperious dictators adopted the familized state authority but discarded the familized royal responsibility to the people. Those sovereigns abrogated the familial reciprocity of the government.

Thus the ontological status of the individual, as well as that of heaven and earth, is elucidated by the patterning of the family (and the state). The weight of an individual *is* that of heaven and earth, with whose authority individuals-together (the people) confer on the sovereign the legitimacy to govern them. This intricate system of interpenetration of ontological dignity constitutes the concentric circles, the stage-by-stage development, of the individual, the family, the state, and heaven and earth. It is on this ecological, that is, anthropocosmic basis that the "people-rooted" (*min-pen*) governance, the peculiarly Confucian democracy, is established:

The ruler of a state advances to office the wise-talented only when it cannot be helped. This is for the low to overstep the honorable, for the distant to overstep the near-relative; can [this matter be treated] without caution?

[When therefore those] about [you] all say, "[This man is] wise-talented," [he] can[not be advanced] yet. [When] various officers all say, "[This man is] wise-talented," [he] can[not be advanced] yet. After the people all say, "[This man is] wise-talented," then examine him; after seeing wisdom-talents in him, then employ him.

[When those] about [you] all say, "[He] cannot [be employed]," do not listen [to them]. [When] various officers all say, "[He] cannot [be employed]," do not listen [to them]. After the people all say, "[He] cannot [be employed]," then examine him; after seeing [that he indeed] cannot [be employed], then [let] him leave.

[When those] about [you] all say, "[You] can kill [him]," do not listen [to them]. [When] various officers all say, "[You] can kill [him]," do not listen [to them]. After the people all say, "[You] can kill [him]," then examine him; after seeing [that he indeed has something] for which [he] can [be] kill[ed], then kill him. Therefore [they] say, "The people killed him."

After [having acted in] this manner, then [you] can become the people's father and mother. ("Liang Hui Wang," 1B7)

This is literally government by consulting the will of the people—no matter how much the scholars quibble over what "the people" entailed in ancient times. Confucian democracy, coterminous with family cosmology, has been in existence since the time of Mencius, about four centuries before Christ.

As a defining metaphor of what Confucian sentiment amounts to, a rather obvious example can be given. Cellist Terry King once said, "In music every note is special." This saying has three important implications. First, it is "in music" that every note is special and unique; outside music, every note is just another noise. No music, no notes. Secondly, there would be no music without the notes which compose it; no notes, no music. And so, thirdly, there is a radical interdependence between the music and the notes; they are internascent.

The music referred to here is of course the resounding music of society, and the ecological resonance of nature, co-existing and co-thriving with, and within, each individual's heart and integrity. All the metaphysical sweep of "speculative" essays in China is for personal cultivation; all historical biographies are to make concrete general points about social and cosmic concord.

These two trends beautifully blend in Mencius's politico-metaphysical exhortations; extending the ruler's love of sex to his people, and sharing with them his recreation, livelihood, and possessions, is both to prosper his kingdom and to fulfill the heavenly decree (and human nature). This is people-rooted governance (*min-pen chu-i*) rather than people-power opposed to the powers that be (*min-chu chu-i*), what is usually called "democracy."

We must here both bring out the difference between people-rooted governance and people-power opposed to the government, and show how this explication of Confucianism is not our private speculation but rooted in the interpretive tradition of Confucianism.

Yuzo Mizoguchi in his interesting recent book, *Hōhō to shite no Chūgoku* (China as Method) claims that in Japan the public (*oyake*) and the private (*watakushi*) are exclusive contraries, while in China the Confucians have been protesting one-man (imperial) privacy in the name of popular collective privacies in the Great Concord (*ta t'ung*).

Although recognizing that individualism has in it a correct insistence on personal dignity, Mizoguchi insists that it is inappropriate to transplant to the Chinese soil such individualistic separatism of Western democracy. He would have "democracy" changed from a civil (*shimin teki*)-individual (*ko*)-contractual (*keiyaku*) sort to a connective (*tsunagari*)-familial (*en*) sort—as befits the collective climate of Chinese tradition—before bringing it to China.

