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Confucian Democrats, Not Confucian Democracy

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Abstract
The notion that if democracy is to flourish in East Asia it must be realized in ways that are compatible with East Asian's Confucian norms or values is a staple conviction of Confucian scholarship. I suggest two reasons why it is unlikely and even undesirable for such a Confucianized democracy to emerge. First, 19th- and 20th-century modernization swept away or weakened the institutions which had transmitted Confucian practices in the past, undermining claims that there is an enduring Confucian communitarian or cultural heritage today that democratic institutions have to adapt themselves to—or that a Confucian cultural spirit can be revived. Second, 20th-century East Asian statist regimes rationalized Confucianism for national ideologies meant to bind their citizens' loyalties to developmentalist goals. Memories of this now delegitimized, statist Confucianism have contributed to the further marginalization of Confucian norms, and to their dissociation from democratic values, in today's pluralistic democracies in East Asia. This essay argues that a Confucian conviction politics developed within the frame of East Asia's actually existing liberal democracies provides a better course for advocates of Confucianism in democratic politics.

Keywords Confucian democracy · Confucian values · Statist Confucianism · Conviction politics

1 Introduction

In the preface to his monumental 1900 book *Nihon Yomei Gakuha no Tetsugaku* 日本陽明學派之哲學 (*The Philosophy of Wang Yangming Learning*), Tokyo University philosopher Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎 explained why he felt there was a need for historical research into Japanese philosophy (*Nihon tetsugaku* 日本哲學). He wanted to awaken the Japanese to a renewed sense of respect for their distinctive national morality

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(*kokuminteki dōtoku* 国民的道徳), and he claimed that this respect could no longer be taken for granted; foreign-educated Japanese scholars had been promoting "foreign doctrines" such as utilitarianism and individualism. If such doctrines continued to spread unchecked, Inoue averred, "the likely outcome from all this in the end is the ruination (*hakai* 破壊) of our country's national morality" (Inoue 1900: 2–4). To Inoue, Confucianism was a central component in this national morality.

Early 20th-century Japanese scholars like Inoue transmitted an important cultural and political legacy for Confucianism which has lasted to the present day. They drew on their European philosophical training to reconceptualize Confucianism as a philosophy (*tetsugaku* 哲學) worthy of equal consideration with European moral and political philosophy (Shirai 2016; Paramore 2016: 150), and bequeathed this reconceptualization to subsequent generations of Chinese, Korean, and Anglo-American scholars keen to defend Confucianism against its modernizing detractors. However, they also pioneered a new role for Confucianism in governance, even as institutions supporting imperial and scholastic Confucianism were being swept away in China, Vietnam, and Korea. They selectively retooled and rationalized it for a comprehensive moral code commanding the loyalty of the newly minted subjects of the first industrialized state in East Asia.

In light of this modern Confucian heritage, what is to be made of today's proposals for Confucian democracy, whether it is conceived in hybrid pragmatist- or communitarian-Confucian terms, as a "democratic way of life," or as a constitutional political order specially adapted to the cultural conditions of East Asian societies? A common justification for such proposals is that democratic theories and institutions must in some sense be Confucianized to make them compatible with an existing communitarian Confucian culture, or deeply held Confucian values, or with a longed-for restoration of a Confucian "national spirit." I will argue that a facing up to the corrosive effects of 20th-century modernization upon older Confucian traditions and to Confucianism's 20th-century statist heritage mandates skepticism about the prospects, or even desirability, for "Confucian democracy" theories. Putting to one side the rather distant prospects for democracy of any description in mainland China, I will propose here a more modest conception of Confucianism in politics—as a distinctive variety of conviction politics, taken up within East Asia's actually existing liberal democracies, of South Korea and (possibly) Japan and Taiwan. In this conception a renewed Confucian politics could distinguish itself from the corrupted legacy of Confucianism under East Asia's 20th-century autocracies, and find a more realistic institutional realization in the pluralistic civil society and electoral politics of East Asian democracies.

2 Confucian Culturalism and 20th-Century Modernization

There are three arguments that supply justification for the notion that if there is to be democracy in East Asia, or if it is to succeed in the long term in countries where it has been established, it must adapt itself to an existing, or reviving national or pan-Asian Confucian culture.[1] In light of the characteristics of that culture, it needs to modify, or

[1] I am excluding works such as J. Chan 2014 and Angle 2012 from this typology since neither offers normative justifications for Confucian polities, or for Confucian-inspired policies, which derive from the culturalist arguments summarized in CI, CM, or CR (see below).

to exclude, some or many of the liberal norms that characterize Western liberal democracies:

1. The Communitarian Identity argument (CI). Strongly conditioned by their ancient Confucian heritages, East Asian countries remain communitarian in nature, and the fundamental values of their citizens reflect this communitarianism. Democracy can only successfully implant itself in these societies if it is modified to respect these communitarian mores and to reject the liberal elevation of rights over moral responsibilities and roles, and over collective welfare. Moreover, representative democracy of the "one person, one vote" variety can be a source of undesirable tyrannies—of ill-informed majorities, or of wealthy, vote-buying elites—in *any* society. East Asian societies aiming to preserve social cohesion and to remain true to their communitarian inheritance therefore have additional reason for implementing democracy in modified form.
2. The Cultural Matrix argument (CM). East Asian societies today are pluralistic but underlying their citizens' attachments to diverse ways of life and comprehensive doctrines is a deep, enduring matrix of Confucian values and "habits of the heart." For democratic institutions and practices to successfully take hold, or for them to flourish where they have taken hold, they must adapt themselves to and be reformed in the light of the values embedded in this deep cultural matrix.
3. The Cultural Restorationist argument (CR). Western ideologies such as Marxism have wreaked havoc upon the authentic national cultures of East Asian peoples, damaging their national spirit and deracinating their moral life. Confucianism is the core component of these national cultures. If democracy is to be adopted or successfully retained in these societies, it must be in such a form that makes it compatible with the revival of traditional Confucian culture.

North American philosophers such as David Hall, Roger Ames, and Daniel Bell, and Singaporean philosophers like Tan Sor-hoon represent the CI position (Hall and Ames 1999; Bell 2006, 2010, 2015; Tan 2003). Their actual prescriptions for Confucian democracy range from pragmatist-Confucian proposals for a democratic, communal, and rites-based way of life privileging cultural development and collective welfare over individual rights (see Hall and Ames 1999: 111–118) through to Daniel Bell's constitutional hybrid democracy proposals. These latter proposals incorporate a meritocratically selected parliamentary house of review (Bell 2006) or, more recently, a vertical national meritocratic/localized democracy model (Bell 2015), which Bell has increasingly contrasted with the shortcomings of "one person, one vote" liberal democracies in Western countries such as the United States (Bell 2015: 14–63; 2016).

