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The Role of Confucianism in Contemporary South Korean Society

Abstract

The studies concerning the role of Confucianism in East Asian countries, including South Korea, predominantly concern the specific aspects of either ancient or modern forms of Confucianism in Korean Peninsula, the time frames tending to be analyzed exclusively. The goal of this paper is to prove the existence of significant parallels and derivative connections between the economic, political, cultural and social traits of the contemporary Republic of Korea the specific aspects of life during Confucianism-influenced Joseon period and; it aims to achieve this goal through the contrastive perspective, taking into account the factors of temporal development (from Joseon period to the modernity) and spatial divisions (such as work, education and family). The formalized rules of social conduct deriving from the Confucian roots in the XIVth–XIXth century gradually became the way of life in the modern South Korea, making the ancient origins of this nation apparent.

Keywords: Korea, Confucianism, Joseon, sociology, philosophy

1. Introduction – sociological basis behind the collective thinking and the reception of ideologies

1.1. The structure of modern East Asian societies as compared to the Europocentric traditions

Most of the sociopolitical systems of the modern countries within the so-called sphere of influence of sinophone culture are based on the principles of capitalism and free trade, even the People's Republic of China, which has adopted Marxism as its official ideology.

Indeed, it is difficult to use the popular term of "democracy" while taking the individual traits of East Asian countries. The *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought* describes social democracy as a system in which combat of injustice and social inequality is the norm[1]. Despite having the officially adopted the modern doctrine of democratic capitalism, such countries as Republic of Korea or Japan accommodate traditional social systems in which group harmony and interpersonal cooperation are universally accepted values. However, the reason for this does not lie in the western thought of democratic politics, but instead, in the ethical and philosophical system of Confucianism. Regardless of the officially proclaimed national course – democratic capitalism or state-governed communism – the influence of Confucianism has been steadily rising since its dawn over 2500 years ago. Shaun O'Dwyer points out, however, that the democratic aim of providing equal rights and liberties to individuals is meant as a step for building a harmonious society[2]. In spite of the popular claim that Confucianism judges the people on the basis of their identity rather than their actions, I believe that there is still much room for personal freedom in Confucian state, as the actions of the individual are his or her primary means of development[3]. Thus, it is easy to prove that the modern sociopolitical ideologies such as democracy and the ancient ethical systems are not mutually exclusive – which certainly proves true in the case of East Asia, where the ideology advocating group harmony and prosperity – Confucianism – is a leading philosophical system governing social interactions, including the spheres of traditional religion, politics and economy. Due to fact, that Confucianism influences the entirety of social life in East Asia to a varying degree term "Confucianism" should be analyzed and interpreted according to the specific sociological factors, with the emphasis set on the analysis of its connections with other value systems.

Its aspect as an omnipresent ethical order, despite its pragmatic nature, is highly compatible with modern-day religions, of which Se-Woong Koo makes a note in his article on the religious preferences of contemporary South Koreans[4], who reportedly tend to choose personal religion on the utilitarian basis. Korean Peninsula is especially fascinating, since it has been popularly described by the general populace as well as by the academic scholars as the "most Confucian part of the world"[5], effectively utilizing ancient tradition for the purpose of national development.

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[1] Paul Barry Clarke and Joe Foweraker (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought*, Routledge, London and New York 2001, p. 813.

[2] Shaun O'Dwyer, *Democracy and Confucian Values*, "Philosophy East and West" 2003, Vol. 53, No. 1, pp. 39–63.

[3] Gilbert Rozman, *Can Confucianism Survive in an Age of Universalism and Globalisation?*, "Pacific Affairs" 2002, Vol. 75, No. 1 pp. 11–37.

[4] Se-Woong Koo, "Religions of Korea Yesterday and Today" (fall 2010), Online: http://iis-db.stanford.edu/docs/511/Korean_Religions.pdf (accessed 11 January 2012).

[5] Byong-Ik Koh, *Confucianism in Contemporary Korea*, in: Tu Wei-Ming (ed.), *Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity: Moral Education and Economic Culture in Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1996, p. 191.

1.2. Sociological thoughts on the reception of Confucianism in Korea

In the course of East Asian history, the countries which have adopted Confucian doctrine as the basis of their sociopolitical setting, have witnessed both positive and negative influences of this philosophy. Joseon-period Korea was no different in this regard, and the question remains whether the result of application of Neoconfucianism in the field of politics of Joseon was positive. On the one hand, the deep notion of conservatism had made the country underdeveloped in the wake of Japan's militarism and increasing presence of foreign forces in the Imperial China. However, as Gilbert writes[6], Confucian ideals promote familial lifestyle, strengthening of social bonds and creation of effective, nation-wide administration; these factors are important today as well, having contributed to the rapid pace of recovery and development of South Korea after World War II and Korean War, as opposed to the situation in Democratic People's Republic of Korea, where gradual departure from Confucianism to embrace the totalitarian system governed by the single party has driven the country into deep stagnation and poverty[7]. Hong Sah-Myung, despite having doubts regarding conservative nature of Confucianism, reaches the same conclusions, with emphasis set on the system of corporate Chaebol, largely based on the Confucian idea of family's structure, which in his eyes raises the organizational level of the company[8]. The ties of modern Republic of Korea with the old Joseon are certainly very deep, similarly to the case of China and Japan's medieval states – especially Qing Dynasty and Tokugawa shogunate, which had cultural and social dynamics similar to those of the Joseon, and have developed roughly in the same time frame. For instance, the basic linguistic rules of reference and deference, which are present in Korean language in the use of distinct speech styles, are derived from the basic Confucian idea of proper relationships – between ruler and minister, father and son and husband and wife. In the past, the central government made deep efforts to promote this ideology among the rural population. Examples include creation of community compacts in villages for the purpose of Confucian education and creation of social networks[9]. However, it is important to note that during the late Joseon period and the Japanese occupation, there were visible tendencies exhibited by both indigenous nationalists and Japanese occupational government, aiming to discredit Confucian thought as sinocentric and reactive, a primary factor contributing to the fall of country's independence[10]. The same notions were shown during the authoritarian, nationalist rule of general Park Chung-

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[6] G. Rozman, op. cit., pp. 11–37.

[7] Joanna Rurarz, *Historia Korei*, Wydawnictwo Akademickie Dialog, Warszawa 2005, pp. 400–403.

[8] Sah-Myung Hong, *Korea and the World*, HUFS Press, Seoul 2008, pp. 235–236.

