

# Confucianism and the Modernization of Free China

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Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I feel very much honored to have this opportunity to visit your country and to join you, distinguished guests, on this occasion. Let me present my humble observations on "Confucianism and the Modernization of Free China."

Confucianism, which grounds its theoretical foundation on the continuation and transmission of traditional Chinese culture, is the mainstream of Chinese thought. Confucianists ever since Confucius have emphasized Humanitarianism. Confucius formulated his principle of *jen* on humanitarian considerations; hence, he revered human free will and stressed mutual respect and love among men in order that they may gain personal dignity. The humanitarian concern aims to bring to the fore the function and values of moral practice and underlines Confucius' views in the matter of political, educational, social and economic affairs.

Following Confucius, both Mencius and Hsün-tzu expounded and helped propagate their predecessor Confucius' philosophy. Confucianism was dubbed "practical learning" in the Warring States period. Under Emperor Wu-ti of the Han dynasty, Confucianism alone was adored nationally whereas other schools of philosophy were banned. Over the twenty centuries since, Confucianism becomes *the* greatest mainstream of traditional Chinese thought and is alive in the Chinese heart today. The influence Confucianism brings to China is profound and great. Even though in the course of Chinese history we have the Six Dynasties and Sui, and T'ang Dynasties when Buddhism was prevailing, this has little influence on the development of Confucianism. In the Sung and Ming Dynasties, with the rise of scholars such as Ch'eng Yi, Ch'eng Hao, Chu Hsi, Lu Chiu-yüan and Wang

Yang-ming, Confucianism was booming.

The arrival of the Italian Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci at Canton in 1580 launched the Chinese encounter with Western cultures. The Chinese assimilated much of Western cultures in various aspects. This is attributed to our open-mindedness, of which Confucius says cogently in his *Analects*: "All men are brothers within the Four Seas." Dr. Sun Yat-sen, our founding father of the Republic, also proclaimed that a large part of his philosophy was based on our cultural heritage; by this he meant his influence by Confucianism. It is true that Confucianist scholars all followed Confucius in placing much emphasis on interpersonal relationships, political and economic institutions, as well as laws and rules regarding decorum. These are also the aspects where the influence of Confucian philosophy on later generations can be seen most conspicuously.

In 1949, the Chinese Communists usurped our mainland and the government of the Republic of China moved to Taiwan where we unflinchingly put into practice Dr. Sun Yat-sen's philosophy, namely the principles of national self-determination, democracy and the well-being of the people's livelihood. Our efforts over the last three decades have borne fruit. In politics, we have achieved creative openness and democracy; in society the strengthening of moral and ethical quality. Economically, we are a developed country; and we succeed in nationwide education of equal opportunities. We have made much progress, and still keep making it while we steadily move into the stage of further modernization. Our result is abundant and all the world can attest to it. In actuality, the achievements in our modernization efforts have much to do with the enduring tradition of Confucian philosophy. Now, let me offer you some examples.

## I. Democracy

Democracy is the inevitable trend in the world today. In adopting any measures, a government must respect the will of its people; even the transition of state power has to be determined by the consensus of the people. The Republic of China has implemented its ideal democracy, given that local mayors and both local and central representatives are all elected by the people through balloting and our president is elected by members of the National Assembly. We may easily trace back the origin of this democratic ideal in Chinese cultural heritage and Confucian philosophy. It is stated in *The Book of History* that

"One must not show any contempt to a widower and widow. One employs the employable and reveres the reverend." The same book also postulates that "The people are the foundation of the state" and that "Let men look not only into water but also the minds of other people." And *Tso-chuan* has the following statement in the same spirit: "Heaven's love for the people is great. Would it allow one man to impose his will and way on the people while he indulges excessively his desire and violates the nature of Heaven and Earth? No way!" Now, let me turn to the remarks Confucius himself made. In the *Analects*, Confucius is recorded as saying "The old will be comforted and the young cherished"; "A state ruler must give extensively to the common people and bring help to the multitude." All this is a testimony to Confucius' concern about the people. His theory was further explicated by Mencius, who observed that "The people are of supreme importance; the altars to the gods of earth and grain come next; last comes the ruler." Mencius' idea is that a ruler is *for* the people—how can a ruler and the state be in existence were it not for the people? Therefore, the people are the most precious! Besides, the people stand always at the center of all political affairs: the superior officials, even the ruler himself, should listen to the people and be responsible for them. Democracy based on the will of the people, democracy grounded in the government's responsibility for the people—this is the prerequisite to true democracy. As Mencius rightly commented:

