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ADMIRAL ZHENGHE AND THE WEST

A Comparative Analysis in Confucian and Christian Civilisation Powers

Peter Chang¹

Abstract

Zhenghe's epoch-making voyages and the subsequent European expansive maritime exploration have exacted varied historical impacts and impressions upon the world. This paper argues that the contrasts stem from their radically different underlying belief systems, namely Confucianism and Christianity. In the East, the Confucian's monistic and polytheistic ethos, coupled with a sanguine and circular worldview, underpinned Imperial China's multilateral and restrained approach in dealing with the outside world. In the West, the Christian's dualistic and monotheistic creed, together with a melancholic and linear worldview, moulded European Imperialism's unilateral and forthright strategy to transform the world. Aside from the past, these divergent philosophical and religious worldviews continue to affect the present, including the current China and US geopolitical and civilizational rivalry.

Keywords: Confucianism, Christianity, Admiral Zhenghe, European Imperialism, Clash of Civilisation, Sino-US Rivalry

Introduction

A resurgent China is continuing to reconfigure the twenty-first century geopolitical landscape. And how these China-induced shifts would alter the present Western-centric world order remains an open question. One often cited historical episode arguing that the People's Republic of China (PRC) could prove to be a different sort of global power vis-à-vis the West is the fifteenth-century Ming Dynasty

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maritime expedition. To be sure, the Zhenghe-led Ming armada was no pacifist and readily deployed its naval might to subdue restive kingdoms. Still, Imperial China did not undertake the full-scale colonisation that European Imperialism embarked upon a few decades later. This paper is a study of these historical contrasts and will argue that Confucianism and Christianity had critical roles in shaping these contrasting outcomes. As will be shown the Confucian and Christian represent two radically dissimilar philosophical and religious traditions that undergirded the distinct Chinese and European worldviews, developed their unique form of statecraft and led to the Confucian East and Christian West varied impact on the world at large. This paper will present four sets of arguments:

The first deals with the dualism and monism distinction. In the West, Christian dualism, I will explain, engendered a divided secular-sacred body polity while in the East, Confucian monism sustained a unified undifferentiated religious-political order. Additionally, for the Christian, the quest for a redeemed world can only be fully realized in the hereafter while the Confucian set their sight on actualising a social utopia in the here and now.

The second set examines the monotheism and polytheism contrast. The Christian monotheistic worldview, as will be shown, drove the European mission to Christianize the world and later infused into the Americans a sense of manifest destiny as the divinely ordained world leader. On the other hand, the Chinese polytheistic belief system, I explain, held Imperial China back from any equivalent Confucianizing campaign and underpinned the Confucian meritocracy-based leadership structure.

The next section looks at the East-West opposing view of human nature. Mencius' sanguine faith in humanity, I argue, undergird the Confucian vision of a harmonious world grounded on thick communal ethos and guided the Chinese collective approach in pursuing peace under the Heaven. By comparison, Christianity's melancholic view of humankind shaped the Christian vision of the world order based on universal values and dictated the West's unilateral strategy in transforming the world.

The paper closes with a study on the linear and circular worldview distinction. Christianity's straight-line view of history, I

will show, injected a sense of urgency into the West's mission to affect change in the world. By contrast, the Confucian cyclical cosmology moulded into the East a more longitudinal perspective in dealing with exigencies around the world. To set the context for these comparative philosophical and theological analysis, we will start with a historical overview of Zhenghe and the West's maritime expedition.

An Overview: Admiral Zhenghe and the West

In 1405, Admiral Zhenghe began the first of multiple voyages down the southern seas, across the Hindi oceans, eventually reaching the horn of Africa. The Ming dynastic expansive expedition's primary objective was commerce, to establish trade ties with the minor kingdoms dotting along the coast of the maritime silk road. But the Ming armada was also a show of geopolitical dominance, to reinforce the Middle Kingdom's command of its tributary states.² For example, in Melaka in lieu of the Sultan's homage to the Chinese Emperor the nascent Malay sultanate was accorded the Ming's protection against attacks from Siam and Majapahit. In 1435, upon the passing of the Admiral, the Ming fleet was retired, bringing an abrupt end to Zhenghe's momentous but short-lived expedition.³

From the second half the of fifteenth century, at the opposite end of the globe, monarchies in Europe were launching their own maritime explorations. Like the Ming expedition, commerce was the primary driver, as the Spanish sailed across the Atlantic and the Portuguese around the Cape of Hope towards Asia, in search of spices and minerals. And as with Zhenghe, the Europeans' considerable military power was used to exact complaisance and to pacify local resistance. But unlike Ming China, the Europeans subsequently embarked upon a total colonization of the territories

² Geoff Wade argues against the common perception of Zhenghe expedition as voyages of friendship, rather they were the Ming Dynasty attempt to assert a "proto maritime colonialism". See Geoff Wade, *The Zheng He Voyages: A Reassessment* (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2004).