[9] Martina Deuchler, *The Practice of Confucianism: Ritual and Order in Choson Dynasty Korea*, in: Benjamin E. Elman, John B. Duncan, Herman Ooms (ed.), *Rethinking Confucianism: Past and Present in China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam*, UCLA Asian Pacific Monograph Series, University of California, Los Angeles 2002, pp. 292–334.

[10] John B. Duncan, *Use of Confucianism in Modern Korea*, in: Benjamin E. Elman, John B. Duncan, Herman Ooms (ed.), *Rethinking Confucianism: Past and Present in China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam*, UCLA Asian Pacific Monograph Series, University of California, Los Angeles 2002, pp. 431–462.

Hee, when the second face-off with North Korea seemed imminent and Confucianism – in essence a philosophy of strictly Chinese origin – was viewed as inferior to indigenous Korean shamanism. On the other hand, many scholars, including Lew Seokchoon and Hahm Chai-Bong made, in the eyes of Seong Hwan Cha[11], the error of explaining the nature of Korean economy in terms of supposedly traditional values, which, according to them, permeated every aspect of public activity, consciously or unknowingly supporting authoritarian developmental notions shown by Park Chung-Hee and his followers; it is important to note, however, that the movements aiming to present Confucianism either in a negative way or to nationalize this philosophy were exhibited in the entire sinic sphere of influence – including Japan. Greater effort must be thus placed in the search for Confucianism's individual paths of development in East Asian countries, including Korea.

After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Confucianism – especially the metaphysically-inclined school of the Principle (chin. "Li") – came to be viewed as monotonous and conservative.

Shinto religion was embraced as the national ideology, and strongly connected with the Imperial rule. Abe Yoshio, quoted in Chai-Sik Chung's paper[12], writes that Japanese Confucianism – generally centered on more "empirical" school of Material Force (chin. Qi) was much more dynamic than the forms of this philosophy that were popular in China and Korea. It can be said that the first half of the XXth century was crucial in redefining Confucianism's role in East Asia, since it was a time when various doctrines – particularly the aforementioned socialism and democratic capitalism – were gaining popularity in the region. Chinese, Korean and Japanese, caught between traditionalist sentiments and the desire for industrialization and social modernization, gradually abandoned ritual application of their ancient metaphysical systems, while at the same time treasuring their ethnolinguistic heritage in their daily life mentality and interpersonal communication. March 1st Movement in Korea and state-inspired nationalism of Japan are directly connected to these transformation processes. Sor-Hoon Tan[13] makes note that it was primarily the failure of proponents of Confucianism to restitute the monarchy that caused the rapid development of modern political parties in China – nationalist Guomintang and Communist Party. In Korea, the fall of the Japanese regime at the end of the Second World War caused the inner tensions to explode in Korea, with society and subsequently the entire Peninsula to be divided, with foreign hegemonic powers having an important role in this process. Still, the South Korea, with its fascinating transfer from military dictatorship to an effective democracy has not stopped developing – in fact, the contemporary society of this country makes it a primary target in East Asia for gauging role of Confucianism and its compatibility with widely-perceived modernity.

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[11] Hwan Cha Seong, *Myth and Reality in the Discourse of Confucian Capitalism in Korea*, "Asian Survey" 2003, Vol. 43, No. 3, pp. 485–506.

[12] Abe Yoshio in: Chung Chai-Sik, *Between Principle and Situation: Contrasting Styles in the Japanese and Korean Traditions of Moral Culture*, "Philosophy East and West", 2006, Vol. 56, No. 2 , pp. 253–280.

[13] Tan Sor-Hoon, *Confucian Democracy as Pragmatic Experiment: Uniting Love of Learning and Love of Antiquity*, "Asian Philosophy" 2007, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 141–166.

2. The dynamic nature of the modern Confucian society of South Korea

2.1. The factor of Confucianism in the formation of Korean democracy

Qingjie James Wang in makes an observation, based on the writings of Ming-period Neo-Confucian scholar Wang Yangming (1472–1528) as well as on modern opinions of Joseph Needham and Tu Weiming, that the Confucian image of the universe and the individual is the organic one, prone to dynamic changes[14]. It may be said that just like the society is composed of constituent groups and groups in turn of individuals, the individual in turn is a sum of higher human values (usually associated with "Li") and the primal instincts (being either positive or negative, and thus commonly associated with "Qi"). Since the Joseon period, maintaining the sense of proper social conduct – which is thought to lead to the general social harmony – has been highly promoted by central governing institutions, as mentioned above regarding construction of community compacts. In modern times, this type of structural discipline has been enforced by both North and South Korean educational facilities, which doubled as places where, in essence, citizens devoted to the cause of the state were made to be created. In the words of Gilbert Rozman, both the modern education systems of South and North Korea as well as the state education of the Joseon period are viewed as the supreme universalistic achievement[15].

On the level of politics and education, the Confucian ideal of "the leader" and the "followers" are still being promoted, as evidenced by the research cited by Geir Helgesen in his book[16], according to which the populace is expected to idealize traditional image of king-teacher-father while at the same time expecting high moral qualities from the leader – the necessary factor of a strong community. This sense of belonging in a specific group – and to the nation – is not only one of the reasons for Korea's economic success, but also for its vibrant popular culture, encompassing such fields as "k-pop" and competitive gaming. While it may seem that Confucian culture lost its influence on popular culture in Korea due to Korean War and subsequent authoritarian militaristic period, this is not the case. The large-scale protests of the late 1980s which toppled the generals' rule (1963–1988) were predominantly inspired by disillusioned students, who resented the tight level of control on society and sought Confucian solution combined with democratic values as an alternative to authoritarianism[17].

The origin of the strong spirit and high level of competitiveness of South Korean students is also embodied in the tradition of national exams, the results of which are published publicly, encouraging competition for the purpose of academic recognition, and with it, hopefully, an official post or employment at one of the Chaebol conglomerates. This type of motivation was actually advised by Confucius himself: according to his

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[14] Qingjie James Wang, *Genealogical Self and a Confucian Way of Self-Making*, "International Philosophical Quarterly" 2002, Vol. 42, No. 1 Issue 165, pp. 93–112.

[15] G. Rozman, op. cit., pp. 11–37.

[16] Geir Helgesen, *Democracy and Authority in Korea*, Curzon, London 1998, pp. 248–250.

