

## CHAPTER 5

# A PRAGMATIST UNDERSTANDING OF CONFUCIAN DEMOCRACY

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### PART I: JOHN DEWEY'S SECOND ASIAN MISSION

#### I A PRAGMATIC PROPOSAL

The widespread skepticism of both Asians and Westerners with respect to the realization of a Confucian-style democracy is rooted in two allied convictions. First, it is too much to expect that democratic institutions will be easily grown from seeds already present in Confucian soil. And second, the present institutional forms of Asian Confucianism and Western democracies are sufficiently distinct to preclude a marrying of the two. With respect to the importation of Western democratic institutions, there is little hope of detaching desirable democratic practices from the questionable economic and cultural forces that, in North Atlantic democracies, have too often mitigated the effectiveness of those practices. In sum, while there might be a strong interest on the part of many Confucian societies in adopting a democratic baby, there is justifiable concern about the continuing quality of its bathwater.

We believe that these skeptics have a strong case. Late-Western democracies are themselves fallen-away versions of their originally intended forms. Unquestionably, the importation of Western democratic institutions by non-Western countries has required the acceptance of economic and cultural forces that have little to do with democracy per se. Indeed, in instance after instance, no sooner is the Trojan Horse rolled through the gates than rationalized social, economic, and technological elements have escaped from it to do their work.

We certainly have our own doubts about the salutary effects of democratization movements in their present form. And, we are not altogether naive about the degree to which counterproposals of the sort we shall be making will bear fruit. Nonetheless, we hold that there is more to be gained from rehearsing the better of our possible futures than rendering what is now a likelihood that much closer to an inevitability by adding our assent to the presently most plausible consequence.

According to John Dewey, one of the two heroes of our essay, “a chief task of those who call themselves philosophers is to help get rid of the useless lumber that blocks our highways of thought and to make clear our path to the future.” In that spirit we shall attempt to highlight what we hold to be the chief difficulties standing in the way of the development of a viable model of Confucian democracy and to suggest means whereby we might seek to remove them. This will, in part, require a search for non-Asian democratic resources that swing free of the most detrimental elements of “modernization” or “Westernization” or “Americanization” that so often accompany such resources. These elements that threaten persistent Confucian sensibilities include a legal formalism that mitigates the role of rituals as socializing processes; a concept of the autonomous individual that would negate the Confucian sense of the socially constituted self; a quantitative concept of equality that fails to note the qualitative distinctiveness of persons; an economic system that further exacerbates the pervasiveness of merely quantitative considerations of merit; a preoccupation with formal institutions as the determinative criteria for adjudicating social progress; and an insistence upon individual rights to the detriment of social responsibilities. In sum, the real consequence of presuming to import democratic institutions has been to promote an overall rationalization of social, economic, and political life that challenges both the form and dynamics of traditional cultures.

Our use of the expression “Confucian sensibilities” here is a deliberate attempt to reformulate the question “What *is* Confucianism?” that seeks an analytic understanding of this tradition to the methodological question “*How* does Confucianism work?” that pursues instead a narrative understanding of what is a porous, aggregating sensibility. We will argue that Confucianism like Deweyan Pragmatism might be better understood as a *way* of organizing and meliorating experience rather than as a potted ideology. That is, Confucianism is not *the* way, but is productive “way making.” This approach to Confucianism would help explain the seeming lack of a severe separation between the momentum of an isolatable Confucianism and its transformation of whatever social and political forces it confronts, from Buddhism in the Song and Ming dynasties to liberalism in our contemporary historical moment.<sup>1</sup>

Following from this historicist understanding of Confucianism, our argument, elaborated in this essay, will be that American Pragmatism offers a productive cultural perspective in terms of which to engage the ideological and practical dynamics of Confucianism and democracy because it effectively side-

1 For a discussion of the desirability of redirecting this question, see Roger T. Ames, “New Confucianism: A Native Response to Western Philosophy,” in *Chinese Political Culture*, edited by Hua Shiping (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2001).

steps the obstacles we have just listed. In particular, the understanding of democracy found in the writings of John Dewey allows us to remain effectively untainted by the sometimes noxious precipitates associated with the dregs of the European Enlightenment, thus escaping many of the consequences of “modernization” and “Westernization.” Specifically, Dewey’s understanding of democracy in social and cultural rather than narrowly political terms prepares us to appreciate the manner in which democratic experiments in China, primarily associated with rural villages, are likely to have greater efficacy than would more self-consciously political efforts focused in the cities. Further, Dewey’s transactional understanding of persons, along with his qualitative individualism, is rooted in a sense of the self as irreducibly social. His promotion of habit, habituation, and education provide sources for a positive evaluation of the constitutive role of rituals in a healthy society. His insistence that democratic institutions stand free of any particular form of economic system allows the importation of democratic institutions without having to accept their historically contingent connection with a strictly capitalist economic system. By rejecting an absolutist understanding of human rights – that is, by finding rights to be resourced in the particular historical community that grants them – Dewey provides a context for the rights debate that is far less threatening to the preservation and appropriate exercise of Confucian sensibilities.

Our contribution to the discussion of Asian democratization offered in this volume, then, is first and foremost an attempt to locate this important conversation about particular institutions and practices within a cultural vocabulary that, although certainly less formal and thus less demonstrable, is no less real or relevant than the specificities that might attend any rehearsal of pertinent case studies. In the absence of a sustained reflection upon those cultural values invested in different world views and alternative distillations of common sense, such a conversation can on the best of days be little more than competing monologues.

## 2 TWO MODES OF GLOBALIZATION

Except for a few late skirmishes and increasingly debilitating Pyrrhic victories on both sides, the dialectical struggle between the modernists and postmodernists has degenerated into a rather empty spectacle. Western (Anglo-European) philosophy owes its present vigor, not to a dialectical victory of the anti- or postmoderns over the promoters of the Grand Enlightenment Project, but to a transformation of conversational space within which viable intellectual engagements are taking place. That transformation is a consequence of *globalization* – a term that has taken on two competing senses.

The dominant sense is that associated, at the ideological level, with the dissemination of a rational and moral consensus born of the European Enlightenment and, at the practical level, rights-based democratic institutions, free enterprise capitalism, and rational technologies. In this sense, globalization is a synonym for modernization – which is itself thought to be synonymous with Westernization.

Discussing “postmodernism” within the context of this sense of globalization serves both to clarify and to relativize the notion. Postmodernity is a peculiarly Western event, if for no other reason than that modernity in its most effective senses is a Western invention.<sup>2</sup> And globalization construed as Westernization is, of course, a distinctly *modern* dynamic. The dialectical response of so-called postmodern thinkers to their received tradition advertises postmodernity as a set of counter-discourses that depend altogether too heavily upon their controlling narratives to serve the interests of non-Europeans.

As long as Western values monopolize the process of globalization, there will be a continuation of the expansionist, colonizing, missionizing impulses associated with the purveyance of liberal democracy, autonomous individuality, and rational technologies. But there are important signs that this modernist form of globalization is transmogrifying. At least in principle, there is no reason to understand globalization as either European expansion or American sprawl. For beyond the provincial, decidedly Western, sense of globalization, there is a competing meaning that recognizes the potential contributions of non-Western cultures. In this second sense, globalization simply refers to *the mutual accessibility of cultural sensibilities*.

Globalization as mutual accessibility retains one important connotation of “postmodernism” for the simple reason that a globalized world under this definition is radically decentered. The shift in world attention away from Europe and toward Asia; the dynamics associated with the complex relations of the Islamic and Christian worlds; the steady, if lumbering, emergence of Africa – all of these trends have provided practical illustrations of the irrelevance of a single narrative to account for past, present, or future events. Doubtless the Western processes of commodification and MacDonalidization will continue, but present globalizing dynamics may be vital enough to stand against even these dark forces. Contrary to the missionary dreams of Anglo-European statesmen and entrepreneurs, there may be a viable alternative to that form of globalization construed primarily as Western colonization.

2 For an extended discussion of the claim that modernity is a Western invention, see David L. Hall's *Richard Rorty: Prophet and Poet of the New Pragmatism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997):29–47, and Hall and Ames, *The Democracy of the Dead: Dewey, Confucius, and the Hope for Democracy in China* (Chicago: Open Court Press, 1999):63–97.

In the West, becoming conscious of our world in a principled manner began with Hellenic speculation. Distinctly *self*-consciousness emerged with Modernity. Both self- and world-consciousness have reached their final flower in a putatively “postmodern” period that relativizes our forms of self- and world-consciousness by recognizing many viable patterns of self-articulation and just as many ontological visions of the way of things. In place of the desire to make the world in the rational and moral image of the Western Enlightenment, some so-called postmodern critics recognize that our name is Legion and that both we and our world are many.

The mutual accessibility of all cultures guaranteed in principle by this second sense of globalization carries the implication that, in the absence of a general consensus, the plurality of cultures and traditions must inevitably lead to local and ad hoc modes of negotiation. In place of the quest for a rational and moral consensus, there will be an increasing need for negotiation among alternative habits and sensibilities. In its most productive sense, global philosophy neither recognizes nor condones claims to any single controlling perspective or master narrative. There can be no consensual model of discourse. Rather, we are urged by our global context to acknowledge a vast and rich variety of discourses. We are thus drawn to the significance of local phenomena.

The term “global,” while suggesting comprehensiveness, may in fact accentuate the fundamentally *local* character of objects and events. The model for understanding this second sense of globalization cannot be a consensual or universalist one that seeks common values or institutions across the globe. Rather, the model must be one that allows for the viability of local phenomena as *focal* in the sense that, while their objective presence may be altogether local, their influence is always potentially global in scope.

Under such conditions, there can be no avoidance of the primary facts of otherness and difference. The articulation of these differences leads inevitably away from universalist concerns and toward the articulation of productive intellectual contrasts. Differences heretofore were placed in the background of discussions, and family resemblances were held to be most crucial. Our post-cultural/multicultural age reverses the polarities – and difference now is thought to reign. In its most positive forms, difference is an emblem of tolerance, accommodation, and respect.

