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The Impact of Confucianism in South Korea and Japan

Abstract

Korea and Japan spent much time culturally and politically under the influence of China, which brought Confucianism to these countries. This study explores the influence of Confucianism on modern Japanese and Korean societies. This paper discusses issues such as loyalty and collectivism in the two previous mentioned countries.

1. Introduction

Whilst most of the literature focusing on Confucianism has concentrated on how important it has been in China, little attention has been paid to a comparison of the development of Confucianism in Korea¹ and Japan. When considering the current society in these countries, we can see that the time has come to analyze whether Confucianism is still the dominant philosophy in these both countries.

The goals of this paper are the following: to find characteristic features of Confucianism in Korea and Japan, and to examine the differences in terms of beliefs and strengths. Regarding its structure, the paper proceeds in four steps: (1) defining Confucianism, (2) outlining its realizations in South Korea, (3) outlining its realizations in Japan, (4) suggesting possible grounds for further development of this project.

Confucianism has its basis in the teachings of Confucius (541–479 BC), despite the fact that Confucius was not the founder of a school of philosophy. He wanted to recreate the kind of social order that would have prevailed at the very beginning of the Zhou dynasty (1027–256 BC). So he traveled all around the Zhou kingdom, hoping that his political ideas would find an enthusiastic patron. Although Confucius never succeeded in this issue, some people became interested in his beliefs. Confucius's followers started to consider him not only as a political figure but also as a teacher.² He set in motion the project of philosophy as a search for harmony. Shortly after he passed away around 500 AD BC, new philosophical schools emerged (Daoism, Mohism, and Legalism³), all of which appeared around the same time, and could be associated with the ideas of Confucius.

¹ 'Korea' here is used to refer to both South and North Korea.

² It has to be said that Confucius never wrote any treatises that included his personal ideas. However, his discussions with his students/disciples came to be recorded as the *Lunyu* (saying of Confucius to his disciples), a term most commonly translated as the Analects (Korean: *Nuno*, Japanese: *Rongo*).

³ [Nicolas Zufferey](#), *La Pensée des Chinois*, Paris: Marabout, 2008, p. 130.



According to Chen Hongxing, a Chinese researcher from the Academy of Social Sciences of Tianjin, the most important notion to be attributed to Confucius was the idea of humaneness.⁴ The *Analects* proposed that this element consists in not treating others in a way that one would not want to be treated oneself. This notion can be considered as the center of its moral philosophy. Another important concept developed in the *Analects* is the notion of the *junzi* (Korean: 향사), a term which can be translated as the ‘prince’.⁵ Confucius considered that the prince refers to the “son of a ruler” who is cultivated as the son of the leader, the only one who knows the truth and who can bring the nation to harmony. Therefore all people can be considered as sons of the prince if they cultivate their personality appropriately. In terms of politics, Confucius suggests in the *Analects* that moral rule, or rule by virtue, is far more effective than rule by law. Rule by virtue brings forth compliance when the coercive power of the ruler is manifest, but also when it is not. It means that it would be right for a father to conceal the crimes of a son rather than turn him over to the authorities.

Confucius’ teachings were developed and advanced by various disciples such as Mencius (371–289 AD).⁶ The most important and significant contribution of Mencius to Confucianism was the idea that human nature is good at birth. As an extension, Mencius suggested that evil is a consequence of the resignation of the goodness people were born with, and is inherent to the body. That is why according to Mencius, the aim of human beings was to maintain the natural goodness of humankind. In terms of politics we can define Mencius as a being more aggressive than Confucius. As an example, he stated that when a citizen does not respect the rules of the country, he should be removed or re-educated, or possibly even executed.⁷

According to traditional accounts, Confucius was credited with editing the various classics of ancient Chinese writing that supposedly existed prior to his day. These books consisted of some treatises from the Han Era: the *Book of Changes*; the *Book of History*; the *Book of Poetry*; the *Book of Rites*; the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. In these times, these texts were studied widely. During the Han dynasty, Confucius began to emerge as the revered sage-philosopher of China, and Confucians as a group of scholars.

