

The Role of Chinese Culture (Confucianism) in East and Southeast Asia

El papel de la cultura china (confucianismo)
en el este y el sudeste asiático

Héctor Arturo Oropeza García
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4970-7157>
a.oropeza@unam.mx

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, México

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“As Jean Levi admitted, until he went in depth into the study of Confucianism, under the influence of the greatest attraction that Taoism and Buddhism usually have for Western thinkers, he remained on the borders of Chinese tradition, interested only in his images, “always wandering around the periphery without venturing to its center.”
Jesús Sole-Farras

Abstract: This paper examines the influence that Chinese culture has had on the configuration of East and Southeast Asia, from a millenary vision that remains relevant. It argues that this Chinese continuity—expressed through a civilizational interpretation of the world and of life, based mainly on Confucianism—has maintained a significant influence on the development of the political, economic, and social ethnicity of East and Southeast Asia.

It puts forward the idea that, under a millenary cultural tributary system of Confucian nature, China has always consolidated its central role in the region. Importantly, it points out that the persistence of the Chinese worldview today, with the revitalizations recorded throughout this long period, continues to be a key interpretative point for understanding the new geopolitical participation of this important region.

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Resumen: Este trabajo examina la influencia que la cultura China ha tenido en la configuración de Asia Oriental y Sudoriental, a partir de una visión milenaria que guarda vigencia. Se sostiene que esta continuidad China expresada a través de una interpretación civilizatoria del mundo y de la vida, basada principalmente en el confucianismo, ha mantenido una influencia relevante en el desarrollo de la etnicidad política, económica y social del Este y del Sudeste Asiático.

Propone la idea de que bajo una política tributaria cultural milenaria de naturaleza confuciana, China consolidó desde siempre su papel central en la región. Y de manera importante, señala que la persistencia de la cosmovisión China en la actualidad, con las revitalizaciones registradas a lo largo de este amplio periodo, sigue siendo un punto de interpretación fundamental para entender la nueva participación geopolítica de esta importante región.

Palabras clave: Confucianismo, civilización, China, Vietnam, Japón, Corea

Introduction

This study examines the historical and cultural influence of China on East and Southeast Asia, under the premise that Chinese civilization is an essential factor for understanding the politics and societies of the region. Unlike the West, whose development has been marked by ruptures and discontinuities, China has been characterized by the continuity of its philosophical, social, and political structures. Confucianism, in particular, established a moral model of the state which, beyond its historical adaptations, shaped the organization of power not only in China but also in Japan and Korea.

The persistence of Chinese civilization, together with its tributary system and the transmission of language, technology, and values, created a regional order that positioned China as the cultural and political center of Asia for centuries. At the same time, the inability of Western analytical frameworks to fully grasp China's civilizational continuity has led to recurrent misunderstandings of its regional and global role.

This paper is structured in six main sections. First, it examines China and its influence in East Asia. Second, it discusses Confucianism and its importance in regional cohesion. Third, it analyzes China's influence in Southeast Asia. Fourth, it considers Southeast Asia and the present Confucian lines. Fifth, it addresses the main challenges faced by Southeast Asia. Ultimately,

the study argues that understanding the continuity of Chinese civilization is indispensable to interpreting both regional cohesion and China's contemporary global rise. The study ends with the conclusions.

China and its Influence in East Asia

East Asia. A Coherent Region

The West has always had an inadequate understanding of East Asia (China, Japan, and Korea)¹, throughout its different stages of coexistence with this region. For millennia, the separation between these regions was the product of distance, which isolated them from greater contact with the Indo-European civilization that, at its extreme western end, was maturing with pretensions to universality.

The intuitions of the other were always present, but the force of the geographical and technological obstacles determined that only the exception would travel between the two worlds, cultures that developed with an idea

1 For the purposes of this essay, the term East Asia will only include China, Japan, and Korea for illustrative purposes. However, it should be noted that according to the United Nations (UN), the concept includes the following countries: China, Hong Kong, Macao, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea. As for Southeast Asia, the UN includes Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, East Timor, Vietnam. The South Pacific is made up of the following sub-regions: Australia and New Zealand, the Christmas Islands, the Cocos Islands, the Heard and McDonald Islands, the Norfolk Islands, Melanesia, Fiji, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu Micronesia: Guam, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Northern the Mariana Islands, Palau, the U.S. Overseas Islands, Polynesia, American Samoa, the Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Niue, Pitcairn, Samoa, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Wallis, and the Futuna Islands. As for South Asia or South Asia, it includes the nations of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Finally, Asia Pacific, which includes several sub-regions and encompasses countries on the continents of Asia, Oceania and, in some cases, the American continent. This category is not used by the UN for statistical purposes but has gained importance due to the creation of the Asia-Pacific Cooperation Forum in 1989. Since it is not a specifically defined category, the countries that comprise it vary according to the source. The countries that comprise it are usually the sum of the subregions it covers: East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the South Pacific. In some cases, Russia is also considered. In the Asia-Pacific Cooperation Forum. The following countries of the American continent are added: Canada, United States, Mexico, Peru, and Chile.

of exclusivity until the Nineteenth Century. At that time, western visitors in the form of military and diplomatic advances broke the decadency of the Chinese imperial period (1839), Japanese isolationism (Sakoku), and the binational pressure (a shrimp among whales) that Korea has always suffered as the hinge country of the area.

China, Japan, and Korea, due to their geographical proximity, have lived for two millennia in an obligatory neighborhood full of vicissitudes that accompanied them with intensity from the birth of their pre-modern states until the 19th century. In time, the precocity of the modern Chinese state, formalized before our era, set the standard for the exchange of a collective regional culture that greatly determined its social and political ethnicity.

The cultural and geopolitical logic which, to a greater or lesser extent, prevailed in the region for nearly two millennia was broken with the arrival of the Western powers resulting in a first clash of civilizations that generated a rearrangement of the axioms and actors in the area. These have gradually been rebuilt but with this process still being incomplete to date.

This region, led by China, held great economic, cultural, and geopolitical importance for two millennia. Now, since the beginning of the 21st century, it is once again gaining greater relevance every day to the point of ushering in a transfer from the Era of the Atlantic, managed by the West, to a new Era of the Pacific, led by the countries of East and Southeast Asia, which, little by little, are taking relevant positions in the economic, social, and political fields of the world. This has led to a leadership clash in different ways and languages between China and the United States when they appear at the same discussion table, debating with increasing intensity, day by day, the attributes of a complex global hegemony during the third half of the 21st century. The Asian century, has arrived, Mahbubani says, even if the area must stumble one or two more times before it rises to the top.

An interpretive lag on central themes regarding East Asia, such as the validity of its millenary culture, the existence of a Confucian Moral State, the organizational filial piety of its institutions, the validity of its utopias, the nature of its ethnicities, and of the Confucian moral lines of their societies, among others, are issues that remain open. This limits a better appreciation and understanding of the construction of the political power of their societies, the nature of the implementation of their economic models, and the ethical-moral behavior of their social organizations.

The Cultural Affinity of the Area

Holcombe, when describing East Asia defines it as “The region of the world that used the Chinese writing system extensively, and that absorbed through these written words, many of the ideas and values of what we call Confucianism, much of the associated legal and political governance structure, and certain specific forms of East Asian Buddhism,” to which he adds, that “East Asia is truly a culturally and historically coherent region, which deserves serious attention as a whole, and not just like a random group of individual countries, or some arbitrary lines on a map” (Holcombe, 2016, pp. 12-13).

The Origins of Affinity. East Asia is the right arm of the largest continent in the world, which, with its geographical characteristics, protected the birth of the three central actors of the region. China is its central axis, and the lucidity of Chinese thought stands out at the level of the best cultures in the world. Just as Greco-Latin thought is a fundamental part of the Western ethos, so the strength of the Chinese proposal became the central scaffolding for the construction of the East Asian States, in particular, and a relevant influence for the nations of Southeast Asia.

The Chinese tree was born early and strong. When Holcombe asks how old China is, he replies that Chinese civilization is often assumed to be the oldest in the world, having arisen in the late Stone Age (Neolithic), having flourished in the rise of the Bronze Age civilization, which emerged 2000 BC, and have survived thereafter without interruption to this day. The invitation is to understand the Chinese and Asian phenomenon beyond a short-term vision and looking beyond the individuality of each of its members. However, Holcombe, himself, warns that no civilization constitutes a permanent concrete reality; civilizations are abstractions of historical continuities and connections that become meaningful, and they also have permeable frontiers where ideas are exchanged (Holcombe, 2016, p. 13).

For this reason, starting with China to talk about Japan, Korea, and East Asia is not only convenient, but it is also mandatory. Their coherent kingdoms of Xia, Shang, and Zhou, from XXI to III BC, with their high level of civilization, make them a starting point, not only for the interpretation of China, but for an entire cultural region of rice, silk, and the language of remote times.

Contrasting with the Chinese development of that time, Japan had the Jōmon and Yayoi cultures arising about 1000 BC, identified by their

pottery and a multiplicity of clans. In the case of Korea, there was a greater number of social organizations from the XXIII century to the first century BC, such as the Old Joseon, Tan-gun, Kija periods, etc., but like Japan, their advance with respect to China was asymmetrical.