³ For further study on the Zhenghe expedition in Southeast Asia, see Leo Suryadinata (eds), *Admiral Zheng He and Southeast Asia* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2005), 57-97.

they came upon. And Melaka was one fateful example. In 1511, barely a hundred years after Zhenghe's visit the Portuguese arrived and decimated the Malay sultanate. Among other things, the fate that befell Melaka marked the stark contrast by which Chinese and European imperialism expanded and affected the world.⁴

Some studies point to preoccupation with internal affairs for China's comparative lack of ambition in territorial conquest. Zhenghe's epoch-making expedition, for example, was curtailed because Emperor Hongxi was purportedly distracted by threats along its northern borders.⁵ While the Ming Dynasty's attention was drawn inwards by domestic crisis, the dynamics in fifteenth-century Europe was the reverse. Intra-geopolitical rivalries were pushing the European monarchies outwards as they competed with each other for natural resources and the national prestige of attaining the greatest numbers of colonies.⁶

Aside from gold and glory, another crucial factor that motivated the West to traverse the world was the God motive. As the Europeans set foot on the 'new world', the Christians saw a sea of humanity lost in spiritual darkness. And this compelled the church to Christianize so as to liberate the indigenous people from bondage.⁷ Now to be sure, as the Celestial Kingdom, Imperial China also exuded degree of cultural superiority especially towards the nomadic tribes roaming along the frontiers of the empire. Still, unlike the Europeans, the Chinese never launched any equivalent sustained campaign to Confucianize the world. Confucianism and Christianity's contrasting reactions to the moral condition of humankind is not an incidental side story but an important backstory of the different experiences of Ming China and the European

⁴ Michael G. Vann, "When the World Came to Southeast Asia: Malacca and the Global Economy," *Association for Asian Studies* 19:2 (Fall 2014).

⁵ Suryadinata (2005); See also Robert Finlay, "The Voyages of Zheng He: Ideology, State Power, and Maritime Trade in Ming China," *The Journal of Historical Society* VIII:3 (September, 2008).

⁶ Lyle N. McAlister, *Spain and Portugal in the New World, 1492-1700* (University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 63-80.

⁷ John Frederick Schwaller, *The History of the Catholic Church in Latin America: From Conquest to Revolution and Beyond* (New York University Press, 2011), 132-156.

monarchies with the wider world. In what follows, we will unpack the philosophical and theological underpinnings of these two belief systems and analyse how they shaped the divergent geopolitical outlook and behaviour of Imperial China and European Imperialism.

Dualism and Monism

Confucianism and Christianity, according to the German philosopher Karl Jasper were two of a group of Axial Age civilizations that, at about the same pivotal moment in human history, transcended local tribalism to embrace the vision of a universal human family. Around 500 BCE, during a period of protracted wars between feudal states, Confucius envisioned a new *Tianxia* (天下) where all people regardless of ethnic allegiance could co-exist as one human family “all under Heaven”. Five hundred years later, in the land of Judea, Jesus preached a new gospel for all Jews and Gentiles alike, rising above the prevailing Judaic ethnocentrism. All humanity, regardless of race and ethnicity can now become God’s ‘chosen people’ i.e., as members of a universal Christian family.⁸ These are historic breakthroughs on the part of the Confucians and the Christians to move past the prevailing tribal-centric world order. But beyond the shared embrace of a common humanity lurked conflicting objectives shaped by their different cosmologies. Both Confucianism and Christianity would subsequently develop distinct versions of the universal good and undertook disparate *modus operandi* to actualize their respective visions. We start by considering one fundamental distinction: dualism and monism.

