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## Viewpoint: Global order - Enlightenment or Confucian values?

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## Viewpoint: Global order - Enlightenment or Confucian values?

### **Abstract**

Extract:

Books with titles such as *When China Rules the World* by Martin Jacques, *In the Jaws of the Dragon: America's Fate in the Coming Era of Chinese Hegemony* by Eamonn Fingleton and *China's New Confucianism: Politics and Everyday Life in a Changing Society* by Daniel A. Bell already pose the question that is the title of this piece. Moreover, articles like *Complexity and Collapse* by Harvard Historian Niall Ferguson in the March/April 2010 edition of the authoritative American journal *Foreign Affairs*, with its focus on the abrupt collapse of empires, give the question an additional immediacy.

### **Keywords**

Confucian values, enlightenment, global order

## **Viewpoint: Global Order - Enlightenment or Confucian Values?<sup>1</sup>**

*By Reg Little<sup>2</sup>*

### **Introduction**

Books with titles such as *When China Rules the World* by Martin Jacques, *In the Jaws of the Dragon: America's Fate in the Coming Era of Chinese Hegemony* by Eamonn Fingleton and *China's New Confucianism: Politics and Everyday Life in a Changing Society* by Daniel A. Bell already pose the question that is the title of this piece. Moreover, articles like *Complexity and Collapse* by Harvard Historian Niall Ferguson in the March/April 2010 edition of the authoritative American journal *Foreign Affairs*, with its focus on the abrupt collapse of empires, give the question an additional immediacy.

The problem has been posed acutely by the almost total discrediting of American norms and values by the world's rolling financial crisis since 2008. The threadbare character of the US economy is revealed by a little reflection. The profitable and commercially viable parts of the US economy are a rapacious financial sector, an increasingly mercenary military-industrial complex and an unaffordable, toxic health industry. The latter defies reform and feeds off chemically-based agriculture, processed foods, synthetic drugs and predatory insurance. These all nurture profits rather than human well-being. The ethos of 'freeing up' the marketplace as far as possible can hardly claim the American model as a good selling point.

In an interview on *Russia Today* on 7 April 2010, the German commentator, William Engdahl, highlighted the difficult position of European elites, caught between an increasingly bankrupt but expansionist NATO grouping (a sinking Titanic) and an economically resurgent and dynamic Eurasia. Should all this seem too harsh, Niall Ferguson prefaced his article in *Foreign Affairs* with the words:

Imperial collapse may come much more suddenly than many historians imagine. A combination of fiscal deficits and military overstretch suggests that the United States may be the next empire on the precipice.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The views in *The Culture Mandala* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views, position or policies of the Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies. Bearing in mind the controversial debates now occurring in International Relations and East-West studies, the editors endeavour to publish a range of diverse, critical and dissenting views.

<sup>2</sup> This is a shortened version of a paper delivered to a publicly invited audience at Oldenburg University, Germany, in May 2010.

The situation is made more critical for the present Anglo-American global order by the fact that the world's greatest financial, production and education resources are increasingly concentrated in East Asia. And the marketplace in these communities is always subordinated to the strategies of a highly educated administrative class. This culture has a great, but poorly understood, record of achievement over the past 50 years.

Of course, "Capitalist" Japan is the butt of media criticism in the West for the government's large borrowings from the Japanese people. Yet, after two decades of recession, the country remains the world's second to third largest economy, has large foreign reserves and no external debt and is rarely explained well by Western media or academia. At the same time, "Communist" China continues to discreetly mock Western stereotypes as it seizes dominant strategic leverage in most global marketplaces.

In reality, both these countries and most of the rest of East Asia are guided by national bureaucracies that can only be understood in the context of Confucian and related traditions. These have long shaped the character of Asian commercial and administrative leaders far beyond the borders of China. The past half century has shown that these are largely incomprehensible if approached with the tired stereotypes that have used ideology to pit public and private sectors against each other. Western denial of this reality has gifted a large strategic advantage to East Asia.

## **Background**

My own interest in this subject is not, however, the product of recent developments and the rise of China. Rather, it dates back almost half a century to 1964 when I arrived in Japan as a young diplomatic language student in the middle of its so-called income doubling decade. This turned out to be an income tripling decade. I had studied accountancy and economics in a Commerce Degree and English and Russian language and literature in an Arts Degree at University. I quickly concluded that Japan was breaking many of the economic rules I had been taught and that it needed to be understood in terms of its cultural traditions, values and institutions. Such an approach, I realise, was politically incorrect, both then and now.

