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Confucianism Today

Hong DM*

Independent Researcher, USA

***Corresponding author:** Dorothy M Hong, Independent Researcher, USA

Opinion

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Abstract

Several American English publications in Republic of Korea in post-COVID 19 era since 2024 in the **Journal of Confucian Philosophy and Culture** led me to ponder on the applicability and relevance of Confucianism in the contemporary American life. Confucianism places more value on effort than talent so it is not as efficient and productive tool when used as measuring factors pointing to advancement of human civilization. To this end this essay provides a brief analysis of Confucianism and Democracy embracing Capitalism in Korean communities, mainly in the Republic of Korea and the USA.

The principle of Confucianism is a pyramidal socio-political order with each rung professional mostly hereditary being dedicated to his occupation. Each of the category is regulated and so then speaking in terms of unit by unit to compartmentalize scope of one's concerns, honoring parents is as a pre-condition to stable family life whose ethical practice can expand in other agency arrangements where relational contracts are integral and therefore totally harmonious with Jesus Christ's teachings as noted in the Gospels by his disciples and other New and Old Testaments passages. As a starter, self-care can be intuitive in the context of parental care or elder care.

Honoring parents is a foundation to self-love out of self-care which can build to incorporate loving neighbors and out of which self-identity and individual sense of history and community could reach at its peak to nationalism and global peace by abating hateful thoughts and anguish and grievances that can be time-consuming, energy and resources wasting and destructive meaning leaving a room for anti-social conducts in a community.

Confucianism is key to mental stability conducive to academic success and work-ethics. One's academic success in high school affords youngsters to consider higher education at prestigious institutions and embark on new level of faculty of thoughts and research in a chosen discipline. Many times, choice is shaped and curtailed by parents' recommendations, and this is pivotal because of the high cost of college and graduate education in the USA. For example, Ivy League Institutions expect parents' monetary contribution to tuition and beyond regardless of the enrollee student's own finance and age. Confucianism is therefore backbone of the sound workings of mechanism of career development and capitalism. So often business starts as a humble mom and pop store and then can grow as a family business and then later expand into corporate entity attracting, recruiting and doing the retention of like-minded and qualified workers for optimum level of productivity and to minimize liability and other pains and chance of escalating hostile work environments that could be actionable. More likely than not, family loyalty and family care can go hand in hand with lucrative business activities.

By the same token, an educated person should be able to process knowledge alone after reading and studying and then deduce his own thought based on bias and his political orientation and doing the charting of cost-benefit analysis that does not run foul to American policy and politics, mainly relevant body of applicable laws in shaping course of actions in a commercial setting, specifically, to make prudent business decisions to "survive and thrive" in his livelihood efforts. When doing the work, he should be mindful of his resources and limitations objectively speaking and then

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subjective personal constraints and boundaries which would not necessarily mean blind faith in any human being including parents and friends, peers and lovers.

So, this is the pivotal departure from Confucianism originated from Dynastic China then transplanted in Korea which flourished better than in China in the bygone days. Confucianism is Godless. Confucianism equates virtue with heavenly beings that could be considered the absolute ceiling limit of education and ethical practice out of Confucianism, meaning the few enlightened with total moral cultivation.

But, by the same token, Confucianism is an ethical system and an ethical practice NOT a theology or for that matter religious practice. Confucianism is not God centered nor do citizens believe that God above is watching their every move to account for good work out of benevolence and generosity or bad deeds out of petty jealousy or from fear of losing one's face. People in Confucius society are moved by proof or indication and obligation not by belief, faith and ideals, not even idols. Today's US political regime of capitalism is, on the other hand, pay as you go options and decision routes by asserting your rights and privileges meaning those outlined in Bill of Rights and other "house rules" of which you are a member. In addition, in capitalism each risks consequences big and small some even inconsequential later because one must be held accountable for thoughts and conducts always deemed colorable under the laws of the land UNDER GOD in all avenues.

