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Do traditional values still exist in modern Chinese societies?

The case of Singapore and China*

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Abstract

The stellar economic performance of the Asia-Pacific region in the 90s led many scholars to credit Confucianism as the impetus for it provided the cultural background conducive for entrepreneurs of this region to excel. Some even believed that a "Confucian Revival" is at hand and have proposed the 21st century to be the "Confucian Century".

Although the causes of economic growth and success are complex and likely to vary from one country to another, the significance of culture has been emphasized. Hicks and Redding (1983) commented, "as there are well over a hundred developing countries, the almost perfect correlation between Chinese heritage and economic success could hardly be due to chance." Another study by Gordon Redding (1990) on the spirit of Chinese capitalism suggested a strong link between Confucian values and modern overseas Chinese business enterprises.

However, when the same region triggered a global economic crisis a few years ago, fingers were also pointed at Confucianism, naming it as the culprit behind the downfall of Chinese entrepreneurship. Further, people often loosely refer to Confucianism or Asian Values when analyzing factors relevant to the economy and social matters. They do so without first synthesizing the system of thought upon which they base their claims, thereby weakening their arguments. Moreover, studies on Chinese values are certainly insufficient if not misconstrued by scholars with no Chinese background. How then does Confucianism influence Asian countries? Do Chinese values still exist in modern Chinese societies? Using quantificational tools to support our thesis, this comparative study attempts to investigate whether Confucianism or traditional Chinese values still played an important role in shaping the mind and attitude of modern Chinese in Singapore and China.

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Introduction

The economic prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region in the 90s has created no less attention to Confucianism for it has been regarded as the cultural background conducive for entrepreneurs of this region to excel. Some scholars even believe that a "Confucian Revival" is at hand and has proposed that the 21st Century be the "Confucian Century".

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Confucianism and the East Asian miracle

Much research has been done on the east Asian economic miracle, mostly substantiating the claim that Chinese society has the distinct character of Chinese values. In this section, we present a few of the more influential and

[1] G. L. Hick and S. G. Redding, "The Story of the East Asian Economic Miracle – Part One: Economic Theory be Damned"; "The Story of the East Asian Economic Miracle – Part Two: The Culture Connection", *Euro-Asia Business Review*, 2:3 (1983), pp. 24–32; 2:4 (1983), pp. 18–22.

[2] Yang Kuo-shu "Chuantong jiazhiguan yu xiandai jiazhiguan neng fou tongshi bing cun?" [Can Traditional and Modern Values Coexist?] See *Zhongguoren de jianzhiguan – shehui kexue guannian* [The Values of the Chinese–A Social Sciences Concept], (Taipei: Guiguan book company, 1991).

substantial projects and their findings in this area, including those of Michael Bond, Geert Hofstede and Gordon Redding.

Among these works, the largest-scaled would be that led by Hofstede. Spanning 13 years and divided into two stages (1967–1978, 1983), his international survey was based on the principles of corporate management. More than 100,000 questionnaires written in 20 different languages were distributed to IBM employees in 50 countries around the world. Results showed that there was co-variance in the responses among the employees of different countries along the following four different cultural dimensions[3]:

(1) *Big/Small Power Distance*
–refers to power distribution in the corporation. "Big Power Distance" means power is unevenly distributed whereas for "Small Power Distance", power is relatively evenly distributed.
(2) *Individualism/Collectivism*
–refers to an individual's level of commitment to his group, how well he merges into the group, and also the cohesiveness of that group.
(3) *Masculinity/Femininity*
–which is differentiated by gender characteristics such as aggressiveness versus gentleness, confidence and competition versus humility and care.
(4) *High/Low Uncertainty Avoidance*
–refers to the individual's emotional reaction, such as tranquility or anxiety, to an uncertain environment.

Hofstede came up with an index for analyzing the variation across all 50 countries along these 4 dimensions, and provided an account with reference to family, school, workplace, the nation and personal thinking. As it turned out, "Power Distance" did not rank low and "Individualism" did not rank high among the subjects from Japan and the Four Little Dragons of Asia. He therefore believed these distinctive values to be what the economic miracle in Asia depended on. Further, in his 1991 work, Hofstede pointed out some shortcomings in data collection. Since the questionnaire was designed by western scholars, it is questionable whether a set of questions using western values as its basis can be used effectively to fathom the value systems in different countries and cultural backgrounds.

To overcome this flaw and also to construct an "Eastern" instrument, Michael Bond, social psychologist from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, listed 40 Chinese values with which he used to formulate a questionnaire. His survey was conducted in 23 countries with 100 subjects from each country. 20 of these countries were the same as those in Hofstede's list.