[17] J. Rurarz, op. cit., pp. 385–389.

words, there is both a great happiness and satisfaction in constant studies[18]. However, regardless of this moralistic commandment, generally speaking, ancient and contemporary Koreans desired primarily not personal fulfillment from learning, but social recognition, and – especially in modern South Korea – economic advantages. However, this seemingly extreme type of education has a tint of tradition as well – in Joseon, while the several restrictions placed by the government essentially favoured members of the highest social class – called *Yangban* – when it concerned participation in the official exams and advancing in the ladder of administration, there were several irregularities and either a blatant disregard of the rules or clever manipulation of them. Yong-Ho Ch'oe gives numerous examples of peasants, sons of concubines or even artisans and merchants – occupations of the low status in the eyes of Confucius – employing various legal or morally dubious actions in order to gain admission to the official exam[19]. Reliance on the interpersonal bonds is very common in these situations; aside of the aforementioned extensive financial and emotional support by the closest family, forming of groups of mutual academic help by close friends is popular, which may serve as yet another example of presence of Confucian values regarding social contact in daily life.

2.2. The personal level of Confucian life in modern South Korea

The unwritten rules of support within groups of relatives and acquaintances extend to the domain of politics as well. However, the potential problem with the Confucian system of social relations may lie in such problems in politics and economy, as nepotism. However, while it was mentioned that South Korean education facilities promote emotional and ethical development of students as part of the usual curriculum, Geir Helgesen[20] notes, that in the process of individual growth, schoolmates and family have a much higher, more personalized and less structural influence. This is in accordance with the postulates of Confucius, who advocated building of interpersonal ties as a means of emotional development of the individual; in fact, this type of philosophy may act as a foil to the many issues of contemporary democratic systems[21], such as alienation of the governments from the real affairs of the people. This communitarian attitude is, in every single one of its aspects, highly regulated by the traditional ethnolinguistic rules, directly connected to the all-encompassing trait of the "virtue" – the term that forms the core basis of Confucian doctrine. In fact though, "virtue" is not a word easy to ascribe the meaning when one analyzes it in the context of sinophone culture. From the entry in the "Illustrated Encyclopedia of Confucianism" one may infer that the "virtue" (called

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[18] Confucius, *Analects*, Book 1 Chapter 1, Penguin Classics, 1998.

[19] Yong-Ho Ch'oe, *Commoners in Early Yi Dynasty Civil Examinations: An Aspect of Korean Social Structure, 1392–1600*, "The Journal of Asian Studies" August 1974, 33, pp. 611–631.

[20] G. Helgesen, op. cit.

[21] Henry Rosemont Jr, *Whose Democracy? Which Rights? A Confucian Critique of Modern Western Liberalism*, in: Kwong Ioi Shun, David B. Wong, *Confucian Ethics – A Comparative Study of Self, Autonomy and Community*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, pp. 54–57.

"Te" in classic Chinese) is a manifestation of the principle of heaven, inherently present in every sentient being. "Li" (the ritual conduct) is one of the key aspects of "Te" in human society. Russell Arben Fox[22] gradually approaches the conclusion, according to which the Master envisioned society governed by the interpersonal moral control and the sense of shame present in every individual, rather than by the set of harsh, formalized laws. In this regard, South Korea may very well fit Confucius' image of the ideal country and society. Despite being one of the few democratic countries which still endorse capital punishment, it may be said that the homicide rate[23], as well as the low rate of general crime which may stem from the aforementioned system of communitarian control, and not from the primal fear of the legal action. In his article, Joseph Chan makes several observations regarding placement of the individual within society[24], and the qualifications one should possess in order to be conscious of his or her surroundings. In the subject "Reflective Engagement", Chan makes an observation that the existence of any functional social system results from individual's inner deliberation. Thus, it may be said that Korean society being communitarian in nature does not equal being anti-individualistic. Instead, every citizen of the Republic of Korea knows that, while he or she has personal freedom of choosing a course in life, there are several traditionally perceived authorities one should always respect to maintain both personal and group harmony. Max Weber has distinguished three types of authority – charismatic, traditional and bureaucratic, the second and third of which came to have the most functional role in contemporary South Korea. Family – commonly labeled as the primary stage of development of person's social instincts – is certainly the most basic traditional structure in Korea's society, fitting the traits of community that were described above, as each member of the family – regardless of being the father of the youngest daughter – is from the early age educated in and made to accept traditionally-regarded roles and modes of behaviour – most importantly, respect for the elderly[25] and awareness of both personal and family's sense of honor. This also includes the instinct of growth and education as the means of proving one's capability to the family and eventually, to the entire nation. Utilitarian attitude is therefore traditionally sanctioned in Korea by the obligations one may have for family members and all possible groups one belongs to. These obligations, of a highly ritualistic nature, are naturally more visible on the personal level in the rural communities, which sadly diminished as a result of South Korean government's developmental policy[26].

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[22] Russell Arben Fox. *Confucian and Communitarian Responses to Liberal Democracy*, "The Review of Politics" 1997, 59, pp. 561–592.

[23] "Suicide Rates per 100,000 by country, year and sex", Online: http://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide_rates/en/, accessed 4 January 2012.

[24] Joseph Chan, *Moral Autonomy, Civil Liberties and Confucianism*, "Philosophy East and West" 2002, Vol. 52, No. 3, pp. 281–310.

[25] Kyung-Sup Chang, *South Korea under compressed modernity – Familial political economy in transition*, Routledge, London-New York 2010.

[26] R. Lewis Lancaster and K. Richard Payne (ed.), *Religion and Society in Contemporary Korea* (Korea Research Monograph 24), Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California 1997.

Regardless, in all forms of relationships other than family, the shared experience is the most important factor shaping the whole process of Confucian interpersonal communication, which, unlike the western model of social lifestyle (focused on the direct delivery of clear message) deeply involves such elements as emotion and interpretation of the meaning. June Ock Yum also notes[27] the crucial role of group intermediaries in East Asian Societies. The existence of this largely informal, yet highly intricate social function may be the primary reason of Korean people seeking ties with various groups, which will give them clear advantage in job-seeking or applying at an university.

