CHAPTER 4

Confucianism's Political Implications for the Contemporary World

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Confucianism, as the dominant philosophical/cultural system of East Asia that has evolved over two millennia, is multidimensional and multilayered. Consequently, its interpretations diverge depending on which elements get emphasized and how they are arranged. Most, if not all, of such interpretations may contain some truth, but no one interpretation may capture the whole monolithic and unchangeable "Truth" of Confucianism. Confucianism is a *living* tradition in perpetual motion and survives through mutations, reflecting the needs and concerns of each generation of the cultural community. This does not mean that Confucianism does not contain some essence that would remain constant. Confucian values of four virtues, such as *ren* (benevolence), *yi* (righteousness), *li* (propriety), *zhi* (wisdom), and self-cultivation constitute such a core. However, even the core values are subject to reinterpretation to fit the pressing concerns of each generation. Some of the most pressing concerns of the contemporary world are economic justice, human rights, and democracy. Confucianism's successful adaptation to the contemporary world is predicated on addressing these issues successfully. Many Westerners, including academics, however, express skepticism about Confucianism on the ground that it cannot adequately deal with such issues. The aim of this chapter is to argue that

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Confucianism can address these critical concerns by resorting to its own philosophical resources.

I shall proceed by first providing a reconstruction of Confucian ethics by focusing on Confucian personhood. Second, I shall elaborate on a conception of the ideal Confucian polity entailed by the Confucian ethics. In this second part, I shall primarily rely on the political theory of a Korean Confucian, Jeong Do-Jeon (1342–1398), the "master architect of the [Confucian] Chosôn Dynasty."[1] Third, I shall show how this conception of Confucian polity successfully addresses the three aforementioned concerns and is therefore applicable, with some modification, to contemporary East Asian societies. The hope is that this chapter demonstrates not only the timelessness of the core Confucian values and precepts but also their timeliness in their ability to adapt to the contemporary world.

Confucian Ethics

The Confucian person is a "reflective and ceaselessly transformative being" conscious of his/her agency (cf. *Analects* 12.1).[2] The reflection or thinking (*si* 思) required of the Confucian self (*Mencius* 6A. 6, 6A.15), however, is not merely abstract and theoretical.[3] Rather, it is always connected with the practical, based on the "moral mind" (*xin* 心), which provides not only the "antecedent commitment" to but also the "actual activity" itself toward moral excellence (cf. *Mencius* 4A.12; 6A.15).[4] The moral mind, according to Mencius, initially consists of the four kinds of feelings that provide the "beginnings" of Confucian virtues: Feelings of commiseration (*ceyin* 惻隱), shame and dislike (*xiuwu* 羞惡), modesty and yielding (*cirang* 辭讓), and the sense of right and wrong (*shifei* 是非). If preserved, these feelings would transform into the four "constant" Confucian virtues of *ren* (仁), *yi* (義), *li* (禮), and *zhi* (智), respectively (*Mencius* 2A.6). The moral mind is "irreducible"[5] and *common* to all humanity, sages and ordinary humans alike (cf. *Mencius* 3A.1, 4B.32, 6A.7, 6A.10; *Analects* 17.2). Indeed the possession of the moral mind is "the defining characteristic of being human"[6] (cf. *Mencius* 4B.19; 6A.15).

Yet the irreducibility of the moral mind does not guarantee a "spontaneous self-realization"[7] of the Confucian moral self for everyone. Although all humans have the moral mind, it is often "lost" due to inhospitable external circumstances (cf. *Mencius* 6A.7, 6A.8, 6A.15). Still, it is "recoverable"[8] through the "establishment of the will" to preserve or retrieve these four beginnings, which is innate in the "mind" as well.[9]

If the original moral mind is preserved or retrieved and these emotional germinations are fully actualized, the Confucian person comes closer to the Confucian moral ideal of someone who embodies the four Confucian virtues. The underlying axiom of Confucianism, therefore, is that "all human beings are endowed with the authentic possibility to develop themselves as moral persons through the cognitive and affective functions of the mind."[10] This potentiality to realize the Confucian moral ideal through the active preservation or retrieval of the moral mind is what renders Confucian persons equal to one another.

In achieving the Confucian moral ideal, the most significant Confucian virtue is *ren* and the most important Confucian principle is that we ought to embody *ren*—I shall call this the precept of *ren*. What, then, is *ren*? Although it is notoriously multifarious and elusive,[11] most Confucians agree that *ren* is not merely a "particular virtue" of human relations, but a "general virtue" in its "inclusiveness" of other Confucian virtues[12] (cf. *Analects* 13.27). Some Confucians even attribute to it a special status as "a principle of inwardness," which is "the self-reviving, self-perfecting, and self-fulfilling process of an individual" toward moral perfection.[13] Construed thus, the process of actualizing *ren* is "practically identical" to the process of "self-cultivation (*xiushen* 修身)"[14] (cf. *Analects* 14.25). Self-cultivation is a strenuous, lifelong process of "self-education" to reach the highest stage of moral perfection, often involving pain and suffering, which stops "only with death" (*Analects* 8.7). The burden, however, is not imposed from without but is in fact "an internally motivated sense of duty,"[15] as "the uniqueness of being human is as much a responsibility as a privilege."[16] Self-cultivation is not simply a process to reach an end.[17] Consonant with the East Asian conception of persons as "processional"—as "something that one *does* rather than *is*,"[18] the becoming process is also an "ultimate end in itself."[19] Given the arduousness of self-cultivation as a perpetual incremental progress toward moral perfection, however, only a small number persists in self-cultivation to achieve the "authentic self."[20] They deserve the title *junzi* (noble person 君子) (cf. *Mencius* 6A.15; 4B.19).