Bond's survey isolated 4 dimensions of Chinese values, namely "Integration", "Confucian Dynamism", "Human Heartedness" and "Moral Discipline". A list of values associated with each of the above dimensions is given below.

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[3] For details, see Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences – International Differences in Work-related Values* (California: SAGE Publications, 1980), pp. 92–112.

(1) *Integration*
Tolerance of others; solidarity with others; harmony with others; non-competitiveness; trustworthiness; contentedness; being conservative; a close, intimate friend; filial piety; chastity in women,
(2) *Confucian Dynamism*
Ordering relationship; thrift; persistence; having a sense of shame; personal steadiness and stability; reciprocation; protecting your "face"; respect for tradition.
(3) *Human Heartedness*
Kindness; patience; courtesy; sense of righteousness; patriotism.
(4) *Moral Discipline*
Moderation; having few desires; adaptability; prudence; keeping oneself disinterested and pure.

Bond carried out a comparative analysis between his 4 cultural elements (representing eastern value system) and Hofstede's (representing western value system). Results showed that Integration and Moral Discipline each correlated with Hofstede's Power Distance and Individualism (negatively), and sizable correlation between Human Heartedness and Hofstede's Masculinity-feminity. Only "Confucian Dynamism" had no prominent correlation with any of the 4 western cultural characteristics.[4]

Bond thought that the uniqueness of "Confucian Dynamism" was not difficult to understand. He explained that the list of values under "Confucian Dynamism" was peculiar to the western value system even then, and hence it was hard to find any correlation with Hofstede's categories of cultural characteristics.[5] Moreover, he emphasized, that the Four Little Dragons and Japan averaged higher scores under this category showed that these values were related to the distinctive economic achievements of these countries. In addition, he thought that such results corroborated the viability of explaining the mid 20th century economic revival in the Asian region with "Post-Confucian Zeitgeist". That "Human Heartedness" and "Masculinity" were positively correlated was understandable, since both dimensions were "human-centered" rather than "task-centered". To Bond, therefore, it was "Human Heartedness" that differentiated Western cultures and Oriental cultures from each another.

While Hofstede and Bond analyzed cultural factors using quantified data, Gorden Redding, Director of the Business School in Hong Kong University chose to use qualitative analysis to explain the influence Chinese value system had on corporate management. He designed a set of interview guidelines according to 9 themes with which he interviewed a total of 72 people from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and Indonesia. The sample pool included large, medium and small family businesses. Each of the interviewees was Chinese and had experience in managing Chinese family businesses. They were generally executive managers. With his research results, Redding argued that Chinese

[4] Michael Bond, "Chinese Values and the Search for Cultural-free Dimensions of Culture: The Chinese Culture Connection", *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Vol 18, No. 2 (1987), pp. 143–164.
[5] *Ibid*., p. 158.

family enterprises had the characteristics of parental authority, endurance of personalism and defensive psychology[6].

Although all these researches aimed to prove that the Chinese value system had positive effects on corporate culture, corporate performance and even national economy, yet not only did they fail to define "Chinese value system" stringently, they had also set their arguments upon a vague "Confucianism" – just as some scholars have loosely labeled any ethical norms of Chinese origin "Confucianism".[7] In reality, such oversimplification fails to explain clearly existing manifestations and contents of the value system of Chinese societies (both overseas or otherwise). Despite having brought out the facts of certain aspects, all three research projects, academically significant as they are in the areas of Chinese value system and family corporate performance, still fall short of fully explaining the relation between the economic performance of the East Asian region and the Chinese value system.

Hofstede's prominent weakness – just as he himself agreed – lies in his use of research tools modeled according to western values. His results do not point out explicitly any close or causal relations between the economic take-off of the Four Little Dragons and his so-called "Chinese value system". While Bond did take into account oriental values and ways of thinking in designing his questionnaire, and while he did arrive at the exciting idea of Confucian characteristics being unique to Asian societies, self-contradictions surface in his results too. He did not explain why in the east/west-differentiating category of "Human Heartedness", the ranking of the Four Little Dragons and Japan were not outstanding – instead, Canada, Britain and USA outranked Singapore, Taiwan and Korea. Furthermore, if "Confucian Dynamism" were indeed the chief factor behind the Asian economic take-off, why then were the core Confucian values of kindness, righteousness and propriety grouped under the rubric of "Human Heartedness" (in which the Four Little Dragons and Japan ranked only poorly) and not "Confucian Dynamism"? As for Redding, that his basis consisted solely of individual interviews renders his argument in want of further investigation.