Since the times of the Bronze and Iron Ages, the first links within the region can already be seen with an inevitable influence of Chinese development on the others within the region. In the case of Japan, for example, in its intermediate period (300 BC), when the first early state formations occurred, the sending of prisoners of war to Chinese monarchs as gifts or tribute was a frequent practice in order to obtain recognition. Based on the Chinese historiography of the time (Han), which was the only one that existed in this period, it had already been recorded that in the 1st century BC, there were a large number of small kingdoms in the Japanese islands; that King Na of Wa (the name that was given to Japan in the Chinese chronicles of that time) had sent a diplomatic mission to an emperor of the Later Han Dynasty; in 107, another Han emperor had received gifts from a King of Wa, including 160 slaves (Tanaka, 2013, pp. 39-40). Regarding this, Mori commented "The information about the first kingdoms of the Japanese islands has been transmitted by Chinese history books. The oldest records are concentrated in the book of the Han according to which the Emperor of China conferred a gold seal on a Japanese King in 57 AD. The meaning of this was that the records still exist and it was discovered in North Kyūshū in the 18th century." (Mori, 2019, p.14) Similarly, archaeological evidence reveals the extensive use of pottery and wares such as bronze mirrors, swords, and other implements in Japanese tombs and burials from 1000 BC on, which possibly came through Korea during the Yayoi period (Vogel, 2019, p.4).

Korea also experienced Chinese influence starting in its early Bronze and Iron Ages. Around 1200 B.C., it developed a culture of black pottery similar to that of Longshan China, now the North Shandong province: bronze mirrors, knives, and other ceremonial utensils such as bronze bells from the 5th century BC, as Nahm indicates, suggest the cultural influence of China. The same sources in the Han Dynasty record books indicated that the kingdom of Kija (1120-18 BC) was formed from a split of the Chinese kingdom of Shang (Yin), which was defeated by Chou King around 1122 BC. This account described that Kija emigrated to Korea with 5,000 followers that revealed themselves to the Chou government. This Sino-Korean Dynasty would later lose part of its dominions and fortresses in the 4th century B.C. at the hands

of the Chinese Yen or Yan State. However, its records show the strong historical ties in the origin of these countries (Nahm, 1996, pp. 24,26).

This porosity of borders of developing States would also lead to a wave of Chinese refugees entering the Korean peninsula at the end of the 3rd century BC due to the establishment of the Qin Dynasty, which ended the creation of the first Modern Chinese State in 221 BC. Chinese general Wiman, one of those affected by this integration of peoples, founded the Korean kingdom Wiman-Choson, which was defeated by the Han Chinese in 109 BC; the same Chinese Dynasty then installed the first bases of administrative control on the ground through which goods collected by the Chinese government (salt, iron, agricultural products, etc.) flowed, as well as cultural knowledge (Seligson, 2019, pp. 35-36).

China was born ancient with an early integration that shared its values with neighboring groups and the different societies of the time. Its difficult stages of Spring and Autumn (722-481 BC), and of warring States (403-221 BC), although they were convulsive and belligerent between their different kingdoms, at the same time represented, as already said, one of the most lucid times in the generation of political and philosophical thought. The integration of China's last seven pre-modern states carried out by the Qin Dynasty pushed it to stages of development superior to those of its neighbors in the region. "Unification under one empire," as Hoffman points out, ended a long period of war and gave people the precious gift of security. Preserving unity then became an essential part of the very idea of the state, even as China was ravaged by rebellions and internal wars. This helped keep the empire intact, as did efforts to reduce ethnic differences through education, migration, and the imposition of a dominant culture. These efforts, he adds, left an indelible mark on ethnic and linguistic differences in China (Hoffman, 2016, p. 145).

The Chinese project developed along the entire cultural horizon. In relation to the creation of written language since, around 1200 BC, there are records of archaic linguistics whose evolution can be traced to the present day. Along with this is documented history from the Zhou Dynasty (1122 BC-256 BC) that narrates the relevant facts of the area, and its daily life. The first evidence of Chinese pottery dates to 7500 BC, at the same time the region represented one of the first world centers for the domestication of plants and animals, it was one of the great exporters of bronze and had the first cast iron production in the world around 500 BC. In the middle of the 2nd century BC, China was technologically more advanced and innovative

than Europe. Among its many advances from the time included (Diamond, Midham, Holcombe, etc.) cast iron gutter gates, deep bores, harness for transport animals, gunpowder, kites, compasses, paper, printing with movable (non-metal) typefaces including porcelain, stern rudders, the trolley, etc. (Kaplan, 2013, p. 246) This overflow of development caused China to be the first nation with the organized production of food, technology, etc., and in a relevant way, the construction of an important social and political organization that contributed decisively to the formation of neighboring states.

Japan and Korea adopted rice cultivation from China in the second millennium BC. In the first millennium, they obtained important teachings on the subjects of bronze metallurgy, pottery, wheat, and barley crops, among many others. However, one of the contributions that most influenced the development of East Asian countries, both individually and collectively, was language. In this regard, Diamond believes "... the prestige that Chinese culture still enjoys in Japan and Korea is so great that Japan does not at all intend to abandon its Chinese-derived writing system despite its inconveniences to represent Japanese words, although Korea is finally regularizing now its cumbersome Chinese type writing by the excellent Hangul alphabet" (Diamond, 2018, pp. 380-389).

Mandarin is presented as the oldest living language on earth, as well as the second most widely spoken language in the world (22%), with speakers in about 30 countries. Until the 18th century, more than half of the books published in the world were printed in Mandarin (Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding, 2015, p. 188). Of course, this language was born within a wide range of phonemes. Today more than 300 living languages are still registered in China. However, the fact that language and books appeared centuries before our era, and within them, a philosophical, political, and social proposal of the State was lucidly reflected, is a transcendent fact that became the main engine of influence on the Chinese civilization of the time. This was especially true for Japan and Korea, which did not have a written language at the time and lagged in their political organization and cultural formation.

Until the 6th and 7th centuries, Japan was an illiterate state. Then Chinese characters began to circulate from those dates, along with a first centralized administrative organization influenced by China. Its first historical compilations, the *Kojiki* (712) and the *Nihonshoki* (720), referring to antecedents and chronicles of a historical nature, were written in Chinese

characters. The chapters of the second of these, the *Nihonshoki*, for example, record the arrival in Japan via Korean scholars of the books of the *Analects of Confucius* and the *Thousand Chinese Characters* (Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding, 2015, p. 238).

Similarly, Korea used the Chinese language as a first form of communication, which remained unchanged until the 15th century. Then one of its most representative monarchs of the Joseon Dynasty, King Sejong (1418-1450), invented an alphabet of 28 characters called *Hangul*, which was published in 1443. Notwithstanding the above, the strong cultural influence of China at the time caused that this proposal was contemptuously received as vulgar, "that did not have the literary merit of Chinese writing;" it was even outlawed in 1504 by Prince Yeonsan, which is why Mandarin remained the privileged means of communication until the 19th century (Romero, 2019, p. 74).

The first Korean historiographies appeared in the 12th century, four centuries after the Japanese, with the publication of the book *Sanguk Sagi*, written by Kim Pusik at the suggestion of King Injong with Chinese characters and Confucian style around 1145. This dealt with the history and customs of the Three kingdoms of Koguryo, Paekche and Shilla. A hundred years later, a second book entitled *Sanguk Yusa* appeared, written with the same characteristics as its previous simile, although more focused on the legends, tales, and stories of the three Korean kingdoms, especially the kingdom of Shilla, which ultimately would be the one that would achieve the first unification of Korea in 668. These first Korean works had as their immediate reference the Han Chinese records, such as the *Weizhi*, and the *Sanguo Zhi*, etc. This is why Kim Bu-sik commented in the preface to the *Sanguk Sagi*, "Among the scholars and high-ranking officials of today, there are those who are well-versed and can discuss in detail the Five Classics and the other philosophical treatises... as well as the stories of Qin. and Han, but as for the events of our country, they are completely ignorant from beginning to end. This is truly unfortunate" (Kim, 1145, as cited in Lee, 1992).

East Asia and its Cultural Tributary Policy

Chinese civilization in East Asia was like a magnet that brought together three social organizations that mixed culturally even beyond their political desires. From this Chinese influence, but also from Japanese and Korean admiration of China, with their trying to learn from the Chinese referent, there

emerged a tax era of a civilizing nature, where the payment of tariffs was least important and where true dependence or taxation was born out of the desire to educate themselves in the knowledge of the Chinese Middle Kingdom in a wide range of modalities, from political organization, bureaucratic administrative technique, social organization, technological knowledge, etc. This led China to become a beacon of illustration from its foundation, up to its regional decline in the 19th century, which is when Chinese taxation really ended. There are authors who mark the tributary era of East Asia only from the formal acceptance of the delivery of stipends to the Chinese nation (Vogel, Nahm, etc.). However, linking the tax period only in the light of a formal gesture of surrender or guardianship would severely limit the appreciation that can be had of the civilizational exchange of the region based on the cultural influence that China always radiated to its neighbors, and to the evident use that they made of this influence in an official or veiled way.

The official tributary policy, as already mentioned, was based on the Asian states in formation that voluntarily went to the emperor in turn to request the ratification of his mandates in exchange for gifts or tribute. It also occurred, although to a lesser extent, in the face of Chinese harassment or military intervention that intimidated its neighbors, forcing them to recognize it as the center of the geopolitical system in the area.