Mizoguchi then quotes a wide range of scholars, from Huang Tsung-hsi (1610-95), Wang Ch'uan-shan (1619-92), and Lu K'un (1536-1618), to Tai Chen (1723-77), Kung Tzu-chen (1792-1841), and then Ch'en T'ien-hwa (1875-1905), Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925), and T'an Ssu-t'ung (1865-98), to show that they all based their positions on the Confucian tradition—where "people" belong not to the sovereign but to under-heaven—in their protest against the dynastic one-man privacy under the banner of collective privacies. Mizoguchi claims that such a sovereign-people opposition differs from the Western opposition of pure individualism against the public realm (Mizoguchi 1989:12-23, 123-128).

"Collective privacies" sounds odd; the "collective personal" may be more appropriate here. Perhaps those courageous Confucians were protesting the imperial privatization (exclusive appropriation) of the personal, which by nature belongs to us all. The protest is made possible by the *distinction* among under-heaven as cultural space, state as people's survival space, and dynasty as governing institution. This protest began with Mencius when he repeatedly and vigorously (even vehemently) advocated, right in the ruler's face, a sharing of the basic enjoyment of sex, family, and music *with the people*.

In any case, we are indebted to Mizoguchi for reminding us of the Confucian *tradition* of people-rooted governance (*min-pen chū-i*) in China. What Mizoguchi missed seems to be twofold: First, the polarization of the public versus the private-individual is not an exclusive characteristic of the Japanese mind but is shared by the West as well; Japan puts an emphasis on the public realm; the West, on the individual. But second and more importantly, he does not say that the category of the shared personal (1) is ultimately based on ecological interpenetration of the individual and the

social, or (2) results in the radical reciprocity of the ruler and the ruled. It is important to note that both these points have been a common assumptive framework of all Confucian speculations, such as those by Confucius, Mencius (already cited), and Tung Chung-shu (c. 179–104 B.C.), as well as Chu Hsi (1130–1200), Lu Hsiang-shan, (1139–1193), Wang Yang-ming (1472–1529), and Tai Chen, down to the recent Sun Yat-sen. What we claim in this section is, then, a mere modern rehearsal of the age-old Confucian tradition which has been again and again suppressed by feudalistic imperialism.

III. Confucianism in Traditional Chinese Politics

We must remember that this political-ecological reciprocity is so radically democratic, that is, so strenuously dynamic, that it all too easily turned sour. The socio-political history of China is a series of sad stories about how this classical Confucianism was twisted into a one-sided authoritarian institutionalism. Confucianism in traditional China at once assumed a twisted form to powerfully support, and at the same time to powerlessly criticize, with the pristine force of the original Confucianism, the socio-political structure of the agrarian empire which surrounded it.

On the one hand, beginning in the Han (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) dynasty, when Confucianism was selected out of a Hundred Schools of Thought to be the official ideology of the state, Confucianism became the official warp and woof of governance by scholarship, and especially of the system of advancement to offices by examination on Confucian Classics (Pan Ku:1555).

On the other hand, Confucianism became emaciated as it infiltrated the governmental system, shedding its vigorous democratic élan. The hierarchical structure of ideal Confucian society was supposed to be a stage-by-stage development of reciprocal coordination between individuals and society. The ideal was not meant to be degraded into a pretext for hierarchical oppression of individuals. Sadly, however, Chinese history, at least since the Ch'in (221–206 B.C.) and the Han dynasties, trod the latter route much more often than the former.