The interpretation of globalization as pan-accessibility and the foregrounding of the local or focal characteristics of forms of life support a strategy that allows us to maneuver around ideologies predicting a coming clash of civilizations. Such prophecies are predicated upon understandings of globalization as involving either competing universalist claims, or the resistance of an insular culture against such claims. The conflict of “Western” and

Islamic ideologies is an example of the former. The Chinese response to the threat of wholesale Westernization exemplifies the latter. A stress upon local sites of cultural engagement promotes a retail rather than a wholesale approach to cultural politics.

In sum, cultural politics is proceeding along two divergent paths. The first is the most recognizable in terms of processes of modernization associated with the extension of rationalized politics, economics, and technologies – all wrapped in the rational and moral consensus of the Western Enlightenment. The second form of globalization involves the recognition of the mutual accessibility of cultural forms and processes leading to ad hoc and local sites of negotiation aimed at the resolution of particular problems.

In the first sense of globalization, the term “Confucian democracy” is oxymoronic. Democratization is tantamount to Westernization – with all of the connotations of that term. Here, Confucianism is seen as a part of the rapidly fading world of traditional culture. And like the Cheshire cat, only its wan smile will be discernible in the New Democratic Age.

Hope for a combination of Confucian and democratic sensibilities depends upon the success of the second form of globalization – a sense that recognizes the potential benefits of mutual engagement in which both Confucian and democratic beliefs and practices are seen as valuable resources for the improvement of modes of togetherness.

### 3 IMPORTING DEMOCRACY: WHOLESALE, RETAIL, OR PIECEMEAL?

Processes of globalization that promote the mutual accessibility of cultural forms promise to relativize the dynamics associated with the extension of the rational sensibility of Western modernity. The increased rationalization of social, economic, and political life is to be resisted by the emergence of a shifting set of sites of intercultural engagement that eschew any overarching cultural norms. Such engagements are both local and ad hoc, aimed at resolving specific issues and problems rather than at realizing a rational consensus.<sup>3</sup>

Our first claim concerning the value of the discourse of Pragmatism as a means of engaging Confucianism and democracy is that the American Pragmatic tradition is at its core neither “Western,” nor “modern,” nor “American” in the dominant senses of these terms employed in both the Asian and the Western worlds. Though this fact is not widely recognized,

<sup>3</sup> Thus, Western proponents of North Atlantic-style democracies ought not be greatly disturbed by the fact that issues of “human rights,” “legal representation,” “free elections,” and so on, are seldom taken seriously on ideological grounds, but rather emerge in response to specific pressures both within and without Chinese society.

representatives of the American philosophical tradition from Jonathan Edwards through Emerson, James, Peirce, and Dewey did not share the problematic of the European Enlightenment. The strains of thought in America that gave rise to Pragmatism were grounded upon aesthetic rather than rational interests and the promotion of pluralistic rather than consensual concerns.<sup>4</sup> As William James noted, Pragmatism is “a method only” – a philosophical activity concerned with the engagement of specific problems arising within the sphere of public praxis.

As long as the Enlightenment search for a rational and moral consensus remained the philosophical dominant, American Pragmatism was neglected and allowed to remain on the margins of philosophical debate. Now, however, as the wholesale approaches of Western rationalism fall into disrepute, the decidedly retail methods of the Pragmatist seem to be in gradual ascendance. The American Pragmatic tradition offers an attractive resource for the engagement of Confucian and Western sensibilities on the subject of democratic ideals and institutions precisely because its intellectual goals and practices are not developments of the European Enlightenment and do not, therefore, share the features of modernity that would disqualify it as a possible connector with Asian sensibilities.

If sustained, our assertion that American Pragmatism is distinctly non-modern may have both substantive and rhetorical consequences in discussions with Asian-resourced sensibilities. For, as long as modernization is equated with Westernization as it is generally construed, it will be resisted by the more traditional elements in Confucian societies – those very elements that would give the term “Confucian democracy” its most authentic resonance. Offering an interpretation of democracy that is not burdened by those aspects of modernity long rejected by proponents of distinctively Confucian societies is a most productive step.

Of equal importance, American philosophy as represented by voices such as Emerson, Whitman, and, later, Dewey is itself a marginalized tradition within America. For this reason, suggesting that we employ the resources of American Pragmatism in the interpretation of the import of democracy and its possible engagements with Confucianism is no more to promote “Americanization” in any narrow sense than modernization. This is true because the majority of American thinkers – including the interpreters of our American sensibility – have themselves, until very recently, peered at their own indigenous tradition through the lenses of Continental philosophy.

4 This claim is briefly considered in Hall and Ames (1999) and is discussed in detail in our forthcoming work, tentatively entitled *Peace in Action – America's Broken Promise*.

As a consequence, the resources of American philosophy have remained *un-*mined – or, even worse, have been *under-*mined, by misinterpretation.

The implication is that American Pragmatism is an essentially nonmodern, un-Americanized sensibility that bypasses the modern and expresses a heretofore marginalized strain of American ideals and practices. This means that it may be able to serve as a productive site of intellectual engagement within a global context. The pragmatic justification of this claim will be spelled out in greater detail in the remainder of this essay. Suffice it to say here that the distinctly American sensibility can be of crucial import in forthcoming global contexts for two principal reasons: First, unlike postmodernism, American thought is a *constructive sensibility* – not a counterdiscourse dialectically bound to the discourse of modernity. It offers a fresh start; one that is seasonally relevant to our global context. Second, the resonances between Asian and American sensibilities reckoned at the beginnings of our tradition by Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, et al. offer promising possibilities for the Asian/Western dialogue that is sure to be one of the more important of the dynamics of future global discourse.

We recall that John Dewey attempted to introduce democratic beliefs and practices into Asia once before. He failed. The reasons for the eventual defeat of Dewey's programmatic reforms in China were largely associated with his refusal to take a wholesale approach to social problems in a period when it was wholesale or nothing. In spite of his radical reconstruction of the popular democratic ideal, Dewey was simply too moderate for a China in search of revolution. He took every opportunity to warn the Chinese against the uncritical importation of Western ideas (including, of course, his own), as well as the uncritical rejection of traditional Chinese values. Given the revolutionary temper of the times, however, it was perhaps inevitable that Marxism's generic ideology would overtake Dewey's decidedly piecemeal philosophy.

In his dealings with China as elsewhere, Dewey eschewed abstract principles and promoted concrete beliefs and practices as the only efficacious formative agencies of a society. Further, he insisted that totalizing processes – either economic or technological – were to be rejected. By contrast, there are presently many proponents of democracy who presume that democratic principles, laws embodying “right reason,” as well as free enterprise capitalism and rational technologies as we know them, are a done deal that may be bundled and “shrink wrapped” for ready export. In his initial sojourn in China, Dewey was consistent in insisting that democracy is expressed in attitudes rather than laws and institutions and that the sort of democratic attitudes entailed by his vision of democracy are both gradually formed by,

and reinforced through, education. This should serve as at least a point of reflection for any who would believe that heavy-handed efforts to democratize Asian nations, however sincere, will have much salutary effect. There are many potential exporters of Western democracy to Asia who seem satisfied that internal changes among urban entrepreneurs, or some influential intellectuals – or the pressure of other so-called democratic nations, or the demands of the world market – will work in a manner that Dewey's intelligent, patient, and altogether sensitive efforts did not.

We suggest that Dewey's second Asian tour faces much the same obstacles as the first. If he is thought to be underwriting ideas specifically identified with Western (read modern) values, his philosophy runs the risk of being rejected not once but twice, on two contrasting grounds. Traditional Confucians will ignore or reject him because they believe he is but another spokesperson for "Western" or "American" values, while the eager champions of a capitalistic version of liberal democracy – both Western and Asian – will reject him because he is (quite correctly) understood to represent a distinctly anticapitalist and resolutely communitarian form of democracy. There is not much hope that Dewey's communitarian views will persuade those already converted to the final virtues of a democracy motored by individual autonomy, free-enterprise capitalism, and rational technologies. Perhaps the more promising task at hand is to try to demonstrate to the more traditional of the Confucians that Dewey's philosophy holds the greatest promise for achieving a Confucian democracy in which central Confucian values are retained still largely intact.

If one merely extrapolates from past historical dynamics, there seems to be little choice but to accede to the forms of liberal democracy associated with the excess rationality of late-modern societies. Any hope that Dewey's second Asian journey will be more successful than his first lies in the fact that the four score years separating the two have seen a rather dramatic decline in the confidence shown toward generic ideologies. A space has opened, and the current trend is toward the transactional and the piecemeal. Citizens of a globalized and therefore localized world are becoming increasingly impatient with the thought of any general solution or universal plan. While we are far from realizing an "end of ideology," it surely seems that we now place much greater faith in the more modest intellectual efforts associated with ad hoc reforms.

In the following paragraphs of our essay we shall consider some specific issues with respect to which proponents of a Confucian democracy might benefit by appealing to the resources of Dewey's pragmatic model. Of course, to be consistent we must avoid any appearance of the simple reduction of Confucianism to Pragmatism. Ours is a distinctly modest, even bit-by-bit,

approach that only seeks to indicate the usefulness of pragmatic resources in this or that particular instance.

#### 4 LAW, HABIT, AND RITUAL

Other essays in this volume address in detail the distinctive role of law in Confucian societies and its application in particular institutions and practices. Such analyses must be qualified by a critical reflection on the distinctly pragmatic understanding of law and ritual as these strategies for social order are shaped by a central concern of pragmatic philosophy – namely, the cultivation of productive “habits.” For, the pragmatic sense of “habit,” in its dramatic contrast with the more mainstream Western philosophical understandings, establishes an intimate link with the distinctively Confucian dispositional understanding of the individual and social worlds.

