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# Asian Values and Liberal Democracy

An Inquiry into Confucian Political Philosophy and Contemporary  
Politics of China

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## Introduction

In the early 1990s it was widely accepted that the United States remained as the sole global hegemon. The demise of the Soviet Union and its communist ideology inspired some scholars to declare a new era in which the western ideology of liberalism would spread to all nations of the earth. The political columnist Charles Krauthammer called it the “Unipolar moment” of the United States, in which no other country was able to mirror its economic, military and cultural power. Other countries that did have formidable economic strength such as Germany, Japan and the United Kingdom are close economic and military partners of the United States. Francis Fukuyama’s “The End of History and the Last Man” also articulated the sentiment that there would be no more serious obstacles impeding the ascension of liberalism as the universal ideology. Fukuyama’s point of view was of course criticized on various grounds, but at the peak of the unipolar moment in the 1990s, the world’s liberal democracies were still at the center of the global economy and dominated global institutions. Liberal values such as free trade and human rights are still considered core principles of global institutions such as the World Trade Organization and the United Nations.

However, one conspicuous rejection of the prevailing concept of Western liberalism as the universal ideology came from Singapore’s first prime minister Lee Kuan Yew. Lee Kuan Yew argued that not every culture shares the ideology of liberalism that has been embraced in the West. Instead, Lee argued in favor of creating a democracy based on “Asian values” rather than Western liberalism, thus creating what is known as the “Asian values” debate. The Asian values debate was strongly reinforced by the rise of the Asian Tiger economies. Due to their export-oriented economic policies, the Asian Tigers were able to follow Japan in becoming non-western first world countries. The economic boom prompted Lee Kuan Yew to challenge the universality of western liberalism, as many East Asian states were able to achieve economic prosperity without becoming liberal democracies, even though Taiwan and South Korea had adopted several democratic reforms by this point. However, the East Asian economic miracle came to an abrupt end during the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Many East Asian governments were unable to deal with the fallout of the financial crisis and began to rely on the support of the International Monetary Fund. After the 1997 Asian financial crisis proponents of the Asian values alternative such as Lee Kuan Yew became more restrained (Langguth, 2003). The authoritarian regime of Suharto in Indonesia also collapsed as a result of the crisis, making way for a more open and liberal political environment.

The Asian values debate may have been at its peak during the 1990s, but it still remains an ongoing and vital discussion. While some countries in East Asia have become less

authoritarian, other authoritarian regimes have maintained or even strengthened their control. The most obvious example of this is the People's Republic of China, which has experienced decades of tremendous economic growth while the Chinese Communist Party remains firmly in charge. The unipolar moment once enjoyed by the United States is rapidly crumbling as China and other major developing economies are expanding their economic and political influence abroad. Hence, liberal democracy is no longer seen as a prerequisite for economic prosperity, which undermines the universal appeal of liberalism. The discussion regarding the compatibility of liberalism and Asian values is not just relevant for East Asia but also questions the applicability of liberalism in other regions as well.

The goal of this thesis is to determine if the core commitments of "Asian values" constitute a morally justifiable alternative democratic political philosophy to Western Liberalism. In order to understand the concept of Asian values, this thesis will explore some of the general arguments raised on their behalf. One of the most immediate problems with the concept is that the term "Asian" is simply too broad to define a specific value system, as the term "Asian" itself is a constructed, shifting and problematic concept to begin with. Because of Lee Kuan Yew's later remarks and the contribution of other scholars in this debate, this thesis will translate the concept of Asian values to the values of Confucianism. This means that this thesis will primarily focus on the discordance or agreement between Western Liberalism and Chinese Confucian values rather than the values of Asia as a whole.

When exploring the Asian values debate, it is also important to properly determine the concept of liberalism that is rejected by the proponents of the Asian values argument. Since the goal of this thesis is to respond to the Asian values debate, a more broad concept of liberalism will be examined in this thesis. The works of John Stuart Mill provide a particularly interesting framework for liberalism, as many of Mill's beliefs, though they provide appropriate conditions for social happiness rather than merely individual freedom, are in stark contrast to the central themes provided by many neo-Confucian thinkers. By comparing liberalism and Asian values (in the form of neo-Confucianism) My aim is to discover how a Confucian values-based democracy would be fundamentally different from the western liberal democracy. Subsequently I will establish whether these differences leave any room for a morally justifiable ground for an alternative liberal political system based on Confucianism, or merely expose a pretext for authoritarianism as is claimed by many of the critics of Asian values.

## The Varieties of Confucian Liberalism

One of the most influential contemporary works in the debate on conflicting values between different cultural groupings is *The Clash of Civilizations* by Samuel Huntington. In *the Clash of Civilizations*, Huntington observes that the different regional entities that are emerging as the divisions of the Cold War between the first, second and third world no longer seem to matter. Huntington argues that instead of the old divisions based on political systems and economic prosperity, the new division in the world will be based on cultural civilizations. According to Huntington, a civilization is the overarching group which people identify with. For example, Huntington claims that the people of Europe (excluding most of the former Soviet Union), the United States, Canada and Oceania share certain values and have a broad common cultural identity. The common Western values of these regions thus create a bond that takes the shape of what Huntington describes as “Western Civilization.” There can still be considerable differences among the subdivisions within a civilization, such as the cultural differences between North America and Europe. Huntington argues that while a group’s economic and/or political positions can change, cultural identities are likely to endure. Since people are more likely to identify themselves based on their culture or ethnicity, the new divisions of the world will be based on culture or ethnicity (Huntington, 1993 p. 25). One of the most controversial aspects of Huntington’s theory is the degree of compatibility that will facilitate willing cooperation between different civilizations. While Western civilization and Latin American civilization seem to be getting along well, for example, Huntington points out a strong resentment of Islamic civilization for the West. While some Islamic countries have adopted Western political reforms such as free democratic elections, they are often dominated by parties that have strong Islamic and anti-Western beliefs (Huntington 1993, 32).

In terms of economic and cultural strength, Western civilization continued to dominate the other civilization; this was even more the case during the time Huntington’s *Clash of Civilization* was published. The Soviet Union was considered the primary adversary to the West. The dissolution of the Soviet Union left the United States as the world's sole superpower. Because Western civilization so strongly dominated the global balance of power, any attempt to create a global civilization would imply creating a global “Western” civilization. Huntington argued that to the promotion of values such as universal human rights would inevitably be perceived by the other civilization as a form of “human rights imperialism” (Huntington, 1993 p. 41). Huntington predicted that many non-western countries would formulate a common objective of expanding their economic and military power in order to strengthen their own cultural sovereignties and protect them from Western influence. This prediction also relates to the origins of the Asian values debate. The initial supporters of this

idea of a creating a modern state based on Asian values rather than the Western liberal ideology were leaders from Asian countries that were experiencing rapid economic growth such as Singapore and Indonesia (Huntington, 1993 p. 49). When Huntington wrote the *Clash of Civilizations*, he argued that so far only Japan had been able to establish a civilization that had the economic power to match that of the West. Today the geopolitical situation has changed dramatically and the unipolar geopolitical supremacy of the United States is quickly shifting towards a multipolar world order. Russia has reasserted itself as a major player in global politics and has rejected many of the liberal values embraced by the West. However, the most important challenger to the unipolar dominance of the Western civilization is China.