Ren, however, is inherently linked to human relations. *Ren*'s sociality is due to its inextricable relation to another Confucian virtue, *li*, which provides *ren* with concrete content.[21] The relation between *ren* and *li* is suggested in a seminal phrase in the *Analects*: *Ren* is "to subdue oneself (*keji* 克己) and [to] return to *li* (*fuli* 復禮)" (*Analects* 12.1). Not surprisingly, the first conjunct implies self-cultivation. Deciphering the phrase "return to *li* (*fuli*)," then, is crucial for understanding not only the sociality of

ren but also the significance of *li* itself. As mentioned before, *li* refers to intersubjective "norms and standards of proper behavior" that accord with public expectations pertaining to each role in the "five human relations." *Fuli* does not imply "uncritical conventionalism" of conforming to accepted conventions of one's society.[22] The Spring and Autumn period in which Confucius lived was a chaotic and violent time, and Confucius was deeply concerned about its corrupt state. When he spoke of *li*, therefore, Confucius was referring to the idealized *li* of Zhou (周), which he believed was more in line with *ren*, not the existing conventions of his own time. Further, even though he looked up to the *li* of Zhou, Confucius did not follow it when it seemed "improper" to him. Instead, he showed the independence of mind by urging people to follow contemporary customs closer to the spirit of *ren* in such cases (*Analects* 9.3; cf. *Mencius* 4B.6). *Li*, then, represents "enlightened" norms of comportment in the spirit of *ren*.[23] Consequently, *fuli* implies adhering to standards of proper behavior in human relations that conform to *ren*, as manifested in one's self-cultivated/enlightened moral mind, predicated on the feeling of sympathy (cf. *Analects* 3.3, 15.17).[24]

The inexorable sociality of *ren* in its relation to *li* justifies its explication as "love" (*ai* 愛) in "concrete terms"[25] (*Analects* 12.22). Confucian love is not the *raw* emotion of affection, although affection, especially toward one's family members, does provide its basis. The proper manifestation of Confucian love is rather "To be able from one's own self to draw a parallel for the treatment of others" (*Analects* 6.28) and to "put oneself into the position of others."[26] This is none other than the "Golden Rule," encompassing both of its positive and negative requirements. The positive requirement is expressed in the concept of *zhong* (sincerity 忠), which is to "establish" and "enlarge" others as well as oneself (*Analects* 6.28; *Zhongyong* 中庸 13). The negative requirement is implied in the concept of *shu* (恕), or reciprocity,[27] which prohibits imposing on others what one does not want to be imposed on oneself (*Analects* 1.4, 4.15, 5.11, 12.12, 15.23; *Daxue* 大學 10). The "one thread that runs through [Confucius's] doctrines" is none other than "*zhong* and *shu*" (忠恕) (*Analects* 4.15). The precept of *ren*, therefore, means in practice following the principle of *zhongshu* in human relationships.

Confucian love, especially in its Mencian interpretation, is often identified with "love with distinction (*chadengai* 差等愛),"[28] indicating the Confucian emphasis on love between parent and child (Mencius 4A.27; cf. 1A.1, 6B.3, 7A.15; *Analects* 1.2, 2.5; *Zhongyong* 20). Yet it does not imply egoism centered on one's family. Love with distinction, involving "an order, a

gradation, or distinction, starting with filial piety," is concerned primarily with "the application of love," which "necessarily varies according to one's relationship."[29] Family is extremely important in Confucianism because it is the fundamental wellspring of love, in which children can practice love and learn the lessons of *ren* applicable to nonfamilial relations in later years.

Yet the Confucian self must embrace all in his love (*Mencius* 7A.46)[30] and "treat with respect the elders in my family, and then, by extension, also the elders in other families. Treat with tenderness the young in my own family, and then, by extension, also the young in other families" (*Mencius* IA.7). Indeed, Mencius's statement "All the myriad things are there in me" (7A.4) implies that the true Confucian self is "an open system"[31] at the center of "a series of concentric circles . . . the outer rim of [which] never closes." Self-cultivation requires "the broadening and deepening 'embodiment' of an ever-expanding web of human relationships" and the precept of *ren* requires "a continuous process of extension" of *li*.[32] Refusing to extend oneself outward "restricts us to a closed circle,"[33] thereby stunting our moral growth. In other words, while self-cultivation starts with the individual, its completion must include "the universe as a whole."[34] The final formulation of the precept of *ren*, then, is to follow the principle of reciprocity in an "ever-expanding web of human relationships."