Confucianism: secularization and localization

Before we analyze the legacy and development of Confucian values, we must first understand that the value systems of all races or cultures change. The emancipation of the individual during the Renaissance, for example, evolved into the extreme individualism of today. The controversy over the East Asian societies in the process of modernization, "Asian value system" is actually the manifestation of the dynamic conflict of varying values. Hence, values are not static but they change as economy, politics and society change.

Diachronically speaking, the development of Confucian values necessary entails constant change, or rather constant "modernization". Synchronically speaking, there would be secularization. Of course, both processes overlap to

[6] Gordon Redding, *The Spirit of Chinese Capitalism* (Germany: De Gruyter, 1990), pp. 115–142.
[7] G. Rozman, ed., The East Asian Region: Confucian Heritage and its Modern Adaptation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), Introduction, pp. 3–42.

some extent, hence it is necessary to analyze Confucian values in both dimensions. Wang Gungwu has clearly pointed out that Chinese arriving in Southeast Asia came mostly from the same social stratum; they were not likely to have exposure to the "high" Confucian culture of the Chinese literati. Generally, "low" Confucian culture is blended with Taoist and Buddhist doctrines and practices.[8] According to Patricia Ebrey, to use the term "Confucian values" in describing Chinese family customs is oversimplification. Similarly, to call Chinese commercial culture Confucian commercial culture also appears too superficial. She listed four important media of Confucian "popularization" namely, religion, state, elite thought and publications. To some extent, each medium modifies the original Confucian values, re-interprets them or re-combines them with extant ideas.[9] Yang Kuo-shu, a Taiwanese scholar who researched extensively on value systems, pointed out explicitly that values are multi-faceted because society and culture are an enormous system of entities in which multiplex character and different cultural groups exist. If we were to think of the Chinese value system solely as continuity from classical Confucian writings to concepts, and then to conduct, we would be overly sketchy.[10] This is especially true of overseas Chinese, particularly in Singapore. Given their peculiar political, social and economic milieu, their legacy of traditional Chinese culture, even core Confucian culture, went through secularization. Thus, in discussing the issue of Chinese values, we ought to address the processes of Confucian secularization and localization, and their effects.

When we talk about Confucian values, we often linger only at the level of "philosophical teachings". In contrast, popular values are embodied mostly at the "psychological" level. We think that since the Han dynasty, Confucianism has been undergoing popularization and socialization, and even became the core of secular teaching and transformation directing the development of Chinese social and cultural consciousness (empowered by its superiority and legitimacy as the official philosophy). Even so, this dynamic process does not consist in a simple, linear and uni-directional input. We have at least two doubts: One, does Confucian thought at the level of teaching match up to its own value yardstick in this process of secularization? What sort of difference would that be? Two, in Confucian teaching and transformation, does the popular system remain unchanged? If it does not, what kind of conflict and exchange would there be between the extant value system and Confucianism? (This includes primitive folk belief in spirits, and Taoism, which was formed later, and Buddhism, which was imported.) What effects would these have on the formation of the Chinese value system?

In real life, the secularization of Confucianism manifests in actual theory and practice. This is where we can see the difference. For example, an important aspect where Confucianism gets to be secularized is the input and promotion on the part of the state. Since the Han dynasty (206BC–220AD), "the hundred schools of thought be proscribed and Confucianism alone be

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[8] For details, see Wang Gungwu, *Community and Nation: China, Southeast Asia and Australia* (Singapore: Heinnemann, 1992).

[9] Patricia Ebrey, "The Chinese Family and the spread of Confucian Value", In: *The East Asian Region: Confucian Heritage and its Modern Adaptation,* pp. 45–83.

[10] For details, see Yang Guoshu, op.cit.

exalted", Dong Zhongshu is to be credited for the elevation of Confucianism as the official orthodoxy. This elevation was actualized at the price of sacrificing and distorting the Confucian spirit to some extent. The humanist essence and democratic spirit of Pre-Qin Confucianism was significantly lost in latter times. Confucius' advocacy of "self-control to restore propriety" aims to uphold the theme of benevolence. Yet, it evolved into the binding propriety of "Three Guides and Five Constants", which strangles the development of humanity. Also, filial piety turned from the bi-directional conditional of "kind father, filial son" to the uni-directional sacrificial sonship. It became closely linked to politics as it served the purpose of the rulers, so that it ultimately became "the subject cannot but die when the ruler wishes so, likewise the son upon the father's desire". Yu Ying-shih also pointed out that post-Han Confucianism developed Legalist features.[11] Evidently, as Confucianism becomes official, it is also being re-interpreted and its original content changed to some extent. Thus, while it is still called Confucianism, it is no longer the pristine, classical Confucianism that we can trace.

