

Articles

# Confucian Values and Democracy in South Korea

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Arguments that particular cultures are permanent obstacles to development in one direction or another should be viewed with a certain skepticism... [G]reat historic cultural traditions, such as Islam and Confucianism, are highly complex bodies of ideas, beliefs, doctrines, assumptions, writings, and behavior patterns. Any major culture, including even Confucianism, has some elements that are compatible with democracy, just as both Protestantism and Catholicism have elements that are clearly undemocratic. Confucian democracy may be a contradiction in terms, but democracy in a Confucian society need not be. The question is: What elements in Islam and Confucianism are favorable to democracy, and how and under what circumstances can these supersede the undemocratic elements in those cultural traditions? (Huntington 1991, 310)

This study attempts to empirically examine the relationships between Confucian values and democracy that have been discussed speculatively in the main up to now. The central question of this research is whether Confucian values have any positive or negative impacts on democracy and argues that Confucian values comprise a positive attitude towards worldly affairs, a life-style of sustained discipline and self-cultivation, respect for authority, and familial collectivism.<sup>1</sup>

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1. This research focuses on Confucian values as a part of the "civil religion," or "the form of life" (Tu 1996; 2000b), regarded as one of the central cultural traditions in Korea and East Asia (Berger 1988; Jeong and Choe 2006; De Bary 1998; Hahm 1997; Helgesen 1998; Huntington 1996; Kihl 1994; Kim 1992; Koh 1996; Nosco 2008; Robinson 1991; Rozman 1991; Tu 1996; Weber 1951; Yang 1999). Our subject is not the words, texts, or practices of traditional Confucianism. I consider the role of Confucianism in contemporary Korean civic culture, the Confucian values that Koreans subscribe to in their daily lives. Even as institutionalized Confucianism declines and Western thought and lifestyles sweep across Asia, Confucian values still fundamentally shape East Asian habits of the heart across regions and ideologies. "Economic culture, family values, and merchant ethics in East Asia and in China ... have also expressed themselves in Confucian vocabulary" (Tu 2000b, 204). Confucianism remains an embedded cultural code in socialist China, decades after early twentieth-century May 4 Movements and Mao's Cultural Revolution sought to discredit it (De Bary 1998). Behind North Korea's Marxist-Leninist front is a Neo-Confucian idealism and emphasis on Confucian virtues such as

I argue that Confucianism does not necessarily thwart popular support for political democracy, but does impede support for democracy in social relations. The impact of Confucianism on democracy, I hypothesize, varies according to the presence of other social factors such as urban experience and religious belief. Some social groups can mix traditional and democratic norms with diminished internal conflict or do so more creatively than others. The present survey and discussion serves to verify these assumptions. Political democracy involves polyarchy which is defined by Dahl (1971) as comprising seven attributes—(1) elected officials; (2) free and fair elections; (3) inclusive suffrage; (4) the right to run for office; (5) freedom of expression; (6) alternative sources for information; and (7) associational autonomy (O'Donnell 1999). Whereas political democracy involves formal conditions of the institutionalized political processes mentioned above, democracy in social relations includes everyday practices of democracy in micro-social contexts within the family, school, and workplace, etc. Democracy in social relations involves individual and collective rights in various social relations such as between hospitals and patients, universities and students, professionals and clients, and parents and children (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986; see also Bobbio 1989).

Asian Pacific nations caught up in the worldwide sweep of the “third wave” of democratization had to grapple with the question of what particular forms democracy would assume in their unique regions. Authoritarian leaders no longer obstructed the long-sought transition to democracy, but intellectuals now confronted the task of developing actual, workable models of democracy (Bell et al. 1995; Bell 2000; Lee 1999; O'Dwyer 2003; Shin 2012; Wang 2008). Social scientists were reminded that their regions provided different political environments from the West for democracy and some concluded that democracy is more than an institution—that culture matters (Diamond 1994; 1999; Hsiung 1985; Inglehart 2000; Inglehart and Welzel 2003; Kihl 2005; Tamney 1996). In the ensuing debate as to the universality versus particularity of democracy, some argued that the West and Asia shared universal values for fostering democracy (Donnelly 1999; Inoue 1999; Lingle, 1996; Sen 1997),

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“benevolence, love, trust, obedience, respect, reciprocity between leader and the led” (Cumings 1997, 407-8). Even apparently Westernized South Korean workplaces are organized in part on the basis of Confucian kinship norms (Kim 1992).

while others claimed liberal democratic institutions had no place in Asia, given the existence of authoritarian “Asian values” (Lee 1998; see also Chua 1999; De Bary 1998; Hsiung 1985; Kausikan 1998; Zakaria 1994).