In the Christian dualistic worldview, reality is divided into the good versus evil, soul versus body dichotomy. An antithetical bifurcation is where the spiritual and heavenly is expected to supersede the material and earthly. In Confucian monism, the

⁸ Karl Jaspers argued that during the Axial Age, “the spiritual foundations of humanity were laid simultaneously and independently in China, India, Persia, Judea, and Greece. And these are the foundation upon which humanity still persists today”. Karl Jasper, *The Way of Wisdom: An Introduction to Philosophy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 98; See also Jaspers, Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*, trans. Michael Bullock (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953).

universe is also halved into two: male and female, light and darkness. But the ancient Chinese considered these as complementary poles, each counterbalancing the other, ultimately unifying as one in a yin-yang harmonious co-existence.⁹

Among others, the dualistic and monistic distinction resulted in a diametrical body polity. In the West, it led to the sacred versus secular, church versus state partition. The European sovereigns, for example, reigned as earthly rulers governing the mundane while the priesthood oversaw spiritual matters pertaining to the heavenly. Thus, the monarchy and the papacy in Europe assumed separate, restricted spheres of influence, the secular and sacred domains respectively. In the East, Confucian monism sustained a unified polity with no sacred-secular demarcation. As the Son of Heaven (天子), the Chinese Emperor reigns as a pseudo divine sovereign, governing 'all under Heaven'. In fact, the Middle Kingdom was a form of theocracy where its Emperor is at once the king and high priest.¹⁰ And when interacting with the world, dynastic China acted as a monolithic power. Zhenghe, for example, was Admiral of the Imperial fleet as well as an emissary of the Celestial Kingdom.

In comparison, the Europeans engaged the world from two distinct centres of power: imperial and ecclesiastic. For instance, Christopher Columbus's expedition to the Americas was financed and spearheaded by the Spanish crown. It was later that the Church followed suit, to provide spiritual justification for the conquest of the colonies with the Christianization of native population.¹¹ To be sure, the state and church do not always work together. In Protestant monarchies, for example, missionaries mostly acted independently and were sometimes at odds with their colonial administrator, as was in India.¹² Underlying the monarchy and papacy institutional rivalry lay a deeper dialectic: Christendom diminished regard for the earthly

⁹ For an overview of Chinese cosmology, see Chan Wing-tsit, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1964).

¹⁰ Julia Ching, "Son of Heaven: Sacral kingship in ancient China," *T'oung Pao*, Second series, 83 (1/3), (1997): 3–41.

¹¹ Melvin E. Page and Penny M. Sonnenburg, *Colonialism: An International, Social, Cultural, and Political Encyclopedia*, Vol 1 (2003), ABC-CLIO.

¹² Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, Vol.II 1500-1900 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 2003).

domain as inferior and subordinated it to the heavenly. As St. Augustine demurred, the city on earth is temporal and Christians should set sight on the 'city of God', the New Jerusalem that awaits the faithful in the hereafter.¹³ As will be discussed later, some variants of Christian eschatology even advocated ending the earthly existence in order to hasten the advent of a new heavenly kingdom.

This brings us to an intriguing Confucian contrast. As explained, in Chinese monism all things are ultimately one and these include the mundane and the transcendent, where there is no predilection of one over the other. As a matter of fact, the Chinese sages famously warned against any excessive fixation with the afterlife. Indeed, in the Confucian political order, the Mandate of Heaven (天命) accorded to the Emperor is decidedly this-worldly, namely to govern rightly and to actualize the harmonious co-existence of all, in the here and now, under the Heaven. Herein lies one key difference in the Christian and Confucian conception of the ultimate good. For the Christians, the longed-for 'city of God' will only be fulfilled in the hereafter. The Confucian's aim, by contrast, is to bring about a social utopia on earth. Indeed, as opposed to Christianity, Confucianism had an unmistakably this-worldly disposition. That said, even with their distinctively down to earth, mundane orientation, historically Confucian East vis-à-vis Christian West has shown little initiative to directly engage and transform the world at large. To explain the Confucian seeming indifference, we will now turn to another pair of traits that separate the two worlds, namely monotheism and polytheism.

Monotheism and Polytheism

A monotheistic religion, Christianity believes there is only one true God in a sea of myriad deities. And as followers of a 'revealed religion', Christians also claim they are the sole recipient, from this one-true God, of a corpus of divine revelations needed for human salvation, without which humankind will perish.¹⁴ It is this

¹³ James Wetzel, *Augustine's City of God: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁴ Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985); See also Julia Ching,

conviction as the singular bearer of truth that motivated the Christian church to embark on the global mission to Christianize the world so as to save it.