Another aspect of change is the transition of values from concept to conduct – the problems at the level of operation. As we know, Chinese popular culture is a very huge and variegated value system; it encompasses primitive beliefs in spirits from high antiquity, Taoism the indigenous Chinese religion which took shape later, and the imported Buddhism. Embraced by the Court, Buddhism and Taoism flourished during the Sui (581–618) and Tang dynasty (618–907), such that the trend of "Merging of the Three Religions" took shape since the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). In addition, both Buddhism and Taoism had their own religious organization and rituals, and clergy who specialized in proselytizing. In reality, they permeated the family life of the commoners. Taoist funeral rites, for example, are extremely widespread. Hence, Confucianism, in transforming and teaching the people, is really coexisting with these other value systems. For this reason, we cannot ascribe all "virtues" thought to be part of the Chinese value system – whether good or bad – to the Confucian tradition, so much so as to take optimistically Confucian values as the hope to salvation of the modern society, or denounce it pessimistically as a heavy burden and a hindrance to modernization. Such polarized views illustrate the incompleteness and oversimplification of collapsing the complex Chinese tradition to the one lineage of Confucianism.

As such, much of the original Confucian core values are now manifested differently in their essence and depth, having undergone secularization and localization. Some of the values commonly thought to be "Confucian" may be traceable to Confucianism in one way or another, but in reality, they are influenced by the doctrines of Buddhism, Taoism, popular religion and foreign thought, such that they differ very much from what is recorded in the Classics. To reinstate them as "Confucian" teachings right now in the 21st century would appear unpersuasive. In such a theoretical framework, we can only take traditional Confucian values as a necessary but inadequate component of the Chinese value system. Only in this light can we talk about the Chinese value system of the modern Chinese societies in the 21st century and its influence

[11] Yu Ying-shih, *Lishi yu shixiang* [History and Thought] (in Chinese), (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1976), p. 31.

without falling into the analytical errors that may stem from overly general terms.

With regards to what most people today (or some scholars) call "Chinese values" or "Confucian values", what kind of characteristics are being preserved or displayed after having undergone diachronic and synchronic transition? What we can be sure of now is that Confucian values are still highly esteemed today in many overseas Chinese societies after several thousand years of development. Out of identification with and honor for the wisdom of the forebears and ethnic culture, overseas Chinese who have migrated elsewhere manage to preserve some core Confucian values such as benevolence, righteousness and propriety. What we need to clarify is this: how we may better classify values outside of these basic Confucian values – generally called "Confucian values" or "Chinese values" – so as to discuss the roles they play in modern society according to their individual characteristics.

Singapore and China: A tale of two cities

While China is historically and geographically the "center", Singapore is undoubtedly a major "periphery" Chinese society overseas. A comparison of the value perceptions of the Chinese in these two places is certainly fascinating and meaningful. The discussions on Singapore in this paper is based on the findings of a research project conducted by the author entitled "Chinese Leadership and Management Practices – A Comparative Study of Chinese Merchant Culture in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia", funded by the National University of Singapore. The findings revealed the value orientation of the management staff of the 28 listed Chinese family business responded to the survey, facilitating some understanding of phenomena pertaining to overseas Chinese. However, discussions on China in this paper are based on the findings by Godwin Chu and Ju Yanan.

The first part of the Singapore project was a Chinese values survey targeted at 368 people from these companies, most of them being chief executives, directors, general managers, managers and other executives. Gender information and linguistic backgrounds of the subjects are provided below.

Male	183 persons	(49.7%)
Female:	185 persons	(50.3%)
Chinese educated/Mandarin as medium of communication:	103 persons	(28%)
English educated/English as medium of communication:	264 persons	(71.7%)
Others:	1 person	(0.3%)

For the age distributions of the 368 subjects, 113 (31%) are 21–30, 159 (43%) are 31–40, 83 (22.5%) are 41–50, and 13 (3.5%) are 51–60 where more than half (54%) have university education. The survey questionnaire consisted of 56 values common to Chinese society, including Confucian values, traditional Chinese values and values having western individualist nuances. Each value was

weighed against a scale of 7, with 1 being least important and 7 being most important. The subjects were to weigh each value based on what they perceived to be most important in social interaction. The results showed that the executives of the locally listed Chinese family companies ranked the following values in the top ten:

1. Filial piety
2. Trustworthiness
3. Sincerity
4. Knowledge and education
5. Family is most important
6. Resistance to corruption
7. Working hard
8. Kindness
9. Moral cultivation
10. Clear direction

The top 10 values included pragmatic ones such as "knowledge and education" and "clear direction", core Confucian values such as "filial piety", "family is most important" and "kindness" as well as values of personal cultivation such as "resistance to corruption", "sincerity", "moral cultivation", et cetera. The high ranking of the 10 values suggests that:

1. Filial piety is the foundation of the family in traditional values. "Filial piety" and "family is the most important" values are virtually inseparable, both ranking high among the top five, suggesting a general high regard for the family.
2. Singapore is the confluence for things eastern and western. Herein, one sees how tradition and modernity blend and conflict. On the one hand, the political and social leaders encourage the conservation of traditional heritage, while on the other hand, Singapore is recognized as the most westernized country in Asia. To a certain degree, this has affected the subjects' value orientation, which we may call "Singaporean".
3. Subjects work for highly traditional companies owned by Chinese families. Due to the size and nature of the companies, the working environment and style of operation are directly influenced by western management philosophy and *modus operandi*, resulting in multiplicity in value orientation.

The results also showed that in locally listed companies run by Chinese families, executive level and higher personnel viewed the following values as least important:

56. Everyone for himself and the devil takes the hindmost
55. Protecting your "face"
54. Do whatever I think is right
53. Man can conquer the nature
52. Having few desires
51. Being conservative
50. A sense of cultural superiority

49. Aloof from politics and material pursuits
48. Bring honor to one's ancestors
47. Life is short, enjoy the moment as it comes

More negative values like "everyone for himself and the devil takes the hindmost", "protecting your face" and "do whatever I think is right" have lowest priority. Other more traditional values like "having few desires", "being conservative" and "bring honor to one's ancestors" do not rank high either. Possible implications are:

1. Traditional value judgments are still relevant today. Even in our age of blatant individualism and materialism, some ostensibly negative traditional values particularly those like, "everyone for himself and the devil takes the hindmost" are still unacceptable to most people.
2. "Bring honor to one's ancestors" is hailed in traditional Confucian values. However, while subjects of the survey viewed family as important, they ranked the above value lowly. This shows that, in modern Singapore, the values "bring honor to one's ancestor" and "family-centered" are divorced. People today do still pursue a happy family, but they no longer set "bring honor to one's ancestors" as the target and impetus of their personal advancement. In the aspect of value/target, the affirmation of the value of self is progressively becoming the target of modern people.
3. The term "being conservative" has too much of a derogatory connotation. Had it been near-synonyms like "lack of innovation" or "insufficient creativity", it would probably be ranked higher. This is because one would not admit oneself to be conservative no matter how one is really so. The term "being conservative" gives one the feeling of backwardness though in reality its meaning is not fully so.
4. "Man can conquer the nature" was ranked fourth from the last. Subjects normally do not care much if individual strength could overcome the environment. Singaporeans, particularly businessmen, is widely held to be slightly too cautious and yielding easily to external pressures. Contrasting this value with "adaptability" on the 19th place, we can see how subjects would rather adapt to the environment than to challenge it. Traditional Chinese values actually do not approve of man challenging nature and environment. "Harmony", being one of the core categories of Chinese philosophy includes harmony between man and nature. This necessarily has some influence on traditional social mentality and the individual.
5. "A sense of cultural superiority" was ranked very lowly. This reflects Singapore being a multi-racial and multi-cultural society. Religious harmony and tolerance for other cultures have always been highlighted in our society. Thus the fact that subjects generally ranked these values low reflects on the one hand their political and historical background to some extent and on the other hand their support for the concept of multi-culture. "A sense of cultural superiority" being held in low regard can also be understood as the lack of arrogance or sense of superiority on the part of the subjects for Chinese culture. Due to the restructuring of our educational system, both the trends of globalization and the invasion of western subculture affect the inheritance of traditional culture. That language is being assigned a pragmatic value more than any cultural value also causes

Chinese culture (which is rooted in Chinese language) to degrade to a "secondary culture".