In Anglo-European cultures, understandings of law developed within societies already characterized essentially as collections of individuals. Conceived as a defense against the exercise of despotic power, the rule of law quite rapidly developed in the direction of the protection of individual human rights associated with the limitation of governmental powers. The essential elements currently associated with the rule of law are constitutional guarantees for civil liberties (due process, equal protection), guarantees of the orderly transition of power through fair elections, and the separation of governmental powers. Together these comprise the fundamentals of a contractual relationship between rulers and citizens that prevents the latter from suffering abuses by the former.

The rule of law developed *pari passu* with the rights-based liberal ideology. Indeed, political liberalism today on some readings envisions the state as an increasingly neutral framework within which citizens may pursue their individual conceptions of the good life with a minimum of state interference. Such a framework is required, so the liberal argues, because of the pluralism of modern societies in which agreements on the meaning of “the good life” cannot be expected.

The different historical development of Asian Confucian nations precludes easy translation of the rule of law into a Confucian context. Confucian societies advertise neither an adversarial relationship between rulers and citizens nor a plurality of individual conceptions of the good life. The principal preconditions of the distinctive understanding of the rule of law in the West were not present, for example, in China. In China, law (*fa* 法) developed as a supplement to ritual action (*li* 禮) aimed primarily as the stipulation of administrative duties. Law developed alongside the development of the complex bureaucratic structure that served as the primary means of stabilizing Chinese

society from the Han dynasty to the beginning of the twentieth century. With respect to what we in the West would term civil and criminal law, these regulations increased in number and application in periods in Chinese history in direct proportion to times when the observance of ritual propriety lost some of its efficacy as a binding force. Moreover, such laws were for the protection not of the citizen but of the community as represented in the persons of the rulers, and the “social order” these elites were enjoined to maintain.

Dewey’s Pragmatism allows for an understanding of the role of law in society radically different from mainstream liberal theory. His understanding of the importance of custom and habit as forces of social cohesion resonates well with Confucianism. For, as radical as were Dewey’s reformist ideas, he well recognized the determinative power of customs and habits, particularly when they function in support of circumstances that allow for the most relevant employment of intelligent action in the furtherance of community. A democratic community is comprised by individuals who are themselves constituted by distinctive social relationships and publicly recognized roles. These individuals realize their greatest satisfactions through roles and associations that are radically embedded in the customs and traditions of a society. Dewey recognized that one cannot simply choose to move beyond these customs and traditions. Thus, “the essential continuity of history is doubly guaranteed. Not only are personal desire and belief functions of habit and custom, but the objective conditions which provide the sources and tools of action . . . are precipitates of the past, perpetuating, willy-nilly, its hold and power.”<sup>5</sup> It is important to understand that the “hold and power” of the past perpetuated by custom and habit is more than mere inertia. Far from construing the power of the past in terms of the “dead weight” of inertial forces, Dewey believed *habit* to be the essential condition of truly aesthetic experience. To understand the connection between habit and aesthetic experience, we must introduce a brief excursus.

We often think of habit in a negative manner as mere routine, or compulsively repetitive behavior, that we would alter if we but had imagination, creativity – or willpower. At a more formal level, we might entertain a more positive sense of habit as contributing to sound character and conduct. But, even here the concept is one most often associated with behavior that is somewhat “accidental” to the essential identity of an individual.

To grasp Dewey’s alternative sense of habit, we may begin with senses of the term developed from the Ancient Greek. *Hexis* (habit) means “having” or “being in possession of.” Early on, it also had the suggestion of both “condition” and “state.” It was used to mean a natural or conditioned “tendency”

5 John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1927): 161–162.

of things – as the habit of a vine. Aristotle himself sometimes used *bexis* to refer to the natural or innate behavior of creatures.

If we combine the senses of habit as a state or condition and as a tendency, we arrive at the sense of the term found in the American Pragmatic tradition. Habit is disposition. Moreover, things do not have habits – they are habits. Habit is a mode of being. Dewey employs the notion of habit to establish a relationship between “having” and “being” that provides the core of his peculiarly aesthetic sensibility.<sup>6</sup>

This distinction, in fact, turns out to be one between two modes of “existing” – unmediated and mediated. Mediated experience entails the fact that being, in the mode of this or that essence, is made manifest through the particular beings of the world. Such experience is entailed by substantialist ontologies and cosmologies that make substance and form fundamental. Substances are known through forms or concepts either existing antecedent to the substances or abstractable from them. On the other hand, immediate experience requires that the particulars themselves be the objects of knowledge. Such particulars are “known” immediately in the sense that the experience of them is simply had. The structures that permit the having of experience are habits that dispose one toward that experience. Mediated experience requires one to grasp the essence of a thing as conceptually presented; aesthetic experience is simply *had*.

Scholars of Chinese thought have long noted that the Chinese lack a copulative sense of “to be” as “to exist.” Rather, *you* 有 means “to have,” “to be present.” Whatever the translation of the Chinese *you*, it must be recognized that the concept privileges unmediated experience. Thus, if we allow for the importance of aesthetic understanding in defining the Chinese sensibility, it is plausible to assume that the notion of *you* as “having” is both a conditioning feature and a consequence of that mode of thinking. Being turns out to be habitual, dispositional. Being is *having*. As we shall elaborate in the discussion of the “enchanted world” of Confucius in Part II of this essay, it is this fact that connects the Confucian understanding of ritual activity (*li* 禮) with the Pragmatic understanding of habit.

## 5 INDIVIDUALITY, HIERARCHY, AND EQUALITY

The limitation of liberal individualism from the Confucian perspective is its challenge to a ritually ordered society in which the boundaries of one’s person may be only vaguely delineated. Confucian selves are “individuated” as a

6 The pragmatic understanding of “habit” derives from the use of the term by the early American philosopher and theologian Jonathan Edwards. For a discussion of the centrality of the notion of habit and its contribution to the “aesthetic axis” of American thought, see our forthcoming work, *Peace in Action – America’s Broken Promise*.

complex of constitutive roles and functions associated with their obligations to the various groupings to which they belong. A particular person is invested in personalized relationships: this son, this daughter, this father, this brother, this husband, this wife, this citizen, this teacher.

The identification of the person with roles is not in any sense a collectivist understanding. One does not begin with a separable sense of "self" which is then absorbed by or into a role. Rather, the roles are constitutive of what one in fact *is*. In the absence of the performance of these roles, nothing constituting a coherent personality remains: no soul, no mind, no ego, not even an "I-know-not-what." Thus, Confucianism is not a philosophy of self-abnegation in which "selflessness" is taken as a primary virtue. On the contrary, there is a palpable sense of not only personal identity but self-realization as well. The roles defining the person are ritually enacted. Again the resonance of Confucianism is with the pragmatic vision that assumes that individuals in a community will realize their greatest productivity through their distinctive roles and relationships.

The phenomenon of the radically individuated self is a rather late development within the Western tradition. In the beginnings of Greek culture, the tribal character of social organization effectively precluded a strong sense of otherness.<sup>7</sup> This sense increased markedly with the growth of cosmopolitan cities. In fact, as the word itself suggests, "civil-ization" was a process of "citi-fication." Attendant upon the rise of cities and of the commercial relations that sustained these urban centers, there emerged a strong distinction between the private and the public spheres. The separation of the intimate relations of the family from the more impersonal relations of public life enhanced the development of a sense of self-identity.

Things went quite differently in Asian Confucianism. Ancient China, for example, overcame the threat of the tensions and conflicts attendant upon ethnic and cultural pluralism by recourse largely to language rather than the process of urbanization as the medium for the transmission of culture. A class of Confucian literati emerged as official counsel to the imperial throne; a canon of classical works was instituted along with a commentarial tradition to promote Confucian doctrine as a national ideology; an examination system based upon these texts was introduced by the literati in the early Han. Throughout the two thousand years of imperial rule, a centralized and hierarchical bureaucracy perpetuated itself as a social and political infrastructure. Since the family was the model of all types of relationships, including the putatively "nonfamilial" relations obtaining among subjects, and between

7 See Alvin Gouldner, *The Hellenic World: A Sociological Analysis* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969): 104ff for a discussion of the development of the Greek notion of the self.

ruler and subjects, there was little by way of an effective public sphere. Rather, social and political order was conceived in terms of mutually implicating radial circles, so that strong person, family, community, state, and cosmos are coterminous and mutually entailing. As such, the notion of “public” as contrasted with a distinct sphere of private life has had little relevance for Chinese society.

There is, however, a sense in which we might speak of the public sphere in China in much the same fashion as John Dewey defined it. For Dewey, the public consists of “all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to the extent that it is deemed necessary for those consequences to be systematically cared for.”<sup>8</sup> Government consists in institutionally organized actions of those officers charged with the responsibility of overseeing these indirect consequences. In pluralistic societies the public sphere so defined is quite significant since there will be an indefinitely complex set of interactions accruing indirect consequences over which there must be concern. This may not be so evident in a more homogeneous, tradition-oriented society such as a ritually organized Confucian world.

One should not conclude that the attenuated public/private distinction in Confucian societies precludes conflicts between the claims of family and those of the larger community. In Confucian terms, these are typically construed with respect to notions of graduated loyalties. Obligations are first and foremost to the family – other loyalties are lesser priorities. In traditional Confucian societies, when disputes do exist between, for example, obligations to the ruler and to one’s parents, these are handled in a distinctly ad hoc manner.

Confucian China has always constituted a political paradox. On the one hand, it has traditionally possessed a strong central government. On the other hand, the majority of the population has expressed the rather casual attitude that “the sky is high, and the Emperor is far away.” We may resolve this seeming paradox by further articulating the rather attenuated sense of “public life.”