When your close attendants all say of a man that he is good and wise, that is not enough; when the Counsellors all say the same, that is not enough; when everyone says so, you must have the case investigated. If the man turns out to be good and wise, then, and only then should he be given office. When your close attendants all say of a man that he is unsuitable, do not listen to them; when the Counsellors all say the same, do not listen to them; when everyone says so, then have the case investigated. If the man turns out to be unsuitable, then, and only then should he be removed from office. When your close attendants all say of a man that he deserves death, do not listen to them; when the Counsellors all say the same, do not listen to them; when everyone says so, have the case investigated. If the man turns out to deserve death, then and only then, should he be put to death. In this way, it will be said, "He was put to death by the whole country." Only by acting in this manner can one be father and mother to the people.

Mencius' words account for the fact that the high esteem a government holds for the will and voice of the people extends to the appointment of officials and the recalling or other disciplinary actions to be taken against officials who fail to fulfill their duty. This explains why Mencius cited tyrants Chieh and Chou as his examples: "It was through losing the people that Chieh and Chou lost the Empire, and through

losing the people's heart they lost the people. There is a way to win the Empire: win the people, win their hearts and you will win the people." Clearly, the status of a ruler is at the mercy of the people and he has to discern what the people's will is. Mencius even encourages the people to join in a revolution to overthrow an inhumane tyrant. On this same ground Mencius did not consider Shang T'ang's ordering Hsia Chieh into exile and Emperor-Wu-of-Chou's righteous uprising against Chou of Shang a regicide or offense against the monarch. Rather, he said: "I have heard of the killing of a mere fellow named Chou, but I have heard nothing of the murdering of a monarch."

Although the underlying ideology and the political institution which we call "democracy" have their origins in the West, yet in China Mencius was already discussing the two requisites of democracy—the will of the people and responsibility for the people—two thousand and three hundred years ago. Hence, Confucian philosophy has indeed laid the foundation of democracy for the Republic of China today.

## II. Ethics in Society

Ethics and morality are the virtues cherished in Chinese society, and together they form the most important aspect in Confucian philosophy. *The Analects* states: "The young should be filial when at home and respectful to their elders when they are away from home. They should be earnest and faithful. They should love all their fellow men and be intimate with men of benevolence." And "Filial piety and brotherly respect are the root of *jen*." Echoing this, Mencius said: "The able-bodied men learn, in their spare time, such virtues as filial piety, brotherly respect, loyalty and faithfulness." These virtues have a practical goal to obtain. As pronounced in *The Book of Rites*, as long as these virtues are observed, "people not only regard their own parents as parents and their own children as children. The old will be able to enjoy their old age and the young to employ their talents; the junior looks up to the elder, and the helpless widows, widowers, orphans and the disabled will be taken care of." Over the last three decades, Free China has been vigorously promoting a cultural renaissance movement, with the late President Chiang Kai-shek taking the initiative and with ethics, democracy, science as our urgent tasks. The importance of ethics as one of the three objectives is best accounted for in the late President's book, *The Fate of China*:

However rapidly and increasingly social organizations change, the funda-

mentals remain unchanged: Fathers and sons, husbands and wives, brothers, friends all behave themselves in accordance with the sense of decorum; mutual respect between the superior, elder and the junior, male and female—all shall not break that decorum; neighbors will help each other in need or in sickness.

The late President's exegesis defines lucidly the meaning and scope of ethics and its essence is precisely in keeping with the ethical, moral views proposed in the Confucian tradition.

Insofar as state economy is concerned, Confucianists stipulate that a ruler should see to it that proper means of support and equal opportunities for economic well-being be created for the people. As Mencius wisely said:

Hence when determining what means of support the people should have, a clear-sighted ruler ensures that these are sufficient—on the one hand, for the care of parents, and, on the other, for the support of wife and children, so that the people always have sufficient food in good years and escape starvation in bad; only then does he (ruler) drive them toward goodness; in this way the people find it easy to follow him.