The strong economic development of some non-democratic East Asian states is often seen as the example that authoritarianism is better for economically developing nations than democracy. Amartya Sen refers to this belief as “the Lee hypothesis”, named after the first president of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew (Sen, 1997 p. 33). Despite the political and economic success of Lee Kuan Yew’s policies in Singapore Amartya Sen argues that the “Lee hypothesis” remains unsubstantiated. For many of Lee’s policies, it is quite clear how they were able to contribute to Singapore’s economic success. A strong focus on education, foreign direct investment, public services and international trade have been very beneficial to the development of Singapore. However, it is much more difficult to prove that Lee’s authoritarianism and suppression of political and civil rights have also contributed to a successful transition towards a first-world economy. Sen points out that there is no reason to assume that a higher degree of democracy or protection of civil rights would have hindered the economic development of Singapore and other Asian tigers. In the case of the Asian tiger economies the friendly economic climate and focus on international trade were much more important than authoritarian leadership. Sen argues that more political and civil freedoms actually increase the government's ability to ensure economic development and prevent social and economic disaster. Political freedom enables citizens to express their concerns about what they consider immediate threats to their well-being and livelihood (Sen, 1997 p. 34).

Sen claims that ensuring political freedom for the citizens has significant effects on the way governments operate and establish their priorities. As an example, Amartya Sen raises the phenomenon of famines. While authoritarian regimes such as the Soviet Union, Communist China or Ethiopia have experienced (often multiple) famines, democratic states have so far managed to prevent famines from occurring. Even a poorly developed democracy such as India has not experienced a famine, despite having a much weaker economy than the Soviet Union. Famines are often associated with natural disasters, but flooding and drought also occur in democratic states. Sen argues that the feedback and participation of citizens in the

political system is vital in ensuring that the interests of the government are in line with the needs of the people. While famines are a disaster for both autocracies and democracies alike, an authoritarian government has less incentives to commit to preventing a famine from occurring as there are fewer political consequences of inaction (Sen, 1997 p. 34).

Amartya Sen not only rejects the “Lee hypothesis” but also the very notion of Asian values. Amartya Sen’s first and most straightforward critique on Asian values is the fact that the Asia as a continent is far too large and diverse to be labeled as a single cultural entity. The focus within the debate on Asian values is usually fixed on the East Asian region. However, Amartya Sen also rejects the notion that East Asian countries and ethnic groups should be regarded as a cultural monolith. Sen argues that there are vast cultural differences between different states in the East Asia region. These stark differences become perhaps most visible when looking at the different religions within the region. Indonesia and Malaysia have Muslim majorities, Thailand is primarily Buddhist while Christianity is the largest religion in South Korea and the Philippines. Within the Sinic cultural sphere, which would include China, Taiwan and Singapore, certain similarities between the Confucian philosophy and the “Lee hypothesis” might be detected. While the teachings of Confucius focus on hierarchy and order, the philosophy also promotes responsible governing and a creating a strong bond of trust between the ruler and their people (Sen, 1997 p. 36).

In 1999, Lee Kuan Yew further clarified his Asian values position by pointing out that the argument was primarily based on Confucian values rather than Asian values (Barr, 2001, p.3). Despite Lee’s decision to distance himself from the expression “Asian values,” Michael Barr argues that the confrontation between Asian values and liberal values is still alive and well. According to Barr, the scope of Asian Values should not include the entire continent of Asia or just Sinic society, but rather focus on communities in the larger East Asian area (Barr, 2001 p. 11). While many of these nations and communities may have vastly different historical and religious backgrounds, Barr argues that they share many common cultural values that differentiate them from Western liberal values. The Asian values debate is not centered around the question of to what extent Asian societies should be regarded as a monolith. The most important aspect of the Asian values debate is regarding to what extent these cultural values are compatible with Western liberalism (Barr, 2011 p. 11). Barr argues that the universalist aspect of liberalism is not only rejected by other societies based on their traditional values, but is also influenced by the failure of many democratic experiments in the Third World during the Cold War (Barr, 2011 p. 14). These past experiences and autocratic political traditions do not imply that democracy cannot be implemented in East Asian societies. The earliest and most conspicuous example of that is Japan, which is currently considered a fully developed liberal

democracy. However, even in the case of Japan, Barr points out some stark contrasts between Western liberal democracies and Japanese democracy. Since the Second World War, the Japanese political arena has been dominated by the Liberal Democratic Party. Excluding a few hiccups in 1993 and 2009, the LDP has been the most important political party in every government coalition. Barr argues that this stable political status quo and the strong integration between politics and corporations shows that, despite adopting a constitution based on western liberal ideas, the political reality of Japan remains very conservative (Barr, 2001 p.14). Barr concludes that civil rights and duties, two of the core elements of liberalism, have different meanings in most Asian societies. Whereas Western liberalism is centered around the sovereignty and agency of the individual, Asian values are much more strongly centered around the community as a whole (Barr, 2001 p. 188). Barr admits that the Asian values position has some significant flaws regarding individuals rights. One example of this concerns the position of women in traditional Asian societies. Gender equality plays an important role in contemporary liberal political philosophy. However, in a society based on Asian values, issues of gender equality and feminism would likely play a much more diminished role (Barr, 2001 p. 183).

Stephen Angle further explores the features of Confucianism as a (potentially) modern political philosophy. In "Contemporary Confucian Political Philosophy" Stephen Angle looks at the different perceptions that scholars of Confucian philosophy have regarding the implications of Confucian moral and social ideas for statecraft and leadership. Confucianism is considered to be the core political philosophy of Imperial China. The Confucian political philosophy has lost much of its influence in the course of the 20th century as the Chinese imperial political system collapsed and made way for military and later Communist authoritarianism. In China, since the 1980s, Confucianism has begun to make a comeback as a political philosophy. Confucianism is often associated with the hierarchical authoritarianism of imperial China. Stephen Angle's work shows that modern Confucian scholars argue that modern Confucian society would require radical reforms to China's current political structure. Some of the contemporary Confucian scholars discussed by Angle have widely different views on what those radical reforms must entail. However, all of the scholars seem to agree that a society based on Confucian political philosophy would be more democratic, pluralist and egalitarian than the current Chinese political system (Angle, 2012).