During these times another philosophical system, Buddhism, entered the Far East and China. Following the fall of the Han, Buddhism gradually expanded, often in association with the ruling power of non-Chinese elites. However, Buddhists were highly persecuted as a result of an increasing awareness of the foreign nature of Buddhist teachings.⁸ As a consequence, Confucian teachings were reasserted under the form of Neo-Confucianism. Rational principle and strong force constituted the basic points of the Neo-Confucian

⁴ Chen Hongxing, ‘Reproduction, Familiarity, Love and Humaneness: How Confucius Revealed «Humaneness»’, *Frontiers of Philosophy in China*, December 2010, Vol. 5, No. 4, p. 507.

⁵ Kim Haboush, Ja Hyun, ‘The Education of the Yi Crown Prince: A Study in Confucian Pedagogy’, in *The Rise of Neo-Confucianism in Korea*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, p. 27.

⁶ Mencius as allegedly a student of Confucius’ grandson. Zufferey, *La Pensée des Chinois*, p. 174.

⁷ John M. Koller, *Oriental Philosophies*, London: MacMillan, 1985, p. 252.

⁸ Some Confucian literati appreciated and socialized with Buddhists. Kim Daeyol, ‘The Social and Cultural Presence of Buddhism in the Lives of Confucian Literati in Late Choson: The Case of Tasan’, *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2, December 2012, p. 214.

description of the world, as responses to Buddhist concepts. Like the scholars of Mencius, Neo-Confucians also affirmed that human nature was at birth good and added that human nature was a rational principle regarding the rational structure of a world that characterized humanity through human nature.

2. Confucianism in Korea

No exact date for the introduction of Chinese Confucianism into Korea can be given, although it can be said that Confucianism was introduced to the kingdom of Koguryo (고구려) by China in the fourth century. A national academy for Confucian studies, known as Taehak (태학), quickly emerged in 372. This academy was followed by local schools called Kyongdang. However, Koguryo refused to be totally Sinicized, and so the impact of Confucianism was highly limited. Confucianism entered Shilla much later than Paekche (백제) and Koguryo⁹. The establishment of a government office in charge of Confucian studies and the National Academy (국학) in 628 marked the beginning of Confucian studies; it produced a quite important number of Confucian scholars. Approximately one hundred years later, in 717, portraits of Confucius and many of his disciples were brought from China and installed at the National Academy where Confucian and Chinese history were taught. We may also remark that it is not known whether Paekche did in fact establish a Confucian school. Nevertheless it should be noted that the Chinese-style Sôgi (書記/서기, the so-called ‘Documentary Records’) of Paekche was produced in the fourth century.

Regarding Neo-Confucianism, this philosophy was first introduced during the closing years of the Koryo Dynasty (918–1392). According to Kim Daeyol, a researcher affiliated to INALCO (Paris, France), the rulers of the Chosun Dynasty (1392–1910) adopted Neo-Confucianism as their national ideology.¹⁰ Furthermore Yi Hye Gyung, a research professor in the Institute of Humanities of the Seoul National University, emphasized that Neo-Confucianism influenced the Chosun Dynasty even more than it did Japan and China. Neo-Confucian scholars thought that in accordance to world-view of Neo-Confucianism, the ethical ability of the individual could generate peace in the universe.¹¹

The rise of Neo-Confucianism led to the sudden decline of Buddhism in Korea. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, King Taejong (태종대왕) inaugurated a clearly anti-Buddhist policy by reducing the number of monasteries and temples. One of his successors, King Saejong (세종대왕) tolerated Buddhism, as an example ordering the construction of the Buddhist Wongak temple in Seoul. In the sixteenth century, Buddhism became the religion of the uneducated and rural population; thus Neo-Confucianism became the dominant value system of the leadership of the Choson (조선) Dynasty (1392–1910). During the Choson Dynasty, Korean kings made the Neo-Confucian doctrine of the Chinese philosopher Zhou Xi their ideology.¹² According to Wang Sixiang, a researcher from

⁹ Koguryo, Paekche and Shilla were the three kingdoms of Korea which ruled over the Korean peninsula between 57 BC and 668 AD.

¹⁰ Daeyol, *The Social and Cultural Presence of Buddhism...*, p. 213.

¹¹ Yi Hye Gyung, *Changes in the Concept of Yulli*, *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 2, December 2017, p. 238.

¹² Kim Haboush, Ja Hyun, *A Heritage of Kings: One Man's Monarchy in the Confucian World*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, p. 234.

Columbia University, the concept of filiality is a part of the extensive state-sponsored project for the promulgation of Neo-Confucian morality in early Choson.¹³ Although it was a foreign philosophy, Korean Neo-Confucian scholars played a role in adapting Zhou Xi's teachings to Korean conditions. This had to be realized without denying the cultural superiority of China as the homeland of civilization. Looking at history, we may note that traditional ties between Korea and China (especially during the rule of the Han dynasty) are deeply rooted in Korean history, and also naturally forced Korea to become Confucian.

3. Confucianism in Japan

As we mentioned in the previous part, the territorial and therefore cultural expansion of the Han dynasty was the time for the introduction of Confucian¹⁴ texts and teachings, not only in Korea, but also into Japan via the Korean kingdom of Paekche in the mid-6th century.

It must be noted that an ancient Japanese text, the *Records of Ancient Matters* (*Kojiki*, 712), relates that earlier, Keun Ch'ogo, the ruler of the kingdom of Paekche, had sent an instructor named Wani, along with a piece of the *Analects* and another Chinese text, the *Thousand Character Classic* (*Qianziwen*; Japanese: *Senjimon*), to the ruler of Yamato around 400 AD.¹⁵ Presumably the intent was to instruct the Yamato prince in the principles of Confucianism. In this way Paekche served as an effective transmitter of Confucian texts and scholars in the mid-6th century. In Japan, Confucian ideals played a major role in the development of ethical philosophy. This was especially true during Japan's formative years (6th to 9th centuries), when Confucianism was introduced. The first patron of Confucianism in Japan was Prince Shotoku Taishi who lived during the 6th century. He enacted a Constitution of 17 acts which established Confucian ideals and Buddhist ethics as the pillars of Japan. During the Edo Period¹⁶ (1600–1868), neo-Confucianism appeared, relatively later than in the Korean peninsula, and became an ideology for the government and the elites of the country. Neo-Confucianism completely broke from the moral supremacy of Buddhism. During these times, the Japanese society was already deeply keen on Confucianism; people would think that a given social concept was “a Japanese value” instead of thinking that it was simply a Confucian value. The role of ancient history cannot be omitted and underestimated either; Confucianism is very strong in Japan because it affects and was affected by Shinto, the indigenous religion of Japan. The moral code in this religion is partly based on Confucian teachings; and so the spirit of Shinto reinforced the Confucian base within Japan. However it has to be said that although Confucianism was adopted by the Tokugawa regime, it had a limited influence on educational institutions. Going further, during the Meiji government (1868–1911), Confucian thoughts were used to

¹³ Wang Sixiang, *Filial Daughter of Kwaksan: Finger Severing, Confucian Virtues, and Envoy Poetry in Early Choson*, *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2, December 2012, p. 177.

¹⁴ The most commonly used references to Confucianism in Japanese history, traditional and modern, are the terms *Jugaku* and *Jukyū*. These, *Ju* is the Japanese reading of the Chinese word *Ru*, literally referring to ‘weaklings’.

¹⁵ Peter Nosco, *Confucianism and Tokugawa Culture*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 22.

¹⁶ Nosco, *Confucianism...*, p. 45; Gino Piovesana, *Out Japanese Philosophical Thought, 1862–1996: A Survey*, Richmond: Curzon Press, 1997.

advocate nationalism.¹⁷ The relationship between the emperor and the people was also compared to that of father and son, and thus loyalty was emphasized, an element which may be compared to Confucianism in the Korean peninsula.¹⁸

4. Confucianism in Modern Korea

As an introduction to the notion of Confucianism in modern Korea and Japan, we have first to discuss the compatibility between Confucianism and the notion of modern society. The following question arises: Is it possible to reconcile a Confucian vision of heavenly and human nature with the modern world with its ethics and political system? According to Jonghwan Lee, a South Korean researcher, it seems so, because many people are disappointed with Western values and have thus returned to their roots, to the Confucian model.¹⁹ It has to be said clearly that the relation between Confucianism and modern society is a very complicated issue because Confucianism is much more focused on historical elements than on the future.

In order to understand contemporary Korean society, we must take account of the fact that its basic premise is the presence of Confucianism in the daily life of Koreans. This means that in order to understand the significance of Confucian influence in the Korean peninsula, we must be sensitive to the specific contexts in which Confucianism is being discussed.

As of today, Neo-Confucian temples and educational institutions are contending with a range of modern practices.²⁰ Many elements of Neo-Confucian thought still exist in the daily administration (loyalty to an organization, long-time contracts, difficulties changing jobs...). It should also be emphasized that Neo-Confucian instruction disappeared from school curricula after World War II²¹. However after the rebirth of Confucianism in the late 1990s, a growing interest in Korean Confucianism reemerged in many countries of the Far East, albeit for different reasons in each country.²² As an example, since around the year 2000 it has become fashionable to reconstruct the grave and memorial stones of an ancestor, or to open private museums for

¹⁷ [Richard Reitan](#), *Making a Moral Society: Ethics and the State in Meiji Japan*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010, p. 18.

¹⁸ Regarding North Korea and Confucianism, the North Korean society is often described as being Confucian or Neo-Confucian. It seems that this system has borrowed a lot from the ideology known as Legalism which was adopted by the Wei state of the first Chinese emperor. In the 14th century, ~~Confucian scholars were ? and~~ all books of philosophy other than Legalist tracts were burnt. This doctrine as implemented during China's Ming dynasty (1364–1644) is a re-interpretation of Confucian teachings.

¹⁹ [Ken Tamai](#), [Jonghwan Lee](#), 'Confucianism as Cultural Constraint: A Comparison of Confucian Values of Japanese and Korean University Students', *International Education Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 5, 2002, p. 35.

²⁰ [Torbjörn Lodén](#), *Covering Confucianism, a Major Philosophy of Life in East Asia*, Folkestone: Global Oriental Media, 2006, p. 98.

²¹ Regarding Neo-Confucian education, see [Lee Jeong Kyu](#), 'Confucian Thought Affecting the Leadership and Organizational Culture of Korean Higher Education', *Radical Pedagogy*, December 2001, Vol. 3, No. 3; and [James Huntley Grayson](#), *Korea – A Religious Country*, New York: Routledge Curzon, 2002, p. 40–50.

²² [Xinzhong Yao](#), *Konfucjanizm. Wprowadzenie* [Confucianism. Introduction], Kraków: Wyd. Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2009, p. 274–275.

local scholars.²³ Regarding this issue, we may add that Korean funeral rites are currently the product of a mixture of influences from both Christianity and Confucianism.

The notion of filial piety²⁴ is also still upheld in South Korean tradition, especially with the importance of respect for the teacher (students do not call their teacher by name but by function – Korean: *seongsaengim*. Some Korean traditions such as the tea ceremony²⁵ and flower arranging follow Confucian principles.²⁶