The Chinese Middle Kingdom was the undisputed leader of its region for most of modern time. Its civilizing and tributary influence not only affected Korea and Japan, but also how it will later be abundantly spread to remote regions such as the Kingdom of Champa, Annam; Tibet, Java, Central Asia, the Ryūkyū Islands, regions of India, Malaysia, Borneo, Sumatra, Iran, and other regions of Asia (Botton, 2010, p. 313). Reaching its greatest territorial height during the Tang and Qing Dynasties, the Chinese empire comprised a surface of more than 5.4 and 13 million km,² respectively (Qixiang, 1982).

As is well-known (Kissinger, Fairbank, Vogel, Botton, etc.), Chinese tributary policy departed from the tradition of Western peoples, of conquest and plunder, but was derived from a moralistic construction of power, internal and external, in which China was divined as the center of a confused world order from which the explanation and disposition of things emerged. Under this tributary worldview, the East Asia region was hierarchically organized as a family with reciprocal duties and obligations, where China was presented as the geopolitical center of the region and the world.

Under this idea of cosmic superiority, but also of shared responsibility, China managed the visits of its neighbors with great attention and gifts in exchange for the greatest respect for the emperor (Kowtow), in his capacity as Son of Heaven, but also under a Confucian idea of filial piety, to esteem China as the father of an integrated regional state.

In the case of Korea, for example, Romero comments that this extended family figure advocated by Confucian ideology, governed society not only internally, but also included political relations with neighboring nations which were considered to be an extension of interpersonal relationships. This implied that the Chinese emperor should be recognized as the elder brother of the Korean State. This relationship appeared to be contained in the expression *sadae kyorin*, whose first term meant to serve the greatest (China), while the second referred to the maintenance of friendly relations between neighbors (Japan). This sentence came from ancient Chinese political philosophy and was linked to the mutual responsibilities that must exist between the son and the father, which by analogy constituted what some authors have called “the Chinese world order” (Fairbank 1996).

In the East Asian region, one could speak of three types of Chinese taxation. The most extensive and which remains to this day, is the one that refers to the civilizing issue which occurs between the three countries beyond their own wills. The second, geopolitical in nature, is the one that corresponds to the Chinese hegemony that was deployed in the area over two millennia according to the circumstances of each moment that finished at the end of the 19th century, before the geopolitical rise of Japan; and the latter or traditional, which is measured only through empirical evidence of voluntary or forced tax acceptance, both from Japan and Korea throughout more than two millennia of their life together (Vogel, 2019, p. 31)².

Confucianism and its Importance in Regional Cohesion

East Asia was born under the influence of Confucian thought that already inhabited its region before the formal appearance of each of its three states.

2 With respect to Japan, for example, Vogel only accepts the existence of three tributary periods: from 600 to 838 as the most important; from 1403 to 1547 when this was accepted openly by Japan; and 1547-1862, when there weren't official relations (Vogel, Op. Cit, p. 31).

The idea of the construction of a moral State proposed by Confucius (551 B.C. 479 B.C.) predates the modern Chinese State by a quarter of a century; almost a millennium before the first Korean unification of Shilla and nearly two millennia before the Japanese unification of Tokugawa. Its philosophical-political approach, constantly renewed by its followers through the centuries, has accompanied East Asia throughout its modern life.

Confucianism in Japan

From its first pre-modern states, by way of Korea, Japan received the political and social ideas of Confucianism that was gradually incorporated into the construction of its ethnicity and political organization. From the 3rd and 4th centuries, tradition already speaks of the first Confucian antecedents on the island. In the year 513, the king of Paekche, one of the three Korean kingdoms of the time, sent doctors to Japan that specialized in the five classical books of China. This inaugurated the intermittent arrival of Chinese and Korean scholars who were in charge of disseminating Confucian thought of the time (Tanaka, p. 50).

Confucian influence in the 6th and 7th centuries was fundamental in the construction of the first political organizations. Under its rules, the nobility was organized, protocols were established, and customs and habits were inaugurated. In Korea and China public administration found a theoretical foundation for both its centralization and its bureaucratic organization. Yamato and Soga were two of the early kingdoms that assimilated the Chinese-Confucian model for the organization of political power and social organization of their time. The Chinese language was the medium that facilitated and accelerated this learning process.

The interaction of the Imperial Academy, which was built mainly to disseminate Confucian knowledge, appeared from the 7th century with similar replicas in each of the provincial capitals. This Academy, and its various schools, were mainly dedicated to the teaching of Chinese classical studies, as well as to the preparation of meritocratic examinations for aspiring officials of the central or provincial government, examinations that, unlike in Korea and China, were mediatized over time by the feudal nobility.

Smith comments that some of the clearest evidence of the early influence of Confucianism in Japan comes through the founding document of the Seventeen Articles of Prince Shōtoku, which were promulgated in 604 under the reign of Princess Suiko (Smith, 1959, p. 6). In this document, known

as the Shōtoku Constitution, Confucianism was decisive in the organization of a central power of a vertical nature (filial piety), as well as in the duties of the people to their sovereign. In its second article, for example, the Constitution described the vertical forms of power and morality as essential elements of the State: that superiors act and inferiors obey; that ritual, justice, trust, and harmony be respected; that wickedness be punished. These were the criteria of a relevant document of Japanese history that, as Mason and Caiger point out, were borrowed from Confucian doctrine (Mason, 1997, p. 41) to build the first links of the Japanese state.

In 646, Emperor Kotoku continued the lines of political control and social organization through his Edict of the Four Articles, by which he limited the political participation of the rest of the clans by means of a more advanced central order of Chinese influence. The content of this Edict is pointed out by some specialists (Vogel), as an important influence on the Five Articles Edict issued in 1868 by the Meiji restoration. In 701 the Taiho Code appeared, which strengthened and expanded the teaching of Confucianism and Chinese scripture by reinforcing respect for its five bonds of filial piety, especially in the military, government, and family. This Code was made with the advice of Chinese scholars. Also, in 718, the Yoro Code abounds in Confucian themes and introduces the Chinese well-field system that prevailed since the ninth century B.C. during the Zhou Dynasty. The Riten-Ryō codes in the 8th century were created under the influence of the Tang Dynasty legal system. The Riten Code, which established criminal law, and the Ryō Code of an administrative nature also emerged under an ideal of Confucian justice. This codification, Chapoy notes, was worked under the principles of the Chinese model, giving the utmost importance to the organization of state powers and to the punishment of undesired conduct. The practice of these activities, he adds, was what made the field of law develop in Japan. The precepts of this era were mainly of a moral character, since, following Confucian principles, their purpose was to invite good and punish bad behavior. Their ultimate aim was to gain access to the ignorant to direct them towards a Confucian ideal (Bonifafz, 2010, p.12).

Throughout the period of the ancient kingdoms and the medieval shogunate, Confucianism behaved in a way that depended on the vicissitudes that prevailed within the struggle for power of the different clans and kingdoms, just as happened in the evolution of Confucianism in the internal life of China. In the Kamakura and Muromachi periods (1185-1573), where

there was a return to diplomatic and commercial relations with China, Japan adopted the lines of a neo-Confucianism led by the thought of Zhu Xi (1130-1200), a scholar of the Song Dynasty (960-1279), which motivated a return to the classics (Confucius, Mencius, etc.). There was a deepening of Confucianism and a delving into the agnostic politics of power and society, addressing sophisticated metaphysical speculations on physical reality and the foundations of human knowledge. Japan's advance towards a more robust political integration through the arrival of Tokugawa Ieyasu's Shogunate in 1603 generated a new political and social stability that benefited the cultural rapprochement with China and Confucian principles.

As an interesting example of the Confucian influence on political and social life in the Tokugawa period, in 1649 the Shōgun Iemitsu decreed the following to the populace:

"People must have deep love and respect for their parents. This love is manifested, in the first place, in taking care of them so that they do not get sick and remain healthy. But the most pleasant thing for parents is that their children do not get drunk, that they do not start quarrels and that they behave well; that siblings live together amicably, that the older ones protect the younger ones, and the younger ones obey the older ones" (Tanaka, 2013, p. 139).

As can be seen from the above, Confucian doctrine was widely disseminated by the shogunates among the peasant population as a measure of control, but also as education of a form of behavior that with its general acceptance and the passage of centuries, was transformed into an ethnicity, and as Prince Shōtoku pointed out, Confucianism became the trunk of the tree of a Japanese civilization of Shinto roots and Buddhist fruits. The above certainly does not disprove the enlightened Confucian education of the Bakufu, the literati, or Daimyō; but it does endorse the universalization of Confucianism through its various forms of acculturation over time. Even in the Kasei period, where a heterodoxy of the doctrine appears, as Tanaka indicates, Confucian teachings were widely disseminated in the middle, urban and rural strata of the Japanese population (Tanaka, 2013, p. 170).

In the seventeenth century, along with stability and greater political integration in Japan (Pax Tokugawa), a nationalist current was born that sought to distance itself from overdependence on Chinese civilization through the impulse of a movement known as "National Studies" (Kokugaku), which led to the promotion of both Shintoism and Buddhist religion. Howe-

ver, until the end of the Tokugawa period in the 19th century, these studies could not replace the strength of a Japanese neo-Confucianism which, as Vogel points out, at that time represented the best Confucian tradition in the region including China (Vogel, 2019, p. 60).

