

Re-birth of Cultural Values in International Relations; Islam and the Asian Perspective

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Abstract

Security and policy analysts are invited to think seriously about cultural transformation in a global context. The question is posed: What may 'Islam' as a religious-social-political force for universal human wellbeing and justice contribute to the stability of the international system? The potential contributions of culture and of religion are assessed by reviewing key issues: – 'The West' vs. Islam; - the process of 'westernization' in the transformation of re-culturation characteristic of globalization; & - the de-secularization occurring in many Asian societies. Finally, the possibility of a future transition from ethnoreligious and nation-state identity towards the Global Community is raised. This article will attempt to review these issues from an Asian perspective.

Keywords: Asia, Culture, Globalization, Islam, West

Introduction

Following the collapse of the USSR and the enhanced profile of Islam worldwide, the impact of religion as an integral socio-cultural and ideological factor is evident both for relations between states and between different regions. With religion resurgent in many regions of the world after the end of the Cold War,

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more internal civil wars have a religious component than ever before, while a number of embattled political leaders have found the best way to survive is to increase their religious legitimacy. Religious civil wars tend to be deadlier and to last longer than other types of internal conflicts. Currently, Islam is present at the heart of a number of civil and regional conflicts for several reasons:

- the fusion of religious ideology and the state,
- the unabated vitality of religious nationalism,
- the location of Islam's holiest sites near petroleum reserves (Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran), and
- the prolongation of trans-national Jihadism aggravated by the interventionist militarism of the United States into the heart of Asia.

Islam is one of the great Asian traditions of universal reach, shaping the lives of numerous peoples and societies for well over a millennium. Originating in Southwest Asia, it quickly spread its polity and values from the Iberian Peninsula in the West to Central Asia and the borders of China in the east. Muslim powers spread Islam through South Asia, while from the 10th century C.E. onward, networks of merchant-scholars diffused their faith in lands of Southeast Asia. The historical experience of immediate advance and political dominance accompanying the success of Islamic polity was taken as confirmation of its universal providential mission and divine support. The burden of this triumphalist worldview in our post-colonial global era still echoes loudly in the perceptions of many Muslims.

The Islamic presence in the Central, South, and Southeast regions of Asia experienced vicissitudes under imperial European powers, while the post-colonial

period has left Muslim societies searching for a renewed sense of authenticity and identity in the face of wrenching changes: experiencing communal life as a disadvantaged minority for Han Chinese, Indian, Philippine or Thai Muslims; emerging from Soviet suffocation for the Newly Independent States; stridently asserting new national entities for Pakistan and Bangladesh; and inheriting states from Britain and Holland for Malaysia and Indonesia. It is frequently forgotten that after the Arab peoples, the second-largest ethnolinguistic group among Muslims today consists of the Bahasa Melayu and Bahasa Indonesia or Malay language speakers [about 280 million], splintered among seven nation-states in S.E. Asia now growing further apart by linguistic drift and nationalist identity¹. Given the economic dynamism and cultural assertion marking this region, Muslims in eastern Asia may expect to play a more pronounced role within the global Muslim community as the twenty-first century unfolds. The Muslim ethnic Han minority in China, for example, has barely begun to forge links with the rest of the far-flung global community of Muslims, in contrast to the Tibetan Buddhist minority in China which has succeeded in drawing the attention of the world to its plight.

The West & Islam

Because of the American military presence in their midst, as well as the legacy of European imperial control, many Muslim majority states in Southwest Asia remain fixated on western powers as a focus of security concerns and as the greatest cultural challenge to their societies. The need for asserting common ties and building coalitions with other Asian states to the east appears less compelling

¹ These are (in order of size of Muslim populations): Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, southern Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, the stateless Rohingya Muslims of western Myanmar [the medieval kingdom of Arakan], and Singapore.

and assumes a lower priority. In order to better perceive this need and its potential benefits, we will begin with reflecting on where Islam belongs between East and West.