The situation in China, which has gone through drastic changes in the past 40 years, is interesting to highlight here for comparison. A survey by Godwin Chu and Yanan Ju assesses the current status of traditional Chinese values in Shanghai. Of the 18 traditional values presented to them, the following index of endorsement for the 18 values was constructed:

Endorsement and Rejection of Traditional Values in China[12]

1.	Long historical heritage	89.7%
2.	Diligence and frugality	86.2%
3.	Loyalty and devotion to state	67.5%
4.	Benevolent father, filial son	48.0%
5.	Generosity and virtues	39.8%
6.	Respect for traditions	38.5%
7.	Submission to authority	33.2%
8.	Harmony is precious	29.5%
9.	Tolerance, propriety, deference	25.3%
10.	Chastity for women	−13.5%
11.	Glory to ancestors	−23.8%
12.	A house full of sons and grandsons	−35.5%
13.	Farmers high, merchants low	−43.3%
14.	Pleasing superiors	−48.9%
15.	Discretion for self-preservation	−55.9%
16.	Differentiation between men and women	−59.2%
17.	Way of golden mean	−59.6%
18.	Three obediences and four virtues	−64.0%

According to the authors, the findings may be grouped into 5 categories: Traditions and Heritages, Familial Relations, Social Relational Guidelines, Roles of Women, and Work Ethic and Social Status.

1. In terms of traditions and heritages, an overwhelming majority (89.7%) of the respondents said they felt proud of China's long historical heritage, with no differences among age groups. The rating is encouraging to those who fear that the Chinese people, in particular the younger generation, are abandoning their historical roots.[13] This is in contrast to their counterpart in Singapore who came from a migrant society with very short history. However, respect for traditions in China, referring to Chinese traditional values especially those with ritualistic manifestations, received rather low recognition (38.5%). The impact of the May Fourth Movement of 1919 and the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, when traditional values were mercilessly criticized, may be related. The confusion regarding traditions during recent decades is reflected in the findings, with one third of the respondents not sure whether they have respect for traditions.[14]

[12]Godwin Chu and Yanan Ju, *The Great Wall in ruins: Communication and cultural change in China*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993, p. 222.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 222–224.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 224.

2. In familial relations, filial respect still has an important position in China though not the most important as ranked by their counterpart in Singapore. Three-fifths of the respondents (60.8%) said they felt proud of the value and 12.8% said it should be discarded. However, a sizable portion of the sample (26.4%) was not sure;[15] this probably reflects the uncertainty and confusion of some towards traditional values. Both "bringing glory to ancestors" and "having many sons and grandsons" received negative response. Probably universal phenomena in modern society, the findings in China coincide with those of Singapore. A major departure from the past, it represents a re-definition of the meanings of "glory" and "prosperity" in Chinese family.
3. In social relations, less than half of the respondents felt proud of the value of harmony, which is largely regarded as the opposite of "struggle". This is further supported by the fact that only 5.4% of the respondents felt proud of the doctrine of the golden mean (*zhong yong*) and a remarkable 65% said that this traditional value should be discarded.[16]

Based on the average scores in the Singapore survey, the chart below displays the top 10 values by the four age groups. The higher the ranking, the more important the value is to their lives in the surveyed age group.

Age 21–30 (31%)		Age 31–40 (43%)		Age 41–50 (22.5%)		Age 51–60 (3.5%)	
Filial piety	6.571	Filial piety	6.374	Filial piety	6.568	Trustworthiness	6.636
Knowledge and education	6.276	Trustworthiness	6.368	Trustworthiness	6.519	Filial piety	6.545
Trustworthiness	6.181	Sincerity	6.226	Resistance to corruption	6.469	Working hard	6.545
Family is most important	6.133	Family is most important	6.213	Working hard	6.383	Resistance to corruption	6.545
Working hard	6.057	Resistance to corruption	6.155	Sincerity	6.358	Sincerity	6.545
Sincerity	6.038	Working hard	6.148	Family is most important	6.222	Having a sense of shame	6.455
Resistance to corruption	5.971	Knowledge and education	6.065	Knowledge and education	6.210	Knowledge and education	6.364
Courtesy	5.933	Sense of righteousness	5.942	Kindness	6.086	Kindness, moral cultivation, righteousness	6.273
Solidarity with others	5.895	Moral cultivation	5.884	Moral cultivation	6.000		
Clear direction	5.838	Clear direction	5.903	Sense of righteousness	5.988		

From the 10 values selected by the various age groups in the chart above, we extracted 14 different value items. In the following, we ordered and compared these 14 items according to how they were perceived by the subjects of the different age groups. This order is basically free of effects stemming from the

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 226.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 230.

uneven representation of the value perception of the subjects from the various age groups.