Jiang Qing is a well-known contemporary Confucian philosopher whose views are taken quite seriously and comprehensively by Angle. Qing rejects many other contemporary Confucian reformist ideas as he argues they are too strongly influenced by Western liberalism and stray too far from the original Confucian principles. In "A Confucian Constitutional Order" Jiang Qing

proposes a tricameral parliamentary system. The three chambers would embody historical, cultural and popular forms of legitimacy, representing the Confucian triad of heaven, earth and humanity (Angle, 2012. p. 53). One chamber should consist of Confucian scholars that have outstanding knowledge of both contemporary Confucianism and the classical Confucian works. The second chamber proposed by Jiang Qing should consist of sages, powerful families and representatives of all the nation's religions. The third chamber should be elected through popular vote and would represent the people of the nation. Within this tricameral structure, a bill must be approved by two of the three houses in order to become law. The different houses should not interfere with each other's affairs. The chamber of Confucian academics would however be more powerful than the other houses, because they would have power to veto bills that are deemed to be incompatible with Confucian principles. Compared to the other contemporary Confucian scholars examined by Angle Jiang Qing's proposed political philosophy places a strong emphasis on Confucian dogmas. While Jiang argues that the three chambers are in balance when all their respective spheres of authority are taken into account, he clearly favors the house of the Confucian scholars within the balance of power by granting it the ability to check both of the other two houses. Stephen Angle argues that Jiang Qing sometimes poorly justifies his interpretation of a Confucian balance of power. In Jiang's *A Confucian Constitutional Order*, the Confucian pillar of "Earth" takes on the political shape of a legislative body made up of representatives from China's various religious groups. Jiang gives little justification for his interpretation of the values of "Earth" as represented by religious communities. Angle argues that "Earth" could also be interpreted as a justification for a stronger representative sphere for environmentalists and scientists in a modern Confucian political structure (Angle, 2012 p. 12). The sustainability and stability of a tricameral political structure in which only one house is determined by the popular vote also is up to debate. Jiang Qing's proposition bears many similarities to that of Estates General of the Kingdom of France in 1789. The representatives of the Third Estate felt sidelined by the coalition of the First and Second Estates which represented church and aristocracy. This frustration of the representatives of the Third Estate caused them to reject the institution altogether, ultimately leading to the French Revolution (Sieyès, 1789).

Another influential scholar that has gained acknowledgment for advocating a political structure based on Confucianism as a model for China's future societies is Kang Xiaoguang. Kang argues that Western liberalism and democracy do not provide a viable Chinese political system because an authoritarian state is better equipped to prioritize on the much needed economic development of China. Kang is very concerned about the damage caused to religion and spirituality in China by the Chinese Communist party. Filling up the empty void of religious sentiment in China seems to be one of the priorities of Kang's political theory. While Kang is

not proposing Western liberalism as a political structure for China, he does argue in favor for a stronger role of non-state organizations in China's civil society. While Jiang Qing uses his tricameral structure to separate Confucian teachings from the body of government representing religious traditions, Kang Xiaoguang proposes to incorporate Confucianism as the official religion of China. Xiaoguang argues that Confucianism should have the same role in China's society as the generalized Christian church in United States, with the obvious difference that, in the United States, the Christian religion is not a *de jure* state religion. This position also resonates in the way Kang proposes to establish the relationship between the state, Confucian church and the people. Kang proposes that Confucian churches operate somewhat like American church communities, in that they receive generous tax advantages, but are self-run and independent from the state. According to Kang, the Confucian church should be dependent on donations and support of its followers and serve as a meeting point for looking communities as well as a place for philosophical and spiritual thought (Ownby, 2009 p. 108). Kang argues that his proposal is also a much more realistic political reform than a Chinese democracy would be. The Chinese Communist Party would be much more willing to incorporate Confucian ideology in its existing political structure than it would be towards adopting democratic reforms (Ownby, 2009 p. 110).

The previous two contemporary Confucian scholars examined by Stephen Angle largely rejected Western liberalism as a viable political philosophy for China. However, there are also some scholars that are heavily influenced by both Confucianism and Western liberalism. One such scholar mentioned in Stephen Angle's "Contemporary Confucian Political Philosophy" is Mou Zongsan. Mou Zongsan seems to be particularly concerned about the separation between not religion and society per se as in Kang, but between ethical and political values. One of the great risks in entrusting a great deal of authority over ethics to a small group of people or single individual is that those agents will effectively become tyrants through their own convictions in their superior ethical insight (Angle, 2012 p. 24). Mou Zongsan argues that political values are derived from moral theories, but ought to be controlled by self-restraint. The question of self-restraint is important in establishing to what extent scientific norms and empirical findings should determine our activities and behavior. It also defines how laws and rights determine our political activities without interference from agents who claim to hold superior moral authority (Angle, 2012 p. 25). The latter part is particularly important regarding Mou Zongsan's interpretation of Confucianism as a modern political theory. It implies that no matter how virtuous or morally cultivated an individual may be, that superior morality should never serve as a reason for absolute control in the political realm. This is one of the major distinctions between Mou Zongsan's conceptualization of Confucianism and the classical conception of Confucianism (Angle, 2012 p. 28). This description by Mou Zongsan of the

importance of self-restraint within the framework of Confucian political philosophy draws criticism from Jiang Qing. According to Jiang, Mou Zongsan's concept of self-restraint is too strongly influenced by Western liberalism and would essentially emulate the checks and balances of Western democratic institutions (Angle, 2012 p. 31). Jiang argues that, just because the concepts of liberal democracy have been so successful in the West, that does not guarantee their success in China, which has no history of democracy.

This divide between the traditional values of Confucianism and Western liberalism also plays a central theme in Sor-Hoon Tan's *Confucian Democracy*. Like Huntington, Tan argues that so called universal values that are promoted through the treaties such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are in practice identical to the values of the West. Tan claims that Western countries use their economic and military advantage to impose those values upon other nations (Tan, 2004 p. 5). While many Asian societies would be open to democratic changes in their political processes and institutional practices, they would be much more reluctant to accept Western liberal values (Tan, 2004 p. 9). One of the oft-cited critiques from proponents of the Asian values position of liberalism is that the latter is centered around the Western ideology of individualism. Imposing this belief system on an Asian society would undermine existing social structures based on community and family. Liberal values such as liberty and pluralism could be interpreted differently by a society that has other cultural preferences. As an alternative, Tan argues that there should be a more nuanced concern for the role of different cultural values in democracy. Tan also points to the communitarian critics in Western society itself and argues that even within Western society there can be found some rejection of the individualism upon which liberal conceptions of rights are based (Tan, 2004 p. 11).

Francis Fukuyama's "The End of History and the Last Man" and Huntington's criticism in "Clash of Civilizations" are regarded as two of the more influential works in post-Cold-War geopolitical thinking. However, while Tan rejects these works as independent accounts, she proposes an alternative worldview that, to some extent, combines both narratives. Rather than Western liberalism becoming the sole mediator of universal values or anticipating an inevitable conflict between different cultures Tan argues that democracy is able to take on different shapes depending on the cultural values of that society which adopts it. China could use the Confucian philosophy and its cultural values in order to create a democratic society that does not merely replicate Western liberal society (Tan, 2004 p. 201). This democratic society would prioritize the maintenance of a harmonious community in which every member contributes and benefits according to their capacities and requirements (Tan, 2004 p. 201). While Tan questions the desirability of Western liberalism being the political framework for Asian

societies, she also rejects authoritarian Confucian ideas. The Confucian ideology is often used as an ideology to justify hierarchical stability and economic prosperity. The authoritarian ruler in the form of a despot or a political party draws legitimization by guaranteeing political stability and economic prosperity. This argument can to a certain degree be viewed as an excuse for centralizing vast amounts of political power and control at the expense of the public. Tan argues that the “power in exchange for stability” bargain is inherently unstable, as the stability is dependent on economic growth. A failure of the authoritarian government to deliver on economic development could also cause social instability. Excluding the people from political participation also negatively impacts the social bond between people. Allocating political power to the people also means that the people bear certain responsibilities towards the country and each other. In a democratic society people will be more likely to address social issues as political actors rather than regard them as affairs that are none of their business (Tan, 2004 p. 204). According to Tan, democracy is essential for creating the harmonious community and social fabric that she perceives to be core values of Confucian philosophy.