Passages in the Confucian classics of stern warnings to the sovereign (such as 4B3, 1B8 quoted in section II) were expurgated; stage-by-stage development of individual humanness through family, and state, and on to the universal heaven and earth, was made into a support for a rigid social hierarchy with oppressive authority as awesome as heaven and earth.⁶ The civil-service examination system became a social ladder of scholasticism to climb to wealth and the elite. Vainly the Confucian scholars protested and criticized the power politics of the day (Chu Hsi: 579a). Classical Confucianism and the Confucian scholars were powerless against the

power structure of the times, because it was the days of agri-economics, with the ideology of stable feudalistic hierarchy and monolithic subordination. China has been from time immemorial wedded to the soil, nourished in the culture of the soil—agricultural ideology—even during the Sung (960–1279) and Ming (1368–1644) dynasties when commerce and technology flourished (Ray Huang 1988). Each individual was eternally defined by a time-honored role and occupation textured within a social *hierarchy*, serving as a social pressure cooker.

This is a structure quite different from the Western “context of community,” to which every individual is directly and equally related, with room for flexibility in the relations among individuals. This is the flexibility (freedom) of individualism.

Unfortunately, individual freedom was exercised in the agricultural hierarchy only at the cost of the life of the individual, either by sacrificing one’s family members for advancement to officialdom or, in case one protests, by being ostracized from one’s relatives and villagers, entering the monastery, or ending up dead in jail (Huang Jen-yu 1985:217–259). The sacrifice of the family is described by Ray Huang with sad vividness. As depicted by Huang (1988:222), the Chinese empire was not exactly a completely “closed society” where all occupations were strictly limited to those that were handed down from the forefathers, from generation to generation. Still, very little freedom of occupational choice was accorded to individuals. If a farming family intended to have some stability in life and some prestige in society, the only way was to have one of its members become a government official through examination in the classics.

But the road to examination success was extremely long and hard, and the efforts of one man or one generation alone could rarely attain the goal. Usually they had to start with a forefather, go through several generations of hard labor and meticulous skimping and saving to secure the ownership of the land they cultivated, then gradually go on to secure the mortgages of other lands, and slowly become a landlord family. The basic condition of financial capabilities having been thus fulfilled, the posterity of this family could then obtain the opportunity for education, for which further untold sacrifices of mothers and wives would have to be given.

And so, on the surface, it looked as if the few hours writing in the examination hall dramatically changed a person from rags to riches and glory; actually, this change for one person was brought on by generations of concerted effort, by generations of the family having been subjected to harsh brutal labor. Naturally that individual’s sense of responsibilities and obligations to his family and relatives was simply overwhelming.

Such was the structure of conformity and homogeneity of feudal farming culture in the traditional Chinese society. This was the social background that twisted and crippled the vitality of Confucian democratic

spirit into a state ideology that supported the gigantic bureaucracy for so many dynasties.

IV. History and Modernity of Taiwan

The history of Taiwan, especially after the Second World War, is a story of emancipation from the traditional social hierarchy of agricultural feudalism and, by implication, from the shackles of Confucian authoritarian society and government.

This emancipation has been effected largely by capitalistic industries and commercialism. Ironically, capitalistic enterprise *and* its ideology were promoted under the aegis of two centralized systems—first Japanese imperialism, then the Nationalist government, one actively promoting industrial modernization, the other adopting a policy to encourage industries and commerce to develop themselves on a worldwide scale. But they shared a similar historical situation, in that Taiwan flourished in the world capitalistic market *after* their bureaucratic grips loosened.

Taiwan is now ripe for futurity; it has entered modernity and is now ready for post-industrial growth. This fact is attested to by its current situation, which fulfills some typical conditions for modernity—professionalization, urbanization, education. These are some of what Daniel Bell called the characteristics of post-industrial society (Bell 1973:12–33). First of all, within gross domestic product (GDP) the proportion occupied by human services becomes more and more important. Human services, which amounted to 44.3% in 1985 (lower than the 49.7% comprised of industry), are projected to comprise 50.5% in the year 2000 (CEPD 1986:24). This trend formally proclaims the advent of “post-industrial society” in Taiwan. This trend also initiates structural changes in distribution among occupations other than human services in Taiwan. Statistics also show that in 1985, 17.5% of employed persons were in agriculture, 41.49% in industry, 41.19% in human services. But in the year 2000, according to the government’s projection, only 9.1% will be in agriculture, 39.4% in industries, and human services will soar to 51.5%. Those who have received professional training will also increase from 102 persons per 1,000 in 1985 to 165 in 2000 (CEPD 1986: 92).