For its richness of thought and development, the Confucian tradition in Japan during the Edo-Tokugawa period (1603-1868) is compared to the Chinese cycle of the "100 schools." Fukiwara Saka (1561-1619), with his studies on human nature; Nakae Toju (1608-1648), with his proposals on filial piety; Kumazawa Banzan (1619-1691), with his studies regarding the virtues of governance; Kaibara Ekken (1630-1714), with the pursuit of happiness; Asami Keisai, (1652-1711) regarding issues of rulers and tradition; especially Ogyū Sorai (1666-1728) with his debates on Answers to Questions; Ninomiya Sontoku (1787-1856) with his works on the good life, Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism, are just a sample of the validity and practice of a Confucian thought that became its own and was enriched under a local vision of its own characteristics (Heisig et al., 2016, pp. 315-471).

After a millennium, where the first ancient kingdoms initiated the construction of the Japanese state under Chinese-Confucian precepts and principles; it was that Prince Shōtoku established the first constitution with Confucian content; the most successful state integration under the aegis of the Tokugawa Shogunate, and gave rise to one of the most lucid and prolific Confucian periods of the island.

The Tokugawa regime with its class hierarchy, its bureaucracy, its complicated coordination of daimyō throughout the country, etc., generally privileged a culture based on moral values; giving a special place to loyalty as a fortunate vertical form of filial piety to exercise and justify the construction and administration of power, similar to what is pointed out in classical Chinese texts.

Along these lines of the moral commitment of power, the Tokugawa Shogunate in its quest for social order and efficient administration, as Confucius recognized, gave priority to the education of the people and the propagation of the administration of the laws. As Kasulis comments, "No tradition in Japan valued literacy and appreciation of classical moral texts as much as Confucianism, and the secular academies were part of a cultural movement that, as mentioned above made Japan, in the 17th century, one of the most literate, if not the most literate, country in the world" (Kasulis, 2019, p. 321).

The Tokugawa rule allowed the development of a cultural base that propitiated the golden century of Confucian philosophy in Japan. Throughout this period, Confucian philosophers formed part of the Shogunate's power structure, including the support of the military class (Samurai), as well as, as already mentioned, that of the peasants, artisans, and merchants in general.

The second part of the 19th century was characterized by a profound disruption caused by the arrival of the West, which shook the structures not only of Japan, but of East Asia as a whole. The Meiji era before its restoration, together with the "National Studies", attempted a displacement of ancient Confucian thought, in a double opportunity of regional and cultural repositioning. The Meiji era promoted the construction of its own narrative through the veneration of the past, which led to the declaration of Shinto as the national ideology of the State in 1890, to which it could be added that, in 1940, Prime Minister Fumimaro also recognized it as the only religion of the country. However, despite this important fact regarding the construction of the new Japanese identity, in the middle of the Meiji era, the Minister of Education Fukuoka Takachika, despite the new Shinto ideology, could not avoid declaring that "In matters of discipline we must promote the only moral thought of this empire, which refers to the following of the doctrines of Confucianism." Without neglecting the importance of Shintoism for the political and social life of Japan, as Smith recognizes, Shinto nationalism and Confucianism communicate and consult with each other in a permanent way since their birth. This is based on a Confucian ethic of common values and a political and social order of a vertical nature at all levels, from a Confucian principle of filial piety as the starting point for organizing the State, and the utmost loyalty and devotion to the emperor, as the established central power (Smith, 1959, pp. 47-237).

However, despite the banishment attempted by the Meiji era, Confucianism continues to manifest itself in many ways: in a subtle way, before the first construction of the word "philosophy", which emerged in this period through a neologism that derived from ancient and modern Confucianism. However, more influential than the fact that the new word "Tetsugaku" catapulted Confucianism to the forefront of the "new" Japanese philosophy, was the work of Inoue Tetsujirō (1855-1944), the first Japanese to obtain an academic position in philosophy at the Imperial University of Tokyo. In his important trilogy, he revealed the importance of Confucian thought and its relevance in the Japanese philosophical corpus produced in the Tokugawa

era. Inoue's studies persuaded many Japanese and Western scholars that Confucianism had been a vitally important element in the Japanese tradition," comments Heisig on the subject" (Heisig et al., 2016, pp. 315-317).

Confucianism and its influence in Japan are a topic that came into debate with the end of its tributary era with China, a debate that became more complex with the economic and political success of Japan since the late nineteenth century and the second part of the twentieth century. Then the topic was relegated in parallel to the construction of a Japanese cultural history of its own, with this even being considered as a taboo discipline in intellectual and political circles of the country. New authors such as Kang Xiaoguang, Jiang Qing, or Kiri Paramore, structured new confrontations and realities against the "Leninism of the Chinese Communist Party," or the neo-liberal laissez faire, laissez passer, or conservative cultural nationalism, among others. New Confucian movements in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, China, etc., are part of a never-ending debate. However, scholars such as Abe Yoshio, Watanabe Hiroshi, Kojima Yasunori, etc., are part of a new wave of scholarship on the study of Confucianism in Japan and the rest of Asia. Scholars such as Yonaha Jun (*The Meaning of Japan*), an intellectual of great brilliance and highly respected in Japan today, irreverently and eruditely reconstructs the historical passage of Confucianism in Japan as part of a Huntingtonian event, a clash between the Chinese civilization and Japanese civilizations, in the hypothetical framework of the Westphalian agreements. Maruyama Masao, for his part, from 1945 onwards inspired the "Maruyama rule," which consists of speaking of Confucianism without mentioning its name. Today, as Paramore points out, the taboo on talking about the shared cultural forms in East Asia has shifted to a limitation of the subject derived from the challenges that both countries face in the 21st century (Paramore, 2016, pp. 173-182).

Confucianism in Korea

Korea is a nation relevant to the Confucian geography of East Asia. It belongs to that cultural community where people still eat with chopsticks, celebrate the tea ceremony, wear baggy attire, speak languages of common origin and where people still bow in respect, which, as Chang warns, makes them distinguishable from Western culture. In a special way, Chang adds, food, clothing, and housing are relevant, but family, social life, and human relations are more so, and in this area, Confucius offered a set of rules to be used, a

series of principles and special codes for human beings to differentiate themselves from animals, to love and respect their fellow human beings as well as themselves; and along with this, he proposed filial piety as the structure of an ordered and hierarchical society in the framework of a moral relationship of mutual commitments (Yun, 2016, pp. 375-376).

Korea, Yao comments, was perhaps the first country in which Confucianism exerted a sweeping influence that not only prevailed in the past, but in an important way is still relevant in 21st century Korea. Yun adds, "Korean Confucianism clearly contributed to the formation of a sense of national identity and sovereignty and became a major force in the evolution of Korean history. It has provided a universal cultural consequence that has given rise to a value system directly related to a highly developed view of ethics and politics and has helped to stimulate a unique national consciousness directly related to the existence and future prosperity of the Korean people" (Yun, cited in Yao, 2001, p. 151).

Korea managed to unify its state beginning in the year 668; however, Confucianism was present in its first social organizations. Both the *Nihon Shōki* and the *Kojiki*, the oldest books in Japan, attest to the arrival of Confucianism in Japan, when Wang Ren, a teacher from the Korean kingdom of Paekche, introduced the book of the *Analects of Confucius*, as well as the classic, the *Thousand Characters*. Likewise, the first written history of Korea, the *Sanguk Sagi*, indicates that in 372, during the reign of Koguryo, the nobles were already studying the Confucian classics at the National Academy (*Tae Hak*), which, as in the case of Japan, was reproduced in time to other Korean localities. The Korean kingdom of Paekche also initiated Confucian studies around the same time, which due to its proximity and communication with Japan, functioned as the cultural bridge to introduce Confucian knowledge to the island. Shilla, the third of the three kingdoms, and the one that consolidated the Korean unification, was not an exception; its leader Muyeol, visited Tang China in 648 and later became King, sending large groups of young people to study in China, preparing themselves in the organization of the administration of the kingdom. Confucianism appears with such force in its society and political power, that it has come to be said that Korea is the most Confucian country in East Asia (Chang, Yao, etc.). In the 9th century, as it was in the 7th century in Japan under Prince Shōtoku, the Korean scholar Choi Chi-Won (858-951) declared that the Korean religion was a composite of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, and helped stimulate a unique na-

tional consciousness directly related to the existence and future prosperity of the Korean people.

Confucianism in Korea is presented as a political and social philosophy that developed along with its first pre-modern states and was taught in academies, schools, books, etc., by the State itself. Its diffusion became more successful with the use of the Chinese language, which in addition to giving the country its first communication bridge, introduced it to an explanation of its social and political life that gradually became part of its ethnicity. Confucianism in Korea, as in Japan and China, developed alongside Buddhism, which also participated in combination with other alternatives in the construction of the country's ethnicity and culture. However, due to its own characteristics of being a political and social philosophy, agnostic and temporary, Confucianism overflowed them, surviving through the centuries until today.