As advocates of a ‘natural religion’, Confucians believe that all humans, by virtue of their reason have access to the Heavenly Principles. Inscribed in nature, these divine laws are revealed to all, therefore every person and by extension every civilization possesses the precepts required to fulfil the ways of Heaven. However, not everyone has measured up to these potentials. For instance, as mentioned, the Middle Kingdom has long deemed the roaming tribes at the fringes of civilization as lacking in civility. Moreover, Confucians also approve of the moral efficacy of many other faraway civilizations. One example is Buddhism, a foreign tradition that has now become an integral part of Chinese religiosity.¹⁵ Thus, unlike monotheistic people, Confucians are polytheistic and acknowledge the role of others in the quest for harmonious co-existence under the Heaven.¹⁶

Chinese polytheism is one reason why Imperial China did not set out to Confucianize the world. Unlike in Christianity, the Confucian moral enterprise was an inclusive one, where all religiosities have a potential role in advancing the aspired peaceable and harmonious world. And there is no better illustration of this religious pluralism than the fifteenth-century Ming maritime expedition where Zhenghe, the Admiral, was a renowned Hui Muslim. The fact that Zhenghe, a minority Muslim, was chosen to helm the Ming fleet underscored the Imperial Confucianism pluralistic ethos. Some recent studies have suggested Zhenghe’s role in the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia.¹⁷ Thus, unlike the European’s outright subjugation and Christianization of the new

Confucianism and Christianity: A Comparative Study (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1977).

¹⁵ Julia Ching, *Chinese Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 1993).

¹⁶ See Robert Cummings Neville, “Confucianism and Toleration,” *Journal of East-West Thought* 4/3 (Sep 2014): 24-38.

¹⁷ See Ta Sen Tan, *Cheng Ho and Islam in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asia Studies, NUS Press, 2009); and Haji Yusof Chang, “The Ming Empire: Patron of Islam in Southeast-West Asia,” *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 61, 2 (1998): 1-44.

colonies, the diverse religious composition of the territories Confucian China embraced were largely left unchanged. Herein lies the next key difference in the Christian and Confucian disparate telos. For Christianity, the world must be redeemed in its entirety, or more pointedly, to become Christianized in order to gain entry into the Heavenly 'city of God'. By contrast, for Confucianism, the envisaged earthly paradise remains a multi-civilizational, multi-religious order under the Heaven.

Civil Religion, End of History, and Manifest Destiny

The Chinese multi-religious milieu calls attention to a distinct character in the Confucian moral order. Aside from cautioning against an overly obsession with the afterlife, the Confucian sages have an intrinsic aversion to the mystical and metaphysical. These reason-guided philosophers were concerned with the problem of how to secure an ethical order free of religious dogmas, where diverse spiritualities and divinities could co-exist. Actually, the Confucian quest for an inclusive public space is not unlike the American 'civil religion' experimentation identified by sociologist Robert Bellah where a set of civic virtues serve as the social cement of a pluralistic society.¹⁸ This leads us to some intriguing observations regarding the American experience. Appalled by atrocities committed in the name of God in Europe, the new republic was founded as a haven for many fleeing persecutions. And the founding fathers, some of whom are known deists, turned to enlightenment principles of liberty and dignity, justice and tolerance to anchor and forge an inclusive community. Over time these non-sectarian values served to unify the United States and evolved into a 'civil religion' distinct from Christianity. But this new American pseudo-religious national creed retains two peculiar monotheistic traits.

The first relates to the 'end of history' thesis where liberal democracy is extolled as the apex of human political progress. American faith in liberal democracy is the secular re-adaption of monotheism's one-God-only worldview. Just as Christians believe there is no salvation outside the church, likewise Americans regard

¹⁸ Robert N. Bellah, "Civil religion in America," *Daedalus* 134 (4) (2005): 40–55.

liberal democracy as the only pathway to a free and just international order. This conviction underpinned and propelled the United States into a global campaign to liberal-democratize the world. This brings to focus the present-day China and US stalemate over liberal democracy. At the root of the current ideological impasse over liberal democracy is in fact a clash of underlying antithetical worldviews, namely monotheism and polytheism. As explained, the Chinese subscribe to a polytheistic, multiple ethos, recognizing the moral efficacy of diverse religiosities. Thus, the Christian West's dogmatic imposition of liberal democracy as the only legitimate form of governance simply runs counter to the Confucian East's pluralistic instincts.

The second monotheistic imprint in the American civil religion is the new republic sense of manifest destiny as the 'shining city upon the hill'. The doctrine of the elect has its origin in the Jewish people's self-identification as God's 'chosen tribe'. Later, Christianity universalized the elect, whereupon Jews and Gentiles alike could be converted into God's 'chosen people'. The American founding fathers then extended the elect to the rank of the nation state, elevating the newly founded republic as God's 'chosen nation', a beacon of light to the world. The United States self-designation as the divinely appointed world leader is the core article of faith underpinning American exceptionalism.¹⁹

This leads us to the Confucian distinctive conception of leadership. At the outset, the Chinese have no equivalent doctrine of the elect. In the Confucian political order, meritocracy determines leadership. The emperor's 'Mandate of Heaven' to govern is not predestined; these divine appointments must be earned. The failure to reign justly would forfeit the sovereign the sacred right to rule. Thus, the idea of a foreordained, undisputed leader contravenes the Confucian merits-based worldview. For the Confucian, the occupant on the throne is not pre-chosen. In fact, anyone, if proven worthy and meritorious, has the right to assume leadership. And as will be discussed next, the Confucian vision of global leadership is a collective endeavour, not the monopoly of any singular power.