Second, demographic concentration in urban areas is another index of post-industrial trends in Taiwan. 73.0% of the entire population was urbanized in 1985; the year 2000 will show an increase to 86.5%. Consumption of electricity will also rise from 47.0KWH per household in 1985 to 99.3KWH in 2000 (CEPD 1986:92).

Third, we must note the rise in the level of education. The illiteracy rate of 8.4% among people of 6 years of age or older in 1985 will decline to 4.7%

in 2000. People over 15 who have received high school or professional education will increase from 38.5% in 1985 to 55.3% in 2000 (CEPD 1986:92).

Signs of post-industrial modernity are not confined to the above three traits—professionalization, urbanization, and education; these three are cited to show their relevance to Confucianism. For, as the percentage of employment in human services increases in Taiwan—50.5% in Taiwan in 2000 is comparable to 55% in England in 1986, 49% in South Africa, and 56% in Japan—this intensification of professionalization implies close-knit division of labor. And the division of labor bespeaks social interdependence. The time is now ripe for decentralization of power and democratization of society.

Similarly, urbanization goes with an elevation of the level of education. Urbanization is both a result and an expression of organic solidarity among people of *different* occupations. Modern industrial-entrepreneurial heterogeneity replaces the feudal agricultural homogeneity of yesteryear. All this firmly establishes Taiwan's unmistakable trend toward post-industrial modernity in all its complex social interdependence, at home and abroad. This has a tremendous significance both for our Confucian legacy and for the necessity of Taiwan society to embrace Confucian aspirations.

V. The Confucian Aspiration in Twenty-first Century Taiwan

The familial-social hierarchy in Confucianism is really an expression of respect for persons *in* their respective places in the social network. Shorn of its danger of promoting social texture at the cost of individuality, such a respect for the *sociality* of persons at once fulfills individuality and resolves the paradox of democracy, whose self-defeating danger it is that people may vote according to democratic principle to abolish it. In other words, democracy can be its own solvent. Contextual Confucian dissolution of this paradox solidifies our democratic solidarity. Despite the above merit, Confucianism in its systematic development of democracy from our anthropocosmic roots has a danger and a potential. The danger is that its systematicity can be and was in fact degraded into bureaucratic hierarchy that suffocates the individuality of personhood. Its potential is that the kind of democracy it develops fulfills both our humanistic roots and our socio-cosmic solidarity.

Chinese history, even with all its sordid records of dictatorship, together with the modern trend toward the free market system and open pluralism, protects us from such a danger of Confucianism; in the twenty-first century no one will succumb to the lure of feudalism of any sort. By the same token, Confucianism has great democratic potentials of a deep natural and cosmic sort; it is up to us to discern and develop these Confu-

cian potentials. And there is no more fertile soil than Taiwan to facilitate their maximum growth. For Taiwan is at once fostered in the Confucian tradition and caught up in the worldwide maelstrom of democratic capitalistic modernity, but at the same time not yet firmly trapped in capitalistic totalitarianism. Taiwan is *the* locus where people can develop and spread a Confucian democracy that co-thrives everyone and everything.

Now, we are at a crucial turning point of history. We all know that Taiwan is now destined for industrial modernity unprecedented in Chinese history. But we seldom notice that this economic miracle has a stupendous ideological implication. For this revolution has smashed to pieces the shackles of the agricultural social authoritarianism that has been supporting imperial Confucianism. We are thus heading toward an unprecedented ideological vacuum.

We in the Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs) are frantically reaching out for two things to fill up the vacuum. The first is the familiar repulsive old imperial Confucianism, as used in Singapore, one of the NICs, to whitewash an authoritarian party-state, for whose benefit individuals exist. This is ominously made possible by the fact that capitalism is also another sort of social authoritarianism, where multi-national corporations are using individuals as mere cogs in the gigantic institutional machinery.