Even so, after a posting to Laos during the Indo-Chinese War and brief stints in Bangladesh, New York and Ireland, I was given the chance to study Chinese in Hong Kong prior to taking up the post of Deputy Head of Mission in Beijing in 1976. With Chairman Mao still alive, I quickly made myself an irritant to colleagues by insisting that China would inevitably emulate Japan's "miracle economy". This led to an Ambassadorial Despatch exploring that line of thought that helped shape Australian policy. This was recognised for its foresightedness in a public lecture in the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in 2007.

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<sup>3</sup> Niall Ferguson, "Complexity and Collapse: Empires on the Edge of Chaos", *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2010 [<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/65987/niall-ferguson/complexity-and-collapse>].

After such a rewarding first 14 years as a diplomat, I lasted only another 11 years, although this contained no hardship and included some fulltime study of Western economic and legal orthodoxies in Geneva and almost three years travelling the Caribbean, Central America and northern South America as the Australian High Commissioner in Jamaica.

Suppressed tensions between my interests and mainstream orthodoxies and my general curiosity led me to leave the diplomatic service in 1988. In 1989 I co-authored a book titled *The Confucian Renaissance*, which, although little read in Australia, has been published several times in both Japanese and Chinese and which contributed substantially to my becoming first a Founding Director of the International Confucian Association in 1994 and being elected one of ten Vice Chairmen of the Association in 2009.

After *The Confucian Renaissance* in 1989, I also co-authored *The Tyranny of Fortune: Australia's Asian Destiny* in 1997, which appeared at the time of the Asian financial crisis. This hardly helped promotion or sales of the book, but in retrospect the crisis hardened Asian resolve and softened Western judgement, making the projections of the book all the more inevitable. In 2006, I authored *A Confucian-Daoist Millennium? On the basis of this record, I believe it is possible to argue that the West has been in denial about transparent trends for at least three decades.*

### **The Situation Today**

Because of this denial, today America and much of the West is bankrupt and capable of producing less and less that adds value to human life. Yet, it remains extraordinarily difficult to generate meaningful discussion of what are perhaps the biggest issues that will confront the world over coming decades.

It is worth recalling that one of the central precepts of Enlightenment economics, the *laissez faire* marketplace, was derived from a French translation of the central Chinese notion of good government, *wu wei* or *non action*. Much of the recent success of East Asian economies derives from the fact that *wu wei* is practised as a higher art form than *laissez faire*. Simply put, most Western democracies today cannot match the quality of government in East Asia.

For instance, an East Asian group of China, Japan, South Korea and the 10 ASEAN nations is positioned to become the centre of global finance, education, technology and production, restoring an order that existed for several millennia till well after 1800. Second, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, with India, Pakistan, Iran and Mongolia as observers, is well placed to establish a new order across Eurasia, capable of marginalizing the Atlantic world. Third, the BRIC grouping of Brazil, Russia, India and China could well facilitate the inclusion of Latin American and the isolation of the North Atlantic powers.

China has commenced planning the construction of rail lines and very fast trains capable of spanning the Eurasian continent before the end of the next decade. It is also showing less and

less patience with what it and others regard as American surrogates in Tibet and Xinjiang. Once China accedes to US pressures to revalue seriously the Yuan the end game will begin. The historians will then be able to evaluate the work of Washington's true rulers, its 35,000 corporate lobbyists — who have shown themselves to be no match for East Asian Confucian bureaucrats.

Should such remarks seem careless in discounting certain military realities, it may be illuminating to reflect on an observation of Kishore Mahbubani. A past Singaporean Ambassador to the UN, he highlights in his *The New Asian Hemisphere* an evaluation that sees 90 percent of the world's PhDs already located in Asia. Given the quantity and quality of Chinese graduates both from home and from the world's best universities, it is hard not to conclude that the Chinese focus on asymmetric warfare has already produced military technologies that overshadow the West, simply mirroring the situation in financial markets. On balance, very fast trains look a more attractive option than more NATO troops in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

### **Enlightenment or Confucian Values?**

As America's economy and financial situation have deteriorated, American power has tended to be exercised in ways that have detracted from the credibility of values which it has rhetorically asserted as universal, such as democracy, equality, progress and the rule of law. These ideals are essentially legacies of the European Enlightenment and gained much of their credibility and authority from the extension of European power and influence across the world.

The economic rise of East Asia, first led by Japan and now by China, accompanied by a plague of economic and financial problems in the Atlantic world, has raised major questions about the integrity and viability of Enlightenment "universal" values. In contrast, China seems to be moving to a position of centrality and key leverage in most marketplaces and emerging organizational structures. In doing this, it is displaying a wisdom and an instinct for politics and organization that escapes Western comprehension.