¹⁹ Leory S. Rounner, ed. *Civil Religion and Political Theology* (South Bend, IN.: University of Notre Dame, 1986): 44-75.

Human Nature: Good and Bad

“When the personal life is cultivated, the family will be regulated; when the family is regulated, the state will be in order; and when the state is in order, there will be peace throughout the world.”²⁰

The above makes plain Confucius’s well-known strategy to transform the world but in these seemingly straightforward steps lay broader insights into the Chinese view of themselves and the world.

The World: A Family of States

To begin with, underpinning these steps is the Confucian unified cosmology where all things are interconnected and ultimately one. For the ancient Chinese, the universe is akin to an organism with multitude yet interrelated parts that fuse together into a unified whole. And this naturalistic theme is carried over to the social-political realm where divergent units join to complete a whole. It begins with individuals forming the family, then families as building blocks of society and henceforth the state.²¹

In this blueprint lies a quintessential Imperial Confucianism trademark: the state as a family writ large. The emperor, for instance, is expected to govern with paternal care. Indeed, for the Confucian, familial values such as filial piety and ancestral worship are the social paste that binds society. These thick communal textures have made China into what some scholars has called a ‘civilization-state’, that is a country founded on natural kinship and common ancestry, shared cultural heritage and history spanning centuries.²² However, the Confucian familial model has spatial limitation. The kindred ties,

²⁰ Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1964): 86-87.

²¹ See Mary Evelyn Tucker, “Religious Dimension of Confucianism: Cosmology and Cultivation,” *Philosophy East and West* 48, no. 1. (Jan 1998): 5-45. See also, “The Philosophy of Chi as an Ecological Cosmology,” in *Confucianism and Ecology: The Interrelation of Heaven, Earth, and Humans* edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker with John Bethrong (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

²² See Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and Birth of a New Global Order* (Penguin Books, 2014): 154-180.

so vital in sustaining the society can only be cultivated within a specific cultural context. In fact, the sequential steps quoted above also represent a concentric circle of weakening bonds. As one moves further away from the centre into the wider world, social familiarity begins to wane with distance, values start to diverge and ability to forge fiduciary trust diminish.

Confucians are cognizant of this geographical constrain. Historically, beyond its immediate neighbours, ancient China had initiated little civilizational engagement with the outside world. This raises the question, if seemingly indifferent towards those at the periphery and beyond, how do Confucians envision transforming the world? The answer lies in the Chinese organic cosmology. Just as a country is an assemblage of families, likewise the world is a family of states. And as strong families are the building blocks of a stable nation, similarly vibrant countries are the anchors of a harmonious world. Thus, for the Confucian, the world is a family of nations and each member state has a stake in advancing the good of the whole. And when individual countries are well regulated, their collective effect will foster peace under the Heaven.

The Sanguine and Melancholic, Thick and Thin World Order

The basis for the Confucian optimistic worldview is the Mencius sanguine view of human nature as innately good. Confucians believe humankind possess inborn moral potential to live in conformity with the ways of Heaven.²³ And this same positive outlook underpins the Chinese polytheistic affirmation of the efficacy of diverse religiosities. Hence in the Confucian moral universe, all peoples in their respective cultural milieu, are endowed with the inherent capability to abide by the Heavenly Principles. Herein lies a central tenet in the Confucian conception of world order, namely familial bonds as the foundation of a harmonious world. Humankind's diverse civilizations, in their respective cultural dominion must cultivate their distinctive communitarian ethos, and the cumulative effect of these civilized states, the Confucians believe, would bring about peace

²³ James Behuniak, *Mencius on Becoming Human* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004): 57-90.

under the Heaven. Of course, as mentioned earlier, many faltered and harmony continues to elude the world. Yet the Confucian faith in humanity remain, convinced that the remedy lies within each state. In fact, the above-quoted sequential step is a universal call for unified action: the pathway to peace under Heaven begins at home, with each family and every 'nation-family' working to realize their innate potential to flourish as vibrant civilization-states. Thus, for the Confucian, the fate of the human family is not the sole responsibility of any one individual but the duty of all.