5. Confucianism in Modern Japan

An important legacy of Confucian philosophy derives from the history of modern Japan.²⁷ This was apparent in the transition from the Tokugawa period to the Meiji period (1868–1912), i.e. the restoration of imperial rule. Confucianism can be considered as an ideology which tends to see ideals in the past. This ideology advocates a return to a ‘golden age’ as a great way to improve conditions in the present. The political transformation giving rise to the Meiji imperial regime was in a way a return to an ancient mode²⁸, and Confucianism had already served as a kind of state philosophy during the Edo era (1603–1868). Some researchers underlined that the Confucianism of the Edo period is ultimately responsible for the modernization of Japan by underlining the role of harmony between employees. This harmony led to an increase in productivity per employee, and to an overall growth of the Japanese economy.²⁹ Some Edo researchers also tried to mix traditional values with Confucianism: Yamaga Soko (1622–1685) in his military book *Bukyo Yuroku* bases his military theories on Japanese and Confucian cultures. His book has also had a great impact on Japanese military tradition.³⁰

As another example of the importance of Confucianism to Japan today is that the modern word for a college or university, *daigaku* (derived from the Chinese *daxue*) is an allusion to the title of the first of the four books of Neo-Confucianism, the *Daxue* (*The Great Learning*), a text that was understood as the gateway to learning for adults.

6. Similarities between Confucianism in Korea and in Japan

Certain similarities in the role of Confucianism in Korea and Japan may be noted. The crucial concept of harmony is one of the core Confucian ideas, a key value in Japanese and

²³ [Tu Wei Ming](#), *Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity – Moral Education and Economic Culture in Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 211–213.

²⁴ Between 1948 and the early 1960s, the use of the traditional Confucian expression ‘Show filial piety to your parents’ was officially avoided in the state’s ideology. Those who are married and families receive protection from the State. It is strongly affirmed that families are the cells of the society and shall be well taken care of by the State.

²⁵ [Oliver Ansart](#), *Le rite: La pensée politique d’Ogyû Sorai*, Genève: Droz, 1998, p. 38.

²⁶ The Korean language has many different registers of speech that can also be traced back to the five types of relationships defined by Confucius.

²⁷ [Wiesław Kotański](#), *Węgi shintoizmu* [In the circle of Shinto], Warszawa: Wyd. Dialog, 1995, p. 73–85.

²⁸ [Robert Bellah](#), *Japan Religion: The Cultural Roots of Modern Japan*, New York: The Free Press, 1985, p. 23–30; [Martin Collcutt](#), ‘The Confucian Legacy in Japan’, in *The East Asian Region: Confucian Heritage and Its Modern Implications*, Gilbert Rozman (ed.), Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.

²⁹ [Kato Shuishi](#), *Réévaluation du Confucianisme*, Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie, Vol. 6, 1991, p. 211.

³⁰ *Le Japon*, Paris: [L’Harmattan](#), 1993, p. 163.

Korean society, and a concept that has helped to shape both Korea and Japan's political cultures.³¹ Any form of open conflict is avoided. According to Torbjörn Lodén³², harmony can be considered as the guiding philosophy for the Japanese and Korean civilizations in familial and business relations. Torbjörn Lodén also mentions that Korean and Japanese children are taught to act in harmony with the surrounding order, starting from the pre-school period. Therefore in both countries there is a great emphasis on politeness, on working together for the universal, rather than on an individual basis.

The concept of education in Korean and Japanese civilizations is dominated by the fundamental principles of Confucian education. Both the Korean and Japanese systems are very similar³³. Many Confucian texts refer to the field of education. The 'educator/instructor' is not only present in educational institutions alone but also in various kind of societies and administrations. The title of 'chief instructor' is therefore very common in Japan and Korea³⁴. However we must remember that the Japanese government tried to extirpate Confucianism from the school curriculum; in 1958, the Ministry of Education introduced a new curriculum which contained no references to prewar lessons such as loyalty or etiquette. In other words, elements related to Confucianism were deleted³⁵.

