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THE TENSION BETWEEN BIOMEDICAL TECHNOLOGY AND CONFUCIAN VALUES

Since the Asian economic crisis and the new Balkan War, the world has become much more uncertain. It is hard for me to predict how the third millennium will be, and also how the bioethics of the third millennium will be, so I limit my paper to two issues: the value of traditional cultures in the 21st century and the third millennium, and the possibility of the pursuit of global bioethics or universal ethics.

I. THE DESTINATION OF TRADITIONAL VALUES: THE MUSEUM OR THE RUBBISH HEAP?

Knowledge is power. Modern technology is a great and fearful power. Wherever it invades, tradition seems to give way to it. It creates new culture everywhere. Almost every country with a traditional culture, after being defeated by imperialists, tries to modernize. They try to introduce, apply and develop modern technology in their country. However, this in turn causes the conflicts between tradition and modernity, or between traditional values and modern values.

The Chinese may never forget that the history since the Opium War in 1840 is a history of humiliation, exploitation and aggression by foreign powers. These powers used advanced weapons, attractive commodities and ingenious technologies to knock China's door open, and impose their values on the Chinese people. The first response from the Chinese was to try to repudiate all of these powers outside the door. The dismantling of a railway near Beijing by the government of the Qing Dynasty and the 1900 Yihetuan Movement,¹ in which traditionalists tried to use *qi gong* to fight against aggressors, are events symbolic of the response. But the counter-action to the latter was the further aggressive invasion by the Eight Powers.² The attempt to keep tradition unchanged and to reject modern values failed. Since then, many attempts have been made to reform the country following the example of Japan, but these attempts were guided by a principle called "Chinese learning as a fundamental structure, Western learning for practical use" (*zhong xue xi yong*). But

these attempts at reform failed too. Eighty years ago there was a May 4 Movement, the objective of which was to invite Mister Sai (science, modern science including modern technology) and Mister De (democracy) to China, along with the slogan "Down with Confucianism" (*Da dao Kong Jia Dian*). This objective has become a perpetual dream for Chinese intellectuals and laymen. Regarding the slogan "Down with Confucianism," should the traditional Chinese culture, with its core of Confucianism, be relegated to the historical museum or should it be discarded upon the rubbish heap? Or can it still play some important and even indispensable role in the era of modern science and technology in the 21st century and the third millennium?

The same questions can be asked of modern biomedical technology, which can efficiently treat or prevent human diseases in an unprecedented way, including altering the human genome, human body, human mind, human relations and human species. In this case also, cultural conflicts and moral dilemmas emerged. The responses to modern biomedical technology in China vary. In a Shanghai case, grandparents and their family rejected a boy born by AID (artificial insemination by donor). In a Beijing case a patient's family sued the doctor for taking their kin's cornea postmortem for transplantation. In both cases Confucian values, which include extending ancestors' lives and maintaining bodily integrity before burial or cremation, were neglected in the practice of modern biomedical technology. Some scholars, including a Taoist philosopher and Heidegger expert at our Institute, argue for the abandoning of all research into the nucleus of the cell and the exploration of the secret of life. Others try to reinterpret Confucianism or Taoism in order to adapt it to modernity. Given this latter strategy, gene therapy, human cloning and other controversial projects are acceptable to Confucianism and Taoism. In this part of my paper it will be argued that Confucianism and Taoism have to be reinterpreted in a way in which they can adapt to modernity, but that there is a hard core that cannot be interpreted in different ways or reinterpreted away. A proper interpretation or reinterpretation of Confucianism will not impede the application or development of biomedical technology, and meanwhile it can play a very important normative role in it.

Human genetics and cloning technology are being developed in great China. In a society where Confucianism has deep-rooted influence on people's mind and social conventions, many challenging issues have emerged and demand a response. In recent years there have been

hundreds of articles in professional journals, popular magazines, newspapers and books, and programs shown on TV on the mainland of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan on human cloning and the human genome project. In 1998 and 1999 symposia on ethics and bioethics were held on the mainland of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan at which many participants made presentations on human cloning and the human genome project. A number of articles addressed ethical issues in genetic intervention and cloning from Confucian and Taoist perspectives.

1. The debate on genetic intervention and reproductive human cloning

The approaches and conclusions of these articles are diverse. Interestingly enough, some proponents of Neo-Confucianism and Neo-Taoism favor these technologies, including reproductive human cloning. S-C Lee³ argues that for Confucians there may be something in the course or change of nature that is not in accordance with human moral judgment, and that humans have natural moral requirement to change it. It is a kind of making up for the inadequacy of nature that violates the *dao* of nature. The argument is that: "Humans can carry forward the *dao*" (*ren neng hong dao*). If humans do so, it actually realizes the Confucian ideal that humans participate in the creation and transformation of nature. So in this sense Lee sees no problem with "playing God" for Confucianism. In other words, we are required to play God together with God. If there is something wrong in human reproduction, we can make up for it with negative eugenics, gene therapy for treatment, and even human cloning. But positive eugenics and gene therapy for enhancement is not expanding the *dao*, but violating it (Lee, 1998). But I think Lee's Confucianism is too new to adhere to the hard core of Confucianism. Confucian classics reiterate of the *dao* that one is *yin* and the other is *yang*, and that only *yin* or only *yang* alone cannot produce or reproduce. Confucius warned us to stand in fear of it (*wei tian*) because *tian* is omnipotent and the warning implies that humans should not play *tian* in a similar sense with playing God.

Another argument is raised by D-H Chen.⁴ He argues that Neo-Daoists will not reject gene repair, gene therapy, organ cloning and human cloning because they are not against the law of nature. "It is the *dao* of nature (*tian*) that the excessive be reduced and the deficient supplemented" (*Dao De Jing*, Chapter 77). Neo-Daoists must only reject medical domination, commercial oligarchy and the abuse of eugenics

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