As was the case, despite the grand designation as the Son of Heaven, the Emperor of China did not assume total dominance 'under the Heaven'. Contrary to conventional perception, the Middle Kingdom never set itself up as the centre of the universe. Rather the Monarch sits at the base of a concentric circle with diminishing sphere of influence, and is acutely mindful that as the circles expand outwards, the Imperial Court's ability to sustain control and exert sway also begins to wane. And historically, the Chinese dynasties had carefully guarded against any overreach, confining its suzerain dominance to the neighbouring and regional vassal states. On this account, Admiral Zhenghe's epic voyages across the four seas were an aberration. The intrigue surrounding Zhenghe's short-lived expedition is not why Emperor Hongxi decided to abruptly end the Ming maritime exploit, but why it was allowed in the first place. Confucians remain committed to the universal good but they believe that the Celestial Kingdom's role in furthering peace under the Heaven is best advanced through exemplary leadership:

"The emperor who exercises government by means of
his virtue
may be compared to the northern polar star, which keeps
its place
and all the stars turn towards it."²⁴

This brings us to the West's distinctly diametrical worldview. At the outset is Christianity's melancholic view of the human race as tainted

²⁴ Analects 2.1 (Legge translation). James Legge, *Confucian Analects, the Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960): 95.

by sin, hence morally compromised. This grim assessment extends to the monotheistic dismissal of all religious traditions as inferior, with Christianity the exception. Accordingly, unlike the Confucian sanguine faith in humanity, for Christianity the destitute human race needs a complete transformation; the world has to discard the old and embrace the new, namely the Christian way of life. And one vital element in the Christian redemptive plan is the inception of a universal community where love is to be extended impartially towards all. Herein lies another crucial East-West contrast, namely Confucius's well-known put-down of Mo Tzu's attempt to appease the distant tribes with universal love as practising an 'ethics without father'. As explained, for the Confucian, filiality remains the social bedrock of human society and a stable world order. The Christian, however, sees the constitution of an all-embracing human family which is the rectification for an ailing humanity. Certainly, blood ties remain important in the Christian social order but if conflict arises, the call to show compassion to all could take precedence over allegiance to kinship. This priority is implied in Jesus's command to his disciples to leave their parents and follow him.²⁵ Thus, while graded love anchors the Confucian quest of peace under Heaven, undifferentiated love becomes the cornerstone of the Christian vision of a redeemed world.

The Christian exaltation to impartial love was revolutionary, with far-reaching consequences for Western civilization. The new Christian family diluted the kinship grip on social bonds. In Protestantism, this sowed the seed of a more pronounced expression of the individual, laying the groundwork for the subsequent formulation of individual human rights.²⁶ And the Christian push for

²⁵ Jesus's words as recorded in the Bible. "For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whosoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." Matthew 10:35-39.

²⁶ Max Stackhouse, "Religion and Human Rights: A Theological Apologetic," in John Witte and Johan van der Vyver (eds.) *Religious Human Rights in Global Perspective: Religious Perspective* (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1996): 485-492.

a trans-cultural milieu set the frame of reference for the dawn of the modern nation-states, where universal values instead of civilizational affinity defined the boundaries of a sovereign country.²⁷ Among other things, these Christianity-induced upheavals and developments also led to the afore-discussed US experience with civil religion, and the American sense of manifest destiny to liberal-democratize and free the world from oppression and tyranny.²⁸ In the next section, we will consider how the Christian West's burden to save a perishing world is made acute by another factor, namely Christianity's linear view of the world.

Linear and Cyclical Worldview

In Christian dualism, God the creator is infinite. The created however is finite, with a beginning and an impending end. And in this creator and created dialectic, the present earthly existence will ultimately cease to exist and be consummated into the Heavenly. One secular re-adaption of this linear view of time is the afore-discussed 'end of history' thesis, a Hegelian conception of socio-cultural evolution, progressing in a straight line towards the pinnacle of human governance. But in Christian eschatology, a far more ominous 'end of the world' awaits, where life on earth is expected to meet a dreaded annihilation. Indeed, biblical prophecy forewarns an apocalyptic finale, culminating in an epic battle of good versus evil. The prospect of doom vexed Christianity and added an element of urgency into the Christian missionary race against time to spread the gospel and save the world. Some Christian denominations even advocated steps to hasten the Messiah's second coming, a return that would activate the breaking up of the earthly kingdom, thus ushering in the Heavenly Kingdom.²⁹ In recent decades the 'end times' restiveness has infiltrated the American polity and rattled the country's national politics. One example is the rise of the Christian right movement,

²⁷ Paul James, *Nation Formation: Towards a Theory of Abstract Community* (London: Sage Publication, 1996): 114-156.