This research argues that the historical and cultural factors relevant to Korean democracy are embraced in what we call cultural tradition. Although democracy in non-Western societies involves importing a set of Western institutions and beliefs, obviously, as a cultural factor—and perhaps unlike science and technology—democracy is interpreted through preexisting cultural lenses. Just as E. P. Thompson’s (1966) study makes clear that English workers’ class consciousness derived from interpretations of new social realities based upon existing cultural tools, so too is the form democracy assumes shaped by tradition. More recent studies also suggest the persistence of traditional values in economic and political institutions (Fukuyama 1995a; Hamilton 1994; Inglehart and Baker 2000; Putnam 1993).<sup>2</sup>

This study supports the particularistic view of democracy by discovering social factors that help explain clear differences between democracy in Korea and the West. This does not mean that universal factors have no influence on Korean democracy or that Asian culture utterly trumps Western influence. However, distinguishing historical and cultural factors influence how democracy takes shape and blends in with more universal factors. As Tu Wei-ming (2000a, 265) says in support of the “dialogue of civilizations,”

The rise of “Confucian” East Asia...suggests that despite global trends defined primarily in economic and geopolitical terms, cultural traditions continue to exert powerful influences in the modernizing process. Although modernization originated from the West, East Asian modernization has already assumed cultural forms so significantly different from those in Western Europe and North America that, empirically, we must entertain alternatives to Western modernism. However, this does not indicate that Western modernism is being eroded, let alone replaced, by East Asian modernism.

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2. Fukuyama argues that a nation’s wealth is dependent on whether it has a heritage of high trust or not. Putnam finds in Italy a close relationship between the level of civil society attained over time and the performance of contemporary democratic institutions.

Current scholarly discourse on Asian values is of great relevance to the broader debate on the particularity of Asian culture (Lee 1998; see also Chua 1999; Bell 2006; De Bary 1998; Kausikan 1998; Zakaria 1994; Yi 2004b).<sup>3</sup> The importance of these debates on Asian values lies in the affirmation of the endurance of tradition. Tradition is a reality that critically determines how democracy will figure in the Asian route to modernity. However, the core of current debates threatens to serve authoritarian purposes (Bell 2000; Lingle 1996). Even Pye (1999, 140), who argues for the particularity of “Asian power,” warns against the tendency for the discourse to legitimize an authoritarianism that acclaims the collective good at the expense of human rights. Such warnings have not only a normative but also an empirical basis. The popular demand for democracy in the Philippines, Indonesia, Taiwan, and South Korea that exploded during the closing two decades of the twentieth century, brooked no authoritarian political institutions (Jeon 1999). Thus, recognizing Asian values as a working reality does not require valorizing them or championing authoritarianism.<sup>4</sup> In the following section, I elaborate on the debate on the relationship between Confucian values and democracy.

## Confucian Values and Democracy

Two conflicting perspectives on the relationship between the Confucian tradition and democracy have dominated discussions. One group of scholars

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3. Singapore is the current epicenter of discussion about Asian values (N.B. Lee Kuan Yew 1998; De Bary 1998). Domestically, Singapore has emphasized Asian values in a conservative attempt to preserve a distinct Asian identity in the face of cultural encroachments from multi-ethnic groups and Westernizing forces. This effort reflects its pride in having found a different road to modernization and exceptional economic prosperity in the midst of an economic crisis that felled most of Asia and beyond as the twentieth century closed. The politico-economic basis of the revered values is the blend of Fabian socialism with Confucian collectivism (Chong 2002; Chua 1999; Moody 1996). Supporters of Asian values attack Western individualism as the source of modernization's dark-side—guns, drugs, violent crime, vagrancy, unbecoming public behavior, extreme individualism, and family disintegration (Zakaria 1994). They place collectivist, public interests over the individual good and human rights which are so important in the West.

4. Being unique does not necessarily mean Asian values are authoritarian. Accordingly, this research attempts to wrest the debate from Lee Kuan Yew and similar scholars so as to include liberal perspectives.

(Ackerly 2005; Bell, Brown, Jayasuriya, and Jones 1995; De Bary 1998; Fox 1997; Fukuyama 1995b; Kang 1997; Lee 1999; Murthy 2000; Shils 1996; Yi 2004b) considers the two compatible, while a second considers Confucianism fundamentally authoritarian and thus irreconcilable with democracy (Gold 1996; Huntington 1991; King 1996; Lee 1998; Park and Shin 2006; Pye 1985). For example, Huntington (1991) dubs Confucian democracy an “oxymoron” because Confucianism values authority over liberty, responsibility over rights, and state power over human rights.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, other scholars believe Confucianism and democracy are compatible (Bell, Brown, Jayasuriya, and Jones 1995; De Bary 1998; Kang 1997; Murthy 2000; Shils 1996). These scholars point out the heritage of civil society and communitarianism as evidence of democratic elements in the Confucian tradition.<sup>6</sup>

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5. More mildly, Pye (1985) speaks of the obstacles paternalistic Confucian political culture poses for democracy. It demands that paternalistic leaders rule with benevolence and compassion, and that dependents respond with grateful obedience and conformity. “Distaste for open criticism of authority, fear of upsetting the unity of the community, and knowledge that any violation of the community’s rules of propriety will lead to ostracism, all combine to limit the appeal of Western democracy” (341). Pye believes that democracy in East Asia is not impossible, but will inevitably incorporate authoritarianism. As mentioned above, Lee Kuan Yew (1998) also stresses the authoritarian nature of Confucian collectivism. The difference between Lee on the one hand and Huntington and Pye on the other is that Lee valorizes authoritarianism while the latter are value neutral. More empirically oriented studies also consider Confucianism an obstacle to democratic political development (Gold 1996; King 1996). They find that the development of civil society in Taiwan involves eradicating all remaining elements of the “institutional Confucianism” that was discredited after the Qing dynasty.