Initiated partly by the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979–80, then accelerated more recently by the global impact of the September 2001 attacks against New York and Washington D.C. by radical Sunni militants, a critical self-awareness is now manifested among Muslim leaders and intelligentsia. The question is being asked: What may ‘Islam’ as a religious-social-political civilizational force for universal human wellbeing and justice potentially achieve and contribute to the stability of the international system? We may recall that the very idea of ‘civilization’ was abused for several centuries by European thinkers as an ideological construction to justify the conquest and enslavement of “barbarian” and “savage” peoples – Muslims, Africans, South Asians, and East Asians (‘Orientals’)¹.

At the close of the 20th century, the idea of an irreconcilable “clash” between ‘civilizational blocs’ was advanced as an American vision of the inevitable alienation and rivalry between strategic geographical regions defined largely by religious values. Huntington’s thesis, while serving the internal needs of American Exceptionalism, was ironically at the same time embraced by many Muslims feeling threatened by arrogant American cultural and military dominance. This divisive legacy remains to be overcome, and only in the past decade has it become possible to speak of the potential for peace and understanding present in the ‘worldview’ every civilization carries within itself -

¹ For a critique and deconstruction of the inherently conflictual basis of the concept of the ‘West’ (vs. the ‘East’), and the similarly polarizing notion of ‘Occidentalism’, consult: (Ernst, August 9, 2007) & (Aydin, 2007) These critiques were partially anticipated by the Tunisian thinker Hichem Djaït, (Djaït, 1985) a work which retains its relevancy.

namely the “dialogue of civilizations” being advanced especially by prominent Iranian thinkers. Recent critics of this ideologically motivated polarizing thesis of ‘the West versus the Rest’, which capitalizes on deep-rooted fears and prejudices in Europe and America, are questioning the very basis of such a notion of the ‘West as a cultural unity along with its linked ideological projects exploiting this notion. The American professor Carl Ernst cogently observes that: *“implicit in the concept of “the West” is the colonial self-image of a superior civilization that is destined to rule over the rest of the world, whether in overt political domination or through the more subtle forms of globalizing economies.”* (Ernst, August 9, 2007, 12)

The historical rise and dominance of Europe (including today’s ‘West’ as a Euro-American construct) with its universalizing tendency, its omnicompetent rationality, and scientism, and its cultural vitality certainly display its own autonomous inner logic. Yet it has been argued with some cogency that one of the prime motives for Europe’s irresistible need for externalization and expansion was the sting of its inferiority complex toward Islam. Hichem Djaït observed that the rise of Europe simultaneously depended on the prompting of external actors for inaugurating its own expansion and overflowing dynamic-the primary agent being the birth and expansion of Islam which provided:

“... the axis around which the world system would turn. ... It was Islam and not, evidently, their own particular cultural roots - that the other groups used to define themselves as parts of a system. ... Medieval Christendom was not so much a particularized structure comparable to Byzantium, or a reminiscence of the [Roman) Empire, as it was a mobilizing response of Europe to Islam... Islam was at once a military force threatening Europe and an economic sphere sharing its

dynamism, just as later it would be an ideological enemy and a philosophical model. ... Europe's emergence into history took place - and it could not have taken place otherwise - through the mediation of Islam: in the beginning by means of defensive recoil, afterward by an offensive explosion.” (Djait, 1985, 107-109)

The reality today is reversed: the United States is the chief military force occupying several Muslim states, and the pervasive dynamism of a mercantile and cultural globalizing “West” sweeps all before it. This economic, cultural, and military projection has been proceeding for several centuries, but has entered a radically new post-imperial and post-modern phase dictated by the Information Age and advances in international mercantile and monetary structures.

On the other hand, many Muslims realize that they remain marginalized as a global presence within the international system and are not contributing sufficiently to offer solutions to problems facing all humanity. Despite the great oil wealth enjoyed by several Muslim states the majority of the world's Muslims are affected by poverty and oppression, low productivity, high birth rates, high unemployment and low levels of education. Muslims remain under-represented in a variety of international organizations or institutions, nor do they effectively project a concerted presence and united voice regarding issues of great regional and global importance affecting human security, stability, and prosperity. Exploiting the undoubted hostility and aggression of the “West” may serve as a foil for distracting attention from these pressing concerns and needs.