What follows is an attempt to highlight some qualities in the Chinese tradition, which are shared to a greater or lesser degree with all its East Asian neighbours and which illuminate the success of this part of the world over the past half century. In the process, I will make not infrequent reference to "intellectual apartheid", a critical insight derived from John Hobson's 2004 publication, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization*. In building an empire of unprecedented reach the British had generous recourse to the strategy of marginalizing and disparaging all but their own Enlightenment values. Once a source of strength, certainty and authority, the habit of intellectual apartheid has become the source of weakness, incomprehension and vulnerability.

I will use ten thematic headings to survey my sense of Confucian values. It could be argued that many of these are not strictly speaking Confucian, but I am convinced that they are all

integral parts of a world largely defined by Confucian tradition, which is challenging Western authority in almost all dimensions of essential human activity.

At the same time, it would be foolish for me to claim that a non-Asian can understand this world in the same way as someone born into it. I have not been exposed to its disciplines, to its humiliation at the hands of the West, or to the strategic determinations that have guided its renaissance. I have had the opportunity, however, of observing the progress of the past half century from a number of privileged positions.

Moreover, I believe I have had the advantage of undertaking my explorations not as a journalist or an academic. Rather, I have undertaken this first as a somewhat privileged in-country language student, second as a diplomat with broad and easy access to diverse aspects of several Confucian societies and third as an independent intellectual who has been accepted into the central organization overseeing the renaissance of Confucianism in Asia. This has left me free of the various forms of professional political correctness that have inhibited, if not prohibited, serious and genuine exploration of some of the most important changes that have taken place in our world over the past half century.

### **Administrative Excellence**

The central quality informing the Confucian civilizations of East Asia is a unique and unrivalled millennia-long tradition of highly educated administrative excellence. This tradition is rich in examples of both success and failure and is familiar with the problems of imperial excess and indulgence and the various forms of corruption, and associated vulnerabilities, that are bred by great imperial power. The ideological stereotypes of the post-Enlightenment West, which in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century dictated an excessively simplistic division between capitalist and communist, blinded most observers to reality. Such distinctions make little sense in East Asia, except as slogans for subtle manipulation by master administrators.

Anglo-American ignorance also ensured that few, if any, commentators remarked on the fact that the Confucian governments of East Asia have been informed by ideals of virtuous and benign administration, severe legalistic authority and liberal notions of *wu wei* or non-action – translated by the French physiocrats as *laissez faire* – that dictate minimal interference in the affairs of the people. This tradition has nurtured communities where people have been both trusting and obedient towards governments, which have tried to guide but not intrude in the commercial lives of the people.

Learning in the Confucian tradition has been used to create an awareness of one's place in, and responsibilities to, the human community – past, present and future. Moreover, learned men and women, who come together for the administration of a community, tend spontaneously to form networks of knowledge and responsibility and to seek reward in achievements which build and strengthen the community, always bearing in mind the continuity linking past, present and future.

The contemporary success of East Asia has highlighted for a small number of informed Western observers some critical problems in contemporary Western practices of democracy. Well noted in East Asia, these attract limited Western debate: These include:

- the power of corporate donors who finance politicians
- the electorate's abysmal understanding of the realities of government
- the power of hype, marketing and show business in the electoral process
- the helplessness of individual voters in the face of disinformation campaigns
- the capacity of corporate greed to betray community interests
- the deployment of the mass media to serve corporate and not voter interests
- the decline of administrative quality when political and corporate interests rule

The vision of administrative networks that shaped many centuries of Chinese history and that provided the source of much Confucian wisdom, are captured by the first three sentences of the *Analects*, rhetorical discussion with the Master (Confucius), which establish in a relaxed, conversational manner three central virtues:

The Master said, 'Is it not a pleasure, having learned something, to try it out at due intervals? Is it not a joy to have friends come from afar? Is it not gentlemanly not to take offence when others fail to appreciate your abilities.'<sup>4</sup>

## **Ritual Learning**

The high priority placed by Chinese tradition and culture on early and continuing learning ensures that each new generation masters quickly as much as possible of the wisdom of its predecessors and identifies as deeply as possible with the community. This priority on learning assumes a timeless quality that protects against passing fads and fashions and ensures strong community reinforcement of educational effort and standards. It instils in each generation of youth habits of obedience, learning and aspiration largely through ritual and repetition. This is a time proven means of equipping future administrators and leaders with the knowledge, discipline, stamina, understanding and wisdom essential to address the world's complexities. This produces strong antibodies that protect communities against yielding authority to those unprepared by the socializing disciplines of rigorous education.