6. Although he does not mention it explicitly, De Bary’s (1998) argument opposes Huntington’s (1991) contention that the Confucian tradition lacks autonomous institutions. De Bary suggests community pacts and community schools comprise an embryonic infrastructure of civil society in pre-modern China. These institutions were the material bases of communitarianism involving the Chinese version of liberal democratic values and human rights. Doubtful of the actual existence of civil society, Shils turns to the *idea* of civil society in Confucian thought. In his analysis of the *Analecets*, Shils locates the virtue of civil society in the Confucian concept of “civility.” Shils maintains that although Confucianism lacks the concept of civil society per se, Confucius offered a forerunner of the idea. Civility comprises more than etiquette and courtesy. It embraces concern for the common good, an “acceptance by the individual self-consciousness of the dictation of the collective self-consciousness in which the individual participates that makes him act toward others in his society with selfless solicitude” (Shils 1996, 43). He cites trustworthiness, respect, flexibility, breadth, and tolerance as the main components of civility, all of which Confucianism teaches. Neither Huntington nor Shils considers Confucian institutional arrangements democratic, but Shils insists that classical Confucian humanism emphasizes values espoused in modern Western concepts of civility and civil society (Tu 1996, 15).

Both supporters and critics of Confucian democracy mistakenly cast Asian values as a Parsonian monolithic system. They either downplay evident diversity in values, or categorically deny the persistence of Confucian values, confusing Confucianism's lack of dominance with its absence (Sen 1997; Kim 1997; Pye 1999) and failing to blend their favored universalistic approach with particularism (Donnelly 1999; Sen 1999). The empirical reality is that multiple values contend and blend with one another throughout Asia. For example, in South Korea, Western values—new middle class postmaterialism, Christianity, and liberal culture—coexist with traditional Confucian and Shamanic cultural practices (De Bary 1998). I find it therefore more useful to ask how, in fact, Confucian culture promotes and impedes democracy rather than to theorize about a single dominant dynamic of political culture. The outcome of Asian political development cannot *a priori* be assumed to be “illiberal democracy” or “soft authoritarianism.”

The literature on Confucianism and democracy, including on Asian values, in general fails to distinguish between political democracy and democracy in social relations. The distinction is particularly important in the study of East Asian democracy because Confucianism would appear less likely to conflict with the former than the latter. As mentioned above, the studies of Bell and his colleagues (1995) broaden the search for possible factors that affect support for democracy in East Asia. This study takes up this pursuit by searching for the unique sources for Korean attitudes towards political democracy.

## **Confucian Values and Political Democracy**

The current political situation in South Korea leads us to suspect a hidden relationship between “delegative democracy” and Confucian values. O'Donnell (1999), who coined the term, admits it is ill-defined. However, delegative democracy is a useful concept for considering the political situation in both South Korea and Latin America. It refers to a sort of democracy or polyarchy that differs from representative democracy. Rather than featuring institutionalization, the primacy of law, and negotiation and compromise among interest groups, delegative democracy grants its president all prerogatives and accountability. Cumings (1989) once described O'Donnell's discourse on bureaucratic authoritarianism as more relevant to South Korea and Argentina

than to any other Latin American country (see also Han 1988). Now that authoritarianism has been supplanted in those countries, they yet continue to follow similar trajectories: O'Donnell's analyses of delegative democracy equally fit post-authoritarian South Korea and Latin America:

Remember that the typical incumbent in a DD [delegative democracy] has won election by promising to save the country without much cost to anyone, yet soon gambles the fate of his government on policies that entail substantial costs for many parts of the population. This results in policymaking under conditions of despair: The shift from wide popularity to general vilification can be as rapid as it is dramatic. (O'Donnell 1999, 170)

Of special interest is the resemblance evident below between O'Donnell's depiction of delegative democracy and Pye's (1985) portrayal of Korean political culture.