US citizens are held to believe we are responsible and conscientious because of our belief in GOD and the weight we place on GOD because we are under GOD wherever we may be or heading. We, in the USA are under one GOD. God is always with us, in our heart, in the sky, in each room we occupy to assure laissez faire with occasional government interventions to referee anti-competitive business practices are meshing soundly with our thoughts and actions. Competition is good because it promotes vigilance in trends, incentivizes product improvements and for any signs of hazards out of desire to maintain and sustain order which we casually call status quo, stoking our inner psyche to act big or refrain in part or else abstain entirely each day. Some even take time out for dating during busy workdays.

Another difference in perspective is the role of money and wealth from business and work perspective. For any Confucius society money is looked at with disdain and associated with vulgar culture and lowest Confucius caste system, meaning merchants as an occupation category who routinely handle goods and services in exchange for money during commerce and trade. This is not to say merchants are lowest class, but only lowest in such caste system. Many occupations are left out from the enumerated career paths in the caste system with rulers, scholar and lawyers and the apex, then farmers, then below that would be artisans and potters and then at the bottom merchants. Physicians, apothecary pharmacists, movie stars, theater performers, builders, construction workers, midwives, transportation and distribution carriers and operators and any work and labor related to cooking and cleaning, lenders, bankers, accountants, tax collectors are all left out in the caste system. While community censure may shy them from certain enterprising activities, these out of caste category of professionals are not as regulated as those in the Confucius caste system.

Most if not all Confucius would say, "Money can only go so far. Money should NOT be the motivating factor to make any determination, but then one would instead place premium on modesty, sincerity and morality." But, on the other hand, any capitalist would say, "Money helps and smooth out things in any transactions. Money affords freedom and choice, new doors to better opportunities and more convenience and comfort. While Confucius would place FREEDOM as an attractive nuisance that conjures temptations and dilemmas, Capitalists would place instead COMFORT as an attractive nuisance that conjures temptations and dilemmas. Basically, a capitalist replaces the phrase moral cultivation for proper guidance in course of action with disciplined and measured plan of action, thereby according to the actor/player in any working group list a paramount weight and pre-condition on work experience and skill set for any operating business [1].

By any stretch of imagination, both value systems put health and life as important and integral for continuation of civilization that invites room for improvement and progress protocols as echoed and endorsed not necessarily by the elite rulers but by mass numbers of majority of denizens, citizens and residents in each community. Therefore, neither system is very precise or for that matter truthful, so this takes a lot of labor and time intensive work, not just confined to priests' and rulers' work.

Such skills and outlooks may be achieved by assuring a prevalent sense of meritocracy which historically in China and Korea had been inspired and instigated by warriors and war lords which would have included commoners and outsiders. In the USA it is borne from the sense of liberty and equality based on the traditional notion of fairness which would have meant reporters might be quicker to notice and recognize pioneers and other newsworthy stories of newcomers and outsiders but elevation of stature and status by merit alone has never been guaranteed and so democratic society also places such traits as tact, affability, social skill and adaptability and storytelling to create new space, new corner for the reason for existence [2,3].

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Either way whether the Korea's Yangban Aristocracy sponsored Yi Dynasty or Democracy and Capitalism modeled after the USA current regime in Republic of Korea aka South Korea today or for that matter the USA today that noticed Diversity, Equity and Inclusion issues, Confucianism gives one reason for our existence. We come from our parents who reared and sponsored us. Thereupon our maturation and financial independence, we model our life based on foundation that our parents have built. Self-love begins with sensible identity shaped by our parents out of which we can branch out to 3 types of love, conjugal, brotherly and our unique but unequal relationship with GOD who bestows unconditional love, the all mighty and omniscient who protects us, blesses us so that we can live in grace and cope to guard our inner peace to live in harmony and work out problems expeditiously in civil manners, to the extent we are able to do so as acknowledged by the law of the land in which we live.

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