Confucian Politics

How would a Confucian polity be organized whose members conceive of themselves as Confucian persons? In portraying a normative vision of Confucian polity, I shall focus on the political theory of a fourteenth-century Korean Confucian, Jeong Do-Jeon (三峰 鄭道傳 1342–1398),[35] who played a pivotal role in founding the Confucian Dynasty of Chosôn (朝鮮 1392–1910) on the Korean Peninsula. Not only was Jeong a key political figure in establishing the Chosôn Dynasty, but his comprehensive Confucian political theory also laid its valuational and institutional foundation. Jeong's theory is a particularly valuable resource for reconstructing a uniquely Confucian polity for two reasons. First, his ideas are far removed from the modernity so that they can be considered as unamalgamated ideas of Confucian origin without Western influence; second, some of his ideas were implemented in the Chosôn Dynasty with some success and

constitute an inalienable part of Korea's Confucian tradition. As such, they could be reinterpreted and revised to fit the contemporary situation of Korea and other East Asian societies with Confucian traditions.

The Goal of Politics

A classical statement about the Confucian polity can be found in the *Mencius*, where it is stated that "the people (*min* 民)[36] are the most important [element in a state]" (*Mencius* 7B.14). Jeong accepted and developed this idea further and argued that the people are the foundation (*bon/ben* 本) of the state (*Sambongjip*, 10:63; 13:236). Indeed, the people are "the Heaven of the ruler" (*Sambongjip* 13:236), as the Heaven's Will, "unfathomable" in itself, expresses itself through "the will of the people which can be known"[37] (*Mencius* 5A.5). Therefore, "the ruler must love the people wholeheartedly" and all state policies must aim at promoting the well-being of the people (*Sambongjip* 13:236; cf. *Analects* 12.2, 14.45). We may call this the principle of "people-centeredness" (*min-bon/minben* 民本) and take it as the most central political principle of Confucianism.[38]

The principle of people-centeredness is in fact an application/extension of the precept of *ren*—the Confucian imperative to embody the virtue of *ren* in "an ever-expanding web of human relations"—and politics and morality are one and the same in the ideal Confucian politics.[39] This is why the ideal Confucian politics is called the politics of *ren*—*renzheng* (仁政, cf. *Mencius* 2A.3). This continuity can be understood in two different senses, depending on which aspect of *ren* gets emphasized. If we emphasize the aspect of *ren* as love, predicated on the feeling of sympathy and implying the adherence to the principle of *zhong-shu*, on one hand, the ideal ruler "acts on behalf of his people" because he "has a heart which cannot bear to witness the sufferings of others" and "extend[s] proficiently what [he feels] so as to affect others" (1A.7; see also 2A.6). The resulting government, then, would be one that "cannot endure that there be any suffering"[40] and thereby treats elders with respect and the young with tenderness in all families under its dominion (cf. *Mencius* 7A.30). Thus by extending "one's kindliness to others, it will suffice to protect all within the four seas."[41]

If we focus on the aspect of *ren* as self-cultivation that requires "an ever-extending web of human relations," on the other hand, then practicing politics according to the principle of people-centeredness constitutes the consummation of self-cultivation. The circle of human relations

involved in politics is by far the widest, involving the last two stages of self-cultivation mentioned in *Daxue*: governing the state (*zhiguo* 治國) and bringing peace to the world (*pingtienxia* 平天下). When the ruler follows the principle of people-centeredness, which is an extension of *ren*, then he practices the politics of *ren* (*renzheng*; cf. *Mencius* 2A.3). Only holy men (*seong-in/shengren* 聖人) or wise men (*hyeon-ja/xianzhe* 賢者) can practice *renzheng*, and ideally the ruler ought to be a sage ruler (*Mencius* 5A.5, 5A.6).[42]

As rulers practice *renzheng*, they follow the Confucian precept of *xiujizhiren* (修己治人), which aims not only at cultivating/rectifying the self (*zhengji* 正己 or *xiuji* 修己), but also rectifying others (*zhengren* 正人 or *zhiren* 治人).[43] Rectifying others—more specifically, the people/subjects—is enabling them to cultivate themselves and strive toward moral excellence. In concrete terms, it entails enabling them to embody *ren* through *li* by exemplifying the proper norm expected of their respective role in human relations. Therefore, it implies the "rectification of names," which enables "the father *be* a father, and the son *be* a son," by "the ruler [*being*] a ruler [and] the minister [*being*] a minister" (君君臣臣父父子子; *Analects* 12.11, 13.3). The responsibility to rectify the people/subjects also entails the responsibility to promote their economic well-being, as those unable to meet their basic needs cannot have the "constant mind" (*hengxin* 恒心) necessary for pursuing morality (*Mencius* 3A.3); in other words, the people cannot be expected to be moral when their economic life is unstable and their basic needs are unmet (cf. *Sambongjip* 14:300). Therefore, Confucian rulers who aim to rectify the people must protect and promote the people's economic well-being.[44]