	Age 21–30	Age 31–40	Age 41–50	Age 51-60	Average ranking	Order by total score
Filial piety	1	1	1	2	1.25	Filial piety
Knowledge and education	2	7	7	7	5.75	Trustworthiness
Trustworthiness	3	2	2	1	5	Sincerity
Family is most important	4	4	6	14	7	Knowledge and education
Working hard	5	6	4	3	4.5	Family is most important
Sincerity	6	3	5	5	4.75	Resistance to corruption
Resistance to corruption	7	5	3	4	4.75	Working hard
Courtesy	8	12	18	19	14.25	Kindness
Solidarity with others	9	14	19	15	14.25	Moral cultivation
Clear direction	10	10	13	16	12.25	Clear direction
Sense of righteousness	24	8	10	8	12.5	Courtesy
Moral cultivation	11	9	9	8	9.25	Sense of righteousness
Kindness	39	11	8	8	16.5	Personal steadiness
Having a sense of Shame	31	27	28	6	23	Patience

There are 3 points on the above analysis that may be further explored:

1. The value "education and knowledge" not only ranked second in the 21-30 year-old age group, but also ranked 7th in the other three age groups. In terms of points, the subjects of both the 21–30 and 41–50 age groups were close, being 6.2, whereas the 31–40 age group scored 6.0 on average. This shows that the regard for education is part of Chinese tradition. The Chinese traditionally have "passion for learning" but the importance young people attach to education could stem from more practical considerations. They probably think education = degree scroll = career opportunities = wealth. For maturing people who already have some social and working experience, other demands would be more important than education. Evidently, among the Chinese family companies surveyed, not much attention is paid to the training and the upgrading of skills of experienced employees. For this reason, experienced employees have a weaker grasp for such notions than fresh young graduates.
2. The subjects of the various age groups demonstrate a vast difference when it comes to the value "kindness". The 21–30 subjects ranked it 39, whereas the other two age groups ranked it among the top ten. The average points of the two groups for this value have a standard deviation of 1 point. This possibly means that "kindness" is a core Confucian value, but is a little abstract and vacuous for people whose views have not been grounded in Confucian ethics. Even for adults and middle-aged adults, "kindness" is not perceived to be as important as concrete values like "working hard", "sincerity", "trustworthiness", etcetera. This phenomenon is even more pronounced among young people. To them, values ranked above "kindness" include "encouragement and reward", "wealth" and "competitiveness", revealing how young subjects consider "kindness" to have little pragmatic significance. The meaning of "kindness" is yet to be defined – Confucian "kindness" differs from Buddhist "compassion" and Christian "agape". The

subjects' understanding of "kindness" should be analyzed in the context of religious faith.

3. Young people put less emphasis on "sense of righteousness". Compared to Mature adults and Middle-age adults, they consider this value to be relatively unimportant in their daily lives. For the above two groups, the standard deviation of the average points given to the value "sense of righteousness" is about 0.5, revealing this value to be an important part of personal cultivation which is manifested in the collective values pertaining to interpersonal interaction. Young people, however, are more practical. To them, a "sense of righteousness" has too much of a moralistic nuance and is also overly idealistic. A survey of young Chinese Singaporeans in the 70s considered "perfect personality" to be one of the three most important personal values – yet, this item no longer exists for the young people of the 90s. Perhaps this accounts for why people above 30 and below 30 differ so drastically when evaluating the same value.

Another survey by Chu and Ju on the goals of life in China provides some interesting findings for comparison. The respondents were asked to select no more than five of their most important goals in life from a list of 14 desirable goals. Their choices are presented in descending order:

Important Goals in Life[17]

1.	Warm and close family	79.8%
2.	Successful children	66.2%
3.	Career accomplishments	60.1%
4.	Comfortable life	57.5%
5.	Harmonious (family) relations	53.2%
6.	True love	27.1%
7.	Education and knowledge	22.8%
8.	Building a house	22.2%
9.	True friendship	19.0%
10.	Contribution to country	18.9%
11.	Starting own business	12.3%
12.	Going aboard for education	9.1%
13.	College degree	8.0%
14.	Adventure and initiative	2.1%

1. The most important goal in life was a "Warm and close family". The finding confirms the paramount importance of family in Chinese society today. This is followed by "Successful children" and "Harmonious family relations", both related to familial values.
2. In contrary to the situation in Singapore, "Education and knowledge" is ranked less importance in China. As Chu and Ju have observed, "In most other societies one would expect education to be related to career accomplishments, in the sense that people of higher education would more likely consider career accomplishments to be more important. This is not so in China. There was no difference whatsoever between the high and low

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 174, figure 8.2.

education groups. This finding confirms the general observation that high education in contemporary China does not lend itself to career accomplishments."[18]

In view of the preliminary analysis of the above findings, Singapore is still a rather traditional Chinese society. However, to say that Singaporeans are deeply influenced by Confucianism and are characterized by it would be quite controversial. Three quarters of the subjects are educated in English and use it to communicate; they have not read any Confucian classics and may be described as totally ignorant of Confucianism. As such, it is highly suspected that they are "Confucian".