According to Albert Pilot, both Korea and Japan societies are highly "collectivistic" societies³⁶. In these kinds of societies, each person born dissolves into a collective entity, either the family or the group. In both countries, more emphasis is placed on group orientation and loyalty to the group, for it is the group that gives one a social identity, provides a feeling of security, and receives the rewards of service³⁷. For example in South Korea, people are attached to various churches which provide them an identity and a path to follow. In Japan, we can notice that businesses (Japanese: 系列, Korean: 재벌) offer their workers total integration within their entire structures (Korean and Japanese companies are very large structures –. For example, Toyota created various educational institutions for its workers and for people with some industrial knowledge and work experience (the so-called Toyota Technological Institute). Regarding integration into a structure, in Korean companies new employees are indoctrinated to regard their workplaces as a family where

³¹ Ken Tamai, Jonghwan Lee, Confucianism as Cultural Constraint: A Comparison of Confucian Values of Japanese and Korean University Students', *International Education Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 5, 2002, p. 33–49. Arranged marriages are serve to maintain group harmony. Olga Barbasiewicz, *The Japanese Family System from the Meiji Restoration until the 21st Century*, Acta Asiatica Varsoviensis, No. 22, 2009, p. 8.

³² Lodén, *Rediscovering Confucianism*, p. 143.

³³ A point on which Japan and South Korea are rather similar is the huge importance attached to university entrance examinations. Furthermore, the educational systems of Japan and South Korea are basically very similar. All children used to go to elementary school for six years, and then to senior high schools for three years. As for higher education, both countries have two-year junior colleges, four-year universities, and graduate schools.

³⁴ Tu Wei Ming, *Confucian Traditions...*, p. 208.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 165.

³⁶ Nguyen Phuong-Mai, Cees Terlouw, Albert Pilot, Cooperative Learning vs. Confucian Heritage Culture's Collectivism: Confrontation to Reveal Some Cultural Conflict and Mismatch', *Asia Europe Journal*, October 2005, Vol. 3, Issue 3, p. 404.

³⁷ Daniel A. Bell, Hahm Chaibong, *Confucianism for the Modern World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 34–42.

the company director (or rather the president) is the head of the family who appreciate contact with workers (family members), leading to formulations such as ‘the Samsung family’, ‘the Toyota family’, ‘the Hyundai family’ and so on.³⁸ This leads to the conclusion expressed by the Chinese researcher Tu Wei Ming, who underlined in his research papers that the owner/managers of small factories are in large measure examples of Confucian values: paternalistic, conservative and traditionalist.³⁹

Regarding loyalty (Korean: 충승한은) to the group and to the leader, we can also notice that loyalty to elders and to the leader is extremely prominent within Korean society (both North and South) and in Japan. In North Korea loyalty toward Kim Il Sung was extremely important until he died in 1994. The entire society also expressed its respect towards him through ceremonies and rituals⁴⁰, similar to the Choson era. Regarding South Korea, loyalty toward leaders is less demonstrative, although South Korean policy-makers have used the concept of loyalty towards the United States, for example.⁴¹

Regarding economic matters, it can be seen that the Confucian values of the common good and hard work are shared in South Korea and Japan. Observing the financial crisis which happened in the late 2000s, it can be noted that Japan and South Korea very quickly recovered from the crisis. This was due to the leadership of these countries (a kind of collaboration between the political and business elite) which mobilized the society to confront problems.

7. Differences between Confucianism in Korea and Japan

First it has to be underlined that there are subtle but significant differences between Japan and South Korea, in terms of their levels of economic development and education⁴². We can then deduce that these factors have clearly impacted the economic and political development of these two countries.

Korean Confucianism stresses particular social relationships, but it is also a universal moral code, which made it easy for the Japanese to adopt⁴³. The Japanese have of course transformed it in their way, and therefore some of the Confucian concepts concerning relationships carry a different meaning from those in Korea. The Korean morality is especially definite regarding the family structure and all blood-related family clans. This is why the former leader of North Korea Kim Il Sung always considered himself the ‘father’ of the Koreans.⁴⁴ Regarding Japan, these kind of relations are not only associated with the family

³⁸ Tu Wei Ming, *Confucian Traditions...*, p. 220.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 273.