Korean philosopher Kim Sungmoon represents the CM position, which incorporates both Confucian public reason-based justifications for a perfectionist model of democratic governance and advocacy for a Confucian-pragmatist democratic "public way of life" grounded in Confucian civic virtues and moral sentiments (S. Kim 2014: 136, 117–119; 2016; 2018) compatible with the diverse value attachments, religious convictions and other comprehensive doctrines of citizens in pluralistic East Asian societies.

A number of Taiwanese and mainland Chinese philosophers have advanced arguments like CR (Guo 2003: 76). Some, like Jiang, are willing to incorporate democratic electoral practices into their proposals for an otherwise illiberal meritocratic political

system and restored Confucian national religion. Others, following JIANG Qing 蒋慶, see liberal democracy as the best means for furthering China's restored national spirit and Confucian culture, so long as it is tapped firmly "into the main artery of the millennia long life of Chinese culture" (Mou 2014: 80, 86–87; see also Elstein 2015: 52–57 and S. Chan 2011: 91–92).

There are of course significant differences between these positions on the current status or continuity of Confucian cultural and moral values in East Asian countries. CI is most optimistic; whatever social transformations and political changes have washed over these societies in the past century, they remain communitarian, and central Confucian values like filial piety are retained in the hearts of their citizens. Advocates for CM are skeptical about attributing a categorical communitarian identity to contemporary East Asian societies. However, while they acknowledge the effects of modernization in fostering diversification in values and ways of life, they hold to the conviction that there is a deep if tacit continuity in Confucian values in the civic lives of East Asian citizens, resembling a Burkean "wisdom without reflection." CR is most pessimistic, acknowledging the near destruction of the Confucian national spirit by war, radical political reform, revolution, and market reforms. Marxism is a major culprit for some Chinese Confucian scholars explaining the degradation of Chinese culture. Others, like MOU Zongsan 牟宗三, believed the degradation started much earlier with the "foreign" Manchu dynasty (see Mou 2014: 73). Nevertheless, there is no clean alignment between strength or weakness of commitment to the thesis of Confucian value continuity and opposition to or support for liberal democracy. Communitarians have been most vociferous in their criticisms of liberal democracy, but as we have seen, some Confucian restorationists are (conditional) advocates for it.

There are, however, a number of objections to CI, CM, and CR that emerge once we shift the focus of analysis away from somewhat fuzzy notions of "culture" as the transmitter of Confucian values, to *institutions* as the chief agencies of such transmission—to the historically specifiable, mutable associations whose practices authoritatively conserved, regulated, interpreted and transmitted the rituals, doctrines and values that could plausibly be defined as "Confucian." In China, Korea, and Vietnam between the 15th and early 20th centuries, this institutional basis for Confucianism was to be found in (1) a system of imperial public service examinations which evaluated knowledge of a canon of Confucian texts; (2) the schools and academies in which generations of examination candidates and their families invested time and money to acquire that knowledge; (3) the monarchical states which authorized the examination system, defined the contents of the Confucian canon, and conferred cultural and political capital upon those who succeeded in mastering it by appointing them to public office; (4) the Confucian temples which allowed for public participation in rites which legitimated state patronage of Confucius; and (5) the familial and clan institutions of traditional rural life, in which the practices of both literary and "folk" Confucianism were transmitted and regulated. To this we could add, as a marginal but still significant note, the neo-Confucian inspired academies that provided training for samurai candidates for public office in the 18th- and 19th- century Tokugawa 德川 Japan, though their examinations were based on knowledge of a more mixed canon that was not dominated by Confucian texts.

The history of the collapse, abolition, or radical transformation of these institutions is of course well known, but deserves reiteration in considering the effects it had on the transmission of "Confucian cultural heritage." Existential crises that arose with

awareness of the technological superiority and imperialist ambitions of the European powers, and then of Japan, drove Korean and Chinese rulers to abolish the imperial examination system and convert the old academies to schools teaching European knowledge-based curriculums in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Such reforms quickly deprived Confucian learning of its status as the sole source of state craft knowledge, and of its cultural and political capital for the landed classes (Gan 2015). This was closely followed by the collapse of China's, Korea's, and Vietnam's monarchical states themselves, to revolution or to colonial occupation; by the closures or destruction of Confucian temples so closely associated with those monarchies, and—with land reform and revolutionary violence—the dispersal of the landowning classes in which Confucian learning and ritual knowledge had once been cultivated. Deprived of these institutional bases, Confucianism has been famously described by historians such as Yu Yingshi as a lost "wandering soul" in search of a body to harbor it again (see Billioud and Thoroval 2014: 3).

The counterargument will be that even with these vast institutional and regime changes, a folk Confucianism has persisted in the everyday lives of East Asians, passed on through rites and values shared within families, or in famialist business practice (Tu 1991). Yet these folk rites and values also have their institutional and material basis, in the inherited social and economic roles and relations of hierarchical extended families in traditional rural life, enforceable—in the last resort—by parents who could withhold resources and property inheritance from recalcitrant adult children. With industrialization, first in Japan and then in South Korea, Taiwan, and China, which incentivized mass migrations of young rural people into waged employment and urban life, that institutional and material basis for folk Confucian and communitarian values has weakened as well. Following thirty years of rapid market reform and urbanization, some 280 million rural Chinese are living as migrant workers in rapidly industrializing towns and cities, leaving their extended families behind (National Bureau of Statistics 2017). One could argue that families geographically split by this internal mass migration are still preserving traditional family ties as best they can; the dutiful remittances of paychecks by young people working in cities back to their families and parents in rural districts could be described as a modern variety of filial piety. However, the social and economic independence of young migrant workers from the traditional role and familial expectations that normally held within coresiding rural families implies confirmation for the thesis that rapidly urbanizing Chinese are undergoing "individualization" in their lives. Older life scripts emphasizing self-sacrifice for the sake of family and community are giving way to more personalized aspirations for educational and career success, and for individual happiness (See Yan 2009; 2010: 36–78).

Moreover, in East Asian countries as a whole, birthrates have been declining dramatically, alongside increased trends for marriage deferral, as marriage and child rearing have ceased to be accepted as traditional vocations and are regarded instead as lifestyle choices which come with potentially steep opportunity costs. These defamiliation trends constitute a form of "individualization without (self-conscious) individualism" (Chang and Song 2010: 37–63). Such changing facts on the ground put into question the attribution of categorical communitarian identities to East Asian societies.