The creation of an ideal Confucian society replete with peace in which all members are rectified is indeed the common good of the Confucian state acceptable to all self-cultivating members. Therefore, the people would be fully supportive of their rulers who practice *renzheng*, as they pursue this common good. Further, rulers are not egocentric or power-hungry politicians but *junzis*, who are superior practitioners of morality and moral educators of the people (*Sambongjip* 11:81; cf. *Analects* 12.19; *Mencius* 5A.5, 5A.6). They pursue politics out of moral obligation not only to cultivate themselves but also to rectify the people (*Analects* 14.44, 12.7, 19.3, 15.17; *Mencius* 2A.4, 5A.5). *Renzheng* categorically rejects rule by force or terror[45] (cf. *Analects* 2.3; 13.3) and its gist is "following the people's mind" (*minxin* 民心) (*Mencius* 4A.9; cf. 1B.7, 1B.10, 5A.5). When this is done, then rulers will obtain the people's support and sympathy (*deukshim/dexin* 得心) (*Sambongjip* 13:214–215; 3:209; *Analects* 2.3, 12.7, 20.1;

Mencius 4A.9, 7B.14, 1A.7) and the people will trust and follow rulers as their symbolic parents who truly care about their moral and economic well-being[46] (*Sambongjip* 13:215; cf. 14:304; *Analects* 2.3,17.6; cf. *Mencius* 1B.7). The ideal Confucian politics, then, is a kind of trustee politics (*shin-tak-jeongchi* 信託政治)[47] (cf. *Analects* 12.7, 12.19, 14.44, 19.19, 20.1; *Mencius* 4A.7, 4A.9, 7B.14, 1A.7),[48] and the Confucian state is a family-state (*guo-jia* 國家). In this ideal vision, an all-powerful central government would be justifiable[49] (cf. *Sambongjip* 13:231).

Economy

As Mencius rightly recognized, the people cannot be expected to be moral when their economic life is unstable and their basic needs are unmet[50] (cf. *Sambongjip* 14:300). Therefore, keeping a stable economy and protecting people's economic well-being are essential for the Confucian state (*Analects* 8.21, 12.9, 13.9; *Mencius* 1A.3, 3A.3) and the rulers "must take the protection of the people's economic well-being as one of the most urgent tasks" (*Sambongjip* 14:293). To promote a stable economy, Mencius advocated an egalitarian distribution of land by the state so that each peasant would have his own small plot of land to till among nine plots of land roughly equal in size and quality. Peasants would be obligated to till a common plot of land located in the middle, the yield from which would belong to the state as tax (the "nine-squares division" system; 3A.3, cf. 1A.3).

Jeong, as a faithful Mencian, proposed a similar, but more detailed, plan for an equitable distribution of land: First, the land should be appropriated by the government in toto. Second, the government ought to distribute the appropriated land equally to all farmers, so that every farmer will have their own plot of land (*Sambongjip* 13:236). Third, each farmer is to pay the state as tax one-tenth of the total harvest for the year. Only the state has the authority to collect tax, and no middlemen are allowed to interfere in this process (*Sambongjip* 13:240). At a time when the overwhelming majority of the population was peasantry—farming was indeed the national industry—this proposal amounts to radical egalitarianism. This proposal would promote other worthy goals as well, such as increasing food production, lowering the tax burden for ordinary people, and increasing the wealth of the state, which ought to be managed frugally and efficiently by the government (cf. *Analects* 1.5). The revolutionary nature of this proposal becomes more obvious when we consider the fact that, at the

time, the land was mostly owned by landlords who would appropriate half of the total yearly harvest of their tenant farmers. Most, if not all, tenant farmers were severely exploited and the inequality between landlords and tenant farmers was stark.[51]

The Confucian state, which has the power to appropriate the land in toto and redistribute it equally to all farmers to achieve equitable redistribution, would be quite comprehensive and powerful.[52] Yet it is not a socialist/communist regime, contrary to the claim of some Confucians.[53] The economic proposal of Mencius and Jeong is more in line with the welfare state, which is not socialist requiring strict equality through controlled economy, but is rather based on capitalism. The welfare state allows the private ownership of even the "means of production," including land. Although the state has the sole power to appropriate the land, it is only a temporary measure prior to an equitable distribution of land to all peasants. After distribution, peasants themselves own their plot of land and are in control of its production. Trading agricultural and other products would take place primarily in the market, which further characterizes the Confucian economy as basically capitalist. As a primarily capitalist system, some degree of inequalities will exist. However, with every household owning a relatively uniform-sized plot of land and producing the staple food, rice, inequalities would be small, and each would be able to meet the basic needs of its members under normal circumstances.[54] During hard times when food is scarce, such as famine or right before harvest, the Confucian state aids the needy. In preparation for scarce times, the state has grain storages (*ui-chang* 義倉) in the capital and other localities that release grain to the starving people when needed. The storages would be refilled with grain especially during times of good harvest (*Sambongjip* 13:251). Also, especially for the indigent, the state would provide medicine at a subsidized rate (*hye-min-jeon-yak-guk* 惠民典藥局) (*Sambongjip* 13:252).

