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Dear Ms. de Wolf Smith

Thank you for sending me Fukuyama's article.

On a rapid reading, my first reactions are that although I agree with most of what Fukuyama says, I feel that certain points need elaboration and qualification, especially in the light of the experience of the (two million) Vietnamese who have embraced communism in the full awareness that communism is an authoritarian system, and I would say, because of it. I have been perusing the writings of VCP veterans which have been piling up on my desk. Many of these veterans have over 40 and even over 50 years' membership, and are sons of communists. Until recently they were almost exclusively ex-members (expelled or resigned from the party); now, they include an increasing number of members still carrying cards. They explain why they joined the VCP and were betrayed, and are now speaking up to demand that the leadership change course to honour the moral as well as formal contract between them and the party.

Briefly, the above members joined the VCP because of lofty ideals: love for their fellowmen, social justice and a better life for all, especially freedom from oppression, injustices and poverty. And they have decided to speak out because the VCP leadership has swallowed its promises and robbed them: instead of democracy and a better life for all, these leaders have installed a dictatorial regime for the benefit of a few, a regime which they say is worse even than the French colonial regime. They want, as one veteran, second generation communist, puts it: "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to the people what belongs to the people". In particular, they want the VCP leadership to give back to them the national democratic revolution for which in 1945-1946 the party leaders asked them to join the party to fight and die.

The Vietnamese experience is important, I would say even crucial, because this is the first time that, in Asia, there are people who have been communists for over 50 years and for two generations who can speak up freely and strongly (because, as I said in my previous message about ex-colonel Bui Tin's disclosures, they know that with 50% of the Central Committee thinking – and voting – like them, they run no risk of brutal repression). They say that they have slowly discovered the evils of dictatorial elitism – self-proclaimed leaders, have slowly discovered the evils of dictatorial elitism – self-proclaimed leaders, maintaining themselves in power by brutal repression, generating unprecedented corruption and intolerable social inequality --. They now want an end to this kind of self-proclaimed elitism, demand the practice of real democracy (as opposed to "socialist" democracy), a pluralist multiparty system, clear separation of powers, freedom of speech, the right to choose and

to change their representatives freely through really free elections. Isn't all that the essence of "western" democracy?

Fukuyama mentions "the mandate from Heaven". But in real Confucianism, "mandate of Heaven" is used as a warning, not as a licence for absolutism, especially for abuse of power. The warning is that if the ruler/government behaves badly, he will lose his job! And the way to know when the ruler ceases to enjoy the mandate from Heaven is to watch the people's behaviour; when they grumble and rebel, it means that Heaven is displeased. So, ruler, beware; reform or you will be overthrown, for you have forfeited your right to rule. This is also what the Vietnamese rebellious communists have been telling their leadership. The message of these communist rebels is no different from that of Confucius: when Confucius was asked about the impropriety of someone killing King Zhòu, he said not King Zhòu, but only a certain tyrant named Zhòu was killed! In Confucianism the right to rebellion is recognised, just as in the American Declaration of Independence! But many Asian leaders, choosing to forget this right once independence has been won and they have gained power, now condemn those showing a rebellious, or even only a critical attitude, as "corrupted by western decadent values" or "agents of the C.I.A"!

Fukuyama stresses "meritocracy" in the examination system. This system is truly democratic in the sense that through it, everyone can accede to the highest offices in the state. But from the Song dynasty onward, the system was twisted to produce a mandarinal bureaucracy, and education became a careerist bread and butter affair whose main aim is to serve absolutist imperial rule. Now, under communism, in Vietnam, even education has become unnecessary: joining the party has replaced education as the best way up the social ladder. In Singapore and Malaysia, although education counts, it does not count decisively: joining the ruling party or being in its good graces is a second major condition for moving up. This is much less true in the West because there politics forms only a part, and not necessarily the principal one, of society, and one can excel and gain prominence in dozens of other way in dozens of other fields. Anyway, in the West, one has nothing to fear if one is not among or with those exercising state power. This is also a "western" value which all Asians, from China to Indonesia, want fervently.

With regards to the primacy of family and the lack of strong individualism, it is true that these are great obstacles to the restoration of democracy, but not in an absolute sense. Sense of family is overridden by a strong sense of nation. The heavy sacrifices accepted by many Vietnamese to make victory over France and the US possible cannot be explained in terms of primacy of family. And the weak individualism is explained by the people's preference to entrust the running of the complicated affairs of state to the ruler, on condition that the ruler observes *wáng dào* according to the basic principles prescribed in *Dà Xué* and Mencius.

What Asians lacked traditionally was a smooth way, other than rebellion and palace coups, for replacing bad governments and changing proven harmful policies. They have found it now in the procedures of set mandates and periodic elections. And they are discovering more and more the virtues of this form of "western" democracy. They are insisting on it, as well as learning to use it more effectively. Vietnam is a good case in point. Burma, too.

Fukuyama mentions the Asians' mistrust of western democracy because of the bad things they see today in the West, and especially in America. But these are only some of the negative aspects of western modern society. The fundamental premises, and the essence, of western democracy are not at stake here. The Asians are very justified in being disgusted by the tolerance of homosexuality, "grass", the prohibition of parents from spanking their children, permissiveness in children's education, free sale of pornographic publications, and unrestrained display of violence and sex on TV, etc... These are not values prized by all in the West. With regard to other western values, the Asians can very legitimately and wisely select what suits them best, but the choice must be made democratically and not imposed through self-proclaimed elitism. Obviously, here, there is the risk of throwing out the baby with the bath water. This can be avoided by the application of the great rule which Confucius has expounded in *Zhong Yong*, the second of the four Confucian classics.

*Zhong Yong* has been translated as *The Golden Mean*. As in the case of *Dà Xué*, this translation is incorrect. I would call it *The essence of high statesmanship*. In Confucius' real teaching, high statesmanship consists in adopting the right measure, doing neither too little, nor too much, knowing how far one must go, where one must stop. This requires considerable intuition, knowledge, virtue, and *chéng*. This word has been usually translated as "sincerity", but in fact, it is the primary quality of Heaven: "*chéng* is the characteristic of Heaven", meaning that Heaven respects its own laws. Implications: man, and especially the ruler, must obey the laws he has set as "being *chéng* in respecting the laws is man's way of respecting Heaven's will". High statesmanship requires respect for state laws, moral laws as well as the laws of nature. That is why *Zhong Yong* is so difficult, and only those born and trained to govern, the *jun zi*, are capable of it. The *qiǎo rén*, the ordinary fellows, with little knowledge and capability, short views and limited vision, cannot grasp *Zhong Yong*.

In any case, *Zong Yong*, doing everything in the right measure, not too little, not too much – revolution, yes, but not too much of it; freedom, yes, but not too much of it; discipline, yes, but not too much of it; anti-westernism yes, but not too much of it; preservation of eastern values, yes, but not too much of it --, just the right dose, is what will ensure good and orderly government, and a healthy and dynamic society, whether in Asia or in the West.

The above proposition is food for thought for all, Asian as well as western statesmen, political scientists, sociologists, philosophers... In opening your columns to this kind of debate, you are surely performing the great service of reminding Asians as well as Westerners that, after all, "there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth, when two strong men (i.e. two *jun zi*, in Confucian parlance, or two *sages*, in Socratic parlance) stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth." In this connection, I cannot resist telling you the following: I remember that a professor of mine told me in high school: when his interviewer (in Paris, 1930) for a scholarship for Balliol College (Oxford) asked him what he thought of Socrates, he replied: "Socrates is the Confucius of the West". He got the scholarship!

That was 65 years ago. Since then, many people in the West seem to have forgotten Socrates, and many people in the East seem to have forgotten Confucius. I mean the real Socrates and the real Confucius. But there are also people, like me, who still remember and value both Socrates and Confucius, who accept the best time-tested values of both East and

West which form the common heritage of mankind, and have ensured the survival and progress of human civilisation to this date. This, I think, should be recalled and stressed, at a moment when human civilisation is seriously endangered, and many people do not know what to do.

I hope you have not found this letter too boring. It is long, but I want you to have before you a wide range of ideas (though by no means full yet) that could be used, so that you can decide what food for thought you will offer your readers in the next article (to take their minds off making money for a while, or to help them make money better – in the long run --. (In the long term, sound philosophy and sound sociology are also profitable! --.)).

I thank you for giving me the opportunity of putting down on paper some of the thoughts which have been darting back and forth in my mind for some time.

I have received the clipping of the April 27 article, and the cheque. Thank you.