Tan’s analysis of the compatibility of Confucianism with democracy is in stark contrast with the analysis of Chenyang Li. According to Chenyang Li, creating a true democracy based on Confucian ideology would be impossible. There are some elements within Confucian thinking that would be adaptable with a democratic political structure. Some important Confucian thinkers such as Mencius considered the people to be the foundation of the state, and asserted that the people had the right to rebel against the ruler if they gained that mandate from heaven (Li, 1999 p. 170). However, this requirement for a heavenly mandate severely limits the scope in which rebellion would be morally justified, often depending on which side ends up victorious. Chenyang Li points out that the sovereignty and liberty of the individual are paramount in establishing a functioning democracy. Furthermore, in a state with a highly centralized power structure and a society based on loyalty towards a tribe or faction, an electoral voting process would not necessarily guarantee democratic outcomes. If loyalty towards the tribe or regime is valued more than the sense of individual freedom, the outcome of the voting process could still be a form of tyranny and clientelism (Li, 1999, p. 168). Contemporary Confucian philosophers are divided on to the extent China can and should embrace democracy. However, even the ones most supportive of democracy such as Mou Zongsan do not make the case for essential liberal values such as equality and individuality to be integrated into Confucianism (Li, 1999 p. 173). Chenyang Li argues that the absence of these essential notions and their attendant rights are left out of the Confucian philosophy on purpose. In the ideal Confucian society there would be perfect harmony and no need for rights or social mobility or struggle (Li, 1999 p. 174). In Confucian philosophy, the most important matter regarding the person are not rights but it's civic duties. The most important responsibility of

the person is playing their role in maintaining a family. The Confucian tenet of self-restraint implies that one must overcome personal desires and individual liberty and dedicate oneself to the needs of the family (Li, 1999 p. 175). This loyalty also extends to the greater community in the form of the state. Whereas Western liberal democracies are characterized by constant power struggles between parties and dynamic politics, a Confucian society aims to stabilize society and establish solidarity between the rulers and people. With unity and harmony in such high regard in Confucian society, Confucianism would also face complications with embracing the liberal value of plurality. Western liberal democracy aims to represent a diverse assembly of political ideas, philosophies and religions. Confucianism on the other hand strongly favors political, ideological and religious unity (Li, 1999 p. 178). This doesn't mean that plurality makes democratic societies inherently divided, but rather implies that democratic unity is established through the willing cooperation between the individuals that partake in this society. Li also points out that within the Confucianism social framework people are inherently unequal. While the ultimate rank of sagehood is essentially available to all, it still implies that those who are at a lower level of attainment in this process are considered lesser and should have a lesser say in determine social and political matters. The people who are not in pursuit of understanding Confucian teaching however are confined to the social role they born in. The Confucian school itself is highly meritocratic, while a Confucian society is inherently paternalistic (Li, 1999 p. 177).

Because Chenyang Li believes that some Confucian values are inherently incompatible with democracy, he argues that there are multiple options for China's future political structure. The first option is that China will maintain its current course and not adopt democracy. The Confucian values of harmony, unity and social hierarchy run deep within the traditions of China's society, and will ultimately withstand both internal and external pressures for political reform. The second scenario is that, in China's pursuit to become a global hegemon and first-world economy. democratic political reforms will become inevitable, and will supersede traditional Confucian values. Most Neo-Confucian thinkers propose the alternative of one form or another of Confucian democracy. As mentioned, the implications of a Confucian democracy vary widely depending the what shape an individual philosopher envisions such a democracy will take. However, most Neo-Confucian thinkers ultimately advocate for some kind of tradeoff between traditional Confucian values and Western liberal democratic values. The different versions of Confucian democracies offer a political structure with free elections but at the same time restrict individual sovereignty and sometimes institutional authority in order to maintain family and community values as the cornerstone of the society (Li, 1999 p.184). However, Chenyang Li argues that, in their attempts to combine Confucianism and democracy, many Neo-Confucians show that they have neither full confidence in Confucian values nor

understand the importance of liberalism in a functioning democracy. Instead, Confucian democracy offers, in Li's view, an unsubstantial political structure that is neither committed to Confucianism nor democracy. This is why Chenyang Li favors a fourth alternative. Li acknowledges that many aspects of Confucianism are incompatible with democracy. However, this incompatibility doesn't mean that Confucianism cannot maintain an influential role in Chinese society, while the political realm could adopt democratic institutional structures at the same time. If Chinese society would allow for a wider degree of plurality, many people would identify themselves with different values and degrees of Confucian ideology. Some citizens could identify strongly with traditional Confucian values, while other citizens would identify more strongly with liberalism and individual sovereignty. However, both of these ideologies and values could be represented in the same democracy. Chenyang Li points towards Taiwan and Japan as examples of modern East Asian countries where Confucian values still hold a strong influence in society, but at the same time have managed to transition towards fully grown liberal democracies (Li 1999, p. 188). By acknowledging Confucianism and democracy as two independent value systems, neither ideology has to shrug off core aspects of their respective philosophies. Nonetheless, in Li's view, democracy is primarily located within the political realm and Confucianism in the social realm.

The last Confucian scholar examined in this thesis is Joseph Chan. Chan argues that there is a fundamental difference in the way that human rights are conceived in liberal philosophy and Confucianism. In the philosophy of liberalism the sovereign individual rules its own life and actions. The only restrictions on this freedom that liberals are willing to accept would be if such actions would harm the freedom of another sovereign individual (Chan, 1999 p. 231). With the exception of the harm principle there is little room for compromise on the concept of individual sovereignty in the liberal philosophy. For this reason Chan believes that liberals would not be able to accept the principles of Confucianism. The Confucianist philosophy allows individuals to determine their own moral actions so long as individuals make choices that are considered morally just. Individual autonomy over one's actions is acceptable as long as they constitute to the larger concept of a moral life. In Confucianism such individual autonomy is not meant as an excuse to engage in immoral actions that would constitute to the corrosion of the morality of life and the community (Chan, 1999 p. 232). Chan's arguments on incompatibility of the liberal and Confucian philosophy will be discussed later in this thesis.

