

Editorial

In the Editorial of the maiden Issue launched in December 2018, we had briefly mentioned the general nature of the development of human society which provided tremendous rooms especially for the inquisitive and curious minds to explore and investigate human history and civilisation(s). We had also stressed on the fact that the ever-increasing complexity of society offers never ending new issues for analysis to these investigative researchers. As societies become more and more sophisticated, so do the methods and subsequently the findings of the later studies. These new insights and results are too valuable to be left unattended by the public, thus justifying the establishment of thousands of journals to ‘house’ these new ‘discoveries’. This *Journal of Religion and Civilisational Studies* was launched to provide a modest medium for these ideas and thoughts to be shared with a larger audience. As the title suggests, the Journal is primarily meant for accommodating themes and issues related to religion and civilisation although in the broadest sense of the word. We believe that any religion and civilisation-related theme or issue should not be confined only to events and concerns of the past but are deeply relevant to the present and the future. Thus, the articles that are included in our Journal this time reflect these three broad time frames – past, present and future. We trust that each selected article that addresses a particular issue is important in its own right and can be perceived in light of religion and civilisational studies in one way or the other.

As one might be aware, the articles in the previous Issue were all country-specific which allowed the reader to gain deeper insights into the religious/civilisational issues that took place in the respective geo-political confines. Partly based on the same principle, we selected four main articles and one Viewpoint to form the contents of the current Issue. These are: “The Genesis and Evolution of the Modern Concept of Civilisation in Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Europe” by Mohd Helmi Mohd Sobri, “A Critique of Tadeusz Swietochowski’s Works on the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (1918-1920) under the Prism

of Edward Said's Orientalism" by Elchin Shahinovich Huseynov and Tunku Mohar Tunku Mohd. Mokhtar, "The Role of Muslim Scholars in Kwara Politics up to the Fourth Republic" by Ibrahim Abdul Ganiyu Jawondo, "Malay Navigation And Maritime Trade: A Journey Through Anthropology and History" by Md. Salleh Yaapar and "The Chinese Civilisation Quest for The Great Harmony (大同 Da Tong) Through Humanness (仁 Ren)" [Viewpoint] by Peter Chang.

With the exception of the first article which is selected to appear first due to the generic nature of its theme and direct relevance to civilisation, the niche of this Journal, the sequence of the other articles is done quite arbitrarily.

The first article by Mohd Helmi Mohd Sobri discusses the historical emergence and transformation of the modern concept of civilisation in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe with the aim of showing how the concept gradually emerged out of the early-modern notion of civility in the second half of the eighteenth century. It is argued that this emergence "needs to be understood in the context of the Enlightenment belief." It also analyses the use of the terms 'civilisation' and 'civility' by the earlier writers so as to show the different perspectives on the way human society gradually transformed from barbarism to a more developed stage.

The second article is written by an independent researcher living in Azerbaijan, Elchin Shahinovich Huseynov, and an academic at the Political Science Department of the International Islamic University Malaysia. It is based on the analysis of the works of a Polish historian and Caucasologist, Tadeusz Swietochowski, who is seen as a leading specialist on the modern history of Azerbaijan. The article's focus is on 'the views of the Orientalist' on the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, an independent state which existed only for 23 months (1918-1920) and which is believed to have laid the foundations for the present Azerbaijan. The main contention of this article is that the reliability of some points/views held by Swietochowski is questionable because "some of Swietochowski's works were written decades ago, before the USSR's dissolution, when the archives were under Soviet confidentiality." It was thus suggested that the research should consider "the newly discovered documents while studying the political events

of the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries for the objective outcomes.”

The third article on the Role of Muslim Scholars in Kwara Politics by Ibrahim Abdul Ganiyu Jawondo focusses on the interplay between religion and politics in human physical and social environments with special illustration from the case of Kwara in the Fourth Republic of Nigeria. It is argued that these two forces – religion and politics – have continued to influence each other right from the beginning. While there are different perspectives on the relationship between religion and politics with some propagating their inseparability and others their dissociation, the article, based on the premise that “in Islam, there is no distinction between religion and politics” examines the influence of religion in the political activities at Ilorin, the Kwara State capital as championed by its Islamic religious scholars (*‘ulama’*). The article argues for the inseparability of religion and politics and concludes that “Ilorin’s Islamic scholars played significant roles in the establishment, nurturing, and sustenance of democracy in Kwara State.”

In the final article, Md. Salleh Yaapar discusses the Malay navigation and maritime trade from anthropological and historical perspectives. It narrates and analyses the spread of the Malays as the huge racial group in the Malay Archipelago or Southeast Asia since the last ice age and their trading activities ever since. The first theme emphasises the widely scattered Malays within the Malayo-Polynesian World - to the north as far up as Taiwan, to the south till New Zealand, to the east till Easter Island, and to the west till Madagascar. It then discusses their socio-cultural activities and achievements with special focus on Malay navigation and maritime trade as reflected in their socio-economic history and anthropological profiles.

Meanwhile this Issue’s Viewpoint portrays Peter Chang’s thoughts on the Chinese civilisation’s quest for the great harmony through humanness. It is written against the background of a paradigm shift “as the American Century gives way to a China lead Asian century” and of the development in recent years in China when “Beijing has been returning to traditional philosophical and religious resources to help mitigate social and political challenges at home and abroad.” Contemporary Chinese are said to be eager and ready to re-embrace

their ancient ethos and this paper tries “to provide some insights into this increasingly dominant yet obscure civilisational power” by discussing two foundational Confucian principles namely the Great Harmony (大同 Da Tong) and Humanness (仁 Ren) with the aim of explaining the ancient Chinese world ultimate concerns, i.e. telos, and how they set out to actualise these religious aspirations.

