

CONFUCIANISM AND THE CONTEMPORARY KOREAN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

The main concern of this article is to understand the role of Confucianism in the democratic and the capitalist development of Korea. In pursuit of this aim, the present article will argue for and against the importance of the role played by the Confucianism in the capitalist development of Korean society, will explore the Confucian tradition and its modern transformations and will trace the historical evolution of Confucianism, showing how, more recently, Confucianism has changed in response to the challenges of the capitalist development. Employing a large survey on more than 200 Korean young people, this article will identify the contemporary forms of Confucian values and their importance for the development of the Korean society.

Keywords: Korea, Confucianism, East Asia, capitalism, development.

INTRODUCTION

Lately there is an increasing body of scholarship dealing with Confucianism and its impact on the contemporary East Asian societies, although Confucianism is currently not functioning as a social norm. Youngjin Choi (2010) reinforces this idea by stating that ‘Confucianism does not presently function as a social norm in the areas of East Asia where it first developed. Nations such as Korea, China, Japan, and Taiwan, which formed the Confucian cultural sphere in the past, have accepted western technology and capitalist culture as the means to become ‘successful’. Of these nations, Korea and Taiwan have succeeded in establishing capitalism and democracy as norms, achieving both modernization and westernization in less than half a century’ (2010, IX). Even so we cannot consider that Confucianism has disappeared from the minds of the Asian people, it is part of their cultural heritage, as the same author implies that ‘Confucianism has not disappeared from the minds of the Asian people. Especially in the case of Korea, where the Confucian tradition is said to be now the strongest, Confucianism as a

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