## **Contrasts between Mill's Liberalism and Confucianism**

In order to understand the supposed fundamental differences between Confucian values and Western liberalism, it is not just essential to understand the core convictions of Confucian values but also articulate a clear description of Western Liberalism. There are plenty of different sources and philosophical works on liberalism. However, the goal of this thesis is to explore the disparities between liberalism and Confucian values. Hence we will now turn to a specific conceptualization of Liberalism rather than a comprehensive one that captures all of its own varieties. John Stuart Mill's "On Liberty" is often regarded as one of the most influential works of liberalism.

This thesis will use Mill's *On Liberty* as the primary source for defining the distinctive features of liberalism for a couple of reasons. The first reason is that John Stuart Mill dedicates a lot of attention to the importance of individual sovereignty in society. John Stuart Mill is particularly keen on standing up for the freedoms of people that are considered non-conformists or hold dissenting opinions. Mill strongly believes that these dissenting or unpopular opinions ultimately strengthen society rather than weaken it, either by providing authentic and useful criticism or by creating an opportunity to identify the falsehoods of dissenting opinions in the public space. Mill's position on individualism and nonconformity seems to be antithetical to what are perceived to be Asian or Confucianism values.

The second reason why Mill's "On Liberty" is relevant in the context of contemporary China is because it challenges the self-righteousness and dogmas of authoritarian beliefs. Most of the different Confucian writers discussed in this thesis reject the authoritarian status quo of the Chinese regime and offer a less repressive political alternative. However, these different propositions for the Confucian political order are also in direct conflict with Mill's conceptualization of the liberal democracy. Proponents of Confucian values argue that their values should be held in high regard because they are deeply embedded in the hearts and minds of the people and provide a solid social structure in which every individual has his place. John Stuart Mill rejects this way of reasoning as it assumes certain principles and doctrines are considered infallible truths, while all opposition to these infallible truths are silenced or rejected outright. It establishes a situation in which the defenders of the status quo are the judges of certainty, without ever hearing any substantive objection from the other side (Mill, 1859 p. 23). These positions do not imply that John Stuart Mill himself values all opinions equally or that all moral truths should be considered relative. Mill argues that some of these challenges to the status quo could be true, and therefore hold significant importance for the future development of our society and belief systems. The importance of these challenges and

dissenting opinions are mostly ignored in the different Confucian political theories discussed earlier. If Confucians want to create a credible democratic alternative to the western liberal democracy, they would have to establish a clearly defined domain for these opinions to be expressed.

A third reason why John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* is an important piece of work in this debate is because Mill addresses a potential decline in the "living power" of a doctrine if it remains unchallenged (Mill, 1859 p. 38). Mill points out that this trend can be seen in the history of various religious beliefs in the world. When writing *On Liberty*, Mill argued that Christianity may experience a decline or diminishment as people's beliefs are becoming less reflected in their actual attitudes, and this is precisely because little challenge is posed to them, and so the convictions and beliefs become stale and irrelevant. Without an open debate on what our beliefs ought to be and why they ought to be held or practiced, people no longer understand the true meaning of these beliefs. Open debate and dissenting opinion teach people about the strengths and shortcomings of their own beliefs. Mill puts the matter this way:

But when it has come to be an hereditary creed, and to be received passively, not actively—when the mind is no longer compelled, in the same degree as at first, to exercise its vital powers on the questions which its belief presents to it, there is a progressive tendency to forget all of the belief except the formularies, or to give it a dull and torpid assent, as if accepting it on trust dispensed with the necessity of realizing it in consciousness, or testing it by personal experience, until it almost ceases to connect itself at all with the inner life of the human being. (Mill, 1859 p. 39)

Mill's argument about the diminishing "living power" of a doctrine that is left unchallenged and undebated can also be observed in the context of both communist China and Confucianism. While the neo-Confucian scholars addressed in this paper often have different views of what a contemporary Confucian political philosophy would entail, they all oppose the current political status quo in mainland China to certain extents. Kang Xiaogang and Stephen Angle describe the regime of the Chinese Communist Party as an alliance of political, intellectual and economic elites that lacks any kind of political or ideological legitimacy. China's regime still claims to represent the Marxist/Maoist values it was founded on, but in reality the People's Republic of China appears to be form of autocratic oligarchy rather than a state based on Marxist principles (Angle, 2012 p. 13). The absence of a political philosophy in the People's Republic of China can also be observed in Xuetong Yan's essay on Chinese values versus Liberalism. Yan argues that the decline of the global influence of liberalism is strongly tied to the decline of the economic dominance of the Western powers. This relative decline has much

to do with the massive economic growth of China in the last few centuries (Yan, 2018). While Yan makes a compelling case for why and how the global influence of Western liberalism is declining, he doesn't succeed in clearly explaining what the Chinese alternative to liberalism really is. Yan describes the Chinese political philosophy as a combination of Marxism, economic pragmatism and traditionalism. While Marxism is the official ideology of the ruling Chinese Communist Party, this has very little influence on its foreign or domestic policies. The Marxist rhetoric of class struggle would furthermore be counterproductive to the regime's attempts to establish social order.

Yan argues that the philosophy of economic pragmatism is most commonly accepted by both the Chinese political elite and the ordinary people. Since the economic reforms of Deng Xiaoping in 1978, the Chinese Communist Party seemingly prioritizes economic growth over anything else. China's economic boom is often regarded as the core of the national political course by the Chinese people (Yan, 2018). Yan points out that political legitimacy derived from economic pragmatism is also related to Marxist philosophy, as it claims the economy to be the core of the political structure. While economic prosperity is no doubt an important aspect for cultural development and the concept of national sovereignty, it doesn't provide a clear political philosophy or value system. China's economic boom has lifted millions of Chinese citizens out of extreme poverty, but it has also created a massive gap in income inequality. Without political transparency these new economic elites will likely collude with the political elite in order to advance their interests rather than debate contrasting views. As a result, the Chinese Communist Party exhibits very few Marxist features despite the name and the propaganda. Yan also maintains that traditionalism is making a comeback in popularity and Chinese political discourse (Yan, 2018). China's officials often refer to ancient Chinese civilization as an inspiration for their geopolitical ambitions. By relying on China's massive economic output, China seeks to dominate the region by peaceful means. This description of Yan of China's contemporary foreign policy is in stark contrast to China's territorial claims in the South China Sea, which puts China at odds with most other nations in the region. While China establishes itself as a lucrative business partner in the region, neighboring countries often regard their relationship with China with suspicion as China's regional influence is expanding. The regime's narrative of economic pragmatism as its political philosophy is ambiguous in both its internal and foreign affairs. The concept of economic growth as the foundation for political legitimacy for the regime is highly unstable. As the world's largest exporter, the Chinese economy is very exposed to the volatility of global trade.

The Chinese regime is quite aware of the shaky legitimacy of its economic pragmatism, which could explain why it is so keen on restricting the freedom of information to its citizens. John

Stuart Mill's framework for the liberal nation state provides a clear explanation of individual freedom and its boundaries. Mill's comprehensive concepts of individual freedoms also sets clear limits to the extents to which governments can regulate and control the behavior of its people. The current political philosophy of the Chinese government acknowledges no such boundaries. The principle of economic pragmatism only provides political legitimacy as long as the people experience economic growth. Economic instability caused by volatile global markets or mismanagement would directly undermine the political legitimacy of the regime. In order to maintain its political power the Chinese regime also has to maintain a strong control over the economy. Instead of enacting reforms that would open up the economy the Chinese government props up inefficient state owned enterprises and actively prolongs a real estate bubble (Economist, 2019) (Bloomberg, 2018).

