

ASIAN PHILOSOPHIES AND AUTHORITARIAN PRESS PRACTICE

A REMARKABLE CONTRADICTION

SHELTON A.
GUNARATNE

Abstract

Contrary to Orientalist interpretations, authoritarian political practices are inconsistent with the axial Asian philosophies, which implicitly call for a socially responsible critical press (communication outlets). This is certainly the case with Buddhist philosophy. Confucianism and Hinduism also do not endorse authoritarianism. First, this essay analyzes each of these philosophies to show their disapproval of actions that enhance state authority and central control against people's wellbeing.

Second, it identifies the probable reasons for the discrepancy between the ethico-political orientations of the main Asian philosophies and the authoritarian press practice prevalent in much of Asia and elsewhere, namely, (a) the failure of the Westcentric modernisation paradigm to uplift the "sovereign nation-states" in the periphery of the modern world-system, which grew out of the erstwhile colonial empires; (b) the appeal of continuing with the colonial tradition of governing through coercive and autocratic institutions to suppress public criticism; and (c) the impact of Orientalism, which caused the rulers of the new "nation-states" to misconstrue or ignore the principles embodied in Asian philosophies. Thus, political-economic reality appears to have superseded the ethico-political orientations of Asian philosophies in engendering the putative Asian model of development. However, because concepts such as *freedom*, *democracy*, *authoritarianism*, and *social responsibility* evoke different connotations in the West and the East, Freedom House's ranking of countries based on Westcentric criteria is debatable.

Shelton A. Gunaratne is a professor of mass communications at Minnesota State University Moorhead, e-mail: gunarat@mnstate.edu.

Introduction

Even after more than 25 centuries, the classical Asian philosophies – Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism – continue to have a pervasive influence on the lifeworld of Asians. None of these philosophies has endorsed authoritarianism in governance. Implicitly, this means that from an ethico-political perspective authoritarian press practices are inconsistent with all three philosophies. What they implicitly endorse is a socially responsible system of communication-outlets consistent with the core values embedded in the Middle Path in Buddhism, Dharma and *Ahimsa* (non-violence) in Hinduism, and the Five Constants in Confucianism.¹

Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, and several other Asian countries have adopted an Asian model of development that gives “priority to the strengthening of state authority, central control, and social discipline” that many in the West consider inimical to the development of democratic institutions (De Bary 1998, 3). The European Enlightenment established press freedom, an extension of the individual’s freedom of expression, as an essential element of *liberal* democracy;² the emergent variant of democracy promoted by the rational intellectuals of the time. Having elevated the press to the status of the Fourth Estate, the West began to “regard the government as the only organised enemy of freedom” (McChesney 1998, 18). Although contemporary press freedom relates more to the freedom of the media conglomerates to propagate the interests of media owners, advertisers, and of powerful business and social forces rather than to the accommodation of the “great liberal notions of free speech” (McChesney 1998, 5), the West continues to judge all variants of democracy (in fact, all systems of government) in relation to the degree of “press freedom.”

The global picture of democracy, as estimated by Freedom House in terms of the libertarian criteria of press freedom, shows almost half of the nation-states in Asia Proper (i.e., South, Southeast, and East Asia) in the two not-free categories.³ That is, they occupy the authoritarian end of the world’s presumed libertarian-authoritarian continuum. Only four countries in Asia Proper – Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and East Timor – belong to the second-tier free category while none belongs to the first-tier free category. Western Europe and North America dominate the libertarian/liberal end of the continuum while the large majority of developing countries and erstwhile or current communist countries occupy the middle and the authoritarian end of the continuum.

Authoritarianism, as defined by the West, appears to be endemic in all parts of the world except the West. It is not a phenomenon peculiar to Asia. This paper examines the reasons behind the apparent discrepancy between the humanistic Asian philosophies and the putative authoritarianism of Asian countries. It argues that the problem lies in a combination of interdependent factors, which include (a) the political economy created by three successive Western hegemonies in the *longue durée* of the modern world-system; (b) the imperial paradox of ruling the colonies through authoritarian laws and practices while at the same time extolling the virtues of Enlightenment ideas of libertarian democracy, rationality, press freedom, individual rights, etc.; and (c) the cultivation of Orientalism (i.e., the denigration of Asian philosophies and cultural practices) to justify European imperialism.

Examining De Bary’s (1998) observation, we find that the *social discipline* aspect of the Asian model of development is at loggerheads with the Western concept of

liberal democracy. Social discipline cannot be de-linked from the core values of all mainstream Asian philosophies. The other two aspects – *strengthening of state authority* and *central control*, however, receive no such endorsement if such action were to impinge on the well-being of the people. In this paper, I shall examine these two aspects in relation to the factors outlined in the preceding paragraph. Before doing so, I shall document that Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism do not endorse authoritarian practices. These philosophies are consistent with socially responsible variants of democracy, but not necessarily with the extreme variant of liberal democracy, which elevates the press to the status of the Fourth Estate and places high emphasis on individualism.

Buddhist Philosophy

Buddhist philosophy is highly consistent with democracy in its classical sense: “rule by the people” derived from the Greek words *demos* (the people) and *kratos* (rule). Within this definition, democracy has taken three forms: direct democracy, the oldest version as practiced in Greek city-states; representative democracy; and liberal or constitutional democracy. Perera (1989) says that these forms of democracy, in varying degrees, prevailed in North India from *Rigvedic* times to the time of Buddha. Muhlberger (1998) points out that numerous republics flourished in India during the near-millennium from 500 BCE to CE 400.