The president is taken to be the embodiment of the nation and the main custodian and definer of its interests...The leader has to heal the nation by uniting its dispersed fragments into a harmonious whole...The president isolates himself from most political institutions and organized interests... (O'Donnell 1999, 164-65)

[T]he Koreans also believe that their difficulties can be traced to the inadequacies of the ultimate political authority, who should be able to handle all problems, as should the ideal father in the family...Traditional attitudes that favor a strong, domineering style of authority are still very much alive; (Pye 1985, 216)

These descriptions indicate how extended Confucian familism, or paternalism, might blend easily with a political system that bestows a father figure president—expected to be comparable to God—with complete power. That is, though Confucian values may not support representative democracy, they might support a delegative democracy, as it expresses paternalism politically (Yi 2004a; Park and Shin 2006). This idea, which I borrow from illiberal or communitarian democracy, suggests that liberalism is not the only backdrop to political democracy; it is replaceable.



## Confucian Values and Democracy in Social Relations

The relationship between Confucian values and democracy is more problematic when we move from the realm of macro political institutions to the everyday practice of democracy in social relations. Confucian values and democracy in social relations clash both in definition and historically. The Confucian stress on hierarchy in social relations directly conflicts with the non-hierarchical relations central to democracy in social relations. In the Confucian family, members are emotionally tied but unequal (Helgesen 1998; Sin 1999). Furthermore, in East and South East Asia, familial collectivism, the key to Confucianism, historically was experienced under authoritarian, hierarchical, political rule. Authoritarian regimes brooked no dissent, demanding that subjects stick to their own affairs (Bell 1995).<sup>7</sup> Politics, in other words, mirrored social relations—both were authoritarian and hierarchical.

However, as we argued above, because tradition is contingent, the negative impact of Confucian values on democracy in social relations might be mitigated or offset by other social forces such as urbanization, religion, and generation. In his work, Lucian Pye (1985, 216) observes the contradictory coexistence in Korean political culture of deference to authority and recognition of individual rights.

Korean culture includes contradictory views of the basis of legitimacy. Traditional attitudes that favor a strong, domineering style of authority are still very much alive; but highly educated Koreans also believe in democratic ideals and the obligation of authority to respond to popular sentiments.... Koreans create this problem for themselves by simultaneously wanting their leaders to be supermen and insisting, perhaps more than in any other Asian culture, that everyone has a right to assert his or her views and to be treated with respect.

Despite a heavily hierarchical legacy, Korean social dynamics value individual

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7. However, no intrinsic relationship appears to exist between familial collectivism and societal authoritarianism. American republicanism has featured both self-organization and family values. According to Habermas (1989), the emergence of intimate human relations in the “bourgeois family” was essential to the infrastructure of the public sphere.

rights and democratic norms. Thus, the empirical question is how, not whether, new trends affect tradition. This research believes they transform tradition. They blend it with Western trends and create hybrids, as, for instance, in Korean Christianity, which blends a worldly orientation with indigenous shamanism (Kim 1993).

## Hypotheses

Hypothesis I: *Confucianism does not discourage popular support for political democracy.*

Confucianism may contradict liberal representative democracy, but not delegative democracy, which grants presidents a firm grip on political decisions, as is the case in South Korea and some Latin American countries. However, though it does not run counter to some forms of political democracy, it does not necessarily encourage them, either.

Hypothesis II: *Confucian values discourage popular support for democracy in social relations.*

Confucian emphasis on hierarchy contradicts the principles of democracy in social relations, which favor individual and group rights in familial and civic decision making.

Hypothesis III: *The negative impact of Confucian values on support for democracy in social relations is lessened by urban experience and religion.*

In the West, the emergence of civil society in an urban context was key to the development of democracy. Urban experience—which brings people in close and dependent contact at work and home with people outside the family—encourages democratic association based upon social ideals rather than bloodlines, and the idea of citizenship based on egalitarian principles. Such factors reduce the hold of hierarchical and emotional kinship (Laski 1937; Lipset 1981; Weber 1981). Similarly, Christianity, as Huntington (1991, 72-74) notes, favors democracy insofar as it stresses the dignity of the individual. Protestantism in particular attenuates blind allegiance to family and familial hierarchy and encourages egalitarian fellowship (Weber 1951). Thus, though traditions such as Confucianism remain a powerful force as groups encounter

new social trends such as urban life and Christianity, new combinations of tradition and modernity tend to emerge.

### *Data*

The Korea Research Company interviewed 1,003 men and women aged 18 or older from 18 to 30 May, 2000 in South Korea. Candidates were chosen through multi-stage probability sampling proportionate to size. Random sampling replaced selected interviewees who had died or moved. The data includes measures of political culture and actions and several variables from the World Value Survey, but emphasizes country specific variables such as Confucianism, Shamanism, regional discrimination, and social democratization.