The lack of limits on government control can also be seen in other realms of China's society. Technological progress in the field of big data and video recognition have allowed the Chinese government to develop a system that continually monitors the behavior of citizens and processes these actions into a social scoring system. This so-called "Social Credit System" is meant to transform and expand the means by which the government can control both society and the economy (Kostka, 2019 p. 1). In this system, individuals, businesses, social organizations and government offices are measured in terms of their "trustworthiness". The official goal of the SCS programs is to establish the idea of a sincerity culture, by promoting honesty and traditional virtues. By implementing this system, which provides rewards or punishments, the government wants to raise the "sincerity consciousness and credit levels of the entire society" (Creemers, 2018 p. 2). Citizens with a high Social Credit Score can enjoy certain discounts or become exempt from paying a deposit. The development of the SCS has gained significant attention in western media and is often compared to plot of George Orwell's 1984. The Vice President of the United States Mike Pence called the SCS an "Orwellian system premised on controlling virtually every facet of human life" (Economist, March 2019). The SCS is still in development and set to become a centralized comprehensive system in 2020. However, there are various city-scaled SCS programs running in China today that track the behavior of residents. It would be wrong to assume that the only goal of the SCS is to strengthen the means of the central government to exert control over the population. The vast majority of current SCS programs are commercial initiatives aiming to create incentives for customers to pay on time or discourage defaulting on debt or ignoring court orders (Kostka, 2019 p. 24). We should also take into consideration that over three quarters of Chinese citizens feel that there is a mutual lack of trust between people in Chinese society. The level of mistrust amongst the Chinese people likely contributes to the fact that many Chinese are supportive of the SCS programs (Kostka. 2019 p. 22). There is a strong public demand that the government

be more involved in combating dishonest characters such as fraudsters, quacks and corrupt officials (Economist, March 2019). One of the goals of the SCS is to blacklist these people based on their untrustworthiness credit score. As of now, the comparison between the current SCS program and Orwellian surveillance might be somewhat exaggerated. Nonetheless, given the regime's history regarding re-education camps and other projects of social engineering, those fears are not unfounded. There are no clear legal and moral boundaries limiting the regime in the current political status quo in China (Creemers, 2018 p. 27). The philosophy of economic pragmatism offers no solutions to cases of excessive government control. Very often this political philosophy only encourages the regime to expand its control over society and the economy as it wants to ensure its political legitimacy. However, an alternative political philosophy of neo-Confucianism wouldn't provide many clear moral limitations to the Social Credit Score question either. On some grounds these paternalistic efforts of the Chinese regime to instill civic virtue, sincerity consciousness and traditional values fits very well with the narratives used by neo-Confucians. On the other hand, Confucianism would reject the use of punishment to instill moral values, as such methods undermine a person's opportunity reform himself in such a way that he can act on their based on their own morality (Chan, 1999 p. 232).

In *On Liberty*, John Stuart Mill strongly champions the concepts of freedom of speech and sovereignty of the individual. However, it would be a mistake to view the differences between Mill and Confucianism as a dichotomy of emphasis on the well-being of the individual against the well-being of the society as a whole. In fact, Mill's essay "Utilitarianism" is partly dedicated to understanding what is good to both the individual and society. Mill establishes the concept of happiness as a good that every individual seeks to gain and pain as something people will always try to minimize. One fundamental part of this position is Mill's claim that the happiness is subjective to the desires of each individual. In the ideal moral society according to Mill, individuals are able to obtain significant shares of happiness while suffering minimal amounts of pain. If the largest number of people are able to acquire happiness with low costs of pain or harm, the highest aggregate of happiness in the society as a whole is reached. According to Mill, the ultimate well-being of society is the highest amount of aggregate happiness. There are many objections that have been levelled at the utilitarian moral view of what should be considered the priorities of public policy. However, the concerns for both individual and social well-being demonstrate that Mill isn't solely concerned for the well-being of the individual, but also believes that the utilitarian position constitutes to what is best for the society as well.

When making a comparison between John Stuart Mill's concept of liberalism and a non-western philosophy it is also important to note Mill's position on colonial rule and non-western

civilizations. Mill's "On Liberty" proposes a progressive philosophy and social dynamics and political order. However, Mill's progressive social views were limited in regards to the British colonial empire. John Stuart Mill had spent 35 years of his career in service to the British East-India Company. Mill considered British colonial rule as an act of benevolent despotism. He often referred to the indigenous population of Asia and Africa as barbaric and uncivilised (Sullivan, 1983 p. 606). Mill support for greater autonomy of the colonies was limited to places such as Canada and New Zealand because Mill believed their European lineage enabled them to govern themselves (Sullivan, 1983 p. 606). Mill also spoke out in support of independence movements of various ethnic groups in the Balkan such as that of the Greeks and Hungarians. Despite these strong racial prejudices Mill acknowledged that native populations were often treated with injustice by European settlers and governments. Nonetheless Mill believed that the creation of the British colonial empire was an essential step in the evolution of human civilization (Sullivan, 1983 p. 611). Considering these positions, it is safe to assume that Mill's position in *On Liberty* was written to be consumed by the Western audience and not intended for Asia. However, this thesis argues that *On Liberty* provides political philosophical framework that is universally applicable regardless of Mill's stance on race and colonial rule.

Though Chinese New Confucians have to varying degrees been critics of the Chinese Communist Party and its methods of autocratic control, and to varying degrees call for democratic reforms, it is not clear that a New Confucian vision of government would fare better than Mill's brand of liberalism on moral grounds. A clear difference between Mill's liberalism and Confucianism is that the focus of Mill's liberalism on the freedom of the individual. Mill's ideas on the well-being of the society as a whole are built on his ideas on individual freedom. Confucian ideology is primary focused on the well-being and harmony of the community. The individual as conceptualized in liberal political philosophy isn't really considered in Confucianism. In Confucianism the person is constituted by its relationship between other people and its environment rather than their personal desires (Tan, 2004 p. 51). Because Mill's approach is centered around the freedom of the individual, it also sets up barriers against the ability of the state to enforce its will on the individual. Many of these barriers seem to be absent from Confucian thought. If Confucians want to establish a credible and morally just alternative political philosophy to liberalism they would also have to acknowledge the role of personal ambitions in their actions and needs. The absence of the liberal concept of the individual in Confucianism diminishes the ability of Confucianism to provide a solid philosophical foundation for a sustainable democracy. The values of a liberal society are protected because the state refrains from interfering in the freedom of the individual unless that individual hinders the freedom of others. The Confucian state on the other hand, is directly involved in maintaining social harmony, protecting the Confucian value system and promoting its civic

virtues. While those aren't necessarily bad priorities, the Confucian political philosophy is unequipped to address the growing problems regarding individual privacy of the 21st century.