In the case of China, despite the success of Buddhism from 500 to 850, mainly during the Sui and Tang Dynasties, the Confucian scholars and bureaucracy exercised control over the Buddhist church, preventing it from minimizing the power of the Confucian State as the essential source of the political and social order of the country; besides, in Buddhist schools and monasteries the Confucian classics were studied, especially regarding the moral supply of the State and society. As for Taoism, "... by its nature, it could not become an energetic organized force in Chinese politics, since it expressed an alternative to Confucianism in the realm of personal beliefs, but in practice, it left the field open to the Confucians." (Fairbank, 1996, p. 111). Finally, as Yao notes, "Through Confucian efforts to limit the extreme practices of Buddhism, and Buddhist efforts to adapt to Confucian policies, a gradual acclimatization of Buddhism to the Chinese scene took place, and the Buddhist monk became a Chinese subject and the monastic community a religious organization under the jurisdiction of the imperial bureaucracy. Buddhism had become politically sinicized." (Yao, 2001, p. 294). In the Korean case this thought interaction had a similar development.

Korean Confucianism modulated its historical presence, but far from disappearing in time, it gradually became embedded in the reality of the country. Scholars initiated the interpretation of the Chinese classics in Korea centuries earlier than in Japan. Choi Chun, for example, known for his work as the Confucius of the East, during the 11th century, pointed out that from the Joseon (Yi) Dynasty (1392), Confucianism departed from Buddhism to beco-

me the foundation of Korean society, which is documented within its different historical currents. In the 14th century, An Hyang (1243-1306), Chung Mong-Ju (1320-1392), and Yi Saek (1328-1395) spread the neo-Confucian thought of the school of Cheng Zhu (Cheng Hao, Cheng Yi, and especially Zhu Xi). In the 16th century, Kyong-Dok (1489-1546) systematized the Neo-Confucian ideas of Zhang Zai and Zhou Dunyi, notable scholars of his time. At the time of the great scholars Yi Hwang (better known by his pseudonym Toegye, 1501-1570) and Yi I (Yulgok 1536-1584), two of the most notable names in Korean Confucianism, intense debates occurred on the Four Beginnings (the Four Sprouts of the virtues, or the Four Good Dispositions) (Mencius), in relation to the Seven Emotions (joy, anger, sorrow, fear, love, hatred, and desire), the generation of a Confucian debate with Korean roots that has continued throughout its history. T'oegye, Korea's greatest Neo-Confucian scholar, noted for his contributions on Zhu Xi, is known as the Zhu Xi of the East. In the 17th and 18th century, in tune with Qing Neo-Confucianism, a new stream of practical learning (Silhak) appeared which refocused on social and public welfare reform, passing through the compromise of the monarchy. In this line, Yong Yak Yong (1762-1836) pushed Confucian knowledge towards better teaching of social and political realities, calling for a return to the Analects of Confucius, i.e., to the original principles of the Confucian model. In the 19th and the early 20th century, another movement arose that sought the recovery of the central ideas of Confucianism for the improvement of social and political outcomes. Oriental learning (Tonghak) appeared as a new school initiated by Choi Te-Wu (1824-1864) and Choi Si-Hyong (1829-1898), in the face of the Western arrival, which sought to reform the feudal system and overcome the old customs that limited the welfare of the people (Yao, 2001, pp. 152-159).

Within the framework of the difficult Confucian debate in the face of the Western invasion of East Asia, as in China and Japan, the orthodox and renewed schools had a difficult period of orphanism and mutual reclamations, especially because of their hegemonic dependence on China at the end of the same century.

Finally, as Yao comments, "Korea has traditionally prided itself on being a more (orthodoxly) Confucian nation than the homeland of Confucianism" (Yao, 2001, p. 158).

The differences between the West and East Asia are real. They are historical, political, economic, cultural, and part of a shared axi-ality that bifur-

cated in time, where East Asia has a better understanding and appropriation of the West, while the latter has not concluded a valid diagnosis of the other.

Cultural and historical issues must be incorporated into the analysis of East Asia and Southeast Asia. Historical factors will be very useful in identifying East Asian actors through their own axioms and myths. Knowing how they are, how they think, what they intend, how they intertwine, etc. is of great help to decipher, in this case, three tigers inhabiting the same mountain, to understand three sources of the same river.

China and its Influence in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia and its Cultural Balkanization

There is no simple way to define Southeast Asia or to describe the important cultural currents that have influenced it since its origins; neither its original societies nor those that come from its proximity to Chinese, Indian, Islamic, and Western civilizations, among others.

Despite its importance, over time, Southeast Asia has distinguished itself by lacking an identity and a proper name that would differentiate it from other countries or geographical areas of its own continent.

From a Chinese perspective, Southeast Asia was considered part of the nanyang, like a continuum of the South Sea. From India's ancestral view, it was known as Subarnadvipa, which is translated as the Golden Island; or Suvarnabhumi or The Golden Land. For his part, the Greek cosmographer Claudius Ptolemy, from Egypt, already spoke of the India Extra Gangem Fluvium, or India beyond the Ganges (Miksic & Yian, 2017, p.1).

For centuries the region has been struggling for a credible and solid integration, which could give it perspective with respect to other regions of the world, within the framework of a vast Asian area that generates powerful civilizations such as the Chinese, Indian, Russian, Japanese, Muslim, etc.

Southeast Asia, within the framework of its history, has also been known as Far East Asia or the Hindu States of the Far East (George Cœdès); the Hindu-Javanese region (N.J. Krom), etc. Similarly, it has been improperly generalized as Indochina, a term that was imposed by the French in the 19th century³ when trying to locate their arrival in the area with respect to the

3 The term Indochina is usually attributed jointly to the Danish-French geographer Conrad Malte-Brun in 1804; and the Scottish linguist John Leyden who used the term in 1804

territories of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia; although its use became widespread for recognizing the geographical boundaries of the region from Burma to Hong Kong.

Another name for the area that appeared at the end of World War II was *Seasia* to refer, in general, to Southeast Asia. It arose from the historian O.W. Wolters who was trying to collaborate in building a unified narrative of the area (Miksic & Yian, 2017, p. 4). The term Southeast Asia, which encompasses the states of Burma, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, is relatively recent, like the previous ones, as it was used in 1943 to integrate the Command of Southeast Asia to lead hostilities against the Japanese (Villiers, 2017, p.3).

Currently, Southeast Asia, South-East Asia, also called Southeast of Asia, Indochina, Seasia or Southeastern Asia, comprises an area of approximately 4.5 million km² representing 3% of the Earth's surface in which a population of approximately 700 million people lives, representing 8.75% of the world's population. In general, an integration formed by ten countries is recognized: among them are Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Brunei, and Indonesia (the United Nations (UN), includes East Timor in this area), which form a wide kaleidoscope of languages, races, and cultures that have inhabited the area since ancient times.

Under a combined integration of islands and mainland; with a geography that draws a capricious neighborhood, the region has on one hand, as an original neighbor, a wide sea that surrounds it on all sides, which has shaped both its ethnicity and its economy over time. On its northern side, on the other hand, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Myanmar share a wide border with South China, one of the oldest civilizations in the world, which has always determined both its origin and its development. On the west side, they live in close proximity to Bhutan, Bangladesh, and India. For many centuries it was a geographical gateway to India, one of the oldest civilizational emporiums of humanity.

In addition to being boxed in by the sea and the borders of China and India, another element that has influenced the course of Southeast Asia is a geographical power represented by the mountain ranges that run along the entire Himalayas towards Southeast Asia by an orographic cord that goes from South China to the South China Sea, represented geologically by the

(Wikipedia 2025).

great Asian landmass, which, in the case of Southeast Asia, ends up in a series of mountain ranges that run, in general, North to South throughout Indochina and then through the islands of Indonesia until reaching the Philippines, like a backbone that runs through Arakan, the Andaman Islands, and Nicobar; it continues through Sumatra, Java, and Bali and then making a curve through the Tanimbar and Kay Islands to Seram and Buru. Other slopes run through the mountain ranges between Burma and Thailand continuing through the Malay Peninsula, returning in curve through Borneo and the Philippines; "So, the geological map of Southeast Asia looks like two arcs tucked inside each other; both start from the mountainous areas of northern Indochina. The presence of these mountain ranges has often been a barrier to communication and peoples' movement in the history of Southeast Asia. The mountain ranges leading from Sumatra to the Banda Sea are largely volcanic and the activity from the archipelago's multiple volcanoes has played an important role in the high fertility of many islands by scattering ash and increasing rainfall density." This North-South pattern of rivers and mountains also explains one of the most constant elements in the history of the peoples of Southeast Asia, their tendency to move south from the mountain areas, through the river valleys towards the fertile plains and deltas, and often beyond, towards the islands" (Villiers. 2017, p. 6).

Pre-modern societies in Southeast Asia already showed important lines of development in their political and social organization. Advanced irrigation and agricultural techniques and complicated handicrafts as well as various forms of social organization, class system, oligarchies, and tribal confederations were part of an autochthonous regional development that is presented as the first starting point in the construction of a southeastern building that has always encompassed multiple ethnic groups of great wealth. At the same time, the influence of more developed neighboring civilizations such as the Indian, Chinese, Muslim, and finally Western, would generate over time what has been called the most complex "Asian balkanization" (Charles A. Fisher) in the world.