Respected and ingrained customs of early, disciplined learning helped the Chinese to subordinate the world's most sophisticated martial and strategic traditions to the authority of scholar mandarins. Moreover, this class has over the past thousand years preserved the vitality of Chinese identity, spirit and culture despite subjugation to Mongol and Manchu conquests and to Western imperial adventurers. Although circumstances and the nature of

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<sup>4</sup> *Analects* I.1, translated by D.C. Lau (London, Penguin, 1979).

Chinese history may have got in the way of an appropriate response to the European intruders of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a deeply studied sense of the region's historical heritage was a critical resource that ultimately enabled East Asians to respond strategically and successfully. Leaders have demonstrated throughout East Asia, an irrepressible capacity to conquer through service.

Rote, ritual and related forms of repetitive learning from an early age remain the foundation of the Confucian tradition and the core strength of Asian communities worldwide. Despite sporadic news reports in the Western media about moves to reform the rote or ritual character of education, it remains a fundamental and vital characteristic of East Asian societies.

Rote learning ensures that many potential social problems are never allowed to develop by building an early sense of shared community endeavour, purpose and trust, together with the foundations for worldly understanding and maturity. This favours cooperation and coherence, even as it concentrates competition for excellence and advancement in intellectual and cultural pursuits. It is now widely remarked that students of East Asian origin commonly achieve outstanding results when working in an alien environment despite their reliance on apparently pedestrian practices of rote learning and their difficulties of operating in unfamiliar languages.

Moreover, the discipline of learning, without necessarily understanding immediately, develops a lifetime talent – an asset that can be utilised to address and master any new situation, no matter how alien, frustrating or seemingly incomprehensible. The unique success of East Asians in a global environment defined largely by Anglo-American norms reflects this strength.

The Harvard authority on the Confucian tradition, Tu Wei-Ming, has highlighted the relevance of some of these themes in works such as *Way, Learning and Politics: Essays on the Confucian Intellectual* and *Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity: Moral Education and Economic Culture in Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons*.

### **Spirituality**

The Chinese spiritual tradition contrasts with Christianity in being essentially unencumbered by monotheism and faith. In addition, it has not been institutionalised and politicised in a manner comparable with the history of Christianity, does not comfortably fit the description of a religion as this is understood in the West. It has prospered largely free of the dogma that has been used to organize and mobilize people in the Christian tradition through the centuries. Moreover, it emphasises a holistic and naturalistic exploration of the paradoxes and contradictions to be found in all aspects of human experience and organic life. It has a profound commitment to mastering the realities of daily life in a way that is highly sensitive to physical and human nature and that enhances spiritual robustness and fulfilment. This produces spiritual qualities that are resilient and creative and can flourish independent of faith.

The Chinese and other peoples of East Asia have various approaches to spirituality, all reflecting a commitment to provide profound and functional responses to the many riddles that confront human life. While these qualities derive predominantly from the major Daoist classics – the *Daode Jing*, the *Zhuangzi* and the *Liezi* – they are also evident in related texts like the Confucian classics and the *Yi Jing* and in the deeply ingrained health and strategic arts disciplines. Parallels can be found for some of these qualities in the West, but they have not survived into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in the same form or with the same vigour as in China. This is due variously to different founding mythologies, to the political power of a Christian Church that sought to maximise its influence and marginalize spiritual rivals, and to the reaction against that religious power in the form of the European Enlightenment and its glorification of a narrow form of mechanistic, scientific rationalism.

Consequently, it is difficult, coming from a Western background, to understand fully the spiritual strength of East Asian people, even if, in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, many East Asian spiritual classics have become popular amongst wide readerships in the West. They clearly appealed strongly to diverse, educated and thoughtful readers that had become disillusioned with both Western religion and science. They did not, however, penetrate the corporatized high culture of Western political, religious, scientific and academic organization or inspire serious revitalisation of failing Western orthodoxies.

Sarah Allan's *The Way of Water and Sprouts of Virtue* explains the early Chinese assumption that the world of *homo sapiens* can be understood by studying the principles that govern nature. Indeed, a profound and recurring theme is the unity of humanity and nature, an ethos that reaches from philosophy to medicine. It is the natural world, not a religious tradition of faith, which provides the root metaphor of Chinese thought and which has facilitated a practical spirituality, a humanistic philosophy and an early and highly productive scientific method.