Re-Culturation

Before the worldwide Euro-American impact, most traditional societies existed in reasonable harmony within the intellectual, spiritual, and material resources at

their disposal. It was the process of 'westernization' - transformed in the internal revolution of reculturation termed modernization or development (Von Laue, 1987) - that forced them into a complex world beyond their comprehension and resources, destroying their former bonds of collective community, individual moral socialization and value formation. Most non-Western peoples have now become re-cultured to comply with the requirements of the global state system (in some cases superficially and reluctantly), while statehood is now the international framework for human existence. The nation-state system has inevitably universalized the structures and values of Euro-American institutions, including government bureaucracy, the armed forces, diplomatic service, literacy and mass education, communications, industrialism, and large-scale organization and management while enforcing a continuous mobilization of competition between states over wealth, power and influence.

In their new global interdependence, this intensely competitive self-consciousness among all peoples is accompanied by judgemental or moralizing cross-cultural comparison. The prevailing EuroAmerican political, economic and military dominance operates with the currency of a value-based symbolic exchange through intensifying flows of globalization.

We mean here by 'globalization' not so merely the international free market, but the widening and deepening connections created throughout our planet by the new information and communication technologies abolishing or fore-shortening time and distance. (Gray, 2002) Global confluence promotes a more uniform global community while simultaneously aggravating global anarchy and violence. Cultural confusion and incomprehension attending the sweeping forces of global interdependence has actually hardened diversity and multiplied insecurity,

encouraging relapse into divisive and self-righteous fundamentalisms, whether in religion or in politics. (Gray, 2003) & (Akram, 2004, 237-279)

This process of re-culturation has also been described as the relativizing effect of globalization, bringing about the universalization of Western cultural preferences and forcing particular traditions to find legitimization from within the dominant Euro-American framework of values and terms of reference. At the same time that it pressures peoples to relativize themselves toward (or operate in relation to) forces beyond their control, globalizing pressures also create trans-national connections or links between collective actors and individuals transcending the frontiers of the nation-state system. This facilitates global movements where electronic transfers of money, mass-mediated mobilizing messages, and educational institutions with students from far-flung continents connect people together across geographical, ideological, and national divides in common efforts and actions.

Despite the exploitation of this reality by Sunni Jihadists in activating their trans-national terror network, it nevertheless remains true that with the spread of mass education, mass communication, and the worldwide media, globalization indeed presents Muslims in each of their societies with new avenues for re-activating the efficacy of the Ummah on the world stage.

Culture and Religion

The phenomenon of ‘culture’ embraces those conditions wherein the human collectivity expresses itself within a social matrix distinguished by the material, aesthetic and symbolic products of human communal life. The social matrix includes human artifacts material, affective and ideational. Culture must not be confused with technological or scientific achievements alone; it embraces the

concrete demonstration of the aspiration and creative capacity of the human spirit in politics, crafts, arts, thought, as well as ethics, and religion. Culture requires either a firm power-base or polity to exist and operate meaningfully, or a firm ethnic and spiritual bond animating a people in terms of a potential polity) beyond state boundaries. Religion invariably occurs embedded within a cultural matrix that provides needed substance and field of play for the religion to operate and persist¹. Culture embraces at least three areas:

- the inter-human social dimension;
- the arena of human interaction with nature, the environment, and with material artifacts;
- and an internal structuring of the individual's inward-universe –the consciousness (the mind-spirit or perceiving soul) — through epistemic, cognitive and ethical disciplines releasing creative activity supporting effective collective organization without blocking individual realization.

This third dimension contains those knowledge, values and modes of symbolic meaning which distinguish the identity of a particular people from other cultures. Religion enters into all three areas, being especially relevant for the psycho-spiritual mechanism enabling the harnessing of individual will and training of psychic energies for the projection of communal goals. (McLean, 2000, 97-127) & (McLean, 2000, 7-49)

¹ The dynamics of interdependence between the cultural matrix and the religious energy it shelters or sustains is not our concern here, yet it is of great significance. Historically one observes how the primary religious impulse or vision may be subsumed and encrusted by cultural constructions, resulting in a shell that mimics the original energy. A shrine becomes a tomb, which in turn fades into a memorial.