## **Variables**

### *Dependent Variables*

The dependent variables measure political democracy and democracy in social relations. The measure of political democracy is based on adding standardized scores of three items with high factor analysis loadings (Table 1). I also measured democracy in social relations by adding standardized scores of three items (Table 1). I left factor scores unweighted so as to maximize prediction of the hypothesized underlying concept, capitalizing on sampling variability. Thus correlations between this scale and other variables would likely decline substantially were the same analysis replicated with a different data set. The factor-based scaling in this research weights items equally and so is less subject to cross-sample shrinkage. In this sense, factor-based scales are more reliable than scales using factor scores as weights. Items pertaining to feminist attitudes are excluded from the measure of democracy in social relations due to a conceptual overlap with the independent variable of Confucian values. The three dependent variables are derived from the result of unrotated factor loadings in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Factor Loadings for the Measures of Political Democracy and Democracy in Social Relations

Items	Factor Loading	Eigenvalues
<b>Political Democracy</b>		
Democracy creates economic difficulties.	.833	2.195
Democracy is too polemic and indecisive.	.861	
Democracy makes keeping social order difficult.	.872	
<b>Democracy in Social Relations</b>		
Necessity of hierarchy in private or public institutions.	.669	1.246
It is natural that juniors use honorifics for their seniors and seniors have more authority over juniors in high schools and universities.	.645	
For social order to be maintained there should be a clear distinction of seniorities.	.619	

### *Measures of Confucianism*

These measures derive from factor analyses. I conduct an exploratory factor analysis on all of the relevant variables of Confucian values in the questionnaire. As a result of varimax rotation, three groups that have Eigenvalues no less than 1.00 are selected. Among the factor loadings, the ones with .5 or over are selected and then I rerun the varimax rotation on the selected seven variables. Table 2 depicts three meaningful factors that suggest filial piety, patrilineal consciousness, and familial collectivism. Further research enhances the reliability of these factors. Similar factors are generated in a statistical analysis of Confucian values (Bak 2000). Since filial piety prescribes relations within the family and patrilineal consciousness dictates how family identity is perpetuated and reproduced, all three factors indicate a Confucian emphasis on family (Helgesen 1998; Kihl 1994).

### *Measure of Urban Experience*

I established urban experience by the region where respondents grew up. It is coded 1 if an official metropolitan district, 0 if not. Seoul, Incheon, Daejeon, Daegu, Busan, Ulsan, and Gwangju are considered urban. Due to rapid urban migration in South Korea, urban experience may be properly measured only in the established cities. One respondent indicated “foreign countries,” and so was treated as a missing value.

**Table 2.** Rotated Factor Loadings for the Measure of Confucianism

(Varimax Rotation)

Items	Filial Piety	Patrilineal Consciousness	Familial Collectivism
When only a single parent is alive, you should live with him/her even after your marriage.	<b>.852</b>	.184	.010
Even if both parents are alive, you should live with them after your marriage.	<b>.884</b>	.088	.018
When parents are sick, children themselves should nurse them.	<b>.678</b>	.010	.252
The rights of primogeniture should be kept.	.082	<b>.843</b>	.129
You should have sons.	.125	<b>.845</b>	.100
You should readily make sacrifices for your family.	.157	.134	<b>.775</b>
For the sake of the family, you should never divorce despite marital conflict.	-.013	.008	<b>.815</b>
Eigenvalues	2.430	1.388	1.042

### *Measure of Religion*

This variable comprised five categories—Buddhist, Protestant, Catholic, other religion, and no religion. Buddhist was used as the reference category.

### *Control Variables*

**Education:** Assessment of education was done in seven categories that indicated respondents' highest level of education. The values of 1, 2, and 3 indicated graduation from elementary, junior high, and high school respectively. Graduates from, or enrollees in, community colleges, colleges, and graduate schools received 4, 5, or 6. The 21 who marked "other" for any other educational level are coded 7 and treated as missing cases and omitted. The education variable was recoded 1 for values 1 and 2, 2 for 3, 3 for 4, and 4 for 5 and 6 based upon regression of political democracy on a dummy education variable that indicated almost all other categories had significantly positive effects on the reference category of 1.

**Age:** Respondents were asked the year they were born, and this figure was subtracted from 1999 to ascertain current age.

Sex: This variable was coded 0 if male, 1 if female.

## Results

To aid readers in gauging the magnitude of effects, Table 3 reports descriptive statistics and definitions for the main variables analyzed in this study. Table 4 reports Pearson zero-order correlation results among the continuous variables. It shows that political democracy and democracy in social relations correlate very weakly—.04—implying that they are mutually exclusive concepts. While political democracy has little correlation with the three factors of Confucian tradition, democracy in social relations shows a negative correlation. Political democracy has a weak positive correlation with “filial piety,” whereas it has a weak negative correlation with the other two components of Confucian values. Democracy in social relations has consistent negative correlations with all three components of Confucian values, among which “familial collectivism” shows the strongest negative correlation coefficient of  $-.251$ . Age has negative correlations with both political democracy and democracy in social relations but retains a stronger correlation with the latter, which implies that political democracy is widely accepted across generations. On the other hand, democracy in social relations is more generation sensitive and less likely to be accepted by older generations. This assumption is supported by the lower mean scores of democracy in social relations, compared to those of political democracy in Table 3. Age has positive correlations with two variables of Confucian values—patrilineal consciousness and familial collectivism—which indicates that younger generations are less likely to subscribe to them. However, the low coefficient of filial piety with age ( $-.049$ ) suggests the enduring nature of this value across generations. The negative correlation between age and education suggests that younger generations are much more educated than older ones.