### **Consciousness**

Both Confucian and Daoist influences in Chinese spiritual tradition place a strong emphasis on the personal, disciplined cultivation of self-understanding and conscious insight, nurturing reflection, intuition, calm and judgment. This has all been undertaken within a broad sense of nature, or of a demanding cosmos. It does not seek to understand the Truth but rather to explore and follow the Way or the Dao. With the emphasis on practical action, community accord and natural harmonies, there is a capacity to develop qualities that are comparatively neglected in the West.

In one sense the consciousness tradition is the essence of the spiritual tradition, but in another it is a separate and robust quality in itself, complementing the spiritual tradition in the same way that the learning tradition complements the community tradition. It ensures that rote learning, whether physical or cerebral, comes alive in the most vital and mature way possible. Indeed, the endless, disciplined repetition needed to advance in the art of *qigong* reveals that much insight and consciousness is denied those who refuse to accept the guidance and discipline of a trusted master or teacher.

Chinese leaders have left the people largely free to explore their own spiritual and scientific truths through the cultivation of consciousness and intuitive knowledge while using ritual and the authority and tact of learned men to instil conformity of behaviour throughout a vast empire. This contrasts with the dogmas and orthodoxies of the institutionalised Christian church and the Enlightenment's mechanistic science. Indeed, the dogmas that have put the rationalism of the Ancient Greeks to good work as a tool to dictate conformity not only of behaviour but also of thought, are directly challenged by many of the disciplines of Daoism and Chan Buddhism.

Consequently, the depth of intuitive understanding of nature and humanity stored in the Daoist, and related Chan (Zen) Buddhist, tradition has produced a number of qualities in Confucian and Daoist communities that are poorly understood in the West. This has been reinforced by the vehemence of the West's intellectual apartheid and rational orthodoxies. As a result, the West has largely denied itself the benefits to be derived from disciplined and cultivated intuition – not the least in devising practical alternatives to dysfunctional forms of rationalism in economics and health.

Mark Edward Lewis' *Writing and Authority in Early China* explores the uses of the written symbol to command assent and obedience in China. Symbols became the foundation of the imperial system and served to perpetuate the dream and reality of an imperial order across millennia. Texts came to exercise the authority of the state, and the text-based sage an authority doubling that of the ruler. Even today the written symbols of early Chinese history command a respect that is little appreciated in the West and dictate codes of behavior beyond Western norms and comprehension.

This all needs, however, to be understood in the context of a culture where words left unsaid carry the most weight. The sense that there is more going on than meets the eye, that the intangible is more important than the tangible, created a community where success depended on both knowledge and intuitive understanding. The opening words of the *Daode Jing*, once understood, capture this timelessly:

The way that can be spoken of  
Is not the constant way;  
The name that can be named  
Is not the constant name.<sup>5</sup>

## Change

There is no more seminal influence in Chinese culture than a book that has a history of over three thousand years, the *Yi Jing*, or *Book of Changes*. Anything with related aspirations in

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<sup>5</sup> Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Book I, I, line 1, translated by D.C. Lau (London, Penguin, 1963).

the West was marginalized either by the Christian Church or by the tradition of Greek rational thought. Consequently, despite its growing popularity in alternative circles, it is difficult for mainstream Western thought to accommodate or relate to the correlative disciplines of the *Yi Jing*. Yet, the *Yi Jing* has made the mature management of inevitable and irresistible change one of the great art forms of the East Asian ruler, or administrator.

The use of the *Yi Jing* as a book of divination spread its influence through all levels of society, even while true mastery of it is perceived to be the preserve of those who are learned, experienced and worldly wise. Its capacity to unify the spirit of both Confucianism and Daoism, often wrongly perceived to be rivals for influence, strengthens its role as the major seminal foundation of Chinese culture.

The nature of the *Yi Jing* is so unfamiliar and alien to the Western mind that perhaps the greatest 20<sup>th</sup> Century Western authority on Chinese science and civilization, Joseph Needham, wrote in the 1970s in *The Shorter Science and Civilization in China: I* about it in disparaging terms. Despite remarking favorably on the Chinese sense that things resonate with one another and on the usefulness of the Chinese Five Element and Yin-Yang theories in Chinese science, he thought the system of the *Yi Jing* could not be regarded favorably.