In China, on the other hand, although there remains some continuity with the past, primarily in family relations, the lifestyle and values in China today see a departure from traditional Chinese culture. This is because many of the traditional values, such as the doctrine of the mean, did not function alone but was part of a pervasive cultural milieu that stressed harmony, tolerance, and propriety. But now, harmony is not highly valued while tolerance and propriety have lost their former cultural relevance. The erosion of traditional values raises a basic question on the viability of contemporary Chinese culture.[19]

Rethinking Confucianism and the significance of traditional Chinese values

The attention recently paid by scholars from around the world to Confucianism has much to do with the economic development of Japan and the Four Little Dragons. The economic miracle of the Four Little Dragons has led scholars to attempt to unravel the secret of their success. This is the background of the genesis of the "Post-Confucian" hypothesis. Western scholars hail the East Asian "Confucian civilization", calling it the invincible cultural impetus. However, whether Confucianism does indeed constitute a beneficial ideological factor to the economic achievement of Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore awaits further investigation. China, the center of Confucian and Chinese culture, will also provide a very good case of study.

Ambrose King's case study of Hong Kong points out that though Confucian culture is still very much alive in Hong Kong, it has actually been transformed into a new value orientation, which he terms "Rational Traditionalism" and considers it to be a very important and conducive cultural factor towards Hong Kong becoming a most successful neo-industrial society.[20]

However, circumstances in various regions differ greatly. Japan, South Korea and Taiwan have a richer ambience of indigenous cultural tradition, whereas Hong Kong and Singapore are more "westernized". The situation in

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 175.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 247.
[20] For the case study of Hong Kong, please refer to Ambrose King (Jin Yaoji) and Zhang Hongyi trans. "Change in Confucianism in the Post-Confucian Era", In: Tang Yijie ed. *Chinese Culture and Chinese Philosophy*. (Beijing: Sanlian Shudian, 1989), pp. 238–253.

Singapore is quite like Hong Kong; both cities are confluences of eastern and western cultures. They have a full-fledged political organization, with their pedagogy and way of life deeply influenced and manipulated by western culture. The Confucianism or "official Confucianism" of the traditional dynastic monarchy cannot possibly be revived and take root in the highly modernized environment of these cities. What the people still widely accept and preserve are the basic tenets of individual moral conduct and interpersonal relations in Confucianism. These do not come from classical tradition, but mainly from implicit influence from within the family and subtly internalized moral values.[21] Some call this "secular Confucianism" or "popular Confucianism", others deem it to be hybridized with Buddhist and Taoist values and therefore can no longer be called "Confucianism". Takeshi Hamashita of Tokyo University, for instance, emphasized the impact of the Taoist "Table of Merit and Transgression" on common folks. In order to avoid the misuse of Confucianism and Confucian philosophy, it is probably more ideal to adopt the more general term of "Chinese value system". Ranging from theoretical conception to recent fieldwork, past research in this field is still riddled with issues that beg clarification. Pertinent research would probably decline as economic crises emerge in East Asia.

The "Post-Confucian" hypothesis is certainly a controversial issue in academia.[22] Nevertheless, the reflection and discussion of development of modern Chinese societies, and the analysis of the value orientation of mainland and overseas Chinese are definitely still significant and valuable. As the above surveys show, Chinese societies, as well as their value perceptions, are never unitary; the generalization of the term "Chinese" is certainly problematic. A new scholarly effort with an appropriately wide perspective to study the different Chinese societies is very much in order.

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[21] For example, the Five Shared Values promote by the Singapore government:
Nation before Community and Society above Self
Family as the basic unit of Society
Community support and respect for the Individual
Consensus, not Conflict
Racial and Religious Harmony

[22] For refutation of Post-Confucianism. see Bao Zunxin "Confucian Ethics and the Four Dragons of Asia – A Refutation of Confucian Revivalism", *Zhongguo Luntan* vol(26):1, 1988, pp. 70–80.

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