Therefore, religion retains precious resources for the transformation of the human mind and spirit by offering distinctive techniques of socialization, disciplining, and creative imagination elaborated and explored over many generations-forming one of the most important legacies of humanity. However, when tied to the narrow identity of in-group parochial awareness, or the downward transcendence of large-group regression in mass movements, religion frequently devolves into an opposite force buttressing cross-cultural ignorance and inviting conflict or violence. (Volkan, 2006) The phenomenon of ethnoreligious nationalism over the past several centuries is instructive in displaying the ambivalent power religion may exercise in human affairs - instructive to those capable of apprehending its lesson.

Consumer commodities, computers, weapons, even nuclear technology and written constitutions may cross easily over cultural boundaries, but not those complex cultural constructions deeply embedded in the internal dynamics of specific cultures elaborated during the span of continuous historical experiences, including such things as 'gender equity', 'democracy or "liberty'. These constructions represent elaborated cultural phenomena not readily transplanted since they take for granted and require a set of aptitudes, social habits and skills, knowledge disciplines, and definite organizational and cognitive patterns that must first be instilled through re-culturation.

Let us take an example: Secularism arose from the peculiar experience of 18th-19th century Europeans breaking free from the intellectual, social and spiritual domination of organized religion, hand in hand with the consolidation of science and material advancement shaping economic and political realities. The conventional wisdom still prevails that:

“It is the moment of secularity, freedom from religious/ecclesiastical tutelage, that separates the Modern Period, especially its science and philosophy, from the Middle Ages.” (Heimsoeth, 1994, 31)¹

Eighteenth-century European thinkers of the Enlightenment opposed the traditional Christianity of the institutionalized Church by rejecting ‘non-rational’ factors of traditional spiritual authority and faith, and they viewed reason as being contrary to ‘feeling’ or ‘emotion’. Modern notions of reason and of rationalism arose out of this spirit of anti-supernaturalism, being an anti-religious and anticlerical movement of utilitarian outlook stressing historical and scientific arguments against theism. The success of secular EuroAmerican culture and worldview over the revealed or faith-based worldviews of traditional societies was facilitated by its emphasis on individuality, personality, and the power of the self.

Nor should one forget that a chief element of pre-modern scientific thinking was the lack of any clear distinction between the sciences and philosophy, thus making the sciences dependent upon philosophy. In the past, philosophy provided

¹ Heimsoeth’s statement was merely part of his characterization of the conventional view of the transition to modernity that he intended to revise. His work sought to undermine the validity of trying to: “Distinguish modern philosophy, as purely secular and directed toward nature and natural existence, from medieval philosophy, which always inquired about ultimate supernatural things, about God, immortality, and the soul. Separating philosophy as autonomous science and secular wisdom from theology is absolutely not the same thing as separating their contents from the sources and the great questions of religious life.” (Heimsoeth, 1994, 32) Heimsoeth’s insightful handling of this process of separation that gave birth to modern scientism and materialism nevertheless fails to adequately account for the inversion of values this process accomplished, for which see (Nasr, 1996, 163-190) 1. The current dominant notion of ‘reason’ derives from the period of the Enlightenment and from Continental Rationalism, reflecting confidence in the unbridled powers of the human intellect (viewed in terms of ‘brainmind’) as a source of knowledge. Intellect was then conceived of in opposition to ‘faith’ and uncritical acceptance of traditional revealed became problematic due to its spiritualistic connotations, and the term ‘mind’ has replaced ‘soul in current western discourse. For the classical Islamic notion of ‘faith-in-reason’ see: (Crow, 2003, 109-137)

a primary epistemological foundation and a metaphysical framework for the sciences. This was true of the physical sciences, cosmology, and psychology of cognitive-perception (soul sciences) - which were treated under the category of *tabi'iyat* 'physics' in Islamic philosophy or *Hikmat*, wherein reason ('*aql*) remained intimately linked with the affective and intentional reality of ethical action at the level of conscience and will. The modern conception of scientific knowledge has separated 'science from any philosophical system, freeing the scientific method of empirical investigation and deduction from the constraints of the worldview of a philosophic metaphysic with its accompanying ethico-spiritual disciplines. 'Scientism' attempts to fill this void through an ad hoc metaphysic that collapses the immaterial cognitive facets of human experience into the empirically verifiable physical.