Wei-ming Ng has shown in *The I Ching in Tokugawa Thought and Culture* how the *Yi Jing* played a central role in assisting the Japanese modernize and Westernize while retaining their own traditions and values. Essentially the Japanese used it in the time-honored manner to manage change within continuity, reinforcing tradition even as they transformed it. Ng shows how the influence of the *Yi Jing* shaped Japanese political, economic and religious (both Shinto and Buddhism) thought as well as the cultures of natural science, medicine, the military and popular life. It represented the entire Chinese cultural tradition, as the Japanese did not confine themselves to one aspect of the tradition, and became an integral part of basic cultural training. At the same time, while all educated groups studied and used it, its philosophical and oracular aspects were used to different ends. Ultimately, the *Yi Jing* illustrated the complicity and dynamism in Sino-Japanese intellectual and cultural interchange, with some not even recognizing it as a Confucian or Chinese text.

## **Organic Life**

*The Way and The Word: Science and Medicine in Early China and Greece* by Geoffrey Lloyd and Nathan Sivin illustrates in a nuanced way a clear division between two key traditions. They conclude that neither China nor Greece uniquely monopolized the development of science, with each possessing the conceptual frameworks and institutional structures necessary to inquire systematically into organic physiologies, material nature and cosmic processes. Yet each displayed unique qualities. The Greek way sought predominantly foundations, demonstration, and incontrovertibility. Its central authority was found in the principles of 'clarity and deductive rigor'. Consequential weaknesses were an appetite for disputation that obstructed consensus agreement and a practice of relentless questioning. The Chinese approach was strongly characterized by the search for correspondences, resonances and interconnections, which aided the exploration of holistic

and organic relationships that integrate highly divergent areas of activity and order. Its apparent weakness lay in a disinclination to pose serious challenges to time-honoured orthodoxies.

Today, the *Yi Jing*, its intellectual influences and its scientific legacies, seem to offer a major source of profound and structured alternative wisdom. This offers hope of providing direction to widespread community efforts to reshape human scientific endeavour in a manner that is less destructive of and more in harmony with the living organisms that maintain human and other forms of life.

The contemporary West has gone to extremes, building a type of structured religious faith around a myth that promises endless progress, through the human conquest and subjugation of nature – marketed as medicine, science and technology. Problems inherent in this faith and myth are compounded by the annual allocation of many of the best brains and most vigorous spirits to intense training and lifetime service before the Gods of medicine, science and technology, to serve corporate, profit-maximization goals.

Of course, the modernization of East Asia has incorporated Westernisation and the apparent acceptance of Western myths. In China, communism led to the excessive use of chemical fertilizers while in Japan capitalism led to the development of Western style pharmaceutical corporations. This has been an integral part of a strategy, not always ideally executed, of matching Western power as a means to recapture cultural and political autonomy. In effect, a significant sacrifice of traditional cultural values has been needed to match the West's aggressive exploitation of science and technology.

Reflection on the role of the *Yi Jing* in past, present and future East Asian science and technology suggests that peoples of Confucian tradition may now help free the world from illusions of progress and science. The *Yi Jing*'s structured, continuous and cumulative cultivation of reflection, awareness and sensitivity towards fundamental human realities can help identify many Western scientific dangers and follies.

### **Conquest Through Service**

One of China's greatest, if not most widely known, strategic legacies is associated with Jiang Tai Gong, the leading military and strategic figure in founding the Zhou Dynasty. The work attributed to him is titled in translation *The Six Secret Teachings*, and contains *Twelve Civil Offensives* which outline a distinctive Chinese path to conquest through service.

The essence of this strategy may seem little more than common sense when clearly stated. However, this succinct statement of ways to overcome an adversary without violence, outlined around three thousand years ago, serves to emphasise the basic importance of human virtue and moral strength, and the vulnerability of those who lack these qualities — something poorly understood in the West, particularly in the corporate world. Any moral weakness in a leader is an invitation to exploitation by a thoughtful and resourceful rival. Ultimately the only true strength is virtue.

It is not hard to identify instances of East Asian use of such offensives over the past sixty years. Successive East Asian communities have used American political and corporate short-term bottom-line thinking, cultural ignorance, moral weakness and material greed to win one strategic advantage after another and to move much of the hi-tech manufacturing capacity of America to East Asia. This has been achieved through coordinating political, commercial and financial policies closely with American interests, in a manner that offers short term corporate and consumer satisfaction at the cost of longer term industrial and technological debilitation.

