INTRODUCTION

This is not a book on Confucianism—Confucian thought, Confucian ethics, or Confucian theory in practice. Nor is it a book on the defining characteristics of the Confucian tradition and its modern transformation. Rather, it is an inquiry into the dynamic interplay of intellectual, social, political, and economic currents in Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore), with particular attention to the cultural implications of the rise of industrial East Asia. The contributors take the Confucian dimension as the point of entry for our inquiry. Confucian concerns (i.e., self-cultivation, regulation of the family, social civility, moral education, well-being of the people, governance of the state, and universal peace) provide a general framework for our joint venture. The Confucian Problematik—how a fiduciary community can come into being through exemplary teaching and moral transformation—underlies much of the discussion.

Our inquiry is guided by a critical consciousness that leads us to question all unexamined assumptions about the rise of industrial East Asia. We do not as a group subscribe to any one thesis or hypothesis as the best way to understand its cultural implications. Since our primary purpose is to comprehend, we hope collectively to bring new insights to this multifaceted phenomenon through our varying interpretations. Our strategy, then,
not to seek consensus but to provide an open forum to accommodate several seemingly conflicting lines of thought. While we are acutely aware of the need for significantly different perspectives, our intent is to explore those ideas, norms, and values that underlie the moral fabric of East Asian societies. It is certainly advisable, at this early stage, not to tie up loose ends prematurely in studying such an immensely complex phenomenon as the rise of industrial East Asia, an area that continues to undergo unprecedented transformation. By characterizing our endeavor as an attempt to probe the Confucian traditions of East Asian modernity, we mean to show that there are different ways to conceptualize the Confucian heritage of modern East Asia, and that this points toward the need for reexamining the whole idea of modernity.

As this digested conversation indicates, there is as much contested interpretation as there is "fusion of horizons" on virtually all aspects of the Confucian thesis. For instance, is Confucian ethics a common discourse in industrial East Asia? We find that the answer varies according to academic discipline, regional specialization, and personal judgment. Historians, especially intellectual historians, tend to stress the common heritage and shared spiritual orientation, whereas anthropologists are wary about making broad generalizations and prefer to offer "thick descriptions" of the local scene. Japanologists, while acknowledging the ubiquitous presence of the Confucian pattern of behavior, tend to minimize the prominence of Confucian thought in Japan's modern transformation. The relevance of Confucian ethics in the economic ethos and political culture of Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and overseas Chinese communities is taken for granted by Sinologists, but there is no consensus on the role and function of the Confucian ethic in the modern transformation of these societies.

It ought to be noted, however, that it was the towering figure of American Japanology, Edwin Reischauer, who, in his seminal essay "The Sinic World in Perspective," first emphasized the pervasiveness of the Confucian mentality in contemporary East Asia, including Japan. Though mindful of Japan's uniqueness, Reischauer insisted on situating Japan in the East Asian cultural universe to show that its economic dynamism indicates not merely exceptionalism but a pattern of modern transformation encompassing the whole of East Asia. Putting the Sinic world in perspective thus provides a proper context for understanding Japan, the Four Mini-Dragons, overseas Chinese communities, and, eventually, socialist East Asia (mainland China, North Korea, and Vietnam).

Surely "the claim that Confucian ethics, as reflected in government leadership, competitive education, a disciplined work force, principles of equality and self-reliance, and self-cultivation, provides a necessary background and powerful motivating force for the rise of industrial East Asia" has yet to be substantiated. Nevertheless, the benefit of addressing the issue is obvious. The difficulty of confronting the role of culture in industrial East Asia is, of course, enormous, but by focusing our attention on the Confucian role, we are compelled to wrestle with the question instead of delegating it to the background or to a residual category. Already this "Confucian hypothesis" has stimulated an impressive array of productive research and will continue to challenge us to formulate more comprehensive and refined interpretations.

Among the conceptual resources widely tapped for this kind of inquiry, the Weberian mode of questioning, as demonstrated in Max Weber's Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, looms large in our discussion. But the method of finding the functional equivalent of the Protestant ethic in the "modernized" or "vulgarized" Confucian ethic is too facile, simpleminded, and mechanistic to merit serious attention. This observation is not meant to downplay the importance of a work ethic in East Asian productivity. In fact, several significant empirical studies have helped us to understand the correlation between value orientation, attitude, and performance in East Asian industry, and the Confucian ethic is often identified as a positive factor in these studies. Nevertheless, the inadequacy of regarding the Confucian ethic in East Asia as the functional equivalent of the Protestant ethic is obvious: what it manages to reveal may turn out to be misleading, but what it inadvertently conceals is at times vitally important. After all, Weber's brilliant study of the psychocultural conditions that made possible the development of the spirit of capitalism was, in his view, only a preliminary step toward estimating "the quantitative cultural significance of ascetic Protestantism in its relation to the other plastic elements of modern culture."4

In The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism Weber indicates that he is critically aware of the requisite intermediate steps involved in the kind of cultural study for which his was a mere beginning:

The next task would be rather to show the significance of ascetic rationalism, which has only been touched in the foregoing sketch, for the content of practical social ethics, thus for the types of organization and the functions of social groups from convivial to the State. Then its relation to humanistic rationalism, its ideal of life and cultural influence; further to the development of philosophical and scientific empiricism, to technical development and to spiritual ideals would have to be analyzed. Then its historical development from the mediaval beginnings of worldly asceticism to its dissolution into pure utilitarianism would have to be traced out through all the areas of ascetic religion.
What Weber outlined was his vision of the rise of the modern West, a vision pregnant with fruitful ambiguities and far-reaching implications for comparative civilizational studies. Understandably, Weber's well-known interpretative stance on Confucianism served as a point of departure for the entire discussion, notwithstanding the obsolescence of many of his empirical observations. For example, Weber's concluding remark in *The Religion of China* is still highly suggestive:

> The Chinese in all probability would be quite capable . . . of assimilating capitalism which has technically and economically been fully developed in the modern culture area. It is obviously not a question of deeming the Chinese "naturally ungifted" for the demands of capitalism. But compared to the Occident, the varied conditions which externally favored the origin of capitalism in China did not suffice to create it. Likewise capitalism did not originate in occidental or oriental Antiquity, or in India, or where Islamism held sway. Yet in each of these areas different and favorable circumstances seemed to facilitate its rise. Many of the circumstances which could or had to hinder capitalism in China similarly existed in the Occident and assumed definite shape in the period of modern capitalism.6

Evidently there is fluidity in Weber's characterization of the genetic reasons for the development of capitalism. As Wolfgang Schluchter notes, since Weber was mainly concerned with a specific historical question—namely, why industrial capitalism emerged in the Protestant West—his interpretation leaves open the possibility that different forms of capitalism might grow out of a variety of cultural traditions in response to the challenge of the modern West.7 This may be what prompted Peter Berger to characterize industrial East Asian capitalism as a "second case."8

Our venture to explore the Confucian influence in Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons is part of this international collaborative effort to come to terms with the rise of industrial East Asia as a cultural phenomenon as well as an economic and political process. Our decision to involve scholars from different academic disciplines, with different regional specializations and working at different levels of generalization and in different styles of explanation, was predicated on the assumption that, since the subject has attracted much attention from policymakers, the mass media, and the general public, it is imperative that we continue our brainstorming to raise thought-provoking questions. Our purpose, then, is to achieve a broad grasp of the interplay between cultural values and the economic, political, social, and ethical life of East Asian peoples.

The underlying assumption that culture matters and that economic facts and political institutions are laden with cultural values was neither trivialized nor relegated to a residual category. While opinions varied in assigning specific weight to the Confucian factor in explaining the dynamic transformation of industrial East Asia, there was a remarkable convergence of views on the need to problematize the Confucian hypothesis and to provide sophisticated cultural and historical background to the Confucian thesis in current interpretative literature on East Asia in the English-speaking community. Imagine a reporter from Beijing who intended to write a series of articles on the American economy, polity, and society during the highly energized 1994 election season, yet who not only was unfamiliar with Christian symbols but insisted on the irrelevance of the Protestant tradition to his journalistic task. Would we have much faith in his ability to present culturally sophisticated reports on the current American scene, including the presidential debates?

Surely, just as it is conceptually vague and misleading to label American society Christian, it is neither instructive nor correct to characterize any East Asian society as Confucian. Still, cultural sensitivity and cultural competence, as reflected in either a general theory or an empirical investigation, are desirable and often necessary. I mention this, of course, not to conflate knowledge about Confucian ethics with sensitivity to and competence in East Asian culture, but to acknowledge that familiarity with Confucian ethics can serve as a litmus test for judging intellectual seriousness in approaching East Asia as a subject in comparative civilizational studies.

We must not underestimate the complexity of the methodological issues involved in addressing the Confucian role in East Asian societies, itself a fine art, because that role is both elusive and pervasive. We are, on the one hand, at a loss to identify and define how the Confucian ethic actually works in economic organization, political ideology, and social behavior. And yet, on the other hand, we are impressed by its presence in virtually every aspect of interpersonal relations in East Asian life. Understandably, the authors of this volume have chosen a variety of methods to investigate the phenomenon. The range of options includes the core curriculum in moral education, ancestral veneration in family ritual, symbolic resources in the development of a civil society, the formation of a political ideology, and networking in economic behavior and organization. If we try to look for an integrated pattern to tell us the precise boundaries and significance of the Confucian influence in industrial East Asia, we are most likely to be disappointed. At the same time, while we frankly admit to an asymmetry in style, method, and level of analysis, we maintain that *Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity* offers a many-faceted conversation rather than discrete monologues. Indeed, there are so many points of
convergence and intersections of communication that it is not farfetched to claim that this book represents a new attempt by like-minded scholars to come to grips with moral education and economic culture in contemporary East Asia. The broad picture that emerges from the contributors focused, sometimes highly specialized studies is, in Jürgen Habermas's expression, a lifeworld, significantly different from our own in the West (specifically western Europe and North America) and yet modern in every sense of the word.

Two implications are worth mentioning. First, there is the fascinating phenomenon of traditions in modernity. The question in what sense has the Confucian ethic contributed to the economic dynamics of industrial East Asia seems less interesting than a much more profound subject of investigation: How does the Confucian tradition, in belief, attitude, and practice, continue to impede, facilitate, and guide the modern transformation in East Asia, and, in the process, how is it being rejected, revitalized, and fundamentally restructured? The limited Weberian project of searching for the functional equivalent of the Protestant ethic must be subsumed under Weber's general comparative civilizational perspective—namely, given the vital importance of the value orientation in economic development, what can the Confucian influence in industrial East Asia tell us about the relation between tradition and modernity?

Weber's assertion that since "the impediments to the development of capitalism must be sought primarily in the domain of religion," Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and, by implication, all indigenous religious traditions, unlike Protestantism, are detrimental to the modernizing process initiated in western Europe and must therefore be thoroughly revised. A more reasonable position is to argue for the transformative potential of all these major ethicoreligious traditions. What the experience of development in industrial East Asia suggests is not the passing of a traditional society but the continuing role of tradition in providing the rich texture of an evolving modernity. Confucianism—and, presumably, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and indigenous religious traditions (for instance, those of the Maori)—may have impeded the modernization of a traditional Oriental society in the Occidental sense. But the modernization of a Confucian society—or, for that matter, a Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist, or Maori society—requires the continuous participation and creative transformation of its ethicoreligious traditions. Since the rise of industrial East Asia indicates the authentic possibility of a Confucian spirit of capitalism, it may not be outrageous to imagine a Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist, or Maori spirit of capitalism.

This inevitably leads to the second implication: Can the modernization process assume cultural forms different from those identified as characteristic Western since the period of the Enlightenment? In other words, are market economy, democratic polity, and individualism so essential to the modernist project and so integrated as three inseparable dimensions of modernity that no society can ever become modernized without simultaneously being Westernized? The rise of industrial East Asia, at a minimum, has significantly complicated the Weberian picture of modernization as rationalization, a sort of unfolding of the Enlightenment mentality. Indeed, no matter how diverse and complex we imagine the West to be (Weber's concept is certainly sophisticated enough to accommodate many conflicting trends), the inclusion of the East Asian experience in the picture of modernity makes it extremely difficult to interpret modernization in light of exclusively Western symbolic resources. Once we begin to acknowledge the compatibility of a market economy and an authoritarian state, recognize the centrality of family virtues to social solidarity, appreciate the fruitful interplay between group consensus and personal independence, construct ideas of civil society based on indigenous categories, and employ new conceptual apparatuses such as network capitalism to understand a different kind of economic dynamics, we are well on our way to an alternative vision of modernity.

In the East Asian cultural context, government leadership is deemed indispensable for a smooth functioning of the domestic market economy and vital for enhancing national comparative advantage in international competition. The central government is expected to have a holistic vision of the well-being of the nation and a long-term plan to help people maintain an adequate livelihood so that they can attain their aspirations of human flourishing. Strong government with moral authority, a sort of ritualized symbolic power fully accepted by the overwhelming majority, is acclaimed as a blessing, for it is the responsibility of the ruling minority to translate the general will of the people into reasonable policies on security, health care, economic growth, social welfare, and education. Indeed, political leaders (including civil servants) in East Asia often possess a commanding influence in the public sphere. They may not be able to dictate the agenda or control the outcome of a public debate, but their voice normally overpowers the voices of other sectors in the society, such as the mass media, the business community, and the intelligentsia. Either in self-understanding or in public image, the political leader ought to be a teacher as well as an exemplar and a public servant. Indeed, scholars, journalists, and entrepreneurs often cultivate their most cherished and coveted personal ties with members of officialdom. The Confucian scholar-official mentality still functions in the psychocultural construct of East Asian societies. The best minds in business, the media, and the academic community are often readily available for political appointments.

The lack of clear boundaries between public and private in East Asian
societies, occasioned by the pervasive influence of politics in all segments of the lifeworld, may not conform to the Western model of modernity, with its highly differentiated spheres of interest. It is, however, wholly commensurate with the centrality of the family in East Asia, not only as a basic social unit but as a metaphor for political culture. The structure and function of the family varies substantially among Chinese, Japanese, and Korean societies, but the family's supreme role in capital formation, power politics, social stability, and moral education is comparable in all East Asian communities. The classic Confucian vision that "only when families are regulated are states governed" (stated in the opening passage of the *Great Learning*) is still taken absolutely seriously in East Asian political culture. The idea of the state as an enlarged family may have lost much of its persuasiveness, but the metaphor of the family is widely present in all forms of social organization. Moreover, family-style connectedness is characteristic of many prominent modes of interpersonal communication based on educational, territorial, and religious ties. The lack of development of Western-style civil society rooted in voluntary associations is clearly attributable to the saliency of this noncontractual, extralegal, and ascriptive networking.

Implicit in the significance of the family for social intercourse is the idea of duty. The sense that one is obligated to, and responsible for, an ever-expanding network of human relatedness may not be a constraint on one's independence and autonomy. On the contrary, since personal dignity is predicated on one's ability not only to establish oneself but also to take care of others, one's level of independence and autonomy is measurable in terms of the degree to which one fulfills obligations and discharges responsibilities to family, community, state, the world, and Heaven. The psychological mechanism reflected in the fear of losing face in public, which is often accompanied by a profound sense of personal guilt, is deduced from this. As the eminent New Confucian thinker Tang Junyi (T'ang Chiin-i, 1909-1978) perceptively notes, duty consciousness prompts East Asian moral and political leaders to act so as to enhance the public good. The difficulty East Asian societies have in developing a sophisticated legal system based on human rights lies not only in the absence of a juridical tradition but also in the strong presence of a different style of moral reasoning.

A significant and captivating aspect of this alternative East Asian vision of modernity is the communal spirit. Consensus as a preferred way of decision making, negotiation as a conventional method of resolving conflict, informal arbitration as a frequent substitute for formal legal procedures, and, as a last resort, the common practice of mediation through third parties rather than direct confrontation between rivals are all symptomatic of an overriding concern for group solidarity in politics, business, and society at large in East Asia. In this particular connection what Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons symbolize is a less adversarial, less individualistic, and less self-interested but highly energized and fiercely competitive approach to modernization.

It is vitally important to note that the East Asian form of modernity is in a substantial way "Western." After all, it has been the result of a conscious response to the challenge of the modern West since the mid-nineteenth century. Without the Western model, including the Dutch, British, French, German, and more recently American examples, East Asian societies would not have embarked on a restless march toward modernization. What would East Asia have become had the imperialist powers never imposed their way of life on the Land of the Rising Sun, the Hermit Kingdom, and the Middle Country? Although the region most likely would not have developed the "capitalist spirit" as Weber understood it, the overwhelming presence of the modern West for more than a century makes this kind of counterfactual supposition historically insignificant, if not theoretically inconceivable. Indeed, East Asian intellectuals have reluctantly but thoroughly accepted modern Western nations as the initiators, executors, and judges of the international rules of the game in foreign trade, diplomacy, power politics, military confrontation, and transnational communication for so long that they themselves have taken it for granted that modernization, in theory and practice, is synonymous with Westernization. The record number of industrial East Asian leaders in academia, politics, business, the mass media, and the military who were educated in the United States since the end of the Second World War further enhances the impression that Westernization is, by and large, Americanization.

The rise of industrial East Asia, paradoxically, signifies the continuous vitality and dynamism of modernization as Westernization. This is clearly evidenced in the persuasive power of market economy and democratic polity and the attendant Enlightenment values, such as progress, equality, liberty, human rights, individual dignity, and due process of law, in the psychocultural construct of the East Asian intelligentsia. Modernization as Americanization is perhaps most obviously demonstrated in the receptivity of East Asian youth to American popular culture and the susceptibility of the East Asian general public to American consumerism. The commanding influence
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of American higher education, however, especially research universities, on the East Asian natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities may have been the single most important factor in perpetuating the image of the United States as a future-oriented global intellectual leader in East Asian minds.

Nevertheless, the modernizing experience in industrial East Asia seriously challenges all the conceptual apparatuses that have been used to characterize Western-style modernity. The modern West may have prompted East Asia to modernize in the initial stages, but as the process gathered momentum, a variety of indigenous resources were mobilized. The structures that emerged, therefore, appear significantly different from those in western Europe and North America. It seems that the social and cultural capital that has sustained the economic dynamism of Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons has been at least commensurate with Confucian ethics, if not thoroughly Confucian in nature. Even if Weber was correct in assuming that Confucianism had impeded the development of modern industrial capitalism in traditional East Asia, the thesis that the Confucian ethic is incompatible with the spirit of capitalism is untenable. On the contrary, it has been shown that the Confucian ethic is not only compatible with the capitalist spirit but may actually have helped industrial East Asia to develop a different form of modern industrial capitalism. Indeed, attempts have been made to argue a much stronger hypothesis—namely, that the capitalism rooted in Confucian ethics may turn out to be more consequential for the twenty-first century than the classic capitalism fashioned by the inner-worldly asceticism of the Puritan ethic. The implications are profound and far-reaching. The contributors to Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity are particularly interested in two of these implications: the role of tradition in modernity and the ways in which the modernizing process may assume several different cultural forms.

In our conference we did not intend to cover, even in bold outline, all the salient features of East Asian modernity. By focusing our attention on the Confucian dimension, we wanted to probe the cultural resources that made modern industrial East Asia distinctive. We are admittedly far from able to make any definitive statements about either the modern transformation of Confucian humanism or the nature of East Asian modernity as shaped by Confucian traditions. As part of an ongoing international conversation, we have nevertheless taken an important step toward setting up a long-term comprehensive agenda for a systematic inquiry into the cultural significance of the rise of industrial East Asia for comparative civilizational studies. Especially noteworthy is our pioneering attempt to formulate a method of interdisciplinary and cross-cultural communication so that the kinds of issues mentioned herein may be addressed appropriately and persistently.

PART I

INTELLECTUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES

This volume begins with four essays exploring the symbolic resources of the Confucian heritage most relevant to East Asian modernity. They are highly selective in a rich repertoire of subject matter for focused investigation. Although the authors do not intend to present either a comprehensive or a fully integrated approach, they do address some of the crucial issues in understanding the modernization of East Asian society. The essays raise fundamental questions about the transformation of the Confucian tradition and offer fresh insights into a sustained Confucian characterization of East Asia today. Whether from the stance of an inside participant or an outside observer, in the style of sympathetic appreciation or critical reflection, or for the sake of opening up the field for further questioning or bringing the discussion to a tentative conclusion, the authors' perspectives are captivating and challenging. They compel us to regard the Confucian influence as requisite “social and cultural capital” rather than as desirable but dispensable background in vital areas such as moral education, cultural identity, the art of government, and the development of civil society in industrial East Asia.