Government Structure

This general description of the ideal Confucian polity may seem too optimistic, oblivious to the fact that rulers, especially hereditary absolute monarchs of Mencius's and Jeong's time, are only human. An all-powerful central government under the rule of a monarch who does not engage in self-cultivation would pose grave danger to all in the dominion. Jeong was keenly aware of this problem[55] and dealt with it directly by arguing for a government in which the hereditary ruler/king is only a symbolic head.[56]

The real power must rest in the hands of a wise prime minister (*jae-sang* 宰相) (*Sambongjip* 9:314–341; 13:220–225). The only power that the king has is to select the prime minister from among the high-ranking government scholar-officials (''officials,'' for short) and make authoritative decisions *in consultation with* the prime minister concerning matters of grave national significance (*Sambongjip* 9:324). It is the prime minister who has real power in making and implementing everyday decisions concerning the governance of the state (*Sambongjip* 9:314, 325, 332; 13:221). Indeed, the prime minister must be ''in full control'' of the state's governance and ''administer fairly.'' Another role of the prime minister is to ''help the king'' (*Sambongjip* 13:221). This does not mean merely obeying the king's orders, but rather aiding him to carry out good deeds and intervening in his wrong deeds (*heon-ga-che-bu* 獻可替否), so that the king would be led the correct path (*in-gun-dang-do* 引君當道) (*Sambongjip* 9:318; cf. 13:221). The prime minister, powerful though he is, cannot do everything by himself and must delegate his authority to lower-ranking officials and bureaucrats. The government, therefore, forms a complex bureaucratic hierarchy stratified according to highly specialized functions, with the prime minister at the top to take ultimate control and responsibility for the governing of the state (*Sambongjip* 13:222–224).[57]

Confucian Government Scholar-Officials

All government officials and bureaucrats must come from the class of Confucian scholars (literati) familiar with Confucian self-cultivation. Indeed, the Confucian scholar's moral duty/ life goal is to serve in the government by becoming a government official or bureaucrat (*yu-ri-wi-il* 儒吏爲/*sa-gwan-il-chi* 士官一致) (*Sambongjip* 3:266–268; cf. *Analects* 8:13; *Mencius* 7A:9), as the goal of Confucian self-cultivation is to rectify not only oneself and but also others. This explains why Confucius himself never gave up his dream to serve a wise king and rectify the world (*Analects* 13.10, 14.41, 17.1, 17.5, 18.7). The primary role of Confucian officials and bureaucrats is therefore to educate/rectify others (*gyo-hwa/jiaohua* 教化) (cf. *Analects* 19.13). Education in Confucianism is necessarily moral education and cannot be administered if the educator lacks moral virtues himself. Therefore, only ''true Confucian scholars'' (*jin-yu/zhenru* 眞儒) (*Sambongjip* 3:44–45) ought to be officials and bureaucrats.[58]

In principle, the literati class is not identical to aristocracy. Scholars (*sa/shih* 士) can come from any class of free people, especially farmers.[59]

Between farmers and scholars, there ought to be no distinction (*sa-nong-il-chi* 士農 一致).[60] Historically, members of the literati class who had not [yet] become government officials had no other occupation than to apply themselves to the study of the Confucian classics every day. What made persons members of the literati is Confucian education, which was in principle open to all free people. Their life was not necessarily wealthy—and many members of the literati class were impoverished—as their main daily activity was primarily devoting themselves to studying and self-cultivation. Yet a true Confucian scholar must keep his constant mind even in a state of indigence (*Analects* 4.5, 4.9, 7.15, 15.31; cf. *Mencius* 3B.2). Indeed, those tempted by bodily comfort and wealth are "*so-in/xiaoren* 小人 (small person)"; a *junzi* must constantly plod along the righteous path of the Confucian way by following the words of the Confucian sages (*Analects* 4.11, 4.16). In order to remain righteous (*yi* 義), he must be willing to persevere through any difficulty (cf. *Analects* 8.6; *Mencius* 2A.2) and sacrifice even his life to maintain the Confucian way of life.[61] Han argues that Confucian righteousness (*yi*) refers to persisting on "the path toward *min-bon* (民本) and *ui-min* (爲民)."[62] Therefore, he interprets "dying for *yi*" as sacrificing oneself to achieve a better world for the people (cf. *Analects14*.13). A true Confucian scholar, then, is someone who not only practices Confucian morality in his personal life but also struggles to protect and promote the people's well-being (cf. *Mencius* 7A.9). When the time comes for him to assume a government post, he must practice what he preaches and strive to improve the lives of the people both morally and economically (*Sambongjip* 6:152).[63]

Education

In order to produce true Confucian scholars, Jeong looked up to the educational system of Zhou, in which elementary education was universal. Although he did not think that the state has the responsibility to provide universal elementary education in his own time (*Analects* 15.39), Jeong believed that the state should be involved extensively in providing equal opportunity for education to all free people and advocated a wide circulation of books (*Sambongjip* 13:263–264; cf. *Analects* 7.7, 8.9,15:38; *Mencius* 3A.3). Children would be taught at *bu-hak* (部學) in the capital (Seoul) and at *hyang-hak /hyang-gyo* (鄉學/鄉校) in the countryside (*Sambongjip* 13:227). Adolescent children of high government officials and talented commoners would be taught at the Royal College (*seong-gyun-gwan* 成均館), which

would be paid in full by the state and therefore free to those qualified (ibid.). Once selected, they would be trained to become government officials or bureaucrats at the state's expense.[64]