The teachings reveal, one might say, both a benign Confucian approach to government and a harsh, Daoist sense of reality. Associated with a time around five hundred years before the birth of Confucius and Laozi, the *Twelve Civil Offensives* reflect a profound sense of human vulnerability, at the same time as they underline implicitly the strength of the virtuous man who is above temptation. The First Offensive illustrates this:

First, accord with what he likes in order to accommodate his wishes. He will eventually grow arrogant and invariably mount some perverse affair. If you can appear to follow along, you will certainly be able to eliminate him.<sup>6</sup>

In East Asia, relaxed and generous ceremonies of hospitality are a critical part of all negotiating situations, serving to establish the qualities of a newcomer while manoeuvring to establish psychological and moral advantage. Of course, such practices can be found in many traditions, but the Chinese have long institutionalised such manners on a grand scale. Not surprisingly, all China's East Asian Confucian and Daoist neighbours have been influenced by the example of the Middle Kingdom.

Any foreign recipient of East Asian hospitality who has sought to respond sensitively to the generosity of a host knows that it is easy to quickly become entangled with a rapidly growing variety of fresh sensations and new human bonds. The newcomer can find it difficult to overcome a sense that the host has a command of the situation that seems to leave little scope for other than preordained responses. These soft, conquest-through-service strategies have left the West with little room for maneuver.

### **Knowledge of Self and Others**

One of the best known passages of the Chinese strategist, Sunzi, declares that victory and success depends on a knowledge of oneself and of one's rival. This is basic to his approach to warfare, which emphasizes that the successful strategist achieves victory without fighting. This strategic understanding seems to widely inform the behavior of East Asian communities, but to be generally neglected by Anglo-American peoples. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the latter are invariably misled by their own Enlightenment creation of universal values and the narrow priorities of corporate lobbies.

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<sup>6</sup> T'ai Kung, *Six Secret Teachings*, 15 (Civil Offensive), translated by Ralph D. Sawyer in *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China*, N.Y., Basic Books, 2007.

Simple strategic principles highlighted by Jiang Taigong and Sunzi are increasingly available in excellent English language translations but they have been given little thought in the Western rush to structure a rational global order. In contrast, Chinese experience of imperial decline and rebirth has ingrained a harsh, strategic wisdom that indulges little in false ideals or false knowledge open to a rival's exploitation.

The last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are likely to be viewed by future historians as a time when American government failed to develop any meaningful understanding of emerging rivals and failed equally to develop any effective international economic or political strategy. Moreover, it is likely to be seen as a period when American ideas of the world frequently distorted realities and allowed rivals to gain easy advantage. Most importantly, however, it will be viewed as the time when decades of patient strategic effort by Confucian-Daoist communities in East Asia were rewarded by their emergence in a position of economic, technological and political power and influence. This is partly based on the dictum:

Know oneself, know one's rival

One hundred battles, one hundred victories.<sup>7</sup>

This variation by Mao Zedong on a phrase from Sunzi's *Art of War*, is remarkable for its acute simplicity. It has a profound incisiveness and a type of protean identification with the forces of nature that mark the Daoist tradition and pervade East Asia.

Thomas Cleary, a leading American translator of Asian classical texts, has highlighted in his *The Japanese Art of War* the Western contrast. He remarks that aggressive Christian missions sought to supplant Buddhism through criticism and rebuke, as the Japanese desire for technical knowledge opened the door to foreign influences. He notes that reason and ethics are the two aspects of Japanese culture that have traditionally attracted the criticism of Westerners. Cleary observes that many Japanese readily agree with Westerners that they are neither reasonable nor ethical and find that this not only placates Western irritation but also facilitates the "art of the advantage". In a sense, it is the institutionalisation of this "art of the advantage" that lies behind the type of exasperation expressed in the title of *Bamboozled: How America Loses the Intellectual Game with Japan and Its Implications for Our Future in Asia*. The problem reduces to the failure of one side to make a serious and humble effort to respect, study and understand the other.

The West has continued to seek clarity and deductive rigor in Confucian and Daoist behaviour when in reality it is best understood by searching for correspondences, resonances and interconnections. The deep-rooted 'intellectual apartheid' in the West's imperial

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<sup>7</sup> Compare the translation from the *Art of War*, Book 3, "Thus it is said that one who knows the enemy and knows himself will not be endangered in a hundred engagements," translated by Ralph D. Sawyer in *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China*, N.Y., Basic Books, 2007.

approach to East Asia has offered Confucian-Daoist strategists a bonus, once they familiarized themselves with the Enlightenment world's faith and rationality.

### **Health in the Community**

As in administration, China has the longest and most comprehensive recorded history of what works and what does not work in health practices. This history does not lack cautionary tales but it records extensively the medicinal values of foods and how to master the body's energies. The spiritual elements of the tradition are integrated with health disciplines that emphasise self-empowerment in maintaining personal well-being.