The social obligations stemming from the Confucian methodology of interpersonal encounters also include the mutual support family's members should give each other in times of hardships. This attitude is clearly visible during the aforementioned periods of intensive studying, when the parents are not only willing to use extensive funds in order to ensure their children's professional success, but also frequently pray for their well-being and fulfillment of their plans. These, highly emotional prayers[28] are derived either from Buddhism or one of the Christian denominations, as the Confucian cult of ancestors is mostly highly pragmatic, regulated by traditional rules and devoid of the metaphysical ecstasy many religions present, and even the primary objects of household ancestral cult – the spiritual tablets – are said to be devoid of an actual spirit, but are rather a cultural memento of ancestors' heritage[29].

The aspect of Confucian philosophy which propagates emotion control may be another reason for modern Koreans' increasing practice of choosing a specific form of religious cult while adhering to the traditional rules of social conduct. Additionally, as Seong Hwan Cha suggests[30], the important role of the pragmatic aspect of Confucian doctrine, aimed both at the respect for the tradition and the endless striving for individual and group development may be parallel to – and yet fundamentally different – to the effect western Protestant cultural heritage had on the development of Capitalism – and, in my eyes – the entire basis for the modern western society. In contemporary South Korea, for instance, shamanistic, ecstatic forms of cult are still highly popular – whether it concerns shamans themselves as the conductors of this ancient rural religion or the general populace, which frequently consults spiritual mediums in any specific, often business-related[31]. In this way, indigenous shamanism presents to Koreans an alternative to highly-strung rules of day-to-day Confucian communication. Despite the adherence to the rules of filial respect, there are many elderly Koreans who are disadvantaged. One reason for their

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[27] Ock June Yum, *The Impact of Confucianism on Interpersonal Relationships and Communication Patterns in East Asia*, in: Communication Monographs, Vol. 55, No. 4, pp. 374–388, Dec 1988.

[28] *Parents Pray, Jets Grounded for Korea College Exam*, Reuters Online: http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/11/09/us-korea-exam-odd-idUSTRE7A849U20111109, accessed 12 January 2012.Reuters 2011.

[29] Rodney E. Taylor Ph.D and Howard Y.F. Choy, Ph.D., *Illustrated Encyclopedia of Confucianism*, The Rosen Publishing Group, New York 2005.

[30] Hwan Cha Seong, op. cit.

[31] Circumstances: Laurel Kendall, *Shamans, Nostalgias and the IMF*, University of Hawai'i Press 2009, pp. 137–139.

problems is that many of them, due to growing up in a wartime conditions of the first half of the XXth century, did not have an opportunity for professional education. With time, the discrepancies have grown between them and the younger generations, who – educated at the academic facilities and grown up in cities – gained clear advantage at the job market. Still, it is noticeable that the seniors – continuously unemployed due to personal circumstances, or the company retirees – seek new job possibilities at the "silver job fairs". Since the traditional model of familial support for the older members is not always applied by their children or grandchildren, and accounting for the low number of the retirees covered by the government pension system, it is understandable for the elderly to seek further means of financial support[32]. This situation of the older generations, stemming from the rapidly changing structure of South Korean family and the economy of this country, is in stark contrast with the traditionally inscribed rule of respect for the elders, and the father-teacher-king chain of positions – the respect for which lied in the center of Joseon's Confucian tradition.

3. Society of modern Republic of Korea and its Confucian Joseon roots – traits inherited and transformed in modernity

3.1. The pre-modern roots of Korean society – Joseon period

The transformation of the extended family system into the modern social setting of nuclear families did not mark the end of Confucian doctrine's dominance in Korea, but nevertheless signified an important transition – a gradual shift to a liberal mentality, as opposed to the ancient way of tightly-knit communities. As Kim Sungmoon[33] makes note of, Mencius – the significant successor of Confucius – placed stress on the family bonds, especially on the respect and servitude for the elder ones. In fact, what the ancient philosopher proclaimed, was the precedence of the family over the affairs of the state. In the modern China, Japan and Korea, the country is commonly considered to be a set of families – unlike a popular definition of a country in the western intellectual tradition, which is a set of individuals. This prominence of the hereditary familial structures used to encompass the entirety of the Korean society and all matters concerning it may have been equated with the customary law in the modern meaning of this term, although the issue of the origins of this type of tradition in Korea's culture – and whether or not it can be considered a law – is a topic of debate[34]. The privileged ones – the traditional aristocracy and the scholars-officials, were both the controllers and members of this

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[32] *In South Korea, Retirement Can Be Elusive*, "New York Times" Online: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/13/world/asia/13silver.html, accessed 28 December 2011.

[33] Kim Sungmoon, Filiality, *Compassion and Confucian Democracy*, "Asian Philosophy" 2008, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 279–298.

[34] Kim Marie Seong-Hak, *Law and Custom under the Chosŏn Dynasty and Colonial Korea: A Comparative Perspective*, "The Journal of Asian Studies" 2007, Vol. 66, No. 4, pp. 1067–1097.

system, as Martina Deuchler describes it extensively[35], particularly meaning the influential Department of Rites, which, being composed of educated Confucian scholars, decided on such matters as inheritance, ancestry rituals and marriage affairs of individual families. However, while the Joseon-period Korea is frequently interpreted to have been under the rule of the royal family and the nobility, there were periods of time when the commoners and their families were considered an important and influential component of the country. While Yi Tae-Jin[36] analyzes the reformatory tendencies of XVIIIth century scholars of Joseon, he makes a remark regarding the origins of the contemporary word gukga (state, kor. 국가), which is in fact composed of the two parts – guk (institution, kor. 국) and, most importantly, ga (kor. 가), which means the family (literally "house", which brings further connections with the hereditary structure of Korean society). As an interesting paradox, one may mention the issue of higher education during Joseon period and the nature of occupations taken by the Yangban and Chungin classes. The latter group, composed of the "outsiders", such as those who lost the title of Yangban or were the descendants of the concubines[37], typically took highly practical jobs such as accountancy, translator linguistics or geographic planning. The former, despite typically having received education in the sociological thought of the ancient Chinese Confucianists, had no clear influence on the matters of the country and its society. While the word "Yangban" ("both sides", kor. 양반) implies classification of "Munban" ("literati", kor. 문반) and "Muban" ("military officials", kor. 무반) as the single social entity having a decried set of official functions, aside of ambiguous permission for conducting of Confucian ideals[38], those who passed the examinations of the highest level were eventually caught up in the royal scandals and fights between political factions. The various institutions, such as the aforementioned Ministry of Rites, were in fact the guardians of propriety among the people, and the proponents of the popular School of Rites, which stood in contrast to the diminishing role of the Legalist School. Tradition was the main component of the official rules, and thus the few codexes made in the eve of the Joseon period gradually lost their influence, except for the creation of the hyangyak (village contracts), which formalized the local administration in the rural regions and the "proper" relationships between individuals and their families[39]. This comparison of the practical role of Yangban and Chungin resembles, in my opinion, the life of the employees of the modern South Korean conglomerates (who are, as previously mentioned, usually the graduates of the top universities), whose office work generally has an unknown degree of, if not minimal effect on the well-being on the company and their country. Ironically, the "low" self-

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[35] M. Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1992, pp. 290–292.