In principle, Jeong advocated strict meritocracy not only in higher education but also in selecting government officials (*Mencius* 7A.20). Admitting talented commoners at the Royal College reflects this spirit, although this principle is mitigated by allowing children of high officials to be admitted regardless of talent. The ideal Confucian bureaucracy is also strictly meritocratic and the selection of officials and bureaucrats is based on talent rather than birth (*Sambongjip* 13:226, 264). The method by which they are selected is the Confucian examination system of various kinds (*Sambongjip* 13:227–228). Jeong suggested that tests should be the only way to select government officials in order to promote fairness (*Sambongjip* 13:228). Once selected, their tenure should be long enough to enable them to work toward their goals with relative independence from the whims of their superiors (*Sambongjip* 13:226).[65]

Division of Power and Freedom of Expression

Despite the aforementioned measures to promote good Confucian governance, Jeong was fully aware of the possibility of corruption and the misuse of power within the government, whether by the king or high-ranking government officials, including the prime minister. Therefore, Jeong proposed many institutional mechanisms to minimize such eventualities. I focus on three such mechanisms. First, Jeong promoted symposia that would enable high-ranking officials not only to offer advice to the king on various policies but also to participate in the reeducation of the king in the Confucian classics, especially *Daxue*, which explicitly argues that governing the state (*zhiguo* 治國) and bringing peace to the world (*pingtianxia* 平天下) must presuppose regulating one's family (*qijia* 齊家), which in turn is predicated on self-cultivation (*xiushen* 修身) (*Sambongjip* 13:263).[66]

Second, a notion akin to the modern idea of "division of power" was advocated. Jeong calls this "keeping the path of words/expression open" (*jak-gae-eon-ro* 作開言路) (*Sambongjip* 2:202). He looked to the ancient times (Hsia, Shang, Zhou), during which freedom of expression was best protected, as the ideal. Back then, Jeong claimed, all persons within the territory were able to criticize the state freely and the state in turn actively promoted critical discourse. Since the demise of Zhou, however, the flow of expression was restricted. Although the institution of remonstration

(*gan-gwan* 諫關) was established, Jeong argued that this institution further restricted the flow of ideas, as only the officials of the *gan-gwan* were entitled to express ideas freely (*Sambongjip* 10:23–28). Jeong accepted the institution of *gan-gwan* (*Sambongjip* 10:23–37), but he argued that nonofficials should be allowed to exercise freedom of expression as well.

The officials of the *gan-gwan* are to be selected from among the most morally upright, competent, and respected scholar-officials and the king must respect their opinion (*Sambongjip* 10:35). Their main task is to criticize the king's unjust actions. They even have the power to impeach the king if he does not mend his ways. They are lower in rank but on a par with the prime minister in their entitlement to criticize the king without restriction (*Sambongjip* 10:29, 190).[67] Another institution that serves a similar purpose is the institution of censors (*gam-chal-gwan* 監察官) (*Sambongjip* 10:15–23). The role of censors is *not* to criticize/impeach the king, but rather to criticize/impeach both high and low-ranking government officials, including the prime minister, who mislead the king by offering him bribes and personal favors to promote their self-interest, instead of acting on behalf of the people. These institutions maintain the "Confucian division of power" in the prime minister-centered government.[68]

Even ordinary people who did not serve in the government were allowed to express their opinion through certain authorized routes. Jeong argued that those who can write should be able to express their opinion directly to the king in writing (*gu-eon-jin-seo* 求言進書) (*Sambongjip* 13:267). Earlier Chosôn kings had actually adopted and implemented such institutions at various stages of the dynasty. Although Jeong himself did not propose this, those who were illiterate were allowed to appeal directly to the king with their complaints by hitting a large drum (*shin-mun-go* 申聞鼓) installed near the palace in the early Chosôn period. In the later Chosôn period, commoners were allowed to approach the king by hitting a metal instrument (*jing*) during his procession and appeal to him directly (*gyeok-jaeng-sang-eon* 擊錚上言). It is debatable how successful such institutions were in meeting their original purpose of protecting the freedom of expression. However, that these were implemented at all is significant in itself, inasmuch as it implies that the ideas were widespread and appealing enough to the ruling class at the time.[69]

Revolution

If the king is a ruthless dictator and all measures to ensure good Confucian governance fail, then Jeong followed Mencius in advocating "revolution