The ritually organized community is shaped by custom understood as what Dewey has called “widespread uniformities of habit.”<sup>9</sup> Rituals articulate these customs without requiring members of the community to develop individual habits. Insofar as one wishes to speak of a collective mind, it is, as Dewey asserts, “a custom brought at some point to explicit, emphatic, consciousness – emotional or intellectual.”<sup>10</sup> As for examples in the more individualistic societies, the idea of a collective mind is usually regarded with some suspi-

8 Dewey (1927):15–16.

9 John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (New York: The Modern Library, 1957):58.

10 Dewey (1957):60.

cion. Mass religious movements, such as those associated with the Great Awakening of eighteenth-century European and American society, illustrate the power of focused habit to give rise to a group consciousness. More contemporary examples include the “collective consciousness” associated with the U.S. participation in World War II efforts.

In more individualistic societies, customs are not ends in themselves, but serve as the conditions under which individuals form their individual habits. In societies in which customs are less articulated through individual habits, the chances are greater that, under the pressure of novel events, collective consciousness will be manifest. This can lead to mob action. As Dewey observes:

[In] a political democracy . . . thought is submerged in habit. In the crowd and mob it is submerged in undefined emotion. China and Japan exhibit crowd psychology more often than do western democratic countries . . . because of a nearer background of rigid and solid customs conjoined with a period of transition. The introduction of many novel stimuli creates occasions where habits afford no ballast.<sup>11</sup>

China’s Cultural Revolution was one of the most dramatic manifestations of “crowd psychology” in recent history. The severity of the government’s response to the 1989 Tiananmen protest was predicated upon the fear of a reversion to mob action. And the recent repression of the Falungong movement, seen from an internal perspective, is only the most recent example of the government taking social stability as its prime directive. The presence of a strong central government in China is a consequence of recognizing the potential for serious collapses of ritually sustained order during periods of transition.

In societies in which autonomous individuality is prized, violence and social disarray are most often threatened by individuals acting against other individuals. For example, while the Chinese government guns down far more of its citizens than does our government, we personally gun down far more of one another than the Chinese people do. Per capita, the United States suffers far and away more murder, more rape, and other forms of violence, and certainly more drug-related crime. As a consequence, we have a greater percentage of our population in prisons. There is no more justification for an individual murdering one of his fellow citizens out of passion, or from mere calculation of profit, than for a government such as that of the Chinese to murder its citizens deemed to threaten the social order. Both sorts of violence need be condemned. And remedies must be sought for both societal defects.

Fear of the collapse of ritually sustained order exemplified in the Chinese government's reactions to Tiananmen and the Falungong movement is one of the primary reasons for the unpopularity of the dominant forms of liberal individualism. It is important to recognize, however, that American Pragmatism offers an alternative perspective on the meaning of individuality. The distinctiveness of Pragmatism as a philosophy of social engagement is most dramatically expressed in its understanding of "individuality." In contrast to the liberal democratic individualism that dominates modern Western thought, American Pragmatists such as George Herbert Mead and John Dewey have provided distinctly social characterizations of experience suggesting that the fullest form of human life is life together. Dewey claims that "assured and integrated individuality is . . . the product of definite social relationships and publicly acknowledged functions."<sup>12</sup>

Dewey took the presumed antithesis between the individual and society to be a consequence of an unwarranted assumption. That assumption is that if, as is the case in a liberal democratic society, individuals have the right to dissociate themselves from any particular grouping, one may conclude that this suggests that individuals may productively exist apart from any association whatsoever. But common sense instructs one that the antithesis of the individual and society is a false dichotomy. The right to dissociate ourselves from all groupings is, in fact, the "right" to cease having any meaningful existence as a human being.<sup>13</sup>

It is not enough to simply show that there are meanings of "individual" and "individualism" acceptable to both Confucian and pragmatic sensibilities. There are other apparent obstacles one must overcome. One of the most important of these is the belief that "hierarchy," as expressed in Confucian societies, is irreconcilable with democracy. This misconception is most telling, for it identifies democracy altogether too closely with understandings predicated upon discrete individualism and the purely mathematical notion of equality that follows from it.

The aesthetic richness required for the realization of a communicating community as the ground of democratic society cannot be achieved within a context defined by simple equality. Not only Confucianism, but Pragmatism as well, requires hierarchical relationships of parity rather than relations of

<sup>12</sup> John Dewey, *Individualism Old and New* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1962):53.

<sup>13</sup> If pressed, liberals might argue that the "right of association/dissociation" is referenced to particular associations construed individually and must not be taken to mean that an individual can exist meaningfully in abstraction for any association. The problem with such a claim would be that unless one qualifies in theory (in principle) the meaning of locutions such as the "right of free association" at the beginning of one's discussion – not simply in an ad hoc manner when forced to respond to a *reductio ad absurdum* argument – the effect is to have it both ways.

abstract equality. Only a society in which individuals stand in relationships that reflect the unique characteristics of their relevant roles and functions is a truly democratic society. According to Dewey: "Equality does not signify that kind of mathematical or physical equivalence in virtue of which any one element may be substituted for another. It denotes effective regard for whatever is unique and distinctive in each."<sup>14</sup>

In earlier times, democracy in America included the presumption of important inequalities with respect to knowledge, virtue, and the burdens of responsibility. Deference paid to teachers, the clergy, and public officials did not cancel the recognition of "equality before God and under the law." Persistent and widespread recourse to the attitude of deference in acknowledging excellence is one of the most effective means of preventing a democratic community from suffering the bland sameness associated with merely mathematical equality.

Equality, construed in individualistic terms, is a distinctly quantitative notion. Such an understanding promotes the conception of individuality as inviolate; it also mitigates the value of informal pressure and persuasion that can serve as alternatives to more coercive instruments for maintaining order. Autonomy so understood stands in tension with the non-egalitarian institutions of family, union, and academy that promote goods-in-common. The definition of persons as autonomous individuals militates against the notion of goods held in common.<sup>15</sup>

The Confucian project is to create community as an extended family. And family relationships are resolutely hierarchical. Ideally, the effects of hierarchy are meliorated by the processive conception of person. The performance of different roles and relationships enables persons to give and to receive comparable degrees of deference. Deference to my teachers will in due course place me in a similar relationship with my students. The roles of communal benefactor and beneficiary alternate over time. Hierarchy need not be as rigid and inflexible as it is often thought to be, and it need not entail the impoverishing shadow of coercion. Having said this, in even the best of Confucian societies, as was historically true in ideal Western societies (for rather different reasons), hierarchical assumptions have threatened the realization of equality for all. The treatment of women and minorities is the most obvious illustration of such inequality.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Dewey (1927):150–151.

<sup>15</sup> It is certainly possible that quite different individuals might share goods in common – most often by having quite different reasons for holding them to be goods. But this would be largely a contingent and accidental feature of any society. Moreover, the senses in which one holds things in common via rational consent and the holding of common goods at the level of attitude and affect are crucially distinct.

<sup>16</sup> We have addressed the issue of women and minorities in Chinese and Western societies in Hall and Ames (1999):44–47 and 206.

For Dewey, the notions of “equality” and “individuality” are not a given but rather arise qualitatively out of ordinary human experience. Like “life” and “history,” ordinary human experience is both the process and the content of interactions with social, natural, and cultural environments: “‘Experience’ . . . includes *what* men do and suffer, what they strive for, love, believe and endure, and also *how* men act and are acted upon, the ways in which they do and suffer, desire and enjoy, see, believe, imagine – in short, processes of *experiencing*.”<sup>17</sup> Individuality is the consequence of the myriad transactions that determine one’s personal focus. Thus, “individuality cannot be opposed to association. . . . It is through association that man has acquired his individuality, and it is through association that he exercises it.”<sup>18</sup> An individual so construed is not a thing, but an event, describable in the language of uniqueness, integrity, social activity, relationality, and qualitative achievement.

For Dewey, the human individual is a social achievement, an adaptive success made possible through the applications of social intelligence. Given the reality of change, this success is always provisional, leaving us as incomplete creatures with the always new challenge of contingent circumstances. And yet this success is progressive and programmatic. “We *use* our past experiences to construct new and better ones in the future.”<sup>19</sup>

Like Confucianism, Dewey’s Pragmatism invests enormously in the centrality of language (including signs, symbols, gestures, and social institutions): “Through speech a person dramatically identifies himself with potential acts and deeds; he plays many roles, not in successive stages of life but in a contemporaneously enacted drama. Thus mind emerges.”<sup>20</sup> For Dewey, mind is “an added property assumed by a feeling creature, when it reaches that organized interaction with other living creatures which is language, communication.”<sup>21</sup>

As we would expect, given Dewey’s qualitative notion of individuality, equality is the active participation in communal life forms that allows one the full contribution of all one’s unique abilities. Commenting on this departure from the common meaning of the term, Robert Westbrook allows that Dewey “advocated neither an equality of result in which everyone would be like everyone else nor the absolutely equal distribution of social resources.”<sup>22</sup>

17 John Dewey, *Late Works*, 1899–1924, in 17 vols., edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981–1990)1:18.

18 “Lecture Notes: Political Philosophy, 1892,” p. 38, *Dewey Papers*.

19 *Middle Works*, 1899–1924, in 15 vols., edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976–1983)12:134.

20 *Late Works*, 1:135.

21 John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Norton, 1929):133.

22 Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991):165.

Equality so construed is not an original possession. Again, attaching a most unfamiliar interpretation to a familiar term, Dewey insists that

Equality does not signify that kind of mathematical or physical equivalence in virtue of which any one element may be substituted for another. It denotes effective regard for whatever is distinctive and unique in each, irrespective of physical and psychological inequalities. It is not a natural possession but the fruit of the community when its action is directed by its character as a community.<sup>23</sup>

In interpreting this passage, Raymond Boisvert underscores the fact that for Dewey, “equality is a result, a ‘fruit,’ not an antecedent possession.” It is growth in contribution. Further, like freedom, it has no meaning in reference to a discrete and independent person and can only assume importance when “appropriate social interactions take place.” In Dewey’s own words, equality can only take place by “establishing the basic conditions through which and because of which every human being might become all that he was capable of becoming.”<sup>24</sup>

In Dewey’s democracy, the integrity of the individual would be a function of the coherence of a community of shared experiences. The fullness of the individual’s experience can only be guaranteed by that community. A consequence of this recognition would be that the achievement of the principal rewards of individuals would be realized through their roles and the functions they perform, rather than through private pecuniary gain. Again we encounter the essentially *aesthetic* character of Dewey’s vision. The individual is *particular*, but not *discrete*. Individuals are unique elements in a community where members serve in mutually satisfying ways to enrich the experiencing of one another. Interactive, participatory behavior is the mark of a viable democratic community, and this provides the context within which an individual is constituted.