In the light of the above articles and viewpoint, it is pertinent to draw our attention to some highlights. Firstly, in the study of civilisation, or any other studies for that matter, we are fully aware of the coinage and popularisation of new terminologies from time to time. Terminologies normally developed due to the need of time and, quite frequently, a concept or a term which was found to be able to better explain the reality of that particular time might fail to do so in its near or distant aftermath. At the initial stage of its appearance, a terminology might be met with controversy, scrutiny and polemic before it was accepted or rejected with varying degrees of acceptance and rejection. Terminologies that could stand the test of time would prevail and last longer. Such is the case for the term ‘civilisation’ which is still prevailing today. The term was found to also be debated along other terms like ‘civility’ and ‘culture’. In the Arab-Islamic context, the terms like *ḥaḍārah*, *madaniyyah*, *tamaddun* and *thaqāfah* also underwent such kind of intellectual scrutiny in the course of its journey to reach a more refined notion of civilisation. Khaldunian term of *‘umrān* has also undergone a similar kind of process.

In the beginning, people might be grappling not only to understand the new concepts or terminologies but also to comprehend their logic and grounding. At any rate, it is clear that there are limitations to whatever is created by humans and as such one must allow some reasonable room and right for people to be critical towards them so as to ensure a more digested comprehension prior to their acceptance and adoption. It is in this context that critical assessment of others’ ideas, thoughts, works and theories is crucial. It is more so as one’s interpretation of events may not always be universal as it is frequently conditioned by what sociologists call ‘social forces’. Under ‘sociological perspective’, the emphasis is frequently on the influence of social forces like values, culture, norms, laws and people on one’s choices, acts, views or in short on life in its entirety. Hence, it is only logical for the authors

of this Issue's articles to explore further their respective subjects and analyse them in the light of their own understanding as grounded in their sources and justifications. Mohd Helmi Mohd Sobri's article, for instance, may be read in the light of this terminological context and so do the revisiting of Swietochowski's views on Azerbaijan Democratic Republic by Elchin Shahinovich Huseynov and Tunku Mohar Tunku Mohd. Mokhtar.

Secondly, in the context of development and civilisation, today's reality is certainly not the same as in the past times. This applies to all aspects at both individual and societal levels. Advancement of human knowledge particularly in science and technology has made it possible for the world to be steadily 'shrinking' and that the rate of dwindling has become speedier - first by year later by month, by week, by day or even by minute. In each minute, there are numerous new things added to the already complex social entity making 'cultural lag' not only a reality of society but the gap that is created between one's ability to embrace those new things and his old way of thinking becomes wider and hardly bridgeable. In such a situation, development may mean nothing to some people and this causes them to ask such question as: do we feel safer, better and happier with the advancement of knowledge and technologies?

As efforts towards better civilisational creation or/and transformation continue, a look at what were known as modest and 'traditional' activities and practices may shed some light for the present generation to take stock. In this context, Roger Garaudy's words of wisdom might be useful for us to understand the way the past is supposed to be engaged. He philosophises, "to be faithful to our ancestors is not to preserve the ashes of their fire but to transmit its flames." We believe that good values may come from anywhere. After all, the 'West' and the 'East' are only names given to the respective geographies. In reality, they both belong to the same Creator. There always are lessons from all cultures and civilisations that can be learnt along with their universal normative and high moral qualities that are instrumental for developing a desired just human civilisation. If what takes place today is found to be equally 'barbaric' in essence albeit with modern terms and outlook or in the name of human rights, freedom and democracy, then one has every reason to revisit their past in order to assist them finding better

formula for developing such a civilisation. Thus, a look at how the past Malays dealt with their time in the economic and trading sense, for instance, as highlighted by Salleh Yaafar and Cheng's analysis of Confucian Da Tong and ren may inspire us in the course of this soul searching. Despite its specific reference to a Nigerian case, Jawondo's analysis of the role of Muslim scholars there may provide useful insights on the universality of people's religious role elsewhere.

The bottom line is that, humanity at large expects new knowledge and technologies, as the tangible products of human intellectual progress, to make the world a safer place for living. This may not be achievable if only wars and famine, for instance, become the definers and characteristics of the emerging civilisation. If development today seems to move towards mere fulfilment of the material human needs and ignore their social, psychological, moral, spiritual and inner necessities, one then has every reason to question the legitimacy and benefit of the present developmental process and, subsequently, to offer alternative development philosophies that are more promising in terms of social justice. In this regard, it is perhaps high time to offer and advance such terms in Islamic tradition as *rahmah*, *ta'awun* and *mahabbah* to be part of the vocabularies for the present and future civilisational intercourses. At a more universal level, we must admit that all humans aspire for universal peace, unity and happiness and all this may be found somewhere in our societies. It is in this context that I find it interesting to share the ideas from various traditions and perspectives as found in the articles published in this Issue. They are not only written by authors from different countries and geographies but also related to diverse issues concerning different cultures and civilisations and hence the writings of Malays, Chinese, Nigerians and Azerbaijanis on various subjects and issues of their interest. This to me is a good blend of intellectual inputs from people of diverse backgrounds – political science, arts and literature, history and others - reflecting the multi-dimensional nature of a civilisation and religion particularly Islam.

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