Model 1 in Table 5 attempts to predict the influence of Confucian values on political democracy on the basis of Confucian values alone. Model 1 suggests that among the three components of Confucian values only patrilineal consciousness has a significant negative effect. Model 2 adds age, sex, and education to Model 1. The addition of the three variables in Model 2 shows no net effect of patrilineal consciousness. The effect of education is somewhat predictable since numerous studies of political development have emphasized

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics and Definitions of Key Variables

Variable	Mean	S.D.	Definition
<b>Support for Political Democracy</b>			
Do you agree with the opinion that democracy creates economic difficulties?	2.86	.76	ranges from 1 (totally agree) to 4 (totally disagree)
Do you agree with the opinion that democracy is too polemic and indecisive?	2.65	.76	
Do you agree with the opinion that democracy makes the maintenance of social order difficult?	2.86	.74	
<b>Support for Democracy in Social Relations</b>			
What do you think about the opinion that hierarchies are necessary in such organizations as private enterprises or public institutions?	2.06	.87	ranges from 1 (very necessary) to 5 (not necessary at all)
When they are in different grades, it is natural that juniors use honorifics to their seniors and that seniors have more authority over juniors in high schools and universities.	2.34	.74	ranges from 1 (totally right) to 4 (totally wrong)
In order for society to maintain social order, do you think there should be clear distinctions of seniorities or not?	3.72	2.41	ranges from 1 (the distinctions should be clear) to 10 (the distinctions may not be clear)
<b>Filial Piety</b>			
When only a single parent is alive, it is desirable to live with him/her even after your marriage.	6.43	2.66	ranges from 1 (totally wrong) to 10 (totally right)
Even if both parents are alive, it is desirable to live with them after your marriage.	5.50	2.76	
When parents are sick, instead of a paid caregiver, children themselves should nurse them.	6.72	2.51	
<b>Patrilineal Consciousness</b>			
The rights of primogeniture should be kept.	5.28	2.69	ranges from 1 (totally wrong) to 10 (totally right)
You should have a son.	5.16	3.03	
<b>Familial Collectivism</b>			
What do you think about the opinion that you have to readily make sacrifices for your family?	3.05	.64	ranges from 1 (totally disagree) to 10 (totally agree)
What do you think about the opinion that you should for the sake of family never divorce, despite marital conflict?	3.02	.83	
<b>Age</b>	40.33	14.12	ranges from 18 to 86
<b>Education</b>	2.34	1.02	=1, if junior high or lower =2, if high school =3, if community college =4, if college or higher

**Table 4.** Correlation among Variables Used in the Analysis

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(1) Political Democracy	—	—	—	—	—	—
(2) Democracy in Social Relations	.040	—	—	—	—	—
(3) Filial piety	.012	-.135	—	—	—	—
(4) Patrilineal	-.075	-.183	.246	—	—	—
(5) Familial coll.	-.036	-.251	.200	.267	—	—
(6) Age	-.084	-.223	-.049	.320	.279	—
(7) Education	.233	.158	.043	-.162	-.163	-.433

N=864

**Table 5.** OLS Coefficients for Regression of Political Democracy on Selected Independent Variables

Independent Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	(b)	SE(b)	(b)	SE(b)	(b)	SE(b)
Filial Piety	.031	.035	-.005	.037	-.001	.037
Patrilineal	-.114*	.051	-.075	.053	-.052	.054
Familial	-.024	.053	.006	.054	-.000	.054
Age			.005	.007	.006	.007
Female			-.280	.179	-.284	.183
Edu			.536*	.091	.519*	.092
Urban Experience					-.093	.173
No Religion					.261	.213
Protestant					.386	.235
Catholic					.382	.322
Other Religion					-1.130	.642
Constant	-.004*	.083	-1.355**	.454	-1.509*	.484
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>		.003		.051		.054

N=874 \*P<.05 (Two-tail) \*\*P<.01

education as a key factor of political democracy (Cutright 1963; Inglehart 1977; 1990). In line with the result of the zero-order correlations, Model 2 shows no effect of age on the support for political democracy. This may be due to the fact that even if older populations do not support liberal democracy, they might support different kinds of political democracy such as delegative democracy discussed above (O'Donnell 1999). Model 3 adds the two variables of urban experience and religion to Model 2 but neither of the variables shows any significant effect. Since Confucian civilization (which includes South Korea) shows a relatively higher level of secularization, religion may have little effect on political attitudes. For example, with regard to the level of the “Secular-Rational Authority,” South Korea stands much above the United States (Inglehart 1977, 93). No effect of urban experience is attributable to data limitations. The



measure for urban areas included several metropolises with officially separate districts. It excluded many with populations of a million or fewer. Even were they included, many mid-size cities were not cities a few decades ago, which would serve to skew results for different age groups. That is, older respondents very probably grew up in rural areas that in the past few decades have exploded into urban areas.