### **The Asian Values Democracy**

Joseph Chan is one of the scholars that explored the concept of a democracy based on Asian values rather than western liberalism. Chan claims that western liberals too easily portray the arguments in favor of Asian values as excuses that serve to justify the authoritarian regimes and their human rights abuses in the region (Chan, 1997 p. 35). Chan argues that the primary motive for creating the narrative of a democracy based on Asian values is to create a long-term vision for democratic states that would both protect human rights and empower cultural traditions. By opening up the discussion to different perspectives on human rights, Chan argues that the Asian values debate strengthens the campaign for human rights rather than protecting its offenders (Chan, 1997 p. 36). Chan makes the distinction between human rights violations that are motivated by the self-interests of regimes and human rights issues that are based on the cultural values of the society. In the case of many East Asian societies, freedom of religion, sexuality and expression are often motivated by traditional values that are deeply rooted in the social fabric of the people. Chan argues that concepts such as freedom, human rights and democracy almost always sound appealing when they are missing. However, there is often much less consensus on how these concepts need to be implemented into actual policies and institutions. Promoting these liberal values and the implementation of democratic reform will come with various complications, including the pace of these reforms and potential popular resistance based on traditional values. Most people would agree with the concepts of freedom, human rights and democracy in the general sense but often have strong disagreements about what those concepts would entail. While Chan favors democratic reform and bolstering human rights, he argues that these reforms must be implemented in such a way that they are in balance with the traditional values entrenched in that society (Chan, 1997 p.38). The degree of protection of an individual's interests in the form of rights should be considered in relationship to the effects caused on the interests of others (Chan 1997, p. 38).

One of the examples in which Chan expects a conflict between freedom of expression and Asian traditional values involves pornography. The publisher of pornographic content has his commercial interests, the consumer has his desires for satisfaction, but Chan argues that the production and consumption of pornography might have a negative effect on a third group that should be considered: that of the community. In a society based on the principles of liberalism the state would be considered to have no interest in determining and managing the morality of the public. Unless considered harmful in terms of legal violations, immoral content such as

pornography is considered to be a transaction solely involving the publisher, producer and consumer. Chan argues that Asian societies have a fundamentally different approach regarding the enforcement of moral values (Chan, 1997 p. 40; 1999 p. 232). Chan argues that there are many Asian societies where the state plays an active role in maintaining certain traditions regarding marriage or religion. In a liberal society such interference by the state would be frowned upon. In the early 20th century many Asian societies considered themselves culturally inferior to the West (Chan, 1997 p. 43). This sentiment encouraged authoritarian regimes in Japan and China to abandon their own culture and embrace Western culture as a means to become a wealthy and powerful nation. Chan argues that the rapid industrialization and economic growth of East Asia has made many Asian societies reconsider their enthusiasm for Western culture. According to Chan, the economic prosperity of East Asia provides an opportunity for these societies to break away from Western cultural hegemony and reinvent democratic political systems based on their own cultural and political values (Chan, 1997 p. 41).

Chan claims that East Asian societies are facing two fundamental challenges in developing an Asian values-based democracy. One challenge is for Asian societies to move away from authoritarian regimes that commit human rights offences in order to pursue their self-interests. Such regimes will likely attempt to maintain their monopoly on power and thwart attempts to establish a political framework that combines the concepts of freedom and democracy and traditional Asian cultural values. The other challenge put forward by Joseph Chan is that of the negative traits of Western liberalism. According to Chan, economic growth will also make Asian societies more susceptible to excessive individualism, consumerism, drug use and violent crime. Chan at least partly attributes these woes to the growing cultural influence of Western culture (Chan, 1997 p. 46).

It is the latter challenge in particular that raises some significant questions regarding Joseph Chan's general argument for an Asian values-based democracy. Firstly, it boldly assumes the existence of a relationship between certain social troubles such as drug abuse, crime, consumerism and materialism with liberal democracy. Chan doesn't give an explanation for his perceived correlation between liberalism and drug abuse. It is true that some liberal democracies such as the Netherlands and Portugal have relatively lax drug laws. Many of the wealthy liberal democracies also score relatively high in global statistical studies on alcohol and drug use. However, these global statistics on drug-abuse also show that many undemocratic states can have high rates of drug abuse. Asian states such as Laos, Uzbekistan and Iran are among the least democratic and most isolated countries in the world, yet have a much higher degree of drug abuse than many liberal democracies (UNODC, 2016).

To make these bold claims without providing evidence could in fact be counterproductive to Joseph Chan's aim to explore an alternative political framework for democracy. As Chan points out himself, authoritarian regimes often use similar rhetoric in order to stigmatize liberalism as an indecent and perverted ideology (Chan,1997 p. 45).

Secondly, Chan doesn't explain why all of these developments should be considered harmful to society. Chan's is worried about the rise of consumerism and materialism as East Asian societies are becoming increasingly wealthy. Chan regards the concept of consumerism as something intrinsically connected to "hypercapitalism" and the loss of traditional values. If Asian societies are intrinsically different from western societies because of distinctive cultural values, as is argued by Joseph Chan, than Asian consumers would likely also behave differently as consumer, and these differences would be measurable. Chan claims that there is a major difference in the transactions between individuals are viewed between the West and Asian societies. Chan argues that in the western liberal society the consumption of goods is regarded as a transaction involving the producer and the consumer of that certain good. In Chan's conceptualization of the Asian alternative, transactions should also take into account the well-being of society as a whole. However, this argument ignores the fact that within western liberal societies certain products and services are subject to both public debate and government regulations because these transactions considered harmful to the public well-being. The sale of alcohol, drugs, tobacco and sexual content remain hotly debated topics in most liberal democracies. The importance of the public well-being in liberal democracies becomes even more contentious when examining public discourse on the availability of certain services such as prostitution, gambling, euthanasia and abortion. In a liberal democracy the debate on these topics will vary depending on the cultural attitudes of the people. Liberal democracies often have very different social attitudes and regulations these topics. Chan is wrong to assume that adopting liberal democratic reform derives society of its capacity to restrict the transaction of goods that are considered immoral and harmful to society. If anything, a liberal democracy provides fair and transparent institutions which allow citizens to express their concerns on these issues. At the same time the separation of power ensures that no single political entity is able to exercise total control on the decision making process. In the liberal democracy public debate and fair elections determine which goods are considered undesirable and restricted. It would be wrong to assume that the protection of individual liberty compromises the well-being of society. Political representation and the rule of law and the separation of power ensure that trust of the citizens in these institutions is maintained.