Confucius himself stated in the *Analects*:

What I have heard is that the head of a state or a noble family worries not about underpopulation but about uneven distribution, not about poverty but about instability. For where there is even distribution there is no such thing as poverty, when there is harmony there is no such thing as underpopulation, and where there is stability, there is no such thing as overturning.

Since ancient times China has been an agricultural economy and all rulers understand that in order to develop state economy, they must create and allocate to the people proper means of support, letting them live peacefully with each other, because a harmonious and prosperous society is possible only when the people are well-off.

In three decades, the government of the Republic of China has successfully implemented the land reform program "Land to the Tiller" which enables each farmer to till his own plot and gives him incentives to more crop production. Our agricultural economy grows so rapidly that it can afford to support the industrial development in turn—the nice coordination helps making miraculous records in our national gross product and *per capita* income.

### III. Education for Everyone

Chinese society prior to the time of Confucius was one which combined the ruling and the educating, with officials serving also as teachers. Schooling resources were under the proprietorship of rulers and the rights of education lay in the hand of officials; only few of the aristocrats had the opportunity for advanced education—which was forsaken to civilians. But Confucius inaugurated the education for civilians, making “teaching without discrimination” his manifesto. Confucius tore down the old notion of aristocratic education (which of course suggests caste stratification) and became the pioneer of civilian education in the history of China. In his “lyceum” he accepted every student who devoted himself to learning. He is indeed the first educator in China. His idea of “teaching without discrimination” becomes the guiding rationale for free China’s “mandatory education” policy.

Since 1968 the Republic of China has extended the length of mandatory education to nine years so that every pupil may at the minimum receive education up to the junior high level. As a result, the index of the citizens’ intellectual level has raised tremendously. Colleges and universities graduate programs leading to master’s and doctoral degrees are offered to dedicated students, with equal opportunities for everyone. This is in accord with Confucius’ idea of “teaching without discrimination.”

All in all, the various achievements in the modernization of free China can be attributed to Confucian philosophy, whose essence is humanitarianism and underlines the marrow of Chinese culture. Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the late President Chiang Kai-shek and President Chiang Ching-kuo now all esteem and promote our cultural heritage and elegant tradition. Anything contradicting our national inheritance—for instance, the provocation of hate, the annihilation of ethics, the impoverishment of the people and keeping the people in ignorance—is in violation of not only Confucian philosophy and Chinese cultural heritage but man’s civilization and current trends of the world. The modernization achieved by Free China is certainly a realization of our heritage, and above all, our leaders have adhered to this tradition, which has borne rich fruit.

Thank you for your attention.

## The Influence of Confucianism on Oriental Society

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Honorable Guest, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a pleasure to have the chance to pay a visit to your country and to meet you here. Now I would like to address the topic “The Influence of Confucianism on Oriental Society.” Any comments from you are very welcome.

Confucianism is the root of Chinese culture. For two thousand years, the ideas and behavior of the Chinese have been under the sway of Confucianism. As is known, Confucianism has been the mainstream of Oriental culture; Oriental societies, especially those of Japan, Korea, Okinawa and Vietnam, territories near China, have been largely influenced by Confucianism in both political measures and living style. The courses of Mandarin Chinese, Confucius’ philosophy and Confucianism are popularly offered in the universities of the above-mentioned territories; in these territories, people build Confucian temples, observe the Confucian memorial ceremony, and circulate widely the portraits of Confucius. All these facts bear witness to the influence of Confucianism. That Confucianism breaks down the barriers of time and space accounts for the fact that Confucianism not only characterizes Chinese culture but also symbolizes Oriental civilization. The Japanese scholar *Kozima* Akiyoshilo, inspired by the great influence of Confucianism, once said:

“Confucius is the greatest among the great men and the most sagacious among the sages. Born in the Orient, he is the common honor of the Orientals. If, instead of singing his praises, harm is done to his fame as a sage, not only the honor of China, but also that of the Orientals will be undermined.”

Now, for a further understanding, I will try to survey the influence of Confucianism in the following territories: