CONFUCIANS AND DEWEY ON COMMUNITY

A Thesis

by

HUI FU

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2006

Major Subject: Philosophy

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	John McDermott
Committee Members,	Gregory Pappas
	Ian Weber
Head of Department,	Robin Smith

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ABSTRACT

Confucians and Dewey on Community.

(August 2006)

Hui Fu, B.A., NanKai University Branch;

M.A., Baylor University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. John McDermott

This thesis offers a comparison between liberalism, Dewey's pragmatism, and Confucianism on their views of community. Today, as China struggles with the influences of modernity, the relations between its Confucian heritage and liberal democracy have been much debated. Some scholars contend that classical Confucianism and the communitarian critique of liberal politics converge, because they both challenge the dominance of modern liberalism. Among the communitarian theories, John Dewey's theory of democratic community comports well with the Confucian doctrine of community to argue against rights-based liberalism. For in a Confucian community, as in a Deweyan democracy, public consensus is often achieved at the aesthetic and practical levels rather than based on the claims of reason. For pragmatists like Dewey and Confucians, experiencing the world aesthetically is a practical way to improve the social functions of everyday life. In this thesis, following John Dewey, I argue that as a

crucially communicative and social practice, art plays a key role on communal harmony. When traditional Confucian China as a ritual-based community is grounded in aesthetic practices, it is comparable and compatible with Dewey's view of community. In addition, the Confucian theory of community is a source for putting contemporary communitarian ideas into practice. I conclude that by relating aesthetics to his democratic theory, Dewey puts forth a theory of pragmatist community that suits well with the Confucian ideal.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, distinguished Professor John McDermott. He has proofread my thesis and made directional comments. Without the encouragement, and positive advice of Professor McDermott, I would not have completed this thesis so smoothly. Writing this thesis and working with Professor McDermott was an enjoyable experience that I will remember for the rest of my life.

I also would like to express my gratitude to the other committee members, Dr. Gregory Pappas and Dr. Ian Weber, for their guidance and support throughout the course of this project. Special thanks go to Dr. Pappas. I had taken two graduate courses with him and worked as a grading assistant for him for two semesters. It was really “an experience” in a Deweyan sense to interact with Dr. Pappas. I also would like to thank Dr. Weber for his thoughtfulness and kindness. When I met him for the first time and asked him to join my committee, he enthusiastically accepted my request. My thanks to him was more than words could express.

Thanks also to the staff in the department, Norma, Rosalie, and Kim, for their kind assistance and considerateness.

Finally, I acknowledge my family for all the support and encouragement they have given me for years. My wife, Fengran, has made sacrifices more than what should be expected of a spouse.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Confucianism is commonly misunderstood as a dull, utilitarian, and conservative sensibility primarily concerned with secular affairs. However, since 1980s, the debates between individualism and communitarianism and the postmodernist deconstruction of modern epistemology and politics have provided an opportunity for the reappraisal of Confucianism.

Today, as China struggles with the influences of modernity, the relations between its Confucian heritage and liberal democracy have been much debated. Some scholars contend that classical Confucianism and the communitarian critique of liberal politics converge, because they both challenge the dominance of modern liberalism. In what way can Confucianism support a particular style of communitarianism that suits democratic ideals and take account of the values and expectations of the Chinese people? An inquiry into this question is important, for it may suggest new possibilities to those in China who struggle between a valuable Confucian heritage and the appeal of liberal modernity.

It should be noted that the model of rights-based liberalism that currently dominates contemporary understandings of democracy, particularly in America, is irrelevant to the

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This thesis follows the style of *The Chicago Manual of Style.*

Confucian ideal community. In comparison with proponents of rights-based liberals and their communitarian critics, the majority of Chinese stand with the latter. As we know, in rights-based liberalism, social and political concerns have largely revolved around the questions such as the relation of the individual to society, the realms of private and public activity, and the character of rights and responsibility, etc. By contrast, the discussion of Chinese social and political thought would include the cultivation of personal and communal life, the function of ritual-based activities in forming a harmonic society, and so on.

What is interesting is that these Confucian concerns are dramatically similar to John Dewey's theory of democratic community. In fact, Dewey's notion of community/democracy has provided us a means of understanding the term Confucian community. For Dewey, democracy is a communicating community. If communitarian concerns are vital within a society, there will be an important check upon the pursuance of novelty of beliefs and opinions simply for their own sake. This must be so since the central desire is the advocation of a consensus to inspire significant communication. Normatively, constraints should not be imposed from outside through oppressive government or legislation. If the desire for communication is to be effective, there will be increased tolerance of differences as well as a concern to maintain the potential for communication by resisting mere empty novelty.

This raises one of the most difficult issues relevant to the construction of a Confucian community, that is, the issue of pluralism and consensus. It is easy for westerners to misunderstand how Confucianism might support a healthy pluralism and consensus, because there is a shift in the meanings of terms as one moves from western to Chinese society. For instance, the vocabulary associated with the Chinese notion of self and community is radically different from the major interpretative categories in the western tradition. We must be cautious in applying the western concepts and categories to understand the Chinese. For a traditional Chinese individual, he can be a Confucian, a Daoist, and a Buddhist at the same time, which, however, is confusing to most westerners who often identify philosophical or religious allegiances with their doctrines or beliefs. The combination of distinct sensibilities such as Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism into a harmonious whole within a single culture or within a single personality demonstrates that the terms of pluralism and consensus in Chinese society must be understood in a particular way. For in a Confucian community, as in a Deweyan democracy, consensus is often achieved at the aesthetic and practical levels rather than based on the claims of reason. The aesthetic and Deweyan pragmatism object to any sorts of metaphysical presumption that grounds public consensus. For Confucians as well as the Deweyan pragmatists, ideally, communal harmony is achieved through moral consensus: not an agreement about what one ought to do, but a consensus at the level of

aesthetic feeling and common practice.[1]

Furthermore, as Russell A. Fox has indicated, Confucianism provides an example of a comprehensive way of life wherein one may put communitarian ideals into practice. According to Fox, contemporary communitarians have been better at analyzing the history of liberalism and the theoretical foundations of community than at actually asking how communities might be ordered. For that reason, many communitarian claims against liberalism have seemed speculative. Fox sees, nevertheless, that "what classic Confucianism provides is a system of constitutive practices and principles that shape communities both practically and theoretically."[2] An inquiry into the ideas of the Confucian community is helpful to enrich the contemporary communitarian theories.

This thesis tries to make a comparative analysis of Confucianism, liberalism and Dewey on their notions of community. By contrast with Dewey's notion of democracy, I will show some promising elements inherent in the Confucian model of community. I would like to argue that both Dewey and Confucians have put forth some responses to the insufficiency of liberal democracy, and they provide an alternative for the problem of

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1 See David Hall and Roger Ames, *The Democracy of the Dead: Dewey, Confucius, and the Hope for Democracy in China* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1999), 99-187.

2 See Russell Arben Fox, "Confucian and Communitarian Responses to Liberal Democracy," *The Review of Politics* 59 (Summer 97): 561-65. Some scholars have argued there is a substantial difference between classical Confucianism and neo-Confucianism. However, contemporary Chinese Confucian thinkers such as Mou Tsung-san, Tu wei-ming, Cheng Chung-ying, and so on, all agree that neo-Confucianism is founded on classical Confucianism of Confucius, Mencius, and other Confucian classics. Neo-Confucianism has been influenced by Chinese Buddhism and yet is essentially Confucian. Fox refers classical Confucianism to those principles raised by Confucius and Mencius, which is not incompatible with later Confucianism.

liberalism. Following David Hall and Roger Ames, I make a distinction between political and economic analyses on the one hand, and cultural analysis on the other. Economic and political approaches are primarily concerned with governmental institutions. Cultural analysis is mainly focused on a broad range of values rooted in social, ethical, aesthetic, and religious sensibilities. The cultural approach intends to recognize promising elements in Chinese culture that merely political and economic analyses could easily overlook.[3]

This thesis has five chapters. The first chapter introduces the purpose and the content of my research. The second chapter lays the foundations for further comparative analysis between rights-based liberalism, Confucianism, and Dewey's pragmatism. A brief introduction of rights-based liberalism and its problem will be included.

The third chapter discusses the Confucian mode of community—in Tu Wei-ming's term, fiduciary community. A fiduciary mode highlights the Confucian ideal of a value-oriented society, which stands in sharp contrast to the interest-oriented ones. As East Asian societies struggle with the influences of modernity, the relations between their Confucian heritage and liberal democracy have been much debated. Some scholars contend that classical Confucianism and the communitarian critique of liberal politics intersect, because they both challenge the dominance of modern liberalism. This chapter

[3] David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, 13-14.

draws a comparison between them, and explains the value foundation of fiduciary community and how such a community is formed.

The fourth chapter analyzes Dewey's notion of community. For sure, the pragmatist might find some value in the Enlightenment narrative of absolute rights. But their defense of rights is grounded in practice rather than in theory. The pragmatist accepts the status and content of the rights raised by the liberal democracy on purely historicist grounds. They are committed to a kind of openness of inquiry and transparent communication, which is central to Dewey's vision of democracy. Dewey defines democracy as a communicating community. Dewey's notion of community provides an effective discourse with which to engage the Confucian model of community. Confucians comport well with Dewey against the claim of rights-based liberalism.

The conclusion summarizes the findings and presents a synthesis of my paper.

CHAPTER II

RIGHTS-BASED LIBERALISM

In this chapter, I attempt to lay the foundations for further comparative analysis between rights-based liberalism, Confucianism, and Dewey's pragmatism. A brief introduction of rights-based liberalism and its deficiency will be presented here. I begin by reviewing the history and theoretic basis of rights-based liberalism. Then I examine the problems of the liberal theory of rights in the light of communitarianism and pragmatism.

As a top capitalist society, America boasts itself of liberal democracy, capitalist economy, and rational technologies. But America is not immune from the crisis of modernity. There are real problems in America for which solution can be sought from an understanding of the Confucian experience. Confucianism, with its stress upon self-discipline, tradition, and the priority of morality over positive law, might offer a good source for corrective measures in a capitalist society.

Rights-Based Liberalism

Rights-based liberalism is a political doctrine that is concerned with individual rights and the limited government. It is founded on the natural goodness of human beings and the autonomy of the individual, favoring civil and political liberties and aiming at preventing people from arbitrary authority. Since the emergence of liberal political

theory in the seventeenth century, liberals have been deeply concerned with the role of the state in preserving individual liberty. The power of the sate is often regarded as a threat to individual freedom. Liberals argue that the government should not impose a preferred way of life, but should leave its citizens free to choose their own values and ways of life. But this commitment leads to some problems. As Michael J. Sandel has indicated, by committing themselves to freedom of choice, liberals have to constantly distinguish between allowing a practice and endorsing it.[4] For instance, they say it is one thing to allow religious practice, and something else to affirm it.

Conservatives sometimes blur the distinction between permission and endorsement. They hold that those who would allow abortions favor abortion. Indeed, as Amitai Etzioni has argued, by permitting a practice such as divorce, the state implies that divorce is morally acceptable.[5] Liberals reply to the charge by invoking higher principles such as freedom of choice, toleration, or fair procedures. But why should toleration and freedom of choice be more privileged than other important values like loyalty? Liberals need to justify the moral basis of the higher principles. According to Michael Sandel, modern political philosophy has offered two main alternatives to justify these higher principles: one utilitarian, the other Kantian.

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[4] Michael J. Sandel, introduction to *Liberalism and Its Critics*, ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 1.

[5] Amitai Etzioni, "A Moderate Communitarian Proposal," *Political Theory*, V. 24 (1996): 159, cited in Russell Arben Fox, “Confucian and Communitarian Responses to Liberal Democracy,” *The Review of Politics* 59 (Summer 97): 567.

The utilitarian view that is often credited to John Stuart Mill defends liberal principles in the name of achieving “the greatest good for the greatest number”. For utilitarians, the state should not impose on its citizens a preferred way of life because it will reduce the sum of human happiness. Mill aims at promoting the principle of maximizing the general welfare and dismissing the notion of abstract right. He writes that “I regard utility as the ultimate appeal on all ethical questions; but it must be utility in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being.”[6]

Utilitarianism as a general basis of justifying liberal principles brings about serious objections. Some have questioned the notion of utility, and the assumption that all human goods can be measured quantitatively. Others counter argue that utilitarian liberals are unable to draw qualitative distinctions of worth because they reduce all values to preferences and desires. Particularly, current debate is focused on whether utilitarianism provides a tenable basis for liberal values like respect for individual rights.

In a sense, it seems utilitarianism is well-suited to liberal principles. Mill was one of the defenders of individual rights; in his *On Liberty* Mill attempts to establish the doctrine of individual rights, including the rights of the minority in the face of an overwhelming majority. He argues that justice and utility is compatible because his

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6 John Mill, On Liberty, ch. 1, cited in Sandel, 2.

ethics is committed to the proposition that there is only one *summum bonum*—the happiness of all.[7]

But the utilitarian calculations are not always as liberal as it prima facie looks. For instance, in his view of equality, he admits that, with regard to happiness, each person's happiness is the same as everyone else. He is convinced that this principle of equality is actually grounded in the principle of utility. But there is a loophole when he states "all persons … have a right to equality of treatment, except when some recognized social expediency requires the reverse." It seems for him, to promote the greatest happiness, social expediency may override the rights of the protesting minority.[8] The utilitarian calculation is precarious and conditional. It hardly meets the liberal purpose not to impose on some the values of others.

One of the most powerful opponents against utilitarianism is Kant. Kant argues that empirical principles like utility can not serve as the basis for the moral law. An instrumental defense of freedom and rights can not secure both rights and respect for the inherent dignity of persons. The utilitarian calculation treats people as means to the happiness of others, not as ends in themselves.[9]

Contemporary Kantian liberals try to replace the utilitarian approach with an ethics

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[7] See Robert Solomon and Clancy W. Martin, *Morality and the Good Life* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004), 352-53.
[8] Ibid., 369-70.
[9] See Sandel, 3.

that takes rights more seriously. For them, certain rights are so fundamental that even the happiness of all or the general welfare can not override them. As John Rawls has stated: "Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole can not override… the rights secured by justice are not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests."[10]

So Kantian liberals not only need an account of rights that is not grounded in utilitarianism, but also need an account that does not impose a preferred way of life. To avoid any particular conception of the good, what liberals can do is to take a neutral stand not to favor any particular ends.

But how is it possible to affirm certain liberties and rights as fundamental and at the same time keep silent about some vision of the good life? The answer offered by Kantian liberals is to draw a line between the 'right' and the 'good', to distinguish between "a framework of basic rights and liberties, and the conceptions of the good that people may choose to pursue within the framework." In Sandel's words, it is one thing for the state to support a fair framework, and something else to affirm some particular ends. For example, it is one thing to defend the right to free speech on the grounds that people may be free to form their own opinions, and something else to support it on the grounds that

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[10] John Rawls, *A theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 3-4, cited in Sandel, 3.

free speech will increase the general welfare.[11]

Such commitment to a framework neutral among ends can be seen as a kind of value, but it rejects to affirm a preferred way of life or conception of the good. This vision is called the conception of right by liberals. It should be noted that the right is a moral category which is different from the notion of individual rights; rather, the right is the basis of individual rights. For Kantian liberals, the right is prior to the good in two senses. In the first place, individual rights can not be sacrificed for the sake of the common good, and in the second place, the principles of justice that specify these rights can not be grounded in any particular view of the good life.[12] What justifies the rights is not that they promote the good, but rather that they form a fair and neutral framework within which individuals are free to choose their values and ends.

Nevertheless, rights-based liberals notoriously disagree on what rights are fundamental, and on what political arrangements are ideal to provide the neutral framework. Egalitarian liberals support the welfare state, and affirm a scheme of civil liberties together with certain social and economic rights—rights to welfare, education, health care, etc. On the other hand, libertarian liberals endorse the market economy, and argue that redistributive policies violate people's rights; they affirm a scheme of civil

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[11] See Sandel, 4.

[12] See Michael Sandel, *Public Philosophy: Essays on Morality in Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 157.

liberty along with "a strict regime of private property rights." But both egalitarian and libertarian liberals share the same starting point that we are "separate, individual persons, each with our own aims, interests, and conceptions of the good, and seeks a framework of rights that will enable us to realize our capacity as free moral agents consistent with a similar liberty for others."[13]

Since the 1970s, academic philosophy has seen the ascendance of the rights-based ethics over the utilitarian one, represented by John Rawls with his *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism*. In the debate between utilitarianism and rights-based liberalism, the latter has come to prevail. But rights-based liberalism has faced a growing challenge from a different direction, from a view that is derived from the claims of citizenship and community that the liberal vision would not allow. This position is called contemporary communitarianism. The communitarian critics of liberalism question the claim that the right takes precedence over the good. Following Aristotle, they argue that it is impossible to justify political arrangements without reference to common purposes and ends, and that it is impossible to understand our personhood without reference to our role as citizens and as community inhabitants.[14]

This debate reflects two different notions of the self. The conception of the self in

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[13] See Sandel, introduction to *Liberalism and Its Critics*, 4.
[14] Ibid., 5.

rights-based liberalism can be traced back to the attempt to critique the utilitarian view of the person. Whereas the utilitarian self is considered as the sum of its desires, the Kantian self is defined as a choosing self, independent of its desires and ends. Whereas utilitarian liberals sum up all desires of a people into a single system of desire, Kantian liberals argue for the separateness of persons. As Rawls states: "The self is prior to the ends which are affirmed by it; even a dominant end must be chosen from among numerous possibilities."[15] The priority of the self over its ends means I am never defined by my aims and attachments, but always capable of assessing and revising them. It is similar to Sartre's terms, that is, existence comes before essence, and man is nothing but that which he makes of himself.[16] This is what it means to be a free and independent self, capable of choice. This is the vision of the self that well suits the ideal of the state as a neutral framework. On rights-based liberalism, such a self requires a neutral framework of rights that refuses to choose among competing ends. If the self is prior to its ends, then the right must take priority of the good.

Communitarian critics of rights-based liberalism argue that we can not see ourselves as autonomous in this way, and we are not the bearers of rights totally isolated from our aims and community ties. Communitarians say that some of our roles are partly

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15 Rawls, *A theory of Justice*, 560, cited in Sandel, 5.

16 See Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism," in Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialsim: from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (New York: Meridian Book, 1975), 346.

constitutive of the persons we are—as citizens of a country, or members of an organization or movement. If we are defined by the communities we are situated, then we must be "implicated in the purposes and ends characteristic of those communities." One's life experience is always embedded in the story of those communities from which one acquires his identity. These stories situate him in the world, and give his life moral particularity.[17]

Over the past few years, in response to their critics, liberals have attempted to improve their theories by absorbing some communitarian concerns. Some terms like association, interdependence, social welfare, the contribution of tradition, custom, etc. have been accepted to liberal theories. But as long as one sticks to the beliefs that the individual is prior to society, that individual rights takes precedence over common goods, and that the rule of law is allowed to trump non-legal mechanisms that presupposes the existence of social empathy, one is still in the camp of rights-based liberalism no matter how far he goes to accommodate communitarian concerns. It is these fundamentals that are irrelevant to the Confucian model of community. Discussions of the Confucian and pragmatic critiques of rights-based liberalism will begin in the following chapters. There I will examine John Dewey's communitarian theory of democracy. I will try to show that Dewey's pragmatism suits well with the New Confucianism that has recently revived in

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[17] See Sandel, introduction to *Liberalism and Its Critics*, 5-6.

China and other Asian nations.[18] Before moving to the comparison between Confucianism, pragmatism, and liberalism, it is necessary to examine what are the problems with rights-based liberalism.

What Are the Problems with Rights-Based Liberalism?

Rights-based liberalism assumes that the individual is the fundamental social unit out of which states are formed. This individual is the bearer of fundamental rights, and the rights are prior to society. Such an individual is not free from association with others. Of course, the liberal individual, like the communitarian, will be conditioned by social relationships. The difference is that, for the liberal, the relationship is voluntary, while for the communitarian, the relationship is embedded in community practices. To put it another way, in a rights-based society, the right of free association is a right of disassociation. The freedom of the individual to choose his relationships must include the freedom to cancel any of those relationships. Michael Walzer points out:

> The central issue for political theory is not the constitution of the self, but the connection of constituted selves, the pattern of social relations. Liberalism is best understood as a theory of relationships which has voluntary association at its center and which understands voluntariness as the right of rupture or withdrawal. What makes a marriage voluntary is the permanent possibility of divorce.[19]

When liberalism is understood as a theory of relationships which has voluntary

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[18] David Hall and Roger Ames, *The Democracy of the Dead: Dewey, Confucius, and the Hope for Democracy in China* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1999), 101-02.

[19] Michael Walzer, "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism," cited in Hall and Ames, 106.

association at its center, it begs questions. A fundamental problem with rights-based understandings of democracy is that they have few mechanisms preventing individuals from being alienated from communities since the rights are often enjoyed in private. Such individual rights neither prevent individuals from joining together in social unions, nor promote community building. Community building is closely related to a need to promote common goods. Although the having of rights does not object to the formation of meaningful associations, there is no obligation to promote community-building. In a rights-based society, obligations must be very minimal. Otherwise, the freedom of choice with respect to goods has to be compromised. Obligations in a liberal society exist only when they are voluntarily accepted. In this vein, it is arguable that "the absence of any notion of obligations grounded in the recognition that the promotion of viable communities is essential for individual growth and development is a serious defect of rights-based liberalism."[20]

Another mistake for the understandings of rights-based liberalism is the claim that it can be universalized anywhere in every culture. As we know, modernity is a Western invention, and liberal democracy, as one of the main elements of modernity, is itself a historically contingent factor. Any attempt to forward cultural values specific to Western culture as universals for intercultural conversation is question begging. Jack Donnelly

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[20] Hall and Ames, 107-08.

has made a comparative analysis on the issue of individual rights between the West and the East. His view represents a typical rights-based liberal position on this issue. He states:

> To claim that there are human rights is to claim that all human beings, simply because they are human, have rights in this sense. Such rights are universal, held by all human beings. They are equal: One is or is not human, and thus has or does not have (the same) human rights, equally. And they are inalienable: One can no more lose these rights than one can stop being a human being.[21]

Like traditional essentialists, Donnelly makes a universalistic and transcendent claim for individual rights without considering all cultural, historical, and communal differences. Donnelly admits that this liberal conception of rights can be traced back to the specific economic and political conditions in the seventeenth-century Europe. He claims, nonetheless, that it can be universally applied in Asia and all other non-western countries as well.

So what is the theoretical foundation behind Donnelly's claim? An exploration of this question can help us better understand the problems in rights-based liberalism. In the remainder of this chapter, I would like to examine the philosophical foundations of individual rights for it is important for us to understand the difference between liberalism and communitarianism.

Traditionally, liberal theorists have grounded political theories in essential

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[21] Jack Donnelly, "Human Rights and Asian Values" in *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights*, ed. Joanne Bauer and Daniel Bell (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1999), cited in Hall and Ames, 221.

characteristics about nature and human beings. This is particularly evident in the Kantian theory of rights. As I mentioned earlier, Kantian liberals have tried to take rights more seriously while dismissing the utilitarian defense of them. For Kantian liberals, certain rights are so fundamental that even the happiness of all can not override them. To avoid imposing a preferred way of life upon individuals, Kantian liberals are committed to a framework neutral among ends and endorse the priority of right over ends. This is the liberal vision of right. In this vein, the right suggests a basis prior to all empirical ends. How can one be free to carry out his will and choose his own ends? The answer is that only when no any particular ends are presupposed. But what might be the basis of the right since it is unconditional and independent of experience? Kant's argument is that the basis of the right or the moral law is to be found in the transcendental subject. It is a subject capable of an autonomous will rather than the object of practical reason. This subject can give rise to the right only when it is capable of choosing among all possible ends. Only such a subject can stay in an ideal realm independent of our social and political context. Just because of the complete independence of any historical circumstances, this subject is able and free to choose its ends.

But what is exactly this subject on earth? Kant's answer is that it is *us*—rational beings. As rational beings, *we* can give *ourselves* the moral law. It seems to Kant that our rationality can naturally guide us to will the moral law. This is how the subject and *we*

are free from historical context and empirical ends. It should be noted that *we* as rational beings that will the moral law are not *we* as particular persons. Instead, *we* as participants in what Kant calls “pure practical reason” are participants in a transcendental subject. But what is to ensure that we are such a subject capable of the pure practical reason? Kant’s answer is that there is no guarantee; the transcendental subject is merely a possibility. But this is a possibility we as rational beings must presuppose; otherwise, we can not consider ourselves as free moral agents. If we were empirical subjects, we would not be free to exercise our wills for exercising the willing would be conditioned by the desire for some empirical object. And our will would never be a first cause, only the consequence of some prior cause. In this vein, to make freedom of choice possible, Kant has to endorse a transcendental subject that is prior to experience and appears possible in ourselves. This is one of the Enlightenment quests for certainty, and like traditional metaphysicians, Kant attempts to ground the moral law on an unshakable foundation as well.

But how is his view related to rights-based liberalism? A corollary of Kant’s argument is that as the subject is prior to its ends, the right takes precedence over the good. In this perspective, society is best arranged when the government provides a fair and neutral framework and leaves its citizens free to choose their own values and ends. If the government imposed a preferred conception of good, it would treat its citizens as

objects rather than subjects, and as means rather than ends in themselves. Kant's notion of the subject comports well with the claim for the priority of right.

But for those in the Anglo-American tradition, the notion of the transcendental subject seems an unreasonable foundation for a practical ethics. One of the most outstanding contemporary liberals in America, John Rawls, has strived to take rights seriously and affirm the priority of right by moving beyond Kant's perspective. He attempts to save the priority of right from the unintelligible transcendental subject. Rawls sees that Kant's idealistic metaphysics compromises too much to the transcendent so that it weakens its liberal position. To reverse the case, Rawls aims to preserve Kant's moral and political teaching while dismissing Germanic idealism. His project is to develop a viable Kantian conception of justice by replacing the transcendental subject with an empirical subject. This is what he calls the original position. The original position tries to secure a foundation for the priority of right over good, but still is situated in the world. As Sandel has indicated, the original position leads us to "imagine the principles we would choose to govern our society if we were to choose them in advance, before we knew the particular persons we would be—whether rich or poor, strong or weak, lucky or unlucky—before we knew even our interests or aims or

conceptions of the good."[22] And these principles that we would choose in that imaginary position are the principles of right. Like those derived from Kant, these principles do not presuppose any particular conception of good.

What they do presuppose is a certain notion of the person. To take priority of right over good, we must be this kind of subject. This is what Sandel calls "the unencumbered self," a self supposed to be prior to and independent of its ends.[23]

Can we view ourselves as independent selves so that our identity is never defined by our attachments and ends? It seems we can not see ourselves as independent in this way, and we are not the bearers of rights totally isolated from our ends and community ties. The liberal view of the autonomous and independent individual as the basic agent prior to society contrasts readily with the understanding of the communitarian individual as a center of relationships. Communitarians say that some of our roles are partly constitutive of the persons we are—as citizens of a country, or members of an organization or movement. If we are defined by the communities we are situated, then we must be defined in the purposes and ends characteristic of those communities. One's life experience is always rooted in the story of those communities from which one acquires his identity. These stories situate him in the world, and give his life moral particularity.

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[22] Sandel, *Public Philosophy*, 162.

[23] For a detailed discussion of Kant and Rawls on their notion of subject, see Sandel, *Public Philosophy*, 157-73.

This leads communitarians to critique the rights-based liberals with "the illegitimate promotion of notions of the good life, which tacitly exclude the creation of viable communities."[24]

Like traditional metaphysicians, Kant and Rawls are concerned with the ontological status of individual rights. They attempt to ground individual rights on an absolute theoretical foundation. The question of the ontological status of individual rights is important to the essentialist but not to the pragmatist. For the pragmatist, there is "less concern to predicate any particular list of rights than there is to demonstrate their value in practice." In comparison, pragmatists concern more the role of community in shaping the character of the individual. They argue that "the principal issue is not the specific belief in an antecedently existing individual as bearer of this or that set of rights. It is, rather, the actual practices of a society or community that validate or fail to validate the value of any set of beliefs." For sure, pragmatists might find some value in the Enlightenment narrative of absolute rights. But their defense of rights is grounded in practice rather than in theory. The pragmatist accepts the content of the rights raised by the liberal democracy on purely historicist grounds. They are committed to a kind of openness of inquiry and transparent communication, which is central to Dewey's vision

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[24] Hall and Ames, 107-08.

of democracy. In fact, Dewey defines democracy as a communicating community.[25] On this issue, the Confucian sides with the pragmatist against the universalistic claim for individual rights.

When we move from the question of the status of human rights to that of their content we are led to ask if there is any agreement about the kind of rights that are desirable. The majority of rights-based liberals would say yes. But this answer is certainly controversial and is continually challenged by those who hold a communitarian perspective. It is evident with regard to the distinction between "first" and "second-generation" rights in the liberal/communitarian debates. First generation rights include civil and political liberties such as life or liberty, which are the basis of most rights theory. Such first-generation rights are often challenged by the second-generation rights associated with economic welfare and cultural development, especially in the emerging Asian communities. Communitarian societies such as China are successful in "generalizing second-generation rights, often at the expense of the freedom of some segments of its people."[26]

Hall and Ames state that second-generation rights of economic welfare and cultural development are difficult to maintain in a rights-based society. This is because the

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[25] See Hall and Ames, 110-11.
[26] Ibid., 112.

underlying assumption of a liberal society is that “individuals are not naturally associated, and primary obligations to others are minimal, at best.” On liberal grounds it is difficult to maintain that the state could promote cultural development without harming its neutrality.[27]

Donnelly is aware that the conception of rights defined as prior to and independent of social obligations is opposite to many of the Asian cultures that define the human being as irreducibly social. From the Confucian perspective, “western rights and their exercise often conflict with traditional duty-based values and practices and appear wildly, even destructively, individualistic.” Donnelly admits that western human rights practices are of limited success. Yet he dismisses the possibility of non-western perspectives that might enrich the western understanding of rights. For him, rights must be “individual, innate, inviolate, equal, and so on.” First generation rights are given priority over second ones. The communitarian often claims that second-generation rights are likely prerequisites of the appropriate exercise of first-generation rights. Is there a different strategy to protect rights other than that of the west? Hall and Ames argue that the Confucian rites (*li*) serve the function of promoting “rights” in a Chinese context.[28] I will discuss it in detail in the next chapter.

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[27] Ibid.
[28] See Hall and Ames, 221-23.

As I have shown, rights-based liberalism is a historical product in the West, and it is one of the most important elements of modernity. The character of rights-based perspectives on democracy is better understood within the context of theoretical interpretation of modernity. According to Ames and Hall, the most basic agencies associated with the notion of "modernity" are liberal democracy, capitalist economy, and rational technologies. It should be noted that these agencies are products of a long history associated with the development of particularly Western institutions and can not easily be universalized in other cultures. They can be traced back to Greek, Roman, Hebraic, and European sensibilities, and they reach their consummation in the American continent.[29]

Liberal democracy or rights-based democracy emphasizes the autonomy of the individual at the level of both thought and action. In a liberal democracy such as America, rights and freedom are enjoyed primarily by individuals and not by communities. Capitalism advocates the notion of *homo economicus* that defines society in terms of individuals with materialistic needs and desires. The notion of autonomous individuals is enhanced by the element of economic competition. Nevertheless, such competition can cause harm to the foundations of a communitarian social system.[30] In a

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[29] Ibid., 65.
[30] Ibid., 67.

liberal democracy, technologies not only provide both production and self-assertion, but also bring about increased control over human environs. The environment so controlled is more likely comprised by private satisfactions. Ames and Hall point out that one effect of technological developments has been “a shriveling of the public sphere and a bloating of the private.” Private satisfactions increasingly replace republic duties as the main character of the good life. As a consequence, it leads to a kind of “default solipsism in which the Cartesian ago, free of physical and moral constraints, surfs virtual space and time.”[31]

As a top capitalist society, America boasts itself of liberal democracy, capitalist economy, and rational technologies. But America is not immune from the crisis of modernity. Hall and Ames indicates that there are real problems in America for which solution can be sought from an understanding of the Confucian experience. With respect to these postmodern problems, Confucianism, with its stress upon self-discipline, tradition, and the priority of morality over positive law, might offer a good source for corrective measures in a capitalist society.

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[31] Ibid.

CHAPTER III

CONFUCIANS ON COMMUNITY

Confucianism is commonly misunderstood as a utilitarian, and conservative sensibility primarily concerned with secular affairs. However, since 1980s, the debates between individualism and communitarianism and the postmodernist deconstruction of modern epistemology and politics have provided an opportunity for the reappraisal of Confucianism.

Today, as China struggles with the influences of modernity, the relations between its Confucian heritage and liberal democracy have been much debated. Some scholars contend that classical Confucianism and the communitarian critique of liberal politics converge, because they both challenge the dominance of modern liberalism. In what way can Confucianism support a particular style of communitarianism that suits democratic ideals and take account of the values and expectations of the Chinese people? An inquiry into this question is important, for it may suggest new possibilities to those in China who struggle between a valuable Confucian heritage and the appeal of liberal modernity. Furthermore, Confucianism provides an example of a comprehensive system of communitarian practices and principles which can inspire contemporary communitarians to order their communities. An exploration into the ideas of Confucian community will be conducive to enriching the contemporary communitarian theories.

This chapter makes a comparison between classical Confucianism, contemporary communitarianism, and liberalism on their views of community.[32] Then I will introduce how the Confucian ideal society—fiduciary community is ordered. Following David Hall and Roger Ames, I make a distinction between political and economic analyses on the one hand, and cultural analysis on the other. Economic and political approaches are primarily focused on governmental institutions. Cultural analysis is concerned with a broad range of values embedded in social, ethical, aesthetic, and religious sensibilities. The cultural approach intends to recognize promising elements in Chinese culture that strictly political and economic analyses could easily overlook.[33] To be sure, in this chapter, what I describe is an ideal Confucian society, which is far from being fully realized at present.

Confucian and Communitarian Critique of Liberalism

As some East Asian societies struggle with the influences of modernity, the relations between their Confucian heritage and liberal democracy have attracted much academic attention. In a recent book, *Towards Illiberal Democracy in Pacific Asia*, some scholars

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[32] Some scholars have argued there is a substantial difference between classical Confucianism and neo-Confucianism. However, contemporary Chinese Confucian thinkers such as Mou Tsung-san, Tu wei-ming, Cheng Chung-ying, and so on, all agree that neo-Confucianism is founded on classical Confucianism of Confucius, Mencius, and other Confucian classics. Neo-Confucianism has been influenced by Chinese Buddhism and yet is essentially Confucian. The basic principles raised in classical Confucianism by Confucius and Mencius are not incompatible with those in later Confucianism.

[33] See David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *The Democracy of the Dead: Dewey, Confucius, and the Hope for Democracy in China* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1999), 13-14.

have noted that when some Confucian nations in pacific Asia such as Japan, South Korea, and Singapore are modernizing, they are moving in the direction of "illiberal democracy." By this is meant a state that develops democratic structures to protect and promote "communitarian ways of life." Unlike a liberal democracy in which the economic, moral and civic resources are used to promote notions of autonomy which posit the individual against the state and group, these pacific Asian countries aim to approach democratic practice by emphasizing social solidarity, political virtue and strong family structure.[34]

The suggestion that Confucian Asia's civilization is leading towards a theory of communitarian democracy is a fascinating one. For sure, the basic Confucian texts rarely speak directly on any democratic matters. But Confucianism does speak clearly to many theoretical concerns which are related to the foundations of both liberal democracy and its communitarian critique. For instance, Confucius favored a limited government and a self-ordering community like liberals. For Confucius, rulers should achieve harmonious social and political order without imposing any arbitrary authorities and coercive oppression. Confucius says "Governing with excellence (de) can be compared to being the North Star: the North Star dwells in its place, and the multitude of stars pay it

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[34] See Daniel Bell, David Brown, Kanishka Jyasuriya, David Martin Jones, *Towards Illiberal Democracy in Pacific Asia* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1995), 1-16.

tribute."[35] In another Confucian classic—*the Book of Documents*, we read: "The masses ought to be cherished, not oppressed, for it is only the masses who are the root of the state, and where this root is firm, the state will be stable."[36] There are a variety of other resources in the Chinese tradition that support democratic practice. It is not far fetching to state that Confucianism is a source to draw for taking account of communitarian model of democracy.

According to Russell Fox, contemporary communitarians derive their points from a variety of sources and thinkers, ranging from Aristotle, Cicero, Aquinas, Montesquieu, Hegel, to Jefferson and Tocqueville. All these thinkers and many other more have provided grounds for challenging the character of liberal modernity. Some contemporary communitarians stress the importance of self-government, others on human virtue or the importance of religious institutions. Despite their theoretical differences, the dominant theme among them is that liberal society fails to foster a sense of community among its citizens. Most communitarians agree that to bring about a sense of community and belonging to individuals, we need to overcome the influence of self interest in liberal politics and society.[37]

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[35] *The Analects* 2.1, translated by Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (New York, Ballantine press, 1998).

[36] *The Book of Documents*, vol 3:158, translated by James Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (HongKong: University of Hong Kong Press, 1960).

[37] See Russell Arben Fox, "Confucian and Communitarian Responses to Liberal Democracy," *The Review of Politics* 59 (Summer 97): 561-66.

The basic argument against self-interested politics is that a society ruled by the liberal notion of neutrality cannot be philosophically defended. As Fox has pointed out, "to say that person A and person B may both pursue what they perceive to be in their best interest, and should only be limited in their pursuits when said interests lead them to interfere with each other's pursuits, is to say that the pursuit of individual interest is always superior to any other value—including normative values that may advocate minimizing or abandoning certain pursuits."[38] An example for this consequence is given by Amitai Etzioni: "By permitting a practice—say, divorce—on the grounds that the state must be neutral about matters of marital intimacy, the state signals that divorce is morally acceptable."[39] For sure, it has been commonly acknowledged that it is necessary for any government to defend minimum standards of behavior—basic human rights, that is, not causing physical harm to person or property. What the liberal notion of rights can provide is a neutral framework within which individuals are free to choose their values and ends. This is what we call passive freedom. But this is far from satisfying for building an ideal community. What communitarians argue is that to merely maintain passive freedom does not inspire community erection and thus lower human aspirations to a level that denies common goods. It is comparable with the Confucian notion of basic

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[38] Ibid., 567.

[39] Amitai Etzioni, "A Moderate Communitarian Proposal," *Political Theory,* V. 24 (1996): 159, cited in Fox, 567.

human rights. For Confucians, basic human rights do not necessarily depend on an atomized vision of persons. Instead, Confucians claim that they can derive human rights from an ethical outlook dominated by notions of persons as centers of relationships. In this vein, human persons are characterized in terms of social roles and relations, and the social responsibilities associated with these relationships accordingly arise. On the contrary, liberal atomistic individualism does not encourage thinking in terms of social roles and responsibilities.

In order to overcome self-interest and revive a sense of common aspiration towards the good life requires an emphasis on community ties. This concern involves two related issues. First, given a multicultural society, the liberal values that most communitarians generally share suggest a need to establish at least some critical distance between the individual and the community, so as to allow for protest and prevent extremes of oppression. On the other hand, community norms should recognize some common values all the members share. But how these values are to be expressed, and on what grounds they are justified, is perhaps the greatest challenge for communitarians who are concerned with the common good. The issue of establishing a fundamental ground that can promote common values entails a second issue, that is, how a community is to be ordered.

Traditionally, there are two approaches to build up a community in a communitarian

sense. According to Fox, most interpretations of community structure run between two poles. Roughly speaking, community ties arise from either the acceptance of a common authority, or the common participation in a common activity, or some combination of the two. In both forms of community, individuals tend to a certain shared conception of the good. The shared conception of the good is embodied either in an authoritative text, person or god as in many religious communities, or in a historically developed set of practices as in most civic organizations.[40] Communities of both authority and activity can both be found within the Western tradition. For example, the classical republican thought involved both an insistence on virtuous citizen activity in politics and the political acknowledgment of moral or religious authority. Fox sees that contemporary communitarians range these poles, although they do not always use this term to describe themselves. Theorists like Michael Walzer, Benjamin Barber, Sheldon Wolin and Hannah Arendt argue for the civic importance of maintaining strong and direct democratic practices, while others like Alasdair MacIntyre, William Galston and Charles Taylor and Michael Sandel emphasize the importance of allowing democratic politics to operate in the light of authoritative traditions and purposes.[41] But both of these forms of communitarianism have been challenged by liberals as a threat to the promise of

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[40] See Fox, 569.
[41] See Fox, 570.

democracy. For example, George Kateb contends that the communitarian quest for common activity may result in submissiveness and even fascism, while Will Kymlicka argues that the development of any authoritative common good may exclude historically marginalized groups.[42]

How are these relevant to classic Confucianism? What is surprising is that the early Confucians developed an approach to order community that ranges both poles. Common activity and authority are expressed and carried out in ritual-based Confucian practices. Confucian ritual gives rise to standards of authority and activity which are comparable with western experience. To inquire after the theoretical character of the Confucian ritual community is a relatively new task, but it is an important one. The remainder of this chapter will focus on the issue how forms of authority and activity work together to create a ritual-based Confucian community.

Confucian Community and Ritual

In China, social order has been seen as a harmony achieved through personal participation in ritually constituted community. Ritual is the constitutive means of Confucian community. It is manifested in *the Analects* that both instructive sayings of the master and communal values are exemplified by life experiences of the speakers in

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[42] See George Kateb, *The Inner Ocean: Individualism and Democratic Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 229-32; Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 82-87, cited in Fox, 570.

the act of *li* (ritual).[43] Creating community through ritual is a basic character of Confucianism. In this vein, Confucian community should not be seen as an abstract entity that sets the individual against the state, but as an open network of relationships. In such a communitarian community, the number and strength of its constituting relationships defines the quality and the character of the community.

David Hall and Roger Ames has put forth a focus-field model to explain Confucian community. In their words, a Confucian community may be considered as a field in which members of the community constitute multiple foci. For them, it is the diversity of specific contexts "defined by particular family relations, or sociopolitical orders, constitute the fields focused by individuals who are in turn shaped by the field of influences they focus."[44] A member's personal cultivation leads to an increase in intensity of focus. Increasing the number of relationships that are conducive to the common good would be an extension of focus, which, in turn, may increase the field if new relationships are formed by persons outside the community. Hence, the individual and the community grow both qualitatively and quantitatively.[45]

The goal Confucian personal cultivation is to achieve authoritative "humanity," that

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[43] See Tu Weiming, *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1985), 83.
[44] David Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking from the Han: Self, Truth, and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture* (Albany, NY: State university of New York Press, 1998), 40.
[45] Ibid.

is, to form creative and aesthetic relationships between the person and community. In Confucianism, ritual is vital to bring about personal-communal growth. Confucius said "Through self-discipline and observing ritual, one becomes authoritative in one's conduct."[46]

Confucians see human persons as neither strangers to nor the culmination of the world, but simply participants within it. As participants, it is acknowledged that there is a moral way of living in the world which could be known and would be made through ritual activity. These rituals include "different creative arts, music and poetry, various standards of decorum and acts of reverence and propriety."[47] Depending on the social roles one has inhabited—father, son, ruler, minister, and so forth—a different set of rituals would be appropriate. But Confucius sees these ritual acts not as merely rituals of worship or filial piety, but as an intimate connection between the person performing the rite and the immanent order of things itself. As Shu-hsien Liu has noted, the term ritual (*li*) does not mean merely external rules of propriety or social conventions that have been imposed on our behavior. Rather, it is in our hearts we have a natural love for it. When our selfish desires are under control, the goodwill toward one's life and others

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[46] The *Analects* 12.1, trans. by Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*.

[47] These ceremonial sacrifices and other rituals of social intercourse, originated around the Shang and early Chou emperors, but had spread to all levels of Chinese society since Confucius. The basic texts that record these activities and traditions were called the *Wu Ching* (Five Classics), including the *Shu Ching* (Book of History, or Documents), the *Shih Ching* (Book of Poetry, or Songs), the *Li Chi* (Record of Rites), the *I Ching* (Book of Changes), and the *Ch'un Ch'iu* (Spring and Autumn Annals). See Fox, 573.

flows out without obstruction. We are then able to recover our normal state of existence, a life of ritual propriety.[48] According to Tu Wei-ming, despite their formalistic nature, rituals are concrete manifestations of the ethicoreligious intent underlying an established ritual.[49] For Confucians, rituals are inseparable with Heaven (*t'ien*), the "supreme moral will," from which the power of the rituals emanate. In Benjamin Schwartz's words, “the entire body of *Li* itself, even when it involves strictly human transactions, involves a sacred dimension.”[50]

These ancient rituals which define the different ways of being in the world are literally “magical” for Confucius. They have a transformative power. In his *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*, Herbert Fingarette discusses his idea of “transformative magic” as follows: “By ‘magic’ I mean the power of a specific person to accomplish his will directly and effortlessly through ritual, gesture and incantation. The user of magic does not work by strategies and devices as a means to an end: he does not use coercion or physical forces. He simply wills the end in the proper ritual setting and with the proper ritual gesture and word.”[51] This is not to say that Confucius is a mystic, but to emphasize that in Confucianism there is no understanding for seeking advantage or

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[48] See Shu-hsien Liu, *Understanding Confucian Philosophy: Classical and Sung-Ming* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 19.
[49] Wei-ming Tu, *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 47..
[50] Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 48-50.
[51] Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius—The Secular as Sacred* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 3.

imposing social oppression through the rituals. The rituals are about one's basic relationships with the world. On the Confucian theory of rituals, Robert C. Neville writes:

> The Confucian theory of ritual propriety can be generalized to include the entire pyramid of signs or of organic and social habits, the higher modifying the lower, the lower undergirding and making possible the higher. The ancient Confucians did not believe, as the Taoists suggested, that the higher signs of ritual behavior can be imposed carelessly on baser habits. On the contrary, the uses of ritual propriety are precisely to fulfill the potential excellence of more elementary natural habits by turning power into government, cooperation into friendship, and so forth…. The moral significance of propriety, or a fully civilized system of signs, is that it makes possible the existence of high culture as harmonies of habits. The achievements of culture have life only in the exercise of habits whose sign structures define the culture. Unless there are signs for friendship, family, good government, and so forth, it simply is not possible to have friendship, family, or good government. The moral significance of propriety or a civilized sign system is its culture-building function.[52]

The moral meaning of ritual is that it makes possible the existence of social habits that are derived from harmonious interactions and communications between people. Ritual provides a concrete pattern of social intercourse, and makes it part of an immanent moral world. Ritual activities become moral in themselves without submitting to an outside end. According to Fox, such a life would need no "strained self-definition or self-analysis, for the individual would in a peculiar sense recede: an immanent sociality, not the sovereign individual, would be the root of things."[53]

What does this moral ontology mean for law and politics? The Confucian position is

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[52] Robert C. Neville, *Boston Confucianism: Portable Tradition in the Late-Modern World* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 14.

[53] See Fox, 574.

that all forms of authority should depend more upon virtue and morality than on penal laws. The Confucian *te* (virtue) exists in conjunction with one's communal, ritual relationship with Heaven. *Li* (rituals) do not just bind the individual to the power of Heaven, but they bind every member of society and all their respective responsibilities in a manifest moral order. The idea of the world revealing a moral order in which we participate is an old one in western culture, but not one that has survived modernity. Since Locke, it has been impossible to believe that politics moves forward in a moral space. In ritual, however, there is a sense of moral order. To take a stand in ritual is to take a position in public. For instance, as Tan Soor hoon has indicated, the “coming of age” ritual brings about an acknowledgement on one’s new relationship to others and his new position in the community. His future conduct is demanded and expected differently from now on, and others are required to treat him based on his new position.[54] In this vein, take a stand is a public act, involving not just a private, inner ordering, but a creating of social meanings as well. This leads to a uniting of one's personal and public life. As patterns of human relations, ritual proprieties suggest that all individuals would be dependent upon each other, recognize their responsibilities according to their positions in ritual practices, and extend the way of interacting to the whole social

[54] See Sor-hoon Tan, “From Cannibalism to Empowerment: an *Analects*-inspired Attempt to Balance Community and Liberty,” *Philosophy East & West*, 2004, Vol 54: 59.

structure. Hence, the exercise of authority requires the cooperation of all.[55]

In a Confucian social order, everyone bears equal responsibility to their own ritual place. But there is not the imposition of a universal equality of persons in Confucianism. Rather, among all participants, Confucian equality is relational and reciprocal based on different societal and familial roles. This notion of reciprocity (*shu*) provides us with an understanding of Confucian "parity" in terms of social roles. Obviously, not all roles are equal; the famous w*u-lun* (Five Relationships) of Confucian orthodoxy (father/ son, older brother/younger brother, ruler/minister, husband/ wife and friend/friend) are between unequals, with one exception (friend/friend). For Confucians, *wu-lun* represent basic human relations. Tu Wei-ming comments that “since their claim to universality is based on commonly experienced modes of human-relatedness, they signify no more than five ordinary modes of human interaction….Although they are all interconnected, we can neither generalize from any one relationship nor specify which among them really occupies the most prominent position.”[56] Furthermore, the five relationships are governed by five moral principles, each representing an important dimension of human community. The purpose of ethical education is evident. Mencius stated the rationale for the existence of the five relationships:

According to the way of man, if they are well fed, warmly clothed, and comfortably

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55 Fox, 575.
56 Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, 55.

> lodged but without education they will become almost like animals. The sage (Emperor Shun) worried about it and he appointed Hsieh to be minister of education and teach people human relations, that between father and son, there should be *affection*; between ruler and minister, there should be *righteousness*; between husband and wife, there should be attention to their *separate functions*; between old and young, there should be a *proper order*; and between friends, there should be *faithfulness*. Emperor Yao said, "lead them on, rectify them, straighten them, aid them, so they discover for themselves [their moral nature], and in addition, stimulate them and confer kindness on them.[57]

As the five relationships are governed by five moral principles, inequality among them is hardly a social and political oppression. The Confucian golden rule: "do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire" is always in operation among human interactions. Moreover, all unequal relationships shift over time: sons become fathers, students become learned, young women become mothers, and so forth. In Confucianism, those responsibilities are also opportunities for exercising various forms of authority. At the same time, particular social roles change over time and across social space. The boundary that distinguishes one role from another is never fixed and universal. As indicated in the *Book of Change*, one's identity and roles change relative to the context. In short, authority becomes "diffused and ultimately reciprocal in Confucian society, giving Confucianism a sort of 'moral equality.'"[58]

This equality between roles is both potential and developmental, but that does not mean that when suffering abuse, the only way to do is to simply endure it. Mencius

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[57] Mencius, III: 4, cited in Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, 55-56. Italics added.
[58] See Fox, 577.

pointed out that there are times it is a duty for those who desire to be virtuous to rebel against tyranny. In addition, the diffusion of authority is not a methodical process; rather, in an aesthetic sense, authority arises spontaneously through ritual activities. Confucius said “if a man is correct in his own comportment, then no commands will be necessary.”[59] There is no arbitrary and absolute authority in a Confucian community, if it is fully realized according to the Confucian principles. What there is in a Confucian community is a plurality of authorities, and these authorities derive their authoritative characters from their social roles and their *li* (rituals).[60] According to Ames and Hall, accepting a meaningful moral structure in the world makes it possible for an individual to become an “author” of his own behavior, which, in turn, contributes to recreate the moral structure. In a ritual constituted society, all participants become an "author" of their own lives by putting themselves in an immanent relationship with Heaven. Ames and Hall state “in the interaction between the human being and *t'ien* (Heaven), a person becomes an 'authority' in his deference to and embodiment of existing meanings... he becomes an ‘author’ in his creative disposition.”[61] A farmer may be virtuous in his farming and act as an authoritative farmer; at home he may be a virtuous father and speak as an authoritative father. Authority is revealed through creative, contextual and

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59 *The Analects* 13:6, cited in Fox, 577.
60 See Fox, 577.
61 Hall and Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius*, 244, cited in Fox, 577.

personal acts of *li* (ritual). According to Ames, in a “ritual ordered community, particular persons stand in relationships defined by creativity rather than power. This distinction between power and creativity is essential” to Confucianism.[62]

When authority is perceived as related to human artistry rather than power, there is a "transformation of all social relationships into personal relationships."[63] In the aesthetic practices, the exercise of authority and the performance of ritual are closely associated. All participants in the ritual activities are intimately tied to a sense of the common good, which is comparable with liberal individuals who tolerate each other within an artificial neutral framework.

If community authority is allowed to be distributed in so unregulated a manner, how can the Confucians prevent the possibility of abuse and the pursuit of advantage and self-interest? Confucius's writings demonstrate that this is his greatest concern: if *li* (ritual proprieties) were not properly understood, the authority given to each in their different times and places would become unreliable and untrustworthy. He sees that engaging in one's *li* (rites) requires “overcoming the self.” This overcoming, which is crucial to the Confucian notion of authority, involves the personal cultivation of “*jen*”

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[62] Roger T. Ames, “Rites and Rights: The Confucian Alternative,” in *Human Rights and the World's Religions*, ed. Leroy S. Rouner (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 201, cited in Fox, 577.

[63] Antonio S. Cua, “Confucian Vision and Human Community,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 11 (1984): 227, cited in Fox, 578.

(benevolence or humanity).[64]

A person who sets his mind to realize *jen* is called the profound person (*Chun-tzu*), who is defined not by birth but by virtue.[65] When the profound person achieves the perfection of *jen*, so that he may act in total freedom and in accordance with the principles of *yi* (righteousness) and *li* (rules of propriety), he is not only a *chun-tzu*, but a sage. *Yi* can be understood as the actual application of *jen* to different situations and relationships. It mediates between the universal principle of *jen* and the particular situations in which the principle is concretely manifested. *Li* is the proper way of expressing and becoming oneself in fulfilling one's *jen*. It is a structure by which *jen* and *yi* are realized in the context of human relations. Thus *jen* is to be identified with the essence of all virtues.[66]

While Heaven has an essential link with the internal virtues of man, Heaven is a source of moral motivation in a profound person. Furthermore, Heaven in Confucius, and later in Mencius, is deemed both as an internal source of one's potentiality and an external limitation and necessity such as death, misfortune, and so on. These limitations come from man's object nature. As an object, man is limited by external causes in

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64 See Fox, 578.

65 Chun-tzu has been translated by a variety of sinologists into nobleman, gentleman, superior man, benevolent man, exemplary person, and so on. In this thesis, I follow Tu Wei-ming's translation—the profound person.

66 See Chung-ying Cheng, *New Dimensions of Confucian and Neo-Confucian Philosophy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, Press, 1991), 69-70.

specific time and space. But Confucius and Mencius point out that besides this object-nature, man has a dynamic subject-nature–that is, man is a subject capable of cultivating virtues and thus acting autonomous and independent of his nature. This is how man may realize his spiritual freedom despite the external limitations.[67]

As a true leader of humanity, the profound person can cause a process of moral transformation in society by his exemplary living without imposing any coercive measures upon the people. The profound person is instrumental in the formation of a Confucian community. His magnetic power gathers people together for no other external purpose than the actualization of their own nature. The characteristics of the Confucian ideal society—fiduciary community, is manifested in the ceremonies of ancestral worship. Tu Wei-ming writes:

> For a traditional Confucian, ancestral worship by filial sons may be taken as the microcosm of an ideal society. Ceremonial acts in this connection symbolize desirable behavioral patterns. To respect the old and to honor the dead is to show special concern for the common origin of all. The old are respected not only for their past service but also for the continual value of their wise guidance. The dead are honored because a loving memory of the forefathers brings forth communal identity and solidarity. Society so conceived is not an adversary system consisting of pressure groups but a fiduciary community based on mutual trust. Only in this sense was Confucius able to make the claim that if the ruler can administer his state with rites, he will no longer have any difficulty.[68]

With all above said, one might ask what the implication of the traditional ritual

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67 Ibid.

68 Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, 48.

constituted China is to the current situation. As Benjamin Schwartz has indicated, considering the traditional rituals of the past have been largely forgotten, there is uncertainty about the nature and significance of the surviving rituals. Due to the notorious Cultural Revolution and the influence of the west, there is a gap between the past and the present, and large subgroups in China are not concerned with Confucianism and ritual practices anymore.[69]

While Tu Weiming agrees with Schwartz to some degree, he has a different perspective. Tu conceives of the Confucian tradition as a live stream. It is dynamic and is able to interact with other traditions. Unlike Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism, Confucianism takes human persons embedded in this world here and now, and aims to understand and transform the self and the world from within. Many other traditions began their doctrines with a transcendent vision of a world outside. Confucianism differs from them in that there is no counterpart of a Christian church, of a Taoist shrine, or of an Islamic mosque in a Confucian context. Like pragmatists, Confucius accepted the world order as meaningful and redeemable, and reformable. There is not a sense of metaphysical certainty in Confucianism. In this light, the Confucian project is understood to moralize politics, to transform society through self-cultivation, and to

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[69] See Weiming Tu, Milan Hejtmanek, and Alan Wachman, ed. *The Confucian World Observed: A Contemporary Discussion of Confucian Humanism in East Asia* (Honolulu, HI: The East-West Center, 1992), 10.

accept the power relationships as possible resources for transformation. This provided a great deal of flexibility for further development. In history, while Confucianism did emerge as one of the major intellectual tradition in China, it gradually entered three cultural areas—Korea, Japan, and Vietnam—which are distinct in cultural form from China. The Confucian tradition has become a language of the moral order and community.[70]

Of course, some scholars have felt since 1960s that with the impact of the West, all of East Asia would enter into a new era. Some even contend that the age of Confucianism was gone forever, and there is no need to associate the tradition with the dynamics of modernity. But the problem is that can we make a sharp distinction between modernity and traditional ideas? With the collapse of the Confucian order, we have moved into a pluralistic society. Can we interpret the complexity of modern East Asia without reference to the Confucian tradition? Many scholars who study the modern transformation of East Asia now feel that they can not really understand the complexity of modern society without exploring the different kinds of categories within the Confucian tradition. For example, Carter Eckert has made a comparison of the view of profit between in a capitalist system in the West and that in Korea. While greed is not valued and welcomed anywhere, capitalist societies do not place any moral obligation on