²⁸ See Sanford Levinson, *Constitutional Faith* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988): 67-80.

²⁹ Johannes Facius, *Hastening the Coming of the Messiah* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Chosen Books, 2003).

energized by an evangelical base known for their fixation with eschatological prophesies pertaining to the rapture and tribulations. This restiveness extends into the international arena where American discourse relating to the US-Soviet cold war and the Middle East crisis was interlaced with 'end times' references such as the Armageddon and the New Jerusalem.³⁰

In the East the view of history is manifestly different. To begin with, according to Chinese cosmogonic mythology, the *Dao* (道) comes into existence spontaneously, begetting a universe in perpetual cycle of yin-yang counter-balancing, with no discernible beginning nor anticipated end.³¹ In the Confucian cyclical worldview, there is no equivalent notion of the Christian West's 'end of history' triumphalism nor 'end of the world' gloom. Instead, for the Chinese, history is an open-ended cycle of alternating periods of dynastic rise and fall. And the task at hand is the perennial quest for the middle pathway in this recurring interplay of order and disorder, peace and war. The cyclical worldview explains Imperial China's comparatively temperate disposition towards the world at large. Thus, unlike in the Christian West where the spectre of a catastrophic end infused a sense of crisis, the Eastern timeless cosmology instilled into the Confucian milieu a more dispassionate frame of mind. The virtuous Emperor, in the Confucian idealization, is one who has attained a 'Wu Wei' (无为) state of tranquillity, governing effortlessly in symphony with the rhyme of nature. And in dealing with today's global exigencies, the rulers of modern China are inclined to formulate these challenges with longitudinal and conciliatory phraseology such as the pursuit of a 'community of common destiny' and the quest for 'harmonious co-existence'. This is a markedly different tone from the American leaders' prevailing

³⁰ Katherine M. Lee, "Waiting for the Rapture: The New Christian Right and Its Impact on US. Public Policy," *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 16, no. 2 (1991): 65-91.

³¹ See Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*; and Angus C. Graham, *Yin-Yang and the Nature of Correlative Thinking* (Singapore: Institute of East Asian Philosophies 1986): 20-35.

antithetical narratives such as the ‘Thucydides Trap’ and the ‘Clash of Civilization.’³²

Conclusion

The fifteenth century Zhenghe-led Ming Dynasty maritime expedition and the subsequent global exploration of European monarchies have left indelible yet different impacts and impressions upon the world. As explained, the East and West contrasting projection of imperial power stems in large part from two profoundly dissimilar underlying belief systems, namely Confucianism and Christianity. As an Axial Age civilization, the Confucian vision was to sustain a multi-civilizational *Tianxia*. And as a monistic, sanguine and polytheistic tradition, the Chinese sages believed that all of humankind had a part in actualizing this social utopia on earth. Set within a circular cosmology, the Confucian embraced this as a quest for equilibrium in a reality encased in a perennial cycle of order and disorder. These Confucian beliefs shaped Imperial China’s worldview and explains why the Middle Kingdom had historically assumed a more restrained if not detached stance towards the outside world. Likewise, as a fellow Axial Age civilization, Christianity also envisioned a community that embraced all of humanity. But as a monotheistic and melancholic tradition, Christendom saw the Church as the only gateway to salvation for a perishing world. And situated within a dualistic, linear worldview, the Christians were pressed by an impending apocalypse to act and save humankind. These theological outlook and religious impulses underpinned European Imperialism’s interaction with the world, compelling the West to embark upon a global mission to transform and Christianize the world. These deep-seated differences between the Confucian East and the Christian West have left behind far-reaching historical consequences, and are still continuing to affect the twenty-first century. The current increasingly tense geopolitical and civilizational rivalry between China and the US is no doubt an outgrowth of the underlying conflict between these two disparate views of the world.

³² Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

The world is faced with the stark reminder that even in a modern milieu that has undergone extensive secularization, religious convictions remain a potent force in the shaping of the statecraft and contestations of the big powers, with its effects on the fate of humankind.