Notions of freedom and autonomy take on radically different meanings for Dewey than for proponents of liberal democracy. Freedom is freedom-in-context in which actions and decisions are rendered effective by drawing upon experiential resources derived from shared existence. Dewey is concerned that freedom be efficacious, not abstract.

In the *abstract* sense we are free when there are minimal constraints precluding any particular action. In the *effective* sense of freedom, an individual is free only when conditions promoting a given action are present. Members of communities are responsible for maximizing their fellows’ opportunities

<sup>23</sup> *Middle Works*, 12:329–330.

<sup>24</sup> *Late Works*, 11:168. For Raymond D. Boisvert’s discussion, see *John Dewey: Rethinking Our Time* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998):68–69.

to make decisions and perform actions that, in turn, enrich the community. Further, in a democratic society, government officials are enjoined to promote these same ends. The enrichment of the community is not an end in itself. The individual, as a participant in the community, benefits from the enriching context. That benefit is shared with the community to the extent that resources for further enrichment of other individuals are augmented. The end of communal interaction is the enrichment of the individual.

For Dewey, autonomy would have to be construed from within the context of a communal understanding of experience. This would require that the moral obligations of individuals are not primarily to their individual consciences but to the communal context to which they belong. It is, after all, the individuals forming that community, who have authored both the content of that conscience and the means of maintaining one's integrity with regard to its claims. Being true to one's self is being true to the resources, capacities, and propensities that constitute the self-in-communal-context. *Being true* means nurturing the terminus a quo of the self (the community as experiential resource) as well as its terminus ad quem (the particular focus of the community). In effect, it means to understand the self as by no means separate from the communal context within which persons emerge as foci of experiencing.

Our discussion above has attempted to show that there is more than sufficient reason for Asian Confucians to take a second look at the thought of John Dewey. Not only does Dewey offer a distinctive alternative to more individualistic forms of political democracy, the specific differences between liberal political theories and his particular form of social democracy are precisely those that resonate with the constructive aspects of the Confucian understanding of society. In Part II of this essay we attempt to further elaborate our argument in terms of Dewey's alternative to the Weberian claims concerning the inevitable rationalization and "disenchantment" of the modern world. Dominant understandings of Asian democratization depend upon a notion of democracy accompanied by the rationalization of political institutions. As we shall see, Deweyan Pragmatism offers a model of democracy that would protect the productively nonrationalized elements of Confucian society and thus maintain a degree of "enchantment" of social life in the Confucian world.

## PART II: DEWEY, CONFUCIUS, AND THE ENCHANTMENT OF THE SOCIAL WORLD

### I JOHN DEWEY'S ENCHANTED WORLD

Were we to refer specifically to the dynamics of late-modern *Western* thought, we might benefit by substituting the term "post-cultural" for our present au

courant “postmodern.”<sup>25</sup> After all, the concept of “culture” maintains its viability only if it is understood as a pattern of values and behaviors, a set of usages, that operate beneath the level of conscious intent. The spheres of tradition and custom encompass the immediacies of life, those circumstances requiring neither calculation nor reflection. Fundamentally, human culture is the pre-rational, tacit, and implicit *lebenswelt*. It is a world of sedimented feelings and practices requiring neither calculation nor reflection. As such, culture is an “enchanted” world.

The history of the modern West is one of increasing awareness – expressed, in Weberian terms, as demystification, secularization, rationalization, bureaucratization leading to “the disenchantment of the world.” A comprehensively rationalized, disenchanted world is effectively *post-cultural*. This is increasingly the character of the modern Western world. Globalization understood merely as modernization would serve, in principle, to rationalize all competing sensibilities.

The important contrast running through our entire discussion thus far is that of the increased rationality of social and cultural dynamics leading to the disenchantment of human life, and the alternative to this rationalizing dynamic found in the philosophy of Pragmatism. Rationalization, as Max Weber noted, involves the depersonalization of social relationships and the increased organization of technical means of controlling nature and society. The resort to legal mechanisms rather than custom and tradition, the merger of capitalism and technology, the appeal to abstract rights, and merely quantitative notions of individuality and equality are all aspects of the rationalization that Weber both celebrated and bemoaned. The gain is to be found in increased efficiency – principally, in economics, politics, and education. The loss is measured in terms of the loss of affective meaning associated with the disenchantment of the social world.

John Dewey seems not to have read Weber until rather later in life, and he offered only sketchy allusions to his central arguments. Partly for this reason, Dewey interpreters have not generally been inclined to explore the degree to which his thought serves as an alternative to Weber’s assumptions of the inevitable disenchantment of the modern world. However one judges its efficacy in the late-modern world, Dewey’s distinctively *aesthetic* philosophy was forwarded as an antidote to the very processes that Weber believed inexorable.

John Patrick Diggins has thematized the rather dramatic contrast between the visions of Dewey and Weber in his *Promise of Pragmatism*.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately,

25 “Post-cultural” is used in much the same sense by David L. Hall in his *The Uncertain Phoenix: Adventures Toward a Post-Cultural Sensibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982):363–365 and 393–395.

26 John Patrick Diggins, *Promise of Pragmatism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). See especially chapter 1, “The Disenchantment of the World.”

the contrast he makes presumes the standard tradition/modernity debate that Dewey's thinking effectively avoids. As a consequence, Diggins finds Weber's critique of science realistic and Dewey's (always qualified) enthusiasm for scientific inquiry altogether romantic and unrealistic. The priority Dewey gives to democracy over science is then simply dismissed as an "article of (misplaced) faith."<sup>27</sup> Diggins's misreading of Dewey is a consequence of his own immersion in the tradition/modernity problematic that leads him to believe that the greatness of modernity lies in the extent to which individuals and societies have allowed themselves to be guided self-consciously by a rational and moral consensus leading to increased freedom and autonomy. The disenchantment of the world through rationalization and bureaucratization is to be considered a problem only if it is "excessive" and overreaching.

It is a commonplace of modernist discourse such as that of Diggins to ignore the centrality of art and aesthetic experience in the formation and maintenance of a healthy society. Thus he cannot take seriously Dewey's discussion of the centrality of art as a means of the continual enchantment of everyday life.<sup>28</sup> The assumption is that concessions to the importance of art are little more than rhetorical flourishes. However, as Dewey insisted, it is not science but *art* that grounds the constructive activities leading to a democratic society and produces a communicating community.

Common things, a flower, a gleam of moonlight, the song of a bird, not things rare and remote, are means by which the deeper levels of life are touched so that they spring up as desire and thought. This process is art. . . . Artists have always been the real purveyors of news for it is not the outward happening in itself which is new but the kindling by it of emotion, perception and appreciation.<sup>29</sup>

It is a sign of just how far along are the processes of rationalization leading to the disenchantment of the modern world, that the first response one is likely to have upon reading the above quote is "What in the world does a 'gleam of moonlight' have to do with democracy?" In fact, proponents of "enchantment" believe the connection to be both direct and important.

Thomas Jefferson's preference for the "enchantments," the affective bonding, associated with rural life as opposed to the lives of the Yankee trader, or "the occupants of the work-bench," is well known. In "Notes on the State of Virginia," he observes that the "corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example.

27 Diggins (1994):42-43.

28 This crucial subject receives but one brief mention of a single page of Diggins's five-hundred-page work.

29 Dewey (1927):183-184.

It is the mark set upon those, who not looking up to heaven, to their own soil and industry, depend upon the casualties and caprice of customers." Looking to a common heaven, working with a common soil, establishes a commonality of experiencing that creates affective community, rather than the merely contractual modes of association bound by transitory "mutual interests" of an economic or political sort.

For Dewey, democracy and the educative processes meant to realize and sustain that democracy serve as the means whereby common affective experiences become effective agencies in society. "Democracy is the name for a life of free and enriching communion. . . . It will have its consummation when free social inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication."<sup>30</sup> Dewey's educational theory is dominated by the notion of communication. Effective communication is the communication of affective *feeling*. We do not begin with ideas. Nor do we begin in any simple sense with practices. "Learning by doing" – the cliché by which Dewey's form of education has been parodied and dismissed – is always a learning by *undergoing* as well. There is no doing without undergoing, no action without *passion*. Feeling both accompanies and is generated by educative activities. And, as all education is transactional, the aim of education is the creation of a *community of affect*. Such a community is the source and aim of a democratic society. And this *communicating community* is continually constituted by the enchantments of art and aesthetic activity.

It is important to recognize that "rare and remote" experiences individuate and separate. Experiences open to but a few create experiential elites of the sort associated with the effete aestheticism of a merely "cultured" class. Art dwells on the commonplaces capable of enriching every life. As a "communicating community," a democratic society ensures the common access to these commonplaces of life.

Dewey's aesthetic understanding is not without its distinctly spiritual component. Dewey employs the term "religious" to indicate "the sense of the connection of man, in the way of both dependence and support, with the enveloping world that the imagination feels is a universe."<sup>31</sup> Dewey's understanding of religion begins from social practices which, when they achieve a certain breadth and depth of meaning, reveal a religious sensibility that connects a cultured human community more profoundly to the natural world. Dewey's sense of religion requires no belief in a supernatural supreme being: "Nature, as the object of knowledge, is capable of being the source of constant good and a rule of life, and thus has all the properties and the functions that the Jewish-Christian tradition attributed to God."<sup>32</sup>

In fact, although Dewey sometimes does refer to “God,” any notion of a temporally prior, transcendent source and architect of the human experience, lawgiver and judge, is anathema to Deweyan Pragmatism. What Dewey wants to preserve of traditional theism is its “natural piety” as a sense of awe and wonder that encourages a humble attitude of cooperation with the natural complexity that surrounds us. It is religiousness in this sense that guarantees the enchantment of the human experience.