⁴⁰ Example of celebrations regarding Kim Il Sung: the birthday of Kim Il Sung (April 15, 1912), the return of Kim Il Sung to North Korea (August 22, 1945), the death of Kim Il Sung (July 8, 1994).

⁴¹ 조상들의 충효사상 고취 시킨다 [Filial piety and loyalty inspire ancestral history], *Chosun Ilbo*, April 16, 2012.

⁴² The systems are similar, but competition among pupils and students is more important in Korea than in Japan.

⁴³ Tu Wei Ming, *Confucian Traditions...*, p. 164.

⁴⁴ *Kim Il Sung and Korea*, Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1982, p. 240. For example, the Party openly describes Kim Il Sung as a god – the “Sun of Love”, “superior to Christ in love, superior to Buddha in benevolence, superior to Confucius in virtue and superior to Mohammed in justice”. Jasper Becker, *The Regime: Kim Jong Il and the Looming Threat of North Korea*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 77.

but also to the larger group with no blood relations. This is an important reason for why the notion of clans is prevalent in Japan. We can thus deduce that when a conflict between two entities appears, loyalty takes precedence over filial piety (i.e. a filial child is recognized only if a person gives a loyal service to a superior).⁴⁵

Regarding nationalism and heterogeneity, which are fundamental values of the Confucian model, Korean organizations are much more tolerant. Koreans are much more interested in foreigners; they accept people from abroad and move around outside Korea fairly freely. Japanese society is more homogeneous and less open to foreign cultures.⁴⁶ Korea's heterogeneity is probably due to the geographical situation of Korea (which is a peninsula and not an island like Japan) and to historical elements. The Korean peninsula has been attacked by both Chinese and Japanese forces of conquest. During and after the Korean War, South Korea was in contact with UN and American forces. Japan, meanwhile, is considered as one of the most insular countries, possibly because it has almost never been the target of massive foreign invasion.⁴⁷

8. Conclusion

The importance of Confucianism in Japanese and Korean history is undeniable: Confucian philosophy in Korea and Japan came to be the dominant system of their modern worldviews. Its legacy is apparent in any number of ways in modern Korean and Japanese discourse (especially in the fields of economy, education, humanities, the approach to foreigners, et al.). It also seems that Korea (both North and South) is more Confucian than Japan. This is due to various factors. First Korea was under more influence from China than Japan was. Secondly, Korea did not have any 'state religions' playing the role which Shintoism did in Japan. Finally, the geographical issue of Japan's isolation cut it off from foreign influences (including Chinese Confucianism and its derivatives). Furthermore, historians have neglected the influence of Christianity in the late Choson dynasty. The surprising flourishing of this religion in Korea was brought about by interactions with foreign partners such as Europe and Japan. Catholicism, which was authorized in Korea, played a significant role in the spread of this religion over the Korean population. On the contrary, Catholicism was prohibited in Japan in the 17th century, therefore reducing its impact on Japanese civilization. In more general terms, it is necessary to emphasize that during the great majority of its long history, Korea was not a hermit kingdom, and only came under the influence of Confucianism in the Choson dynasty, in contrast to Japan, which tried to protect its own model of social development more strongly.

⁴⁵ *Opinion Survey on Social Consciousness*, Public Relations Office, March 19, 2001. Available at http://online.sfsu.edu/squo/courses/psc411.ch1_ChineseJapanese_Confucianism.doc (accessed 1.06.2013). Such conflicts/frictions are always avoided on a national scale. Therefore Korea and Japan adopted an economic model where specialization (especially in the electronics industry) would help international coexistence.

⁴⁶ Scott Aubrey, 'A Cross-Cultural Discussion of Japan and South Korea and How Differences Are Manifested in the L2/EFL Classroom', *Asian Social Science*, Vol. 5, No. 5, May 2009.

⁴⁷ Jeffrey Hays, 'Japanese Society: Wa, Confucianism, Homogeneity, Conformity, Individualism and Hierarchies: http://factsanddetails.com/japan.php?itemid=642&catid=18#07' (accessed 20.05.2013).