I do not want to completely endorse the thesis that what are termed Confucian values are irrelevant to the lives of East Asian people today; what I want to draw attention to are the discontinuities between the imperial and scholastic Confucianism that lost its

institutional bases in the early 20th century, and the rationalized Confucianism of East Asia's 20th-century developmental states, which is now also weakening under the influence of the demographic and social trends described above. Those states did seek to inculcate selected Confucian values through moral education in school curriculums through the 20th century, as I will point out below. Such moral education, alongside familialist welfare policies incentivizing intergenerational family coresidency in urban settings, and practices of strict, paternalistic discipline in workplace relations, could have ensured some sense of continuity in Confucian political and ethical habits. This continuity is not always of the type celebrated by today's Confucian democracy advocates. Thus sociologist and politician Chun Soonok, reflecting on her own background as a labor organizer and worker in Seoul's textiles factories in the 1970s, writes of a "transposition of Confucian mores from agrarian to industrial (society)" in South Korea's industrializing economy after 1945. Yet these mores were of "paternalism and patriarchy," and they were enforced more autocratically, and more cruelly in industrial workplaces than they had been in the premodern rural society dominated by the landowning classes (S. Chun 2003: 83–84).

In the meantime, there is a question that requires answering by those Confucians who argue that democracy needs to adapt itself to the ingrained *Confucian* sociopolitical identity, to a deep Confucian value inheritance or to a yearned for restoration of Confucian national spirit in East Asian societies. Are they right to believe that enduring Confucian communitarian identities, or deep cultural matrixes of values, are so influential in East Asians' lives today—and that such identities and values, or a longed-for "Confucian" national spirit are even Confucian? For claimed Confucian values to be convincingly attributed to East Asian societies as *Confucian* values—which are also action-guiding values in contemporary ethical practice, I suggest three conditions would need to be satisfied: (1) that they are the subject of a minimal common specification *as values* to the communities or societies within which they are (or were) instantiated; (2) that they are (or were) demonstrably instantiated as *action guiding values* in the communities and societies to which they are attributed; and (3) that they are the subject of a noncontested attribution as *Confucian values* for the communities and societies within which they are (or were) instantiated. Take for instance the value of harmony (*he* 和). As Li Chenyang has shown, *he* arose in a rich variety of cosmological, metaphysical, aesthetic, ethical, and political discussions in ancient Confucian as well as wider pre-Qin 秦 thought, and in its broadest sense can be taken to denote the ordered, stable, pleasing integration of different elements in a unity, such that each can realize the distinctive flourishing or *dao* 道 appropriate to it. (Li 2006). Harmony, however, is not identical with sameness; while sameness or conformity is one of harmony's constituent elements, it is not its dominant element. Sameness is considered deficient when it generates in-groupism and insularity in human relations, as shown in the following aphorism of Confucius: "Exemplary persons are harmonious and not clannish; small men are clannish and not harmonious" (*Analects* 13.23). At least for Confucius, Mencius, Xunzi 荀子, and early Confucian classics such as the *Book of Rites*, harmony in ethical and political relations exists when each participant fulfils the role appropriate to them as rulers, ministers, subjects or family members in the social hierarchy, ritually finetuning their conduct in relation to others as circumstances require. Still, part of what it means to fulfill those roles harmoniously, and to sustain harmony in political institutions to prevent them from being compromised by injustice,

is to practice remonstrance and protest when social superiors fall short of what is expected of them by failing to fulfill their own duties in accordance with ethical and ritual standards. That being said, even in eras when Confucian texts had canonical status in the monarchical states of Korea, Vietnam, and China, what Confucian scholars understood by "harmony" and what rulers understood by the same concept could clash. The story of the Confucian scholar who brought his coffin with him to scold the tyrannical Hongwu 洪武 emperor is an impressive testament to the courage of such scholars—and Hongwu was apparently impressed too. After all, in spite of the terrifying body count of slain ministers and scholars attested for his reign, Hongwu considered himself to be a devoted Confucian ruler.

In the late 20th century, Singapore began promoting a Confucian identity for the state, and designed programs for teaching Confucian values in schools. The Singaporean government's Confucianized "Five Shared Principles" for its official national ideology, promulgated in 1990, included two that implicitly or explicitly invoked harmony: "consensus, not conflict" and "racial and religious harmony." "Core values" statements about "social" and "industrial" harmony also proliferated in public declarations by Singaporean leaders in the 1990s (Barr 2010: 76). In the context of Singapore's autocratic governance, however, harmony as an ideal became synonymous with "consensus, not conflict" not only for relations between diverse religious or ethnic groups, but also for citizens, civil society groups, and opposition party politicians in their relations with government. Numerous activists and opposition party politicians who refused to accept such harmony-as-consensus in politics have found themselves arrested, jailed, or sued by the ruling People's Action Party (PAP).

Harmony as the Singaporean government conceived it in the 1990s certainly looks like the sort of Confucian value that would sharply condition the nature of any democratic institutions implanted in Singaporean political culture. The civil and political rights characteristic of liberal democracies, which permit freedom of speech or protest potentially "disharmonious" with the opinions and policy preferences of a ruling government, or offensive to other religious and ethnic groups, would be incompatible with this conception of harmony—and that was exactly the opinion of Lee Kuan Yew in his many attacks on "Western" liberalism in the 1990s. Yet how does this value of harmony comport with the three conditions stated above for persuasively attributing Confucian values to present day East (or Southeast) Asian societies today? It is probably the case that the value of harmony has been sufficiently promoted by the Singaporean government in schools, and through its public exhortations, for it to have acquired a common specification for diverse communities and ethnic groups in Singapore; when its members hear the word, they are no doubt familiar with what the government means by it. It is then understood as applying both to relations between ethnic and religious groups in a multicultural society, and to relations between citizens and the ruling government. Second, there can be no doubt that it is an action-guiding value; it is normative, laying out standards for desirable conduct and for punishing deviations, according to the commonly understood specification of "harmony."

Yet there are also sound reasons for thinking that the attribution of a *Confucian* character to this value is contestable, as stated by the third condition. The conflation of harmony with consensus and the suppression of dissenting civil society activists and political opposition leaders cut against the understanding of harmony derived from ancient Confucian texts summarized above. The PAP's self-understanding of its

legitimacy is untroubled by any recognition of the ancient Confucian concept of the mandate of heaven—a mandate conditional upon rulers' ethical and ritual rectitude, and which can be withdrawn, providing reasons for righteous ministers (or opposition parties) to overthrow or replace their rulers. The PAP's concept of harmony thus appears both highly selective, missing key normative principles setting out both the responsibilities of rulers to their people in maintaining harmony *and* the entitlements of ministers, or of opposition parties and activists to hold rulers accountable when they fail in such responsibilities. Moreover, there are historical reasons for disputing the Confucian heritage of this value in Singapore as well. That is, that Singapore, a multiethnic city founded under British colonial rule, was never historically a Confucian society; even its ethnic Chinese majority has little connection with the languages and cultures of their ancestors who had first migrated from China to Malaya in the 19th century (Englehart 2000).