[36] Tae-Jin Yi (2007), *Why Yangban Confucian Culture has been Denounced*, *The Dynamics of Confucianism and Modernization in Korean History*, East Asia Program Cornell University, Ithaca, New York 2007.

[37] Joe J. Wanne J, *Traditional Korea – a Cultural History*, Hollym, Seoul 1997.

[38] Tae-Jin Yi, op. cit.

[39] Key P. Yang and Gregory Henderson Gregory, *An Outline History of Korean Confucianism: Part II: The Schools of Yi Confucianism*, "The Journal of Asian Studies" 1959, Vol. 18, No. 2, pp. 259–276.

employment and the work independent of the Chaebol (such as the real estate agencies, private medical clinics, or small restaurants), is more visible in the daily life of the country than the isolated activities of the Chaebol employees. Furthermore, in the past, the mobility of Koreans across their country was limited, partly due to the authoritarian nature of the state, technical difficulties, but also because of the fact that the individuals were bound to their communities in pragmatic and ritual sense.

With the advent of the free market and the technological advancement, the individual's constrains gradually diminished, contributing to dissolution of the village compacts and the system of the extended families. During the rule of Yi dynasty, even the scholar-officials usually travelled on the basis of the official decrees. In the modern South Korea, Chaebol administration promotes attachment to the company among all employees, but even without that, many of those who start the work at a Chaebol commit themselves to this specific company until they retire. These employees are hopeful for an advance in the company's hierarchy, as the privileges the higher position grants are tantamount to discharge one's responsibilities, as Sor-Hoon Tan[40] concludes basing on Confucius' own thoughts. Ironically, despite being a privileged social class with aristocratic traits (derived from the Silla's heritage), the Yangban were severely limited by their own code of conduct, family traditions and responsibilities stemming from their relation to the ruling spheres[41]. Therefore, a key question must be answered – what are the reasons for the high level of acceptance of the seemingly constraining rules of Confucian heritage among the Korean people? Firstly, it is important to see that the differences between the sociopolitical setting and bureaucracy of Joseon and the reality of the modern Republic of Korea are more numerous than the proponents of the so-called "Confucian Capitalism" say. Seong Hwan Cha[42] raises valid points regarding this issue, furthermore implying that the attempts of many modern scholars to view the modern social, political and economic dimensions of South Korea as the syntheses of indigenous Neoconfucian thought and imported sociological ideas of the West are oversimplifications. In my eyes, the key to understand the role of traditional philosophies and their compatibility with the Western scientific systems lies in the individual reinterpretation of these two distinctive heritages, as well as in the reexamination of the crucial stage of history – the first half of the XXth century, when East Asia's and Korea's image shifted from feudality into pre-modernity.

3.2. Struggle for the preservation of national identity

The time of rapid socioeconomic development of Korea in the second half of XIXth century was forced by the so-called "Kabo Reforms", which were in turn heavily influenced by the political plots of the Japanese government. They changed the legal

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[40] Sor-Hoon Tan, op. cit.

[41] J. Rurarz, op. cit., pp. 220–236

[42] Hwan Cha Seong, op. cit.

structure of politics, such as the separation of the royal court, the government, and of the civil and judicial matters. The subsequent developments included the abolition of slavery and the official dissolution of privileges of the Yangban, as well as the elimination of their social distinguishment[43]. The latter change spelled the beginning of the end of the formalized, Confucian social order on Korean Peninsula. The traditional constraints of the Korean people were lifted as the weak-minded, penultimate monarch of the Yi dynasty – king Gojong (1852–1919) – has gradually succumbed to the will of the imperial Japan, which sought to dominate the political affairs and the economic potential of Korea in the time of the rivalry between itself and the other hegemonic states, particularly Russia. Despite the best efforts aimed at preservation of the independence of Korea (such as the proclamation of "Korean Empire" in 1897), the country's political and military potential was too low to present any real resistance against the Japanese. As its sovereignty diminished, the resident-general Ito Hirobumi ordered the investigation of Korea's extant traditions and regional customs with the purpose of codification of these traditional practices. This unprecedented legal and academic work was meant to create a temporary placeholder for an eventual modern law to be applied in Korea by the Japanese. Regardless, as Marie Seong-Hak Kim[44] writes, the collections of these traditions has proved useful not only for the subsequent occupational bureaucratic administration of Korea, but also provided a highly valuable record of the old Korea for the historians. They came to be remembered by the people of Korea and may have influenced the large-scale protests of the year 1919, which were directly caused by the Versailles tractate and the death of Gojong.

While the Korean movement of national renovation sprouted various political organizations and facilities worldwide – particularly in Paris and Shanghai[45] – the cultural activity within the formally occupied (1910–1945) country in fact flourished. As Adrian Buzo[46] makes note of, this sustainment of the national heritage was also due to the economic factor of Japan directing the entirety of Korea's resources to Japanese markets. The invaders tended to describe themselves as the educators of the "backward" Koreans, and this notion gained acceptance of such countries as the United States, which in turn made it difficult for the independence movement to effectively operate[47]. Nevertheless, during this time, the traditions of Korea could be embraced by the entirety of its populace, as the Japanese administration permitted printing of newspapers and other literary materials (albeit heavily censored in many cases) written in the native Korean alphabet. Hangul was recognized as the carrier of Korean national identity, with which the various historical

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[43] Michael J. Seth, *A History of Korea – From Antiquity to the Present*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers inc, Plymouth 2011, p. 247.

[44] Kim Marie Seong-Hak, op. cit.

[45] J. Rurarz, op. cit., p. 333.

[46] Adrian Buzo, *The Making of Modern Korea*, Taylor & Francis, Oxford 2007, p. 24.

[47] Ibid.

and linguistic movements were initiated – "Chindan Society (1934)" in the former case, and "Korean Language Research Society (1921)" in the latter[48].