TRANSLITERATION TABLE

CONSONANTS

Ar=Arabic, Pr=Persian, OT=Ottoman Turkish, Ur=Urdu

Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR
ء	‘	‘	‘	ز	z	z	z	گ	—	g	g
ب	b	b	b	ژ	—	—	ř	ل	l	l	l
پ	—	p	p	ژ	—	zh	j	م	m	m	m
ت	t	t	t	س	s	s	s	ن	n	n	n
ٹ	—	—	ṭ	ش	sh	sh	ş	ه	h	h	h ¹
ث	th	th	th	ص	ṣ	ṣ	ş	و	w	v/u	v
ج	j	j	c	ض	ḍ	ḍ	ž	ی	y	y	y
چ	—	ch	çh	ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ة	-ah	—	-a ²
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	ال	al ³	—	—
خ	kh	kh	kh	ع	‘	‘	‘	¹ – when not final ² – at in construct state ³ – (article) al - or l-			
د	d	d	d	غ	gh	gh	ğh				
ڈ	—	—	ḍ	ف	f	f	f				
ذ	dh	dh	dh	ق	q	q	k				
ر	r	r	r	ك	k	k/g	k/ñ	k			

VOWELS

		Arabic and Persian	Urdu	Ottoman Turkish
Long	ا	ā	ā	ā
	آ	Ā	Ā	—
	و	ū	ū	ū
	ي	ī	ī	ī
Doubled	ي	iiy (final form ī)	iy (final form ī)	iiy (final form ī)
	و	uww (final form ū)	uv	uvv
	و	uvv (for Persian)	—	—
Diphthongs	و	au or aw	au	ev
	ی	ai or ay	ay	ey
Short	ا	a	a	a or e
	ا	u	u	u or ū
	ا	i	i	o or ö
	ا	—	—	ī

URDU ASPIRATED SOUNDS

For aspirated sounds not used in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish add h after the letter and underline both the letters e.g. جھ jh گھ gh

For Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish orthography may be used.

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Vol. 26, No. 1, 2021

Contents

ARTICLES

- THE PERSONIFICATION OF HOSPITALITY (DIYĀFAH)
IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND ITS INFLUENCE
ON SOCIAL SOLIDARITY (TAKĀFUL IJTIMĀ'Ī) THROUGH
THE PROPHETIC TRADITION (SUNNAH) 1

*Ahmad Hassan Mohamed, Mohamed Aslam Akbar,
and Hassanuddeen Abd. Aziz*

- IBN AL-'ARABĪ'S CONCEPT OF DREAMS 27
Megawati Moris

- SYED AHMAD KHAN'S TWIN OBJECTIVES 49
OF EDUCATIONAL REFORMS IN BRITISH INDIA:
MUSLIM ADVANCEMENT AND HINDU-MUSLIM UNITY
Md Yousuf Ali and Osman Bakar

- ISLAMOPHOBIA IN INDIA DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS: 71
A SURGE OF STIGMATIZATION, VILIFICATION AND MURDER
Thameem Ushama

REVIEW ESSAYS

- SYED MUHAMMAD NAQUIB AL-ATTAS AND THE DIALOGIC 99
OF OCCIDENTAL KNOWLEDGE: A PASSING GLANCE TO
THE STUDY OF SOCIETY IN THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO
Ahmad Murad Merican

- ALBERT CAMUS, THE ABSURD AND MARTYRDOM 111
Arief S. Arman

- BOOK REVIEWS** 121

ARTICLES

- ORIENTAL MIMICRY: CONTESTING ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
AYAAN HIRSI ALI'S *INFIDEL* 141
Sadiya Abubakar Isa & Md Salleh Yaapar

- ADMIRAL ZHENGHE AND THE WEST: A COMPARATIVE
ANALYSIS IN CONFUCIAN AND CHRISTIAN
CIVILISATION POWERS 159
Peter Chang

- RESTORATION OF RIAU SULTANATE-OTTOMAN
RELATIONS (1857-1904): EXPLANATORY FACTORS 177
Alaeddin Tekin

- LITERARY AND INTELLECTUAL LIFE IN
NINETEENTH-CENTURY PENYENGAT
ISLAND, RIAU: THE WORKS OF RAJA ALI HAJI 197
Arba'iyah binti Mohd Noor

- THE POSSIBILITY OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE
IN ISLAMIC THEOLOGY 219
Mustapha Tajdin

REVIEW ESSAYS

- TARIQ RAMADAN'S IDEA OF REFORM: REALIZING
INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE (IOK) AND
DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC ECONOMICS (IE) 241
Jasmin Omercic

- ALBERT CAMUS, THE ABSURD AND MARTYRDOM
BY ARIEF S. ARMAN: A REJOINDER 251
Malick Elias

- BOOK REVIEWS** 261