From the perspective of Buddhist socio-political philosophy, democracy is a tool for the furtherance of the human good. Siddhartha Gautama (c. 563–483 B.C.E.) founded Buddhism in a revolt against Brahmanism and the monarchical state, which the Hindus glorified.⁴ In the Buddhist view, “ultimate sovereignty resided not in any ruler, human or divine, nor in any body governing the state nor in the state itself, but in [*dharma*], the eternal principle of righteousness” (Perera 1989, 365).

Jayatileke (1963) asserts that “we always find the Buddha recommending doctrines which are claimed to be true in an empirically or experientially verifiable sense,” and rejecting doctrines “considered to follow from premises which were held to be true in an *a priori* sense” (p. 404). Thus, contrary to orientalist misinterpretations, Buddhism is more in tune with the scientific approach than with rationalist metaphysics (Cabezon 2003). This explains the doctrinal preference for democratic forms of governance.

Freedom to think, an essential element of democracy, is ingrained in Buddhism, which permits each individual the freedom to ignore or follow the doctrine, which is based on the Four Noble Truths: that suffering exists; that the cause of suffering is thirst, craving, or desire; that a path exists to end suffering; that the Noble Eightfold Path is the path to end suffering. Described as the “middle way,” it specifies the commitment to *sila* (right speech, action, and livelihood), *samādhi* (right effort, mindfulness, and concentration), and *paññā* (right understanding and thoughts). The essence of the doctrine is the chain of causation. The doctrine is not “a set of absolute dictums or divine commandments” for Buddhism has a “fundamental aversion to dogma and dogmatists” (Peek 1995, 528). Thus, Buddhism aims to engender social discipline through individual discipline.

Pluralistic thinking marks the history of Buddhism. Buddhists split into sects long before written records came into being. But all sects and schools were united

on certain fundamentals, including the pre-Buddhist theory of *karma* (Needham 1956). The Buddhist version of *karma* differed from that of the Upanishads “in that the happiness or misery was regarded as being based only on moral or ethical grounds, and not on whether ritual or sacrificial acts had been performed” (Needham 1956, 399). Buddhism looks at man in the *samsaric* context. Birth and death only demarcate a visible link in the stream of becoming or life. The psychological inheritance from the past is what is called *karma*, which ends only with the attainment of *nirvana* (self-enlightenment). A morally unjust act radiates a negative *karma* that harms not only the victim but also the actor. The theory of codependent arising (*paticca samuppada*) asserts the interdependence of all life – past present, and future – across the cosmos. Thus, independent existence and egotism are incompatible with Buddhist philosophy, which also asseverates the impermanence of all things.

The Buddhist scriptures comprise three collections: the *suttas*, the *vinaya*, and the *abhidhamma*. The *vinaya* relates to the discipline of the monks, and the *suttas* relate to the doctrine. *Abhidhamma* relates to doctrinal matters mentioned in the *suttas* in greater depth (Dasgupta 1922). Buddhism crystallised into the Hinayana (Lesser Vehicle) and Mahayana (Greater Vehicle) forms in the second century BCE. The former advocated individual progress to *arhat*-ship and attainment of *nirvana* while the latter advocated the salvation of everyone “by deliberate submission, if necessary, to a further series of rebirths, thus postponing the individual’s attainment of *nirvana*” (Needham 1956, 403). In the Mahayana view, the world was full of *bodhisattvas*, and “only the effort to save others could lead to the salvation of the self” (p. 404) – a paradox that the Daoists in China readily appropriated.

Mahayana Buddhism spread in East Asia from the second to the fifth century. In China, as Needham (1956) says, Buddhism “collided with Confucian skepticism and [Daoist] selflessness” (p. 410) because “Buddhism was a profound rejection of the world, a world which, each in their different ways, both Confucianism and [Daoism] accepted” (p. 430). Dasgupta (1922) points out that Buddhism encountered several ontological problems because of its thesis that everything was impermanent, so neither cause nor effect could abide; so no part-whole relationship could exist; so no universals could exist; so no substance, apart from its attributes, could exist; and no power-possessor separate from the power could exist (p. 165). Needham finds fault with Buddhism for turning away from Nature thereby discouraging the development of science.⁵ However, he asserts that Buddhism was a great civilizing force in Central Asia, and he credits Buddhism for introducing “that element of universal compassion which neither [Daoism] nor Confucianism, rooted as they were in family-ridden Chinese society, could produce” (p. 431).

De Bary (1958) draws attention to the few definite instructions on social and political life that Buddhist literature provides. Buddhism, as evident in *Sutta Nipata*, disapproved the extremer manifestations of social inequality in the system of class and caste; it “definitely discouraged the pretensions of kings to divine or semidivine status” and tended to mitigate the autocracy of the king (p. 128). The first king, according to the *Digha Nikaya* (the Discourse of the Great Passing-away), held office by virtue of a contract with his subjects – one of the oldest versions of the contractual theory of the state. The king was merely a leader chosen by the people to restrain crime and protect property. Buddhism encouraged deciding major issues after free discussion based on the practices of the tribal republics of the Bud-

dha's day. (This calls into question the West-centric tendency to trace democracy to ancient Greece alone.)

Moreover, as Goonatilake (2001) points out, personal experience and verification is central to Buddhist theory: "Buddhism is ... experiential and experimental, built on individual perception and experiences, not necessarily on another's unverified word of his experience" (p. 16) Buddhism measures human affairs in terms of the universal norm of righteousness, and also holds that a good end can only be reached by good means (Perera, 1989). Thus, the government must subserve its ends in accordance with the universal norm. All are equal before the cosmic justice of the universal norm, and everyone may aspire to attain the status of a Buddha. Perera (1989) says:

It can well and truly be said that the universe, in Buddhism, is conceived in the democratic model. It is against this background that the Buddhist view of democracy as a polity among mankind has to be examined. . . . Since Buddhism credits the human personality with a dignity and a moral responsibility, it would look upon every human being as qualified to be vested in the Dhamma, in the management of human affairs. This Buddhism indeed does, by the vesting of supreme legislative power in the people as a whole, through a theory of social contract (Perera 1989, 365).