Possibly the most important point that is raised by Chan's challenges for the Asian values based democracy is that these developments also disprove to what extent traditional values are inherent to Asian society. Joseph Chan argues that within the Asian values system pornography would be censored because it is deemed incompatible with their traditional values. Chan also warns that economic prosperity will increase the influence of Western values and goods that would threaten these Asian values. Chan's warning implies that, when given the economic means, Asian consumers often demand the same goods as consumers in Western societies, including immoral goods such as pornography. Nonetheless, if the consumption of certain goods and services are considered to be harmful to the rest of society, the liberal democracy provides plenty of institutions and mechanisms to address such concerns. Joseph Chan's essay wrongly portrays the balance between the rights of the individual and the well-being of the community as a zero-sum game. These kind of assumptions undermine the sustainability of the Asian values democracy, as it would open up a narrative for authoritarian leaders to justify their repressive rule. Chan's challenges should not be considered a threat to Asian values that must be censored and repressed in order to protect the well-being of society. On the contrary, these challenges show that cultural attitudes and social norms are changing because people desire such changes. As in any other society, Asian values are subject to change as people are discovering new ideas, lifestyles and technologies.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the Asian values debate being over two decades old, the issues that formed the core of that debate still remain relevant today. During the 90s the Asian Tigers demonstrated that non-western countries could also attain the affluence of first-world nations. Lee Kuan Yew's proposal of the Asian values alternative to western liberalism lost traction after the 1997 Asian financial crisis. However, the unipolar hegemony of the United States is being challenged by the new economic powerhouse: China. As pointed out by Amartya Sen, "Asian" is too broad a term to be able to define a value system due to the wide variety of cultural backgrounds in Asia. As Lee Kuan Yew himself later clarified, his concept of Asian values mostly rests on the values of Confucianism. So far, there has been much disagreement among scholars on how the Confucian political philosophy should be institutionally and socially constructed. Kang Xiaoguang rejects democracy as a viable Chinese political model and instead proposes that Confucianism should be incorporated as the official state religion of China. As the state religion, Confucian churches would serve as community centers for philosophy and culture. Jiang Qing's *A Confucian Constitutional Order* offers a blueprint for a tricameral political system. In this political system, new legislation requires the approval of two out of the three

chambers. The legislators of the chamber of the people are decided based on a popular vote. The second chamber consists of representatives from the different religious groups. Confucian scholars reside in the third chamber and have the ability to veto proposals made by the other chambers. While Jiang Qing offers an opportunity for the public to directly elect their representatives, the political influence of this democratically elected institution is still limited by two non-democratically elected houses. The legitimacy of the other two houses are more opaque and it is not unlikely that Jiang Qing's tricameral political structure would face similar internal opposition as that of the Estates General of France. Mou Zongsan on the other hand argues that democracy should be considered an integral part of Confucianism. Mou believed that political values are derived from morality, but that morality should also contain a degree of self-restraint when exercising power. Mou's principle of self-restraint means that leaders shouldn't rule others based on their claims to superior morality. Sor-Hoon Tan and Joseph Chan oppose western liberalism but are in favor of democracy. They argue that Asian states should develop their democracies based on their traditional values and cultures. The main criticism of Sor-Hoon Tan and Joseph Chan is that Western countries are determined to impose their own liberal value system upon societies that do not share those beliefs. The former argues that Asian societies are much more open towards the image of democracy than they are to the idea of western liberalism. Like most other scholars analyzed in this thesis, they are particularly concerned that the West's emphasis on individualism is in conflict with the community-based value systems of East Asian societies.

Many of the proponents of Confucianism or the "Asian values alternative" seem to agree that the people in Asian societies do not want liberalism, and therefore need to be protected from its influence. Joseph Chan warns that economic development creates challenges for traditional Asian values as societies are becoming increasingly consumerist and individualistic. The fact that economic development promotes such changes also shows that there are many people who prefer a "Western" lifestyle over traditional values. During the Asian values debate of the 1990s, opponents of the Asian values position argued that authoritarian regimes and political elites use the argument of Asian values to justify their repressive rule while they consolidate their power. Joseph Chan acknowledges this risk, but claims that there is also the possibility of establishing a democracy that would both uphold traditional Asian values and protect human rights. Chan explains that Western liberalism emphasis on individual rights potentially harms the well-being of the community. The Asian values democracy prioritizes the well-being of the community at the expense of certain individual rights. Yet Chan's justifications for these limitations on individual rights remain insufficient. Chan's claim that social developments such as crime and drug abuse are caused by the influence of westernization is unfounded.

Perhaps the greatest flaw of Confucianism as a political philosophy is not its limitations on individual freedom but its lack of limitations on the control of the government. The primary challenge to Confucianism is not Western liberalism but the political status quo of the Communist Party of China. Unlike in liberal democratic states, there are no clear boundaries to the authority of China's regime. Confucian scholars claim that the revival of Confucianism is needed because the current political regime lacks a coherent political philosophy. Some aspects of Confucianism as a political philosophy are inherently paternalistic and could undermine the integrity of a democracy. The values that the current regime tries to instill through initiatives of social engineering such as the Social Credit Score are similar to that of Confucianism. While Confucianism rejects the use of punishment to instill these values, it still argues that implanting moral values upon the people is an important duty of the political leaders. The Confucian political alternatives are in need of more comprehensive conventions that would ensure some basic human rights and freedoms of individuals, particularly to those who belong to minority groups. Without those principles, the Confucian philosophy is likely to be absorbed into the narrative of the current political regime rather than becoming a democratic alternative. Even if the current political status quo would be replaced by a Confucian political establishment, the political reality for the Chinese citizens would likely be the same. This might also explain why Confucian philosophy has become increasingly popular among Chinese political elites. If Confucianism were to be the political philosophical foundation of a sustainable democracy, it would need to establish stronger and clearer principles that address the scope and limits of the executive power.

Chenyang Li recognized these inherent limitations of the Confucianist political ideology. Opposing neither democracy or Confucianism, Chenyang Li argues that the two positions cannot be combined into a Confucian democratic political system without compromising each other's principles. The protection of individual rights and freedoms are essential to the functioning and legitimacy of a democracy. While Mou Zongsan claims that democratic values are inherent to Confucian thought, he does not clarify how Confucianism would protect the rights and freedom of the individual. The central theme of Confucianism is to establish harmony, social unity and a sense of civic virtue. The Confucian society requires people to restrain their individual desires for the well-being of the community. The Confucian political philosophy lacks the means to deal with the plurality of ideas and persons within a democracy. A well-functioning democracy requires dynamic politics and cooperation between representatives of different political ideas and social backgrounds. The proponents of the Confucian democracy insufficiently address the rich diversity of ideas and philosophies that exist in China's many communities. This does not mean that Confucianism would be of no

value in a Chinese democracy. The principles of Confucianism still play an important role in the social fabric and the values of many Chinese citizens. Therefore it is inevitable that many of these values would be enshrined in the Chinese democracy. However, there is no need to reject liberalism on the basis of it being non-Asian or non-Chinese. As in the West, the liberal democracy provides plenty of space for traditional thought to be expressed while at the same time protecting the rights and freedoms of the individual. The proposal of Chenyang Li would allow both Confucian philosophy and democratic values to thrive without undermining each other's principles. Instead of considering Confucianism as the alternative to liberalism and making it an integral part of the political system, it should become an ideology independent from the political structure. The strength of liberal democracy is its ability to give a voice to all people regardless of their beliefs, ethnicity or social class. Instead of dismissing liberal democracy as a threat to traditional values, Confucianists should aim to take part in it.

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