Over time, this generated a mosaic of cultures where Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, Taoist, Hindu, and other beliefs coexist daily; where approximately 240 million Muslims, 140 million Christians, 240 million Buddhists, 8 million Hindus, etc. communicate and do business. They speak hundreds of languages that are grouped into about four families in which the Austronesian stands out, which includes the languages of Indonesia, Malaysia,

and the Philippines; as well as the languages used in Polynesia, Hawaii, and New Zealand. Austroasiatic includes Khmer and Vietnamese. Thai covers the languages of Thailand and Laos, as well as the Tibeto-Burman (Burmese). All these families were mixed to a greater or lesser extent with Sanskrit, Chinese, Arabic, Portuguese, German, English, etc. By recognizing the original and most important civilizing sources in the area, an open debate continues on which neighboring influences were the most powerful in Southeast Asia.

In light of the results of religious or cultural allegiances, over time, the Muslim influence captured a little more than 45% of the population of the area, leaving a percentage similar to the sum of the Buddhist and Christian population in very similar proportions; and paradoxically places Hinduism, which according to various authors (Villiers, Miksic, Mahbubani etc.) was the oldest and broadest influence that the region had over time, on a purely informative level.

It is said that the Indian influence in Southeast Asia is more than 3,000 years old, and that this process of Indianization developed in a variable way depending on the area in question; underlining the Indian character of much of the art, religious practices, social organization, and customs in Cambodia or modern Java, although its presence is not easily noticed in Vietnam or the Philippines.

The Chinese influence, on the other hand, stands out clearly in Vietnam, to the extent that the ancient societies of Tonkin and Annam (today Vietnam) were subjected from very early on to an intense Sinicization, unlike other areas of Southeast Asia that did not register the evident impact of Confucian culture. Similarly, one can speak of a strong presence of the Chinese culture in Thailand, where in the 18th century (1782) King Rama I ruled as a king of Chinese descent, as did his successor, King Mongkut (1851-1868), who proclaimed his Chinese lineage very proudly. Regarding this Chinese influence in Thailand, Mahbubani points out that it is of such magnitude, that it is difficult to distinguish Thai from Chinese in Thai society. Also, in modern day, Chinese influence must be added into Singapore and Malaysia, where the percentage of the population of Chinese descent in those countries is 77% and 12%, respectively.

Under an overall view, when discussing Indochinese influence in the region, Cotterell believes that India's presence is seen as a source of the area's religious ideas, and China has always been interpreted as playing a political role. Mahbubani, for his part, tells us that Southeast Asia is part of

the Sanskrit cultural world, and that China actually impacts the political and economic issues of the region.

Villiers also comments that the Chinese presence in Southeast Asia has been fundamentally political and economic rather than cultural, citing the idea that its civilization was superior to any other and that dealing with the barbarians of the South could not yield many valuable results. He also adds that most of the states of Southeast Asia regarded China as the greatest empire on earth and the source of all civilization (Villiers, 2017, p. 63).

For different geographical, historical, and cultural reasons, and despite the enormous strength of the Chinese civilization, its civilizational influence in its four cardinal axes: East Asia, North Asia, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia, showed different degrees of influence; being greatest by far in East Asia where it built a civilizing tributary system from its origin until the end of the 19th century. Its immediate northern zone, the Mongolias, Manchuria, and East Turkestan, also registered a profound influence of civilizational Confucianism. In Central Asia, geographical and ethnic conditions and the presence of other relevant empires prevented a further flourishing of cultural Confucianism even though China has been present since the second century B.C. Similarly, Southeast Asia, due to its own reasons, also presents a varied kaleidoscope of the different cultural expressions of the Chinese civilization.

Southeast Asia has vestiges of the Chinese presence from the first centuries of our era where, for example, ceramic vessels and bronze artifacts from the Han dynasty have been found on several Indonesian islands; even a Sumatran vessel dating back to 45 B.C.; a bowl engraved with Chinese shapes, and Han-style horses, etc. (Villiers, 2017, p. 63).

Beyond these historical discoveries of Chinese cultural products that appear in the region's anthropological sites, there is evidence that Southeast Asia paid tribute to various Chinese emperors from their first political organizations (Mahbubani, Villiers, Cotterell, etc.), as is the case of the kingdom of Funan (3rd century, 6th century, approx.), which together with its name of Chinese origin, sent tributes to China from its first political organizations until its decline and disappearance; in the same manner as the relevant societies that succeeded it such as the Srivijaya, the Chams, the Khmers, the people from Thailand, Bali, Java, Annam, etc.

Since the first Qin dynasty, China asserted its presence on its southern border in what is now Vietnam. The Han dynasty, for its part, expanded its presence in the region. During the Southern Zhou dynasty (420-499), and

the Sui (581-618) and Tang (618-906) dynasties, the tributary missions from Southeast Asia to China were very frequent expanding, in turn, China's important trade activities in the port area of the archipelago of Indochina. In 971, the Canton maritime customs service was reorganized and at the end of the 10th century it was declared that all trade was a state monopoly. During the 11th century, the Chinese began to spread throughout the archipelago organizing trade settlements in the Moluccas and the Philippines. Between 1405 and 1431, the Chinese naval prestige continued to grow by combining commercial activity with the empire's geopolitical influence (Ibid, pp. 63-64).

Precisely at the beginning of the 15th century, during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the famous expeditions of the Chinese admiral Zheng He were organized who, in 1405, integrated, in Southeast Asia, one of the largest navies of his time with about 300 ships carrying 27,000 people, where at least 62 of these ships, because of their size, were called treasure ships, since they could measure 122 meters long and 52 meters wide. For reasons not yet fully clarified, the trips were suspended by the Ming Empire despite the success achieved in technological, commercial, geopolitical, and military matters, with an excessive maritime capacity to expand its empire. It renounced its enormous maritime potential, precisely in the century where the great maritime developments of the time determined the rise of the European continent, which would eventually become the force of conquest for India, China, Japan, and the rest of Asia⁴.

4 “... Three points should grab our attention here. First, these official expeditions were not voyages of exploration like those of Vasco de Gama or Columbus: they followed the routes established by Arab and Chinese trade in East Africa seas. Second, Chinese expeditions were diplomatic, not commercial, much less piracy or colonizing adventures: they exchanged gifts, established the payment of tributes, and brought back geographical information and scientific curiosities such as giraffes, for example, which were exhibited as unicorns of luck. The third point, and the most impressive, is that once these voyages ceased in 1433, they were never resumed. Instead, the deputy minister of war destroyed the records around 1479, and Chinese international trade was severely restricted until 1567. In the great age of navigation that was beginning to arise around the globe, Ming's China had all the odds in its favor, since it was far ahead; however, it refused to go ahead. It took the Europeans almost half a century more just to start. After 1433, it would be another 37 years before Portuguese explorers from the west coast of Africa arrived as far south as the Gold Coast, and 59 years before Columbus undertook his first voyage with three small vessels totaling only 450 tons. Edward Dreyer describes how the great Chinese sea crossings were stopped by Confucian scholars-officials, who opposed foreign trade and contact on grounds of principle. Ray Huang emphasizes the regime's fiscal crisis, which didn't really have the funds to finance such expensive adventures...” (Fairbank, 1996, pp. 175,176).

However, as mentioned before, the cultural-civilizational influence of China in East Asia cannot be compared to that which it maintained in Southeast Asia. On this point, Reid (2015) provides four reasons why this was the case. The first, according to the author, concerns the difficulty of the Chinese writing system, which contrasts with the Hindi alphabet, a writing system that is easier and more logical to learn. The second reason refers to China's detachment from the sea for most of its imperial history—not because it was unaware of it, but because at various times it chose to renounce expanding its hegemony in this field. As an example, reference is made to the case of Taiwan, which, although geographically close to China, was not conquered until 1683. Likewise, maritime events involving Japan only occurred with the arrival of the Mongols, who attempted several incursions between 1274 and 1281, all of which ultimately failed. Mention is also made of the case of Admiral Zheng He (1405–24), when the Ming dynasty gave up its naval power.

The third factor noted by Reid (3026) concerns the low population in the region and its limited level of social organization, coupled with orographic conditions that posed a physical obstacle to Chinese penetration, making it difficult to transport military equipment and supply troops. The environment was also conducive to the spread of diseases such as smallpox, malaria, and cholera. This environmental and orographic disadvantage was so pronounced that, in Chinese, it was referred to as Zhang. The stench (Zhang) that pervaded the jungle environment led the powerful Emperor Qianlong (1736–95), during a campaign he attempted in the 1760s against Thailand—then Burma—to exclaim: “The land of Burma is horrible. Human beings cannot compete against the harshness of the water and the soil. It is most lamentable to see soldiers die and elite generals perish of Zhang for nothing.”. The fourth barrier to China's expansion into Southeast Asia, the author concludes, was the combative resistance of the different peoples of Vietnam along the Red River Delta.

Viet Nam and China's Cultural Confucianism

Vietnam could be one of the Asian countries that has one of the largest Chinese influences in East and Southeast Asia, rivaling Korea on the strength of this presence, to the extent that the two were neighboring countries, one

in the East and one in the South, of an expanding Chinese empire whose presence was always present since the birth of these two countries; in both cases, there is the phenomenon that they were able to maintain their civilizational identity despite this enormous Confucian culture, each under their own times and considerations.