The second thing that people in the NICs are trying to grab is a seemingly innocent one, what is usually taken to be the democracy of the West. Unfortunately, the usual democracy represents another extreme one-sidedness in the dynamic interdependence between individuality and sociality. One can say that Hobbes's nasty, brutish state of nature has lingered on as a tacit baseline in Locke's and others' contractual society. All these theories amount to arguing for the need to design a social polity to meet the external exigency of the breakdown of social network, endangering individual survival. Society arises as a practical contingency measure to clamp a balance over conflicting individuals, who in turn are supposed to watch over the shoulders of the politicians. All these arguments are presented in the framework of atomistic individuals *against* one another and against society.

It is understandable, then, that the statement, "Every man is created equal," came to be interpreted to mean everyone is indifferently equal, nothing special. The statement, "Everyone is endowed with inalienable rights," came to be interpreted to mean that everyone is an isolated individual, having nothing to do with societal interdependence. Taken this way, democracy in the West is a prescription for lonely atomistic individuals externally tied together by contractual sociality.⁷

And in the final analysis, these two things that NICs are groping after—imperial Confucianism and individualistic democracy—are but two sides of the same mentality. They both share the perspective of rebellious indi-

viduals *opposed* to authoritarian society which has little to do with nature. As Hobbes and Locke also noted, blind individualism in protest is matched by contractual sociality which, we add, tends toward blind authoritarianism.

But the classical vibrant Confucianism, as we described a while ago, cuts through this twofold blind alley and strikes out in a new direction, where an individual is special only within the music of social-ecological community, which in turn exists only as long as each component individual is treasured as unique and special. Instead of individual and society in conflict, classical Confucianism envisions an interdependence between individual and society, each existing *within* the other. To return to this classical Confucian vision is to go home to our cultural root at which all of us are nourished.

And yet, why return to Confucianism, which has for so long failed the people by fostering nepotism, state centrism, oppressive familism? Don't we feel some chill running through our spine when we hear about making Confucianism—again—the basis for social reform and appraisal? Can't we see that any philosophy that does not work is useless? If Confucianism didn't work before, why should it work now? To all these understandable questions three responses are in order:

First of all, has any ideal worked in history? Has any worthy ideal in the world not been corrupted but successfully implemented as envisioned? An ideal is not the less an ideal for our failure to implement it. We on our part must continually reach up for the stars despite our failures, for what else are the stars for? Besides, has any "ideal" that worked produced a wholesome result? What works may or may not be what is best for us; witness the "ideals" of Legalism, Nazism, Machiavellianism. The pragmatic frame of mind as critical relevance to actuality should differ from a simple belief in workability.

Second, classical Confucianism gets its bad name from having been missed and expurgated, used and misappropriated. Nepotism is a sad case of starting rightly with family solicitude yet stopping there, failing to *extend* familism beyond family; oppressive familism and family-dynastic statism are nepotism writ large. All this came from *using Confucianism* (by twisting its original intentions) to support feudalistic despotism. The reverse should have been the case—to use a governmental system to implement the Confucian spirit. We cringe at hearing "Confucianism" because we confuse the misappropriated version of Confucianism with the Confucian ideal itself. The ideal cannot be blamed for *our* misuse of it.

Finally, three signs exist today to show that Confucianism, having failed before, can still work today. First, technological interweaving of world communities, and of ourselves with nature, has proven (through ecological disasters) the Confucian insight that we thrive together—indi-

viduals, societies, nature—to ignore this *fact* is to perish inevitably. Second, misinterpretation and expurgation of Confucianism is much less likely today than in the age of closed community, given the free and open flow of information and international commerce. Third, it is now less likely than before that post-industrial totalitarianism would deign to utilize for its purpose that “outmoded discredited Confucianism.” And so Confucianism, having failed for so long, can still work today, especially given the modernity in Taiwan that has not been *firmly* occupied by technocratic totalitarianism. The danger of misinterpretation and misappropriation of the Confucian ideal is ever present, however. Constant vigilance is sorely needed. Four uncertainties are in store for Taiwan’s tomorrow:

1. Would adopting Confucianism reintroduce a monolithic repressive society?
2. How can Taiwan of the twenty-first century ward off the post-industrial ill of economic technological hegemony, where a person is just a button in a machine, economic or otherwise—easily pushed on and off, easily replaced?
3. How about pollution and ecological disasters?
4. How about ennui, violence, and social ills?