There is much in this idiosyncratic vocabulary of Dewey’s that resonates with distinctly Confucian sensibilities: “experience” and *dao* (道), “consummatory experience” and *he* (和) (harmony), “individuality” and *ren* (仁), “religiousness” and *li* (禮), human nature and the processional *renxing* (人性) (human nature). Other points of convergence include the irreducibly social nature of human experience, the priority of situation to agency, the central importance of effective communication, and a human- rather than God-centered religious sensibility. On all these issues the ideas of Dewey and Confucius are joined in the effort to promote and maintain an enchanted world.

Critics are certainly correct in noting that Weber’s fears have been more justified than Dewey’s hopes. Weber’s vindication, however, is more the result of refusing to attend to the Deweyan alternative than a consequence of circumstantial inevitabilities. Moreover, there is some reason to believe that, in its service to the development of a Confucian democracy, Dewey’s thought may itself become additionally revitalized in the Western world. That is to say, the new variable in the historical equation – that of Confucianism – may shift the balance somewhat toward Dewey’s understanding of democracy as a communicating community and away from Weber’s concession to the inevitability of disenchantment and rationalization. In any case, if institutional democracies are to escape the strictures of Weber’s “iron cage,” they must proceed along lines similar to those charted by Dewey. The advantage here lies with Confucian societies since they are already shaped by an aesthetic rather than a rational dominant.

## 2 CONFUCIUS AND THE ENCHANTMENT OF THE FAMILIAR

Weber famously excepted Asian societies from his generalizations about the inevitability of rationalizing processes. Of course, were he theorizing today, he might wish to reconsider this exemption in the light of the current narrowed dynamics of globalization. The religious traditionalism predominating in Asian societies, which Weber thought to be intransigent, has begun to soften considerably under the pressure of Westernization. In particular, the hope that traditional values defining the Confucian sensibility might be

isolated from the forces of secularization seems to have been in error. There are many informed and sometimes sympathetic interpreters of contemporary Asia who believe that, if present tendencies continue apace, what we recognize as Confucian culture might well be in jeopardy.

Indeed, a significantly rationalized Confucian society is difficult to imagine. Rituals (*li* 禮) are agencies of enchantment. They are means of allowing human transactions to take place at an unmediated, aesthetic level without the necessity of one having to “take thought.” Rationalization of social forms is antithetical to Confucian *li* – and to the core of Confucianism itself.

In Confucianism, *li* are to be understood in terms of the controlling metaphor of “family” as a sphere of unrationalized intimacy. “The degree of love due different kin and the graduated esteem due those who are different in character is what gives rise to ritual propriety (*li*)” (*Zhongyong* 中庸 20). Speaking generally, it is the patterns of deference that constitute the family itself. The appropriate transactions among its members give rise to, define, and authorize the specific ritualized roles and relationships (*li*) through which the process of individual refinement is pursued. What makes these ritualized roles and relationships fundamentally different from rational rules or laws is the fact that not only must they be personalized, but the quality of the particular persons invested in these *li* is the ultimate criterion of their efficacy.<sup>33</sup>

The expression *zhongyong* (中庸), first found in the *Analects* and then elaborated in the text that takes this same term as its title, actually means a thorough attentiveness to the ongoing need to “focus the familiar.” *Zhongyong* 1 states: “The Master said, ‘Sustaining focus (*zhong*) in the familiar affairs of the day is a task of the highest order. It is rare among the common people to be able to sustain it for long.’” This *Zhongyong* version is reminiscent of *Analects* 12.1 in which “self-discipline (*keji* 克己) through full personal participation in *li* (*fuli* 復禮) produces authoritative conduct (*ren* 仁): “If for the space of a day one were able to accomplish this, the whole empire would defer to this authoritative model. Becoming authoritative in one’s conduct is self-originating – how could it originate with others?”

In reading the *Analects*, we have a tendency to give short shrift to the middle books 9–11 which are primarily a series of intimate snapshots depicting moments in the life of the historical person Confucius that reflect the habits of his daily life. Yet it is precisely these passages that are most revealing of the extent to which the appropriate behaviors of a scholar-

33 See *Analects* 3.3: “What has a person who is not authoritative got to do with observing ritual propriety? What has a person who is not authoritative got to do with the playing of music?”

official participating in the daily life of the court were choreographed: the slightest gesture, the cut of one's clothes, the cadence of one's stride, one's posture and facial expression, one's tone of voice, even the rhythm of one's breathing:

On passing through the entrance way to the Duke's court, he would bow forward from the waist, as though the gateway were not high enough. While in attendance, he would not stand in the middle of the entranceway; on passing through, he would not step on the raised threshold. On passing by the empty throne, his countenance would change visibly, his legs would bend, and in his speech he would seem to be breathless. He would lift the hem of his skirts in ascending the hall, bow forward from the waist, and hold in his breath as though ceasing to breathe. On leaving and descending the first steps, he would relax his expression and regain his composure. He would glide briskly from the bottom of the steps, and returning to his place, he would resume a reverent posture.<sup>34</sup>

Such care in one's conduct, far from being reserved for court life, begins in the intimacy of one's home environment: "In Confucius' home village, he was most deferential, as though at a loss for words, and yet in the ancestral temple and at court, he spoke articulately, though with deliberation."<sup>35</sup>

The *Analects* does not provide us with a catechism of prescribed formal conducts, but rather with the image of a particular historical person striving with imagination to exhibit the sensitivity to ritualized living that would ultimately make him the teacher of an entire civilization. Take, for example, the following passage: "When ill, and his lord came to see him, he would not recline with his head facing east, and would have his court dress draped over him with his sash drawn."<sup>36</sup> This is an image of Confucius. It does not say that in all instances of being visited by a lord, one must behave in a particular way. Rather, it describes how Confucius found a way to express the appropriate deference and loyalty required of a relationship, even under the most trying of circumstances.

From these passages and many others like them, it should be clear that *li* do not reduce to generic, formally prescribed "rites" and "rituals," performed at stipulated times to announce relative status and to punctuate the seasons of one's life. The *li* are much more. The performance of *li* must be understood in light of the uniqueness of each participant and the profoundly local and focal project of becoming a person. *Li* involve an ongoing process of personal investment that, with persistence and effort, refines the quality of one's communal transactions. Rather than imposing some superordinate character

upon this process, we might want to think of *li* as producing an achieved disposition, an habituated attitude, a posture, an identity-in-action.<sup>37</sup>

Referring to our discussion of Dewey's understanding of "habit" in Part I of this essay, we can understand how *li* promote unmediated, aesthetic, experience. We can further understand how inappropriate it is to think of *li* as a social mechanism that routinizes experience, effectively impoverishing it in the process. In fact, the Confucian reliance upon *li* is meant to achieve precisely the opposite. *Li* are intended as means of enchanting the everyday and inspiring the ordinary. Appropriately performed, *li* elevate the commonplace and customary into something elegant and profoundly meaningful. The focus on the familiar is an attempt to optimize the creative possibilities of the human community and to transform the patterns of everyday living into profoundly socioreligious practices.

Conversations among educated Chinese appeal to a core repository of discourse. Such conversations tend to be highly allusive, involving citations of classical texts and the employments of apothegms and proverbs common to the tradition. Such allusive interactions serve aesthetic, rather than strictly rational, ends. The effects of such aesthetic, allusive, communication is 1) to point away from individual personalities toward some commonly acknowledged cultural models, 2) to promote affective bonding by appeal to evocative rather than conceptual meanings, thus precluding raising to consciousness the precise reasons for any disagreements, and 3) to thereby preclude the otherwise meliorative exchange from degenerating into dissonance.<sup>38</sup>

To the extent that the term "propriety," entailing the cognate range of meaning of its root, *proprius* – "proper, appropriate, property" – is understood as "a making one's own," it is a felicitous translation of *li* that emphasizes the process of personalization. *Li* is thus a resolutely personal performance revealing one's worth to oneself and to one's community, a personal and a public discourse through which one constitutes and reveals oneself qualitatively as a unique individual, a whole person. Importantly, there is no respite; *li* requires the utmost attention in every detail of what one does at every moment that one is doing it, from the drama of the high court to the posture one assumes in going to sleep, from the reception of different guests to the proper way to comport oneself when alone; from how one behaves in formal dining situations to appropriate extemporaneous gestures.

37 See an extended discussion of ritualized living in Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Focusing the Familiar: A Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong* (中庸) (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001).

38 One might reflect here how much more civil was our Western democratic life when Homer, the Bible, and Shakespeare formed the core curriculum.

Another way of underscoring this claim that the proper observance of *li* entails a full awareness of and responsiveness to the complexity and range of human interdependencies is to explore the role that *li* has as the primary subject of “study (*xue* 學)” in the classical texts. In fact, it is *li* that actually constitute the range and determinate pattern of one’s own person, projecting and extending an identity outward against the indeterminate boundaries of one’s world. When Confucius repeatedly celebrates a profound commitment to learning (*haoxue* 好學)<sup>39</sup> and describes his favorite student Yan Hui in the same terms,<sup>40</sup> he goes on to define the content of this “learning” as the personal refinement accomplished through ritualized living. The cognate, paronomastic relationship between “studying (*xue* 學)” and unmediated “feeling (*jue* 覺)” is of course relevant here. While the written culture might be an ancillary element in this education, recording as it does the narratives of cultural exemplars and the defining events of their lives, far more central is the actual authentication of *li* in “feeling” the familiar affairs of one’s day.

