

China's Economic Development and Cultural Renaissance in the Multipolar Growth World of the 21st Century¹

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Abstract: Based on Malinowski's definition of culture as an integral whole of artifacts, organizations, and values, this paper analyzes the possibility of China's rapid economic development leading to a revival of Chinese culture with *ren* (benevolence) as its core value. Emerging economies such as India, Brazil, Russia, South Africa, and Indonesia have their own unique cultural heritages. In the 21st century multipolar growth world, they are also likely to maintain their respective core values and become modern nations like the forerunning Western industrialized nations, Japan, and Korea. The 21st century is likely to be a time of all civilizations developing, prospering, and shining together.

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I. Introduction

China's civilization is one of the oldest in the world. Before the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century, Chinese culture was preeminent among world civilizations.² After the Industrial Revolution, however, China's economic and international status dropped precipitately, while the West enjoyed substantial gains in social, economic, and technological progress. By the mid-19th century, when many nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America were colonized by or fell into the spheres of influence of Western powers, China also descended to become a poor, underdeveloped, semi-colonized nation that had to pay indemnity and surrender territory to the West.³ After WWI, nationalism rose worldwide and self determination became the popular demand of every nation. Eventually, one by one, the developing nations won their struggles for decolonization, gained political independence, and harnessed the opportunities to pursue their own development in the wake of WWII.

Chinese intellectuals have always assumed due responsibility for the nation's destiny. Over the one hundred and sixty-odd years since the Opium War, they have been searching for ways to rejuvenate the Chinese nation. For quite a long time, many Chinese and foreign scholars have blamed conservative and bigoted Confucianism for China's backwardness. They held that China must discard Confucianism and eliminate its influence to rejuvenate the nation. The view that Chinese traditional culture has inhibited the country's development and modernization has had far-reaching impact. One example from the early period of reform and opening in 1980s was a popular Chinese television series named *River Elegy* (Heshang), which defined Chinese civilization as Yellow civilization and Western civilization as Blue civilization. According to the *River Elegy*, the Yellow civilization was inward-looking and conservative, whereas the Blue civilization was outward looking, open, and positive. The program implied that China must transform from the Yellow civilization

² According to the study of Cipolla (1980) on European society during A.D.1000 to A.D. 1700, compared to China over the same period. Cipolla found that the West was essentially agrarian, poor, and underdeveloped, whereas China was industrialized, rich, and developed.

³ According to Maddison (2006), in PPP terms, the Chinese economy accounted for 33 percent of the world economy in 1820, 11 percent in 1900, and only 4.6 percent in 1950.

to the Blue civilization in order to achieve modernization .⁴

Since the country's reform and opening in 1979, China has clearly not followed what these scholars envisioned: that is, to carry forward cultural transformation before economic development. From 1979 to 2010, China maintained an annual GDP growth rate of 9.9 percent and increased its economic size over 20-fold, becoming the world's second largest economy. In terms of world economic history, it is truly remarkable that China has been able to sustain such rapid growth for such a long period of time, especially given the country's huge population and weak initial economic conditions (Lin 2011a). Moreover, since the eruption of the global financial and economic crisis in 2008, China has continued to grow dynamically and has become the engine of global recovery. Many studies by international organizations and independent scholars now predict that the Chinese economy is likely to maintain dynamic growth into the future and could become the largest economy in the world by 2030.⁵ Other emerging market economies, with their diverse cultural heritages, are also likely to maintain their current dynamism and continue to lead global economic growth. There is little doubt that the 21st century will be characterized by multipolar growth in the global economy, with the centers of growth emanating from emerging market countries.

To address the issue of whether or not Chinese culture can be revived, this paper analyzes whether economic development itself represents cultural revival and whether the key elements of Chinese culture that has persisted for several thousand years can survive in modern times. In addition, this paper will explore, given the new landscape of a multipolar growth world, whether the 21st century could be a century in which all civilizations developing, prospering, and shining together.

⁴ This view is similar to the cultural determinant of Max Weber. In his famous book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber (1958) postulated that the Industrial Revolution and the development of capitalism are as result of the Protestant Reformation, which formed the Protestant Ethic and broke down the control of the Roman Catholic Church. Until now, the view of "modernization preceded by westernization" has remained quite popular among developed and developing countries (Huntington 1996).