[70] Ibid., 107-110

an individual's pursuit of profit. In a capitalist society, one's avarice stimulates the economy and serves a larger purpose within the mechanism of the marketplace. In Korea, capitalism was imported by the Confucian literati who should argue against profit based on the Confucian principles. But they resolved the value conflict between Confucian attitudes of disapproving the pursuit of profit and the profit motive inherent in capitalism. Their claim is that the main purpose of profit was to improve the general welfare and ensure the nation's independence. The business activities of hero-merchants were encouraged because they are expected to contribute to the community's interest rather than merely to their own.[71]

Indeed, some of the traditional rituals have been forgotten by the current Chinese people. But some important rituals have survived the impact of modernity. A good example is that of rituals of passage: one is marriage and the other is funerals. There are certain things that must be done in these rituals. In the case of funeral, there is a sequence of nine ritual acts that have to be performed. Through these ritual practices, the basic Confucian virtue—filial piety is cultivated, and the Confucian humanistic sensibility is fostered. The classic Confucian rituals are a source to draw to overcome the crisis of modernity. As Daniel Bell has indicated in his classic work, *The Cultural Contradiction of Capitalism*, capitalism has contained three significant contradictions

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[71] Ibid., 8-9.

since its beginning. The first is the conflict of asceticism and acquisitiveness. This is a tension between the self-discipline work ethics and the greed for profit. The second contradiction is the tension between the bourgeois tradition and modernism. The third contradiction is found in the separation of morality and law. A set of rules and procedures as penal laws have replaced "informal mechanisms of a community ethos" and changed traditional social relations. Bell concludes that "acquisitiveness, modernization, and resources to legal mechanism have come to dominate western capitalist societies at the expense of self-discipline, tradition, and informal ethical relationships."[72] With respect to all these problems, Confucianism, with its focus upon self-discipline, tradition, and the priority of morality over positive law, might offer a good source for saving the crisis of modernity.

[72] See Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), cited in David Hall and Roger Ames, *The Democracy of the Dead*, 95.

CHAPTER IV

DEWEY AND CONFUCIANS ON COMMUNITY

In this chapter, I will analyze Dewey's notion of community. For sure, the pragmatist might find some value in the Enlightenment narrative of absolute rights. But their defense of rights is grounded in practice rather than in theory. The pragmatist accepts the status and content of the rights raised by the liberal democracy on purely historicist grounds. They are committed to a kind of openness of inquiry and transparent communication, which is central to Dewey's vision of democracy. Dewey defines democracy as "a communicating community."[73] Dewey's notion of community provides an effective discourse with which to engage the Confucian model of community. Confucians comport well with Dewey against the claim of rights-based liberalism.

This chapter makes a comparison between Dewey and Confucian views of community. I begin by introducing Dewey's notion of experience. It is important because Dewey's notion of community is grounded in his theory of experience. For Confucians as well as the Deweyan pragmatists, ideally, the process of achieving communal harmony is through moral consensus at the level of aesthetic feeling and common practice. I discuss what Dewey means by experience and aesthetic experience.

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[73] See David Hall and Roger Ames, *The Democracy of the Dead: Dewey, Confucius, and the Hope for Democracy in China* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1999), 110-11.

Dewey's concept of community is closely associated with his notion of experience. Next, I talks about Dewey's notion of community. For Dewey, democracy is the idea of community, and democracy is a communicating community. The central idea of a Deweyan community is the realization of communication in an aesthetic and intelligent way. I will examine Dewey's view in detail. Finally, I make a comparison between Confucians and Dewey on their views of community. Confucian community is created through ritual. In rituals, the meanings and values shared by the community are affirmed through certain forms of speech, action and objects. It raises the question how it is possible to preserve liberty and individuality in a Confucian community. I would like to argue in the ritual semiotic structure, there lies plenty of possibilities for personal and communal growth. If we understand ritual at its best is an artistic performance, we can distinguish rituals that are oppressive from those that are beneficial to community. To understand how this is possible, I examine the aesthetic dimensions of ritual practice in Confucianism. It is fascinating that Confucian aesthetics seems similar to pragmatic aesthetics. For pragmatists like Dewey and Confucians, art is a practical way to improve the social functions of everyday life. As a crucially communicative and social practice, art plays a key role on communal harmony. Dewey considers art as "a remaking of the experience of the community in the direction of greater order and unity." By relating aesthetics to his democratic theory, Dewey argues for a pragmatist community that suits

well with the Confucian ideal.

Dewey's Notion of Experience

Dewey's notion of community is grounded in his notion of experience, which stresses the process or the content of the interaction of human organism and environment. To understand what Dewey means by community, it is necessary to examine Dewey's notion of experience in detail.

Dewey insists, historically, experience had come to mean only the process of "experiencing" and to exclude what was experienced. He was not satisfied with this term and had hoped to revise the title of *Experience and Nature* to be *Nature and Culture* in 1951. By "culture," Dewey refers to the complex and various ways in which human beings live together in the world. "The name 'culture' in its anthropological (not its Mathew Arnold) sense," says Dewey, "designate the vast range of things experienced in an indefinite variety of ways."[74] It includes artifacts, activities, customs, beliefs, dispositions, morals, arts, knowledge, and world-views. Culture also refers to "the material and the ideal in their reciprocal interrelationships."[75] Culture is the shared life of human beings as it is appropriated in terms of meaning and value. We can see that the word "experience" which Dewey had intended to replace with culture is radically

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[74] See John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*(LW: 1) (Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 362.

[75] Ibid., 363.

different from the traditional conception.

The concept of experience may provide a basis for Dewey's philosophical project; he defines it in a broad way. He agrees with William James that experience is a "double-barrelled" word that can emphasize the process or the content of the interaction of human organism and environment. Dewey states:

> Experience is what James called a double-barrelled word. Like its congeners, life and history, it includes what men do and suffer, what they strive for, love, believe and endure, and also how men act and are acted upon, the ways in which they do and suffer, desire and enjoy, see, believe, imagine—in short, processes of experiencing.[76]

For Dewey, it is possible to distinguish within experience two "levels" that Dewey calls primary experience and secondary or reflective experience. The distinction is one between gross, crude subject-matters in primary experience and the refined, derived objects of reflection. Derived and refined objects are experienced because of the intervention of systematic thinking. Dewey argues with empirical methods, natural sciences not only draw their material from primary experience, but also refer it back again for test. Dewey insists that philosophers, however, often do not return to primary experience from their theorizing for test.[77]

Dewey's notion of experience has been critiqued By Richard Rorty. To better understand Dewey's point, it is necessary to clarify Rorty's criticism. In his article

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[76] Ibid., 18.

[77] Ibid., 15-16.

"Dewey's Metaphysics," Rorty argues that for Dewey "there must be a standpoint from which experience can be seen…which… will make it impossible for us to describe it in these misleading ways which generate the subject-object and mind-matter dualisms… This viewpoint would resemble traditional metaphysics in providing a permanent neutral matrix for future inquiry."[78] Obviously, Rorty critiques Dewey as a metaphysician like any traditional ones. In fact, as an anti-foundationist, Dewey firmly argues against traditional metaphysics. Rorty's argument comes from a different view of experience. It seems for Rorty, there is no such a distinction between primary and secondary experience. And primary experience is impossible. Experience, for Rorty, is no more than a confusion between the data and the products of their analyses. In addition, Rorty agrees with Derrida that "language is not a device for representing reality, but a reality in which we live and move." Has Rorty identified language with primary experience? It seems not so. For Rorty, language is the starting point for inquiry, and there is nothing behind language. In his eyes, Dewey's experience is an attempt to inquire into "the genuine conflict which lay at the bottom of fruitless verbal disputes." In this vein, Rorty argues Dewey's experience is another attempt to ground language in the metaphysics of experience.[79]

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[78] Richard Rorty, "Dewey's Metaphysics", in *Consequence of pragmatism: Essays: 1972-1980* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 79-80.

[79] See Rorty, 86-87.

One problem with Rorty is the pragmatist notion of primary experience. Dewey distinguishes between primary experience and secondary experience. Primary experience is the raw, undifferentiated experience prior to any reflection, and secondary experience is reflective experience. For Dewey, the starting point for inquiry is primary experience. In primary experience there are no distinction between subject and object, between gross, crude subject-matters and the refined, derived objects, and it is an unanalyzable totality. All inquiry begins in primary experience, and the results of any inquiry may serve as the starting point for future inquiry. This is completely different from Rorty's position. For Rorty, there are no non-linguistic entities, and we live and move in language alone. He argues Dewey's experience is another attempt to authorize an absolute description of reality and ground language in a metaphysics framework. Of course, Dewey is not guilty of Rorty's critique for he has no intention to seek a neutral matrix for inquiry.

Primary experience is always more than reflective and linguistic acts can grasp. For Dewey, a thing's reality is not merely a matter of what can be described; other modes of experiencing are also important in the forming of reality. Pragmatists need not choose a precise and absolute description of reality or experience. As Hildebrand has indicated, characterization of the Deweyan experiences may proceed empirically: observe, propose, test and revise. We can never exhaustively define primary experience, but we may "approximate them, conscious of the fact that approximations stand or fall based on their

instrumentality to a particular inquiry."[80] To use language as the starting point may result in what Dewey says "disparagement of things experienced by way of love, desire, hope, fear and other traits characteristic of human individuality."[81]

Unlike Rorty has critiqued, primary experience is not a neutral standpoint from which language can be grounded. For the pragmatist, primary experience is not "pure" experience free of our conceptual and cultural "baggage." There is pre-theoretical selectivity in primary experience because "as social and cultural organisms we always confront a situation with a character (set of habits, emotions, beliefs) that to a certain extent determines the content of what is non-reflectively "given" and present in our lives."[82] As a social being, a person inevitably grow up in a social environment with a shared language and forms conceptual and perceptual habits that may affect what we directly experience. Dewey tells us that the world in which we live is a qualitative world and every situation we encounter is a qualitative situation. A situation is a complex whole which is dominated and characterized by a single quality. This quality is felt rather than thought. It is to this lived experience that we have to be faithful even though the quality of a situation might be conditioned by our character and our historical context. But it is not an absolute neutral matrix for inquiry as Rorty has pointed out. If we ask if

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80 See David L. Hildebrand, "The Neopragmatist Turn."

81 Dewey, LW 14: 32-33, cited in William T. Myers and Gregory F. Pappas, "Dewey's Metaphysics: a response to Richard Gale," *Transaction of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, XL: 4, 684.

82 See Myers and Pappas, 687.

there are some guiding principles or a foundation for a Deweyan empiricist to experience the world and create values, Dewey might recommend what he calls “an experience.” However, we should keep in mind that such experiences do not provide an absolute standpoint from which experience can be seen. They create values for us to share and follow, but they can be revised and improved for further inquiry.