Nevertheless, the pattern of evolution experienced by Western European and North American societies may not easily serve as guide or blueprint for the cultural development of many societies who function individually and collectively in different modes constrained by their own specific historical and cultural dynamics. To assume that all other cultures or societies must inevitably undergo a similar process towards secularism as that experienced by Europe is a false assumption, as the current impasse in Turkey teaches us.

"Societies or politics culturally conditioned over long stretches of time cannot readily transform themselves according to a different cultural pattern: non-Western cultures cannot automatically follow the Western upward-bound route."
(Von Laue, 1987, 314)

To fail to anticipate and act on this reality when attempting cross-cultural intercourse in international security affairs only invites a form of cognitive

imperialism whereby one's effort to comprehend and have relations with others remains trapped within prevailing power relations, and it results in the abdication of responsible intellectual insight whether in historical research or policy studies.

H. Von Laue correctly remarked:

“Who understands whom on whose terms? In the last analysis, cross-cultural understanding is a matter of raw power: who has the power to make his own understanding prevail?” (Von Laue, 1987, 376)

So we see that re-culturation represents the inevitable reaction of weaker cultures compelled to relate to a powerful dominant culture.

De-secularization

Another important change in thinking that may assist policy analysts and decision-makers both east and west when dealing with this actual reality is to stop treating religious faith as a 'category of irrational action. They should understand and make allowance for the re-assertion of political-religion in the cultural sphere. The previous widespread assumption that religious faith and ideology would necessarily fade away in the face of consumerist market capitalism spearheaded by multi-national corporatism is to be discarded as mistaken and utopian. It is now evident that modernization or 'westernization' does not necessarily induce the decline of religious faith in a society or in the minds of individuals, nor does the process of secularization inevitably usher in the assumed privatization and marginalization of religion in our globalizing world. (Høibraaten, 1993, 231-257) & (Casanova, 1994, 1166) & (Berger, 1999)

Presently we are witnessing a vibrant trend of de-secularization with its accompanying affirmation of public religious identity in many Muslim societies.

This is true in the Southeast Asian region, particularly in Indonesia and Malaysia, as well as in Pakistan, the Arab world, Iran, Turkey, and even among Muslim minorities in Europe. The long-term consequences of this complex socio-cultural, ideational and spiritual shift are loaded with possible alternative directions whose unfolding depends upon how Muslims respond to the challenges and threats they confront both as individuals and as national polities.

While Euro-American discourse speaks of ‘post-modernity’ from within their own cultural and ideological perspective - indicating that their societies have moved beyond the 19th–20th century social and economic transformations brought about by industrialization and mercantile expansion that largely fueled colonial enterprises - it is good to caution that for much of the remaining regions of the world ‘modernization’ remains the norm both in material and infrastructure changes as well as in the conceptual and symbolic realms. We mean simply that the relativizing process of re-culturation is still ongoing and unconsummated in many Asian societies, although greatly accelerated over the past few decades. Today’s pervasive globalizing forces nurture and reinforce an intellectual and spiritual passivity, where people do not think about their role in society or reflect on the requirements and implications of their faith. Instead, they are being habituated to become passive consumers whose material and psychic appetites are stimulated and magnified, replacing inner contentment with outwardly directed desires. Cultural and religious values may offer a significant antidote to this deep-set trend - but only when such values are understood and practiced intelligently and wisely, and are not exploited for the legitimization of ruling cliques in pursuit of private parochial self-interest. This type of abuse of the religious component of one’s cultural patrimony flourishes today in several Muslim societies.

