Confucian Ethic and the Spirit of Sun Yat-senism: Their Impact upon International Relations and Modernization in Asia

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Prof. Max Weber, a German scholar, impressively analyzed the impetus for the modernization of the Western society in his book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* At the same time, in trying to analyze Chinese society with this same pattern, he made many mistakes due to the barriers he had in studying Chinese culture, which caused the failure of his book *The Religion of China.* So as a Chinese scholar and imitating Weber's title, the author will try to discuss “The Confucian Ethic and the Spirit of Sun Yat-senism” and analyze their impact on international relations and modernization in Asia.

First, it is worth mentioning that Western Intellectuals have realized the importance of analyzing the modernization process in Asia by penetrating into its cultural factors. However, their success deals only with phenomenon analysis, but not its essence—the real meaning of Confucian ethics.

The book *Japan as Number One* by F. Vogel, a Harvard Professor, is a typical example. Although he noticed Japan's spirit of knowledge acquisition and teamwork, he has nevertheless neglected the origin of this spirit—Confucian ethics. Another American scholar, Mr. Hermann Kahn, has a better knowledge of this, and in his book *World Economic Development*, he has specially discussed the contributions of Confucian ethics to modernization. He selected Japan, Korea and the R.O.C. as

examples, and named them as "the Heroes." Nevertheless, most of his discussions are still limited within the economic field, he did not give stress to the key element, the spirit in *Spring and Autumn Epoch's Classics*, or the moral rectitude, which contains the essence of Confucian ethic and could contribute much to the influence on international relations. In addition, he did not discuss Confucianism's modern fruit—The Three Principles of The People, or, in short, Sun Yat-senism. This is a common shortcoming of Western scholars in their studies of Asian problems.

Stated in the Constitution of the Republic of China, The People's Three Principles is an essential basis for the construction of the country. And Dr. Sun Yat-sen, founder of the Republic, has clearly stated that the basis of his thought was inherited from the tradition of Confucianism. He said: "There is an ideological orthodoxy in China, which has been successively transmitted from generation to generation. And the basis of my thought is inherited from this tradition." Continuity of this tradition from Confucius to Dr. Sun Yat-sen is vitally important. Unfortunately, it has been constantly ignored by Western scholars, resulting in mishandling of Chinese problems and Asian international relations in many occasions.

In short, the relationship between Confucian ethics and Sun Yat-senism is just like that of the origin and the flow of brooks and rivers, which are both parts of the same stream; and both are also like the relationship between root and fruit. The deeper the root reaches down, the more fruit there will be grown. Dr. Joseph C.H. Wu once made a very proper comparison in this regard by using the relationship between mother and son. He said: "The Chinese culture is the mother and Sun Yat-senism is the son. When the son grows up he could take up the duty to glorify his old mother. This mother-and-son relationship is inseparable just like Lao Tze's illustration between Tao (Mother) and Cosmos (Son)." However, many of the so-called "China experts" in Western countries have little clear understanding of it. Some of them even think that Confucianism is a kind of authoritarianism, thus Communist China has inherited authentic Confucian traditions, and the Communist dictatorship was a natural result of that heritage. For instance, Prof. John King Fairbank claimed that "Peking today sings a different tune, but there are Confucian overtones in the Marxist orchestration."