The growing body of evidence that powerful corporate interests are actively corrupting the character of food, medicine and science and the quality of health and well-being in the West, is accompanied by accounts of dumbed-down educational systems and the loss of integrity in the use of knowledge. Successful strategies to lock in very large profits in synthetic pharmaceuticals, chemical agriculture, processed food or others area of entrepreneurial activity have led to epidemics of degenerative disease, mounting problems with unsustainable health budgets and a variety of related ecological and environmental problems.

But the situation is not simple. The increase in human population and the steady increase in life expectancy provide contrary evidence of improvements in human health and well-being. People living today in advanced economies also have access to a more abundant range of genuine health and well-being information, products and facilities than ever before in human history.

Still, there are a growing number of refugees from mainstream Western health culture to Chinese and Indian practices. Perhaps the parallel with environmental and ecological problems helps illuminate this dilemma. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, people have access to man-made ecologies and environments that are probably also unrivalled in past history, but that does not ease growing concerns about the overall state of the world's ecological and environmental condition.

*The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine*, also referred to as *Neijing*, is both a major Daoist text and perhaps the highest authority on traditional Chinese medicine. It also reflects a sense of cosmic order that could be described as Confucian. Attributed to Huang Di, the Yellow Emperor, from the third millennium BC, its observations impress as still being relevant for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The contrast with the agricultural, food and pharmaceutical innovations of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century could not be greater.

It represents a tradition that is holistic and organic and that is inseparable from Chinese identity, having matured and flourished over the full length of Chinese history. It exists as a timeless protector against contemporary health follies. One translator of the classic, Maoshing Ni, notes in his preface that the technological breakthroughs of the last two hundred years propelled science to its zenith through an increase in communications that raised standards of living, increased productivity and saved lives but also was responsible for

genocide on a massive scale, destruction of the planet and a steady diminishing of quality in people's lives. He recalls that many of the West's greatest achievements have been simple borrowings from the Chinese. He also observes that the so-called scientific and industrial revolutions did not occur in China, despite many advances prior to those of the West, because Chinese science and technology functioned within a philosophy that recognised the importance of balance and harmony between human beings and the environment. He concludes that modern science and technology will continue to produce destruction to life on earth, unless it restores sensitivity towards the wider scheme of universal order.

### **Body Energies**

The Chinese focus on balance, resonances and correspondences has accompanied an extensive exploration of *qi*, or energy, in relation to human internal and external environments. Principles deeply rooted in Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist traditions, have guided this exploration. Other traditions, like the Indian with its concepts of *prana* and *charkas* and its utilization of homeopathy, have identified related qualities.

'Energy' has been fundamental to Chinese and Indian medical therapy for some millennia. Energy medicine, however, only began to be recognized in the modern West in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The mastery of *qi*, or the body's energies, either in martial arts or in health therapies, requires a long and disciplined education. Increasingly, however, Westerners are discovering that even a general introduction to relevant practices can deliver of sense of self-empowerment, awareness of many of the problems associated with modern medicines and lifestyles and influence over personal well-being and longevity.

Western political norms, like the use of simple rational structures, abstract and generalized universal principles and a rhetorical demand for egalitarianism, support this character. The words 'you do it, you get it', used by the Thai-Chinese authority Mantak Chia in his *qi gong* teaching to overcome the incredulity of the usual Western student highlight other forces that remain alive in Asian traditions. These reflect the practice of the master, who demands respect and obedience and transfers practical life disciplines that focus attention on intuitive self-observation and self-understanding.

### **Conclusion**

The hubris of Anglo-American corporate empire, often exercised through innumerable lobbyists who buy and sell elected representatives, has blinded Western leadership classes to powerful forces at work bringing about fundamental changes in the global knowledge economy. The potential of human body science is of particular interest because it helps highlight the bankrupt quality of much Western food and medicine, which in turn appear to be mirrored in the financial and military sectors.

As the global community enters a period of uncertainty and chaotic unpredictability it will become increasingly important to look deeply and carefully into many of the beliefs and assumptions on which Western leaders have become accustomed to base actions. The

remarkable success of East Asian Confucian communities in the face of major obstacles over the past half century alone should make it the priority object of comparative study and evaluation. The discovery of the wisdom inherent in the region's traditions will offer rewards and insights that are likely to ensure further effort and discovery.

This complements other forces that are undermining the credibility of assertions of the benign character of American hegemony, its sense of international morality and universal values and its claims to scientific and technological leadership.