Paradoxically, under the process of forceful japanization, the native form of Neoconfucianism ceased to be the exclusive domain of the Yangban. Instead, despite the downfall of the Sowon schools and increasing prominence of the public education facilities organized by the Japanese government and the earlier, significant initiatives of the Christian missionaries[49], the awareness of the country's traditional heritage, culture of Joseon and the earlier Korean states was rising due to the cultural leniency under the rule of governor Minoru Saito. This included the educational development of the rural areas, with the traditional village schools "Sodang" essentially replacing the Sowon system. It is important to note, though, that the former Confucian scholar-officials and the members of the royal Yi family were at least partially recognized, and some members of these groups were granted special privileges, titles and age grants[50]. Furthermore, the traditional model of Korean family survived, as did the masculine and patriarchal nature of the Confucian order[51]. These factors had contributed to the unification of the former Korean social classes and have gradually caused the development of the nationalist movement, which sought to lead the nation with the values it perceived as traditionally indigenous. However, this uniform aspect of Korean society was not completely compatible with the aims of the formal independence organizations, which desired funds and political support of the powerful states of the time, such as the Soviet Union or Western-European countries. As the result of this, foreign doctrines – capitalism and socialism – appeared on the Peninsula, effectively dividing the independence movements. One may reach the conclusion that the mixture of bureaucracy and militarism affected the mentality of Koreans and their administration, by providing a basis for creation of post-World War II industrial and political setting of both North and South Korea. Despite the hatred most of the nation felt for the Japanese governor-generals, much of their infrastructure was made use of after the occupation, including the formation of the Chaebol conglomerate system. Practice of Confucian ideology and tradition was also perceived as the credible form of opposition against japanization, which in the late 1930's took such forms as aggressive spreading of Shinto beliefs, restricting the public use of Korean language and forcing native Koreans to adopt Japanese names[52]. The linguistic structures of Korean language and its Confucian basis survived against all odds, and not even closing down of all official newspapers written in Korean (in 1940) could destroy the patriotic spirit of Koreans. Unfortunately, the time after the liberation proved that the legacy of Confucian tradition

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48 M.J. Seth, op. cit., p. 295.

49 S.M. Hong, op. cit., p. 165.

50 Bernard Reich, Mark Peterson, Phillip Margulies, *A Brief History of Korea*, Infobase Publishing, New York 2010, p. 160.

51 A. Buzo, op. cit., p. 27.

52 Andrea Matles Savada, William Shaw (ed.), *South Korea: A Country Study*, GPO for the Library of Congress, Washington 1990, *Korea Under Japanese Rule*, Online: http://countrystudies.us/south-korea/7.htm, (accessed 1February 2012).

and the national heritage of the past can easily be treated as the instrument of political warfare. The factions born in this time period proved incompatible of cooperation, and the two of them – the socialists and right-winged capitalists – have indirectly caused Korean War of 1950–1953.

3.3. The basic role of Confucianism in North and South Korea in the second half of XXth century

The Korean War and the creation of the individual countries of Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea marked the beginning of an age of the military and cultural confrontation on the Peninsula. Confucianism started to be viewed in a separate way, and both Kim Il-Sung and Rhee Syngman sought to reconcile modern political ideas with Confucianism in their own separate ways. While Waldemar J. Dziak is wrong in his assumption on the supposedly "brutal" aspect of the Yi dynasty, he certainly makes a good explanation of the modern, oppressive nature of the DPRK's "juche" ("self-sufficiency") system[53]. There might indeed be some basis to the North Korean propaganda regarding the high role of the powerful state institutions in the daily life of the citizens, which is justified as "taking good care of the weak people"[54]. This type of official mindset reminds of the "teacher" function traditionally ascribed to monarchs. Hong Sah-Myung[55] has analyzed that the sociopolitical setting of North Korea is the result of social engineering through which the state attempts to create a society based on the fear, hatred and disdain directed at the "hostile" ideologies and countries. It is important to note that while the ruling Kim family and the dependent bureaucratic administration were the proponents of the "anti-feudal" view of the Joseon period, the Juche ideology was reminiscent of the "hermit kingdom" setting of the past. Secondly, despite the personality cult of Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-Il being foreign to the conservative Confucian tradition, the concept of the ruling "dynasty" has never been alien to Korean people. The nationalism of South Korea gave birth to similar notions. Rhee Syngman's perceived role as the uniting figure of the Peninsula and the militaristic bureaucracy created by him and his supporters was in fact equal to the authoritarian rule, even though the South Korean politicians and academic researchers of the 1950's and 1960's frequently described their country and society as "free", in contrast to the "marionette" DPRK[56].

In both countries the equivalents of the Yangban nobility were the founding fathers of the states, their families and co-workers, who typically received academic education in the Soviet Union or the United States; the rest of the society of typically deeply impoverished. This new form of meritocracy proposed their own visions of the development of an individual within the society, respectively influenced by Marxist and Western value systems. The political dimension of the North and South quickly alienated itself from the

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53 Waldemar J. Dziak, *Kim Ir Sen*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 2001, pp. 93–95.

54 Ibid., p. 94.

55 S.M. Hong, op. cit., pp. 191–193.

56 Tae-Hung Ha, *Guide to Korean Culture*, Yonsei University Press, Seoul 1978, p. 60.

general public, as the countries gradually became respectively totalitarian and militaristic authoritarian states. Despite the challenges of the post-war period and creation of the new political settings, Confucianism maintained its role as the primary way of life, and at present it is difficult to answer the question of the exact number of the "faithful" to the doctrine. Rather, one should analyze its influence on the specific areas of social activity within the country – economic, political, or cultural[57]. The Republic of Korea came to be ruled by the representatives of the military regime, who, despite their probable awareness of this aspect of their indigenous culture, heavily affected the education system of the country with their 군인 ("soldier") mentality.

4. The official basis for the public images of South Korean Confucianism: Education and Politics

Exploitation of the image of the strong central government and the traditional model of the obedient subject, especially during the authoritarian rule of general Park Chung-Hee, factored in the development of the new state doctrine centered on industrialization[58]. In order to social engineer the loyal citizens capable of standing against the communist threat, the school education was made to resemble a military training, with students forced to train both their bodies and minds, with maintenance of proper interpersonal relationships and respect for the teachers, elderly people and the politicians being the focus. Their families are typically supportive of this model of education, enforcing diligent studying and respect for the teacher. They spend large sums of money on the development of their children, including various forms of preparation for exams, which sometimes include illegal activities in order for the child to achieve placement in a special study class, or creating strenuous plans for daily life, giving the student very little free time from the beginning of their education, since the course of career is typically planned several years in advance[59].