“Familiar” is a deliberate choice of a term here because it shares the same root as, and thus evokes the notion of, “family” which is at the center of the Confucian socioreligious experience. In rehabilitating the “familiar” nature of *li*, we have to allow that the radial focus for observing ritual propriety in the “familiar” affairs of the day lies with the family. The *Zhongyong* 20 underscores the relationship between family and its extension as social and political order: “In general there are nine guidelines in administering the world, the state, and the family, yet the way of implementing them is one and the same.” *Analects* 1.2 explicitly states that *dao* (道) itself – the emerging way of conducting oneself as a human being – emerges out of the achievement of robust filial relations: “Exemplary persons (*junzi* 君子) concentrate their efforts on the root, for the root having taken hold, the way (*dao* 道) will grow therefrom. As for filial and fraternal responsibility, it is, I suspect, the root of authoritative conduct (*ren* 仁).”

The family as an institution provides the model for this optimizing process of making one’s way by allowing the persons who constitute it to both invest in and get the most out of the human experience. The underlying assumption is that persons are more likely to give themselves utterly and unconditionally to their families than to any other human institution. Promoting the centrality of family relations is an attempt to assure that entire persons without remainder are invested in each of their actions.

A second consideration in optimizing the creative possibilities of the community is the absence of a religion of transcendence. The power of the family to function as the radial locus for human growth is much enhanced when

39 *Analects* 1.14, 5.15, 8.13, 17.7. 40 *Analects* 6.3 and 11.7.

natural family and communal relations are not perceived as being in competition with, a distraction from, or dependent upon some higher supernatural relations. It is from the family expanding outward radially that persons emerge as objects of profound communal, cultural, and ultimately religious deference. Beyond the achievement of an intense religious quality felt in the everyday experience of their lives, these exemplary persons emerge as ancestors for their families and communities and as contributors to the ancestral legacy.

The Hegelian picture of an Oriental despotism in which all authority lies with the emperor reflects a common failure of Western interpreters to appreciate the extent to which *informal* social mechanisms such as “observing ritual propriety (*li* 禮)” and the cultivation of a shame culture are conduits through which the community effects its own order. This is precisely the point of *Analects* 2.3: “Lead the people with administrative injunctions (*zheng* 政) and keep them orderly with penal law (*xing* 刑), and they will avoid punishments but will be without a sense of shame. Lead them with excellence (*de* 德) and keep them orderly through observing ritual propriety (*li* 禮) and *they will develop a sense of shame, and moreover, will order themselves.*” This passage gives us an aspirational Confucian version of “noncoercive” guidance through full participation in a ritually constituted community, a Confucian version of “non-assertive actions (*wuwei* 無為).”

In the absence of an individual soul or essential nature, a human being in classical Confucianism is ultimately an aggregate of shared, usually familial experience. Ritual activity is a medium which ensures that this cumulative experience is constantly refined and meaningful. Thus the human being is an always “enchanted” being – and the social relationships focused by that being are themselves processes of the continued enchantment of the world.

### 3 THE ISSUE OF RIGHTS

Contemporary China remains, even under “communism,” a ritually constituted society, without even a rhetorical appeal to the belief in objective principles often associated with liberal reflections upon the issue of human rights. The very idea of some regimen of human rights possessed prior to their being granted by the particular society to which one belongs has never been an assumption of Chinese rulers or peoples. But, as we shall see, this does not mean that the Chinese are left without any guarantees of social or political rights.

The real irony of the liberal approach to human rights is that even if it were wholly defensible, the exclusive rhetoric of its presentation precludes Chinese investment in its ideas and implications. After all, the consequences

of Western universalism for the Chinese have thus far been hegemonic and humiliating. And given the communal commitments of the indigenous Chinese notion of person, the values of autonomy, independence, and self-sufficiency espoused by liberal democracy would be seen not as ideals but as a particularly pernicious pathology.

In the recent rights talk, the Chinese have traditionally held, consistent with the pragmatic view, that "rights" are granted by society. Further, these rights are promoted through the sort of education meant to sensitize individuals to their importance both to individuals and to the overall harmony of society. Thus, in China there is less of a tendency to stress the strictly legal enforcement of rights. In fact, reliance upon the application of law, far from being a means of realizing human dignity, has been perceived as fundamentally dehumanizing since it leads to the impoverishment of mutual accommodation and compromises the particular responsibilities of the community to define what would be appropriate conduct.

It is also important to realize that the Chinese communitarian understanding of rights tends to lead to the promotion of social *interests* over individual *rights*. The distinction between rights and interests mirrors the liberal distinction between the right and the good. The distinction provides some protection against collectivist arguments that would lead to the coercion of the individual in the name of some social good.

Rights are defined categorically in terms of moral principles. Interests, on the other hand, are associated with utility and social welfare. The moment social welfare is appealed to, the interests of the majority are thought to be sustained over those of the minority. Rights sometimes function to protect the individual against the majority. Appeal to interests tends not to allow for such protection. The goal in an interest-based society is not the protection of the individual, but the integration of individual interests with those of the group. This is a real roadblock to the development of a Confucian conception of human rights. By making social harmony the goal, Confucianism does not seem readily consistent with any vision of human rights that would protect the individual against the majority. As Randall Peerenboom has observed: "Translating rights into the language of interests generally produces outcomes favoring state action and impinging upon individual protections. When one weighs the interests of the individual against the interest of the many individuals, the community, the state, the many usually win."<sup>41</sup>

41 Randall Peerenboom, "Confucian Harmony and Freedom of Thought: The Right to Think Versus Right Thinking," in *Confucianism and Human Rights*, edited by Wm. T. de Bary and Tu Wei-ming (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998):251-252.

In a communitarian society, when social harmony collapses, the consequences are indeed most grave. For, in the absence of legal mechanisms promoting social stability and protecting the individual against the state and the majority, authoritarian actions by the government are all that remain. The present rapid transitions in China, therefore, are peculiarly troublesome since it seems inevitable that China will suffer from excess reliance upon actions of the central government. In spite of the imminence of this crisis, a careful and sympathetic look at the Chinese model might suggest that long-term solutions do not lie solely in the direction of increased legal resort, but to alternative nonlegal mechanisms.

The practical effectiveness of legal guarantees depends upon a significant degree of “social empathy” – the feeling that others are as deserving of legal protections as oneself. Honest reflection upon the status of minorities and the poor in liberal societies suggests that legal guarantees are hardly enough. The same is, of course, true in China. The egregious treatment of the Tibetans by the Chinese is a most serious case in point. Were we to face the issue squarely, we might be willing to recognize that since “human rights” are only guaranteed to *humans*, the practical question is always “Who among us counts as a human being?” Pragmatically speaking, the Tibetans are denied the honorific “human being” by the Chinese – but so have been the Aborigines by the Australians, African Americans by white America, Muslims by Christians (and vice versa) in Eastern Europe – and so on across the globe. It is an open question whether in America, for example, minorities and women have achieved more effective rights through the institution of legal mechanisms than would have been achieved by concentration upon the enlargement – through the agencies of a truly democratic education – of our practical understanding of precisely who is fully human.

For the Pragmatist, there is less concern to “ground” any particular list of rights than there is to demonstrate their value in practice. The principal issue is not the specific belief in an antecedently existing individual as a bearer of this or that set of rights. It is, rather, the actual thick social practices of a society or community that validate or fail to validate the value of any set of beliefs. These thick practices are grounded in social empathy that extends the honorific “human being” as far as is possible through ritualized living.

So much of the liberal rhetoric concerning human rights amounts to little more than abstract theorizing about the need for every individual to be granted this or that right, with the communitarians’ appeals to cultivating thick social practices being dismissed impatiently as Pollyannish utopianism. Dewey recognized this theoretical bias as a central problem of human rights discussions. It was his view that the more attention we pay to the implementation of rights, and the less to abstract speculations concerning their

status and content, the better off we would be. Wryly alluding to the French wag who observed that “the law prohibits both the rich and the poor from stealing bread,” Dewey suggests that we see the problem of human rights as having “changed from that of seeking individual rights themselves to one of seeking the opportunity to exercise those rights.”<sup>42</sup> Political theory has to be reoriented to inquire into ways in which individuals can get property, so that they can exercise the right of property ownership, instead of continuing to theorize in empty abstractions about the need for every person to be granted the right to own property.

Dewey’s distinctly communitarian concerns are most clearly expressed here. Rights-based liberalism must be less concerned with the implementation of rights than the communitarian. Worrying over the fact that the “have-nots” de facto have less *effective* rights than the “haves” would tempt one to believe with the communitarian that second-generation rights, such as economic welfare, may actually precede the implementation of equitable first-generation rights. And no self-respecting rights-based liberal wishes to be so tempted.

#### 4 RATIONAL POLITICS VERSUS ENCHANTED CULTURE: AN ILLUSTRATIVE COMPARISON

The central thread running throughout this essay has been the essentially Weberian contrast of rationalized “political” mechanisms and nonrationalized, “enchanted” operations of culture. Traditional democratic theories are both consequences of the processes of rationalization and agencies for the furtherance of institutional rationality. Our use of Deweyan Pragmatism as a possible counter to the disenchantment of the modern world has permitted us to bring Confucianism into a positive engagement with at least the communitarian wing of the proponents of Asian democratization.

It so happens that, as one might expect, the current trends toward democratization in Asia are represented by the forces of rationalization, on the one hand, and those of enchantment, on the other. In the following paragraphs we want to suggest how one might better understand and interpret the processes of democratization as they are presently playing themselves out in one Asian society. Although we focus on China, our comments have applications to other traditionally Confucian societies, certainly South Korea.<sup>43</sup>

42 John Dewey, *Lectures in China*, translated and edited by Robert Clopton and Tsuin-chen Ou (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1973):152.

43 See the chapters by Lew Seok-Choon and Chang Yun-Shik for more elaborate discussions of the ways in which “social empathy” is shaped in Confucian societies.