In the case of Vietnam, unlike Korea that assimilated all Confucian knowledge through the adoption of the Chinese language and thought, from the 3rd century and clearly from the 7th century; the existence of their own languages in the early Vietnamese societies were part of a cultural defense towards a total assimilation of identities. Austroasiatic languages were already used in the area, with the Khmer and the original Vietnamese.

China's proximity to Vietnam and its expansion to the South generated a symbiosis between the two countries at the same time as a clear account of their history through the annals of Chinese historians or travelers who, as in the case of all their neighbors, documented the facts of their time, as happened with the essential histories of Japan, Korea, and Kashgaria in Central Asia, which were recorded by different Chinese chroniclers and historians from the Han dynasty or earlier. China's influence over Vietnam even reached the awarding of the country's name, when in 1803 Chinese diplomatic envoys objected to the official name of Nan-yue that the Southeast Asian country intended, changing it to the name of Vietnam.

As a border country of Southeast China, Vietnam was annexed by its first emperor Qin Shi Huang in the 3rd century B.C. At the fall of this empire, as in the case of Korea, a dissident Chinese general created his own government in the now territory of Vietnam and called it the Kingdom of South Yue, which in its time comprised both the Chinese provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi as well as the northern part of Vietnam.

However, at the beginning of the Second Han dynasty (206 B.C.- 220 A.D.) in 112 B.C., its territory was absorbed again and it was subject to an intense assimilation through all the Confucian cultural baggage. At that date, as is known, it already represented the fundamental lines of what is today the Chinese civilization where the classic Confucian books were included in the philosophical-political part and the lines of the already efficient Chinese administration were implemented with their ministries, civil service, and exams to select those best prepared to hold public office. Among the Confucian lawyers in Viet Nam, Nguyen Bing-gian stands out, a specialist in the

book of mutations; just as Pan Fu-xian and Wu Shih-lian stand out during the period of the Chen dynasty (1226-1428), (Chi-Yun, 2012, p. 398).

From this closeness and hegemonic control, the Chinese and Vietnamese coexistence merged over time. A prime minister of Vietnamese origin, Jang Gong-fu, joined the Chinese government of the Tang dynasty through civil service examinations. Similarly, Chinese lawyers such as Shi Xie came to Vietnam to promote Confucian studies, which were accepted successfully by the local people.

Vietnam's pro-independence line was also headed by a Chinese general named Wu Kuan in 939; and in 968, another Chinese general, Ding Bulig, becomes king. Twelve years later, a third Chinese general, Li Huan, ascends the throne (Ibid, p. 398).

Confucianism was the ideology of the Vietnamese people along with a civilizing tributary system that was lived in all its magnitude like no other country in Southeast Asia until before Vietnam fell under the Western influence of French Indochina. Nonetheless, the people and government would continue to use calligraphy and Chinese written language, and Confucian classics would continue to be taught in schools.

Annam, direct predecessor of Vietnam, was under the direct control of China for almost a thousand years, until the year of 939, during the Song dynasty. During this dynasty, an agreement of a Confucian nature was reached in which through the concept of filial piety an edict was published through which a new relationship was established for China and Vietnam (Dai Co Viet). In this edict, Vietnam declared itself an obedient son and China a benevolent father, within the framework of the idea of a Confucian world order where China was the center or kingdom in the middle of the world.

Although technically independent between 939 and 1883, as in the case of Japan and Korea, under their own circumstances, Vietnam remained a tributary nation of the Chinese civilization throughout that period.

- Champa

Until 1471, Vietnam, as was already mentioned, cohabited with the kingdom of Champa, which arises approximately from the 3rd century. This kingdom was a combatant of Vietnam and China until the time of its demise, although it was also a tributary kingdom like most of the kingdoms of Southeast Asia.



Historical Southeast Asia

Source: Mahubani (2017, p. 23).

Champa was present in the life of Vietnam in its southern part, since its earliest times. However, the Chams spoke an Austronesian language which was very different from that of Vietnam. From around the 4th century, the Indian influence was felt in the people of Champa through Hindu rites and beliefs, founding the compound of the temple “My Son”, which is located on the

banks of the Red River Valley, incorporating into their culture the dominant cult of Shiva and gods such as Vishnu, Brahma, and the goddess Uma, wife of Shiva, among others.

From the 5th century onward, the Chinese army came to the borders of the first kingdoms of Champa to demand tributary recognition. According to the Chinese accounts of the time, the local people lived in houses built with bricks and terraces and they were a people of prominent noses and very curly black hair, where men and women wore almost no clothes, only a few small strips around their bodies; and they pierced their ears placing on them small hoops, where the ruling classes wore leather shoes while ordinary people went barefoot (Cotterell, 2020, p. 90).

Champa regularly sent tributes to the different Chinese governments in search of legitimacy on the part of China for their internal and area recognition. When it saw the weakening of the empire, in turn, it avoided this type of obligation, but in the face of the repositioning of the new dynasties it once again accepted its collaboration. In 529, the Rudravarman dynasty attempted to stop its tribute payment. However, with the restart of the Chinese Sui dynasty in 595, once again it sent tributes in 623 and 625. In 628, it continued with the Tang dynasty that replaced the Sui in 618. Although the Mongol Empire (Yuan dynasty) disrupted China's internal life and the relations abroad, they quickly reinstalled and even expanded them once Kublai Khan took over the entire Chinese empire. According to Marco Polo, King Cham Indravarman V, upon the arrival of the Sino-Mongol armies sent emissaries to the Great Khan with the following message:

"Sir, the king of Champa greets you as his lord. He informs that he is an elderly man and that for a long time he has ruled his kingdom in peace. That he is willing to be your faithful servant and to send you elephants and aromatic woods every year. Therefore, he pleads with you politely, imploring your mercy, that your country will call back its commander, remove the forces that are ravaging his kingdom" (Cotterell, 2020, p. 95).

Faced with this plea, Kublai Khan had mercy on the king, who, in exchange for the Sino-Mongol consideration sent annually, as tribute, quantities of fine wood and elephants. Serving as an example of its influence in the region, the Chinese presence in Champa, continued directly during the Ming Empire.

In the 15th century, the Champa government suffered a sharp fall at the hands of the Vietnamese kingdom when the city of Bijaya was captured and annexed to the city of Da Nang; the small groups that survived were

absorbed in 1653. At present, remnants of these important people still persist. The influence that China exerted over two millennia—at times in the form of imperial domination and later intermittently through a tributary system—led Vietnam to construct a Confucian ethnicity in its family, social, and political life.

This Confucian orientation experienced a turning point with the French conquest of 1861–67 in southern Vietnam and 1884 for the rest of the country, when the French began an attack against Confucianism. Nevertheless, as Walter and George point out, Confucianism continued as a moral code and as a cultural influence for most of the Vietnamese people. Until the First World War, Vietnamese families continued to respect Confucian principles, even though scholars no longer enjoyed the prestige of their predecessors.

As in China, beginning in the 1920s, a critique of the traditional way of life emerged, lasting until the 1930s through a group of young writers led primarily by Tu Luc Van Doan, who promoted the implementation of modern Western ideas. Yet, as in China, this did not achieve the desired results in the face of families' continued respect for filial piety and Confucian morality.

With the division of Vietnam in 1954, Confucianism faced a major challenge, similar to that of China, under the imposition of Marxism-Leninism, which directly opposed Confucian precepts. Despite these profound changes throughout its history, Confucianism remains present in Vietnam's political and social life, although, of course, its reach and influence can no longer be considered representative of the entirety of the Vietnamese people.

Southeast Asia and the Present Confucian Lines

The Confucianism culture in Southeast Asia has a lower impact than is yet appreciated overall in East Asia. Despite this, the strength of its postulates politically, economically, and socially, was a permanent example that competed with other civilizational currents such as the Indian and the Muslim.

Confucianism in China emerges and evolves as a philosophical humanist current that has served to structure and give meaning to its society, to its political organization, and even to its economic development; thus, becoming an example with respect to its neighboring nations regarding a civilizational idea that influenced its identity and direction.

Throughout the history of Confucianism, the knowledge of its books and classical concepts has been part of a doctrinal inspiration, sometimes taken outside of China as a religion. The moral commitment to which Con-

fucius invites, as the starting point of a universal cosmogony where human beings can live his social and political reality in harmony; borders on religious ethical concepts that have also served over time as a form of Confucianism, especially outside of China. Regarding these, specialists such as Billioud identify three steps, namely, the theoretical elaboration of doctrine, the reform of the initiation ritual, and the reading and dissemination of the Chinese Confucian classics (Yong et al., 2021, p. 269).

Yong Chen tells us that today, these Confucian influences that originate along with the Chinese presence in Southeast Asia, continue through various schools that have been unfolding among different social groups of some of the countries of the area in the form of philosophy and religion during the 20th and 21st centuries.

As an example of the above, he discussed the currents of Yiguan Dao, De Jiao, etc., which advocate for a morally edifying society. The De Jiao current originated in 1939 in the middle of the Sino-Japanese War, it was born in the province of Guangdong and spread rapidly to the Chinese communities of Southeast Asia, arriving in the early 50s of the 20th Century to Singapore and Malaysia.