The teachers themselves were also subject to the specific restrictions, and some of them are still under the pressure of withdrawing expression of their personal opinions while conducting the official curriculum. As it is noted in the interview included in the book of Geir Helgesen[60], it is forbidden for teachers to speak their minds freely, as their official duty is teaching the students the values closely related to both the traditional Confucian ideology and the credo of the state. Helgesen thus makes a valid conclusion

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[57] G. Rozman, op. cit., pp. 11–37.

[58] Gary G. Hamilton and Nicole Woolsey Biggart, *Market, Culture, and Authority: A Comparative Analysis of Management and Organization in the Far East*, "American Journal of Sociology" 1988, Vol. 94, Supplement*: Organizations and Institutions:Sociological and Economic Approaches to the Analysis of Social Structure*, pp. S52–S94.

[59] *College Entrance Exam*, Korea 4 Expats Online: http://www.korea4expats.com/article-csat-korea.html accessed 20 December 2011.

[60] G. Helgesen, op. cit.

that the South Korean education system derives from the same cultural source as its North Korean equivalent. It is my opinion though that we can see one clear difference between the modern teachers in the two aforementioned countries, and the philosopher-teachers of Joseon – it is the freedom to speak their minds. While the historical records of that time include several instances of scholar-officials being punished for standing in opposition to the state, one can see that these events were mostly caused by association with the wrong political clique. The figure of the teacher held a special status in that time, and was held in great esteem by the entire society, resulting in the lively academic environment of the second half of the Joseon period. The teachers of modern South Korea, although still largely respected, in fact do not have this type of freedom. As a consequence, the traditional role of the teacher as an equal to the ruler and father becomes greatly lessened. The pedagogue seems to be akin to a marionette to the state in this manipulated social setting, while the students themselves are taught the curriculum directly for the purpose of exams, and the fear for the teacher combined with the policy of not questioning the teacher's words. From the philosophical point of view, this system, while effective in creation of good, skilled citizens, is completely devoid of "Jen" (humaneness), with "Li" (the proper conduct) becoming empty[61]. Furthermore, Gilbert Rozman[62] citing words of academic scholars concludes, that the original reason for the initial underdevelopment of Korea compared to the neighbouring countries is the rigidity of Korean Confucianism and the higher level of social engineering, which in contemporary South Korea may bring further challenges at de-confucianization and possibly the adoption of other value systems[63].

The aforementioned vision of the ideal politician is sometimes embodied in public acts of highly enthusiastic performance of the political candidates and their teams, aiming for the creation of deeper connection with emotions of the people and strengthening of bonds between the politicians and people from their regions (the regional factor is deeply meaningful in Korean tradition; this topic is extensively examined by Choi Joon-Sik[64], by these means, as music is not only one of the most popular mediums in the world, but also, according to Confucius, should be accompanied by the most human virtues[65]. Furthermore, it is common in modern South Korea for the politicians to lose control of their emotions, which may be seen as a side-effect of the restrictive rules of interpersonal contact and the stress of their work. The rivalry between groups of interests – resembling the faction wars of Joseon – is also an cardinal factor defining the politics of South

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61 R.E. Taylor & H.Y.F. Choy, op. cit., pp. 310–313.

62 G. Rozman, op. cit., pp. 11–37.

63 Haejoang Cho, *Male Dominance and Mother Power: The Two Sides of Confucian Patriarchy*, in: Slote and DeVos (eds.), *Confucianism and the Family*, pp. 195–196; M. Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1992, pp. 290–292.; James B. Palais, (ed.), *Confucian Statecraft and Korean Institutions*, University of Washington Press, Seattle 1996, pp. 966–984.

64 Joon-Sik Choi, *Folk-Religion, the customs in Korea*, Ewha Womans University Press 2005.

65 Confucius, *Analects*, Book 3, Chapter 3.

Korea[66]. This competition is an indirect result of the Confucian promotion of personal development and growth as a means of gaining social recognition. Formation of guilds by online gamers and extensive use of internet communities may be stemming from both this nature of Koreans and their possible frustration at the numerous limitations present in real-life communication.

5. Factors of age, experience, heredity and authority in South Korean private and corporate environments

Through their conscience of their national heritage, patriotism and the advent of the new communication technologies, it was typically the generation of Koreans growing up in the 1990s – the descendants of the aforementioned proponents of the anti-authoritarian protests – that eventually popularized western pop-culture in Korea. Their descendants were the ones who indirectly caused the so-called "Korean Wave", influencing the popularisation of Korean TV drama and k-pop worldwide. It must be noted, however, that "pop-culture" does not mean complete separation from the traditional heritage of the country – in fact numerous TV series deal with the history of Joseon period and Confucianism-based society. Another link to the posterity lies in the sharply competitive mentality of Koreans. Whether it is seeking the best grades possible in a school class or striving to become a master of an online game (such as for example the "Starcraft"), the citizens have always sought higher social status stemming from the achievements. The young generation of Koreans, despite their acceptance of the Confucian doctrine in their daily life, are most likely not aware of the full degree of influence Confucianism exerts on their country, or, as describes it[67], are suspicious of the "official" forms of the doctrine, connecting it with conservative and weak government, and, in their personal lives, they tend to embrace the alternatives the IT technologies present. It may very well be that, as they become employees of Chaebol, the young Koreans harbor deeper feelings towards their perceived duty for the entire nation than for the main controlling family of the company. In the words of Hamilton and Biggart[68], unlike the similar Zaibatsu structures of Japan, the level of control of the state over the central holding company is much higher, and thus, the distrust Koreans feel for the influence of the state in their daily lives may be justified.

A careful analyst may reach the conclusion, that despite the full recognition of global market system as well as American and European value systems, traditional Confucian mentality of South Korean daily life deeply influences new generations' paths of career. Even the penultimate stage of personal development – as per common Korean sentiment – the employment at one of the conglomerates, is subject to the rules of social reference

[66] *Brawl Breaks Out in South Korean Parliament*, Huff Post World Online: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/07/22/brawl-breaks-out-in-south_n_242533.html, accessed February 15 2012.

[67] G. Rozman, op. cit., pp. 11–37.