Another reality is the increasing attraction of many in society to westernized or globalized lifestyles, consumerist cultural artifacts, and informational knowledge modes, but without the proper contextual understanding¹. This is true, especially among the younger generation shaped by modern mass education and T.V. and strongly affected by changing social and economic requirements of contemporary societies fundamentally re-shaped by nationalist group identities. Within many Muslim societies today there is a vivid sense of being under siege, whether from the 'West' or from their own authoritarian governments. This important segment of Muslim societies experiences tension between the traditional requirements of Islamic observances and practice and the demands for leading a successful modern existence in society. The dynamism and creative energy of youth shall play an increasingly crucial role in shaping Muslim futures, yet in many instances, they are not being provided with sufficiently enlightened models or wise guidance to adequately meet these challenges. Youth are not always shown more adequate responses that feed the flame of authentic Islamic values and principles while simultaneously facilitating a well-informed and engaged social and ethically responsible existence. The continuing appeal of militant Jihadism among certain sectors of Arab, Pakistani and Indonesian youths is one index of this failing.

Problems

It is helpful to highlight several potential fault lines in the international system which may affect the possible outcomes for the stability sought for by Asian societies.

¹ A small yet telling example is the fashion among young Japanese women of wearing jewellery in the form of a Christian cross or Nazi swastika with no comprehension of their historical symbolism, out of a naïve conviction that these represent modernity.

1) One lies in the expectation that economic growth will continue without interruption, even while patterns of economic growth may be unevenly distributed. The current high price of petroleum and liquefied gas resources lends this expectation a seeming inevitability for the producing countries. However, the ongoing turmoil in financial loans and banking practices, as well as the recent steep rise in food prices, undermines the certainty of such optimism. The probable shrinkage of global financial activity could well bring about increasing levels of deprivation and poverty - rising food and energy prices are already inducing hardships.

2) The increasing centrality of resource scarcity, with particular emphasis on water, food and energy as well as other natural resources of strategic value. Maintaining access to these resources will be crucial, especially since many strategic resources are located in areas of dubious security, raising the likelihood of resorting to military force to secure these strategic resources.

3) Increased wealth provides more resources for treating human needs while also increasing the risk of political and economic injustice and abuse. Globalized communications tend to feed frustrations over relative deprivation by heightening awareness of these uneven patterns of economic development and increasing pressures on governments to meet minimum standards of wellbeing for their people. Social-economic deprivations contain the potential for feeding new waves of conflict and violence whether at the level of inter-state wars over resources or regional influence, internal conflicts and civil wars, or the so-called asymmetric violence between the state and 'non-state actors'.

4) Proliferation of small arms and man-portable weapons as rocket-propelled grenades, shoulder-launched missiles, light mortars, and anti-personnel mines.

Already such weapons kill more people every year than automobile accidents. Given the increasing number of national defense industries – all seeking the limited goal of self-sufficiency in small arms and ammunition production - the proliferation of small arms and man-portable weapons represents the greater security concern for the immediate, medium, and long terms. The negative implications of these trends remain overly rooted in the realm of military security, but not all security concerns affect military power or are addressed best by military means alone. The current ‘crisis’ over nuclear energy acquisition by several Asian states, with increasing risk of nuclear weapons proliferation, has unfortunately tended to marginalize or eclipse the severity of the continuing threat to security that proliferation of small arms represents.

5) Growing contacts between different cultures and regions flowing from ongoing globalization are creating the conditions for people to become increasingly comfortable with cultural diversity. This intensified friction between cultures and polities is therefore not just a problem but an opportunity. Whether these conditions are exploited for sincere dialogue and selfless multi-cultural engagement does not necessarily follow. They may also coincide with increased secularism and spreading consumer materialism (especially among youth), as well as moral relativism and selfish pragmatism. This trend triggers a reaction from traditionally-defined communities having a conformist societal makeup that values faith-based social ethics and public adherence to religious ideals. An example of this latter reaction is the political activities of conservative Islamic parties in several Arab states, Pakistan, Malaysia, and Indonesia, who feel compelled to exercise some form of social censorship on public behavior, dress, and the media; or the imposition of shari’ah law in Aceh (the westernmost province of Indonesia) leading at times to abusive vigilantism.