Highlighting the disputable character of a Confucian value attribution brings to light difficult questions over how to adjudicate, say, the *authenticity* of such attributions. Confucianism is a diverse set of scholarly, spiritual, and political traditions which have evolved over twenty-five centuries, and inevitably even the meanings of its so-called "core values" have been contested at different times. What *is* at issue is the Singaporean government's claims (at least up to the 1990s) to be the heir of a Confucian tradition, of "Confucian" or "Asian" values inherited uninterrupted from the premodern past, in differentiation from the values of the liberal West. *This* Confucian attribution is disputable; for what we have here is a value incorporated within what I call statist Confucianism, a Confucianism rather sharply differentiated from the Confucianism of the monarchical states of China, Korea, or Vietnam, and which has no history prior to the emergence of modern nation states in East and Southeast Asia beginning in the late 19th century. I describe this Confucianism below.

3 Statist Confucianism

In his book *Outline of a National Morality*, published with the sponsorship of Japan's Ministry of Education in 1912, Inoue Tetsujirō declared that the Japanese Confucian ideal of *chuko ippon* 忠孝一本—the essential unity of filial piety and loyalty—"was practiced only in Japan; not in China, not in the West, and not anywhere else" (Inoue 1919: 277). This Japanized Confucian ideal was an important doctrinal constituent in a national morality discourse that incorporated Buddhist, Shintoist, Bushido, and selected "Western" spiritual, moral, and political doctrines. The idea of a unique national morality—requiring from citizens of potentially diverse religious beliefs a supreme duty of filial and loyal reverence for the imperial house, loyalty to the government that ruled in his name and preparedness to sacrifice one's self for nation in time of emergency—was a central plank in the statism of a modernizing Japan. *If* there have been lingering moral-psychological, ideological, and institutional barriers to the adoption of liberal democratic norms and practices in East Asian countries, these barriers are much more likely to be the legacies of 20th-century statist governing ideologies and institutions, than of any premodern Confucian cultural heritage. This is certainly true of the Communist Party's statism in post-1949 China, which has acquired renewed legitimacy after four decades of market reform and massively increased living standards, and which is self-defining itself anew in hostile contrast to the liberal democracy

of the "West." Yet it may also be true for the developmental statism pioneered by Japan in the late 19th century. This statism incorporated a rationalized Confucian component into its national moral education system, and provided a model for national moral education under autocratic developmentalist state regimes in post-1945 Taiwan and South Korea. However, as I explain later, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan *are* liberal democracies today; the barriers to the adoption of liberal democracy have, after all, proven surmountable.

I do not want to spend too much time discussing the character of this statist Confucianism, but I would like to clear up some possible misunderstandings of how I would construe it and its enduring influence. I would not go so far as to say that it is an invented tradition, confected out of second-hand Confucian platitudes and Prussian nationalist dogma. The German philosophical influence is undeniable, however. Faced with the overwhelming technological power and imperialism of the European powers, Meiji 明治 era intellectuals and early Chinese nationalists studying in Japan such as Liang Qichao 梁啟超 took inspiration from the German philosophers Gottlieb Fichte and Hegel (in his "right Hegelian" iterations), to advocate a statist version of nationalism (See Kurtz 2012). According to such nationalism the state exercised supreme authority over political and economic affairs and over the moral life of its citizens, who were conceptualized not as atomistic "liberal individuals" with their own innate interests and preferences, but as subjects who could only realize their complete objective, universal moral life within the state—and in complete loyalty to it.

Nevertheless, to assuage the fears of nativists that imported Western ideas and technologies were sweeping away indigenous traditions, ways had to be found to show that continuity with those traditions was being maintained, and that they remained central to the identity of the nation state. The outcome was what South African literary theorist David Atwell has called a "traditionalization of modernity" (Atwell 2002). Ingenious ideologues like Inoue Tetsujirō, steeped in both Japanese Confucian learning and European philosophy, articulated a state moral doctrine or "civil religion" that suggested strong continuity with doctrines of the national essence (*Kokutai* 國體) and of the unity of filial piety and loyalty developed by earlier generations of Japanese nativist and Neo-Confucian scholars. Yet, against a background of industrialization, a new mass education system, emerging mass literacy, and mass communications, this was a Confucianism rationalized in a manner unimaginable to premodern Japanese scholars. With the old caste distinctions abolished, it was no longer the samurai classes or clerisies who were bound to offer loyalty and filial piety to the emperor. All subjects were now understood to be bonded together in a great family united by ties of shared race and shared blood (*ketsuzokuteki kankei* 血族的関係) under the paternal rule of the emperor, representing an unbroken imperial line descended from the Sun Goddess (see Inoue 1919: 280–281, 286–287); and all male citizens were required to offer their lives in the emperor's name in time of national emergency. The national ideology or civil religion these ideologues elaborated was in the service of a constitutional government developed on European lines. Yet the Confucian and imperial traditions it invoked continuity with were interpreted in such a way that they set limits on what forms of governance could be acceptable to Japan's "national essence." Neither democracy nor republicanism were acceptable.

In the post-1945 era, even after this national ideology had collapsed with Japan's wartime defeat, the emerging nation states of Taiwan and South Korea did incorporate a

strong Confucian component into their governing ideologies and school education curriculums. In doing so they followed the example of their former colonial rulers in pre-1945 Japan. That is to say, as Allen Chun puts it in the Taiwanese case, they reinterpreted Confucianism as "stripped down ethical values that had a particular role in the service of state." Filial piety and loyalty became the most important of these values, merged in a communitarian famialism extending "feelings of family solidarity"—and harmony—"to the level of the state" (Chun 2018: 26–27). In Taiwan the Kuomintang 國民黨 government incorporated Confucian moral education into school curriculums up until the 1990s, with the purposes of furthering the Sinicizing of Taiwan's indigenous population and legitimizing Kuomintang claims to be the true guardians of Chinese culture—of which Confucianism of course was a chief constituent (Fetzer and Soper 2013: 45–49). In South Korea during the mid-1970s, modernizing president Park Chung-hee 박정희 rediscovered the value of Confucianism for Korean national development after years of disparaging its influence. Most likely paraphrasing the contents of his Japanese school and military education of decades before, he proclaimed that love for the "small community" of the family was identical in substance to love for the "greater community" of the state, and these were the roots of the "tradition of loyalty and filial piety." From 1977 onwards, instruction on that tradition was incorporated into moral education classes in school curriculums (Moon and Jun 2011: 124). It goes without saying that Park did not consider "Western-style" liberal democracy to be compatible with his own authoritarian, statist vision of democratic governance (Moon and Jun 2011: 133).