Model 1 in Table 6 attempts to predict the influence of Confucian values on democracy in social relations on the basis of Confucian values alone. All three components of Confucian values show significantly negative impacts on democracy in social relations as predicted in Hypothesis II. Model 2 adds age, sex, education, urban experience, and religion to Model 1. Age has significant negative effects on the dependent variable, which shows that younger generations tend to support horizontal social relationships more than older generations. Education again shows a significant impact on the dependent variable. The liberalizing effect of education may work for democracy in social relations (Kriesi 1989). Urban experience has no effect on the dependent variable and I attribute this result to similar factors that were mentioned regarding Table 5. The nil effect of religion implies that no religion emphasizes democratic social relations particularly more strongly than any other.

**Table 6.** OLS Coefficients for Regression of Democracy in Social Relations on Urbanization and Other Selected Independent Variables

Independent Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	(b)	SE(b)	(b)	SE(b)	(b)	SE(b)
Filial Piety	-.048*	.027	-.063*	.029	-.072*	.036
Patrilineal	-.138**	.039	-.081*	.042	-.089*	.050
Familial	-.263**	.041	-.215**	.042	-.316**	.053
Age			-.020**	.005	-.019**	.005
Female			.093	.144	.090	.143
Edu			.144*	.072	.149*	.072
Urban			-.145	.136	.088	.168
No Religion			-.075	.169	.065	.183
Protestant			-.067	.184	.306	.245
Catholic			.315	.246	.123	.514
Other Religion			.191	.515	-.109	.136
Urban*Filial					.008	.056
Urban*Patrilineal					.015	.084
Urban*Familial					.267**	.086
Constant	-.039	.064	.354	.456	.342	.454
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.082		.099		.108	

N=914 \*P<.05 (One-tail) \*\*P<.01

Hypothesis III received less support. Tables 5 and 6 reveal several insignificant interactions between Confucian values and both urbanization and religion. However, three interactions were significant, among them that between urban experience and familial collectivism (Model 3, Table 6). All else being equal, for those raised in rural areas, one unit increase in familial collectivism leads to a .316 decrease in democracy in social relations, and in urban areas, a .049 decrease. Thus, urban experience lessens the negative impact of familial collectivism. Familial collectivism in the urban context may serve a different function from its rural counterpart. The urban family tends to be a “bourgeois” nuclear family that emphasizes mutual understanding and reciprocal relations (Habermas 1989). Table 7 portrays interactions between religion and Confucian values with Buddhism as the reference category. Two are significant—in Model 1, between filial piety and Protestantism; in Model 2, between patrilineal consciousness and Protestantism. Their significance persists in Model 4. Model 1 in Table 7 indicates that for Buddhists, one unit increase in filial piety decreases the dependent variable by .113, while for Protestants, it increases it by .039. Model 2 shows that one unit increase in patrilineal consciousness leads to a .163 decrease in the dependent variable for Buddhists and a .058 increase for Protestants. These findings imply that Protestants more effectively screen out authoritarian elements in Confucian values than Buddhists.<sup>8</sup> However, these results of interaction terms should never be exaggerated. Interaction effects are notoriously difficult to replicate because they often rely on a small number of extreme cases.

## Discussion

This paper empirically assesses the effects of cultural tradition on democracy in South Korea. Impacts depended on whether the dependent variable was political democracy or democracy in social relations. This indicates the importance of minimizing theoretical generalizations that lead to contradictory

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8. The statistical results of the democratic potential of Protestantism need to be supported by subsequent research since much research on Korean Christianity shows an opposite result which highlights its patriarchal and authoritarian aspects (Jang 1977; Kim 2005).

**Table 7.** OLS Coefficients for Regression of Democracy in Social Relations on Urbanization and Other Selected Independent Variables

Independent Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	(b)	SE(b)	(b)	SE(b)	(b)	SE(b)	(b)	SE(b)
Filial Piety	-.113*	.050	-.065**	.029	-.063*	.029	-.105*	.051
Patrilineal	-.080*	.042	-.163**	.072	-.080*	.042	-.160*	.076
Familial	-.216**	.042	.207**	.043	.221*	.077	-.183*	.080
Age	-.020**	.005	-.019**	.005	-.019*	.005	-.020*	.005
Female	.086	.144	.090	.144	.102	.144	.094	.144
Edu	.144*	.072	.140*	.072	.142*	.072	.136*	.073
Urban	-.152	.136	-.139	.136	-.135	.136	-.147	.136
No Religion	-.091	.169	.126	.171	.064	.170	-.125	.172
Protestant	-.073	.184	.060	.187	.068	.185	-.067	.188
Catholic	.282	.248	.275	.248	.284	.248	.220	.252
Other Religion	.279	.532	.363	.568	.435	.552	.406	.571
No Rel.*Filial	.040	.065					.030	.067
Protestant*Filial	.152*	.072					.128*	.075
Catholic*Filial	-.001	.096					-.014	.100
Other*Filial	-.108	.225					-.030	.257
No Rel.*Patril			.058	.094			.050	.100
Protestant*Patril			.221*	.107			.189*	.113
Catholic*Patril			.146	.152			.190	.160
Other*Patril			-.183	.288			.075	.420
No Rel.*Familial					.042	.099	.016	.105
Protestant*Familial					.038	.111	-.046	.116
Catholic*Familial					-.121	.144	-.160	.148
Other*Familial					-.377	.320	-.371	.433
Constant	.403	.456	.404	.457	.330	.458	.440	.460
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.101		.101		.098		.099	

