Introduction

I took Ambrose King's "Chinese Society" course when I was a freshman at The Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1971. His course is so interesting and stimulating that it unlocked my intellectual curiosity, making me determined not only to major in sociology, but also to specialize in the fields of modernization and development when I took my PhD qualifying exams at UCLA in 1978.

Therefore, I felt deeply honored that Ambrose King asked me to write an introduction for the present volume. This is because King is not only my former teacher, but he also is an esteem sociologist, a cherished public intellectual, and a superb university administrator. King was one of the founding fathers of the sociology discipline in Hong Kong, a Fellow of Academia Sinica in Taiwan, and the Vice-Chancellor of The Chinese University of Hong Kong. Like many intellectuals of his generation, King is concerned about the new developments in Chinese nation as it sloughed off the old society and the subsequent course that Chinese culture might take.

Titled as *China's Great Transformation: Selected Essays on Confucianism, Modernization, and Democracy*,

the present volume is a collection of King's twelve papers published between 1975 and 1997. These two decades are turning points for China as we observed the following dramatic historical trends: the shift from revolutionary Maoism to Four Modernizations in mainland China; the unexpected democratic transition in Taiwan; and the rise of four little dragons (Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore) in East Asia. Focusing on the cultural dimension, King's papers in this volume are aimed to understand, to interpret, or to explain all these new developments from a historical, comparative framework.

The twelve chapters in this volume centered on the following three themes: (1) Confucianism, (2) modernization, and (3) democracy.

There are four chapters on Confucianism. Chapter 1 articulates an innovative "*relational perspective*" to examine the organic linkages between the individual and society. King argues that Western literature has wrongly presented an "over-Confucianized view of Chinese society" because the individual's action is wrongly interpreted as the result of a complete internalization of Confucian norms and values.

King argues that complete Confucianization is impossible because there are inconsistent values and norms with the Confucian ethics. In addition, the very ambiguity or elasticity of the family group would give individual ample room for maneuver in constructing his social networks. The boundaries of both the family and other groups are thus very much dependent upon the decision of the individual. Thus, King argues for "*self-centered voluntarism*" in Confucian ethic, i.e., the individual's freedom of action in constructing a personal relational network.

Although an individual has considerable social and psychological space for constructing a personal network, the emphasis, however, is placed on the particular relations between oneself and other concrete individuals. Thus, *the individual interacts with others always on a particular relationship basis*. As a result, when the individual faces an amorphous entity called group (or society), he finds himself no longer structurally situated in a relation-based social web. In this group setting, the Confucian values and norms would seem to him not morally abiding and relevant. The Chinese common saying ("if one does not think of his own interest, neither heaven nor earth will save him"), by no means a socially embarrassing statement, only becomes thinkable and understandable in a relation-free context. Using a relational perspective, King is thus able to explain the puzzle why the Chinese individual often ceases to be a "social being" in the true Confucian sense in relation to the amorphous group (or society). According to King, this is because the Confucian paradigm has not provided a "viable linkage" between the individual and the group, and it only focuses on *particular relations between oneself and other concrete individuals*. For example, a Chinese is happy to donate a large sum of money to a charity organization because many of his friends and relatives are members and leaders in the charity organization, but he is not willing to donate a single penny to the same organization if he knows nobody there.

Chapter 2 follows up this line of argument by examining the concepts of face (*mian*) and shame (*chi*) in Chinese culture. Chapter 2 demonstrates that the concepts of face and shame have often been interpreted too rigidly by students of Chinese culture. The tendency has been to speak of Chinese culture one-dimensionally as a

face-conscious one in purely the social sense and a shame-conscious one on the behavioral level.

King argues that Ruth Benedict's single dichotomy between the Chinese *face-shame* complex and the Western *sin-guilt*, one fails to do justice to the complexities of the Chinese understanding of the key terms utilized in posing such a dichotomy. King explains that face and shame are not merely external sanctions lacking potentiality of internalization: the long tradition of intrinsic Confucianism testifies not only to the possibility of their being internalized as individual moral guidelines but insists that internalization is a moral necessity. Thus, King concludes that examining face-shame in a purely *social* sense (a social face) in traditional Chinese society is incomplete. The concept of face-shame also involves a *moral* component (a moral face) which does not require the judgment of others to be lost (audience is not necessary) because it is internalized in the conscience or superego.

Chapter 3 further develops these ideas into the Confucian paradigm of man. The literature depicts Confucianism as a social force that tends to mold the Chinese into group-oriented, or more specifically, family-oriented and socially dependent beings. King, however, challenges this Western presentation of Confucianism because it grasps only a part of total complexity. Chapter 3 attempts to show that the Confucian paradigm of man has a built-in structural imperative to develop a person into a *relation-oriented individual* who is not only socially responsive and dependent but also capable of asserting a self-directed role in constructing a social world.

In Confucian paradigm of man, man is socially situated, defined, and shaped in a relational context. In brief, man is a relational being. King emphasizes that the individual is more than a

role-player mechanically performing the role-related behavior prescribed by the social structure. The individual has an active self that is capable of shaping the role-relationship he enters.

The self-oriented precepts became vital for the individual when he was caught in a dilemma resulting from divided loyalties. Confucian scholar-bureaucrats were often under cross pressures coming from the family group (for which the ethical principles were particular) and from bureaucratic organizations (for which the ethical principles were universalistic), the resolution of such conflicting demands required active struggle and individual choice.

Western analysts tend to stress that Chinese people have a strong sense of belonging to a group. Compared with the individualistic culture of the West, this statement can hardly be debated. However, King insightfully points out that in comparison with the Japanese, the Chinese is less group-centered. For example, while in Japan, family ethics are always based on the collective group (i.e., member of a House or a Company), not on the relationship between individuals. In China, family ethics are always based on relationship between particular individuals (such as father and son, brothers and sisters, parents and child, husband and wife). King remarks that perhaps the source of difference between Chinese and Japanese culture is the consideration given within Confucianism to the individual.

The Confucian version of individualism has, however, a relational emphasis. Confucian "individualism" means the fullest development by the individual of his creative potentialities, not however for the sake of self-expression but because he can thus best fulfill that particular role which is his within his social nexus.

This is because the Chinese individual was also locked into a

hierarchical and cohesive family structure. The structural restraints of the Chinese family have produced a tendency to subordinate the individual to the wishes of superiors as well as to those of the group (family). Since the early twentieth century, however, the Chinese family system has been eroded by urbanization and the increasing influence of Western individualistic values. As a result, individual's life space has been extended more and more from this primary group into secondary group. The Chinese individual is no longer tightly locked in a family structure, but finds himself in a quite a new social situation where the individual is given a much broader scope for self-expression.

King also observes that once outside the rigid role requirements of the immediate family structure, the individual self has considerable freedom in constructing the relational network. What cannot be overemphasized is that the boundary of the Chinese relational network is highly elastic in the sense that it can be expanded or contracted according to the decisions of the self. Family is in fact an elastic entity. It can mean only the members of a nuclear family, or it may also mean all members of a lineage or a clan. This ambiguity or elasticity of the family gives the individual ample room for maneuver in kin-relation network construction. It is this vortex of voluntary network building that the Chinese have demonstrated impressive and sophisticated skills, and Chinese culture has developed interpersonal relationships to the level of an exquisite and superb art.

King observes that this culture of network building has not only survived in socialist China but has become increasing rampant. Indeed, the phenomenon is so widespread that a new term, *guanxi xue* (relationology), has been coined for it. King further remarks

that this phenomenon is no monopoly of the mainland Chinese, but is quite widespread in all Chinese communities in the world.

To a certain extent, Chapter 4 builds upon the discussion in the previous chapter to further develop the concept of *guanxi*. Chapter 4 begins with the premises that *guanxi* (personal relationship) is a key sociocultural concept to understand the Chinese social structure and has played a significant role in shaping the social behavior of the Chinese people.

Chinese *guanxi* building is based on shared "attributes" such as kinship, locality, surname, dialects, schooling, and so on, which are the building blocks the individual employs to establish "pluralistic" identifications with multiple individuals and groups. Indeed, network building is used (consciously or unconsciously) by Chinese adults as a cultural strategy to mobilize social resources for goal attainment in various spheres of social life. To a significant degree, the cultural dynamics of *guanxi* building is a source of vitality in Chinese society.

However, for a long time, *guanxi* has been perceived as undesirable or dysfunctional for Chinese modernization and development. *Guanxi*, for example, is deplored by Chinese modernists, Communists or not, who believe *guanxi* is a private and particularistic morality and what China needs is a universalistic morality. However, King points out that, with the Chinese cultural system, there are mechanisms to neutralize or to freeze the practice of *guanxi* (like the employment of an official in his native place was prohibited in the Qing dynasty) in order to carve out room for the universalistic rationality that is necessary for the management of economic and bureaucratic conduct in Imperial China.

King further observes there is no sign that *guanxi* building

is disappearing in modernizing Chinese societies, like Taiwan and Hong Kong. In the modernizing societies where market rationality and law are becoming the predominant values, the scope of *guanxi* practices has been narrowed and circumscribed and its strategy subtly transformed.

What is interesting to note is that the devious practice of *guanxi* for personal or organizational purposes in Communist China has reached an unprecedented level. The widespread phenomenon of "going through the back door" (to get things done through *guanxi*) has indeed become a social epidemic in Communist China since 1978. King explains that a drastic change has occurred in socioeconomic life in post-Communist China. The market is being partially reinstituted and civil society is being revived. The often-criticized traditional behavioral norms are now officially sanctioned in privatized, interpersonal relations. During this rapid transition period, when the socialist universalistic values are cast into doubt, and the market is not yet fully operational, *guanxi* blossoms to play a new instrument which enables people to achieve what has usually denied them through normal channels. King concludes that the widely cursed phenomenon of "going through the back door" will not go away easily, not until the day when market rationality is fully operational, and law becomes the rules of everyday political life.

The chapters on Confucianism are followed by chapters on modernization and development in Great China (mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong). Chapter 6 critically examines the concepts of modernization and modernity in its discussion of the construction of a modern Chinese civilization order.