Today, however, advocates of CI, CM, and CR must reckon with the impact of democratization and growing pluralism in the education systems and civil societies of Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea, and the inclination many citizens have to associate Confucianism with the top-down communitarianism and repressions of 20th-century authoritarian governments. This association is strongest in Japan, where Confucianism was ultimately implicated in wartime fascism and imperialism. Kiri Paramore has written of a post-war "taboo" on Confucianism (Paramore 2016: 167–182), though this was preceded by post-war recriminations implicating Confucianism in Japan's confused modernization and subsequent descent into national disaster. The Tokugawa Confucianism scholar and political scientist Maruyama Masao 丸山眞男 played a prominent role in these recriminations (see, e.g., Maruyama 1961: 177; Kersten 1996: 52–53). Explicit Confucian moral education disappeared from school curriculums, and Confucian allusions no longer figured in the motherhood statements of Japanese politicians.

In modern South Korean high school education, moral education textbooks feature Confucianism as one of a number of Western and Eastern moral theories to consider and adopt, in the interests of cultivating a more globalized and autonomous moral character (In 2014). In civil society, Korean progressives and liberals today often associate Confucianism with an authoritarianism that merely reinvented itself in the transition to a modern, industrialized society under the rule of Park Chung-hee. Chun Soonok sums up the progressive indictment of Confucianism thus:

> Confucianism not only embraces the concept of authoritarian rule, but positively encourages its adherents to serve the ruler without question and without any reference to extraneous "law"; whether the ruler be the monarch, the head of the family, or the head of the company. (S. Chun 2003: 23)

In contemporary Taiwan, the reputation of Confucianism is in decline not only because of its negative association with the excesses of the Kuomintang regime in the past, but also because of the rising influence of an "indigenizing" cultural nationalism that renders Chineseness, and a once prominent Chinese culturalism as its "other" (A. Chun 2018: 68–69). The Kuomintang government planned in 2011 to introduce a voluntary moral education curriculum based on the Confucian classics was greeted with hostility from many students, teachers, and elements of the mass media, amid suspicions that the Kuomintang government was "imposing mainland Chinese values" on children (Fetzer and Soper 2013: 45–46). Meanwhile, Taiwanese scholars promoting Confucian restorationism have found themselves marginalized because their Confucian cultural nationalist assumptions—about the centrality of Confucianism to Chinese culture, and about the centrality of Chinese culture to Taiwanese national identity—are increasingly incompatible with today's indigenizing cultural nationalism (Makeham 2005: 201–211).

To return, then, to one of my main themes: the question of what type of democracy would best be able to flourish in East Asian societies, if assumptions about enduring Confucian communitarian identities, or of underlying Confucian values and sensibilities, or about the centrality of Confucianism to a longed for cultural restoration, hold good. The answer to that question seems unclear because the assumptions themselves are flawed, at least when we confine ourselves to the Japanese, Taiwanese, and South Korean contexts. Advocates of the Communitarian Identity position claim, as we have seen, that the rights-based individualism of Western liberal democracy is not a good fit with the enduring communitarian culture of East Asia. Advocates of the Confucian cultural matrix argument are less hostile to individualism, but will hold that Confucian values or sentiments such as filial piety remain robust enough to serve as underlying, unifying civic values in otherwise pluralistic, democratic East Asian societies (S. Kim 2014: 147–148). A different, communitarian, or Confucianized variety of democracy is therefore more suitable for both CI and CM advocates. Yet even a superficial acquaintance with contemporary sociological studies in East Asian societies will show that these assumptions about communitarian identity and Confucian value continuity are undermined by evidence of growing individualization, in social conditions of defamiliation, fertility decline (Chang and Song 2010: 539–564) and rising elderly poverty. In such conditions, a hoped-for communitarian democracy, or a democratic order built around a shared Confucian civic culture, will appear unlikely to arise organically. On the other hand, attributions of *Confucian* motivations and values to political actors, policies, and social practices within East Asian societies will also be open to contestation, as I suggested in Section 2 above.

If advocates of CI or CM acknowledge this Confucian deficit, there may well be an incentive for them to see common cause with Confucian restorationists. Grant that the Confucian communitarian way of life, or certain Confucian values and sentiments, are vital moral or civic goods in the lives of East Asians, and that their dissipation is leading to cultural deracination, social anomie, rampant materialism, and political disharmony. If this is so, there would be strong incentives to encourage the development of a communitarian or comprehensive perfectionist democratic policy that will revive these Confucian goods, implementing Confucian moral education curriculums in schooling, passing pro-familialist, pro–filial piety, and pro–fertility legislation, and even invoking meritocratic principles to limit the effects of popular will upon governmental policy. Putting aside the unlikelihood of realizing any kind of democratic

government, whether liberal or not, in China or North Korea today, there are some major concerns about how such Confucian communitarian or perfectionist forms of government could arise, or be electable, in the pluralistic democracies of Taiwan, South Korea, or Japan. The danger is that explicit invocations of Confucianism in advocacy for such forms of governance may alienate large numbers of citizens who are indifferent or even hostile to Confucianism for the reasons described above, and who remember the excesses of Confucian-style policies under East Asia's autocratic regimes in the past. It seems unlikely that the Confucianized communitarian or hybrid Confucian-democracies models of CI, CM, or CR advocates will make themselves persuasive in present day electoral politics and civil society in Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan.

As Baogang He states rather frankly, Confucian democracy proposals remain at the level of intellectual advocacy, with little in the way of political experimentation to validate them so far. Confucianism's compatibility with democracy most likely has been achieved through the retreat of Confucian practices and into the confines of private life (He 2017: 57). That being said, there are legitimate sentiments in the cultural nationalism often underlying proposals for Confucian democracy in East Asia, or even in the yearnings of North American scholars for an idealized communitarian democracy in East Asia. The adoption of originally European (and subsequently Japanese) technologies, knowledge, political, economic, and educational institutions have paid off more handsomely for East Asian nations than for most other nations outside of Europe and America—in vast increases in living standards, economic wealth, social stability, and geopolitical power. Yet in the midst of such success, regret over the marginalizing of long-prized indigenous traditions is sometimes tinged with humiliation over past defeats and losses of sovereignty at the hands of European great powers, Japan, or the United States, the very same powers upon which East Asian states initially depended for the knowledge and technology transfers that drove their modernization.