Confucianism is ready to dissolve all the above problems. To begin with, will Confucianism reintroduce a repressive society? We do not think it likely for three reasons. First, agricultural feudalism, that repressive society where the landlord manipulates for his profit those farming peasants under him, is gone forever, and with it that one great prop of imperial Confucianism. Secondly, thanks to our lesson from history, we can now clearly see the wrong direction of NICs which may want to use imperial Confucianism for the party-state. And finally, capitalistic imperialism, that economic-industrial authoritarianism, has not yet taken its firm hold among the NICs.

And so now is the unique opportunity, an ideological clearing and vantage point, in which we are free to try out a new future, the ecological democracy of classical Confucianism. If the USA is a world experiment in individual democracy that has worked for more than 200 years, then Taiwan should be a new experiment on ecological democracy that ought to work for everyone—each person, various flora and fauna, the entire heaven and earth.

But capitalistic imperialism is fast coming to us, together with both industrial pollution and ills of modernity such as despair, drug abuse, and the widening gap between the haves and the have-nots. How do we deal with these three disasters—capitalism, pollution, modernity? We think

that, while these are the result of multiple factors, among which social institutions are one, we must not forget a crucial basic factor: our mental perspective, how we think and look at things. For how we think directs what we do. New ideas revolutionize our pattern of behavior. As was said above, individual isolationism invites social control, and together they breed post-industrial disasters. Classical Confucianism can do something about them.

Hegemony by technocrats and multi-national corporations—where only money and machines talk—grows in an ideological soil (“Western democracy”) where everyone is indifferently equal in a lonely crowd, a mass society. Confucian democracy dissolves this danger. Here everyone is treasured as a social person, that is, not as a faceless individual but as a person in a specific role which is imbued with the special warmth of that particular person.

Taiwan is furthermore plagued by various kinds of pollution—noise, population, and industrial (air, water, chemical). They all stem from blind individualism that disregards “others,” that is, the soil, the air, the flora and fauna, the heaven and earth, and destroys their intimate symbiosis that supports individuality. This is due more to an ideological vacuum than to selfishness. Confucian ecological democracy fills this vacuum.

Confucianism gives us the dynamic depths of the self (*ch'i*) flooded with, and flooding throughout, the vitality of the heaven and earth (*hao jan chih ch'i*). Confucianism gives us the heartfelt unbearable compassion (*pu jen jen chih hsin*) that spreads steadily from the familial near to the communal-cosmic far. The following story about Ox Mountain by Mencius is full of ethical and ecological implications:

The trees of Ox Mountain were once beautiful. Being, however, on the outskirts of a large state, axes and bills hewed them down—could they retain their beauty?

Still, with the vegetative life vitalizing them day and night, with rain and dews moistening them, they were not without buds budding and sprouts sprouting. But then oxen and goats came along to graze on them. This is how the mountain came to appear bare and stripped. People, seeing its bare appearance, think it was never finely wooded. But is it really the nature of the mountain? (“Kao Tzu,” 6A8; Legge’s translation modified)

Mencius then applied the “mountain” to ourselves and argued for our original (but now stripped “bare”) goodness deep inside us. But this story also applies literally to today’s ecological stripping of the meadows and the mountains by emissions from industry and automobiles. Mencius’s story tells that, in the end, laying waste to our nature goes hand in glove with laying waste to physical nature. Both come from our callous insensitivity to the profound ecological system of symbiosis. Hewing

down the woods hews down ourselves; violating nature violates ourselves. Mencius gives us the unity of ethico-ecological principle, that anthropocosmic complex that is all too immanently and imminently real. To take this cosmic *nervure* seriously, however, is to inaugurate the first step toward the solution of the problems of modernity—pollution.