(*hyeok-myeong/geming* 革命)" to depose the king by force if necessary (*Sambongjip* 13:214; *Mencius* 1B.8, 2B:2, 4A:1, 4B:3, 5B.9). The right to rule is endowed and justified by the "Mandate (Decree) of Heaven" (*cheon-myeong/tianming* 天命) (*Mencius* 5A.5; cf. *Analects* 20.1). As mentioned earlier, the Heaven's Will is "unfathomable" in itself and the people's will functions as the medium for the Heaven's Will. "Heaven and the people are one and the same" (*cheon-in-gam-eung-seol* 天人感應設) (*Sambongjip* 3:216). Therefore, the ruler's loss of the Heaven's Mandate is indicated by the disapproval of the majority of the people and "the legitimacy of the ruler's entitlement to rule is decided by whether the people voluntarily accept his rule" (*Sambongjip* 13:214). If one loses the Mandate of Heaven, the entitlement to rule dissipates and transfers to another person who is in turn endowed with the Mandate to rule anew. The preferable method of transfer would be the voluntary relinquishment of power by the previous king who lost the mandate (*seon-yang* 禪讓) (*Sambongjip* 11:82). Transfer by force (*bang-beol* 放伐) is justifiable, however, if no other option is available (*Sambongjip* 11, "King's Way"). The change in the Mandate of Heaven to rule is "revolution."[70]

Mencius had first proposed the idea of revolution, but Jeong took it a step further. For Mencius, the revolution meant the removal of a king by another would-be king. For Jeong, the removal of a king by a subgroup of the people—in his case, a group of Confucian scholars who represent the people's will, aided by the military—was justifiable. This opens the possibility of justifying revolution from the bottom.[71]

Political Implications for the Contemporary World

Does the ideal Confucian politics as envisioned by Jeong have any implications for the contemporary world? Are Jeong's political ideas relevant to contemporary East Asia? I believe so. A strong indication for this is that Jeong's ideas can successfully address the three major concerns of the contemporary world: economic justice, human rights, and democracy, as I shall argue in this final section. My argument for the feasibility of Jeong's political ideas, however, does not imply that Jeong's theory can be transplanted to the contemporary setting without any modification. Jeong's political theory is a product of his own sociohistorical context, designed to apply to a particular time-space set. There are clear limits in his theory from the contemporary perspective, as it was meant to apply to a world of feudalism in which the vast majority was illiterate peasants. For example,

he takes for granted that some people, although a small minority, are unfree—slaves—and completely ignores them in his theory; also, despite the remarkable fact that he proposed some institutions for free common people to participate directly in the political process, they are mostly viewed as a passive majority. Still, considering his social milieu, Jeong's theory contains arguably unprecedented and remarkably "modern" political ideas for his time, which may provide valuable insights in the reconfiguration of contemporary East Asia more in line with its Confucian tradition.

Economic Justice

The Confucian state is a comprehensive welfare state that considers an equitable distribution/redistribution of collective wealth as well as an adequate increase of collective wealth as the two most crucial economic goals for the state. It may seem that only the first goal is directly relevant to the concept of justice understood as a fair distribution of resources. However, the second goal is also relevant to justice, for a fair distribution of resources is meaningful only when it ensures the well-being of all social members and enables them to lead decent human lives. What constitutes a decent human life that ensures the well-being of a person is a debatable matter. However, it is relatively uncontroversial that one necessary condition for leading a decent human life is being able to meet one's basic needs for food, shelter, and health care.[72] To enable all social members to meet their basic needs, it is crucial that society procures a sufficient amount of resources for the entire society. It is clear from the account provided in the second part of this chapter that both Mencius and Jeong promoted economic justice predicated on the aforementioned two goals. They both emphasized an equitable distribution of farmland, as their societies were agrarian, and explored ways to increase its productivity. Yet the main underlying idea endorsed by both is enabling every 'free' member of society to lead a decent human life through an equitable distribution and sufficient increase of collective wealth.

This idea of justice is important for any society, including contemporary East Asian societies, although their current circumstances have changed dramatically from the days of Mencius and Jeong. Many contemporary societies of East Asia are no longer agrarian feudal economies but industrial or even postindustrial service economies, heavily influenced by the ideology of neoliberalism/libertarianism. This ideology has been the

most dominant economic position since the "neoliberal revolution" led by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher in the early 1980s, boosted by the collapse of communist regimes in the 1990s. It advocates an unfettered free market over which the state has minimal control, intervening only to provide "emergency relief to people in conditions of extreme distress."[73] Neoliberalism excessively focuses on maximizing collective wealth, remarkably oblivious to the issue of its fair distribution, whether domestically or internationally. Neoliberalism, the spread of which has been aided by international economic institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization, has transformed even the global economy itself so that Northern multinational corporations can freely roam the globe with the sole aim of maximizing profit. The result has been devastating for the majority of human population and the environment.

Many East Asian countries went through the liberalization of their economies, in large part due to pressure from powerful Northern states and international economic institutions. Despite the dramatic growth of their overall economies touted by the West as "economic miracles," East Asian countries have experienced extreme disparities of wealth among its citizens. The living standard of the majority has been stagnant or even falling, while a minority has been reaping the disproportionate economic benefit of economic liberalization and fueling unsustainable consumerism. In other words, the aforementioned first goal of economic justice has been largely ignored in this process, leaving the majority feeling alienated, resentful, and even envious, and increasing the potential for social conflict and unrest. At the same time, the environment has been devastated in the wake of irresponsible consumerism propagated by libertarian capitalism. Under such circumstances, East Asian societies may benefit in the long run by restructuring their economies to be more equitable as well as sustainable.[74] Core ideas of the Confucian comprehensive welfare state that promote an equitable (re)distribution and sustainable[75] increase of collective wealth may provide a better alternative vision of economy feasible in the East Asian context.