In this experience East Asian societies and indeed postcolonial societies everywhere are not alone. As Isaiah Berlin astutely observed, the roots of romantic and cultural nationalism lay in the deep humiliation felt by educated Germans and Russians exposed to the culturally invasive influences of the European Enlightenment. Subsequent efforts to forge distinctly national bonds, and to revalue (and reinvent) indigenous traditions as distinctive national literatures, philosophies, and religions are not to be dismissed (Berlin 1996: 249–266) nor derided as mere *ressentiment*. North American advocates of Confucian democracy are also not unreasonable in expressing concern over the global problems resulting from an expanding liberal market order and the normalization of a "neutral, procedural" conception of democracy within their own societies—such as political polarization, the emergence of moral and political extremism (Hall and Ames 1999: 168–169), social anomie, atomization, vast income inequalities, and the resentments derived from acute awareness of growing divides in wealth, status, educational attainment, and life opportunities. I will suggest that there is still a way to address these concerns and redress the marginalization of Confucianism, but this will involve giving up comprehensive schemes for Confucian democracy, and also the Confucian culturalism often taken for granted in those schemes. That way lies in the articulation of a conviction-based Confucian politics which seeks to restore legitimacy to Confucian moral and political ideals in piecemeal fashion, within the constitutional orders of East Asian liberal democracies in South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan.

4 A Conviction-based Confucian Politics

Before proceeding to outline what a democratic Confucian conviction politics is, I want to clarify some basic contextual and definitional issues. First, this conviction politics is conceived in the context of the three liberal democracies in East Asia—Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan. In North Korea's dictatorship, or in the vastly more sophisticated and wealthy autocracy today in mainland China, a democratic Confucian conviction politics is certainly conceivable, but all I will say for it is that it would be heroic and richly productive of martyrs. I will leave it to others to tell its stories.

Second, I am defining liberal democracy in a minimal sense as a constitutional electoral political order which grants to all of its citizens equal political rights, property rights and civil rights (see Mukand and Rodrik 2017). South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan are all by this definition liberal democracies. A common assumption in proposals for Confucian democracy is that they take the United States as their default model of liberal democracy, and with it the comprehensive metaphysical and moral doctrines apparently built into the background political culture of that model; the metaphysics of the unencumbered, atomistic self; the moralities of biblical, republican, utilitarian, and expressive individualism; the political doctrines of republicanism, neoliberalism, libertarianism, and so forth. Viewed solely in comparison to this depiction of the United States' liberal democracy, East Asia's constitutional democracies might appear insufficiently liberal, perhaps because of residual, *deficient* Confucian legacy values that restrain the establishment of desirable liberal democratic norms. Alternatively, they could be viewed as sufficiently illiberal, because of residual, *beneficial* Confucian legacy values that restrain the establishment of undesirable liberal norms. However, viewed against the background of the wider, diverse family of liberal democracies, the corporatist social democracies of western and northern continental Europe, with their traditions of ameliorative government intervention in economic affairs and their welfare states, or the less extensive but still substantial welfare state democracies of Canada, Britain, and Oceania, the South Korean, Japanese, and Taiwanese polities provide unexceptionable variations on liberal democracy's main themes. It might be argued that in these latter countries liberal democracy is a young, vulnerable, and fragile transplant, perhaps still ill-adapted to underlying indigenous cultural traditions. Yet with a wave of populism and nativism now destabilizing the polities of the so-called consolidated democracies in Europe and North America, it appears that liberal democracy is a fragile planting everywhere. In its austere requirements of respect for justice—and in particular, for equal respect for civil rights—liberal democracy is always in some contention with powerful, arguably universal psychological impulses of particularism, sectarianism, and nativism.

Third, I agree with Kim Sungmoon in thinking that John Rawls and his successors drew a too static division between a freestanding conception of justice, ideally instantiated in a "public political forum" regulated by principles of public reason, and a "background culture" or wider civic society "with its many forms of non-public reason" (Rawls 2000: 133–134). For Kim, the "Confucian public reason" of, for instance, South Korean society derives organically from its background culture, comprised predominantly of Confucian-Mencian moral sentiments and values (S. Kim 2014: 128, 137–138). Where I part company with Kim is in his characterization of the dominating *Confucian* moral character of that background culture, in the South Korean case. First

of all, Kim does not give enough credit to the non-Confucian nationalist and Christian liberal contributions to Korea's background culture in the early 20th century, and during the prodemocracy movement era in the 1970s and 1980s. Some of the values that Kim claims as Korean Confucian-Mencian moral sentiments, such as *jeong* 정 and *uri* 우리, could just as plausibly be interpreted as 20th-century products of the cultural and ethnic nationalism of influential, even anti-Confucian nationalist writers such as Yi Kwang-su 이광수 (see Yi 2011a, 2011b; Miyoshi-Jagger 1994: 23–24, 34–40; Shin 2006: 47–49).[2] Moreover, as will be explained later, dissenting Protestant and Catholic leaders who sponsored democratic opposition to the authoritarian Park regime in the 1970s advocated powerfully for liberal democratic values, ensuring that these became important constituent values in South Korea's political culture during the democratization process (see Wi 1997). Far from Confucian moral sentiments and values forming a deep cultural matrix under South Korea's otherwise pluralistic background culture, I would argue instead that value pluralism reaches all the way down—while including some residual Confucian components.

Otherwise, Kim's perspective is in keeping with my own view: that a conviction politics originating in civil society, practiced by elected representatives and by activist organizations and political movements, can mobilize compellingly reasonable arguments and powerful moral sentiments that cross the border into the public political forum, transforming the application of what are understood as the fundamental principles of justice. Political suffrage, civil rights, and prodemocracy movements have had just these effects in widening the scope of application for political and civil rights and liberties to the working classes, to minorities, and to women, and in making economic inequalities a fundamental question for justice in the public political forum. However, political movements and elected officials have also mobilized more sectarian, particularist, and nativist sentiments on behalf of restricting the scope of application for political and civil liberties, potentially distorting understandings of justice in the public political forum and driving political transformations towards illiberal democracy or autocracy. There are, then, good reasons for hanging onto some distinction between public and nonpublic reason, and for hanging on to principles of reasonableness and reciprocity in evaluating the utterances and conduct of powerful political and activist leaders, elected officials, and judges when they bear on fundamental questions of justice in what Rawls termed the public political forum. Communitarians or Confucian critics of popular democracy are not alone in warning of the damaging effects unrestrained factionalism and majority voting power have upon, for instance, minority or religious groups' rights. Advocates of representative liberal democracy like James Madison have long emphasized the function that representative democratic institutions and the division of powers between branches of government play in protecting the public political forum from the intrigues of factions and majorities, who would justify abrogating its central constitutional principles and rights by appeal to particular interests "adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community" (Madison 1864: 105).