On a positive note, the demands imposed by pervasive forces of globalizing modernity are pushing Muslim societies toward more adequate responses. In order to maintain and freshen time-honored rituals and principles, an increasing proportion of Muslims turn to the essential vision and energy conveyed in their intellectual and ethical teachings, as well as in religious legal rulings. They view Islam as the immovable bedrock providing nourishment for the reinvention of community through transforming self, society, and polity. However, re-energizing religion as a social blueprint and basis for governance and polity demands enlightened understanding and humane implementation to ensure that society inhabits the fifteenth century A.H. and does not revert to the first century. The resources provided by Islamic rationalist disciplines of legal theory, theology and philosophy, and ethical and spiritual teachings may be more valuable in the long term than the strictly juridical tradition that historically manifested certain servility to the preferences of the power possessors. For religion to play its proper role in awakening and strengthening culture, moral and intellectual leadership is crucial. Attention has naturally focused upon the qualities and vision of ‘Ulama’ and on reforming Islamic religious education.

Re-birth of Spiritual Culture?

The cultivation of a more spiritually-oriented culture and enlivening of essential values has great relevance for the possible future transition from the nation-state identity and specific ethno-religious collectivities towards the Global Community at large - for this is the inescapable logic of our global interdependence, indeed it is becoming the unavoidable demand of our terrestrial climate. This ‘change of mind’ in communal identities imposes the transcendent perspective of a more inclusive awareness beyond the constraints of particular national boundaries or

ethnic and class groupings. It opens up a unified planetary awareness joining all nations and continents, requiring the unity of the human race for wise and equitable action.

The stirrings of an expansion of identity are discernible in 'Green' movements for environmental conservation and purification, and it may be that natural events might force peoples and states to advance toward a planetary consciousness from necessity. The dramatic incidents of large-scale natural disasters in recent decades has now become a concern of policymakers and security experts who created the new discipline labeled "non-traditional security" in recognition of the reality of this threat to the collective wellbeing of society and state. But security and policy experts, who claim to possess intelligence and foresight, do not appear to have thought seriously about cultural transformation in a global context.

The change of mind' begins by turning our gaze inward toward the interior dynamics of the human person and his or her unfulfilled potentials - the third dimension of culture mentioned above. This demands a balance between the human mind and heart and organism, between thought-feeling-instinct: an integration of the whole of the human person into a unity that reconciles opposites. It is achieved through conscious suffering and sacrifice. At the same time, it imposes new obligations and restrictions on individuals, corporations, and governments in adjusting to a greatly expanded community of common interests (e.g., for decreasing carbon emissions). The change occurs first within individuals, spreading through influential circles and organizations, before reaching a critical mass weighty enough to color the worldview and goals of ruling groups and governments, thereby effecting a transformation in the global human environment.

But this transformation is not a certainty, merely one possibility among others, and it cannot be taken as likely or inevitable however much hoped for. The resources that religions and their related cultural matrix may provide for advancing toward closer global cooperation beyond the limitations of the nation-state, for outgrowing parochial mentalities by instilling universal values nourished from the depths of human experience, demand individual and collective discipline, creativity, and a living moral sense. In the past, this order-of-magnitude change was often accomplished by means of war and conquest combined with widespread recognition of common interests transforming a collectivity into a greater community with an enhanced level of organization and corresponding cognitive and artistic-technological skills, as happened with the Islamic conquests. Our age of global confluence and the events of the twentieth century show that force and the threat of force shall not achieve the needed transformation - that persuasion and shared conviction hold out greater promise and hope.

The great material and social-political cultures now dominant in global affairs are approaching a point of internal assessment and critical self-appraisal. In a rush to acquire the material advantages and technological prowess of 21st-century existence, they must at the same time be actively searching for a comprehensive framework of spiritual culture and human values that may complement and rectify the imbalances brought by rapid outward development and profound socio-economic transformations. In their search for rediscovering essential principles and values buried in the roots of their own specific culture, each great universal culture has to experience its own process of self-awareness and self-criticism, and self-affirmation. Movements in the recent past that harmed or destroyed much of the valuable heritage of our human history (e.g., the Chinese cultural revolution')

give added urgency and importance to this search for enduring permanent values that may guide the re-birth of spiritual culture. Humans will never achieve the perfection and fullness of their existence if life's higher spiritual culture continues to be ignored or marginalized. Once the stomach is full and the sexual instinct sated, there remains a deeper imperative that hungers for fulfillment: to realize the full potential of being human creatures in our universe created for a wise and compassionate purpose.

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