According to Dewey, there are certain experiences with *internal integrity* that are worthy of special consideration. In such experiences, “every successive part flows freely, without seam and without unfilled blanks, into what ensues; there are no holes, mechanical junctions, and dead centers when we have an experience.”[83] This is what Dewey calls “*an experience*.” Such experiences are aesthetic and can align themselves with the rest of experience. Dewey gives the following examples:

> A piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory; a problem receives its solution; a game that is played through; a situation, whether that of eating a meal, playing a game of chess, carrying on a conversation, writing a book, or taking part in a political campaign, is so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation.[84]

Dewey suggests that consummation is present in “those courses of action in which through successive deeds there runs a sense of growing meaning conserved and accumulating toward an end that is felt as accomplishment of a process.”[85] This kind of meaning is a value. When such an end is reached and meaning is conserved, there is a

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[83] John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigee books, 1980), 36.
[84] Ibid., 35.
[85] Ibid., 38.

tendency to repeat and perpetuate them; and such a tendency is a foundation for value. For Dewey, a value is a goal in such areas of experience as education, working, and political life.[86]

Such aesthetic experiences can provide a foundation for thinking and inquiry. If we call such a non-absolute foundation for inquiry as a metaphysics, Dewey does have one. As a matter of fact, Dewey does not deny that he has a metaphysics. In *Experience and Nature*, he acknowledges his development of a naturalistic metaphysics. But Dewey has his own definition, that is, metaphysics is "cognizance of the generic traits of existence." It is this definition that Rorty critiques. In "Dewey's Metaphysics," Rorty argues that for Dewey, there must be a standpoint from which experience can be seen in terms of some "generic traits." And Dewey wants to be as naturalistic as Locke and as historicist as Hegel. But naturalistic metaphysics is a contradiction in terms. One can not serve both Locke and Hegel.[87]

To understand Rorty's critique, it is necessary to take a look at what those generic traits are for Dewey. Dewey claims that natural existence is a mixture of stability and precariousness, certainty and uncertainty, repetition and variance, and so on. The error of traditional metaphysicians is that they do not take into consideration the traits of

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[86] See James Campbell, *Understanding John Dewey* (Open Court, Chicago: 1995), 72.

[87] See Rorty, 80-83.

precariousness and uncertainty. Dewey's rejection of traditional metaphysics is based on his insistence that precariousness and uncertainty are just as genuine traits of nature as stability and certainty. Why does he insist on this? On what basis does he claim all these traits characterize nature? Dewey's reasons are grounded in his empirical method. Experience is the only means of disclosing the characteristics of nature. Experience is of nature and in nature. For Dewey, what exists is just that which is experienced. Dewey shifts an emphasis of philosophy from upon reality as it is known to reality as it is encountered in experience.[88]

Thomas Alexander sees that "in human experience, process can develop into a creative expression, involving the individual in the active participation with the world which culminates in Aesthetic meaning."[89] For Dewey, meaning is more important than truth, and the culmination of meaning is art and the aesthetic. Art and the aesthetic, therefore for Dewey, can disclose the meaning of our existence. Dewey argues that "it is reasonable to believe that the most adequate definition of the basic traits of natural existence can be had only when its properties are most fully displayed—a condition which is met in the degree of the scope and intimacy of the interactions realized."[90] The art and the aesthetic thus reveal the possibility in nature for the fulfillment of value and

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[88] See Thomas Alexander, *John Dewey's theory of Art, experience, and Nature* (State University of New York Press, 1987), 76.
[89] Ibid.
[90] John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 201.

meaning. This has important philosophical and practical meaning. Based on this notion of experience, Dewey proposed an ideal political system for the realization of individual potentiality and the growth of value and meaning.

Dewey's Notion of Community

Dewey's concept of community is closely related to his notion of experience. For Dewey, democracy is the idea of community. He states:

> There is more than a verbal tie between common, community and communication. Men lived in a community by virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common.[91]

A community is a regulative ideal that leads a group of individuals to achieve shared goods through communication. In a community, communication enables mutual interactions and brings about a sharing of ideas and experiences. The central idea of a Deweyan community is the realization of communication in an aesthetic and intelligent way. In addition, Dewey argues that democracy is "more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience."[92] It is this broader sense of democracy that recognizes "the moral sense of democracy as a way of living together." Dewey understood democracy as a form of moral association in which a certain way of life is formed in the relations of its citizens.[93]

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[91] John Dewey, MW 9: 7, cited in Sor-hoon Tan, "From Cannibalism to Empowerment: an Analects-inspired Attempt to Balance Community and Liberty," *Philosophy East & West*, 2004, Vol 54: 58.
[92] Gregory F. Pappas, "Dewey's Ethics: Morality as Experience", in Larry Hickman, ed., *Reading Dewey* (Indiana University Press, 1998), 116.
[93] Ibid.

Democracy as a way of life is tested by interactive living. “From the standpoint of the individual,” says Dewey, the democratic idea

> consists in having a responsible share according to capacity in forming and directing the activities of the groups to which one belongs and in participating according to need in the values which the groups sustain. From the standpoint of the groups, it demands liberation of the potentialities of members of a group in harmony with the interests and good which are common.[94]

Dewey’s democracy emphasizes upon engagement in social life. To fulfill the responsibilities of democracy requires Dewey’s democrats to participate in communal life actively. “The key-note of democracy as a way of life may be expressed,“ he writes, “ as the necessity for the participation of every mature human being in formation of the values that regulate the living of men together...”[95] Without the chance to participate, individuals can not grow: “human nature is developed only when its elements take part in directing things which are common, things for the sake of which men and women form groups—families, industrial companies, governments, churches, scientific associations, and so on.”[96]

As I mentioned in Chapter II, in rights-based liberalism, social and political concerns have largely revolved around the questions such as the relation of the individual to society, the realms of private and public activity, and the character of rights and

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[94] Dewey, LW 2:327-328, cited in James Campbell, “Dewey and Democracy”, in *Dewey Reconfigured*, Casey Haskins and David Seiple, ed. (State University of New York Press), 3.
[95] Dewey, LW 11:27, cited in Campbell, “Dewey and Democracy”, 4.
[96] Dewey, MW 12:199-200, cited in Campbell, “Dewey and Democracy”, 4.

responsibility, etc. By contrast, the discussion of Chinese social and political thought would include the cultivation of personal and communal life, the function of tradition-based ritual activities in forming a harmonic society, and so on.

What is interesting is that these Confucian concerns are dramatically similar to John Dewey's theory of democratic community. In fact, Dewey's notion of community has provided us a means of understanding the term Confucian community. For Dewey, democracy is a communicating community. If communitarian concerns are central within a society, there will be an important check upon the pursuance of novelty of beliefs and opinions simply for their own sake. This must be so since the central desire is the advocation of a commonality to insure significant communication. Normatively, constraints will not be imposed from outside either through legislation or through oppressive public opinion. If the desire for communication is to be operative, there will be increased tolerance of differences as well as a concern to maintain the potential for communicative interactions through the insistence upon mere empty novelty. This concern raises the important question that how it is possible to preserve liberty and individuality in a Confucian society, because ritual plays a crucial role in Confucian community construction.

Confucians and Dewey on Community and Aesthetics

Anthropologists have noted the importance of ritual in communication. As I have

mentioned in Chapter III, Confucian community is created through ritual(*li*, rites). Communication involves transactions with signs. Tan Sor-hoon indicates that Confucian ritual is a semiotic structure because it gives Confucian community continuity and stability. The Confucian rituals can be traced back to religious ritual practice in ancient China. The ancient Chinese used rituals to communicate with natural forces, with deities and ancestors. Those rituals were intended to produce satisfactory outcomes to individuals and community. Ancient Chinese religious rituals were often symbolic repetition of great cooperative endeavors, for example, the cultivation of crops or the rally before going to war. In those rituals, participants communicate with each other, reaffirming their mutual trust and commitment to shared goods.[97]

As the religious elements in ancient rituals are dismissed by Confucius later on, human communication becomes more important and gives ritual a humanistic meaning. Today, attending a ritual, for example, ancestor worship, does not require one to believe that dead ancestors will influence our lives through mystic means; instead, we can understand that its significance lies more in what it affirm one's relationship with those who are dead and those who will come later.[98] As mentioned in Chapter III, according to Tu Wei-ming, ancestral worship may be considered as the microcosm of an ideal

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97 Tan, 58.
98 Ibid.

society. Ceremonial acts symbolize certain ideal behavioral patterns. To honor the old and the dead is to "show special concern for the common origin of all. The old are respected not only for their past service but also for the continual value of their wise guidance. The dead are honored because a loving memory of the forefathers brings forth communal identity and solidarity. Society so conceived is not an adversary system consisting of pressure groups but a fiduciary community based on mutual trust."[99]

Rituals have existed in the Chinese social and political realm for thousands of years. According to the Confucian classic—*Liji*, "he who understands the ceremonial sacrifices to heaven and earth, and the several sacrifices to the ancestors, would find governing a kingdom as easy as looking into his palm."[100] The Chinese believed that ritual may facilitate government. In Chinese history, the imperial court attempted to control the meaning and value that pervaded Chinese life. The effectiveness of ritual as a means of political control is due to the state's ability to control the semiotic structure of rituals. Indeed, such political rituals sometimes prevent effective communications between people. But the significance of ritual goes beyond political, and its effectiveness is not limited to the oppressive. In the ritual semiotic structure, there lies plenty of possibilities for personal and communal growth. In Confucianism, ritual helps form harmonious

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[99] Wei-ming Tu, *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 48.

[100] *Liji* 32.13, cited in Tan, 59.

social order. Tan indicates in premodern China or modern societies, we can find important rituals such as “rites of passage celebrating birth, coming of age, marriage, and death; these mark significant moments in human life, moments of transition between key stages of the life cycle and between significant social territories.”[101] These moments signify important changes in human relationships.

The meaning of these moments is constructed through communal participation and interaction. By sharing ideas and emotions through ritual acts, the relationships that constitute community are renewed and strengthened. For instance, the “coming of age” ritual brings about an acknowledgement on one’s new relationship to others and his new position in the community. His future conduct is demanded and expected differently from now on, and others are required to treat him based on his new position.

In rituals, the meanings and values shared by the community are demonstrated through certain forms of speech, action and objects. When the participants in a ritual stand to each other and affirm shared meanings and values, they learn how to better coordinate with each other and extend the way of interacting to other situations. Ritual lead to make “stability of meaning prevail over the instability of events in human interactions.” It not only facilitates interaction, but also form the way we understand our

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[101] Tan, 59.

world and assign meanings to various relationships.[102]

Any set of rituals that constitutes a community seems to leave little room for liberty and individuality. Does a society based on ritual imply an intolerance of diversity that will lead to some form of totalitarian society? Such a danger is undeniable. If any individual or group succeed in imposing its semiotic structure on others, it would lead to control over the latter's value and liberty. Such destruction of liberty is also harmful to community. However, if we understand ritual at its best is an artistic performance, we can distinguish rituals that are oppressive from those that are beneficial to community. The difference between the harmony of a community created by ritual and the imposed homogeneity of a totalitarian society lies in the liberty and creativity individuals are able to carry out. Confucian ritual is not a rigid and oppressive semiotic structure. Confucian semiotic structure of ritual is open and dynamic, leaving room for creativity and liberty.[103] To understand how this is possible, it is necessary to examine the aesthetic dimensions of ritual practice in Confucianism.

Confucian ritual is closely related to poetry and music. In Confucian education, typical communication is inspired by the *Songs* (Poetry, or Odes), which are derived from ritual and music. Confucius once told his son, "if you do not study the *Songs*, you

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[102] Ibid., 60.
[103] Ibid., 61.

will be at a loss as to what to say."[104] Quoting the *Songs* to express oneself is a form of ritual mastery. In traditional Chinese banquet rituals, quoting poetry or other classic works to express one's sentiments is very common and highly regarded. Appropriate quotation involves the use of certain forms that has been passed from generation to generation. Yet it is not without room for creativity: these forms, when used in new situations, do not prohibit free improvisation. They can create new meanings relative the context.