I will define conviction politics as the conduct of political campaigns, policy, and an overall political career in accordance with deeply held principles and values, rather than

[2] I further develop this argument on the likely 20th-century genealogy of *jeong* and *uri* in O'Dwyer 2019: 221–225.

in response to a perceived consensus or majoritarian sentiment (though these latter responses may contextually be allowed a subordinate role in the conviction politician's conduct). Conviction politics is typically exemplified in the careers of elected officials and heads of state, although it could be used to characterize the conduct, and career, of a civil society organization leader. The conviction politics I have in mind derives from the career of KIM Dae-jung 김대중, South Korean democracy activist, politician, and president. It self-consciously draws on those aspects of Confucian traditions deliberately marginalized in the 20th-century statist appropriations of Confucianism—the practices of what KIM Sungmoon terms "moral criticism and rectification of government" (S. Kim 2014: 284). In his four decades of public service as an elected official, opposition leader, human rights activist, and president, KIM Dae-jung availed himself of many opportunities to engage in such moral criticism and rectification. Entering politics during the dictatorship of RHEE Syngman 이승만, he went on to become a courageous critic of President PARK Chung-hee's dictatorship, opposing him in elections as opposition leader and as a prodemocracy activist, and paying the price in imprisonment, exile, and in repeated attempts on his life. His career from 1987 to 1997 as opposition leader in an emerging liberal democracy and as president from 1998 to 2003 provide a praiseworthy—if not unblemished—record of "rectification of government," implementing economic reforms that sped up South Korea's recovery from the 1997 economic crisis, laying the foundations for a more substantial welfare safety net, and pursuing a controversial policy of rapprochement with North Korea.

A caveat is in order. I do not want to create the impression that Kim was *solely* a Confucian conviction democrat. Baptized as a Catholic in 1957, he also participated in a tradition of conscientious Christian dissent. He repeatedly testified to the strength of his faith in sustaining him through the imprisonment, exile, and violence the Park and CHUN Doo-hwan 전두환 regimes subjected him to. From the mid-1970s, he was also prominent in a wider prodemocracy and prohuman rights movement headed by dissenting Protestant and Catholic churches. Reacting to political persecution by the Park regime, the ecumenical "Declaration of Korean Christians" of 1973 and Catholic bishop Daniel CHI Hak-sun's 지학순 "Declaration of Conscience" of 1974 defiantly proclaimed Christian principles of natural law to justify liberal democratic values of the rule of law, civil and human rights, freedom of conscience, and democratic accountability of leaders to their people (Wi 1997: 101–102, 104–105, 167–169). These stirring documents provide instances of how religious "comprehensive doctrines" can draw on the conceptual resources of their traditions to "endorse a reasonable public political conception of justice with its principles and ideals" in accordance with Rawlsian liberal principles of public reason (Rawls 2000: 146, 155). Kim showed there was scope for Confucianism to do the same.

KIM Dae-jung's 1994 *Foreign Affairs* article "Is Culture Destiny?," a response to Singapore First Minister LEE Kuan Yew's 李光耀 invocation of Confucian values on behalf of autocratic governance, explained the contribution that Confucianism can make to endorsing "a reasonable conception of justice" including civil liberties in Korea's liberal democracy. Kim wanted to show, against Lee, that democracy is not alien to East Asian cultural traditions, that its justifications are multiple and can also be found in Asia's "rich heritage of democracy-oriented philosophies and traditions." Buddhism and the late 19th-century Korean *Tonghhak* 동학 농민 운동 rebellion supplied non-Confucian sources for such a heritage. Most importantly, however, he pointed to

Mencius' explanation of the Mandate of Heaven, of "the people's right to rise up and overthrow" sovereigns who had lost that mandate, to the ancient Confucian adage that "the will of the people is the will of Heaven," to the many dissenting Confucians in history who gave their lives for the right to remonstrate "with erring monarchs" and to historical Confucian institutions such as the Boards of censors to argue that "the fundamental ideas and traditions necessary for democracy (historically) existed in both Europe and Asia." Indeed, he added, many of these ideas existed in East Asia long before they did in Europe (D. Kim 1994: 191–192).

This, then, is how I would put the case for Confucian democrats over Confucian democracy. It draws upon the example of a Korean statesman who carried a Catholic conscience and faith, and a critical Confucian understanding of political sovereignty, in his conduct as a political activist, opposition leader, and national president. There are some objections to my argument to consider. First, it may appear that Confucian traditions justify meritocratic-based practices of political dissent and accountability, but that participation in such practices is more ideally the responsibility of *junzi* 君子 or "humane persons" publically recognized for their moral and intellectual cultivation. Against Kim's assertion that Confucianism is a "democracy-oriented" tradition, Confucian meritocratism on this view is not conducive to *popular democratic* participation in the practices of political criticism and political accountability. Rather, such participation is the province of those who have acquired the requisite symbolic capital through participation in intellectually rigorous, credentializing institutions such as the old imperial examination system, or elite modern universities.

Yet there are in Confucian traditions more intuitionist understandings of moral excellence that could legitimate the idea of popular participation in political criticism and political accountability. This intuitionism was most powerfully voiced by the Ming 明 dynasty philosopher Wang Yangming 王陽明 and his followers, who rebelled against the notion that the moral credentials of a *junzi* were acquired through rigorous immersion in Confucian learning and rites, formalized through acquisition of an imperial examination diploma. In their arguments that all can perfect their moral judgement merely through removing the selfish desires that are obstructions to innate moral knowledge (*liangzhi* 良知) (Ivanhoe 2002: 121–137), there could be the basis for a Confucian justification for more popular involvement in the political process. In a liberal democracy, anyone seeking reasonably to uphold justice and to transcend "selfish" urges toward zero-sum factionalism—the humble trade union organizer demanding enforcement of labor law, the ordinary voter determined to hold irresponsible elected officials to account, and the elected official who humbly listens to and acts honestly on the petitioning of her constituents—would all be candidates for sagedom, on this understanding.[3]

A second objection is that my argument retains Western liberal democracy as the default universal democratic norm, putting the burden upon East Asians to cobble together whatever ideological and rhetorical resources their indigenous traditions can supply to justify liberal democracy to themselves. However, the singular identity attribute "Western" presupposes a question-begging cultural essentialism that is rarely interrogated, but certainly needs to be in an era marked by the destabilizing spread of

[3] For a discussion of a hybrid communitarian-liberal justification for liberal democracy grounded in Wang Yangming learning, see M. Lee 2008.