[68] G.G. Hamilton & N.W. Biggart, op. cit., pp. S52–S94.

and deference. As Tan Soo Kee notes in his article[69], it is natural for the low-level employees of large companies not to have any real influence on the policy of the enterprise, and absolute acceptance of all decisions of the paternalistic figure of the director is enforced. In the 1960's and 1970's, it was common for Korean enterprises not to give their employees any substantial material or legal advantages, despite informal "care" the director ("father") and the high-ranking executives ("elder brothers") should extend to the rest of the firm ("females" and "younger siblings"). This patriarchal hierarchy, along with usually lifelong commitment of the employees to their job, is in essence a carbon-copy of Korean family structure, and the mindset shown by the members of both familial and corporate environments is motivated by the popular desire for the group harmony. The ones who are not successful enough or do not have sufficient familial support – crucial in the Confucianism, since it sets focus on the development of interpersonal relations – are prone to descend into stress, as Chang Kyung-Sup points out in his extensive study concerning elderly Koreans[70].

The vertical relationship between the political bureaucracy and the economic establishment in South Korea further distinguishes the socioeconomic reality of this East Asian country from the model of the typical enterprise of the West[71]. Strong bonds are an important factor in the entirety of Confucian doctrine, and in the case of Chaebol this element functions on the official level, being the primary means of gaining feeling of comfort and social accomplishment by the employees. The major difference between Japanese and Korean corporate environments is the much more developed aspect of hierarchy in the case of the latter[72], which may be the reason of the individual employees seeking bonds of friendship and mutual cooperation with each other on the basis of similar age and formal position, to compensate for the seemingly harsh attitude the company leaders may feel for the employees. The key component in creation of interpersonal bonds in Chaebol and all other aspects of Korean's life is called "jeong" (kor. 정), and, according to Christopher K. Chung and Samson Cho's opinion[73] is a term encompassing all types of emotion-based communication patterns in Korean society. It may be said that the emotion in Korean tradition is defined as an specific type of atmosphere pertaining not to single individual, but to the respective group and in the defined space. Therefore, types of "jeong" within the family and within the group of school friends are fundamentally different, and form a potential basis for the problems such as the aforementioned distrust between younger generations of Koreans and the South Korean political establishment.

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[69] Soo Kee Tan, *Influence of Confucianism on Korean Corporate Culture*, "Asian Profile" 2008, Vol. 36, No. 1 pp. 9–20.

[70] K.S. Chang, op. cit.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Jangho Lee, Thomas W. Roehl and Soonkyoo Choe, *What Makes Management Style Similar and Distinct across Borders? Growth, Experience and Culture in Korean and Japanese Firms*, "Journal of International Business Studies" 2000, Vol. 31, No. 4, pp. 631–652.

[73] Christopher K. Chung and Samson Cho, *Significance of "Jeong" in Korean Culture and Psychotherapy*, Harbor-UCLA Medical Center, online: http://www.prcp.org/publications/sig.pdf.

The maintenance of the interpersonal peace and harmony – which are called "kibun" (kor. 기분) – is the important value in Korean culture, sometimes leading to the indirect contact and social restraint[74], at times baffling the Westerner. Philosophically profound metaphysical elements of Neoconfucianism may be used to explain the social behaviour of Koreans, which Seong Hwan Cha[75] does, referring to the impersonal yet deity-like principle of the Supreme Ultimate and the idea of harmony between the Heaven (as perceived in the ethical and metaphysical traditions of China) and humanity. The desire for the social harmony gains thus a further, substantial justification in the form of tradition. Due to this traditional, Confucianism-connected set of values, the potential areas of conflict in modern South Korea are relatively sparse and predominantly contained within the sphere of public life, visible, for instance, during frequent strikes and organized protests. This form of public opposition is, as Jose Aleman analyzes[76], the important element shaping the state's democratic nature and basic employment-related rights. Furthermore, the respect for the elderly is still present, and both age and the competences have significant role in the process of communication, despite the aforementioned gradual dissolution of the system of extended families and the structures of rural communities. The younger generations, finding their own space within urban areas and being under influence of foreign value systems may depart from the economic and social interests of their parents and grandparents; nevertheless the respect for the elderly they were taught since childhood is not suppressed by the modernity. Similarly, the entire traditional Confucian aspect of Korean life is neither forgotten nor disregarded in the process of modernization.

6. Conclusions and the possible predictions for further research of the subject

This paper was an attempt at explanation of Confucianism's role in the process of formation of the modern states of Korean Peninsula, with the focus set on South Korea and its society. It shown the dynamics of Confucian doctrine, which should be interpreted not merely as the conservative ideology enforced by the Yi family in the past, but rather as an all-encompassing system, governing daily lives of South Koreans, in spite of the processes of modernization.

As the main purpose of Confucianism has been considered the harmonic transformation of an individual and society, the key element of this paper was to examine the developing role of this doctrine leading to the formation of the modern South Korean society, including such interconnected aspects of it as pop-culture, politics, education and corporate environments. It may be concluded that despite the rapid technological development occurring since the 1980's, no government of the Republic of Korea could depart from

[74] G. Helgesen, op. cit., pp. 251–253.

[75] Hwan Cha Seong, op. cit.

[76] Jose Aleman, *Protest and Democratic Consolidation: A Korean Perspective*, "International Journal of Korean Studies" 2005, Vol. IX, No. 1.

the Confucian traditions defined during the Joseon period, as, in fact, they became the way of life rather than a purely theoretical philosophy. The evolving image of South Korean family, the increasingly large role of the education system and Chaebol structures leave space for the further analysis of this subject. The young generations bring new momentum to the development of this country, indirectly causing changes of the state's political structure and the underlying rules of the economic conduct along with the evolving model of Korean family. Another crucial issue that should be raised in the research of the modern aspects of South Korean Confucianism is the factor of the individual as confronted with the collectivistic traditional mentality, and which of these should be the beacon of Korea's development. Furthermore, there is the case of the lack of clear distinguishing between Korean tradition and Confucian influence. While Confucianism has extensively shaped the reality of Korean Peninsula, it is erroneous to constantly ascribe Confucian origin to all forms of Korean tradition. This must be further examined, taking into account the role of Shamanism, Buddhism and other doctrines which took roots in Three Kingdoms, Goryo and Joseon periods, and which, along with the modern political, economic theories and western religious beliefs, still continue to both clash with and influence the image of the modern Confucianism in South Korea.