Since the 20th Century, within the framework of Confucianism renewal, these new expressions adopt Buddhist, Daoist, Christian, and Islamic teachings, although the teachings of the Chinese cultural tradition prevail within them in the name of virtue and cultivation of morality.

These new ethical-religious expressions are clearly oriented to Confucianism through the recognition and acceptance of its ten virtues, eight rules, and six precepts. The ten virtues are filial piety, brotherly love, loyalty and faithfulness, trustworthiness, propriety or courtesy, justice, incorruptibility, sense of shame, benevolence, and wisdom. Meanwhile, the eight rules consist of refraining from deception, falsehood, greed, recklessness, arrogance, laziness, bad temper, and hatred. The six precepts would be the detailed reiteration of the previous ones (Yong et al., 2021, p. 274).

Yong states that nowadays, Confucianism has adopted different strategies to continue within its host countries due to the political environment of Southeast Asia, which, as has already been mentioned, also occurs today in Japan and Korea. There, because of the Murayama Clause, Confucian philosophy can be discussed, but without mentioning the name of Confucius.

In that sense, Confucian influence in Malaysia commits itself to not participating and not intervening in political or religious activities, and in

Thailand it openly became a religious organization of the Chinese community generating a direct relationship with Chinese Buddhism and social assistance. In the case of Indonesia, on the other hand, the Agama Khonghucu line of thought is officially recognized as a private school oriented to the values of Confucius. So far, it is the only entity in the world that carries the word Confucianism in its name and operates fully as a religion. In addition, it enjoys legal recognition and designates the four books and five classics as the central canon of thought of the group (Yong, 2016, p. 277).

These types of expressions of a new Confucianism, that has been reviving under different modalities in Southeast Asia, are part of a more powerful cultural influence that permeated the Chinese empire under different modalities during its long life as a millennial Asian civilization; where Confucianism was part of a cultural tributary system that has prevailed over time with greater or lesser luck, with more or less impact, according to the circumstances of each country.

As they did two millennia ago, the ten nations that currently form this important region, within the framework of their multiculturalism and heritage, live the challenge of their coexistence and the mixing of their cultural and religious values.

As for China, as Sole-Farras points out, in its new role as the second economic power in the 21st century, it is unthinkable that it renounces the capacity that a new Confucianism gives it as a social binder of its inner life and as a strategic factor of its public diplomacy or soft power abroad (Sole-Farras, 2018, p. 360).

Southeast Asia and its Challenges

Mahbubani comments that in civilizational terms, Southeast Asia is the most diverse region on the planet; that no other region of the world comes close to its complexity; that it is therefore not easy to understand or decipher it properly (Mahbubani, 2017, p. XV). Regarding this, the author himself states that the success achieved to date by this complex region of the world should be worthy of the Nobel Peace Prize. That the success achieved in recent years has generated an optimistic discourse where it can be believed that the coexistence of Islam and the West may be possible; being therefore The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) a laboratory of peaceful coexistence, where Vietnam, as another example of this regional advance, reduced extreme poverty from 50% to 3% in 30 years; and where Indonesia

achieved the second highest confidence index in the world in 2015, etc. (Mahbubani, 2017, p. 1).

In this line of results, the role that the integration of the five ASEAN pioneer countries has been playing since 1967 stands out. They decided to undertake their association following the call of an important group of leaders from the area such as Thanat Khoman, a Buddhist from Thailand; Narciso Ramos, a Christian from the Philippines; Adam Malik, a Muslim from Sumatra; Abdul Razak, a Muslim from Malaysia; and S. Rajaratnam, a Hindu from Singapore; who, within the framework of their diverse cultures and beliefs, initiated this movement of association, development, and mutual defense in which all 10 of the countries that make up the association participate.

The current strength of Southeast Asia, agree other authors such as Yates, is born from the important decision to initiate the integration of ASEAN in the 60s of the 20th century and through it, to manage their objectives and to resolve their multiple differences avoiding conflicts, disputes, or conflagrations, in exchange for promoting a shared economic development and regional resilience (Yates, 2019, p. 2).

The integration path that ASEAN followed as of the first five signatory nations, which were Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, gradually expanded with the association of Brunei in 1984, Vietnam in 1995, Laos and Myanmar in 1997, and Cambodia in 1999, turning it today, as a whole, into the seventh largest economy in the world with a significant economic growth from 2000 to 2013 of more than 5% per year on average.

Its transformation in 1992 into a free trade area gave it greater strength. The signing of treaties with its important regional neighbors such as China, Japan, Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and India, gave it greater cohesion to attain the signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), (ASEAN + 5 before the non-joining of India) in 2020, which represented an economic and geopolitical turn of enormous importance whose consequences will be broadening from 2022 onward when the agreement will come into force. It also strengthens its geopolitical role in the area through the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) (1994) which now has 27 members. Among them, the controversial nation of North Korea participates. It also has the East Asia Summit which is a strategic regional forum of cooperation, together with the East Asia region.

In line with this important regional and global success, the economic and political confrontation between China and the United States inevitably

appears. Their first scenario of conflict passes through the control of the Asian leadership, which has been clearly held by the United States up to the end of the 20th century and which is today under debate, especially at the start of the third decade of the 21st century.

In this framework of analysis, some authors such as Fox, Mahbubani, etc., believe that the era of Western domination in Asia is coming to an end and they perceive a distancing on the part of the United States from the mainland of Southeast Asia, where it seems that the United States will not return soon. This opens the opportunity for China to relaunch the historic position of dominance that it exercised for many centuries in the region. Regarding this Auslin adds (Stuart-Fox, 2003, p. VIII) that, "As the world negotiates with China's new rules, much will depend on the balance of global power in the coming decades" (Auslin, 2020, p. 48).

The success achieved by ASEAN to this day will depend in many ways on the consistency and unity it continues to maintain towards the third decade of the 21st century to negotiate not only with China but also with all relevant global actors. Similarly, it will also depend on the "new tributary policy" that China is trying to impose on the region.

To date, in the face of the fading of the United States and the European Union, China is coming to be the most important trading partner of most ASEAN countries, most notably Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam. At the same time, it is the most important foreign investor in Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, the second in Vietnam, and the largest considering the entire region combined.

Likewise, since 2013 through the New Silk Road and its investment schemes such as the Asian Infrastructure Bank (AIIB), the Silk Road Fund, and its Development Bank, and through two of its six important international economic corridors, which cross the 10 ASEAN countries by land and its nine coastal countries by sea with the Maritime Silk Road, China has intensified all its significant investment lines by industrial corridors, roads, trains, digital route, energy, and most importantly, in the strategic ports of Cambodia (Koh Kong), Myanmar (Kyaukpyu), and Malaysia (Port Klang), etc.

Notwithstanding the above, at a meeting in 2010 held in Hanoi, Vietnam, between China and the 10 ASEAN countries, Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi expressed the much-remembered phrase, "China is a big country and you are small countries, and that is a fact" reminding all the parties of the return of the idea of a forgotten geopolitical tributary system within the framework

of a millennial cultural tributary system where rebuilding a Chinese world order is back on the regional agenda.

Southeast Asia sometimes feels more pressured by China's new rules, but it will clearly obtain better results if the ten ASEAN countries prove to be more united and cooperative amongst themselves (Murray, 2020, p. 535).

Turning to history as a way of broadening the understanding with respect to what Southeast Asia has been over time, in line with its multiple differences, but also with its great coincidences and the long tributary relationship they have had with a millenary hegemon such as the People's Republic of China, will be fundamental to contributing to the creation of a better rapporteurship that explains a new global order where one of its most important epicenters is located in Southeast Asia.

Conclusions

At the start of the second quarter of the 21st century, unprecedented situations are arising. These transformations revolve around issues of the environment, globalization economy, trade and investment, geopolitics, technology, ideology and culture. From this perspective, studies on civilization and culture emphasize their importance to better understand the positions, similarities, and differences of the major nations; in this case, the countries of East and Asia-Pacific region.

This article has analyzed the importance of Confucianism in Asian culture, referring to the territories of East and Southeast Asia, without neglecting the Indo-Pacific. Naturally, the common denominator that gives unity and identity to most countries in this part of the Trans-Pacific region is the common origin of Asian ideology, language, and values expressed in Chinese Confucianism and its transcendence, among other important influences.

In this sense, Confucianism is the main substance that brings cohesion to populations of Chinese origin or cultural Chinese influence, not only in mainland China, but in virtually all East Asia, which encompasses around 15 nations that operate under better or worse the precepts of Neo-Confucianism, and this is what distinguishes them and gives them strength.

It could be concluded that Eastern Confucianism presents itself as a homogeneous whole, despite the diversity of ethnic groups and endogenous populations in Asian countries and forms a diverse and certainly heterogeneous common front full of convictions, visions, and aspirations for a shared community. In this context, the idea that China and its Confucianism

is currently playing an important role in the named – the economic miracle of the zone; and it's an important hypothesis in the

The 21st century is still in its first half, and at this historical stage of its development, it remains to be seen whether, after more than half a century since the Asian nations were reconstituted after the Second World War, they will be able to confirm Confucianism as the option that East Asia and, in general, all countries with Chinese roots offer to the world, and that it stands firm against Western ideology and culture.

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