civilizational identity politics (see, e.g., Sen 2006: 10–12, 23–28, 40–56). Such essentialism defines certain political concepts as categorically and primordially "Western," encouraging a reactive "non-Western" nationalist self-definition and reducing motivation to explore possible parallel concepts in East Asian thought. Take for instance the democratic notion that a political leader can only legitimately *represent* or stand for the people if she has been chosen to govern in a free and fair election, governs in accordance with the rule of law and constitutional limitations, and respects the will of the people in accepting policy and electoral defeats. As Kim Dae-jung eloquently put it, there are in Confucian traditions parallel concepts for such understandings of legitimate representation, even if they never endorsed electoral democracy or pluralism in the past: in the concept of the "Mandate of Heaven," in the conviction that "the will of the people is the will of Heaven," and in the belief that rulers were also answerable, if not to the rule of law or to explicit constitutional limitations, then to the ritual and ethical standards set by exemplary sage kings, as interpreted to them by dissenting ministers and scholars (see K. Lee 2014: 105–126). In this parallelism there is, incidentally, a means for distinguishing the liberal Confucian conviction politics of Kim Dae-jung from the statist Confucian conviction politics of Park Chung-hee or Lee Kuan Yew.[4]

Another criticism from a very different perspective is that there are slim odds for a Confucian politics of this type to emerge in Japan, where Confucianism has barely any presence in civil society discourse, or in Taiwan, where today's indigenizing cultural nationalism is increasingly indifferent to Confucianism. As noted above, the reputational stocks of Confucianism in Taiwan, Japan, and even South Korea are now depleted, and its moral currency has also suffered more unconscious attrition with industrialization and urbanization. A conviction politician in Taiwan or Japan seeking to restore political legitimacy to Confucianism would have to proceed carefully, follow the lead of a statesman like Kim Dae-jung, and advocate values from the Confucian tradition that might have application to contemporary social problems. She would then craft their appeal in a manner that can also find endorsement in the doctrines of other traditions, whether Buddhist, Christian, secular liberal, feminist, or conservative.

Filial piety is an obvious candidate for such a value, in light of a growing crisis for elderly welfare in East Asian societies confronted with decreasing fertility, shrinking families, and depleting tax bases for funding elderly welfare spending. More conventional "Confucian" remedies for these problems, such as punishing adult children for failing to see to the financial and welfare needs of their parents, can impose intolerable burdens—and moral stigmas—on small, financially insecure families overwhelmed by the complex care needs of frail elderly members. They also do little to remedy the plight of growing numbers of childless, lonely elderly people. A Confucian-inspired conviction politician could instead follow political philosopher Joseph Chan's advice, advocating policies that do not presuppose prior acceptance of Confucianism "as a complete and packaged conception" (J. Chan 2014: 203–204)—nor even of Chan's own political perfectionism. Such policies could nevertheless promote humane Confucian values such as love and respect for elders while appealing to similarly humane values in Buddhism, Christianity, liberalism, and so forth. One such policy Chan suggests is for professional voluntary organizations to provide home care and welfare

[4] My thanks are due to Lee Kwanhu for highlighting to me the issue of legitimate political representation for Confucian democrats. The argument in this section owes much to his suggestions.

services to the elderly, instead of tax-funded government agencies. Citizens would be offered tax breaks for donations to such organizations, while the government would play a middleperson role by supplying to citizens information on the services and accredited quality of those organizations (J. Chan 2014: 186–188). There is no space for me to evaluate such a proposal. However, with its likely broad appeal and its potential to promote cultivation of elder-regarding virtues through volunteer participation in elderly welfare support, such a policy could go some way to restoring the moral currency of Confucianism in contemporary East Asian democracies.

A final possible criticism would come from Deweyan pragmatists: that I have focused narrowly upon a Confucian democratic politics in the institutional setting of electoral democracy. In the great prodemocracy and human rights movements of South Korea and Taiwan from the 1970s up to the present day, with their coalitions (and factions) of civil society associations engaged in conjoint political mobilization, struggle, and inquiry, I actually think there is a remarkable approximation of the Deweyan ideal of democracy as a "Great Community." Yet in these movements Confucianism is a minor and often unacknowledged player, alongside the multiple self-identifications of their participants—Christian, liberal, socialist, feminist, nationalist, and so forth. Here I have confined myself to the conviction politics of a type of elected official who explicitly identifies with Confucianism and with other political or religious doctrines.

On the positive side, the following can be said in favor of this argument in support of Confucian conviction politics. First, this argument goes beyond what Baogang He describes as "intellectual advocacy" to point to an instance of political, institutional experimentation against which it can be evaluated. Second, it derives support from the actual Confucian declarations of individuals practicing this politics, rather than inferring a potentially contestable Confucian subtext into their conduct and declarations. Third, it renews (or reinvents) traditions of dissenting Confucianism, which always had a fragile presence during the long epochs of imperial Confucianism under Korea's, China's, and Vietnam's monarchical states, and which were deliberately marginalized under the statist, autocratic regimes of pre-1945 Japan, post-1945 Korea and Taiwan, and under Xi Jinping's 習近平 autocratic rule in China today. It thus provides a means for its advocates to distance themselves from the morally compromised legacy of Confucianism under East Asia's 20th-century autocracies. With Kim Dae-jung it invokes the Mencian doctrine of righteous revolution, a doctrine execrated in Japanese fascist appropriations of Confucianism in the 1930s, and ignored by the Kuomintang and Park regimes. It reminds us of the examples of sages such as Confucius, Mencius, or Bo Yi 伯夷, who remonstrated with princes over their militarism and greed, or over their failure to see to the economic and spiritual welfare of their people, and who also resigned from their posts rather than tolerate such injustices. Most importantly, it provides a means for wresting interpretation of the Confucian virtues away from those who would instrumentalize them for the overriding interests of the state, at the expense of conscience and liberty. For a Confucian conviction democrat committed to upholding human rights, freedom of conscience, and distributive justice without repudiating the claims of patriotism and of cultural nationalism, the following answer by Mencius to the question, "what is the business of an exemplary person (*junzi*)?" has special significance: "to set his mind on high principles … to be moral …It is contrary to *ren* [仁] to kill one innocent man; it is contrary to rightness (義 *yi*) to take what one is not entitled to" (*Mencius* 7A33; see Lau 2004: 152).

5 Conclusion

I admit that my preference for Confucian democrats over Confucian democracy will be found wanting by scholars who argue for the varieties of Confucian culturalism discussed in this essay—for a Confucian communitarian identity, a deep Confucian cultural matrix or Confucian restorationism in East Asia. I have acknowledged the yearnings behind their claims for a cultural distinctiveness in East Asia, defined against what seemed (until recently) to be a global, cultural hegemony of western liberal individualism and democracy. Yet I have argued that liberal democracy is neither so essentially "Western" nor so unitary as they often suppose, and a fair claim can be made that South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan are liberal democracies. The particular, diverse characters of their civil societies provide, I think, the best supports for claims to cultural distinctiveness in relation to North American and European nations. As a component of a conviction politics, or in political activism, Confucianism may yet be able to contribute more self-consciously to the political life of East Asian democracies, and perhaps even beyond them.

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