

While China continues to open more and more Confucian Institutes (read that propaganda forums) around the world, within China itself, the past spirit and soul of Confucianism spirals downward in confusion as real politik governmental manipulations and fiat bounce against reality. The unchanging hierarchical structure of Confucianism has always made it easy prey for authoritarian rulers to justify their regimes and explain their fiat and lack of rule by law. Today's world of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is no exception, but sooner or later the chickens of those fiat and dictatorial efforts do come home to roost.

In the Cultural Revolution Mao manipulated the sense of hierarchy to convince youth that hierarchical subservience to him was clearly above other hierarchies including that of family. It became a sign of patriotism for youth to turn on and denounce parents and elders. Since youth were always low on the totem pole of the hierarchy they found delight in the permission to both vent their frustrations from the system and feel justified in doing so. Later, when the Red Guard had done Mao's dirty work, Mao would enlist another hierarchical power, the military, to bring them back under control. Many who had gone through this experience nevertheless found a cathartic repentance in writing as is evidenced by numerous books on this topic. Whether China as a whole learned from this is doubtful.

Filial piety has always had a prominent role in Confucianism. Yet a current indication of the chickens coming home to roost and how far gone from true Confucianism China is, is seen in a recent proposal by China's Civil Affairs Ministry to the National People's Congress. That Ministry wants an amendment to the 1996 law on rights of the aged. Such amendment would require by law that adult children regularly visit their elderly parents, and give the parents the right to sue the children if they do not. Can morality, virtue or filial piety be legislated? That is a strange proposed law and a strange requirement for a country that touts a belief in the Confucian virtue of filial piety.

Some in China's government may think that one dictatorial governmental fiat can solve the problems created by previous fiat. It will not, yet that is what China is trying to do. The problems of China in this area are certainly due in large part to China's past draconian one child per couple policy. That policy brought untold human suffering including forced abortions and sterilizations so much so that one would wonder if the policy could justify itself as being based on any Confucian thought at all. Regardless it created today's problem.

Under China's present policy, when a couple marries in addition to any child they may conceive, they can immediately expect that they will have four parents to take care of and up to

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eight grandparents. That in addition to supporting untold levels of bureaucracy is a heavy responsibility for each young couple whose combined salaries may barely keep themselves afloat. Nevertheless, under the one child policy, the number of China's elderly continues to increase while the number of young adults decreases. By 2050, the estimates are that one out of every four Chinese will be 65 or older, factoring the number of children into that equation does not leave too many adults to work and pay the taxes to support all. This is the gist of Chen Guidi and Wu Chuntao's work; "Will the Boat Sink the Water?" And it may be a reason why other statistics show that China's urban suicide rate among the elderly continues to skyrocket.

Closely linked to this is another Confucian based myth, the right of xinfang. Xinfang, the right "to petition the authorities," relies on the Confucian belief that the emperor/rulers are benevolent and will both listen and right wrongs. Simple honest folk in the countryside suffer most from this. Aside from open rebellion it appears to be their only recourse to the corruption of party authorities where they live. So it leads millions each year to journey to Beijing in a Kafkaesque quest to seek redress. One study from 2004 showed that only 0.2 per cent actually achieved success. Millions of others were beaten, abused and often ended up in "black jails" as they were exploited in the capital. What keeps the myth alive is the government's control over media so that the people do not know what happens in actuality to petitioners. Professor Qin Shao used another water metaphor in addressing this when she wrote "Bridge Under Water: the Dilemma of the Chinese Petition System."

The chances that China's Civil Affairs Ministry's recommendation on the aged will become law appear to be slim, but the issues remain. Can a dictatorial regime that cloaks itself in Confucian benevolence also legislate morality and social behavior? The issue of whether an agricultural based Confucian society can be adapted to the modern age has been debated since the May 4th Movement on and still not resolved.

But as Confucian Centers spring up around the world, it is time to look behind the curtain of the non-democratic, dictatorial regime that promotes them, rules China and cloaks itself in Confucianism. Westerners should examine how Confucianism is more honored in the breach than in the observance. And Taiwanese who share Confucian traditions should examine how China seeks a rich Taiwan to help bail it out of the mess it created. Instead of solving its own problems, China wants to impose its lack of soul on Taiwan.

Western Naivete, Taiwan and China's Continuous Manipulation of Confucianism

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