In Confucianism, dance is also closely associated with ritual practice. Early Confucians were considered as "masters of dance." Dance is music and poetry in motion. As an expressive form of thinking, feeling and moving, dance is an appropriate parallel to ritual. Mencius describes moral achievement in terms of a continuous experience of joy that expresses itself in dance. In *the Analects*, Confucius's gestures, bodily movements and facial expressions are portrayed in affectionate detail. In ritual practice, the body and its movements are vehicles of meaning and value. By engaging the rituals, the participants interact within it and experience affective and cognitive change in the relationships that constitute community. We can distinguish the difference between the harmony of a community created by ritual and the imposed homogeneity of

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[104] *The Analects* 16.13, trans. by Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine Press, 1998), cited in Tan, 61.

a totalitarian society through the case of dance. It is just like the difference between dancing mechanically and dancing artistically. When dancing mechanically requires no emotions and creativity, dancing artistically involves "skills in symbolization, emotional expression, agility of movement, and the ability to use syntactically novel forms without being trained in the phrases of that form." In an artistic dance, new sequences of movement and gesture may be created and understood by the viewers. Like dance, ritual can be an open semiotic system that can create new meanings.[105]

Richard Shusterman observes that Confucian aesthetics seems similar to pragmatic aesthetics. For the pragmatist, the function of aesthetics is to enhance our experience of art and beauty rather than to produce accurate formal definitions or abstract theories. As Dewey has recognized, in aesthetic matters, such "formal definitions leave us cold."[106] The real value of aesthetic discourse, including definitions, thus, is of pragmatic guiding toward an improved experience. Hence Dewey states that "a definition is good when it points in the direction in which we can move expeditiously" to have "an experience."[107]

Confucius holds a similar view. Shusterman sees while Confucius speaks of music, he does not attempt to give a formal definition of this art. Instead, Confucius provides guidance on how to appreciate musical value in experience. For instance, he raises

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[105] Tan, 62-63.
[106] John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 155, cited in Richard Shusterman, "Pragmatism and East-Asian Thought," *Metaphilosophy*, Jan. 2004, Vol 35: 18.
[107] Ibid., 19.

examples of musical excellence and proposes exemplary methods of music practice in *the Analects*. “The Master said of the *shao* music that it is both superbly beautiful (*mei*)and superbly effective (*shan*). Of the *wu* music he said that it is superbly beautiful but not superbly efficacious.” “The Master said ‘the cry of the Osprey’ is pleasing without being excessive, is mournful without being injurious.” In contrast, “the zheng music is lewd.”[108]

For pragmatists and Confucians, art is a practical way to improve the social functions of everyday life. As Dewey has stated, art is an essential means of ethical education that can transform both the individual and society. In artistic education, we can cultivate a sense of good order and propriety, enhancing our understanding of harmony and meaning.

In history, Confucians speak highly of the aesthetic model of education. They stress the importance of music and ritual as key means in refining both the self and society. These aesthetic practices concern the formation of social order and good government in the character of the individual and society. Confucius said, “In referring time and again to observing ritual propriety (*li*), how could I just be talking about gifts of jade and silk? And in referring time and again to making music (*yue*), how could I just be talking about

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[108] *The Analects*, 3.35, 3.20, 15.11, translated by Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont, cited in Shusterman, 19.

bells and drums?" Confucius asked his students, "my young friends, why don't you study the *Songs*? Reciting the *Songs* can arouse your sensibilities, strengthen your powers of observation, enhance your ability to get on with others, and sharpen your critical skills. Close at hand it enables you to serve your father, and away at court it enables you to serve your lord." Confucius likewise urged the study of ritual. For him, the most valuable function of observing ritual is to achieve harmony in both self and society.[109]

Pragmatism likewise concerns the formative ethical and political power of aesthetic practices. For pragmatists, art is more than a private affair of personal taste since it is socially formed. As a crucially communicative and social practice, art plays a key role on communal harmony. Dewey considers art as "a remaking of the experience of the community in the direction of greater order and unity." He speaks of "the power of music in particular to merge different individualities in a common surrender, loyalty and inspiration."[110] It should be noted that this is not the demand for imposed homogeneity in a totalitarian society. It is not an arbitrary demand like that in a fascist society. Dewey argues that "art is more moral than moralities" because it offers new visions of better orders and promote respect for individuals. By relating aesthetics to democratic theory,

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[109] *The Analects*, 17.11, 17.9, cited in Shusterman, 20

[110] Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 349, 338.

Dewey states that while significant aesthetics wholes "must be constituted by parts that are themselves significant apart from the whole to which they belong…no significant community can exist save as it is composed of individuals who are significant."[111]

[111] Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 207-08.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Confucianism is commonly misunderstood as a utilitarian and conservative sensibility primarily concerned with secular affairs. However, since 1980s, the debates between individualism and communitarianism have provided an opportunity for the reappraisal of Confucianism.

Today, as China struggles with the influences of modernity, the relations between its Confucian heritage and liberal democracy have been much debated. Some scholars contend that classical Confucianism and the communitarian critique of liberal politics intersect, because they both challenge the ascendancy of modern liberalism. There are real problems in America for which solution can be sought from an understanding of the Confucian experience.

To understand the issue, I begin this thesis by examining rights-based liberalism in detail. Rights-based liberalism is grounded in its notion of the self. This theory assumes that the individual is the fundamental social unit out of which states are formed. This individual is the bearer of fundamental rights, and the rights are prior to society. Such an individual is not free from association with others. The liberal individual, like the communitarian, will be conditioned by social relationships. The difference is that, for the liberal, the relationship is voluntary, while for the communitarian, the relationship is

embedded in community practices. To put it another way, in a rights-based society, the right of free association is a right of disassociation. The freedom of the individual to choose his relationships must include the freedom to cancel any of those relationships.

A fundamental problem with rights-based liberal democracy is that they have "few mechanisms preventing individuals from becoming alienated from communities since the rights serving as the fundamental signs and rewards of a just society are so often enjoyed in private." Such rights do not prevent individuals from joining together in communities, but neither do they stimulate community building. Community building is in need of the promotion of goods-in-common.[112]

According to Russell Fox, contemporary communitarians have been better at analyzing the history of liberalism and the theoretical foundations of community than at actually asking how communities may be ordered. For that reason, many communitarian claims against liberalism have seemed speculative, at best. Fox sees, nevertheless, that classic Confucianism provides a system of constitutive practices and principles that may help put communitarian ideals into practice. An inquiry into the ideas of the Confucian community is helpful to enrich the contemporary communitarian theories.

What is interesting is that Confucianism and American pragmatism comport well to

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[112] See David Hall and Roger Ames, *The Democracy of the Dead: Dewey, Confucius, and the Hope for Democracy in China* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1999), 102-08.

argue against rights-based liberalism. For the pragmatist, there is “less concern to predicate any particular list of rights than there is to demonstrate their value in practice.” Thus, the pragmatist places community ahead of the individual. They argue that “the principal issue is not the specific belief in an antecedently existing individual as bearer of this or that set of rights. It is, rather, the actual practices of a society or community that validate or fail to validate the value of any set of beliefs.” For sure, the pragmatist might find some value in the Enlightenment narrative of absolute rights. But their defense of rights is grounded in practice rather than in theory. The pragmatist accepts the content of the rights raised by the liberal democracy on purely historicist grounds. They are committed to a kind of openness of inquiry and transparent communication, which is central to Dewey’s vision of democracy. In fact, Dewey defines democracy as a communicating community.[113] On this issue, the Confucian sides with the pragmatist against the universalistic claim for individual rights.

Moreover, in a Confucian society, as in a Deweyan democracy, consensus is often achieved at the aesthetic and practical levels rather than with regard to the claims of reason. The aesthetic and Deweyan pragmatism object to any sorts of metaphysical presumption that grounds public consensus. For Confucians as well as the Deweyan pragmatists, ideally, the process of achieving communal harmony is through moral

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[113] Ibid., 110-11.

consensus: not an agreement about how individuals ought to behave, but a consensus at the level of aesthetic feeling and common practice.[114]

In this vein, then I discuss how pragmatist and Confucians construct their community. According to Fox, most interpretations of community structure run between two poles. Roughly speaking, in a community, individuals tend to a certain shared conception of the good. The shared conception of the good is embodied either in an authoritative text, person or god as in many religious communities, or in a historically developed set of practices as in most civic organizations.[115] Communities of both authority and activity can both be found within the Western tradition.

But both of these forms of communitarianism are challenged by liberals as a threat to the promise of democracy. However, what is surprising is that the thought of the early Confucians develops an approach to community order that can solve the contradiction. Confucian ritual suggests standards of authority and activity which are comparable with western experience. Then I focus on the issue how forms of authority and activity work together to create a Confucian community. A community base on ritual is not a totalitarian community. Confucius saw ritual acts not as merely rites of worship or filial piety, but as an intimate connection between the person performing the rite and the

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[114] Ibid., 99-111.

[115] See Russell Arben Fox, "Confucian and Communitarian Responses to Liberal Democracy," *The Review of Politics* 59 (Summer 97): 569-70.

immanent order of things itself. As Shu-hsien Liu has noted, the term *li* (rites and proprieties, or ritual) does not mean merely external rules of propriety or social conventions that have been imposed on our behavior. Rather, it is in our hearts we have a natural love for it. When our selfish desires are under control, the goodwill toward one's life and others flows out without obstruction. We are then able to recover our normal state of existence, a life of ritual propriety.[116]

Confucian notion of community based on ritual is comparable with Dewey's view of democratic community. Dewey's notion of community is grounded in his notion of experience, which stresses the process or the content of the interaction of human organism and environment. To understand what Dewey means by community, I examine Dewey's notion of experience in detail.

I explain what Dewey means by experience and aesthetic experience. According to Dewey, there are certain experiences with *internal integrity* that are worthy of special consideration. In such experiences, "every successive part flows freely, without seam and without unfilled blanks, into what ensues; there are no holes, mechanical junctions, and dead centers when we have an experience."[117] This is what Dewey calls "*an experience*." Such experiences are aesthetic and can align themselves with the rest of

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[116] See Shu-hsien Liu, *Understanding Confucian Philosophy: Classical and Sung-Ming* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 19.

[117] John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigee books, 1980), 36.

experience.

Human experience process can develop into a creative expression, involving the individual in the active participation with the world which culminates in Aesthetic meaning. For Dewey, meaning is more important than truth, and the culmination of meaning is art and the aesthetic. Art and the aesthetic, therefore for Dewey, can disclose the meaning of our existence. Dewey argues that "it is reasonable to believe that the most adequate definition of the basic traits of natural existence can be had only when its properties are most fully displayed—a condition which is met in the degree of the scope and intimacy of the interactions realized."[118] The art and the aesthetic thus reveal the possibility in nature for the fulfillment of value and meaning. This has important philosophical and practical meaning. Based on this notion of experience, Dewey proposed an ideal political system for the realization of individual potentiality and the growth of value and meaning.

Dewey's concept of community is closely associated with his notion of experience. For Dewey, democracy is the idea of community, and democracy is a communicating community. The central idea of a Deweyan community is the realization of communication in an aesthetic and intelligent way.

I offer a comparison between Confucians and Dewey on their views of community.

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[118] Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 201.

Confucian community is created through ritual. In rituals, the meanings and values shared by the community are affirmed through certain forms of speech, action and objects. It raises the question how it is possible to preserve liberty and individuality in a Confucian community. I argue in the ritual semiotic structure, there lies plenty of possibilities for personal and communal growth. If we understand ritual at its best is an artistic performance, we can distinguish rituals that are oppressive from those that are beneficial to community. To understand how this is possible, I examine the aesthetic dimensions of ritual practice in Confucianism. It is fascinating that Confucian aesthetics seems similar to pragmatic aesthetics. For pragmatists like Dewey and Confucians, art is a practical way to improve the social functions of everyday life. As a crucially communicative and social practice, art plays a key role on communal harmony. Dewey considers art as “a remaking of the experience of the community in the direction of greater order and unity.” By relating aesthetics to his democratic theory, Dewey argues for a pragmatist community that suits well with the Confucian ideal.

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VITA

Hui Fu
Department of Philosophy
314 Bolton Hall
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX 77843-4237

Email Address: ryanhfu@yahoo.com

Education:
B.A. Applied English, Nankai University Branch, July 1994
M.A. Philosophy, Texas A & M University, August 2006.
M.A. Church-State Studies, Baylor University, August 2004

Work Experience
Grading Assistant, Texas A & M University, January 2004-May 2006
Graduate Assistant, Baylor University, August 2001-May 2003