⁵ In *The China Miracle*, Cai Fang, Li Zhou and I (1994) forecasted that by 2030, China would surpass Germany, Japan, and the United States to become the largest economy in the world. At that time, few people believed us. But now this has become the mainstream consensus among many scholars and international think tanks. For new studies on China becoming the largest economy, see Subramanian (2011) and World Bank (2011). The latter also provides evidence on the coming of a multipolar growth world in the 21st century.

II. The Connotation of Culture

To answer the question of whether China's economic development implies its cultural revival, one must understand what culture is and what cultural revival means. According to the dictionary, culture is defined as the integral whole of material and spiritual wealth that has been created and transmitted from generation to generation in the process of social development. Except for the emphasis on generational transmission, this definition is basically consistent with Karl Marx's definition of human society, which is the organic whole of economic base and superstructure. Different scholars, however, use different ways to define culture for the convenience of their research. When studying a country's development, I prefer to use the definition by Malinowski. According to Malinowski, one of the world's most important anthropologists, culture is an integral whole of three components⁶: artifacts, including means and mode of production; organizations, including social, economic and political organizations; and the ethics and values.⁴ In fact, these three components correspond with Marx's classification of economic base and superstructure. Specifically, artifacts—the means and mode of production—are economic base, and organizations and spirit are superstructure.

In a cultural system without foreign cultural shocks, economic base and superstructure will form as an internally consistent entity. For example, in primitive society, the means of production was stone tools; the mode of production was hunting; the economic and social organization was the commune; and the principal ethics and values were communal ownership and sharing. With a low productivity level in primitive society, the commune could exploit the economies of scale derived from hunting; and sharing could reduce the survival risks resulting from low productivity levels and the non-storability of food. Therefore, primitive societies' ethics, values,

⁶ Malinowski's definition can be found in his *Theory of Culture*, translated by Fei Xiaotong.

⁴ The definition of culture with three integral components is a useful framework for analyzing China's social and political development after the Opium War. At the beginning, Chinese intellectuals only realized that China needed to upgrade its artifacts. That was why China engaged in a Foreign Affairs Movement to acquire Western weapons and machines while attempting to maintain the Chinese traditional system and values. After China's defeat in Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, Chinese intellectuals recognized the backwardness of their country's organizations. Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao advocated for a constitutional monarchy and Sun Yat-Sen led a revolution to establish China as a republic. After World War I, the humiliating Treaty of Versailles woke up Chinese intellectuals. They realized the importance of ideas and values and started the May Fourth New Culture Movement to advocate for democracy and science (Lin 2011a).

and social organization were consistent with the productivity level at that time. Later, with improvements in productivity, the mode of production changed from hunting to agriculture; the means of production changed from stone tools to bronze and iron tools; the social organization evolved into a clanship society with individual families as its constituents; and the ethics and values changed to promote private ownership over the communal wellbeing. Such evolution was attributed to improvements in productivity. In agricultural production, as long as one worked hard, the production and harvest could be predicted, and the output (for example, grain) could be stored. Therefore, the establishment of private ownership was good for enhancing individuals' production incentives, and the clanship social organization helped individual families overcome various risks and provided a safety net through the blood bond. In the absence of an external cultural shock, and given an adequate timeframe for development, every culture should be an internally consistent entity of artifacts, organizations, and values.

III. The Connotation of Cultural Revival

The concept of cultural revival should correspond to the concepts of “advanced culture,” “backward culture,” and “continuous culture.” Cultural revival indicates that the culture was once advanced, but now has become backward. What, then, is “advanced culture”? And what is “backward culture”? Moreover, if a culture were not continuous, then there would be nothing to revive. If culture needed to start afresh, there would be no revival at all.

First, the progressiveness or backwardness of a culture is a relative concept that is determined by economic base. When a culture clashes with another culture, the differences will become apparent through the three cultural components previously mentioned. During the Opium War in 1840, in terms of artifacts, Chinese production activity was agriculture, whereas the West had already progressed to industrialized mass production. Chinese soldiers fought with bow and spear, whereas Western soldiers had steel warships and cannons. In terms of organizations, China had a centralized imperial system, whereas the West had either democratic republics or

constitutional monarchies. In terms of values, China upheld Confucianism, whereas the West abided by Christianity.

When all three cultural components are different, how can one determine which culture is advanced and which is backward? For example, when the values of communal ownership and sharing are compared with the value of private ownership, the former diversifies risks and ensures survival, whereas the later provides individual incentives. Each ethical component of a culture has its own pros and cons. The Confucian core ethical value *ren* and Christianity's *love* share the same essential meaning of universal love; however, the former originates from one's own personal feeling and the intensity is determined by the degree of intimacy, and the later has God as its link to other men and women and distinguishes between Christian and non-Christian believers. Therefore, it is difficult to determine objectively which one is better.

I argue that the key determinant of the progressiveness or backwardness of a culture is economic base (the 'artifacts' cultural component), such as means of production or war. While China was still relying on draft animals, the West was already using tractors. Using this viewpoint, it becomes self-evident which culture had higher productivity. In the 19th century, China fought with sword and spear while the West was equipped with gun and cannon. That was why the British and French troops could quickly conquer Beijing with only 20,000 soldiers and burn down Yuanmingyuan, a gorgeous imperial garden. Therefore, determining whether a culture is advanced or backward depends on first examining its economic base.⁵

Second, the continuity of a culture lies in its unchanged core values. The concept of cultural continuity can be contrasted with concept of cultural extinction. Egypt, Rome, and Greece were all renowned ancient civilizations. Today, however, these

⁵ The difference between dominant culture and weak culture lies in economic base. Currently, many civilizations are concerned with American's cultural invasion. But only 100 years ago, the United States was considered a cultural desert. Over this time, the core value of American culture has not changed, but what has transformed the United States from a cultural "desert" into a dominant culture is its advanced economic base. As the United States became the largest and most powerful economy, the American lifestyle and values also became popular globally. Similarly, the Western culture as a civilization was born from the Greek and Roman civilizations in the 8th and 9th century, but did not become the dominate culture until the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century when Western economic achievement started to exceed all other civilizations.

names only represent their political and economic entities. The ancient cultures that they once represented are now extinguished. But what exactly has been extinguished? Chinese culture has 5,000 years of continuity. What has exactly been continued? From the perspective of economic base, China's means and mode of production (the cultural component of 'artifacts') has evolved over the past 5,000 years, particularly with the introduction of China's four great inventions: the compass, gunpowder, papermaking, and printing, all of which have greatly improved China's production force. Scholars in Chinese economic history generally agree that China had fairly rapid technological progress in the Song Dynasty, and some even refer to this period as China's industrial revolution (Elvin 1973). On the component of organizations, China had the Well-field system (井田制) in the Zhou Dynasty, an arrangement similar to feudal serf system in the West. After the Qin and Han Dynasties, however, land could be traded and laborers could migrate freely. In the early Ming Dynasty, the sprout of Capitalism led to the emergence of capitalist organization and production relations (Weber 1997).⁶ In short, Chinese economic organization has been constantly evolving in tandem with its ever-changing production force.

On China's political organization, the Zhou Dynasty practiced feudalism, which was abolished by the Qin Dynasty and replaced by the prefectures and counties system thereafter. Thus, both China's economic base and economic and political organizations have been changing. If these elements have been in continuous transition, then what is the constant element that has perpetuated Chinese culture? What has perpetuated is *ren* (benevolence), the core ethical value of the Confucianism. Confucius explained that *ren* means loving others. To love others is the essence of *ren*. Feng Youlan pointed out that, "Confucius mentioned *ren* in many places in the Analects. ... In short, *ren* refers to natural and sincere reveal of human feelings and understanding of others through putting yourself into others' shoes with a compassionate heart" (Feng Youlan, 2000). For example, in May 2008, China's Wenchuan County suffered a catastrophic earthquake. Though many Chinese in other

⁶ Some research findings show that, in the Ming Dynasty, Chang Zhi County in today's Shanxi Province produced about 700,000 sets of farm tools and exported them to Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, and other neighboring countries. The capitalist system of employment relations had already emerged.

provinces did not know the victims personally, they also felt the pain and sorrow of the victims' families. This is what we called *ren*. This core ethical value has been maintained for thousands of years, therefore, Chinese culture has continued for thousands of years. Likewise, Western society moved from the feudal agrarian system to the present industrialized, mass production system, and Western political institutions have evolved from the divine-right absolute monarchy to the democratic system. What has maintained the Western culture is the core ethical value of Christianity, which has remained unchanged since the civilization's birth on the fertile soils of Greek and Roman Civilization in the 8th and 9th century.

IV. Can China Revive its Culture?

Whether China can revive its culture depends on three issues: The first issue is whether Confucianism, with *ren* as its core value, can support an ever-changing economic base with constant innovation of artifacts and improvements in production force. Second, will the organizations formed under the *ren* ethical value evolve and adapt to the changing economic base? Third, can the essential meaning of *ren* be maintained to help form an internally consistent cultural entity of artifacts, organizations, and values in the process of constant economic base upgrading and ever evolution of political, economic, and social organizations?

First, from the perspective of economic base, China possesses great potential to sustain its rapid development and is likely to maintain its growth momentum for next twenty, or even thirty, years. Technological innovation is the most important driving force behind productivity growth and the evolution of economic base in the long run (Kuznets 1966). Take the West as an example. Maddison's research (2006) on Western economic growth shows that during the 2,000 years before the 18th century, the average annual income growth rate per capita was only 0.05 percent, and it took 1,400 years to double per capita income. During the first one hundred years after 18th century, the average annual income growth rate per capita jumped to 1 percent, and it took around 70 years to double per capita income. During the next one hundred years, the growth rate was increased to about 2 percent, and it took 35 years to double per

capita income. The substantial increase in the rate of growth is attributed to the acceleration of technological inventions after the Industrial Revolution in the mid-18th century. Before the Industrial Revolution, technological invention basically stemmed from happenstance and experience, whereas after the Industrial Revolution, technological invention mainly resulted from experiment-cum-science.

Before the 18th century, China had an early lead on the West because of its large population, which produced more farmers and workers and hence more experiences for technological invention.¹⁰ But after the 19th century, China quickly fell behind the West because it failed to shift to the experiment-cum-science-based process of invention. China's lag had nothing to do with its *ren*-centered value system, but rather was mainly a consequence of its civil service examination system, which did not place importance on mathematics and controlled experiments, and ultimately inhibited the occurrence of a scientific and later industrial revolution in China (Lin 1995). Once the education system changed, Chinese people's ability to pursue scientific discovery and technological innovation was not inferior to any people in other countries or regions.

Like any country, China needs technological innovation to achieve sustained and rapid economic growth. For countries at different stages of development, technological innovation can be acquired via different approaches. Since Western advanced countries already produce with the most cutting-edge technologies in the world, they have to rely on their own indigenous invention to achieve technological innovation. For developing countries like China, however, there are two different approaches to achieve technological innovation: one is original, indigenous invention and the other is borrowing technology from advanced countries. Which is the preferred approach? By definition, innovation refers to the use of more efficient technology, but not necessarily the most state-of-art production process. From the perspective of economics, a simple cost-benefit exercise can help inform the preferred approach. New technological invention is often costly, risky, and success is uncertain, whereas technology borrowing is low cost, less risky, and easily successful. The true

¹⁰ Another possible reason behind a powerful China before the 18th century was that China had maintained unity among its huge population, which created a larger market with a more intensive division of labor, and therefore higher productivity, as emphasized in *The Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith (Lin 2007).

secret behind the economic miracles of Japan and the Four Asian Tigers after World War II was that these economies successfully tapped the potential of their technology gap with advanced countries and borrowed technologies at low costs to achieve swift technological innovation (Lin 2009). The rapid technological innovation ensured their dynamic development of economic base, which in turn narrowed their development gap with advanced countries. China's experiences before and after 1978 also proved this point: Before 1978, China tried to develop sophisticated frontier technology domestically to compete with advanced countries, but economic development was far from satisfactory. After 1978, China followed a growth path similar to that of Japan and the Four Asian Tigers and borrowed technologies from advanced countries to achieve technological innovation. In the following thirty years, China has maintained the highest economic growth rate in the world, with the annual rate at 9.9 percent (Lin 2011b). Such contrast has demonstrated that technology borrowing is the best catch-up strategy for developing countries to achieve technological innovation.¹¹

Will China be able to continue its growth pattern and maintain its high economic growth rate over the next ten, twenty, or thirty years? Or even longer? The answer lies in the size of the technology gap between China and advanced countries. In 2008, China's per capita income, in PPP terms, was only 21 percent of that of the United States (Maddison 2010). This demonstrates that the technology gap between China and advanced countries is still very large. Before this gap is narrowed, China can still rely on the advantages of backwardness to accelerate economic growth.¹² According to Maddison's estimation, in terms of per capita income, Mainland China's gap with the U.S. in 2008 is similar to that of Japan in 1951, Taiwan, China in 1975, and Korea in 1977. Japan's annual GDP growth rate during 1951-71 was 9.2 percent; Taiwan, China's during 1975-95 was 8.3 percent; and Korea's during 1977-97 was 7.6 percent. Since its reform and opening-up, Mainland China has followed the same economic

¹¹ To borrow technology does not imply that China does not need indigenous R&D. In some industries and technological fields in which China has cutting-edge advantages, China needs its own R&D for further upgrading. In addition, China should adapt foreign technologies to fit Chinese conditions, which also requires R&D. Moreover, it is only through such follow-up adaptation that China will be able to develop and innovate its own technologies and industries as it approaches the global technology frontier.

¹² The per capita income data in this paragraph is taken from Angus Maddison's *Historical Statistics of the World Economy: 1-2008 AD*. (www.ggdc.net/maddison/Historical_Statistics/horizontal-file_02-2010.xls).

development strategy as Japan, Taiwan, China and Korea. Therefore, China should have the potential to maintain 8 percent growth for next twenty years. The per capita income of Japan, Taiwan, China and Korea in 1971, 1975, and 1977, respectively, was 65.6 percent, 54.2 percent, and 50.2 percent of that of the U.S in PPP terms in the respective years. It is likely that China's per capita income could increase to the level of 50 percent that of the U.S. in PPP terms in 2030, the total economic size of China on a PPP basis could be two times of that of the U.S., and at least the same size as the U.S. measured by the market exchange rate by 2030 (Lin 2011b).

Given its present trajectory, China is likely to become the largest economy in the world by 2030 or earlier. To translate the technological potential into actual economic growth, however, China needs to continue the reform and open up to address challenges in Chinese economy, maintain political stability and social harmony, improve the education system, upgrade industries, absorb foreign technologies and management expertise, and at the same time, gradually enhance China's indigenous research and development. Only by pursuing this course of action can China deliver on its long-term growth prospects (Lin 2011a).

The second issue is whether the organizations formed with *ren* as their core value can adapt themselves to fit China's ever-changing economic base. In terms of economic organization, all present-day developed countries are market economies, and most scholars believe that this system is the most compatible with the modern global economy. Theoretically speaking, a market economy based on private ownership maximizes the incentives of producers, allocates resources effectively, and promotes technological innovation. Is Chinese culture compatible with a market economy? The answer is definitely affirmative, because China had long been a market economy when the West was still a feudal society, both in terms of its land system and its labor market. For example, during the Warring State Period, China practiced private ownership and allowed free trade of land, whereas in Europe land belonged to aristocrats and there was no land market. In terms of the labor market, China had already had a well-functioning labor market in the Spring-Autumn Period and

Warring State Period. Ancient elites such as Confucius, Mencius, Su Qin, and Zhang Yi, all travelled across state lines to seek jobs, which is equivalent to today's white-collar job searching in overseas markets. Guan Zhong, who helped Duke Huan of Qi State gain dominance over all other states in the Spring-Autumn Period, said in his book *Guan Zi* that “a prosperous state will have foreigners from far away to dwell in; and improved infrastructure and productivity will attract local farmers to stay.” This shows that at that time, laborers could migrate freely and follow the same principle of labor mobility as is practiced in modern market economies. In medieval Europe, however, farmers were serfs tied to the land, and only very few farmers could ever gain the freedom to migrate.

In the Spring-Autumn Period and Warring State Period, China not only had active factors markets, but also a prosperous commodity market, and with it speculation activities along the same lines as those practiced today. The most famous case was that of Fan Li. During the war between the states of Wu and Yue, Fan Li helped the king of Yue defeat the state of Wu. Fan Li was smart enough to understand the rules that once the birds are gone, the bow will be put away; and once the cunning hare is killed, the hound will be boiled. Thus, after the victory, Fan Li resigned from his high position and started a business. He was able to make a fortune in a short period of time and gave away his wealth to his friends and relatives. The secret to Fan Li's success was the way he speculated. According to Sima Qian's “Biographies of Usurers” in the *Records of the Grand Historian*, Fan Li's speculation rules stated that the price of a commodity is determined by its supply-demand relations in the market, and if a commodity becomes too expensive, then the price will go down, and vice versa. When the price of a commodity is high, it should be dumped like trash. When the price of a commodity is low, it should be purchased and stored like treasure. These rules reflect how producers follow price signals to make production decisions. A high price will induce more production, and then oversupply will lead to that price being lowered. Low price will attract less production, and then undersupply will lead to that price being raised. Fan Li's last rule is the real trick of speculation. When a

commodity is expensive, one should sell the inventory of the commodity as soon as possible. When a commodity is cheap, one should build up inventory as much as possible. This same principle guides modern-day speculation activities, which Fan Li had already summarized 2,300 years ago.

As was mentioned previously, the sprout of capitalism emerged in China during the Ming Dynasty. Why did this fail to develop into a full-fledged capitalism in China? It was not because of the ethics of *ren*, but rather because of China's failure to make the shift from experience-based invention to experiment-cum-science-based invention. Historically, the pace of technological change was slow in China: capital could hardly be deepened and the capitalist relations of production could not progress far (Lin 2007). In terms of culture, however, China's *ren*-centered ethics is fully compatible with a market economy system.

With higher average income, the general public has a stronger awareness of political participation, and compared with Western cultures, traditional Chinese culture has always emphasized the concept that the people come first, the nation second, and the ruler last. The ruler should see what the subjects see and hear what the subjects hear. This concept, which is quite different from the Western concept of divine right, places the people's interests on the top of political agenda and makes public opinion an important benchmark in the political decision-making process. Given this concept in Confucianism culture, the organization component of Chinese culture should be able to adapt itself to the ever-changing economic base.

The third issue is whether the *ren*-centered ethics can adapt and form an internally consistent culture system and still maintain their original spirit in the face of continuous upgrading of economic base and constant changes of political and economic organizations. Many scholars believe that Confucianism is backward and conservative and inhibits China's development because Confucius said that he would only narrate the predecessors' learning, not create it (The Shu Er of the Analects). But this understanding of Confucianism is not accurate. Mencius referred to Confucius as "the Sage of All Times" (Part I, Wan Zhang of the Mencius). He believed that

Confucius could always adapt himself to different situations and behave properly in different contexts. Confucius advocated *ren* and discussed *ren* more than twenty times in the Analects, but each time the statement differed. This was because each case had a different subject and situation, and therefore required a different expression or focus. Confucius was very selective when he narrated the predecessors' learning. He organized and reinterpreted innovatively the ancient knowledge and principles in light of the needs of his time.

After Confucius, Chinese cultural elites have carried forward the core ethics of Confucianism with different and enriched forms of manifestation. The second representative of Confucianism is Mencius. Confucius advocated *ren* and Mencius focused on *yi* (propriety). Confucius said that in everything, do unto others as you would have others do unto you (The Yong Ye of the Analects), and do not do unto others what you would not want others do unto you (The Yan Yuan of the Analects). By *ren*, Confucius advocates the moral consideration of treating others like oneself. By *yi*, Mencius means proper behavior or compliance with moral rightness, *ren*, which refers to the code of conduct that people should abide by (Part I, Li Lou of the Mencius). *Yi*, however, is largely determined by people's moral sense. That is why Mencius said that "if on self-examination, I find that I am right, I will go forward against thousands and tens of thousands people" (Part I, Gongsun Chou of the Mencius). Compared with Confucius, Mencius emphasized one's social responsibility. His thoughts reflected the chaotic social reality of the late Warring State Period.

After Mencius, Confucianism continued to evolve. During the Song and Ming Dynasties, Confucianism was faced with changes in social and economic base and pressures from Indian Buddhism. Eventually, Confucianism absorbed and integrated Buddhism into Chinese culture. The Neo-Confucianism that emerged emphasized the role of mind, but followed the core ethic, *ren*. In India and Thailand, Hinayana Buddhism has a large following, which pursues individual salvation (Moksha); whereas in China, Mahayana Buddhism prevails, which pursues universal salvation, similar to *ren*. Buddhism has incorporated this core value and become an inseparable

part of Chinese culture.

By the Ming Dynasty, social division of labor had been further advanced and the sprout of capitalism emerged. Wang Yangming developed the School of Mind and advocated the unification of knowledge and action. The main difference between the School of Mind and the Neo-Confucianism can be illustrated through different interpretation of “qin min” (亲民) and “ge wu zhi zhi” (格物致知) in *The Great Learning* by Wang Yangming and Zhu Xi. Zhu Xi held that “qin min” means to teach people to renew themselves and “ge wu zhi zhi” is to investigate things to acquire knowledge. That is, to attain knowledge of everything and eventually understand the principle of everything. Wang Yangming advocated that “qin min” is to love people (i.e. *ren*), and “ge wu zhi zhi” is to revert to and practice one’s innate feeling, which means to shake off external desires to recover one’s innate feeling.

From the above discussion, we find that Confucianism, as superstructure, has the ability to adapt and innovate itself to fit a changing economic base and keep pace with different times and contexts while maintain its core ethic, *ren*. Confucianism was not bigoted or conservative and did not inhibit economic development in China. Moreover, this can be proven through the experience of the Four Asian Tigers that have all attained modernization based on Confucian ethics.

The last issue is whether the core ethical value of Chinese culture could be lost. If China loses the core ethic, *ren*, then China would follow the fate of the ancient civilizations in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, and Rome. Even if China were to maintain its the economic entity on the same piece of land, the Chinese culture would extinct in the absence of *ren*. One’s value orientation is not innate, but rather is acquired during one’s childhood, and is passed from one generation to the next. China has an old saying that one can tell what a person’s behavior at adulthood will be at the age of three and what would be a person’s behavior at old age will be at the age of seven. A person’s pattern of behavior and value orientation have already taken shape

by the age of three and become innate by the age of seven.¹³ Likewise, the core ethical values of a nation's culture are transmitted from generation to generation through the interactions of children with their parents and surrounding people. Although it is not easy to change the value orientation of a nation, it is still possible. Otherwise, the civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, and Rome would not have vanished.

In the process of rapid economic development, some Chinese people are committing wrong doings and corrupting public morals for the purpose of pursuing personal material gains and social fame, and Chinese people are also being influenced subconsciously by foreign cultures through media and from personal contacts. If such interaction happens frequently, it could have an impact on the behavioral development of the next generation, and the core ethical value, *ren*, could become diluted or even gradually vanish. Therefore, everyone who is committed to China's cultural revival, especially the social elites, should not only promote economic modernization, but also take the spread and continuity of *ren* as a personal crusade. They should practice *ren* so as to set an example for other people, especially the younger generations. The government and media should consciously advocate the ethical value of *ren* through education and public communication. Only by following this approach can China maintain its core ethical value and revive Chinese culture in the process of economic take-off and modernization of social, economic, and political institutions.

V. Conclusion: The joint-development, common prosperity, and mutual resonance of different civilizations in the 21st century, multipolar world

Since the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century, a few industrialized nations in Western Europe and North America have represented Western dominant civilization and have been playing a leading role in the global economic and political stage. Before 2000, the G-7 countries (the U.S., Germany, the United Kingdom, France,

¹³ Though this is an old Chinese saying, many psychological studies have found that one's value orientation formed before the age of seven is hard to change.

Italy, Canada, and Japan—who modernized after WWII) accounted for over 60 percent of global economy and contributed the lion’s share of global economic growth. However, the global economic landscape has changed dramatically in the first decade of the 21st century: the total contribution of China, Korea, India, Brazil, Indonesia, Russia, and South Africa to global growth exceeded that of the G-7 (Lin 2011b). The 21st century economic landscape will be characterized by a multipolar growth, as many developing countries will continue to grow at a rate double the average growth rates of developed countries, achieving industrialization and modernization (World Bank 2011).

All civilizations around the world have their own historical and cultural heritages, as well as core ethic values.⁷ As argued in the paper, the progressiveness or backwardness and dominance or weakness of a civilization is determined by its economic base, and China’s cultural renaissance in the 21st century is hinged on its rapid economic development. The acceleration of growth in other emerging economies, such as India, Brazil, Indonesia, Russia, and South Africa, in the multipolar growth world will also imply their culture renaissance on the basis of their respective cultural heritages and core ethnic values. Therefore, the 21st century is likely to see not only a renaissance of the Chinese civilization with *ren* as its core value, but also the co-development, joint-prosperity, and shining together of multiple civilizations in the world.

⁷ Currently, in addition to the Western civilization, there are several major civilizations in the world, including those of China, Japan, India, Islam, Orthodox, Latin America and Africa (Huntington 1996).

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