Finally, Taiwan is heading for “ills of civilization”—anomie, violence, drug abuse, the rich against the poor, etc. The *usual* democracy of atomistic individual autonomy tears the self away from intimate symbiosis with the enviroing others. This lone abandoned self breeds recklessness, emptiness, despair.

Confucianism floods the depths of the self, the dynamic “stuff” which constitutes what we are (*ch'i*), with the vitality of the heaven and earth (*hao jan chih ch'i*); it spreads the heartfelt unbearable compassion (*pu jen jen chih hsin*) from the familial near to the communal and cosmic far. Violating our nature violates physical nature, in our insensitivity to the ecological system of symbiosis. Mencius gives us the ethico-ecological imperative. It is in this way that Confucianism heals individual isolation that breeds post-industrial ills.

And so, in sum, this essay has proposed three interrelated points. First, the classical Confucianism at our cultural root offers us radical symbiotic interpenetration between individual integrity and societal concord, the one constituting and thriving the other. This socio-individual internascence manifests itself, among other ways, in the political sphere in the form of people-rooted governance (*min-pen chu-i*) different from people-power opposed to the powers that be (*min-chu chu-i*, “democracy”).

Secondly, Taiwan is undergoing an unprecedented industrial revolution and economic miracle. The agrarian feudalism that supported Confucian institutionalism is gone with the coming of open international trade. Thirdly, combining the above two points, we see that, having cleared Taiwan from the feudalistic hegemony of Confucian institutionalism, the modernization (point two) renders Taiwan an ideological clearing not yet taken over totally by the new totalitarianism of capitalism. Now is the unique opportunity for classical Confucianism (point one) to thrive without fear of being covered over again in feudalism.

To embrace this pristine Confucian principle of democratic togetherness is in essence to go back home to our primal root. But this root, this interdependence of individuals with society and nature, is so dynamic that returning to it requires a strenuous effort. Without our constant vigilance and striving it is all too easy to slip back into the old rut of imperial institutional Confucianism, though perhaps in forms other than agrarian feudalism. This brings us to our legendary Seattle salmon. Huang Chün-chieh's deeply felt experience in Seattle is profoundly relevant here.

Once Huang went to the lock and gazed with deep emotion at those courageous salmon, one by one, swimming out of their comfortable ocean, braving the current, struggling with all their might against the stream, jumping up, falling back down, and jumping again, and again, *upstream*, back to their home where they were born. There they reproduce themselves, and are reborn into the new generations of salmon.

It is a mystery why the same people who proposed the ideal of ecological people-rooted governance have so often degraded themselves with totalitarian rulership. We have no solution to this mystery, any more than we have an answer to why the salmon must go downstream before going upstream. One thing is certain, however. Salmon may be unable to break the cycle of going down to the ocean before struggling back up to the fountainhead of their births-rebirths. But *we* can. For us the past is passed; the future is in our hand. It is up to us to swim strenuously upstream, beyond the totalitarian past, back to that pristine fountainhead.

To go back to our cultural root of classical Confucianism is to brave the current of the past (of misappropriation), salmon-like, back to the spiritual home where we were born, the fountainhead which feeds the stream of our life-activities. It requires as much conscious vigilance and strenuous effort.

First, we must reject comfortable Confucian scholasticism and positivism that merely repeat worn-out clichés of Confucian imperialism. Standing at the new vantage point gained by Taiwan's industrial-economic revolution, we must dare to demythologize Confucian institutionalism to bring out the vibrant but repeatedly expurgated implications of classical Confucianism, that is, the radical reciprocity of "ecological democracy" and people-rooted governance.