The popular media and the American Congress have no monopoly on what can fairly be referred to as “the demonizing of China.” Although usually less strident, this indictment-in-search-of-an-issue attitude also has its counterpart within the Western academy. The profoundly negative and counter-productive affect of this posture with respect to the possibilities for Confucian democratization cannot be overstated. It encourages divisive tensions between those individuals who would pursue precisely that decidedly liberal democracy for China which we believe is anathema to traditional Chinese senses of social order, and an often insecure government that in this present period of transformation has taken the maintenance of social order as its prime directive.

We would suggest that the problem with this sort of critique of Chinese democratization is that it presupposes a distinctly rationalized political interpretation of democracy in which governmental institutions and decision-making processes are identified as the substance of a democratic society. If there is to be anything like an indigenous, Confucian democracy in China, this political approach must be replaced by one that is rooted in the fundamental operations of cultural values. To make this point, we shall contrast Michel Oksenberg as a prominent representative of the typically political method of assessing the possibilities for democracy in China with Kate Zhou and her distinctly cultural approach.

Michel Oksenberg has recently authored a “PacNet” essay entitled “The Long March Ahead.” In this essay, Oksenberg first enumerates the many economic, social, and cultural obstacles that Chinese must clear in order to sustain China’s upward direction in democratization, only to declare that such areas of concern are peripheral. In worrying over them, we are looking in the wrong place. According to Oksenberg:

The biggest problem is neither economic nor social nor cultural. It is political: can the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) reform itself and retain its relevance? Can the party, through self-reform, lead the nation through the major transitions that loom ahead? Or, will the party prove unable to meet the challenge, resulting in serious disruptions and setbacks in the modernization process?<sup>44</sup>

It is the CCP that is the “make it or break it” factor in China’s march to democracy. Observing that even though China is not in imminent danger of disintegration, Oksenberg is concerned that “the party is in trouble. It is approaching the point where its decay will be irreversible. The 1980s and 90s have witnessed a severe erosion in the efficacy of the party’s ideological

44 PacNet Number 45 (November 19, 1999) of Pacific Forum CSIS, 1001 Bishop Street, Honolulu, HI.

appeals, a weakening of its authority over other institutions, and the atrophying of its core apparatus. In many localities, the party is defunct.”

In fairness to Oksenberg, he does not embrace the commonplace that China has achieved its astounding degree of economic reform without any significant political reform. Still, Randall Peerenboom observes that “after providing a lengthy list of reform initiatives,” Oksenberg “acknowledges that political reforms have proceeded slowly and that China at its core remains a Soviet-Leninist state.”<sup>45</sup> Oksenberg believes that the most important indicator of China’s ongoing political reform is the formal structure of government. The elites are to be either blamed or credited for whatever changes occur in the quota of human liberty.

But most students of Chinese culture who have spent any time at all living in China over the past two decades have witnessed exponential changes in the liberties that attend the business of everyday life, not simply in the cities, but even more importantly in the countryside as well. If the CCP is the key factor and Oksenberg is right about its intransigence, what are we to make of this galloping transformation in the ways of thinking and living that are reshaping the habits of the day? And to what extent is an understanding of this sea change pertinent to an adequate assessment of the process of democratization?

The pragmatic perspective that requires arguments be made on behalf of practical relevance by no means enjoins an abandonment of cultural explanation. On the contrary, any attempt to ignore the broad range of cultural variables that might serve as guides or goads of action is distinctly unpragmatic.

Unquestionably, Oksenberg is correct in suggesting that events are often shaped by specific decisions relevant to concrete circumstances which may or may not involve explicit appeal to so-called cultural values. But it is crucial to note that the influence of cultural values does not have to be explicit to be important. Indeed, the specific effects of the enchanted world of culture are not easily reckoned with. Nonetheless, it constitutes the life-world to which political and economic actions must ultimately answer.

Individuals who accept political actions and decisions as the motors of social change are adverse to arguments that presume the importance of cultural values and institutions because they have already bought into the inevitable disenchantment of the cultural sphere consequent upon the rationalization of social life in late-modern societies. Edward Friedman notes,

45 Randall P. Peerenboom, *China’s Long March Toward Rule of Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), citing Michel Oksenberg, “China’s Political System: Challenges of the Twenty-first Century,” *The China Journal*, No. 45 (2001):24–25.

“Political action can rapidly change the conditions that matter. . . . Politics changes faster than culture.”<sup>46</sup> The presence of political pressure groups, or the unilateral decisions of a powerful leader, can effect at least short-term changes in spite of any cultural conditioning features appearing to work against them.

Politics, indeed, makes a difference. The rapidity with which China appears to be making the transition to a capitalist economy clearly suggests the power of economic interests and motivations. The point of the pragmatic culturalist is that while politics is faster, culture runs deeper – and has far greater long-term efficacy. Moreover, both politics and economics are cultural expressions whose power to effect change must be assessed alongside other cultural values. Economic and political approaches are largely focused upon governmental institutions. Cultural analyses, on the other hand, are concerned with a broad range of values embedded in social, ethical, aesthetic, and religious sensibilities in the everyday life of the people. The cultural approach permits us to recognize promising elements in Chinese society and culture that strictly political and economic analyses could easily overlook.

In our recent study of the prospects for democracy in China, *Democracy of the Dead*, we attempted to defend the explanatory principle that “everything is local” by challenging what we take to be the limits of political and socio-economic accounts of the accelerating process of democratization that is presently taking place in China. We argue that in trying to interpret change in China, we are often influenced by our own prioritization of causal factors and end up looking in the wrong places. For example, we are inclined to fasten onto the intellectuals as a motive force in channeling and directing the floodwaters of democratic reform, forgetting that as elite (and often effete) “institutional intellectuals,” they are, in important degree, complicit in the existing power structure and have a real vested interest in the status quo. Perhaps we need to look elsewhere. With the unstoppable rural influx into the urban centers having swelled to some 10–20 percent (100–200 million) of China’s population and having altered irrevocably the human landscape of both country and city, we might do better to be looking to bottom-up, emergent pressures in explanation of democratic developments.

The anthropologist Elisabeth Croll argues persuasively for a much more nuanced and culturally sensitive understanding of “development” that was, during the communist era, driven by a collective dream of an imagined millenarian future. More recently, in an abrupt and painful awakening from a

46 Edward Friedman, ed., *The Politics of Democratization – Generalizing Asian Experiences* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1994):4, 5.

dream that had darkened into an ideologically sustained nightmare, development has been driven by new ways of thinking about time and change.

It is possible to identify a domestic space, domain or arena of relations which constitutes the peasant household and which is the locus of much of the rural development process. Indeed, what characterises the period of reform in the past decades has been the identification of development with the domestic sphere; it is the site where development is produced and re-enacted so that domestic organisation and activity is the centre piece of the rural development plan.<sup>47</sup>

We may also contrast the sort of analysis represented by Oksenberg's state-centered elite-focused approach with the account of the forces of change proffered by the political scientist, Kate Zhou. Deliberately substituting the term "farmer" for "peasant" to express a reassessment of the perceived locus of power, she argues that the reforms so evident in contemporary China were initiated in the countryside and have been successful not because of the deliberate policies of the CCP, but largely in spite of them. At best, the CCP that would take credit for the rising tide of recent development can only claim that it did not intervene to stop it.

In Zhou's book, *How the Farmers Changed China: Power of the People*, she traces the origins and energy of the most dramatic changes – economic, political, and cultural – to what she sees as the effects of informally tolerated relaxations in the locus of production at the local level. *Baochan daohu* 包產到戶 – the production and marketing by farmers of privately owned goods beyond their official quotas allowed at the local household level – was a seemingly minor innovation that had, and continues to have, cascading consequences. Zhou argues that the escalating process of reform, rather than trickling down into the countryside from policies enacted and enforced by power elites in the urban centers, was in fact the product of "a spontaneous, leaderless, non-ideological, apolitical movement (SULNAM)" that continues to induce restructuring at the macro levels of government. Importantly, Zhou does not set out to simply challenge political and socioeconomic accounts of reform in China, but to actually rewrite recent history from the farmers' point of view.

Although the issue of "democratization" is implicit in Zhou's earlier analyses of "development" in China, in her more recent work on civil rights it becomes the main theme of discussion. Her argument, building on and really going beyond the research of James Scott who first articulated the idea of the power of unorganized everyday resistance in Southeast Asia, is that civil rights are not given by those who run the formal apparatus of state, but are rather

47 Elisabeth Croll, *From Heaven to Earth: Images and Experiences of Development in China* (London: Routledge, 1994):x.

won slowly and surely by the people. And they are largely won through the informal and nonconfrontational transactions that take place in enchanting the everyday lives of the people as these doings and undergoings are played out in their schools, workplaces, and homes. It is the constant and unrelenting pressure of informal actions, including civil disobedience on a massive scale, that tests the tenacity of the formal structures, sometimes rendering them porous and malleable, and sometimes rendering them defunct.

Zhou's research looks to the changing conditions of the local and the everyday as they exert transformative effects on the global. Her project is entirely consistent with our suggestion that Confucian democracy as it emerges will have more to do with the degree of success that local groups have in slowly and quietly enchanting the routine habits of the day than with any dramatic pronouncements of central authority. It is precisely in the social, economic, and especially the cultural landscape of China that democratization will occur if it is to occur at all.

Is the demystification and disenchantment of the Confucian world unavoidable? If so, then the term "Confucian democracy" is, indeed, a contradiction in terms. We believe that the only hope in escaping the tradition/modernity dynamic encapsulated in the Weberian notion of rationalization is to appeal again to something like the pragmatic proposals we have been forwarding, since these proposals effectively swing free of many of the rationalizing processes Weber thought inevitable in the Western world. And we further believe that it is this pragmatic model of democracy that offers the only prominent exception to the processes of rationalization and secularization that are currently shaping democratization in Asian societies.