The Buddhist concept of both the state and the law, based on Digha Nikaya, presumes that all human beings are born with equal rights, both socially and politically. However, Buddhism does not deny differences among individuals resulting from other factors. Peek (1995, 540) has assembled the central components of a bill of rights consistent with Buddhism:

1. Freedom to select the government
2. Right to petition the government for a redress of grievances, and to receive just compensation
3. Freedom from cruel and unusual punishment such as torture, the death penalty, and inhuman internment
4. Right to equal and fair treatment under the law
5. Freedom of religion and conscience
6. Freedom from discrimination on the basis of race, creed, economic class, or gender
7. Right to education
8. Right to work and receive just compensation including health care
9. Freedom from want for those unable to work through social security programs
10. Right to a clean environment.

We can easily add to this list another fundamental human right: Right of free expression consonant with the universal norm of righteousness. This implies a positive freedom, not the negative freedom associated with the Occidental concept of liberal democracy. The effects of negative freedom would have a recursive impact on all living beings through the causal law of co-dependent arising (*paticca samuppada*), which some describe as Buddhism's cardinal doctrine.

Hindu Philosophy

The origin of Hindu philosophical ideas is associated with the Vedas, a body of texts traced to some 2,000 years before Christ. Mohanty (2000) says that the Vedas provide “an exemplary spirit of inquiry into ‘the one being’ (*ekam sat*) that underlies the diversity of empirical phenomena, and into the origin of all things” (p. 1). The Upanishads, a group of texts dating from 1000 BCE to the time of Buddha, gave Hindu thinking a more philosophical character with their attempt to reinterpret Vedic sacrifices and to defend one central philosophical thesis: the identity of *Brahman* (the source of all things) and *atman* (the self within each person). These ancient texts, as well as the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, Kautilya’s *Artha-shastra*, Buddha’s *dharma*, Sukra’s *niti*, and various literary works, provide the elements constituting the Indian philosophy of state, society, and law.

Babbili (2001) states that the Hindu concepts of *dharma* (construed as duty, righteousness, customs, traditions, law, nature, justice, virtue, merit, and morality) and *ahimsa* (non-violence) form the basis of the entire superstructure of ethics in Hindu philosophy. *Dharma* takes three forms: virtues of the body – charity, helping the needy, social service; virtues of speech – truthfulness, benevolence, gentleness; and virtues of the mind – kindness, unworldliness and piety. *Ahimsa* requires absolute harmlessness and friendliness toward all beings. Mohanty (1998) adds that three basic concepts form the cornerstone of Hindu philosophical thought: the self or soul (*atman*), works (*karma*), and salvation (*moksa*).

Sarkar points out that the Hindu theory of the state emerged from an attempt to analytically define the state from the non-state or the state of nature. The Hindu thinkers associated the state of nature with the logic of the fish, i.e., the doctrine of *matsya-nyaya*. In the non-state, people were “devouring one another like the stronger fishes preying upon the feebler,” according to the *Mahabharata*; or “the strong would devour the weak like fishes,” according to the *Manu Samhita*; or “people [would] ever devour one another like fishes,” according to *Ramayana*; or “the child, the old, the sick, the ascetic, the priest, the woman and the widow would be preyed upon [based on] the logic of the fish,” according to the *Matsya-Purana* (cited in Sarkar 1921, 80). Kautilya (fourth century BCE), who wrote the *Artha-shastra* (which is often compared with Sunzi’s *The art of war* and Machiavelli’s *The prince*),⁶ asserted that the logic of the fish prevailed in the absence of the state. Kamandaka, who wrote the *Niti-shastra* in the fourth century after Christ, also said that the logic of the fish would operate in the absence of punishment (*danda*).

Sarkar states that two “inseparable accidents” of the Hindu theory of state are the doctrine of *mamatva* or *svatva* (i.e., property), and the doctrine of *dharma* (i.e., law, justice, and duty). Lying behind these two is the doctrine of *danda* (i.e., punishment, restraint, or sanction). The Hindu philosophy of sovereignty is based on these three concepts. The absence of *danda* is tantamount to *matsya-nyaya* or the state of nature. “A state is a state because it can coerce, restrain, compel” (1921, 84). Thus, the theory is based on two premises: 1. No *danda*, no state; and 2. No state, no *dharma* or property. In Hindu philosophy, the rationale for *danda* is the original nature of man as described by Kamandaka, Manu, and others. Sarkar explains, “The state is designed to correct human vices or restrain them and open up the avenues to a fuller and higher life” (p. 87). The ruler in office is the *danda-dhara* (i.e.,

bearer of the torch of sovereignty). However, the ruler as a person is subject to *danda* as any other. *Danda* is a two-handed sword: It is a terror to the people and is a corrective of social abuses; it is also a most potent instrument of danger to the ruler himself. As Manu observes, *danda* would smite the king who deviated from his duty, as well as his relatives and possessions. Sarkar says herein lies “the logical check on the possible absolutism of the *danda-dhara* in the Hindu theory of sovereignty” (p. 90). In Kautilya’s view, however, the king’s authority is a matter of divine right, and no misgivings need be permitted to intrude themselves such as may weaken the ruler’s will; and he must have no scruples, even when expediency compels him to be cruel (Gowen 1929, 179).

Sarkar (1918) says that every branch of Sanskrit literature provides accounts of Hindu political life and theory. The sources include some of the *Puranas* (legends), all the *Smṛiti-shastras* (treatises on human tradition), *Manu-samhita* (hymns of Manu), the epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, *Pancha-tantra*, *Raghu-vamsha*, *Hitopadesha*, *Dharma-sutras* (aphorisms on Dharma), *Dharma-shastras* (treatises on Dharma), *Arthashastras* (treatises on material gain), *Niti-shastras* (treatises on science of polity, particularly those of Kamandaka and Shukracharyya), *Dasha-kumaracharita*, *Dhanurveda* (a treatise on warfare), and King Bhoja’s *Yukti-kalpa-taru* (requirements of the royal court). Sarkar asserts that the Hindu state was thoroughly secular, and never theocratic because of the absence of the concept of the divine right of kings.

Dissanayake (1987) has pointed out eight guiding principles in Indian philosophy related to communication: oneness of things – the interlinking of all beings, events, and phenomena in a composite whole; intuition; transtemporality; nonindividuality; liberation (*moksha*); illusion (*maya*); idealism; and renunciation and nonattachment (p. 154). All, except the last, of these show similarities to the Chinese philosophical principles of part-whole interdetermination, (the intuition, liberation, and idealism associated with) infinite interpretation, and (the transtemporality, nonindividuality, and illusion implicit in) the dialectical completion of relative polarities.

Mohanty (1998) says the problems that the Hindu philosophers raised but escaped the attention of their Western counterparts include such matters as the origin and appreciation of truth. The problems that escaped Hindu philosophers “include the question of whether knowledge arises from experience or from reason and distinctions such as that between analytic and synthetic judgments or between contingent and necessary truths” (p. 191). Thus, he argues, knowledge of both Hindu philosophy and Western philosophy is beneficial to fill the gaps.

The Hindu theory is more akin to the benevolent despotism of Confucianism though it does not agree with Mencius’ view of the “original goodness” of human nature. It agrees neither with the Daoists’ faith in primitive agrarian collectivism nor with the extreme authoritarianism of the Legalists. It has similarities with the thinking of some early modern European philosophers as well. The Hindu theory favored monarchy whereas Buddhist theory “opposed monarchy and defended a sort of republican government” (Mohanty 2000, 96) because change and impermanence were central to Buddhist philosophy. Buddhism, in its two sectarian forms, promoted individualism, as well as collective responsibility. It promoted democratic ideals with its disapproval of caste and class distinctions and its propagation of universal love. Mohanty clarifies that the Hindu concept of monarchy also in-

volved compassion; therefore, it is not comparable to the concept of sovereignty in Western political thought because in India the concept of *dharma* maintained its superiority over the sovereignty of the king.

The Hindu description of the non-state was quite similar to the description of the state of nature by European philosophers such as Hooker, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Mill in the early modern period. They conceived the state of nature as a state of the right of might, a war of all against all, an anarchy of birds and beasts, or a regime of vultures and harpies. Mo Di, the Chinese philosopher, also painted a similar picture of the non-state although the Mohists' view of the non-state was sometimes consistent with that of Daoists.

Thus, it is clear that neither libertarianism nor authoritarianism is consistent with the Hindu philosophy on the nature of man, the nature of society and the state, the relation of man to the state, and the nature of knowledge and truth. Its central concern with *dharma* and *ahimsa* does not allow for authoritarian governance. On the other hand, its concern with *matsya-nyaya* (the logic of the fish) leads it away from libertarianism toward a form of governance capable of maintaining law and order through the righteous administration of *danda* (punishment). Therefore, Hindu philosophy implicitly approves a socially responsible system of communication-outlets that can reveal the excesses of those in authority and assist the maintenance of social discipline.

Confucian Philosophy

The rulers' strategy should be to use moral force or virtue (*de*), rather than violence and coercion, according to Confucius's *ru* (soft/gentle/enduring) philosophy. The "superior people" (*junzi*) should follow filial devotion (*xiao*), humaneness (*ren*), and ritual decorum (*li*) in their conduct. These three practices are vital to governance as well.

Interpreting the *Analects*, De Bary and Bloom (1999) write:

Filial devotion [has] a bearing on the stability of society as a whole Humaneness, associated with fellow feeling, is bound up with reciprocity. . . . [P]erhaps the most important capacity that a ruler can have is the capacity for recognizing that he must treat the people as he himself would want to be treated in their position. Ritual . . . represents the ideal mode of governance because the rites are the vehicle through which the ruler expresses his own virtue or moral power and also encourages a sense of dignity and responsiveness among the people (De Bary and Bloom 1999, 43).

Byun and Lee (2001) point out that the "Five Constants" of Confucianism make up its foundational moral principles or insights: *ren* or *in* (human-heartedness), and *li* or *ye* (rituals and ceremonies) – already mentioned above, as well as *yi* or *ui* (righteousness, proper character, and a principle of rationality), *zhi* or *ji* (wisdom), and *xin* or *shin* (trust).

The Confucians propagated social justice within the framework of the feudal, or feudal bureaucratic, social order. Needham (1956) says their advocacy of freeing education from the barriers of privilege and social class was revolutionary because "it embodied some of the essential elements of modern democratic thought" (p. 7). They believed that the purpose of government was to bring about "the welfare

and happiness of the whole people" through the "subtle administration of customs generally accepted as good and having the sanction of natural law" (pp.7-8). Birth, wealth or position had no necessary connection with the capacity to govern. The goal of Confucianism was "intellectual democracy" (p. 8). Government was to be paternalistic. The Confucians' picture of nature envisaged that "man is born for uprightness" (p. 12). Mencius "developed the democratic conception that the goodwill of the people was essential in government" (p. 16).

Legge (1895) quotes Mencius thus: "The people are the most important element in a nation; ... the sovereign is the lightest" (p. 483); and "Benevolence is the distinguishing characteristic of man" (p. 485). Confucians believed that knowledge was the beginning of action, and action the consummation of knowledge (Jung 1999, 283).

Another element of Confucianism is the doctrine of the mean (*Zhongyong*), traditionally ascribed to Zisi, the grandson of Confucius: "Let the states of equilibrium and harmony exist in perfection, and a happy order will prevail throughout heaven and earth, and all things will be nourished and flourish" (Legge 1893, 385). Rubin (1976) points out that Confucians had understood the "idea of man as a harmonious and fully developed person" long before Renaissance humanism (p. 25). Xunzi, a humanist, viewed human culture as the noblest thing in the world.⁷

Yum (2000) has outlined the impact of Confucianism on communication patterns in East Asia. These patterns include the perception of communication as a process of infinite interpretation, the use of different linguistic codes depending on the persons involved and the situations, the emphasis on indirect communication, and receiver-centered interpretation of meaning.

Confucianism included numerous elements linked to the ethos of social responsibility (e.g., emphasis on knowledge and education, intellectual democracy, natural law, and moral obligations). Nuyen (2001) has pointed out that Confucianism placed "a supreme value on personal freedom and autonomy" (p. 70), as well as equality, within a horizontal and vertical structure of social responsibility very similar to the Western liberal tradition.⁸

Li (1999) asserts that the "harmony model is at the core of the Chinese culture" (p. 191) considering that most Chinese follow a multiple approach to life by following Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism at the same time. Thus, even though some core values of democracy may seem incompatible with Confucianism, both can coexist in harmony – an aspect most relevant to the conceptualisation of social responsibility as a cultural outcome of the interaction of the two extremes of libertarianism and authoritarianism. (However, as stated earlier, Confucianism also embodied some of the essential elements of modern democratic thought.) Li compares Western and Chinese philosophy in terms of seven dimensions: being, truth, language, ethics, family, religion, and justice.

Li (1999) points out that Chinese thinking follows Zhuangzi's *contextual perspective* ontology whereas the Western world follows Aristotle's *substance* ontology that emphasises individuality. The West, as evident in Heidegger's work, usually understands *truth* semantically whereas the Chinese understand it as a matter of being a good person, as a way of life. In the West, *language* performs a solely semantic and logical function whereas the Chinese see the social and pragmatic function of language as evident in the Confucian doctrine of "rectification of names" (p. 3).

Important similarities exist between Confucian *ethics* and feminist ethics.⁹ On the issue of *family*, fundamental differences exist in relation to filial morality. In contrast to Western thinking, Confucianism states that people are “not atomistic, self-serving, rights-laden individuals coming to construct a society out of self-interest” (p. 138). As for *religion*, in contrast to Western orthodox monotheisms, the Chinese culture accepts multiple religious practices. Finally, as for *justice*, democracy as a “value system” can co-exist with Confucianism even though the two systems are not fully compatible. These seven dimensions demonstrate that a purely Western definition of “social responsibility” is inadequate to capture the meaning of that term in East Asia or in other non-Western cultures. A communication theory, therefore, must recognise different shades of social responsibility within different cultures.

Tu Weiming (1997) says that the Chinese thinkers, unlike their Western counterparts, were not all anthropocentric because a cosmological, as well as an anthropological, vision had inspired them (p. 3). Thus Chinese philosophy exhibited humanism – an emphasis on social relations, a strong commitment to the world, and the primacy of political order – from the very outset (p. 6).

Tang (1991) sees Chinese philosophy as a threefold integration: the “integration of heaven with man,” which inquires into the unity of the world; the “integration of knowledge with practice,” the problem of an ethical norm; and the “integration of feeling with scenery,” involving the creation and appreciation of artistic works (p. 6). Cheng (1987) has expanded on these three integrations to derive six basic principles of Chinese philosophy most relevant to contemporary communication theory: the principle of part-whole interdetermination; the principle of dialectical completion of relative polarities – the *yin* and the *yang*; the principle of infinite interpretation; the principle of embodiment of reason in experience; the principle of epistemological-pragmatic unity; and the principle of symbolic reference (p. 26).

The foregoing summary makes it clear that classical Confucian philosophy allows no room for authoritarianism. Fukuyama (1995) says that “there are fewer points of incompatibility between Confucianism and democracy than many people in both Asia and the West believe . . . [if one were to concede that] the contours of Asian democracy may be very different from those of contemporary American democracy” (p. 20). Fukuyama asserts that Confucianism is compatible with American democracy in three ways: the egalitarian implications of the Confucian examination system; the Confucian emphasis on education itself; and Confucianism’s record of tolerance.

Fukuyama (1995) further asserts that one should distinguish between “political Confucianism” and “Confucian personal ethic” – a distinction made by Tu Weiming. Fukuyama says that classical Confucianism emphasised the latter – building a well-ordered society from the ground up, and conceptualizing the state and other political authorities as a “family of families” that united everyone into a single social entity. The Japanese modified Confucianism, imported from China during the Song dynasty, to suit their imperial system thereby emphasizing “political Confucianism.” Elucidating this distinction, Fukuyama disputes the assertions that “authoritarian political systems are necessarily more Confucian than democratic systems” (p. 32).

Asian Values ≠ Authoritarian Practice

A remarkable contradiction exists between authoritarian press practice and the major Asian philosophies. Asian values so far as they reflect the core principles of Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism do not support authoritarian governance or a subservient system of communication-outlets. All three emphasise that the rulers should abide by the wishes of the people.

Buddhism places the ultimate authority on the universal norm of righteousness, not on any ruler; and its emphasis on equality, liberty, and freedom of thought brings it closer to the ideals of the rationalist notion of democracy. Some scholars have drawn a bill of rights based on Buddhist philosophy.

Hinduism subjects the ruler to punishment (*danda*) as any other. *Danda* is a two-handed sword – a terror to the people and a corrective of social abuses; it is also a most potent instrument of danger to the ruler himself. *Danda* would smite the king who deviated from his duty, as well as his relatives and possessions. Thus, the Hindu theory of sovereignty provides a logical check on the possible absolutism of the ruler. Buddhism arose partly as a rebellion against the social inequalities of the Hindu caste system justified by the very rational law of *karma*. Although Hindu philosophy vitiates the ideal of equality because of its tolerance of the caste system, Hindu society in Northern India practiced democracy in all its three forms even before the advent of Buddha. An authoritarian system of communication-outlets does not receive the approval of Hinduism.

Confucianism asserts that the goodwill of the people is essential in government. Mencius viewed the people as the most important element in a nation, and the sovereign as the lightest. Violence and coercion were not compatible with good governance. The ruler's strategy should be to use moral force, adopt humaneness, and rule with decorum. Unlike political Confucianism that Japanese developed to strengthen the authority of the emperor, classical Confucianism clearly rejects authoritarianism.

However, the implicit rejection of authoritarian political practices by these three Asian philosophies does not mean that they readily approve the type of libertarianism conceptualised by the rationalists of the Enlightenment. A libertarianism that permits negative freedom without concomitant responsibilities and duties would be unacceptable to all three philosophies although Daoists, as well as liberal democrats, would readily welcome it. All three philosophies proclaim the interconnectedness of parts and the whole. Therefore, negative individual freedom is likely to produce recursive effects inimical to the wellbeing of others.

Explaining Discrepancy and Looking at Future

Let us examine the probable reasons for the discrepancy between philosophy and practice we have already outlined in this essay:

1. The economic reality that the new "sovereign nation-states" in Asia and elsewhere encountered as peripheral units of the modern capitalist world-system – which evolved over the *longue durée* out of the Dutch complex in the 17th century, the British complex in the 19th century, and the U.S. complex in the 20th century – pushed these countries away from the dominant modernisation paradigm associated with the liberal democratic ideals of the Enlightenment. The struggle for cease-

less capital accumulation witnessed the rise and fall of the Dutch and the British as hegemony who succeeded in a massive transfer of wealth to the West from the Indian subcontinent, China (particularly after the opium wars), and the Indonesian archipelago.

India's huge demographic resources buttressed British world power both commercially and militarily ... India was made to pay for the privilege of being pillaged and exploited by Britain (Arrighi, Hui, Ray, and Reifer 1999, 63).

The exploits of the Dutch and the British chartered companies and their successor transnational behemoths under the U.S. hegemony shaped the core-periphery structure of the world-economy. The capitalist framework invariably produced a few winners (the core) and many losers (the periphery) and some in-between (the semiperiphery). Press freedom and democracy as defined by the West suited the citizens of the core – the former imperial powers and their wealthy cohorts. The operational mechanics of the world-economy were stacked against the “sovereign nation-states” in the periphery, except for a few like the Four Dragons – Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan – who received massive capital infusion from the core as buffers against communism. Facing criticism for their economic failures, the rulers of many developing countries resorted to authoritarian practices.

2. The centrality of coercive and autocratic institutions in the government of British India stood in contrast to the Enlightenment ideals propagated in Europe. The rulers of the newly independent “nation-states” in Asia found it politically expedient to continue the British tradition in the face of adverse criticism. Arrighi, Ahmad, and Shih (1999) point out that during Britain’s “high” hegemony, it never applied to India

any of the democratic institutions characteristic of British hegemony in the West. British India was governed primarily by coercive and bureaucratic institutions – the civil service, the army, and the police. . . . Western ideas of representative government could not be applied to India because India was not ruled for the benefit of the Indians (p. 240-241).

3. A third reason for the discrepancy was the concerted attempt by the British in particular to degrade Asian philosophies and culture through the mechanism of Orientalism. Arrighi, Ahmad, and Shih (1999) go on to say that the British resorted to rationalizing their coercive rule:

through the construction of a body of ‘knowledge’ about the Indian past and heritage aimed at demonstrating both the unfitness of India for the institutions of representative government and the fitness of Britain to rule India by means of a “vigorous” despotism – a construction now familiar to us as Orientalism (p. 241).

Montesquieu’s early 18th century *Persian Letters*, Hegel’s early 19th century lectures titled *Philosophy of History*, Marx and Engel’s mid-19th century writings *On Colonialism*, Weber’s early 20th century work on religion of China and India, among others, exemplify how Eurocentric discourse vilified the colonised and enslaved people of Asia and Africa to rationalise Western imperialism. Mirsepassi (2000) traces

the roots of the modernisation paradigm to the work of these intellectual luminaries who demonstrated their deep prejudice against non-Western cultures. Mirsepassi traces the “clash of civilizations” thesis conceptualised by Bernard Lewis and elaborated by Samuel Huntington to the same line of thinking.

In short, Orientalism misinformed the ruling class of the newly independent “nation-states” not to take Asian philosophies seriously or to regard them as obstacles to achieving modernity. Although it is true that the Europeans introduced the modern press to the colonies, they did so for their own benefit to perpetuate their rule, and not for the benefit of the masses. Judge (1996) claims that even China, whose print civilization is the oldest in the world, had to await the introduction of the model newspaper by Western missionary and commercial interests. Judge’s interpretation is clear evidence of the power of Orientalism on world history.¹⁰

I present the foregoing as probable reasons for the nature of the libertarian-authoritarian continuum based on the annual press freedom scores of Freedom House. When a few countries on the periphery manage to beat the odds of the world system, they can become more open to press freedom and liberal variants of democracy. This is what happened in Taiwan after the revocation of martial law in 1988, and in South Korea after the nationwide pro-democratic movements of 1987 (Gunaratne 2000). Singapore, however, stubbornly continues to follow a sort of authoritarian democracy to enforce social discipline on a similar model to that of Malaysia. A social responsibility model of democracy will place these two countries in a more positive light.

The two most populous nation-states in the world, India and China, follow different paths that the press-freedom ratings of Freedom House tend to overlook. Although India lags behind China economically, India has been truer to its ancient democratic roots and the ethico-political principles of Buddhism and Hinduism (except during Indira Gandhi’s emergency rule) than the other “nation-states” of the subcontinent. China, on the other hand, is conflating its revived Confucian ethics with economic savvy to bring about the reunification of the East Asian regional economy as the epicenter of world trade. Arrighi, Ahmad, and Shih (1999) say that the “rise of East Asia as the most dynamic center of world-scale processes of capital accumulation” may cause the transition of global hegemony from the United States to the East Asian regional economy (p. 265).

A shift in global hegemony to East Asia is likely to engender shifts in emphasis from “press freedom” to “press responsibility”; “individual rights” to “individual responsibilities”; “libertarian democracy” to “Confucian democracy” (see Tan, 2003); and so on. Moreover, the transnationalisation of news is likely to render press censorship by individual nations ineffective. Attention will shift to the interests of the giant media conglomerates responsible for global news dissemination.

Notes:

1. This is the revised version of a paper presented at the international workshop on “Democratization and Communication in Asia” at the Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, School of Politics, University of Nottingham, April 25-26, 2003. I have incorporated much of the original paper into my latest book *The Dao of the Press: A Humanocentric Theory* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press Inc., 2005). The interpretive angle used in this essay is new.

2. For a discussion on different variants of democracy, see Gunaratne (2005). By liberal democracy I refer to the general form of representative government that ensures freedom of

assembly, speech, press, and religion; protects individual liberties and minority rights; and provides equality before the law and due process under the rule of law. It is “based on the assumptions of individual autonomy and of the government as a necessary evil to be limited as much as possible” (Tan 2003, 9).

3. These criteria and country ratings are readily accessible from www.freedomhouse.org, the Web site of Freedom House, which also rates countries by political and civil liberties. Adjusted scores for Asia Proper show noticeably higher (i.e., more authoritarian) P&CL ratings over PF ratings for East Timor, Pakistan, Cambodia, Maldives, Bhutan, China, Laos, and Vietnam. The scores for India are in the reverse direction (Gunaratne 2005, 144).

4. Pre-Buddhist philosophers who rejected Brahmanism included Samjaya, and the *Ajivikas* led by Makkhali Gosala. Another rebel was Mahavira (599-527 B.C.E.), who founded Jainism. This essay excludes these rebel philosophies because Hindu and Buddhist philosophies have the most contemporary relevance. Mohanty (2000) lists a number of other major schools of Indian philosophy: Materialist (*Carvaka*), Analysis (*Samkhya*) and Yoga, Logic (*Nyaya*) and Atomism (*Vaisesika*), Exegesis (*Purva Mimamsa*), and *Vedanta*. (*Jainism* asserted that all truths are relative to a standpoint. *Carvaka* believed that pleasure was the only thing desirable. *Samkhya* asserted that the highest liberation was a state of aloneness brought about by discriminating knowledge. *Vaisesikas* and *Naiyayikas* believed that both truth and falsity were extrinsic to cognition. *Mimasakas* were ambivalent on existence of God, but rejected theistic arguments. *Vedanta* asserted that freedom from ignorance was possible through devotion.) Mohanty (1998) provides thumbnail sketches of these schools.

5. Buddhism has come under criticism for turning away from society rather than from nature. On the contrary, the adherents of the Zen tradition of Mahayana Buddhism, which incorporates Daoism, are known to love nature and help people in society.

6. Gowen (1929) and Modelski (1964) have compared the work of Kautilya and Machiavelli. Gowen describes *Artha-shastra* as “the crown of all earlier Indian experiments in the exposition of political theory” (p. 178) while Modelski describes it as “the finest, fullest, and most cogently reasoned Sanskrit treatise” on the science of polity (p. 549).

7. The goal of Confucianism should not be confused with the misuse of the Confucian focus on harmony and cooperation by those in authority, e.g., the authoritarian-tending governments in the two Koreas and in China, particularly under Mao Zedong. In Japan, Confucianism enabled the emperor to command the intense loyalty of the people during World War II.

8. Disagreement exists on the interpretation of Confucianism. Li (1999) maintains that the value systems embedded in Confucianism and democracy are incompatible. First, democracy presupposes individual rights compared to the Confucian social ideal of *jen* with the family viewed as civil society. Second, democracy emphasises liberty whereas Confucianism emphasises duty. Third, democracy values equality whereas Confucianism assigns unequal social roles to people. Fourth, democracy implies pluralism whereas Confucianism implies harmony and unity. However, Li argues that these two value systems can co-exist in Chinese culture as much as Buddhism and Daoism have co-existed with Confucianism for centuries.

9. Li (1999) compares the idea of *jen*, the central concept of Confucian ethics, and the idea of care, the central concept of feminist care ethics. He explains, “Like feminist care ethics, Confucian ethics centers on human relatedness and responsibility instead of individual liberty and individual rights” (p. 114).

10. China had its own official press, *Dibao*, which is believed to have started during the Han Dynasty (206 BCE - CE 200). These official gazettes, which got the name *Jingbao* in the Qing Dynasty, survived until 1911. The Orientalist interpretation underplays China’s role as the inventor of printing to give the primary credit to Gutenberg.

References:

- Arrighi, Giovanni, Iftikhar Ahmed, and Miin-wen Shih. 1999. Western Hegemonies in World Historical Perspective. In G. Arrighi, B.J. Silver et al. (eds.), *Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System*, 217-270. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

- Arrighi, Giovanni, Po-keung Hui, Krishnendu Ray, & Thomas E. Reifer. 1999. Geopolitics and High Finance. In G. Arrighi, B.J. Silver, et al. *Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System*, 15-96. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Babbili, Anantha S. 2001. Culture, Ethics, and Burdens of History: Understanding the Communications Ethos of India. In S. R. Melkote and S. Rao (eds.), *Critical Issues in Communication: Essays in Honor of K. E. Eapen*, 144-176. New Delhi: Sage
- Byun, D.H., and Lee, K. 2001. Confucian Values, Ethics and Legacies in History: Neo-Confucian Debates and Communication Philosophy in Korea. Paper presented at the annual convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Washington, DC, August.
- Cabezón, Jose I. 2003. Buddhism and Science: On the Nature of the Dialogue. In B. A. Wallace (ed.), *Buddhism and Science: Breaking New Ground*, 36-60. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Cheng, Chung-ying. 1987. Chinese Philosophy and Contemporary Human Communication Theory. In D. L. Kincaid (ed.), *Communication Theory: Eastern and Western Perspectives*, 23-43. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Dasgupta, Surendra N. 1922. *A History of Indian Philosophy* (Vol. 1). Cambridge: University Press.
- De Bary, Wm. Theodore, ed. 1958. *Sources of Indian Tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- De Bary, Wm. Theodore. 1998. *Asian Values and Human Rights: A Confucian Communitarian Perspective*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- De Bary, Wm. Theodore, & Irene Bloom. 1999. *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (2nd ed.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Dissanayake, Wimal. 1987. The Guiding Image of Indian Culture and Its Implications for Communication. In D. L. Kincaid (ed.), *Communication Theory: Eastern and Western Perspectives*, 151-160. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Fukuyama, Francis. 1995. Confucianism and Democracy. *Journal of Democracy* 6, 2, 20-33.
- Goonatilake, Susantha. 2001. *Anthropologizing Sri Lanka: A Eurocentric Misadventure*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Gowen, Herbert H. 1929. "The Indian Machiavelli" or Political Theory in India Two Thousand Years Ago. *Political Science Quarterly* 44, 173-192.
- Gunaratne, Shelton A., ed. 2000. *Handbook of the Media in Asia*. New Delhi: Sage.
- Gunaratne, Shelton A. 2005. *The Dao of the Press: A Humanocentric Theory*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press Inc.
- Jayatilake, Kulatissa N. 1963. *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Judge, Joan. 1996. *Print and Politics: "Shibao" and the Culture of Reform in late Qing China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Jung, Hwa Yol. 1999. Postmodernity, Eurocentrism, and the Future of Political Philosophy. In F. R. Dallmayr (ed.), *Border Crossings: Toward a Comparative Political Theory*, 277-296. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Legge, James. 1893. *The Chinese Classics: Confucian Analects, the Great Learning, and the Doctrine of the Mean* (Vol. 1). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Legge, James. 1895. *The Chinese Classics: The Works of Mencius* (Vol. 2). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Li Chenyang. 1999. *The Tao Encounters the West: Explorations in Comparative Philosophy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- McChesney, Robert W. 1998. The Political Economy of Global Communication. In R.W. McChesney, E. M. Wood, and J. B. Foster (eds.), *Capitalism and the Information Age*, 1-26. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Mirsepasi, Ali. 2000. *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Modelske, George. 1964. Kautilya: Foreign Policy and International System in the Ancient Hindu World. *The American Political Science Review* 58, 549-560.
- Mohanty, Jitendranath N. 1998. Indian Philosophy. In *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* (Vol. 21),

- 191-212. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica.
- Mohanty, Jitendranath N. 2000. *Classical Indian Philosophy*. Lanham, MD: Bowman & Littlefield.
- Muhlberger, Steven. 1998. *Democracy in Ancient India*. <<http://www.nipissingu.ca/departement/history/muhlberger/histdem/indiadem.htm>>
- Needham, Joseph. 1956. *Science and Civilization in China: History of Scientific Thought* (Vol. 2). Cambridge: University Press.
- Nuyen, A.T. 2001. Confucianism and the Idea of Equality. *Asian Philosophy* 11, 2, 61-71.
- Peek, John M. 1995. Buddhism, Human Rights and the Japanese State. *Human Rights Quarterly* 17, 3, 527-540.
- Perera, L. P. N. 1989. Democracy. In A. W. P. Guruge (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (Vol. IV), 363-369. Colombo: Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Government of Ceylon (Sri Lanka).
- Rubin, Vitalii A. 1976. *Individual and State in Ancient China: Essays on four Chinese Philosophers*. S.I. Levine, trans. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Sarkar, Benoy K. 1918. Hindu Political Philosophy. *Political Science Quarterly* 33, 482-500.
- Sarkar, Benoy K. 1921. The Hindu Theory of the State. *Political Science Quarterly* 36, 79-90.
- Tan, Sor-hoon. 2003. *Confucian Democracy: A Deweyan Reconstruction*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Tang, Yijie. 1991. *Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity and Chinese Culture*. Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy.
- Tu Weiming. 1997. Chinese Philosophy: A Synoptic View. In E. Deutsch and R. Bontekoe (eds.), *A Companion to World Philosophies*, 3-23. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Yum, June Ock. 2000. The Impact of Confucianism on Interpersonal Relationships and Communication Patterns in East Asia. In Larry A. Samovar and Richard E. Porter (eds.), *Intercultural Communication: A Reader* (9th ed.), 63-73. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.