Then we must strive to embody these novel implications of the classical Confucian spirit in all phases of society—in laws and statutes, in tax credits for supporting parents in their old age, in every phase of social intercourse, in industrial management of personnel and waste, in street traffic and international commerce. The *Mencius* is soaked with concrete policy applications of the Confucian principle. So are the *Hsün Tzu* and practically all Confucian tracts and treatises. We must read them with care and creatively apply them to our situations today, for Confucian ethic is one thing; the Confucian spirit of cosmic reciprocity is quite another. The latter is the constitutive principle of the former. Ethics is one manifestation of universal interdependent reciprocity, which is an explanatory principle of ethics, what undergirds and justifies both ethics and law. Law and ethics should be separated; law and its constitutive principle should not. The Confucian ecological principle should be the spirit that infuses the letter of the law in Taiwan, differentiating it from both the Marxist and the Jeffersonian legal systems.

The world today is exploding with democratic fervor, everywhere upholding liberty, equality, and dignity. Confucianism advocates these values on a cosmic scale, to correct the tendency of the usual democracy toward atomistic individualism and social indifference. If Taiwan embraces this vibrant classical Confucianism as it marches into the post-industrial future, it can contribute much to our common fight for democratic freedom. We can together achieve a truly anthropocosmic symbiosis in every field—political, economic, social, cultural, and ecological.

Notes

1. The epithets "agrarian imperialism" and "agrarian feudalism" mean, as correctly deciphered by an anonymous reader, "the agrarian order that supported the old imperial system," i.e., the centralized bureaucratic order of imperial China. But since no other handy phrase comes to our mind at the moment, we just let the phrases stand, asking the reader to understand them as interpreted here.

2. Statistics show that there have been 1,516 protest movements between 1983 and 1987 in Taiwan. The year 1987 witnessed 676 cases of demonstrations. See Chu Yün-han 1988.

3. For various new interpretations of Taiwan's development experience, see the newly founded journal *Tai-wan she-hui yen-chiu chi-k'an* (*Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies*), beginning Spring, 1988.

4. There is no dearth of contemporary philosophers of Chinese thought who acknowledge the importance of classical Confucianism as "ecological democracy," although they do not use this phrase. To this extent they all support our thesis in this essay. We even occasionally adopt Benjamin Schwartz's coinage, "anthropocosmic." Sadly, however, such an acknowledgement by these contemporary thinkers—T'ang Chün-i, Hsü Fu-kuan, Yü Ying-shih, Tu Wei-ming, H. G. Creel, William Theodore de Bary, Thomas Metzger, David Nivison, Joseph R. Levenson, Benjamin Schwartz, David Hall, and Roger T. Ames, to number but a few—is often overshadowed by their preoccupation with various historical abuses and their misunderstanding of classical Confucianism, as mentioned at the beginning of Section I. They all stress the problematic character of Confucianism to the comparative neglect of the central core of classical Confucianism. And so, what is peculiar to our present essay is that it emphasizes this ecological, democratic aspect of Confucianism as central, classical, and therefore as the vitality crucial to the salvation and enlightenment of the world's future.

5. Neither Confucius nor Mencius produced any "handy definition" for *jen*, which pervades the entirety of their writings.

6. The nature of dynastic regimes in China's political history constitutes an issue of academic polemics. The renowned patriotic historian Ch'ien Mu indicates that civil rights have been protected in traditional China. See Ch'ien Mu 1980. Ch'ien's points have been refuted by a number of contemporary scholars. See Hsiao Kung-ch'uan 1982:60-77; Hsü Fu-kuan, ed., 1979:171-82; Chang Chün-mai, 1986.

7. Not until recently, in the beginning of the twentieth century, did such philosophical categories as I-thou, intersubjectivity, the other, appear in the West. Sel-

dom, however, were these categories explicitly applied to the political realm in a thoroughly reciprocal symbiotic manner, much less developed in a cosmological context, as was done by the classical Confucian philosophers. No Rousseau or Montesquieu has proposed an anthropocosmic ecology of political internascence. Even Merleau-Ponty did not develop the cosmic "chiasma" (between the bodily-perceptual and the world) in a political direction.