Human Rights

What human rights are is an intensely contested question these days. Instead of addressing this question here, I shall simply assume that the conception of human rights represented in the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights and other international charters are too "partisan" because they presuppose a particular cultural/philosophical framework—liberalism, predicated on the conception of persons as free individuals. A globally acceptable conception of human rights has to be minimal in order to be compatible with all "decent" societies,[76] including Confucian polities, that do not subscribe to the liberal conception of persons. Human rights ought to be understood as "a special class of urgent rights that are necessary conditions of any system of social cooperation."[77] In order for social cooperation to be possible, society must protect the basic well-being of members, necessary for them to lead decent human lives, as constitutive of the well-being of society itself. The basic well-being of each member is predicated on securing his/her vital human goods, such as life, physical security, subsistence, and self-respect, among others. "Human rights" compatible with all decent cultural frameworks would refer to entitlements to such vital human goods, and would consist of "rights" to subsistence, physical security, moderate amount of property, an institutional system that will treat similar cases similarly, and bodily and mental freedom to live one's life without *undue* external interference.[78]

Being a comprehensive welfare state, the ideal Confucian polity would take it as its primary responsibility to protect the first three human rights of members. The fourth human right restates the principle of formal equality, upheld by any orderly state that administers law and justice fairly, and the ideal Confucian state would certainly uphold it. Some Westerners may claim that the last human right may not be protected sufficiently in the Confucian polity because it would not allow extensive individual freedom advocated by liberals. In the Confucian state, some individual liberties, such as freedom to pursue self-interest (*li*) at the expense of others (see *Analects* 4.12; *Mencius* A.1) or freedom to denounce the Confucian values/common good publicly, would be strictly prohibited. This, however, does not imply morally unjustifiable restrictions of individual freedom. All human societies uphold certain core cultural values advocated by the majority; promoting and maintaining such values may require restricting certain actions of individuals that vitiate such values. If so, not all restrictions of individual freedom would count as unjustifiable limitations, although the range of justifiable restrictions would vary from society to society.[79] Given the *moral* nature and respectability of the Confucian values/common good elaborated in previous parts of this chapter, it is conceivable that the majority of the Confucian polity would approve of such restrictions in order to protect Confucian values/common good.

Democracy

Most Western political theorists and even some Confucian philosophers claim that the Confucian state is at best a paternalistic state or ''benevolent dictator'' and therefore incompatible with democracy.[80] I disagree. Democracy is predicated on respect for the people and respect for the people looms large in Confucianism, despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of the people (*min*) were illiterate and ignorant peasants throughout the history of Confucian dominance. The primary basis of Confucian respect for the people is their *equal* potentiality for self-cultivation and moral perfection. Historically, this fundamental axiom of Confucianism was too progressive for a world in which the overwhelming majority lagged far behind. Hence, understandably, the Confucian classical texts contain condescending remarks toward the people as the individually indistinguishable ''amorphous mass of commoners.''[81] Such remarks give rise to the impression that Confucianism is so hopelessly elitist to some (see *Mencius* 3A.4, 2A.3).[82]

Yet there are as many positive references to the people as ''a potential source of humanity,''[83] predicated on the Confucian recognition of equality in their moral potential. Especially in the contemporary setting in which members of East Asia are some of the most well-educated and well-informed citizens in the world, more capable of self-cultivation than ever, the condition in which all members can cultivate themselves and realize the Confucian ideal is ripe. Consequently, respect toward the people can no longer be just respect for the collective whose aggregate will represents Heaven's Mandate. Confucian respect for the people must be extended to each and every individual member of the people. Yet the Confucian common good of realizing a world in which every member is rectified still remains an elusive goal, given how difficult the process of self-cultivation is. Therefore, the Confucian requirement that politicians ought to be superior practitioners of morality and moral educators of the people is still a valid one and various political mechanisms ought to ensure that the right persons are selected as political leaders.

If a political system whereby persons with superior moral and intellectual capacities are selected as political leaders qualifies as political ''hierarchy,'' then political hierarchy does not vitiate the Confucian conception of equality. Further, Confucian political hierarchy is compatible with *democracy*, understood as a politics that empowers equal social members to participate, free from coercion and deception, in the cultural/political/

economic discourses aimed at actualizing the common good in their polity.[84] If political leaders are true moral exemplars conscientiously promoting the Confucian common good, then the people would willingly entrust to the leaders with political power to govern the state at discretion and give them full support. Under circumstances in which leaders are doing their jobs properly, the lack of contestations in the public realm by the people does not necessarily imply that the latter is by nature passive or apathetic. To the contrary, Confucianism recognizes that ordinary members of Confucian polities are equal to leaders in their moral capacities and endorses equal education to promote self-cultivation for everyone. Furthermore, Confucianism advocates many political mechanisms to allow ordinary members to express their concerns about and dissent from leaders who betray their trust. Under extreme circumstances in which a dictator shuts down legitimate paths of dissent and public pressure, Confucianism even justifies revolution from the bottom up.