N=914 \*P&lt;.05 (One-tail) \*\*P&lt;.01

logical and empirical findings. It also impugns Huntington's argument that Confucian democracy is oxymoronic as well as Pye's (1985) views. As for political democracy, Confucian values are of little relevance. That is, that the *Analects'* Confucian principle is one thing, but how people decode it in concrete historical and cultural contexts is another (Hall 1993). Huntington's argument may apply to liberal democracy, but in East Asia polyarchy may support a strong state, low institutionalization, and presidential concentration of power. Similarly, O'Donnell's (1999) delegative democracy may accommodate Confucian values.

However, claims that Confucian values favor democracy also receive no support.<sup>9</sup> Confucian texts may contain sentiments that support civil society or

9. Similar results are produced by Fetzer and Soper (2007) who examine the effects of family

other democratic values, but secular Confucianism displays little democracy in action. We find no evidence of an illiberal democracy based on Confucian communitarian elements. Confucian values do not in fact appear to be as great a resource for democratic thought as advocates of Confucian democracy suggest (Kang 1997; Shils 1996).

This research shows that Confucianism impedes quotidian democratic practices. Emphases on hierarchies do not favor democracy in social relations. Still, tradition does not inevitably clash with democracy in social relations, given new social forces, such as urbanization and Protestantism, that in practice work to harmonize the two. This finding is significant in the discourse on tradition and modernity. It suggests that East Asian tradition is malleable. It can become less authoritarian and coexist with modern and Western values. Conceivably, the interaction between old and new may bring out previously neglected or downplayed aspects of tradition that at the same time promote democracy. This may offer a preliminary answer to Tu Wei-ming's questions regarding "the role of tradition in modernity and the ways in which the modernization process may assume several different cultural forms" (1996, 10).<sup>10</sup>

My research findings may be limited by several factors. I operationalized political democracy by speaking of "democracy" in the questionnaire. This might attenuate my findings, because respondents may well have interpreted the word itself in broadly different ways. Another potential problem is that interviewees may have inflated their positive response to democracy as the politically correct response. We also should point out the limitation of the measure for "democracy in social relations" that only emphasizes hierarchy, leaving other important aspects of the concept intact. This limitation leads to a conflation of measurements between "democracy in social relations" and Confucian values, although the two concepts are mutually independent. Finally, we should be open to the criticism that a set of Confucian values derived from factor analyses in this research may be no more than a simple group of traditional attitudes. On the other hand, even if they are not Confucian, it should be noted that this article discovered certain factors that may not be

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loyalty, social hierarchies, and social harmony on democratization.

10. Admittedly, partly due to the limitation of the measures, this research is slanted toward the negative aspects of Confucianism. The more positive side of the relationship between Confucianism and democracy is yet to be studied.

packaged into Confucian values but still work in contemporary political life in South Korea.

The fundamental question remains of interest in further inquiry. How will Confucianism, traditionally experienced as part of an agrarian social order, transform itself in the industrial age? South Korea was predominantly agrarian just one or two generations ago. Confucian tradition may even now be in the process of radical reformation. This suggests that this research may prove provisional, as future modernized Confucian values may interact differently with democracy when compared to the traditional values we observed during this transition period. Whether Confucianism will be at odds with, or develop an affinity to, contemporary society has yet to unfold and remains a crucial issue for future research.

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## Abstract

This paper investigates the influence of cultural tradition on democracy in South Korea, with a particular focus on Confucian values. Confucian values comprise a positive attitude towards worldly affairs, a life-style of sustained discipline and self-cultivation, respect for authority, and familial collectivism. The data relies on a national survey conducted in 2000. Survey analyses served to provide empirical evidence that previous speculative debates lacked. The evidence shows that Confucian tradition exerts no effect on popular support for political democracy but has a negative impact on support for democracy in social relations. However, the authoritarian effect of Confucian values weakens in the presence of other social forces such as urbanization and Christianity. Protestant belief and growing up in an urban area diminish the negative effects of Confucianism. This suggests that Confucianism is adapted to new social trends and that the relationship between tradition and modernity is not one of antithesis, but of mutual accommodation.

**Keywords:** Confucianism, democracy, political culture, democracy in social relations